

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***PROJECT WILL CREATE STRATEGIC PLAN TO MARKET VANCOUVER ISLAND AND
SUNSHINE COAST TRAILS TO THE WORLD***

COURTENAY – When surveys show that 50% of visitors to Vancouver Island and Sunshine Coast choose to go hiking during their visits here, even if it was not their primary motivation for coming, it makes sense to leverage that fact and create a plan to effectively market, manage, and improve the hiking trails in the region.

Tourism Vancouver Island is embarking on the second phase of a three-phase project to do exactly that, and the Island Coastal Economic Trust is a partner in funding the multi-year project.

“In Phase 1, we created an inventory and user-friendly database of 235 ‘market-ready’ trails in the Vancouver Island and Sunshine Coast regions,” said Dave Petryk, President and CEO of Tourism Vancouver Island. “Now that we have that baseline data, we can start the work of developing a strategic plan to align visitor needs and expectations with the supply of trails here on the Island and Sunshine Coast.”

The project will see coordination and collaboration between stakeholder groups with an eye to identifying the gaps in our trail product and how the region can work together to improve and transform these existing assets into international market ready tourism attractions.

“We’ve seen the success that has come from ICET investments in some of the region’s more well-known assets, like the Wild Pacific Trail, the Sunshine Coast Trail or the North Coast Trail,” said ICET Chair Phil Kent. “Hiking trails are a significant attractor for visitors to our region, and they play a role in broader economic activity too.”

Kent said that communities are recognizing that infrastructure like hiking trails will not only appeal to visitors and attract tourism sector businesses, but also play a significant role in encouraging entrepreneurs of all stripes to relocate or launch a business in the region.

“Employees today are seeking work-life balance, and with advances in technology like broadband internet, many companies no longer need to be in major metropolitan areas to be successful,” he explained. “Access to amazing hiking trails can help companies recruit and retain workers who value an outdoor lifestyle, and that translates into more economic activity in our region.”

Tourism Vancouver Island has pegged the value of this second-phase project at \$60,000, and ICET is a funding partner for \$30,000 of the total. Recreation Sites and Trails BC will be providing \$20,000, with the region's communities providing the balance of funding for the project.

"The Province, through Recreation Sites and Trails BC, is pleased to be able to support an important, collaborative project that will benefit not only trail users living on and visiting Vancouver Island, but will also provide opportunities and economic benefits to many communities across the Island," said Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations Minister Steve Thomson.

The project is expected to get underway shortly, with completion anticipated in early 2016.

About the Island Coastal Economic Trust

The Island Coastal Economic Trust is a \$50 million endowment established in 2006 by the Government of British Columbia to help diversify the economies of central and northern Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast.

ICET is guided by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials and MLAs and five appointees. This exceptional team of leaders collaborates to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community-centred decision-making process, ICET has approved \$49 million for over 140 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects on the Island and Sunshine Coast since implementing its grant program in 2007. ICET investments have leveraged over \$271 million in incremental funding into the region.

A full overview of ICET can be found at www.islandcoastaltrust.ca.

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