

SUNSHINE COAST TRAIL AND OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTRE ATTRACTS VISITORS, RESIDENTS AND STUDENTS TO THE COMMUNITY

POWELL RIVER PARKS and Wilderness Society — the visionaries and stewards of the Sunshine Coast Trail — recently hosted the 23rd annual Marathon Shuffle, with more than 300 participants taking to the backcountry trail to enjoy the abundant natural beauty of the region.

The success of the trail has surpassed the expectations of those involved in the project who carefully stewarded their vision and resources to create an outdoor recreation attraction that Vancouver Island Tourism and Trails ranks second only to the West Coast Trail.

"The Sunshine Coast Trail is now Canada's longest hiking trail and accommodates both day trips and multi-day excursions of up to 14 days," says Eagle Walz, President of the Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society. "We have been successful in protecting the natural environment along the trail by working with BC Parks and now have a long corridor of preserved wilderness."

The trail has also become an important part of the Sunshine Coast economy, attracting visitors from around the world, as well as being a community asset that helps to recruit and retain people living and working in the region.

Free-to-use visitor huts are being built along the trail, with 12 huts completed so far. The enhancements to the Trail have created a world class piece of infrastructure making both day hikes and multi-day excursions comfortable and fun.

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Paul Kamon, Marketing Director with Sunshine Coast Tourism, said that number one request at the Visitor Centre is for information about the Trail, and that has translated into growth opportunities for local businesses.

John Hermsen owns Footprint Nature Explorations, a kayaking and hiking guiding company on the Sunshine Coast. The trail and huts have become a key part of their business.

"We often use the trail for evening hikes after a day kayaking, and we take day-trippers for hikes using the huts

for lunch," Hermsen explained. "The trail system is a highly-valued asset for the region and our business."

With many clients already coming from Western Europe, Hermsen recently scored a public relations coup with a feature article about the company and the region in the Holland Herald, the in-flight magazine of KLM Airlines.

"That single story will reach 2.2 million people in July," he said.

Visitors coming to Powell River to explore the trail discover the beauty of the area, and many have chosen to bring their families and businesses to the community.

The Sunshine Coast Trail expansion project also included the development of the Powell Lake Outdoor Learning Centre, developed in collaboration with School District 47. Designed to facilitate programs in eco adventure, sustainability and ecology, the facilities were specifically designed to accommodate participants with disabilities.

By partnering with Terracentric Coastal Adventures, School District 47 is able to provide outstanding outdoors and camp experiences that further develop the growing education-tourism sector of Powell River's economy.

One of many economic boosts that are partially attributed to the Sunshine Coast Trail and Powell Lake Outdoor Learning Centre is a projected \$23M investment from China's Sino Bright School. The company plans to build a new school and dormitories for up to 400 students on lands which were jointly owned by the City and Tla'amin First Nation beside Brooks Secondary School.

The small, friendly population and pristine natural environment attracted the school for international students to the area.

Approximately 80 students from Sino Bright's schools attend a summer immersion program hosted at the Powell Lake Outdoor Learning Centre. The success of the program at the Centre has been the catalyst for the partnership between Sino Bright and School District 47 leading to the planned permanent year-round campus in the community.

PROJECT PROFILE

SUNSHINE COAST TRAIL AND POWELL LAKE OUTDOOR LEARNING CENTRE

