



GBCTA 2030 STRATEGIC PLAN

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1. Introduction

This document articulates the high-level vision and strategy for the evolution of the Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association (GBCTA) over the next 10 years as both an organization and as the manager of the trails system. This plan is in response to the anticipated needs of all non-motorized trail users who benefit from the trails system in the West Bragg Creek (WBC) area of Kananaskis Country, as well as the community of Greater Bragg Creek within Rocky View County.

To determine key directions to be undertaken over the next ten years, the GBCTA draws on key foundational components, which include the organization's history, its implied mission and core values, a situational analysis covering internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external trends potentially impacting the organization. With these foundational components and the development of an over-arching 10-year vision, specific goals and strategies are identified that will be required in order to move the organization, the trails system and trail users toward this vision.

Background

The GBCTA began in 2004 as a small group of passionate Bragg Creek residents seeking to build trails in the Greater Bragg Creek area. In 2007, this effort became integrated with an existing volunteer ski grooming group operating under approval from the Alberta Government. In addition, new (and initially, unsanctioned) mountain-bike trails started being developed in Kananaskis Country by yet another small group of local and passionate volunteers.

In 2012-14, Spray Lakes Sawmills undertook a harvest plan in West Bragg Creek that directly impacted the existing trail network. Proactive efforts undertaken by local individuals within the GBCTA, to protect both the trails and the natural environment from the detrimental impacts of proposed clear-cut logging plans, resulted in the GBCTA emerging as one of the leading trails organizations in Western Canada.

As such, the GBCTA took on virtually all of the responsibility for winter trail grooming and trail building/maintenance in WBC Kananaskis Country, as well as the Greater Bragg Creek area of Rocky View County.

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The trails system is now a significant draw for people from surrounding communities (primarily Calgary and the Bow Valley) as it provides a means for people to be active, explore the natural world, connects communities, and boosts the local economy of Bragg Creek. As such, the GBCTA has become the steward of one of the most extensive multi-user trail networks in Western Canada.

Challenge

Over the past 10 years, the GBCTA has executed its government approved “All Seasons Trails Plan”, as well as planned and overseen construction of the Trans Canada Trail (The Great Trail) both in the community of Greater Bragg Creek, as well as the West Bragg Creek area of Kananaskis Country. The organization now manages a fleet of equipment based at a government owned maintenance facility in West Bragg Creek, as well as coordinating many volunteers working thousands of hours per year– a far cry from a few residents working on the trails. Therefore, it is now time to turn the focus toward the next 10 years.

2. Approach

GBCTA initiated a strategic planning process in late 2018 and early 2019. However, this work was put on hold due to the need to address some higher priority and time-consuming operational matters. Strategic planning was restarted in late January 2020 to develop the 10-year vision and plan to unify the goals identified for trail development, organization and provision across the GBCTA. Although the global pandemic of COVID-19 declared in mid-March 2020 introduced a substantial delay to the scheduled completion of the plan, it did not derail planning all together. While timelines were extended, the overall approach and work steps remained largely unchanged. The approach taken for the development of the GBCTA 2030 Strategic Plan is outlined in the following five steps:

1. Information Gathering and Consultation
2. Assessment, Consolidation, Identification of Key Themes
3. Plan Development
4. Approvals
5. Communication to Stakeholders

Information Gathering and Consultation

The focus of this work-step is to efficiently gather as much relevant information about the current state of the GBCTA, as well as what the future may hold. Activities to support this first step include:

- Member Stakeholder Questionnaire with higher than 85% response rate
- External Key Stakeholder Interviews
- Internal Key personnel facilitated sessions – in person

Assessment, Consolidation, Identification of Key Themes and Plan Development

While Steps 2 and 3 appear to be sequential in nature, in reality much of the final direction and plan were developed iteratively over the course of the information gathering. A traditional strategic plan framework of analyzing the GBCTA's mission, vision, core values, situational assessment, and key themes was incorporated to create the 2030 Strategic Plan. At this stage of the process, it was also imperative to separate the opportunities into what GBCTA is

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mandated to achieve, has the capacity to execute and the financial sustainability to maintain in the long term. All other opportunities were captured for future consideration.

Approvals

Following the preliminary work steps described above, the Strategic Plan was developed by the Steering Committee to be approved by the Executive Committee and subsequently submitted to the Board of Directors for organizational approval and adoption.

Communication to Stakeholders

Once the Strategic Plan is approved and adopted, it will be shared and communicated with Stakeholders.

3. The Foundation

Mission

The Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association is a registered charitable organization with the express purpose of building and maintaining a sustainable trails system for the enjoyment of all non-motorized trail users in both Rocky View County in the Greater Bragg Creek Community, as well as the West Bragg Creek area of Kananaskis Country.

Vision

The GBCTA believes that outside is home and are proud to be active stewards of the place that community comes together to explore, connect with nature, and recreate in every season. The GBCTA connects a diverse community through a shared love for the outdoors by providing a robust, thoughtfully maintained multi-use trail system – by community, for the community.

The GBCTA is widely recognized as one of the premiere trails management associations in all of Canada. In particular, we are known for:

- Developing and stewarding Western Canada’s premiere multi-user trail network system
- Being a leader and advocate for the environmental sustainability of sensitive ecosystems in conjunction with trail usage
- Our support of youth sports and leadership programs and being a nexus for outdoor education
- Our harmonious community of non-motorized trail users from all disciplines with a culture of mutual respect and understanding at its core
- Being an organization that invests in and nurtures one of the top trail volunteer programs in Canada
- Being an organization that is governed and managed with the utmost professionalism and a relentless pursuit of continuous improvement and excellence
- The positive impact we have had in our local community of Bragg Creek

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Core Values

- **Community Focused**
- **Teamwork & Collaboration**
- **Volunteers**
- **Healthy Ecosystems**
- **Diversity**
- **Safety & Respect**
- **Promote Health & Fun**
- **Building Leaders**

Our Core Values are the principles that guide how the GBCTA (volunteers and employees) show up every day.

Community Focused – The GBCTA is guided by the collective needs of the multi-user community and the local community at large.

Teamwork & Collaboration – The GBCTA values and believes in teamwork. We know that we are more effective when we collaborate with one another and work together as volunteers and employees of GBCTA. We also know that we are more effective at reaching our goals when we collaborate with our Strategic Partner organizations, such as Government, sports groups, schools, local businesses and other trail organizations.

Volunteers – First and foremost, the GBCTA is a “volunteer” organization and is more successful when it keeps volunteerism at its core. The GBCTA will continue to focus on building the volunteer program to sustain the organization over the long term.

A Leader in Healthy Natural Ecosystems – The GBCTA is privileged to play a role as land steward for the West Bragg Creek area of Kananaskis Country by providing active multi-user trail experiences for its constituents. The GBCTA embraces the commitment to protect the environment as much as possible, such that a healthy, natural ecosystem can coexist with a sustainable trails system for non-motorized trails users.

Diversity – The GBCTA values the richness diversity provides to the organization, as it serves as the foundation of the multi-user trail network the GBCTA maintains. Specifically, diversity of perspective, experience and expertise from volunteers, employees and trail users is desired.

Safety & Respect – The GBCTA volunteers and employees work on a foundation of safety and respect. Volunteers and employees strive for safety first, and aim to prevent and educate unsafe work at every opportunity. The GBCTA is always respectful of one another and the community trail users served.

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Promote Health & Fun – The GBCTA will continue to promote active healthy lifestyles by working with the trail users' community and all other trails' partners. A love of the trails fuels the GBCTA and its volunteers. Whether working or recreating on the trails, smiling faces and a love of the outdoors is the experience the GBCTA strives to provide every time.

Building Leaders

- Individual Growth and Mentorship – The GBCTA is a place where volunteers and employees can come to work with the confidence that they will grow as individuals, with the benefit of leaving each and every person better off from having made a working contribution to the GBCTA. Mentorship is a significant aspect of this, where those with experience within the organization are committed to imparting their experience on newer members of the organization in a mentorship capacity. In fact, the mentor often learns the most about him or herself in this mentoring relationship.
- Continuous Improvement – The GBCTA volunteers and employees embrace knowledge and change. Being open and eager to learn a better way leads to a superior outcome - a more effective outcome, a more efficient outcome, a safer outcome. Good change management is a necessary and beneficial leadership skill.

4. Situational Assessment

This section provides an overview of what the key volunteer leaders and employees believe to be an accurate, current assessment of the GBCTA, internally, externally and possible future considerations.

Strengths

Strengths are those attributes of the organization which have largely been responsible for its success to date. For the most part, strengths do not change significantly over time but that doesn't mean they won't or cannot. The GBCTA's strengths are:

- Volunteer base that is passionate, highly skilled with skill diversity and available (local)
- A high standard of excellence with respect to trails construction and maintenance
- Culture of dedication and desire to succeed
- Culture of safety first
- Proximity of location to Calgary as a preferred day-use area
- The landscape and eco-system that accommodates our trail network
- Foundation of processes and policy (e.g., safety, operating framework, etc.)
- Partnerships with Alberta Environment and Parks, Rockyview County, Trans Canada Trail, Alberta Trail Net as well as Elbow River Watershed Partnership, and XCBC
- Environmental focus and stewardship
- Reputation with partners and trail users
- Diverse trail-user base

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are those attributes of the organization which have largely been a hindrance to any success the organization has achieved to date. For the most part, weaknesses do not change significantly over time but that doesn't mean they won't or cannot. Weaknesses need to be addressed and mitigated where possible for future success. The GBCTA's weaknesses are:

- Over dependence on key people
- Lack of diversity within the organization (gender, age, ethnicity)
- Operating funding is too reliant on user donations and therefore not secure
- Hampered by slow decision making in government

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- Conflict between self-focused trail user groups
- The need to work with, and be impacted by, other land users (primarily forestry and ranching)
- Extensive trail standards with which to comply in order to build and maintain trails to a “multi-user” specification
- Residual “committee” decision-making culture and associated lack of delineation between board member volunteers and operational lead volunteers
- Increased traffic in the local community largely due to the effectiveness of the GBCTA’s development and ongoing maintenance of a very high-quality trail system
- Operational silos and lack of teamwork driven by individual agendas creating lack of unity within the organization, conflict and significant inefficiency

Trends (Possible and Probable)

Trends are those external forces – both possible and probable – that can impact the organization and can represent either a threat and/or an opportunity for the organization.

- Significant increase in E-bike trail users
- Increased precipitation and more volatile local weather induced by climate change
- Government spending (cutbacks to parks on the one hand; potential for directed funding to support operations through user fees on the other)
- Increase trail user visits (30% year over year increase in 2020)
- Flat-lining local economy due to dual impacts of the 2020 pandemic and a lack of economic diversity (therefore over exposure to economic shocks)
- Societal requirement for diversity and social license to operate
- Aging and active ‘Boomers’
- Increased industrial activity – specifically, additional clear-cut planning by Spray Lake Sawmills

5. 2030 Themes

By incorporating the Mission, Vision, Core Values and Situational Assessment, the following five interdependent themes emerged as priority areas of endeavour to enable the GBCTA to achieve its objectives over the next 10 years:

- 1. Diverse and Thriving Trailhead Community**
- 2. Organizational and Operational Excellence (Governance and Operations)**
- 3. Business Model and Financial Sustainability**
- 4. Environmental Sustainability and Leadership**
- 5. Youth, Education & Growth**

5.1 Diverse and Thriving Trailhead Community

The GBCTA is focused on building community among trail-users and among different trail-user groups. Our trails and trailheads are natural places to encourage and support community. Diversity is critical not only to our organization internally but also to our trailhead community. To this end, we have been successful in fostering a trailhead community culture of mutual respect and understanding among trail-users and among different trail-user groups.

Developing and supporting a diverse trailhead community consistent with our values is also integral to the successful advancement of the other 2030 Themes.

The Greater Bragg Creek Trails System provides the link to connect all trail users and the area community in a positive and healthy environment. Trail users support and respect the trail environment and community businesses in the area. The area community embraces the opportunity that the trails system provides in supporting the economy and facilitating a healthy lifestyle.

GBCTA elevates the profile of a diverse trailhead community through positive interactions with users, user groups, community residents, business leaders, trail hosting and education programs and builds a deeper community presence through engaged communication and partnered events.

Strategic Projects	When	Who
Establish a rolling two year plan and schedule for trailhead community events (updates annually)		
Plan, design and build a new and permanent Trailhead Community Centre in West Bragg Creek that serves as both a place to gather, as well as a nexus for outdoor education for all trail users		
Develop and implement an active and comprehensive Trailhead Community Communication Strategy – with a primary goal of fostering the community of respect and understanding between all trail users		
Proactive outreach and engagement with Bragg Creek residents and businesses to ensure we are doing our best to support the community of Bragg Creek		
Establish a Trail Hosting program for education, communication and developing a presence within West Bragg Creek		

5.2 Organizational and Operational Excellence

The GBCTA adheres to the principles of organizational and operational excellence. Integral to this pursuit is the clear delineation of roles as defined by agreed responsibilities and accountabilities internal to the organization – the details of which are articulated in the GBCTA Operating Framework. A key delineation point is that which distinguishes the role and purpose of the Board of Directors from the rest of GBCTA management and operations. The Board of Directors remains strictly focused on governance and policy and delegates entirely all responsibility and accountability for execution of all other matters of the organization to the Executive Committee (or Executive Director as the case may be) within its Delegation of Authority level.

Whether it is the Board of Directors, Management or Operations, our culture, as defined by the Core Values section above, is what serves as the touchstone for the entire organization. This is how we show up every day.

Governance – Board of Directors

- Separation of board from operations involves not only ensuring the majority of board level conversation focus on governance / policy matters (rather than operational) but also transitioning to board composition whereby volunteer operational leads do not also serve as board members and vice versa
- Succession: Board members to serve a maximum of two continuous three-year terms – board term limits (2 three-year terms, maximum)
- Diversity on Board of Directors consistent with accepted ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) guidelines
- In the event the Executive Committee (EC) is no longer a viable option for GBCTA due to coordination and / or workload challenges, the GBCTA may institute a formal Executive Director (ED) position to replace the EC where the ED becomes solely accountable for all operational matters of the GBCTA. Similar to the EC, the ED would be accountable to and serves at the pleasure and discretion of the Board of Directors

Management and Operations

“Operations” comprises of all non-board activities of the GBCTA involving not only West Bragg Creek trails operations but also all other areas including marketing and communications, donor relations, events, administration, etc. All operational areas and initiatives are accountable to the Executive Committee. A few of the principles defining operations are as follows:

- Small cohort of paid staff for continuity and sustainability
- Large cohort of operational volunteers both functioning in “lead” and “specialist” capacities. All leads, whether volunteer or paid, are accountable to the Executive Committee or Executive Director
- Leads not committees. Elimination of decision by committee (residual committee culture) as this tends to be inefficient and unnecessary
- Critical operational functions requiring clear descriptions, work processes, delegation of authority levels and criteria enabling the GBCTA to assess whether or not these functions should transition to paid employee positions implemented as required:
 - Executive Management or Chief Executive Office (currently fulfilled by the Executive Committee where a paid function would become an Executive Director (replacing Executive Committee))
 - Coordination of Operational Volunteers (distinct from Board volunteers)
 - Coordination of Administration
 - Management of physical assets and maintenance of those assets
 - Management or Coordination of all Trails Planning, Construction & Maintenance
 - Management or Coordination of Winter Trail Operations and Maintenance (including all winter trail grooming for cycle and ski and maintenance for all winter trails)

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Teamwork & Open Communication

Teamwork and open communication is critical to achieving success within the GBCTA. This is achieved through regular review and communication of the Operating Framework, as well as how people show up every day. It will be a priority to eliminate all siloed thinking and behaviour within the organization.

Strategic Projects	When	Who
Establish a plan and schedule for Board of Directors Transformation – transition the Board to become strictly a policy board and adopt best practice governance principles (e.g., term limits, diversity, etc.)		
Establish a semi-annual review of the Operating Framework by the Executive Committee and communicate updates to the rest of the organization as necessary		
Undertake an organizational review with a purpose to eliminate siloed thinking and implement a GBCTA team-first philosophy		
Review critical operational functions and develop an organizational plan with a focus on key functions as outlined above. This includes developing principles and criteria for determining if certain functions should be transitioned to paid employee positions		
Develop and implement an annual priority focused workplan, single-source-of-truth consistent with (and perhaps linked to) annual budget. Workplan to be reviewed and updated on a monthly basis		

5.3 Business Model and Financial Sustainability

The GBCTA has migrated to a business and financial model that sees the majority of its funds being allocated to support “sustainment” of the organization and ongoing maintenance of the trails system. This is a shift from the first 15 years of the organization where the vast majority of funds were allocated to capital (primarily new trail construction or other significant one-time expenditures). Therefore, the financial model is now one that primarily supports ongoing predictable funding to support ongoing operations and trails maintenance. This requires the organization to implement more robust financial controls, proper budgeting and accountability. By 2030, the GBCTA funding model can be broken down into the following areas – the most significant portion of which is provided through ongoing contractual operating revenue.

Operating Revenue

- Alberta Government contracts
- Rocky View County contracts
- GBCTA hosted trails events

Large Donations

- Large donor funding realized through strategic campaigns and donor relationship management

Capital Grants

- Capital grants to fund discrete capital projects as needed

Trail User Donations

- Continuous trail user donor funding through trail head drop boxes, fund raising events

Strategic Projects	When	Who
Develop a ten-year operating agreement with Alberta Government which sets the stage for long term operational funding to be provided by operating fees charged to and paid by the Alberta Government – funded through the imposition of trail/park user fees imposed and administered by the government		
Continue financial separation of Kananaskis Country Trails from Rocky View County Community Trails		

5.4 Environmental Sustainability and Leadership

Trails provide an opportunity for people to interact and experience the environment in an immersive way. As stewards of the land, the GBCTA is a leader who invests in both the trails and the environment while educating how they are not mutually exclusive. Efforts undertaken should always have in the forefront the need to minimize the impact on the natural environment and the desire to protect it for future generations.

The GBCTA is a leader in environmental stewardship for trails system management by using documented and proven best practices and procedures for trail planning, trail building and construction. Trails are enhanced through winter grooming and ongoing trail maintenance. Certain trails are left ungroomed but maintained to allow for a more rustic trail experience. GBCTA activities are successfully accomplished when impacts to water systems, flora and fauna are mitigated in the planning and construction phases or are minimized to the extent of one season.

Strategic Projects	When	Who
Establish formal partnership with Elbow River Watershed Partnership		
Determine and Implement best practices for watershed protection and erosion control in all trail building activities		
Develop an environmental stewardship policy to promote to our trail users and incorporate environmental education in our messaging (Trail host program)		
Develop a communications policy/plan that incorporates both pro-active communication on key environmental issues, as well as timely response to public concerns over environmental impacts of trails and user activities		
Establish a lead role with the West Bragg Creek Land Users Agreement Group to ensure that other land users are following best practices. This will begin with organizing regular meetings (either annual or semi-annual) to review environmental impacts and collaboratively develop mitigation strategies		

5.5 Youth, Education & Growth

The trails maintained by the GBCTA provide a pathway for people to explore the natural world and serve to connect our trail community, young and old, while improving their health and well-being. Today’s trail users and the future generations of trail users are integral to the continued success of the network trails, fostering a respect for both the land and each other. GBCTA manages this responsibility through facilitating education programs for all users, user groups and the area communities. Education programs are designed to reach both young and senior trail enthusiasts, encouraging users to find enjoyment, empowerment, and connection to the community through healthy pursuits. The trail-hosting program is a great example of the investment GBCTA is making in reaching out to the wider trail user community by providing a visible presence both on and off the trails year round.

In order for GBCTA to continue its mission and grow, investment into user programs (i.e. skills development, amateur racing events, partnerships with schools, informal community events) will be the foundation for succession planning and for reaching a wider, more diverse future membership.

Strategic Projects	When	Who
Develop a youth outdoors and youth sports group engagement plan with a goal to foster the next generation of trail stewards and leaders through active engagement		
Develop a youth education outreach program (similar to above) supporting education groups in outdoor and environmental education		
Engage local Indigenous community in trail related activities to facilitate community trail connectivity and relationship building		

6. Strategic Management Process

This document provides an overview of the GBCTA's vision for 2030 as well as associated key themes, goals and strategic initiatives. As it is critical the GBCTA remains adaptive to circumstances arising over the next ten years, this is meant to be a living document which can adapt over time, as required.

Therefore, the GBCTA Board of Directors will review the GBCTA 2030 Strategic Plan on an annual basis to ensure it remains effective and, will either approve or reject any changes to the Strategic Plan proposed by the Executive Committee or Executive Director, as the case may be.