The Shuswap Hut-to-Hut Trails Circuit and Waterway Initiative

as part of the 5 Rings Trail Product Development Strategy

Updated: November 29, 2004

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Overall Purpose and Foundational Goals

The vision. . .

- □ An integrated, internationally recognized hut-to-hut trail and waterway system for self-propelled, four-season nature-based travel in the Shuswap;
- □ **founded on principles of ecological integrity and human connection** within a sustained wilderness landscape;
- □ expanding self-propelled, four-season, nature-based recreation and learning opportunities for the novice, intermediate and experienced wilderness traveller where "self-propelled" includes (though is not necessarily limited to) hiking, mountain biking, canoe and kayaking, skiing, snow-shoeing and equestrian travel;
- with extended overnight capacity both in fully self-sufficient and/or professionally guided and/or catered tent and hut-to-hut facilities;
- □ linking a series of smaller, multi-day trail circuits into a longer and more ambitious multi-week circumnavigation of the Shuswap highland plateau and lake system one conceivable in a single extended venture, but more likely experienced as a series of return visits over time:
- □ all linked together into an integrated hut-to-hut destination trail and waterway system spanning the interior British Columbia mountain trench from Osoyoos through the Okanagan and Monashee to the Shuswap and over to Revelstoke (The Five Rings Trail)¹

This vision of an integrated hut-to-hut trail system is founded on. . .

- a multi-stakeholder partnership approach of first nations leadership, nature-based/self-propelled guides and tourism operators, recreational users (both individuals and clubs), environmental organizations, industry stakeholders, tourism alliances and destination marketing organizations, community economic development organizations, municipalities and regional districts, and other vested community stakeholders
- □ principles of ecological integrity and human connection within a sustained wilderness landscape of multiple stakeholders but where the natural capital² of the regions eco-systems is awarded an equal or greater value of importance in the overall review of assets and capital;³
- □ a desire to create an internationally acclaimed destination of authentic, four-season nature based travel and natural encounters, realized through partnership within the 5 Rings Trail bio-reserve system
- a long-term vision of community economic development measurable in stable local employment and the retention of regionally based business operations related to nature-based travel and the hut-to-hut trail system;
- □ a 2011+ plan for long-term management driven by sound business principles that factor natural capital assets into the bottom line calculation of sustainable operation;
- commitment to continuous review and renewal of environmental and socially sound hut-to-hut trail management, becoming international leaders in the policy and practice of recreational, nature-based travel management and planning;

¹ See Appendix: *The Five Rings Trail initiative* Adventure Okanagan Cooperative/Bearfoot Canada

² Natural Capital refers to an emerging approach in business that includes "ecosystem services" on the economic balance sheet. It is a concept gaining recognition as companies discover that making resources more productive not only increases ecological protection but can also improve profitability and competitiveness. See *A Road Map for Natural Capitalism*, by Amory Lovins, L. Hunter Lovins, and Paul Hawken. The Harvard Business Review, May-June 1999.

³ See also the Five Rings Trail "Bioreserve" concept. Adventure Okanagan Cooperative/Bearfoot Canada

Background and Perceived Need for a Regional Hut-to-Hut Trail System

In May 2002 the Shuswap Tourism Opportunity Strategy was published. Commissioned jointly by the Salmon Arm Economic Development Corporation and the Columbia Shuswap Regional District, the study was the first comprehensive effort to identify the most promising tourism products and opportunities, based on the land and water resources of the region. Ten product clusters were identified as holding the best short-term promise for outdoor recreation-based tourism opportunities in the Shuswap. Five of these clusters – Nordic Skiing, Light Touring, Ski Touring and Snow shoeing/Mountain Biking and Cycle Touring/Horseback Riding/Lodges and Resorts/ and most specifically, Cabin-to-Cabin Systems – relate directly to this proposal.⁴

Based on regional consultation, interviews and international market research, the Shuswap Tourism Opportunity Strategy concluded, "the market potential for lake or trail-based cabin-to-cabin systems is significant, judging from the increasing demand for cabin stays in (other regions such as) Alaska."⁵

(Note: the U.S. Forest Service operates a comprehensive wilderness system of 193 rustic trail-accessed cabins in Alaska. Similar cabin-to-cabin systems exist elsewhere in the world, including Scandinavia, the European Alps, Washington, and New Zealand. The scope of this initial study intends to draw on this existing market data to assess the feasibility of a hut-to-hut system in our own region.)

The Shuswap Tourism Opportunity Strategy assessed the market demand for Cabin-to-Cabin trail systems to be high in the province, neighbouring US states, the wider US market, and internationally. An analysis of competing cabin-to-cabin trail systems suggested low to medium competition provincially, with a few US locations established as high competitors. Overall potential was rated as high for all five regions of the Shuswap.

More recently, through the combined efforts of regional adventure tourism operators in the Okanagan and Shuswap, a major hut-to-hut trail initiative titled "The Five Rings Trail" has been launched aimed at establishing a world-class wilderness travel destination in advance of the 2010 Winter Olympics.

The Five Rings Trail is a proposed Hut-to-Hut Trail Network that would link backcountry areas from Osoyoos and the Boundary/Similkameen with the Okanagan and then the Monashee and Shuswap, ending in Revelstoke. As an industry led initiative, it is directly linked to benefit nature-based tour operators, small backcountry lodges and rural accommodators. An in-principal tenure agreement for the 5 Rings Trail System has been established with Lands and Waters BC, and negotiations are underway to finalize details of the initiative.

The 5 Rings Trail System is intended to be constructed in partnership with rural communities and outdoor organizations as well as key stakeholders that presently perform business operations in the backcountry. ⁷ The trail system holds the potential to unite the interior regions as one single product unit within what is being referred to as "a bioreserve philosophy of smart travel" – one that would hold significant international appeal. For the Shuswap region, the opportunity is before us to define how this relationship should look.

⁴ *The Shuswap Tourism Opportunity Strategy (STOS 2002)*, Salmon Arm Economic Development Corporation & Columbia Shuswap Regional District, May 2002.

⁵ STOS 2002, p. 122

⁶ Source: http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/cabin_web_page/cabin_files/index.html

⁷ See Appendix: 5 Rings Trail Initiative, Adventure Okanagan Cooperative/Bearfoot Canada

Added to the background research of the Shuswap Tourism Opportunity Strategy, and the current development of the 5 Rings Trail system, a series of conversations and meetings between local recreational trail advocates and operators has been gaining recent momentum. It appears critical mass support for a regional hut-to-hut concept is very good, with committed local advocates prepared to champion it forward. In particular, the ongoing development of local mountain bike trails reveals a lively, committed and willing core of people.

Preliminary discussions have been held with representatives from several of the region's economic development agencies, all with positive encouragement and support. (See "Project Partners" below.) A review of these organization's Economic Action Plans suggests the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut trail initiative would be a strong complement within their mandate.⁸

It should also be noted that the local Spirit of 2010 committee is currently exploring direct opportunities for our region tied to the 2010 Winter Olympics. With this the Provincial Government has doubled its funding support for tourism development in an effort to increase year-round industry capacity – an issue of significance to the Shuswap's traditionally summer based tourism industry. The international appeal of the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut Trail system project, together with the goal of creating and retaining year-round economic opportunity rooted in the ecological health of our region, establishes the initiative as a high priority for immediate investigation.

A brief consideration of intended user groups

The draft vision for the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut trails circuit identifies a desire to create selfpropelled, four-season, nature-based recreation and learning opportunities for the novice, intermediate and experienced wilderness traveller - where "self-propelled" includes (though is not necessarily limited to) hiking, mountain biking, canoe and kayaking, skiing, snow-shoeing and equestrian travel.

This identifies the "user groups" in the broadest sense, primarily by desired activity. It is recognized a more comprehensive approach to tourism and recreational development has to consider the deeper cultural, social, ecological and personal qualities of a travel experience to fully understand the motivations and benefits to potential user groups.

The Shuswap Tourism Opportunity Strategy identified two general markets or user groups for a cabin-to-cabin trail system:

Lake-based cabins would appeal to those who enjoy "softer" water activities like swimming, boating, fishing and nature viewing. The report identifies this group as similar to the market attracted to lodge or destination resorts: affluent, seasoned travellers willing to pay for a unique outdoor experience combined with comfortable accommodation and high quality amenities.9

Cabins on trails and in the alpine would be more rustic, appealing to skiers, sledders¹⁰, mountain bikers, hikers, or horseback riders seeking a more backcountry experience. The report goes on to suggest trail-based cabins have more appeal for those seeking an adventurous wilderness

⁸ See Economic Action Plan for Salmon Arm, DSA & SAEDC. 2004 - 2009

⁹ STOS 2002, p. 118

¹⁰ It should be noted the focus of this initiative is on self-propelled, non-motorized nature-based travel. Significant development for motorized backcountry recreation in the Shuswap has been possible thanks to the excellent efforts of the Columbia Shuswap Regional District's Economic Development office. This project seeks to develop similar regional opportunities for non-motorized recreational users.

experience. These users are more inclined to enjoy moderate to high challenge, solitude, and a respite from other people. 11

The study goes on to note trail-based recreational users are more likely to:

- □ seek recreation within a pristine environment,
- prefer minimum development and limited modern conveniences
- □ travel in small groups, with little tolerance for other people
- and may seek multi-day camping or cabin experiences

At this point in the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut Trail Circuit's conceptual development, it is hoped further target market data can be gathered and assessed for both of these general target groups.

Given early discussions, there appears to be opportunity for both high and low end target markets. While basic wilderness hut facilities may tailor well for the self-sufficient independent adventure traveller, opportunities for high-end, "soft" adventure lodge, lakeside and trailhead resort products show considerable promise, and may well present an integrated strategy. ¹² The recent development of two new backcountry cat-ski lodges in our region would also suggest potential for year-round, high-end backcountry user groups.

Similarly, a creative strategy for mixed-use mountain bike terrain, accessed by both local and visiting riders shows promise. Authenticity of the mountain bike trail riding experience is often judged by the perceived involvement of a local, passionate riding community. The destination can grow out of the reputation of the local riding community and the trails they are building, attracting visitors to stay and ride for multiple nights. Recent examples for study include Nelson and the Vancouver North Shore.

Project Partners: Agency and Community support to date

Community consultation over the past 6 months has tested and shaped the current draft hut-to-hut trail concept. Support for this draft vision has been consistent and encouraging. Agency discussions to date have included the Economic Development office of the Columbia Shuswap Regional District (Adelheid Bender, Robyn Cyr), Community Futures (Dave Andrews), Salmon Arm Economic Development Corporation (Caroline Grover), Sicamous Chamber of Commerce (Doreen Flavel), Little Shuswap Indian Band (Andreas Artz), and the Adventure Okanagan Cooperative (Don Elzer).

It is anticipated these primary community agencies will play a key role in driving this initiative forward.

Wider consultation is needed. Agencies and community organizations within the following are critical partners toward the success of this project:

- o the Shuswap first nations
- o local municipal and regional government
- o tourism operators
- o forest industry
- o recreational user groups
- o environmental organizations
- o other industry and business stakeholders

¹¹ STOS 2002, p. 118

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¹² The *5 Rings Trail Initiative* includes a trailhead cluster concept aimed at integrating current provincial support for increased lodge and resort capacity. This strategy is worth looking at for the Shuswap region. See Appendix: *5 Rings Trail Initiative*, Adventure Okanagan Cooperative/Bearfoot Canada

- o tourism alliances and DMOs
- o regional economic development organizations
- o Provincial government

The Community Consultation Approach

The scope of the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut Trail Circuit Initiative is substantial, with a core vision that spans economic, recreational, industry, cultural and environmental interests. To this end, a broad approach to community involvement is recognized as essential. Each phase of the hut-to-hut trails development will include regional community consultation through interviews, reporting and feedback with individual stakeholders, a series of community forums and presentations, and regular public relations communiqués through the media.

Overall direction of the project will be monitored by a community steering committee of individuals keen on supporting the trails project.

The Project Development Stages and Timing section outlines some of the key community consultation target actions and anticipated results.

A Legacy of Benefits to the Communities of the Shuswap

Through the feasibility planning and community consultation process wider benefits of a linked hut-to-hut trail circuit throughout the Shuswap will be explored. Early research suggests benefits to highlight include ¹³:

- u the value of developing nature-based recreation resources for use by all in the community
- □ the long term economic benefits to the region, specifically through the creation and retention of local business and job opportunities
- □ the promotion of understanding and respect for our natural environment
- □ the opportunity to support new approaches to sustainable natural resource management between First Nations, recreational, business, community, and ecological partners (including an opportunity to define the term "sustainable" in terms of measurable criteria)
- □ the value of adding non-motorised, nature-based travel to our region's reputation for natural beauty and outdoor pursuits
- □ the creation of a new tourism resource with potential for strong shoulder and four-season travel product opportunities
- □ the ability to strengthen regional identity and leverage international exposure through trail-linked communities
- □ the promotion of health and personal well-being
- u the increase in profile and support for local trail development and planning initiatives
- □ the establishment of a new level of local involvement in the management of our region's natural resource capital

¹³ See *Focus on Trail Planning for Recreation Trails*, published by the Ministry of Sport and Recreation, Western Australia. Dec 1998.

Feasibility Planning Phase 1: Preliminary Concept Development

Overall goals for this stage of the planning:

- to determine the overall economic, recreation and environmental viability of the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut Trail Circuit and Waterway Initiative;
- and to assess regional community support for the concept

Objectives for this phase:

- establish a steering committee and advisory cluster to direct the trail planning process
- □ consult with vested stakeholder groups and individuals throughout the Shuswap, (see "Project Partners" above)
- gather existing research on the design, management and market potential for a regional hut-to-hut trail system, including:
 - o a review of other regional hut-to-hut systems and trail development initiatives
 - o interviews with businesses linked to backcountry hut, cabin, or lodge operations
 - o further collection of relevant background studies and reports
- conduct a review of existing recreation trail and land management plans in the region, as well as compatibility with new plans currently being developed
- prepare a draft mapping template of the potential hut-to-hut trail system, including a survey of current landholders, licensees, tenure applicants, first nations interests, recreational management use, and other relevant geographical layering
- research the potential for creating a legacy project within the provincial Spirit of 2010 initiative, and the LegaciesNow support network
- define the nature of a partnership within the "Five Rings Trail" initiative
- establish initial contact with relevant governing agencies. These would include:
 - Local Government
 - First Nations
 - o Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans Canada
 - o Lands and Water BC
 - o The Ministry of Forests
 - o Ministry of Energy and Mines
 - o The Ministry of Sustainable Resources
 - o The Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection
 - o British Columbia Parks
 - o Wildlife, Habitat and Enforcement
 - o Federal Ministries may also include Aboriginal Affairs and HRSD
- address key issues in the design and management of a hut-to-hut trail system ¹⁴, including:
 - o tenureship application requirements
 - o how to balance commercial and non-commercial recreational use
 - o how can it be economically viable and present solid eco-business opportunities
 - o scenic management of the forest land base
 - o regional accountability and organizational structure what is the best way to coordinate our long-term efforts society? alliance? association? trails council?
 - o trail and hut building issues
 - o trail and hut reservations and the value of a centralized reservation system
 - insurance and liability
- draft a development and implementation outline for phase two of the trail system
- conduct an initial survey of financing options for development and management
- gather endorsement for phase two of the hut-to-hut trail initiative from local government and stakeholder groups
- prepare funding proposals for phase two of the hut-to-hut trail initiative

¹⁴ See Regional SWOT Analysis for Cabin Systems, p. 115. STOS, May 2002

Feasibility Planning Phase 2: Design and Planning

Overall goals for this stage of the planning:

- □ refine the concept of the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut Trail Circuit and Waterway initiative
- develop a comprehensive plan for the design, implementation and long-term management of the trail system
- and build regional ownership through ongoing community consultation

Objectives for this phase include:

Route Planning and Mapping

- identify key links between towns, community facilities, trailheads, greenways, and other natural, cultural, historical, and recreational assets
- pinpoint specific trail routes, circuits and hut locations, and prioritise for development
- prepare detailed mapping of priority sections based on file data and in-field surveys
- research and address cultural and heritage considerations for each area
- research and address core environmental considerations for each area
- assess and establish applicable trail use, sharing and access protocol

Concept Design and Building Plan

- research applicable trail and hut design standards
- consult with potential trail users to identify preferred design requirements
- research design options through discussion and site visits to established trail systems
- □ draft concept design and building plans for trails and huts, addressing issues such as:
 - o route placement and hut location
 - o environmental impact and development policies
 - o water and erosion control
 - o signs and traffic markings
 - o safety, risk management and liability
- prepare a timeline for trail and hut development

Management, Marketing and Maintenance Plan

- draft a detailed business plan for the hut-to-hut trail system, addressing:
 - o aims, objectives and target user groups
 - o strategies to meet objectives
 - o evaluation methods to measure outcomes
 - o management and organizational structure
 - o staffing
 - o registration systems
 - o future planning and development
 - o maintenance of the huts and trails
 - o budget and financial managment
 - o programs and services to be offered
- □ develop a marketing strategy that can address:
 - o positioning of the trail as a world-class destination experience for the self-propelled, nature-based traveller
 - o promotion of the business opportunities for tourism and recreational operators
 - o initiation of new tourism products based on the hut-to-hut trail system
 - o development of wide spread local recognition and ownership of the trail system

Land Tenure and Environmental Clearance

- determine land tenure and environmental clearance requirements
- **a** gather necessary information and prepare applications
- conduct ecological impact audits of priority trail segments
- negotiate and secure required approval

Financial Viability and Funding

- □ develop a financial strategy that addresses:
 - o capital funding for the construction of the trail project
 - o ongoing management, maintenance and marketing of the trail system
 - the opportunities and structure for sustainable commercial operations
- □ consult with potential funding sources
- prepare funding proposals for further implementation of the trails initiative
- and where feasible, to initiate and/or support the development of new trails that fit within the Shuswap Hut-to-Hut Trail Circuit's strategic goals and regional mapping template

Landowner, Licensee and Community Consultation

- □ identify and contact landowners and licensees along priority routes
- gather, negotiate and confirm local endorsement from stakeholders through ongoing consultation and the establishment of formal partnerships through individual and public meetings
- □ build broad regional public awareness and ownership for the trails initiative through public presentations, media announcements and community-wide PR

Phase 3: Implementation

While the final plan for implementation needs to be developed through the previous stages of planning, it is anticipated the following broad working goals will apply:

- ☐ Establish a regional governing body for the hut-to-hut trail system
- initiate the action plan developed in phase two of feasibility and planning
- continue the process of prioritization, route planning and mapping, tenure and environmental clearance, community consultation, and new trail and hut development monitor and evaluate target outcomes, and review and redirect strategic plan according to foundational project goals.

Appendix A: The 5 Rings Trail Initiative

communiqué

Adventure Okanagan Co-operative and Bearfoot Canada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 13, 2004

ADVENTURE OKANAGAN PROPOSES WORLD-CLASS TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

Okanagan/Shuswap, British Columbia – Adventure Okanagan Co-operative and its Development Division Bearfoot Canada have announced today that it has officially proposed trail development project to both the Federal and Provincial governments that would help retain small business operations hit hard by natural and political events of the past number of years.

The Five Rings Trail is a proposed Hut-to-Hut Trail Network that would link backcountry areas from Osoyoos and the Boundary/Similkameen with the Okanagan and then the Monashee and Shuswap, ending in Revelstoke.

"It is our intention that the Five Rings Trail be complete in advance of the Olympics in 2010 and be directly linked to benefit nature-based tour operators, small backcountry lodges and rural accommodators" stated Don Elzer, Managing Director of Adventure Okanagan Co-operative (AOC).

The project would be constructed in partnership with rural communities and outdoor organizations as well as key stakeholders, which presently perform business operations in the backcountry.

Elzer stated that the Hut-to-Hut would have a public access and commercial formula that remains a "work in progress" however he stated, "Adventure Okanagan represents self-propelled travel, so our intention is to retain the environment as pristine and emphasize guided group travel, along the lines of what occurs in other areas of the world where visitors want to explore sensitive habitat".

Elzer claims that within an overall tourism strategy the Five Rings Trail would be a world-class visitor experience that would have significant impact as far as building tourism revenues. He compared it to having two more ski hills in the interior without the environmental impact.

"The trail would really help existing backcountry and rural accommodators, since they would act as "Trailhead" locations. These operations have been suffering of late, and while the government is moving to develop resorts in time for the Olympics there does not seem to be a lot of effort placed on retaining existing business operations to ensure that they survive between now and the Olympics", stated Elzer.

Presently, AOC is working with potential partners for the project to draft detailed plans for the construction of the Five Rings Trail. If you would like more information as to how to get involved, contact Don Elzer at 250-547-9812. Or visit www.bearfootcanada.com

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About Adventure Okanagan Co-operative

The Adventure Okanagan Co-operative (AOC) represents adventure and eco-tourism operators located in British Columbia including the Okanagan, Shuswap and Monashee regions, from Osoyoos to Sicamous. AOC members work together to bring a diverse travel experience to

visitors through travel packaging that promotes safe, exciting, responsible travel within one of the most beautiful regions in Western North America.

AOC performs marketing programs; travel packaging services and promotion; tour itinerary design; helps reduce business costs for members; offer business development services and promote advocacy promoting habitat preservation and adventures in education, ecology and culture.

www.adventureokanagan.com

About Bearfoot Canada

"Bearfoot Canada builds unique and authentic Canadian cultural experiences through naturebased travel"

Bearfoot Canada is the development division of Adventure Okanagan Co-operative and is a Canadian Tourism Commission Product Club. Bearfoot builds partnerships that assemble the resources to provide assistance for the ongoing maintenance of backcountry trails and sensitive habitat while educating the public about responsible travel as well as marketing nature-based travel worldwide. Bearfoot Canada also performs educational programs for the travel industry. www.bearfootcanada.com

Appendix B: Regional SWOT Analysis for Cabin Systems

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Strengths		Shuswap and Mabel Lakes provide ideal backdrops to floating cabins.
		Supportive features and corresponding activities including rock climbing,
		river activities, kayaking, ski touring, snowmobiling, etc.
		Good mix of front, mid and backcountry.
		Proximity to population/ transportation centers.
		Proximity to high-quality outdoor recreation features.
Weaknesses		Vandalism, compliance and enforcement
		Minimal support infrastructures (trails) in many areas.
		Access to Crown leases or other Commercial Recreation (CR) tenure.
		Repeatability of land based product potential.
		Poor shoulder season.
Opportunities		Opportunity to provide support services that cater to the cabins including
		waste management, servicing, booking, boat and other equipment rentals.
		Cabin-to-cabin systems have yet to be developed in the Shuswap region
		and
		there are suitable circuit locations.
Threats		Scenic management of the forest land base.
		Road closures.
		Increased recreation use affecting "remote" experience.

from: The Shuswap Tourism Opportunity Strategy, May 2002. p. 115