

Sustainable Management of Backcountry Trails: Tourism, Technology and Climate Change

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Access to sensitive backcountry environments is being made easier through technological innovation, the effects of climate change, continued resource extraction and a growing tourism sector in Western Canada. Current regulation and management practices must be adapted to protect these ecologically sensitive areas. While existing academic literature discusses the ecological impacts of nature based tourism, there are limited resources available that give insight into holistic land management solutions specific to remote backcountry trails in Western Canada. This research examines the appropriateness of current industry standards, best practices and policies related to trail design, construction, access and management in their application to backcountry environments. Qualitative methods in the form of in-depth interviews were used with key industry stakeholders who are currently using or managing remote backcountry environments. Online surveys were utilized to gain insight from the trail user perspective. A community based participatory research (CPBR) methodology provided the foundation for this study. Using a CPBR approach, gaps in existing knowledge were identified and research questions were shaped based on concerns within the trail management community. This research assists in the adaptation of existing land management policies and encourages a more sustainable tourism management strategy for summer use of sensitive backcountry environments. While focusing on sustainable management of a growing industry, this study also provides a better understanding of the effects that climate change is having on tourism economies in Western Canada.