

CARTS President's Report

This year marks the 15th anniversary of the creation of CARTS. It was originally a joint initiative of the City of Red Deer and Red Deer County to both foster the encouragement of interconnecting trails throughout the region and to promote the routing of the Trans Canada Trail along the Highway 2A corridor. Originally the initiative included most of the towns, villages and hamlets of Red Deer County as well as the City but it very quickly was embraced by several communities within Lacombe County and expanded further to include Ponoka to the north and Olds to the south. However due to limited resources, both human and financial, the focus became the routing and promotion of the TCT between Ponoka and Penhold with the intent to extend the trail to Innisfail and Olds at a later date.

This coming August marks the 10th anniversary of the Trans Canada Trail pavilion at Bower Ponds in Red Deer. At the time, sections of TCT were built in Red Deer, Innisfail and Lacombe. However, rural linkages were slow to get traction, in part due to the reluctance of Alberta Transportation at the time to allow trails along highway rights of way.

Since then, we've come a long way. Two pedestrian river bridges have been built, more communities have built trails, a rural linkage of TCT has been constructed from Lacombe to the Blindman River with a temporary linkage to Red Deer, a short section of TCT has been built south of Springbrook, preliminary studies have been completed for further rural linkages and Alberta Transportation is much more open to trail development along highway rights of way.

The big event of the past year was the Grand Opening of Trans Canada Trail through the Abbey Centre in Blackfalds, the only indoor section of Trans Canada Trail in the country.

The big project of the year was the completion of the Red Deer to Springbrook Trail Concept Plan. This \$25,000 study was initiated by CARTS and funded by TCT through Alberta TrailNet.

Four options have been proposed.

1. East side of Highway 2A to 19 St.;
2. Along Range Road 280 to 32 St.;
3. Along Range Road 280 to Fort Normandeau and along river to Heritage Ranch;
4. Mintlaw Bridge route to north side of Red Deer River.

No particular route is recommended but feedback from various stakeholders indicated a preference for the Mintlaw option, even though it is the longest and most costly but the most scenic and has the highest tourism potential. The study went to a Red Deer County workshop on May 12 and goes to open council on June 2 to determine the County's willingness to pursue the next steps in developing this trail. The current County position is that funding for trails is not a high priority so most funding will need to come from other sources.

Currently, trail projects are underway in Innisfail, Blackfalds, Lacombe, Sylvan Lake and Red Deer. Lacombe County is pursuing options for a connection between the City of Lacombe and Ponoka County. Innisfail strongly supports a trail linkage to Penhold; Sylvan Lake strongly supports a trail linkage to Red Deer; and the Springbrook Community Association strongly supports trail linkages to both Penhold and Red Deer.

An established but weak link between the Blindman River bridge and Red Deer along the C & E Trail is expected to be improved in the future when development starts north of Highway 11A.

There have recently been two exciting announcements. Nova Chemicals is building a trail network near their plant and the Kuhnen family has donated 140 acres of land south Lacombe Lake to Lacombe County for recreational use.

This past year, our meetings have been hosted by the following communities: the City of Red Deer for last year's AGM and another meeting, the Town of Ponoka, the Town of Penhold, the Town of Sylvan Lake and the Town of Blackfalds for this year's AGM.

The CARTS website is getting around 1000 hits per month on average and the website will be refurbished sometime in the next few months. The CARTS Facebook page currently has 28 members. CARTS has purchased two banners, one of which is stand-alone.

Over the past few years, CARTS and our member municipalities have made considerable progress in promoting trail development in Central Alberta. Excitement has been building toward getting more trail on the ground and laying the groundwork to finalize the routing and completion of the Trans Canada Trail as close to the target year of 2017 as possible.

Paul Pettypiece