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## Riverland Recreational Trail Society

One year ago, this organization began its existence with the encouragement of the Town and the County of St. Paul. Today we have earned not only the interest but also in general the support of the Counties of Smoky Lake, Vermillion River, Bonnyville, and Thorhild, and also the Towns, Villages and Hamlets in those respective Counties.

Thank you all here for your participation in our group.

Initially, our goal was rather simple, establish and build a trail thru the County of St. Paul to connect Westward to Smoky Lake and onward, and Eastward to the Saskatchewan Border.

LOCAL USE &  
USE PROBLEM SOLVING.

Then came word that the rail line in this area may become abandoned, possibly providing us with a year-round recreational corridor connecting our original plans and including a line to Cold Lake. Since word of the rail line abandonment has come out, and news of our plans around that abandonment has circulated, individuals opposing these trail plans have gone to work in rallying up support for their objection.

We on the other hand may have been caught up in such things as the Relay, municipal presentations, other functions, and have not even begun to rally up the supporters.

At the same time as we must respect the objectors points of view, we must not ignore the silence of many who may support the trail concept that have not yet been called upon to show their support. A majority --- a minority --- a tough judgement call ---who is right, who is wrong.

Change is never easy to accept, yet our rural lives seem to be changing daily as are our rural economies. To accept the unknown in advance is a lot to ask the people of small communities. Yet to ignore an irreversible opportunity may be unforgivable. Is it worth the struggle to encourage people to look far ahead and consider accepting at least a trial run of the beginning of a new and hopefully improved lifestyle of local community fellowship and local recreation all the while encouraging a new economy generated by recreational travellers from other parts of our Country and perhaps the world. I think so.

We have two huge tasks in front of us, if we choose to take on the rail line:

One, the acquisition of the line

And the other, making clearly visible the support of the majority of the county and community residents involved.

With the previous unknowns that we have been dealing with, it is a challenging task just to determine which to take on first, and we may not have a choice because very recently word came out that the sale of the rail line is becoming very near to happening.

Our group has been identified as an interested but possibly unqualified party, and it appears that Rail America is pursuing a first option of finding a lock, stock, and barrel purchaser who would do with the property as they can best profit by.

If we are to possibly entertain the line acquisition, then we seem to have four apparent possible options:

1. form a consortium of communities, counties, and interested sponsors including possibly the Provincial government in purchasing the line as it stands, removing the salvage in order to pay down the cost of acquisition, selling off parcels of non-essential land to prospective buyers, and continuing to develop the line for recreational trail.

□ obviously a huge task, but most likely the surest way to acquire the line

2. acquire the service of a commercial operator to do the above on our behalf up to the trail development portion.

3. work with a salvage operator who has no interest in the land acquisition.

4. challenge the protocol of rail line abandonment -- federal/provincial/municipal/landowner which may not be considered for 2 reasons:

1. this line is not interprovincial

2. CN and Rail America have already been subjected to serious problems in the South and do not want to go there again

This is serious stuff, and I guess that I need to know if this group has the interest or the desire to take any part of the above on in the near future.

I would like to open the floor to discussion for just a few (10?) minutes and ask for a vote on which recommended direction we take. Let things not happen or continue working to make this rail trail concept a reality. I for one believe that even though the public support has not been rallied that it is really there and that the project can be done. What about each of you??

Before the RRTS even began to look for recorded public support for the future abandoned railway corridor trail, it was handed a copy of a petition opposing the concept. Although small in numbers and subject to interpretation, it clearly pictured an effort in opposition to the direction of the RRTS.

We then realized that we too must begin to "officially" present the support of those that agreed with us, and set out with a goal of doubling or more the numbers on the objectors petition. To our best knowledge, we are presently at or near 10 times that of opposing petition.

The support from the people of the region has been overwhelming, and just like the organizers from the opposition of the trail corridor, our group's organizers too have considerable difficulty in spending enough time on our cause. Not knowing where that support was coming from, we went about to qualify to the best of our ability where our supporters lived within the region. Of the identified petition signors so far, 40% are farm residents, 23% are rural non-farm residents, and 36% are townsites residents. Obviously, 63% are rural based county residents.

What's strange is that in the last 2 weeks we have had a feeling of sadness over the recent newspaper articles and chamber presentation submitted by 2 or 3 individuals from the opposing group. We have realized that in our quest for support of the project that we may have become a part of the reason for some of that group's outcries to the public.

RRTS has at every workshop and gathering expressed its commitment to work with the adjacent landowners (objecting or not) towards a compatible arrangement by which the trail corridor might exist and minimize the negative effects that its existence might have on the near-at-hand residents and property owners. That commitment stands.

RRTS will not endorse or encourage the use by any trail group or user that does not have any of the following:

1. The implementation of the highest Safety Standards in the development of their use of the trail corridor.
2. Liability Protection or insurance that covers not only the intended useage on the trail but also provides coverage for the adjacent property if because of the existence of the trail, access has been made available to adjacent property.  
(The Alberta Snowmobile Association trail insurance presently has similar coverage)
3. A solid plan of responsibility for the abatement of the following:
  - Speed especially through congested or sensitive areas
  - Noise throughout the entire useable coprridor
  - Littering
  - Trespassing on to unauthorized property which might be adjacent to the trail corridor
  - Damage or Vandalism to property which is adjacent to the trail corridor

OTHERS???

4. Fire fighting costs insurance AND fire prevention program including possible trail closure during hi risk conditions.
5. Acceptance of Trail Closure for any other significant event or reason of responsibility.
6. A plan of shared trail corridor useage with other groups.
  - Eg. Motorized users must slow and give way to non-motorized users in shared use season.
  - Special events are planned, publicized, and given priority
  - The development of separate and non-conflicting paths of useage in areas of congestion.
7. The acceptance that through the development of the corridor, that solid efforts will be made to enhance and benefit the business of agriculture on lands adjacent to the corridor.
  - Eg. Improved corridor crossing from parcel to parcel for farmers and farm equipment.
  - Improved weed control.
  - Enhanced Wildlife movement otherwise restricted by agricultural fencing.
  - Compatible rerouting of the corridor surface to areas more advantageous to agriculture.
  - Fewer restrictions than in the past to crossing the corridor with utilities lines, etc. that might enhance farming operations.
  - Because of the existence of the trail corridor that motorized area random riding pressures of the past would be reduced or even alleviated.
8. The acceptance that implementation of the use of the trail corridor may be necessarily gradual and over a period of months or even years for uses that are not ready to be accepted now.
9. The ability and acceptance to work with a group governing the future use of the corridor (which includes representation from the adjacent landowners) in order to address concerns and issues that may come up from time to time.
10. Acceptance that the regions municipal corridor governing body will have final decisionmaking regarding the joint and public useage of the corridor.
11. Other items or concerns that may arise in the future.

It is with the above intentions that the RRTS hopes in the future to help to provide a functioning and publicly correct new amenity which will benefit the regions townspeople and rural residents alike. This new form of acceptable and responsible recreation may also help the many little communities which it passes through with the added economy that they may very well

need to keep alive some of the facilities and business which we have all enjoyed for some time to come. High stress levels from accelerating industry in areas near to us need local forms of family recreation, and such a corridor may provide an added avenue for that social stress relief.

The benefits are many.

The support is overwhelming.

The structure to properly manage and take stewardship from the people of the region has had a strong start.

Please do your part and join the RRTS, voice your support with your municipal representatives, and spread the good word.

To lose such a future benefit may be an unforgiveable loss to the region.