

To: Community Services Committee – *Councillors Murray and Friesen*

From: Active Trails Whitehorse Association (ATWA)

Date: February 14, 2022

Issue: Pee Wee Hill (Old and New Trail)

Dear Councillors:

Action #15 of the 2020 Trail Plan calls for the [creation of] “more accessible connections to access Grey Mountain trails within Chadburn Lake Park.” It goes on to say that, “Well used connections to access the Grey Mountain trail network within Chadburn Lake Park have difficult, often slippery conditions as a result of steep grades. Trail improvements should be implemented to allow a wide range of users to access the trail networks in these areas in all seasons. Specific locations to consider for improved access include *Pee Wee Hill*, *Crocus Ridge* and *Heartbreak Hill*.”

As a result of the above, a second Pee Wee Hill trail was constructed adjacent to the “old” Pee Wee Hill Trail.

On February 11, ATWA received a second email from a couple concerned about both the new and “old” Pee Wee Hill trails. We have received permission from the writers to bring it to your attention. They have asked that their names not be divulged.

The issue is one that ATWA brought to the attention of Parks and Community Development in September of 2021, when we first learned of the construction of a new “switchback” trail adjacent to the “old” Pee Wee Hill trail.

Unfortunately, it has become obvious that the new construction has failed completely to address the issues associated with the old Pee Wee Hill trail. In fact, it has exacerbated those issues and has led to even more safety concerns.

As you are both new to City Council you may not be aware of the long-standing issues with regard to the Pee Wee Hill trail and the associated policies, plans, and bylaws that relate to such trails. Therefore, we will send you a separate document that will give you the necessary background information.

Following the email (found immediately below) you will find ATWA’s suggestions as to the actions required to address the concerns that have been raised.

Email:

“This is for your information:

My husband and I narrowly avoided being hit by a cross-country skier at the top of Pee Wee Hill. (This is not the first time that we have narrowly avoided a collision...bikers sometimes come flying down the hill and we scramble to get out of the way...which is not always possible because the trail has a U shape, especially toward the upper bank. And we don't want to be on the drop-off side because we could easily get bumped off the trail and fall down the slope.)

Thursday, February 10 around 1:00 pm, we hiked up Pee Wee. (We didn't use the new switchback trail because it wasn't easily navigable, even with microspikes on our boots. The top curve is very snowed in and hikers have made a shortcut that is very steep and uneven.)

However, it wouldn't have mattered which route we took up because the near accident happened above where the switchback trail enters the old Pee Wee Hill trail at the top.

First, two dogs, running extremely fast, came running from the southeast. My husband and I were on either side of the trail at the top and we froze to the spot because the dogs were out of control. Although the trail was icy, they were able to brake and skid to avoid collision with me. The arrival of the dogs was the only indication that a human might also be coming.

Then a male cross-country skier came skiing down from the hill from the southeast at a speed at which he was unable to stop. He did not call out, and so we had no way of knowing someone was approaching at such speed.

He snowplowed around the top corner and then snowplowed all the way down Pee Wee. He needed the whole width of the trail in order to snowplow, and my husband and I both thought that it was highly unlikely that he would have been able to stop or to avoid anyone on the trail because of his speed. In addition, the trail was icy at the time, further preventing his slowing down. There could have been a very serious accident.

Fortunately, we had remained frozen to the spot after the arrival of the dogs; otherwise, we couldn't have moved out of the way fast enough. We were seriously shaken by the near collision!

We see lots of people using the old Pee Wee Hill trail:

1. Grey Mountain Primary School sometimes brings a group of their children up Pee Wee Hill...the students at Grey Mountain range in age from 5 to 8 years old.
2. We have a friend who walks her two dogs there. She is in her 70s and has had at least one surgery for either her hip or knee, and she is a bit hampered in her agility. She and her dogs would have had no chance to avoid this out-of-control skier.

3. Anyone walking on the trail might not have been able to move far enough to the side to avoid collision.

4. Anyone riding a bike up...and we see numerous fat-tire bikers, who also need the whole trail width to “wobble” their way up...would have had a collision with the skier.

5. As I mentioned in my previous email, we see many people who use the trail who are not totally agile, and/or who go up with little kids and/or dogs [and are] of varying ages and abilities.

The situation is further exacerbated because a snow-dog type of machine is being used to pack/groom the trails to the southeast of Pee Wee Hill, making the trails readily usable for both bikers and skiers. As far as we know, the grooming of these trails to the southeast of Pee Wee has been done in only the last year or two. That is why we are seeing more bikers and skiers using Pee Wee Hill to access the groomed trails.

The way Pee Wee Hill is currently used by such a variety of users is a serious accident waiting to happen!

Recommendations:

1. We recommend that this dangerous situation be addressed immediately. The only *immediate* solution we see is that a sign be posted at the top of the old Pee Wee Hill trail requiring all skiers, bikers, and sledgers to dismount at the top and walk their devices down to the bottom.

However, we feel that people with a do-not-care attitude will ignore any signs that get posted.

The newly built switchback trail is no help to improve safety at the top because it meets Pee Wee far enough down that everyone still has to be on Pee Wee at the top.

2. Ultimately, there needs to be TWO completely separate trails that do not meet: One exclusively for people on foot, and a second one for people who don't mind risking their lives. A trail with a combined usage is not going to help people stay safe.

My husband and I have been hiking up Pee Wee since the early 1990s. It is only in the last few years that we are experiencing inconsiderate users. We are trying to devise a strategy for getting up Pee Wee while avoiding any more potential accidents.

At least we are aware of the potential dangers. We feel that many other users may not be aware of the danger from people coming down way too fast.

Anyhow, this sums it up. I have repeated information from my previous email, but I felt I needed to describe to you the whole situation in one document so that this information stands on its own.”

Active Trails Whitehorse Association: Actions required to deal with this issue:

The new adjacent trail is a fait accompli. The City is not going to rehabilitate the area in order to restore it to pre-build condition. So what is to be done?

- 1.** Immediately place signage at the top of the old Pee Wee Hill trail asking bikers, skiers, snowboarders, and those using sleds to walk their equipment to the bottom of the old hill. The sign should be two-sided, so that both ascending and descending trail users can read it. (It should be placed in a position making it obvious that it refers to the “old” Pee Wee Hill trail and not the new one.)
- 2.** Immediately place “Use at your own risk” signage at the bottom of the new Pee Wee Hill trail, as until appropriate steps are taken, the trail will continue to present obvious safety concerns to all users in both summer and winter. Or, simply close the trail until its problems can be effectively addressed.
- 3.** In the coming summer reduce the grade of the old Pee Wee Hill trail as the City proposed in 2017. This would help address the concerns related to the steepness of the trail and the related slippery conditions encountered at certain times of the year.
- 4.** Address drainage concerns related to the old Pee Wee Hill trail, which have allowed a “channel” to develop down the middle of the trail creating a very uneven surface for users.
- 5.** The lack of protective fencing at certain points between the old and new trail is a cause of concern due to the steep drop between the two. This should be addressed.
- 6.** Ensure the exit/entrance at the top of the new Pee Wee Hill trail does not enter the old Pee Wee Hill trail, which it currently does in more than one place. This situation is dangerous and it needs to be corrected. There should be no exits or entrances that connect the old trail to the new trail.
- 7.** Consider using a snow fence on the new Pee Wee Hill trail in an effort to prevent the trail from being snowed in.
- 8.** Consult with Fire Protection Services (FPS) to see if widening the “old” trail would facilitate getting their equipment above the Pee Wee Hill trail. (It is our understanding that FPS has no intent of getting a fire truck to the top of the hill, so widening the trail may not be of any additional benefit.)

9. Should signage prove to be ineffective in getting bikers, skiers, snowboarders and those using sleds to walk their equipment to the bottom of the old Pee Wee Hill trail, then close the old Pee Wee Hill trail to such users and restrict them to the use of the new Pee Wee Hill trail.

10. Update the Trail Development Policy to reflect the intent of various City policies and plans to ensure public participation in trail related issues such as new trail development and maintenance.

The Pee Wee Hill issue has made it obvious that all new trail construction, and not just those 500 metres and over, should undergo public oversight.

We are very concerned that a similar situation may arise when the City embarks on trail “improvements” to both the Heartbreak Hill and Crocus Ridge trails, if it does so without public consultation.

We ask that your committee take the lead in addressing the concerns raised in this document and the forthcoming second document, and bring these matters to the attention of all city councillors.

We would ask that Parks be instructed to carry out the first two of our ten suggested actions *immediately*, and the rest as soon as possible. (Signage may have to be of a temporary nature until summer, when conditions permit permanent installation.)

These actions need to be taken in order to address the multitude of problems associated with the old Pee Wee Hill trail that have now been exacerbated by the construction of the new “switchback” trail, and to ensure that a similar situation does not arise when “improvements” are made to the Heartbreak Hill and Crocus Ridge Trails.

Thank you for your attention to the concerns and issues raised.

Keith Lay (Active Trails Whitehorse Association)

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PS: You can view winter photos of the new trail by going to <https://www.activetwa.org/photos.html> and scroll down. Most were taken on January 19, but the last two were taken on February 8.