

September 11, 2023
Mayor & Council
Prince George City Hall

Dear Mayor and Council,

Miworth landowners who will be directly affected by the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club's proposal to expand their License of Occupation have neither been informed of, nor consulted on, this initiative. Other relevant stakeholders, including existing recreational users of the land in question, are similarly unaware of the ski club's intent to disturb that forest through tree removal and the creation of year-round mechanized access.

In 2021 after local residents found a road right-of-way ribboned off on crown land behind their properties, a letter was submitted to the Club voicing opposition to this access road on the basis that it would damage wildlife habitat, create year-round noise pollution from motorized vehicles, introduce security hazards, and notably increase the probability of catastrophic property damage caused by wildfire. Community anxiety surrounding risk of human-caused wildfire is likely stronger today than it was two years ago and despite counter-claims in at least one letter of support, the science on wildfire hazard indicates that road and trail networks make forests more vulnerable to fire starts and fire spread.

The residents of Miworth deserve to be informed and any concerns they have regarding this proposed expansion of the Ski Club's occupation of crown land ought to be addressed in advance of Mayor and Council publicly supporting such a controversial initiative. We hope that residents who will be materially impacted by this proposed expansion stand don't learn of this for the first time when notice spreads through the community that the City of Prince George officially supports plans to impact the safety and security of their homes and families.

Sincerely,
Michelle Connolly

1800 Catherine Drive

Board of Directors
Caledonia Nordic Ski Club
P.O. Box 1243
Prince George, BC
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August 22, 2023

Dear Board of the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club,

The purpose of this letter is to communicate to the Caledonia Nordic Ski Club our collective concern as biologists over the pursuit of an expanded License of Occupation on crown land south of the Centre's existing trail network, including areas overlapping the Greenway.

Residents of Prince George region have come to enjoy the benefits of the Greenway and the opportunities to experience the diverse complement of plants and wildlife that thrive in forests free from pervasive human disturbance. The region in question is unique within the immediate area of Prince George for being essentially free of trails and roads save for the Greenway Trail. This is in stark contrast to the Crown Land in areas to the north (e.g., Caledonia Nordic Ski Club and the Piderny Recreation Site), and to the south and east (UNBC/Forests For the World) which are very heavily trailed. (Figures 1a and 1b on page 2).

The area within the proposed License of Occupation is also an extraordinary mixture of sensitive and rare ecosystem types including at risk primary and old growth forest (Price et al. 2021) of the Biogeoclimatic Sub-boreal Spruce dry warm subzone (DeLong et al. 1993), and a variety of listed wetlands including the Wf06 Slender Sedge-Buckbean complex (MacKenzie & Moran 2004). These ecosystems, though once plentiful, are now so rare as to make the value of their contribution to the landscape incalculable.

The mosaic of wetlands interspersed among mature spruce, fir, and pine leading forests also makes for ideal Ungulate Winter Range (BC GOV) – another habitat type whose current supply is likely implicated in recent declines of some large ungulate populations. The impacts of significant road and trail building will include not only physical displacement of overwintering moose and deer, but also loss of canopy interception associated with provision of winter travel and high-quality forage. The value of this forest complex for ungulates is not limited to winter as evidenced by the popular use of these areas in autumn by bow hunters. We note that an expanded trail system will put existing user groups [of the ski centre and those presently using of the adjacent forest to the south] in direct conflict.

The area in question presently receives heavy seasonal use by public seeking experience of remoteness and discovery not available anywhere else in proximity to Prince George. Knowing these forests actively contribute towards our common commitment to environmental stewardship and maintenance of biological diversity is a source of local pride. The inevitable forest fragmentation following development of permanent trail/road infrastructure will negatively impact those species who rely on forests with interior condition free from edge effects, the moderating influence of mature closed canopies on microclimate, and the provision of security cover necessary to ensure coexistence of healthy predator-prey systems (Forman & Alexander 1998, Kapustka 2014).

Of particular concern is the projected impact of trail and road expansion on the proliferation of invasive plants. We note that although the BC Weed Control Act imposes a duty on all land occupiers to control designated noxious plants (Ralph et al. 2014), the area under the Ski Club's current License of Occupation already harbors established populations of noxious weeds including burdock, hawkweed, and thistle. Nearly all of BC's terrestrial noxious weeds establish following human disturbance. It is unsurprising, therefore, that noxious weeds are not yet a serious concern throughout the intact portions of the proposed expanded license of occupation.

These are but a few of the many reasons why the forests in question already perform rare social and environmental functions for the residents of Prince George, Miworth, and the wider region. An expanded license of occupation will place most of these present values in jeopardy while risking conflict between existing user groups. We urge you to consider other options.

Sincerely,

Redacted

Heather Bryan, PhD
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Department of Ecosystem
Science and
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Jeff Werner, PhD,
RPBio

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Barry Booth, MSc
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Figure 1a. Trail network in area in Prince George Area

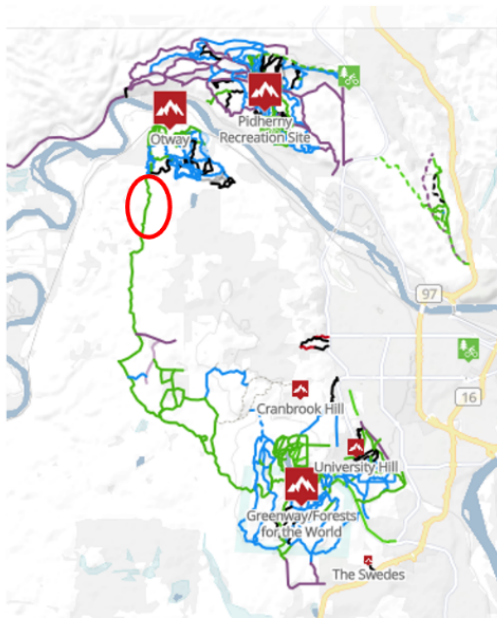
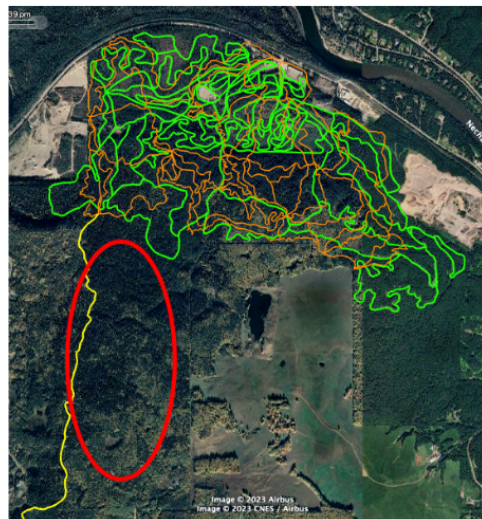



Figure 1b. Trail network in at Caledonia Nordic Centre in detail



Green: ski trails/roads
Orange: single track mountain bike trails

 = approximate location of area where new trails are proposed

Supporting Literature

BC GOV. Ungulate Winter Ranges. URL: <https://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/frpa/uwr/index.html>

DeLong, C., D. Tanner, & M.J. Jull. 1993. A Field Guide for Site Identification and Interpretation for the Southwest Portion of the Prince George Forest Region. Land Management Handbook 24. Government of British Columbia.

Forman, R.T.T., & Alexander, L.E. 1998. Roads and Their Major Ecological Effects. Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics, 29(1), 207–231.

Kapustka, L. (Ed.). 2004. Landscape ecology and wildlife habitat evaluation: critical information for ecological risk assessment, land-use management activities, and biodiversity enhancement (No. 1458). ASTM International.

MacKenzie, W.H. & J.R. Moran. 2004. Wetlands of British Columbia: a guide to identification. Res. Br., B.C. Min. For., Victoria, B.C. Land Manage. Handb. No. 52

Parker, T.H., Stansberry, B.M., Becker, C.D., & Gipson, P.S. 2005. Edge and area effects on the occurrence of migrant forest songbirds. Conservation Biology, 19(4), 1157-1167.

Price, K., Holt, R. and Daust, D. 2020. BC's Old Growth Forest: A Last Stand for Biodiversity. URL: <https://veridianecological.files.wordpress.com/2020/05/bcs-old-growth-forest-report-web.pdf>

Price, K., Holt, R. & Daust, D. 2021. Priority Deferrals: An Ecological Approach. URL: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/forestry/stewardship/old-growth-forests/summary_for_g2g_package.pdf

Ralph, D., Miller, V., Hougen, C., & Leekie, J. 2014. Field Guide to Noxious Weeds and Other Selected Invasive Plants of British Columbia. Williams Lake, BC.