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District of Squamish  
37955 Second Avenue  
Squamish, B.C.  
V8B 0A3

**ATTENTION: MAYOR AND COUNCIL**

**DELIVERED BY HAND**

Dear Mesdames & Sirs:

**RE: SMOKE BLUFFS PARK – PUBLIC SAFETY, UNAUTHORIZED USES  
AND TRAILS, PARKING**

I am a citizen and resident of Squamish. I am writing to draw your attention to public safety and environmental impact issues that have recently arisen in relation to the use and management of Smoke Bluffs Park, and to ask that the District take appropriate action to address these problems as soon as possible. The issues include:

1. Construction of unauthorized bike trails and stunts in the Park, and their impacts on Park users, public safety, and the environment.
2. A recent influx of bikers into the Park, particularly on the Loop Trail but also the new trails and stunts, and the risks this creates for the public.
3. The appearance of e-bikes, which are often faster, heavier, and more powerful, and so have greater impacts.

These problems have only arisen in the last few years, and are growing. Action by the District is needed as soon as practicable.

I communicated regarding these matters with Elaine Naisby and Aja Philp at your parks department in spring and early summer 2024, and believe that others have raised these issues with the District and the news media. I am unaware of the District's having taken any effective management action to date.

(In this letter, "Park" means Smoke Bluffs Park; "bikes", "bikers", and "biking" refer to mountain bikes, electric bicycles/vehicles, and motor bikes of all types, and their riders; "walkers" include all pedestrians, including dog walkers, hikers, climbers, and runners; "Loop Trail" means both that trail and the sub-trails linking into it; and "commuter route" means the wide path on the south and west sides of the Park, following the powerline and pipeline rights of way.)

## **LITTLE SMOKE BLUFFS**

Smoke Bluffs Park is a treasure for citizens, climbers, walkers, and visitors. It has for many years provided a welcoming, reasonably accessible environment for walking and climbing, and is a key to Squamish's claim to being the "outdoor recreation capital of Canada". The Park was devastated by fire in September 1951. It is bounded to the south, east, and west by Northridge and by hydro and pipeline rights of way, and has a repeater station at its top. So it is no wilderness. But it offers a large variety of friendly, natural experiences, with tens of thousands annual user days.

The District and its citizens remain hugely indebted to the climbing community, which forty years ago purchased key central land for the Park, and persistently advocated that it become a public park. Without that, and all the efforts that climbers and hikers then and since have put into fundraising, projects, management, and stewardship, the Park might not exist.

I have been involved in climbing and hiking in and stewardship of the Little Smoke Bluffs since 1974, including leading roles with a variety of organizations. From 1995 – 2008 I was president of the Climbers' Access Society of B.C., which had an active role in management of what became the Park. We eventually had the area recognized and managed as a park by the District, and taken care of by an independent committee involving all stakeholders. The committee was ably led for many years by Brian Moorhead, and did much good work.

I hike, climb, or engage in stewardship activities in the Park once or twice a week year round, and have for decades.

1. The Park was not established and has never been managed for biking, with the limited exceptions of the commuter trail and a few mountain bike trails that briefly dip into it at or just outside its northeast corner.
2. None of the trails in the Park is suitable for 'sharing' between walkers and bikers. Which is why there are separate walker and biker trails on the hill going up from the parking off Loggers' Lane, posted as such.
3. Mountain bikers have little history in the Park or its management.
4. The current problems seem to have begun with a small group, but the number of bikers in the Park, their new trails and stunts, and resulting environmental damage and threat to public safety are growing.

## **NEEDED ACTIONS**

Public safety and protection of the Park's environment require the following, at least:

1. An amended management plan, stating that all bikes are prohibited in the Park, except for the commuter route, and that unauthorized construction of trails is prohibited.
2. Updated and clear signage and maps at all kiosks, as well on trails, trail junctions, and where trails enter the Park.
3. Expanding the north and possibly east boundaries of the park, so that they conform with natural features rather than artificial straight lines. The boundaries should also be clearly marked.
4. Gates and fencing, particularly on the Loop Trail, but also on all trails entering the Park at its boundaries, or the nearest natural boundary outside the Park.
5. Blocking all bike trails and stunts, with environmental remediation as needed.
6. Appropriate signage and barriers to protect users of the childrens' play area off Smoke Bluffs Road.
7. Enforcement as needed.

These actions should be taken as early as possible in 2025, and extend to land within the Park owned by the Federation of Mountain Clubs of B.C., and where practicable to immediately adjacent lands.

Management actions of this kind are normal, whether at Squamish, on Vancouver's north shore, or Whistler, and have been almost since mountain biking first appeared. Some areas and trails are designated for walkers only, particularly in parks; some for 'shared' use, if topography and trails safely allow; and some just for bikers. Trails are only recognized as shared when they are wide and low angle.

## **REASONS**

The Park was established for walking, hiking, and climbing. Mountain biking barely existed in Squamish in the late 1980s. None of the park study and later management plans recognize biking in the Park, with limited exceptions. The biking community in any case is well aware that biking in the Park would create user conflict, and that the trails in the Park aren't suitable for safe use by both walkers and bikers. Virtually all bikers – many of whom are also hikers or climbers – have the common sense to instead make use of the abundant opportunities elsewhere in Squamish.

In the last few years, a group of bikers has become active in the Park, often on and near the Loop Trail. Those on the Loop Trail tend to ride fast and are careless of walkers. Many of their trails and stunts intersect with, cross, or

overlap parts of the Loop Trail, and one is within the Loop Trail. This creates further conflicts.

The trails in the Park are narrow, winding, and hilly, with limited sight lines. None of them was designed or built for “multiple use”, except for the commuter route, and the paths leading up from the parking – which are separated. Walkers must use most trails single file – there’s no room for bikes to safely pass. Unauthorized new trails and stunts that intersect, cross, or overlap the Loop Trail compound the problem. Given the terrain, it would not be possible to widen the trails sufficiently or add “bike lanes” to allow the safe use of bikes. It does not help that some of the bikers who have invaded the Park are reported to have behaved aggressively.

The Loop Trail is very heavily used by walkers. Many are young, older, in groups, and/or have dogs. Some are hearing impaired, whether from youth, age, or ear buds. Walkers do not expect to encounter bikes. It’s surprising that no one has been hurt by being hit by a biker – so far. The Loop Trail has evolved over the last 40 years or more, but as with all trails in the Park, was not designed or built for bikes. And the number of walkers in the Park will increase as the Red Bridge development becomes occupied.

In the last two years I have seen a steadily increasing number of bikes and tire tracks on the trails in the Park, particularly the Loop Trail and vicinity. On at least three occasions in the last 18 months I have been forced to the side of or off the Loop Trail by bikers. Those bikers who I’ve been able to talk with insist that they can ride wherever they want in the Park. Other walkers have reported similar incidents to me, but given the aggressive behaviour of the bikers involved, don’t want their names disclosed.

The recent influx of bikers has also created substantial environmental impacts, both from damage to existing trails (ruts, widening, braiding, etc), and construction of unauthorized new trails and stunts. The damage is to the Loop Trail itself, as well as throughout the north and east sides of the Park, within the Loop Trail, and in some lower areas. This may be tolerated for bike trails and stunts elsewhere, but is unacceptable in the Park. An early priority should be to locate and block them all, assess the damage, and take appropriate deterrent and remedial action.

Bikers built a new trail in the Park, including cutting large trees and construction of a ‘boardwalk’, as recently as the last week of December 2024.

(There is some activity in the Park by “moto riders”, but they are not part of the current problems.)

## **SMOKE BLUFF ROAD PLAY AREA**

There are also safety concerns with bikes speeding through the childrens’ play area in the Park, at the end of Smoke Bluff Road. The area is often

congested with walkers, climbers, children, residents, and others, as most Park users pass through the play area, and the nearby cliffs are very popular.

There need to be large, clear signs for bikers approaching this area from all directions, posted speed limits, and possibly barriers to ensure that they slow down.

## **PARKING FEES**

The notion of users being charged for parking at the main parking area for the Park, off Loggers' Lane seems most unwise. If it is pursued, it should be subject to the following:

- Agreement by the Federation of Mountain Clubs of B.C., which continues to be the owner of a key parcel of land in the Park, one which most users pass through. In other words, asking the neighbours whether they think it's a good idea.
- All net proceeds from such fees, after reasonable expenses, being added to the budget for maintenance, repairs, and improvements in the Park. That is, to significantly increase the budget.
- Ensuring that there is a very 'user friendly' system.

The imposition of parking fees seems likely to lead to Park users starting to park again in Northridge, as they did from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s. In the mid 1990s, at the initiative of the climbing community, the current parking off Loggers' Lane was set aside and Northridge posted as 'residents only parking'. The introduction of parking fees parking may simply displace users back to Northridge, and create traffic and parking issues both there and at Hospital Hill. Park users may also start to use the parking areas just south of the hospital, and opposite the Adventure Centre.

## **FUTURE**

The District should extend the Loop Trail to the repeater tower at the "Smoke Bluffs summit". It has long been a popular walkers' destination, and offers a nice view. There may be possibilities for other new walkers' trails and viewpoints in the north and northeast areas of the Park.

Existing stairs on trails in the Park, particularly the Loop Trail, are wearing out. Many are 15 or more years old, and a plan for replacing, upgrading and where needed adding to them seems appropriate. There is a significant backlog of needed trail repairs and maintenance. The addition of a modern, maintained outhouse near the apex of the Loop Trail also seems desirable.

It also seems time to generally update the master plan for the Park, in consultation with other owners and stakeholders, and significantly increase the budget for management and needed improvements and repairs.

The public engagement process for the District's 2025 – 29 budget showed that one of the most supported items is "...investments in recreation and culture services and facilities." <https://www.squamishchief.com/local-news/what-the-squamish-community-said-about-the-2025-2029-budget-9941980>

## **CONCLUSION**

Thank you for your prompt attention to these matters. Please let me know if you need further information, or want to discuss them with me. I would be happy to take council or involved staff on a walk through the Park, to show you the situation. Clearly action needs to be taken by early 2025, before any accident occurs, and to prevent further environmental damage.

Yours truly,

Anders I. Ourom, K.C.

cc: Climbers' Access Society of British Columbia, British Columbia Mountaineering Club, Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia, Squamish Off-Road Cycling Association, Squamish Access Society, Squamish Trails Society, Alpine Club of Canada – Vancouver Section, news media.