

Trail Daily Times

Festival has an agenda

Thu Feb 11 2010

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Section: Local

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Source: The Daily Times

Illustrations: Photo: Jorge Rivas / Keith Robine is one of the many recreational users of the Rossland Range backcountry.

While Rossland land's recreation-obsessed population is always ready for more powder footage, the upcoming film festival by the Friends of the Rossland Range has a serious side to accompany its healthy serving of snow.

The short films celebrate backcountry experiences from around the world, a sentiment the society knows Rosslanders share. Society members hope community enthusiasm will help them keep the public engaged as they renew their pitch to the province for better planning and protection.

"It's a growing field, backcountry recreation in the winter," explained society president Kim Deane, who's keen to keep the community posted on the group's efforts. "And the Kootenays are really a hotspot. . . . It used to be just for the more adventurous and more rugged, (but now) there's more and more pressure on the backcountry."

The society has been working for years to have the provincial government recognize the extensive recreational use of the Rossland Range, particularly around Old Glory and in the cabin area on both sides of the Nancy Green summit.

It's Crown land, with some management tenures granted to forestry companies like Atco and others to commercial recreation operations like Red Mountain Resort and Big Red Cats cat-skiing company. But the powder sees plenty of other people.

Motorized recreation, like snowmobiling in the winter and ATV riding in the summer, is largely contained in certain areas, and non-motorized users like skiers, hikers and snowshoers enjoy other spaces.

And while this informal "sharing" agreement has worked well for a long time, Deane pointed out that with the backcountry's growing cachet, usage is ever increasing and some issues are emerging, such as parking, forest road and trail-brushing, and stresses on the current system of volunteer cabin maintenance. A system of interpretive signage is also on the wish list.

Some type of recreational designation from the province would provide valuable protection against losing the land to incompatible commercial operations, and would also give the society some clout when applying to granting agencies for funds for its projects and maintenance.

While citing both Red's and Big Red Cats' initial interest in the land as "triggers" for the society's designation dream, Deane said both companies are

supportive of the provincial pitch, and the society also has a good relationship with Atco.

He stressed that the society is keen for multi-party use to continue, and wouldn't protest a tenure application by a company with a sustainable plan, provided it's consistent with existing recreational use.

"And the usage is quite amazing," said Deane.

A car count of vehicles parked at well-known areas yielded an average of 40-50 vehicles on a weekend and 20-30 on a weekday between Rossland and the Nancy Green Pass.

The data is being submitted to the tourism and sport ministry in the hope it will do its own assessment of the area, consult with the community, and draw up a plan that formally designates areas for each type of usage.

A provincial plan also needs to place some weight on recreational use. That way if tenure is applied for at a later date, at the very least, the province will start negotiations aware of the community's existing use of the land and involve the society in its discussions. For many years, the ministry has indicated such an assessment is coming, but it never gets started, Deane said.

Having an accessible backcountry experience at Rossland's doorstep is a community asset, he stressed, helping the community draw in new residents and visitors.

"This is natural, genuine, (people) just love it," he said, acknowledging that for some users, it will be hard to think about formalizing a backcountry experience that's emerged organically over many decades fuelled by the strength of local volunteerism and enthusiasm for the outdoors.

"It's sad, but unavoidable. The world keeps moving forward."

But the film festival on Feb. 28 (at the Miners Hall, 7 p.m.) will be fun, as well as a good reminder of why Rosslanders love their backcountry. The more kid-friendly films will be shown before 8 p.m., and under-12s are free. \$5 for everyone else at the door or at RossVegas. There will be refreshments for sale, but no alcohol.

FILMS

- Gentemstick (10 min.)

A short of the award-winning film "Signatures", a lovely tale of deep powder mystery and a film about expression and the art of riding on snow deep in the hardwoods of Hokkaido, Japan.

- Generations, a Skiers' and Snowboarders' Perspective on Climate Change (17 min.)

Within the span of a lifetime, one can observe and experience the planet's changing climate's impact on farmers, ski areas, glaciers, skiers, snowboarders. A film about the consequences of climate change.

-From Stew's Eyes (5 min.)

Local photographer, Stew Spooner, shares his vision of our outstanding local Rossland backcountry.

- Fast Grass and Dirty Corn (4 min.)

A clever short about a group of Vermont skiers who refused to let patchy snowfall and half-thawed conditions halt their winter fun.

- Winter Dreaming (20 min)

Australian filmmaker Steve Curtain succeeds in capturing nature, wildlife and adventure above the snowline.

- Red Lady: the Battle for your Mountains(13 min.)

A documentary about Crested Butte and one of the longest running mine fights in North America.

- Flakes (13 min.)

A short on a winter of backcountry telemark skiing.

by top telemark skiers in all the beautiful mountains that needed to be skied, and while trying to capture the joy and freedom that is powder skiing, which is not an easy task.

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