Draft Canmore Area Trails Master Plan Public Engagement

What We Heard Report

November 2026



Contents

Introduction **3**

What we did **3**

Who we heard from **4**

What we heard **6**

What's next? **13**

Introduction

The Canmore Area Trails Master Plan (the plan[1]) provides a framework for developing, managing, and maintaining an integrated, authorized, and sustainable trail network in the Bow Valley. It responds to increasing demand for high-quality trail experiences while protecting wildlife and habitat. The plan focuses on Crown land trails (Alberta Parks and public land) and considers connections to trails on private and municipal lands. It will guide capital improvements, trail experience quality and management approaches for the next 10 years.

Preliminary engagement was held June 24–July 24, 2024, and gathered feedback on the project's draft Terms of Reference and Background Review report. Participants provided input on the project purpose, objectives, principles, key issues and opportunities and the proposed desired conditions for future trail management. This feedback informed the development of a draft plan.

This report summarizes public engagement feedback received on the draft plan from November 26, 2025 to January 21, 2026, including whether its proposed directions, strategies, and actions were appropriate and sufficient to achieve the desired conditions. Insights from the engagement were used to inform the final plan.

The ministry acknowledges the contributions of the Canmore Area Trails Master Plan Advisory Group and thanks Indigenous partners, stakeholders, and members of the public who completed the surveys, used the interactive web map, promoted the engagement process and contributed to informed conversations about the future of trails in the Canmore area.

What we did

The public engagement process for the draft Canmore Area Trails Master Plan was launched on November 26, 2025 and closed on January 21, 2026. Indigenous groups and organizations, stakeholders and the public were invited to share their input and perspectives on the draft plan through an online survey and interactive web map administered through Alberta.ca. Written submissions in the form of direct emails and letters were also accepted. The online survey and web map enabled participants to provide input on the following components of the draft plan:

- Introduction and planning context,
- Inventory of the existing trail conditions and experiences,
- Desired condition statements,
- Trail planning and design approach, and
- Proposed trail network improvements for each of the eight planning units.

Input collected through the survey's closed-ended questions were analyzed quantitatively and the results are presented as summary statistics and charts. Input received through the survey's open-ended questions, as well as comments submitted through the interactive web map, were analyzed qualitatively and are presented according to the key themes that emerged from the feedback.

[1] Formerly the Canmore Area Trails Strategy

Input collected through the engagement process was collected subject to Section 4c of the *Protection of Privacy Act (POPA)*. A notice disclosing this was posted as part of the survey and interactive web map preamble. The survey software automatically generated unique identification numbers with each submission to screen for multiple responses received from a single device, while ensuring responses were anonymized.

Engagement Promotion

The Ministry promoted the engagement process through the following mechanisms:

- Online survey and interactive map had 12 posts across multiple social media platforms (Alberta Parks Facebook, Alberta Parks X).
- Links to the online survey and interactive map were posted on the Alberta.ca engagement website.
- Posters and postcards (with a QR code) encouraged Albertans to complete the survey and interactive map.
- Direct stakeholder and Indigenous outreach to a variety of user groups in Canmore and the Bow Valley.
- Media interviews (11 articles posted).

To further raise local awareness about the draft plan and promote participation in the engagement process, the following events were organized and delivered by local stakeholder groups:

- Canmore Area Mountain Bike Association (CAMBA) hosted a community open house on December 15, 2025, at the Bill Warren Training Centre, Canmore.
- The Biosphere Institute of the Bow Valley hosted a panel discussion and information session on January 14, 2026, at the Canmore Senior's Centre, Canmore.
- The Climbers Access Society of Alberta held two sessions for their members on January 10, 2026 in Canmore and January 15, 2026 in Calgary.

Who we heard from

Approximately 6,426 individuals visited the project webpage during the engagement period. Of those, 1,334 individuals clicked on the survey link and 835 submitted survey responses for a response rate of 63 per cent. Approximately 712 individuals visited the interactive web map from the project web page. A total of 5,790 interactions on the web map (placement of a point, line, comment, like, dislike) were received. 44 written responses also were received.

While primary residence and demographic details were not captured for individuals that took part in the interactive web map, postal code data collected via the online survey indicates that 67 per cent were residents of Canmore, 19 per cent were from Calgary, and the remaining 14 per cent were from elsewhere in Alberta. In total,190 survey respondents did not provide a postal code and are therefore not reflected in this geographic breakdown.

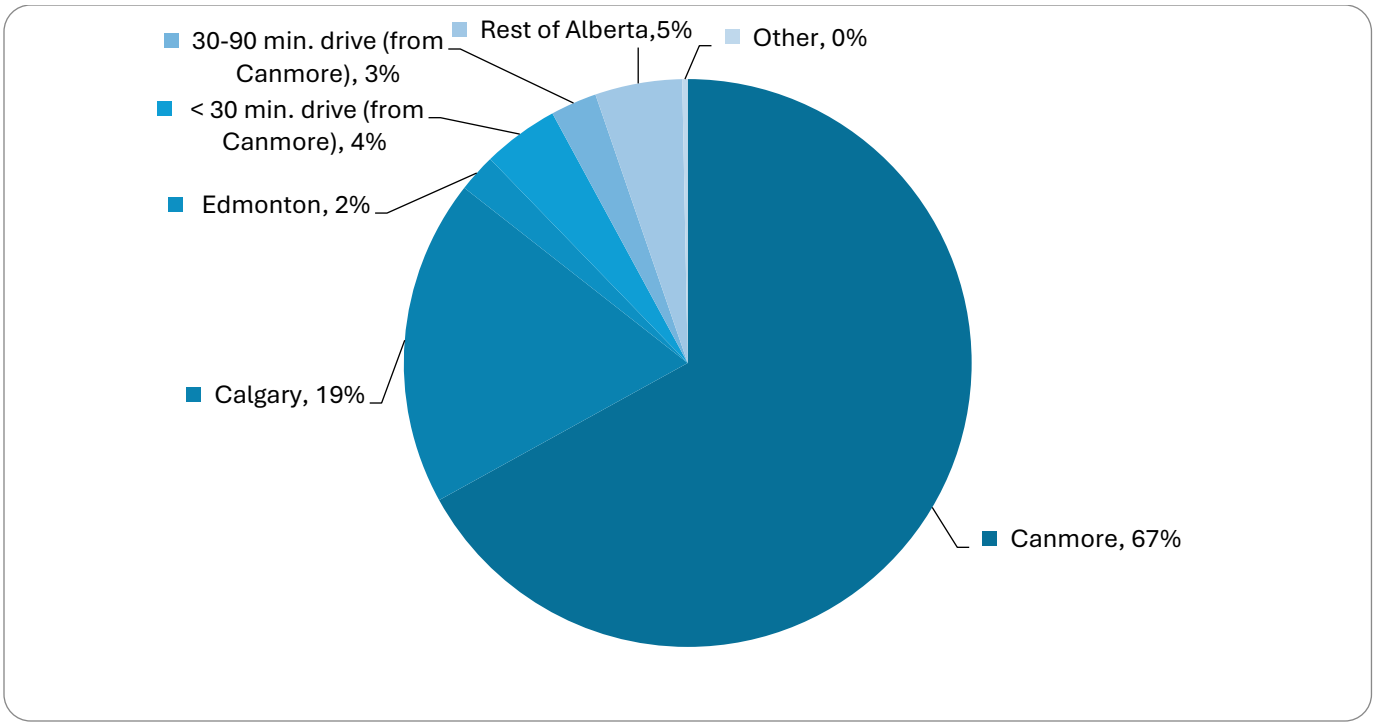


Figure 1 Survey Participants' Primary Residence (Postal Code analysis)

Survey results for the age of respondents show that two per cent of respondents were aged 15-24, 13 per cent age 25–34, 25 per cent aged 19 per cent aged 35-44, 45–54 and 18 per cent aged 55–64, 16 per cent aged 65-74, two per cent aged 75- 85, and 0.1 per cent aged 85+.

What we heard

A total of 835 survey responses were submitted during the engagement process. Of these, 78 per cent of the surveys were fully completed, while the remaining 22 per cent were partially completed.

Most survey respondents indicated that their role in completing the survey was as a Canmore and area resident (66 per cent). 25 per cent indicated they were an interested Albertan, while three per cent indicated they were a formal recreation organization or club, two per cent were a local business owner and one per cent were an environmental organization, local First Nation or tourism operator.

Non-probability sample – how to interpret these results

This survey used an open, non-random online questionnaire. Because participants chose to take part, the results are not statistically representative of trail users or the general population.

The margin of error cannot be calculated for this type of sample. The findings still offer helpful insights, but they should not be generalized to the broader population. Use caution when interpreting or applying these results.

Use of trails in the Canmore Area, level of experience and trail activities

Nearly all (98 per cent) of respondents indicated that they had used Canmore area trails at least once in the past five years. Responses suggest that participation in the survey was dominated by highly experienced trail users. 70 per cent of respondents identified as expert trail users, 25 per cent identified as intermediate trail users and three per cent identified as beginners. Two per cent of respondents selected “not applicable (n/a).”

Respondents were invited to indicate which trail activities (up to three) they primarily participate in during the warm season (spring, summer, fall) and cold season (winter). Survey respondents represent a wide range of trail activities. The top five most reported activities include: 1) hiking / walking, 2) cycling (mountain bike/ fat bike) 3) Skiing (cross-country), 4) dog walking and 5) trail running.

Respondents noted several additional activities not captured in the pre-determined activity list, including swimming or water access, picnicking and social or family use, meditation, wellness or spiritual use, backcountry camping and education, teaching or interpretation.

Preferred Locations for Trail Activities

Respondents were invited to rank the eight planning units (see Draft Plan or Terms of Reference for spatial descriptions) in order from one (most preferred) to eight (least preferred) based on which planning units they most prefer to undertake trail activities in. Planning units with lower average rank scores were more preferred than those with higher scores. As shown in Figure 2, the preferred planning unit was the Canmore Nordic Centre while the least was the Town of Canmore.

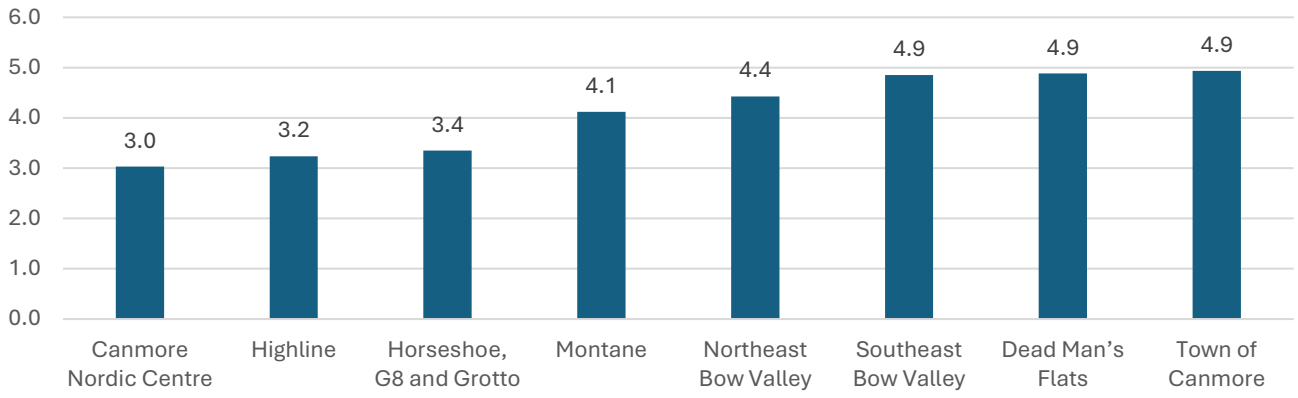


Figure 2 Average Ranking Score of Planning Units Most Preferred for Trail Activities (one most preferred to eight least preferred)

What We Heard: Key Overarching Themes

Engagement feedback identified a consistent set of overarching themes across the online survey, interactive web map and written submissions. While comments often related to specific planning units or proposed actions, the themes below reflect shared priorities, concerns, and expectations for trail management in the Canmore area.

Implementation, Governance and Funding

Respondents frequently called for clearer direction on how the plan will be implemented, including roles and responsibilities, decision making processes, phasing, funding, and long-term maintenance. Many supported the plan's direction but expressed concern that a lack of implementation detail could limit effectiveness and accountability.

Wildlife and Habitat Protection

Protecting wildlife movement, habitat connectivity, and ecological integrity was a dominant theme in feedback received. Respondents emphasized maintaining corridors, managing cumulative effects, and taking a precautionary, evidence-based approach to trail planning, particularly in sensitive areas. While views varied on sources of ecological stress, there was broad agreement that ecological outcomes should guide decisions.

Unauthorized Trails, Decommissioning and Restoration

Many respondents supported decommissioning unauthorized trails in principle, especially in ecologically sensitive locations, but stressed that success depends on clear criteria, effective restoration, visible enforcement, and long term follow through. Others raised concern that poorly managed decommissioning could displace users, increase crowding, or encourage new unauthorized trails.

Sequencing and "Like for Like" Replacement

Respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of constructing and opening new or alternative trails before closing or decommissioning existing ones. Poor sequencing was seen as a risk to experience quality, safety, and compliance, particularly where advanced or heavily used trails are affected.

Education, Enforcement and Adaptive Monitoring

There was strong agreement that trail infrastructure alone is insufficient. Respondents called for stronger education, more consistent enforcement, and clear monitoring programs with indicators and adaptive responses to ensure desired conditions are achieved and maintained.

Capacity, Crowding and User Conflict

Concerns were raised that expanding or improving trails could unintentionally increase use, leading to crowding and user conflict. Approaches such as trail bundling, separation of uses, and directional trails were seen as potentially useful but requiring careful design. Many respondents emphasized the need for explicit capacity management, not solely network expansion.

Accessibility, Equity and Everyday Use
Respondents highlighted the importance of trails that serve a wide range of users, including seniors, families, people with disabilities, and near town everyday users. Concerns included loss of accessible routes, overemphasis on fitness-oriented designs, and unequal distribution of investment. Some emphasized trails as essential public infrastructure, not only recreational amenities.

Access Infrastructure and Emergency Readiness
Parking, staging areas, washrooms, transit access, and emergency response were repeatedly cited as shaping user behaviour and compliance. Respondents noted that inadequate or poorly located access infrastructure contributes to unsafe parking, trail damage, and emergency access challenges.

Motorized Recreation
Feedback on the proposed motorized trials area was mixed but strongly expressed. The most common concerns related to noise, wildlife disturbance, safety, and compatibility with ecological objectives. Some respondents supported designated motorized areas but emphasized the need for clear rationale, safeguards, and consideration of long-term precedent.

Written Submission Results

A total of 44 written submissions were received during this phase of engagement. Overall, written submissions closely mirrored the overarching themes identified through the survey and interactive mapping. However, submissions often provided greater detail, stronger advocacy, or more explicit expectations regarding plan implementation and long-term outcomes.

Written submissions commonly emphasized the need for clearer governance, implementation sequencing, and funding commitments, as well as stronger education, enforcement, and monitoring frameworks. Many reinforced the importance of prioritizing wildlife corridors and habitat connectivity, with some calling for more precautionary limits on recreation in ecologically sensitive areas.

Submissions also tended to express firmer positions on specific topics, including concerns about motorized recreation in the Bow Valley, expectations for permanent and well-enforced trail decommissioning and calls for science-based monitoring and adaptive management. Several submissions highlighted the importance of establishing clear indicators, thresholds and accountability mechanisms to ensure the plan can respond to changing conditions over time.

While perspectives varied, written submissions reinforced the themes expressed through other engagement tools and underscored the importance of implementation clarity and ecological integrity in achieving the plan's desired outcomes.

Draft plan sections 1 (Introduction) and 2 (Existing trail system and desired conditions)

Question: *Please indicate your level of support for sections 1-2 of the trails plan. Does each section provide accurate, suitable, and sufficient contextual information to help readers?*

Of the total survey respondents, 10 per cent did not respond to the section 1 rating and 13 per cent did not respond to section 2 rating question. As shown in Table 2, for section 1, 80 per cent of respondents expressed

some level of support and 15 per cent indicated a level of non-support. For section 2, 79 per cent of respondents expressed some level of support and 17 per cent indicated a level of non-support.

Table 1 Level of Support for Sections 1 and 2 of the Draft Plan

	Not at all supportive	Not very supportive	Somewhat supportive	Very supportive	Unsure
Section 1 - Introduction	9%	6%	43%	37%	5%
Section 2 – Existing Trail System and Desired Conditions	8%	9%	42%	37%	5%

Draft plan section 3 (Trail planning and design approach)

Question: *Please indicate your level of support for the trails plan's content on this topic. Do you support the proposed approach and how they are presented?*

Respondents expressed notably higher levels of support than non-support for all proposed trail planning and design approaches. The application of seasonal closures, habitat improvements and community loops received the highest levels of support. Shifting recreation and trail free areas, approach to designating trails and season closures received the highest levels of non-support. Of the total survey respondents, 12-19 per cent did not respond to section 3.

Table 2 Level of Support for Trail Planning and Design Approaches

Planning and Design Approach	Not at all Supportive	Not very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Unsure
Shifting Recreation and Trail Free Areas	17%	9%	34%	37%	3%
Seasonal Closures	12%	10%	28%	48%	1%
Trail Bundles	11%	10%	37%	36%	7%
Community Loops	11%	10%	38%	36%	7%
Addressing Trail Experience Gaps	9%	6%	32%	49%	6%
Expected Habitat Improvements	10%	9%	29%	43%	7%
Approach to Designating Trails	9%	7%	25%	54%	4%

Draft plan section trail network improvements and interactive mapping

In both the interactive mapping and in the survey, respondents were invited to identify how the proposed actions for each planning unit could be improved. Some feedback was overarching in nature and applicable across all planning units, while other feedback was specific proposed actions within individual units. Below, the themes that emerged specific to each planning unit are summarized.

Trail network improvements

Question: *Please indicate your level of support for the trails plan's content on each planning unit. Do you support the proposed actions and how they are presented?*

As illustrated in Table 3Table 3, respondents expressed overall support for the proposed actions across all planning units. Support was strongest for actions proposed in the planning units Canmore Nordic Centre (80 per cent), Montane (74 per cent), Town of Canmore (74 per cent), and Horseshoe, G8, Grotto (72 per cent). While most respondents continued to express support for proposed action in all planning units, comparatively higher levels of opposition were noted in the Northeast Bow Valley (30 per cent) and Dead Man's Flats (26 per cent).

Table 3 Support for Proposed Actions by Planning Unit

Planning Unit	Not at all supportive	Not very supportive	Somewhat supportive	Very supportive	Unsure
#1: Montane	10%	8%	39%	35%	12%
#2: Horseshoe, G8, Grotto	12%	9%	39%	32%	7%
#3: Northeast Bow Valley	19%	11%	34%	23%	13%
#4: Canmore Nordic Centre	8%	5%	32%	48%	7%
#5: Town of Canmore	6%	6%	35%	39%	14%
#6: Highline	14%	8%	35%	36%	7%
#7: Dead Man's Flats	16%	10%	32%	26%	16%
#8: Southeast Bow Valley	16%	8%	34%	26%	16%

Interactive mapping

Input received through the interactive web map was extensive. Approximately 5,970 interactions (point, lines, comments, likes, dislikes) were received.

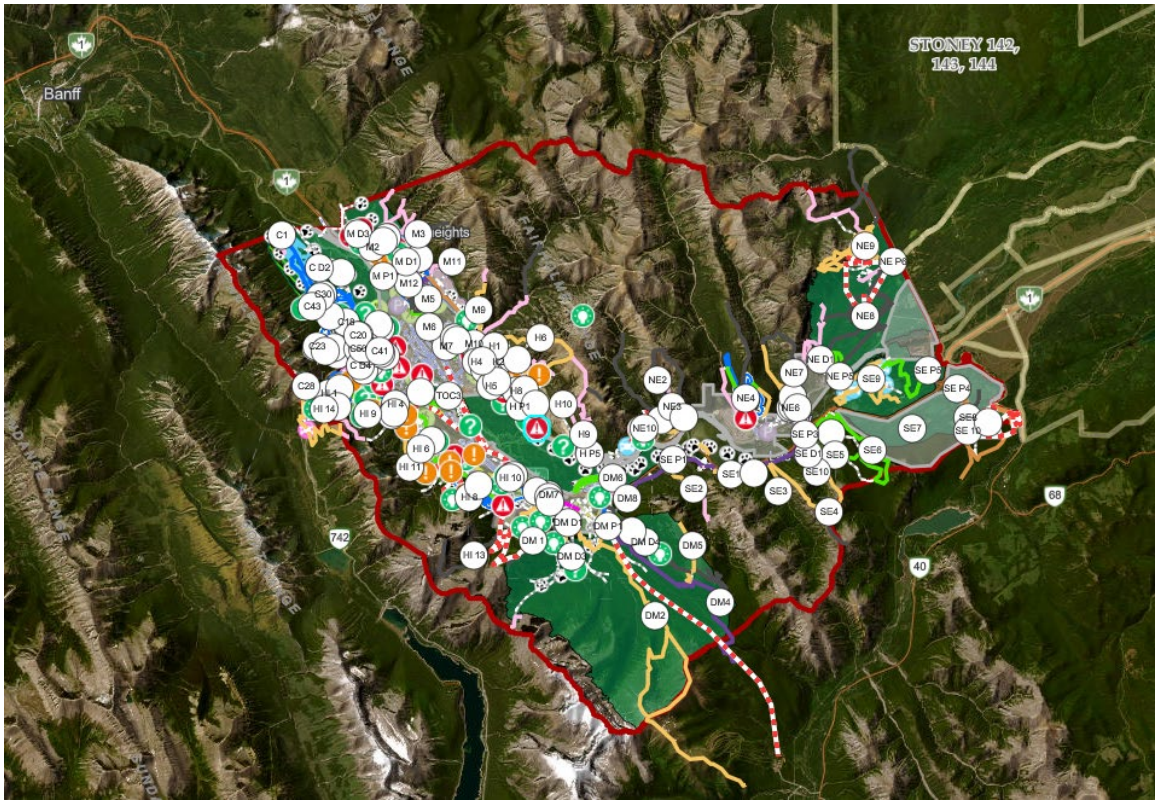


Figure 3 Input received through the interactive web mapping

Table 4 Planning Unit-Specific Interactive Mapping Feedback

Topic and description of feedback	Relevant planning units
Mountain-bike development and progression • Support for more varied, high-quality experiences, from beginner to advanced skill opportunities, conditional on professional and sustainable design, construction and maintenance. • Opposition focused on wildlife impacts, conflict and increased destination use.	• All planning units
Parking, staging and trailhead amenities • Calls for adequate, safe parking, formal staging, horse-trailer capacity, washrooms, shelters, garbage facilities, bike locks, transit and signage. • Concern that removing informal parking before providing alternatives would increase congestion, roadside hazards and approach times.	• All planning units
Local, regional commuter connectivity • Support for better return routes, loops, neighbourhood connections, continuous cycling routes and safe crossings. Requests for paved or gravel multi-use connections between communities and to regional destinations, along with fewer out-and-back routes. Opposed to alignments behind homes impacting privacy, wildlife, parking or safety. • Concern about off-leash conflicts, alongside requests for designated dog-walking loops and dog-friendly winter opportunities.	• All planning units except Horseshoe / G8 / Grotto • Town of Canmore; Canmore Nordic Centre
Wildlife, habitat and ecological impacts • Support for protecting habitat and movement corridors through buffers, closures and seasonal restrictions. Concerns included trail expansion, fragmentation, downhill trail development, fireguard effects and fence effectiveness. Varied perspectives were noted on the impacts of specific advanced trails. • Some support for wildlife and habitat protection restrictions. Others opposed permanent or broad closures and preferred targeted seasonal access, particularly for established recreation and equestrian use.	• All planning units except Town of Canmore • Dead Man's Flats and Canmore Nordic Centre
Decommissioning, replacement and formal designation • Some support for closing undesignated trails and consolidating braided networks, particularly in sensitive areas. Others warned that closures without comparable replacements would displace users and eliminate valued experiences. • Request for alternatives before closures, formalization, signage and maintenance.	• Montane; Horseshoe / G8 / Grotto; Northeast Bow Valley; Highline; Dead Man's Flats; SE Bow Valley
Directional trails, user separation and capacity • Some supported one-way routes and separation of uses for safety. Others opposed parallel alignments because they duplicate infrastructure and potential ecological impacts. Respondents also requested careful mixed-use design and capacity management.	• Montane; Horseshoe / G8 / Grotto; Canmore Nordic Centre; Town of Canmore; Highline; SE Bow Valley
Crowding, capacity and user conflict • Conflicts were identified among different activity types. Respondents sought capacity management, careful mixed-use design and separation where necessary rather than network expansion alone. • Concerns included privacy, parking spillover, wildlife, safety, crowding, development pressure and loss of wild character. Others cited tourism and economic benefits from advanced trails.	• Horseshoe / G8 / Grotto; Canmore Nordic Centre; Town of Canmore; Highline; SE Bow Valley • Montane; NE Bow Valley; Town of Canmore; Highline
Equestrian access, impacts and heritage • Some supported safe connections, seasonal access, trailer parking and separation from downhill cycling. Others raised concerns about trail damage, waste and conflict. Operators warned that closures or use changes could affect guiding businesses and historic routes.	• Montane; Horseshoe / G8 / Grotto; Dead Man's Flats; SE Bow Valley

Nordic skiing and winter use • Requests included easier ski loops, expanded snowmaking, directional ski trails, a dog-ski loop and fat-bike grooming. Conflicts among fat bikes, runners and other winter users were also noted.	• Canmore Nordic Centre; Dead Man's Flats
Accessibility, equity and public access • Requests for beginner routes, easier climbing trails and facilities serving a broader public. Concerns included exclusive coaching access, women's program access, concentrated funding and designs favouring highly skilled or e-bike-assisted users. • Frustration that recreation and trail access may be restricted around mineral lease areas.	• Canmore Nordic Centre; Highline; Town of Canmore • Horseshoe / G8 / Grotto
Other recreation opportunities • Strong support for retaining or formalizing direct access to bouldering and climbing areas including wayfinding, parking and approach trails. Concern that fencing, reroutes and parking removals would lengthen approaches or eliminate historic access. • Support for expanded and improved disc-golf opportunities, including an 18-hole course, winter access, tournament potential and better infrastructure. • Requests for gravel routes, motorized trails, alpine riding, skills areas and a broader range of experiences beyond the most frequently discussed activities.	• Montane; Horseshoe / G8 / Grotto; NE Bow Valley; SE Bow Valley • Canmore Nordic Centre; Town of Canmore • Northeast Bow Valley; Dead Man's Flats; SE Bow Valley

What’s next?

Feedback from the public engagement process was reviewed by Alberta Forestry and Parks and was used to inform refinement and finalization of the Canmore Area Trails Master Plan. The final plan will guide ministry staff in developing annual operational plans, prioritizing implementation actions and informing ongoing trail development, decommissioning and management decisions.

Appendix A: Engagement Evaluation

Question: *Before completing this survey, did you complete the interactive mapping exercise?*

Approximately 65 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they completed the interactive mapping exercise while 35 per cent indicated that they did not.

Question: *Do you have any feedback on this activity (interactive map)? What did or didn't work well?*

Respondents were invited to share feedback on the interactive mapping exercise (408 comments were received). Most of the comments received were positive and respondents appreciated the transparency of the tool, the ability to see input from others and the ability to like/dislike and comment on others' input. The most common concerns about the interactive mapping tool included:

- A learning curve was required before the tool could be used effectively (initial confusion),
- Usability and ease of use (confusing interface, clunky interaction, unclear symbology)
- Navigation and usability challenges (clicking, zooming, finding legends, pop-ups)
- Information detail (too much detail, crowded markers, challenge to interpret proposed changes)
- Challenging performance on mobile devices (smart phone, tablet)
- Desire for more or better onboarding for tool (e.g., video tutorial)
- Quality (e.g., clearer map symbology, legends, scale bars, base maps, imagery) and accuracy (e.g., trail names, missing trails / features) of the map
- Comment viewing, some frustration with having to open comments one by one, cannot see all comments at one time
- Small number of comments referred to technical issues or performance challenges due to crashes, lagging or freezing.
- Concern that the tool exposes sensitive trail locations

Question: *How was your experience sharing your input today?*

Over 91 per cent of respondents rated their experience with the survey as good (37 per cent) or acceptable (54 per cent). A minority of nine per cent rated their experience as poor. Respondents were invited to share what made their experience with the survey "good" or "poor. Table 4 presents the common themes.

Table 5 Survey Evaluation Themes

Good (381 comments)	**Poor** (47 comments)
• Ease of use and clarity • Opportunity to provide meaningful feedback • Clear questions and good survey structure • Balanced and neutral framing of questions • Quality and thoroughness of the plan • Inclusion of visual tools and interactive map • Convenience of the survey • Informative supporting materials • Amount of community engagement beyond the survey itself	• Survey length / time burden • Complexity / usability - described as too long, overly complex, hard to navigate (especially the maps) • Technical errors and submission issues • Unclear questions / lack of specificity • Information gaps / missing content • Language and accessibility concerns • Dissatisfaction with using a survey for feedback • Perceived bias and belief decisions have already been made