

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO

DRAPER TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY
WHAT WE HEARD REPORT



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DRAPER TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY: WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

PREPARED BY

EDS

PREPARED FOR

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF WOOD BUFFALO

MARCH 2023


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Photo courtesy of the McMurray Sno-Drifters



1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

EDS Group Inc. (EDS) has been retained by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) to complete targeted consultations with local stakeholders to determine the feasibility of improving Draper Trail. The current trail alignment leads generally from the Tom Weber Park and boat launch in the Waterways community, to the south and east leading to Saprae Creek. The scope of work includes a set of engagement activities, site evaluations, and a report that identifies the feasibility of improvements upon this trail segment.

The approved scope of work for this project includes a commitment to engage local stakeholders and residents of the broader community, and was achieved through conversations, workshops, a project page and email exchanges. In summary, engagement for this project included:

- meetings between the EDS team and the RMWB Project Manager;
- online engagement with local stakeholders, to assess the needs and vision for the trail alignment and proposed elements such as improved trail segments and day use areas; and
- a written "What We Heard Report" made available on Participate Wood Buffalo.



1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS ENGAGEMENT PLAN

An engagement plan was created to outline the target audience, information to be presented, feedback sought, timing and other elements of a proposed engagement process. The RMWB's assigned representative(s) approved the engagement plan prior to engagement activities being executed.

The objectives of this engagement plan include:

- to obtain approval of the proposed engagement program for this project;
- to work collaboratively with the RMWB's Communications & Engagement and Indigenous & Rural Relations Departments to execute the public and stakeholder engagement program;
- to pursue engagement that ensures stakeholders and affected residents have an effective and meaningful opportunity to inform the results of this Report; and
- to comply with the RMWB's engagement policies and practices.

1.3 POLICY CONTEXT

Several existing statutory and non-statutory plans were reviewed as part of our understanding of the policy context for this project. These include, but are not limited to:

- Alberta Trails Act;
- Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act;
- Alberta Public Lands Act;
- Alberta Wildlife Act;
- the latest OHV Master Plan for the RMWB outlining strategies for the use of trails for OHV use; and
- RMWB bylaws associated with OHV use, the use of regional trails and transportation.





2.0 PURPOSE OF ENGAGEMENT

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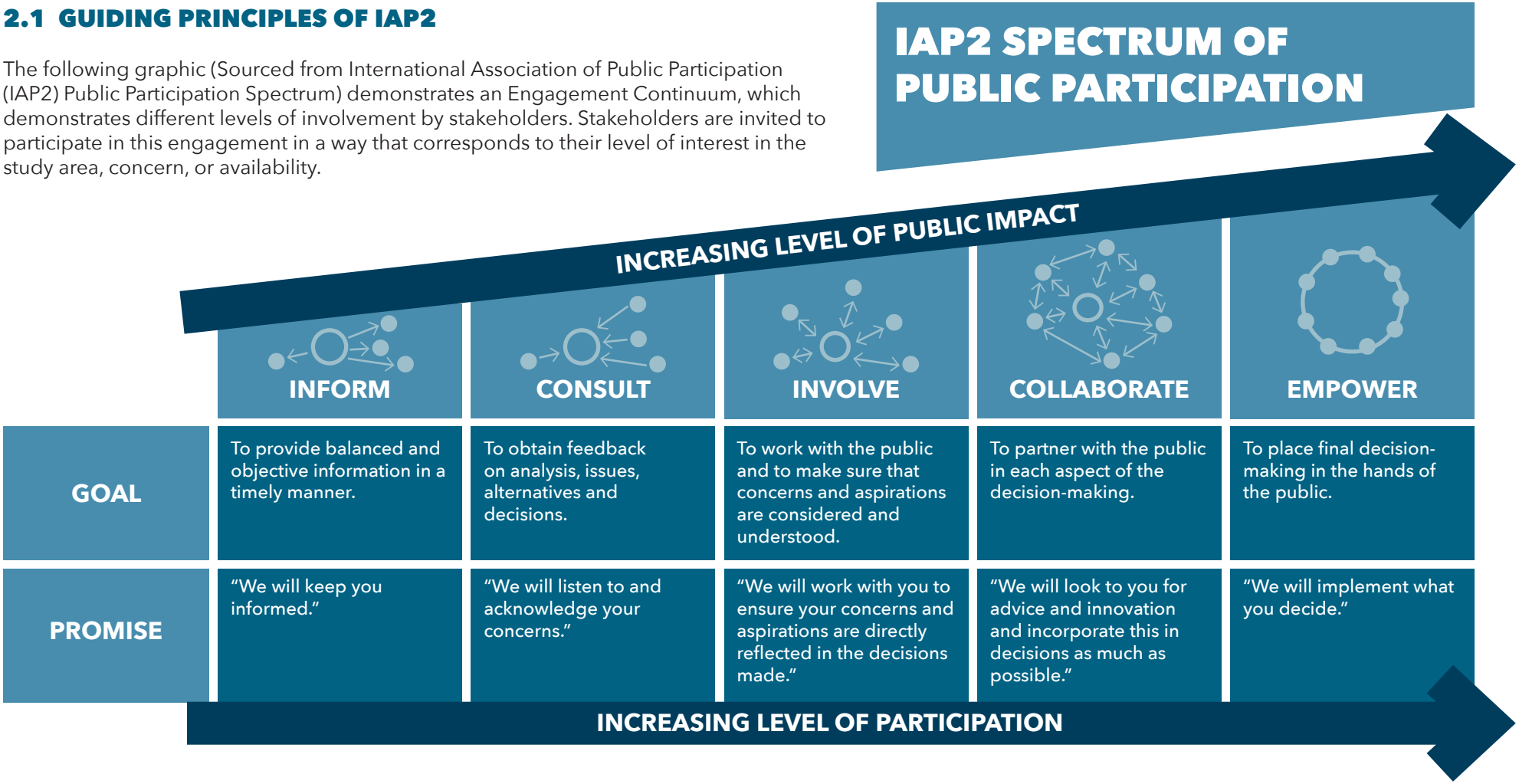
Public and stakeholder engagement should be initiated early on in any community development project that involves public facilities and open space that is shared by more than one user group. The overarching purpose of public and stakeholder engagement is to promote transparency in the public planning process. The goal for engagement is to get a better understanding of community interests, preferred uses, and priorities, which will help determine the vision for the trail's future use.

Public engagement is an opportunity for the Municipality and the consultant (EDS Group Inc.) to demonstrate that the recommendations are consistent with various Municipal, Provincial and Federal statutory and non-statutory planning instruments as well as the Municipality's parks and open space practices and engineering servicing standards protocols.



2.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF IAP2

The following graphic (Sourced from International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum) demonstrates an Engagement Continuum, which demonstrates different levels of involvement by stakeholders. Stakeholders are invited to participate in this engagement in a way that corresponds to their level of interest in the study area, concern, or availability.



The following chart includes the highest level of involvement by each identified stakeholder in this process, and suggested engagement techniques:

STAKEHOLDER	LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION	TECHNIQUES
Identified Stakeholders, User Groups & Public	Consult	Participation in a workshop session allowing for open exchange of ideas and to affirm the direction of this feasibility study. Will also engage using *Participate Wood Buffalo* platform.
Administration	Consult	Face to face meetings, email exchanges and review of draft and final reports.
Other Government Agencies	Inform	Email exchanges, provide details of the project as it is at various steps through the process.



3.0 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Photo courtesy of the McMurray Sno-Drifters

3.0 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

3.1 ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE

PHASE 1:

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY REFINEMENT

FALL 2022

PHASE 2A:

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

DECEMBER 2022

PHASE 3:

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

MARCH 2023

PHASE 2B:

PARTICIPATE WOOD BUFFALO PAGE: *SURVEYS, IDEAS, POLLS, HOTSPOT MAPPING & MORE*

DECEMBER 2022 - JANUARY 2023



Photo courtesy of the McMurray Sno-Drifters

3.2 ENGAGEMENT PROMOTION

The Municipality and the consultant (EDS Group Inc.) promoted the engagement for this project and encouraged participation in numerous ways. Specific tactics included:

- Rural newsletter (Draper & Saprae Creek);
- *Participate Wood Buffalo* (PWB);
- PWB newsletter;
- Social media;
- Direct emails to stakeholders and community groups;
- Electronic message boards; and
- Pulse.





4.0 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

4.1 PURPOSE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

On Monday December 5th we facilitated a 60-minute meeting with internal departments and a two-hour evening workshop with identified stakeholders. The following user groups and departments were invited to attend the session:

- Wood Buffalo ATV Riders Club;
- McMurray Sno-Drifters Club;
- McMurray Dirt Riders Association;
- Alberta Snowmobile Association;
- Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association;
- Alberta Dirt Riders Association;
- Alberta TrailNet;
- Fort McMurray Search & Rescue Society;
- Dutton Quad Riders Club; and
- RMWB internal departments.

The following outlines the program for these engagement sessions:

- our initial stakeholder engagement session allowed us to present findings to date, site inventory and assessment and our understanding of challenges and opportunities along the trail alignment;
- learn of each stakeholder's interest in this trail, known information from years past, recommendations on the feasibility of improving the trail and potential partnerships between, user groups and also identify user group needs and gaps;
- the session involved a range of trail users, both motorized and non-motorized; and
- we hosted the stakeholder workshop online via Microsoft Teams. A video recording of the meeting was posted on *Participate Wood Buffalo*, so those who couldn't attend the workshop could still hear the discussion and provide informed feedback through online tools provided (i.e., survey, forum, etc).

4.2 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The two sessions followed the same format. They started off with group introductions. All attendees were asked to state any current or past involvement in trails, off-highway vehicle planning, knowledge of stakeholder and public needs in Draper / Saprae Creek. Attendees were also asked what would make it easier for them to participate in the session (i.e., speaking loudly and clearly, pausing for question breaks as opposed to raising hands, etc.).

Next, an overview of the Draper Trail Feasibility Study was given focusing on background information, goals, why we are undertaking a feasibility study, project principles and the study process. Findings of our site assessments were then presented to the group. We then collected the following information from the group:

Are there any existing conditions or past occurrences that we should be aware of? (i.e., areas that had significant repair in past years, the role of RMWB versus user groups, areas of user conflict, any incidents, major events, slope failures, etc. that have occurred):

- Sno-Drifters;



Photo courtesy of Dennis Norman

    - regarding the slope to the river crossings – access is very challenging for snowmobiles;
    - Sno-Drifters have had to bring in a lot of snow to make the slopes less steep;
    - In winter, creek crossings less of a concern since it was iced over;
- There are a few areas along the trail alignment with significant slope failures;
- FireSmart – there is a newly approved Council plan for "FireSmarting" that does not include this area;
- This area has been examined previously as an egress road
    - Unstable slope identified along trail – was recommended that geotechnical stabilization was needed;
- Residents in Saprae do trail cleanup in the area, and we need to create very clear roles of who does what in the area – RMWB vs residents, etc.;
- Does Draper Trail go into the Caribou range?
    - No mapping that supported this was in this zone;
- There is an ongoing slope stability monitoring program underway in this and other areas around the region;
- If egress crossings were built is there any concern with salt maintenance and then runoff into the river?
    - This all depends on the RMWB maintenance practices; and
    - If this is a designated transportation route there will be maintenance best practices that will need to be followed.

The presentation then went over regulatory considerations involved in creek crossings and potential bridge options depending on permitted uses. We then collected the following information:

What's your vision for the trail?

- Signage would be a fantastic addition to the trail;
- Sno-Drifters – snowmobile club has requested having wayfinding points;
    - With the downtown revitalization, there will be some wayfinding programming done that we can build on outside the urban service area;
    - Between March and November, not using the trail;
    - There are several trail crossings along this trail where they install stop signs, yields, etc.;
    - The RMWB is finalizing a wayfinding strategy, which focuses on the downtown area but is region-wide. Operations would need to be looked into with respect to maintaining the trail to determine if the project is feasible and if Council will support it;
- We should not be looking to keep the trail as is – washouts are getting worse and more dangerous every year;
    - Look at fixing drainage issues and washouts at very minimum from a safety perspective;
- If we did rehabilitate this trail and open it to OHVs would it change the FireSmart approach for the area?
    - OHV users are using the trail now, unpermitted bush fires are occurring. This formalization likely would not see more FireSmart focus in this area if the uses change; and
    - There is great risk from dead standing trees that fall regularly.

"Signage would be a great addition to the trail."

"I thought that in the past the trail was multi-use and worked great."

Following these discussions, we then opened up the session to any general comments or questions the group had regarding the project. The following are the findings:

Additional Questions / Comments:

- I thought that in the past the trail was multi-use and worked great;
    - If it stays the same (with horses using the trail) most riders that use trails like this have horses that are not scared of engines;
    - As for walkers, it would be good if they stay visible as OHVs move a lot faster;
    - Trail etiquette education should be explored if trail is to be multi-use;
- If a project is deemed feasible then what happens next;
    - The consultant will determine what is "feasible";
    - The report will then have short, medium and long-term items, along with dollar amounts associated with them;
    - Then Administration reviews the study and presents it to Council to see if there is budget allocated toward it;
- If Senior Leadership endorses this study, how long does it take to implement;
    - The RMWB starts looking at projects in the summer, then goes to budget planning each fall;
    - If deemed feasible, the project would be proposed through the capital budget process
    - The project goes out to tender to consultants and contractors and then gets built; and
    - Construction can then take one or more construction seasons.




5.0
PARTICIPATE
WOOD
BUFFALO

5.1 PROJECT PAGE

The project page on Participate Wood Buffalo was designed as a hub of project information. To-date, the project page has engaged 317 participants. The page features many tools such as:

- Quick Poll: what mode of transportation are you most likely to use Draper Trail for recreationally;
- Mapping tool;
  - Ask people to place pins identifying hotspots;
  - i.e., areas of use conflict, wildlife sightings, concerns, erosion, etc.;
- Ideas tool: this is where we ask people to share their vision for the trail;
  - Allows people to post their ideas and others can comment on them or like them;
- Videos: recordings of engagement sessions;
- Public survey;
- Frequently asked questions;
  - What is a feasibility study;
  - Why is this study being undertaken;
  - How do I get involved; and
  - What comes next.

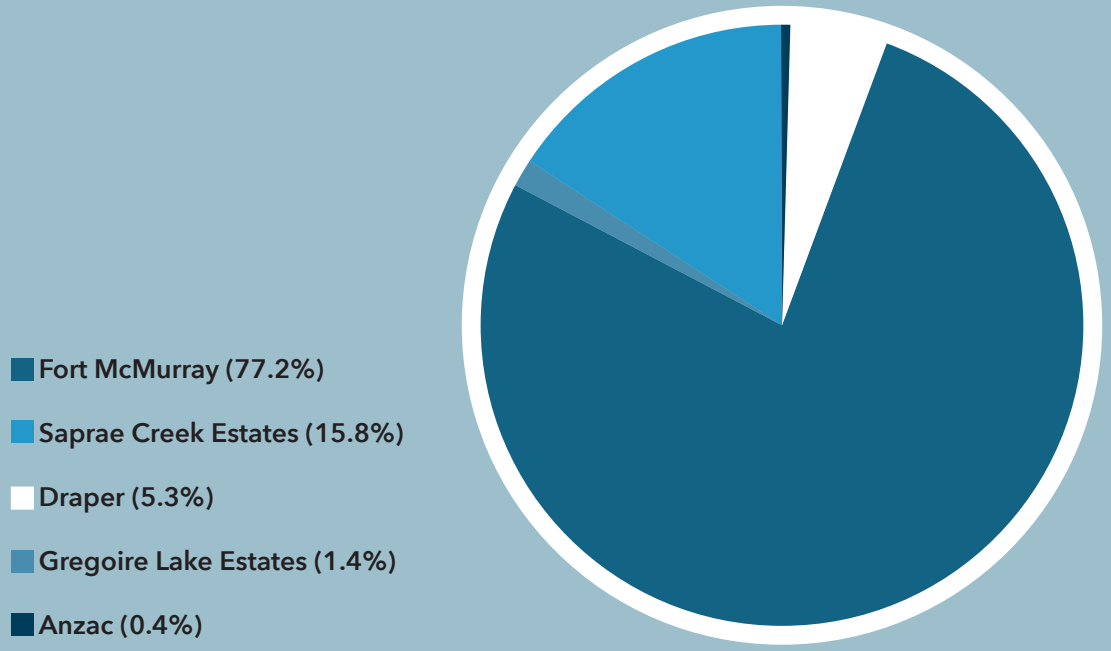
5.1.1 Public Survey

The public survey was open from November 22nd - December 21st, 2022 and received 285 responses. The following summarizes the results:

What community do you live in?

- 77.2% of respondents live in the Urban Service area of Fort McMurray;
- 15.8% live in Saprae Creek Estates;
- 5.3% live in Draper;
- 1.4% live in Gregoire Lake Estates; and
- 0.4% live in Anzac.

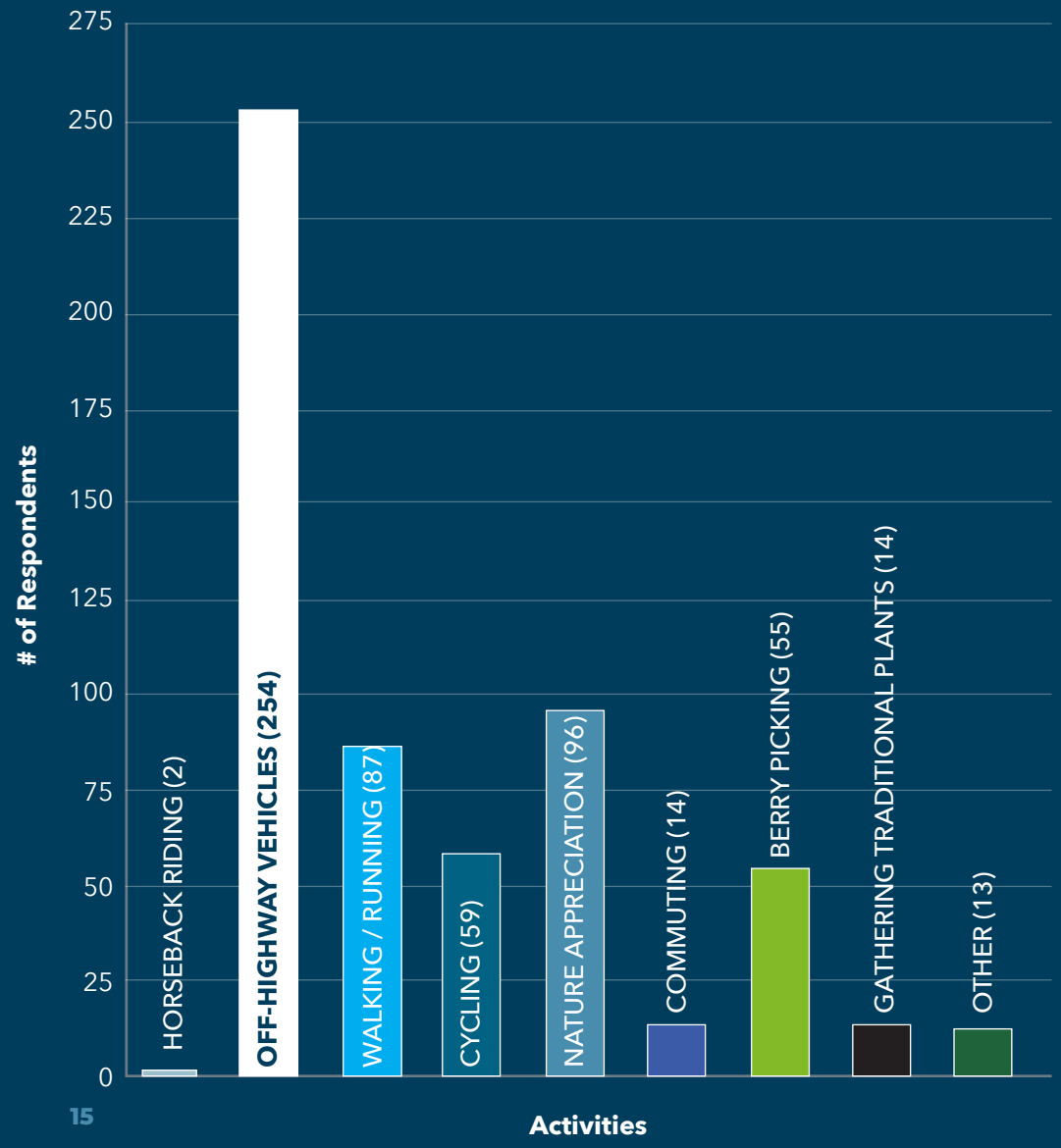
What community do you live in?



77.2%

of respondents live in the Urban Service Area of Fort McMurray.

What activities do you currently use the trail for or have in the past?



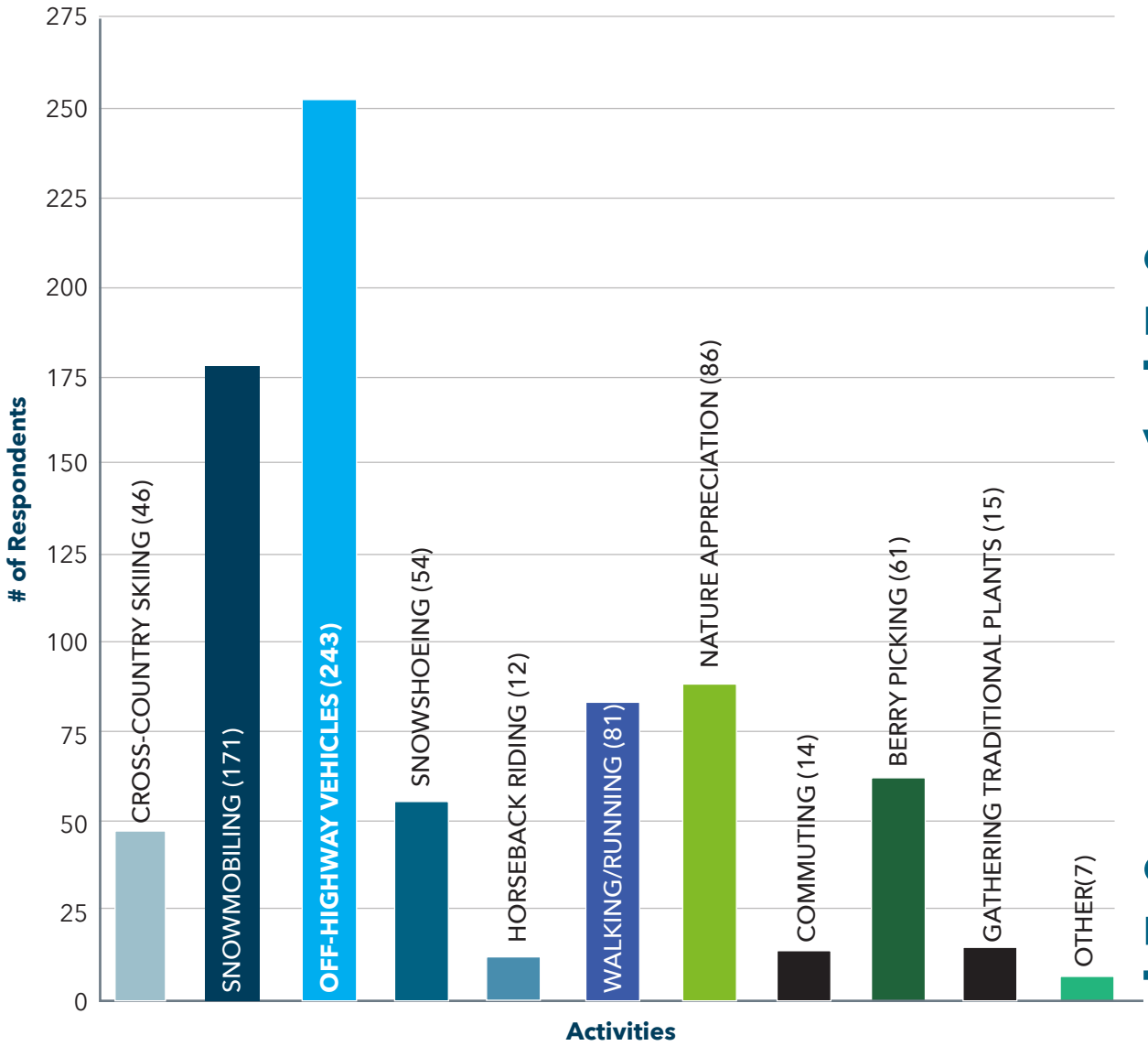
89.1%

of respondents currently use Draper Trail for off-highway vehicles.

33.7%

of respondents currently use Draper Trail for nature appreciation

What activities do you want to pursue on the trail in the future?



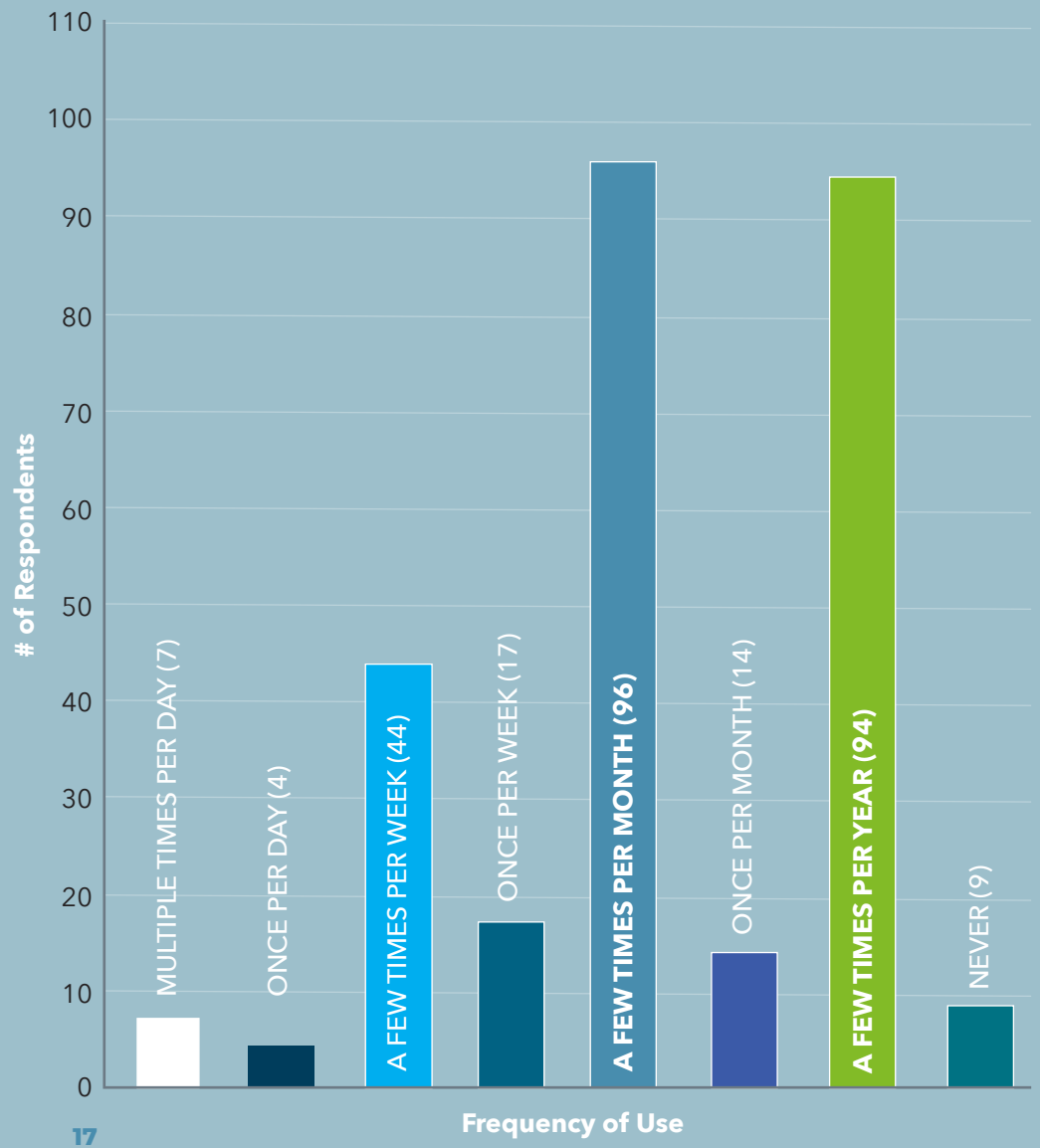
85.3%

of respondents want to recreationally use Draper Trail for off-highway vehicles.

60%

of respondents want to recreationally use Draper Trail for snowmobiling.

How often do you currently use the trail?



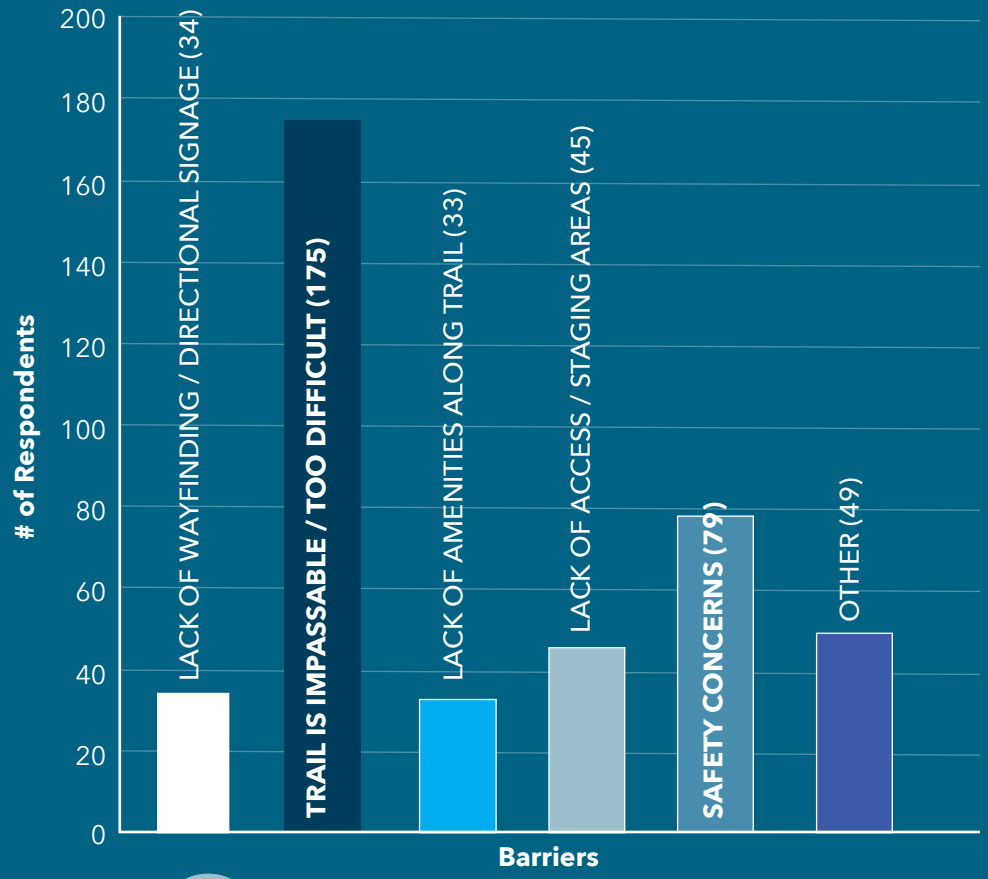
33.7%

of respondents currently use the trail a few times per month.

33.0%

of respondents currently use the trail a few times per year.

What currently prevents you from using the trail?



TOP TWO

barriers to respondents accessing the trail are:

- **trail is impassable / too difficult (61.4%)**
- **safety concerns (27.7%)**



In one sentence, describe your vision for Draper Trail:

Below is a graphic representation of the responses to this question. It is evident that the greatest priority for the public is to ensure that Draper trail is safe and accessible for all. Maintenance and formal creek crossings are a large part of the desired improvements. In addition, the trail should focus on off-highway vehicle use, but also be designed to safely accommodate a multitude of uses.



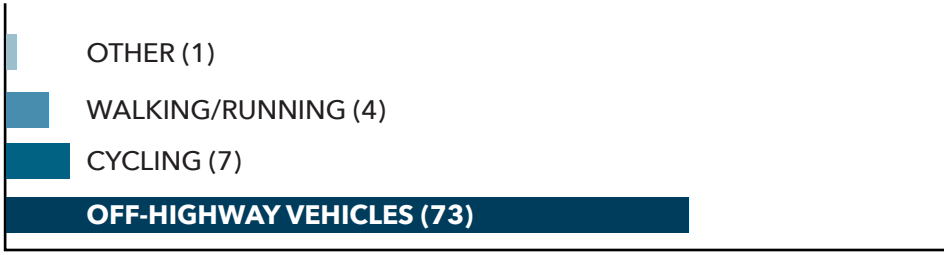
5.1.2 Ideas Tool

The ideas tool asked participants to share their vision for the trail. Three responses were collected:

1. Added access to the trail (see image below);
2. Shade trees to decrease heat when running that route. Benches. Viewpoint(s) of the Clearwater River; and
3. Warning signs, safety barriers on embankments, minor drainage work around current rut/mud hole area (leave all minor holes / ruts - it makes drivers all reduce their speed).

5.1.3 Quick Poll

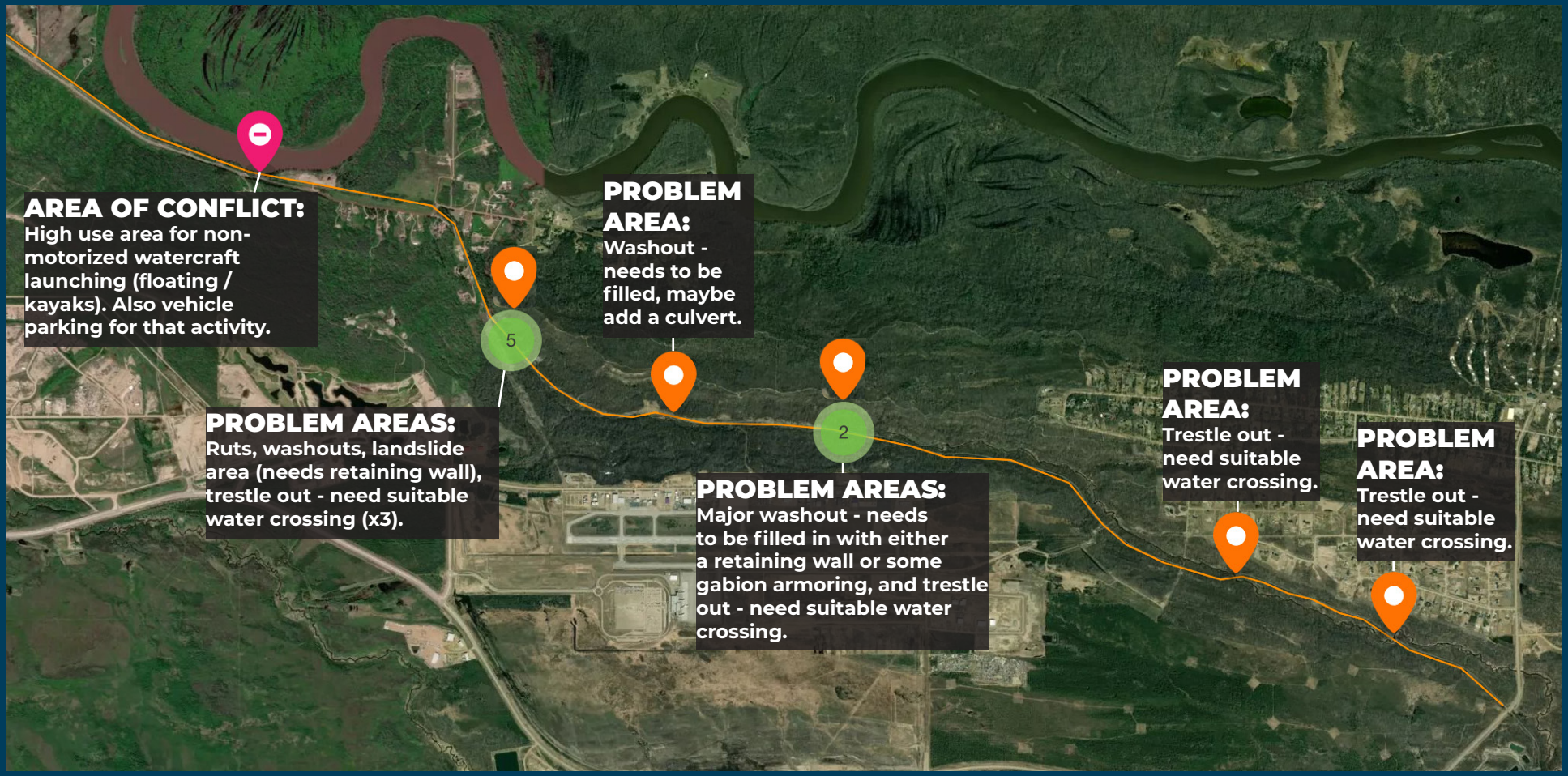
The quick poll tool asked participants what mode of transportation they were most likely to use Draper Trail for recreationally? There were 85 responses:





5.1.4 Mapping Tool

The mapping tool asked participants to plot hotspots along a map of the trail. Hotspots requested included wildlife sightings, areas of conflict, problem areas and erosion. There were 11 hotspots collected, summarized below:





6.0 NEXT STEPS

6.1 REPORTING BACK

We will provide the What We Heard Report, informing residents of the feedback provided through public engagement. Feedback will be reviewed and considered by Administration as part of the direction for the project.

6.2 NEXT STEPS

Once the feasibility study has been completed Administration will review and provide recommendations. If the trail is feasible, the project will be requested through the annual capital budget process. The public will be informed through appropriate communications when project information becomes available.

6.3 STAY INFORMED

To stay up to date on this project, visit or subscribe to rmwb.ca/participate.

