

**MOUNTAIN BIKING OPTIONS  
WITHIN THE WOLFVILLE WATERSHED NATURE PRESERVE  
PROPOSAL #2**

**Submitted by:  
ANNAPOLIS VALLEY MOUNTAIN BIKE ASSOCIATION**

**February 13, 2007**

Dear Nature Trust Committee Members,

We have received your response to the proposal we submitted on January 11, 2007. Although initially disappointed that mountain biking remains singled out from other similarly low impact uses we have not given up our belief that there is a positive solution that does have the potential to satisfy everyone if we work hard, keep an open mind and continue to discuss things in a positive way. In response, AVMBMA held two 3-hour brainstorming sessions with its members to discuss what additional options could be presented that take into account the issues your committee has brought up. The result is a response to your concerns and a short list of potential options that we would be happy to discuss at the upcoming meeting on Wednesday February 14 at 8:30 am. We believe that within these ideas there is the potential to satisfy the public, town council, the nature trust and the recreational enthusiast and thus be a positive step towards making this project a huge success AND environmentally sustainable.

Your committee can assume that all of the offers we made in our initial submission for significant volunteer work on trail assessment, design, maintenance, educational presentations on sustainable riding, trail etiquette, monitoring, and funding are all still part of our offer and we are completely committed to this. The majority of information in the initial proposal is still equally relevant but we have decided not to repeat much of it here in the interests of making the report a little easier to read through.

Happy Trails,

Glenn McMullen

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***Annapolis Valley Mountain Bike Association (AVMBMA) Background and Philosophy:***

The recently formed **Annapolis Valley Mountain Bike Association (AVMBMA)** is a not-for-profit society consisting of dedicated volunteers working together to build and maintain sustainable multi-use recreational trails in the Annapolis Valley and act as a positive voice for Mountain Biking.

The organization is affiliated with the **International Mountain Bike Association** (www.IMBA.com) - a hugely proactive organization which promotes rider education, environmental stewardship, active transportation, trail building and maintenance, advocacy, research and support for outdoor recreation and more.

First, we will respond to the reasons for banning bikes that the committee cited in its letter to the AVMBBA regarding our submission dated January 11, 2007.

The following points are direct quotations (***bolded and italicized***) taken from the letter sent to AVMBBA on behalf of the Nature Trust committee.

- ***“there never have been mountain bike trails on the property by either design or permission of the owner;”*** **AVMBBA Response:** AVMBBA members were not responsible for building the trails that are present in the nature preserve and that have been there for many years. We do not support trail building without permission from landowners. The fact remains however that there ARE multi-use trails on the property and as such are a huge asset for many recreational uses. Don’t punish a whole community of cyclists, other recreationalists or AVMBBA who are trying to be above board with everything and are supporting making trails legal, well maintained and low impact. This was the main reason our organization was formed.

- ***“the precautionary principle is a worthy one to invoke in such circumstance as is presented here; one of the main ecological interests of the property is the area of old growth Hemlock forest; such forests are very vulnerable to disturbance and are now extremely rare in the Valley and in Nova Scotia;”*** **AVMBBA Response:** What we are not understanding is why the “precautionary principle” only seems to apply to mountain bikes? As presented in the submission, independent scientific studies indicate no greater impact from mountain biking as compared to hiking. When the hemlock area was mentioned as a concern, AVMBBA researched the topic and spoke with a multi-use trail consultant near Truro who informs us that they have developed trails through sensitive old growth Hemlock forests under Crown Supervision. It created some specific design issues including the requirement to have a built tread with the fill brought in off site – but it CAN be done (see “support” letter at the end of this submission for contact information). The fact remains; to study the area “scientifically” or for people to be educated and learn about the value of old growth forests they are going to want to see it up close - that will require some form of trail. However, all this being said, **AVMBBA have no objections to not having trails in the particularly sensitive old growth area and are not opposed to rerouting trails away from those areas.** We had hoped that was clear in the initial proposal. We don’t need to bike in the hemlock area if that’s the wishes of the committee. We are open and flexible. This concern is a non-issue with us.

- ***“The need for policing is to be mitigated.”***

**AVMBBA Response:** This point seems to insinuate that policing would be necessary if mountain bikes are allowed but not necessary for the other permitted uses which we are not sure we understand. We feel we would be an asset in this instance - AVMBBA are looking to have several of its members take the trail patrol officers training course through the NS Trails Federation to assist in providing free monitoring/self-policing of the Preserve area for proper use and educating trail users while out on the trail which would **help reduce** the need for policing - not increase it. We would take that opportunity to educate trail users.

- ***“Recreation was never a major focus of the use of the property – it’s well down the list after preservation, education and ecological research and study;”***

**AVMBBA Response:** This is the biggest issue and the one that needs the most discussion. AVMBBA understand that the priorities of the committee are not recreation and therefore this argument makes sense from that point of view given those goals in the order listed. What it does not do is provide any guidelines or reasons why recreational uses of similar low impact are

allowed and mountain bikes are not. All the concerns listed in this letter are equally applicable to any form of recreation and not specific to biking.

The main comment about recreation not being a high priority/focus of the Nature Trust committee is at the root of many of the issues being brought up. Many actions flow from this assumption. AVMBAs believe that recreation should be a major priority and one of extreme importance for the Watershed Area. We also believe that the public places a high value on recreation. Whether public support is also strong for goals such as ecological research and study could also be discussed and evaluated. Maybe a public forum on the topic could be developed? The Nature Trust easement is one way to prevent the land from being developed - AVMBAs also agree that this land should remain undeveloped in terms of commercial and/or residential uses. However, is the Nature Trust Easement the only way to achieve those goals or are there other methods to be explored? Ways that might be more recreation-friendly/focused while still being very conscious of preservation and minimizing impact. Are we certain that everyone can't walk away happy? We believe they can and that is the concept behind the following ideas.

**New Options for consideration:**

1. **Split the area into two entities** - Designate a portion of the entire Watershed area including the sensitive old growth hemlock areas to come under the nature trust "jurisdiction" and make the other portion have a healthy lifestyle/recreational focus with various recreation stakeholders working together to sort out sustainable uses, develop policies to lay out a plan for maintaining trails, monitoring use, etc. A plan could be developed and then sent to Town Council and/or the Nature Trust Committee for final approval. This would allow the Nature Trust Committee to excel and focus on what they do best (preserve) while leaving the recreation aspect to people actively working in recreation. This group would include town and/or county recreational staff, associations such as the Annapolis Valley Mountain Bike Association, Keiran Pathways, hiking, equestrian and other "green" outdoor recreational groups along with a trail consultant or expert. This could serve as a model for sustainable trail management to be used as a template for future development in other areas outside of the preserve.
2. **Allow mountain bikers into the preserve for a trial "probationary" period** of the 2007 riding season where our use will be reviewed at the end by comparing before and after trail conditions, number of unresolved conflicts between multi users, etc. The criteria would all be discussed before hand. This would give AVMBAs a chance to prove its intentions to the committee that we are responsible, environmentally sensitive and can be a huge asset to this project OR give the committee justification to ban bikes if we don't live up to our end of the deal and are proven to have a net negative effect on the big picture after everything is considered.
3. **Designate a small portion of the less environmentally "sensitive" area for mountain bike use to be managed by the Annapolis Valley Mountain Bike Association.** There would be an agreement put in place specifying responsibilities which could serve as a local model for sustainable mountain bike trail management.

In all these examples an appointed spokesperson from AVMBAs would report to the governing committee on a regular basis and agreed upon schedule to update on any potential issues, inform around trail conditions, maintenance schedules, etc. We are suggesting close contact and good two-way exchanges of information - not working in isolation. The committee would know clearly what was happening and when it was happening.

**In addition to working together towards further exploration of any of the options above, AVMBBA also commits to the following action items as outlined in the initial proposal:**

**1. Undertake a full professional Trail Assessment in Late Spring 2007**

The **Trail Assessment** would be performed through consultation with recognized experts in the field who have training in trail design and maintenance. It will cover potential issues including erosion, trail widening, tread creep, rerouting around sensitive areas if necessary, standard internationally recognized signage, trail design, trail maintenance, etc.

**2. Address any trouble spots/issues that are indicated from the trail assessment.**

The trail expert would prepare a full report to the Nature Trust committee outlining issues and recommended course of action for approval by the committee. This could include potentially rerouting trails around sensitive or wet areas, repairing damaged areas, ensuring proper drainage, etc. through the use of advanced trail design and repair techniques. Some suggestions AVMBBA have already discussed and are supportive of include minimizing or eliminating recreational uses during the wet spring until trail conditions are assessed as supporting trail use with minimal impact. Others include appropriate signage with low impact trail use guidelines, warnings to not use trails during or immediately following heavy rain, etc.

Good trail design is the key to sustainable recreational trails. It takes into account things like water courses, proper trail drainage, grades, outsloping, trail width, a clearly defined trail and appropriate signage. AVMBBA members are committed to “raising” local trail experts from within the local community and partnering with local schools and/or recreation clubs to work with youth to provide a positive learning experience, recreation opportunities and an appreciation of nature.

**3. Explore funding grants** where appropriate (trail assessment, trail maintenance, proper signage, education on proper trail use, design and etiquette.) Funding Sources accessible to the local Mountain Bike Association include the NS Department of Health Promotion and Protection, the International Mountain Biking Association, Mountain Equipment Co-op and our own local fundraising efforts.

**4. Provide a committed group of volunteers to perform trail maintenance**

**5. Provide workshops on sustainable multi-use trail design & maintenance**

**6. Educate recreational users including bikers on responsible & sustainable trail use** including proper riding technique, rules of the trail, etc.

**7. Have several AVMBBA members take the trail patrol officers training** course through the NS Trails Federation to assist in providing free monitoring/policing of the Preserve area.

***A few other thoughts:***

In terms of support for mountain biking within the town limits, it is limited solely to the busy roadways and the dykes and has been banned right from the start from all recreational trails and parks within the town. That's one of the reasons why the Watershed area is such a great opportunity to bring together ALL recreationalists in a positive way. Without this particular green space/trail system being available in some form, the opportunities for mountain biking will be severely diminished in the Wolfville and surrounding area.

AVMBA believe the initial proposal we submitted on January 11, 2007 successfully outlined the independent scientific research that supports that mountain biking is low impact and comparable to the other forms of recreation currently allowed on the property such as hiking so we will not reiterate it to the extent of the first submission. We continue to maintain that ALL recreational activity has an environmental impact - the goal is to minimize that impact while experiencing and enjoying the outdoors. The suggestions we have made throughout this proposal in conjunction with the philosophies of Tread Lightly and the International Mountain Bike Association will all help to minimize the environmental footprint and ensure that Mountain Biking and ALL other permitted recreational activities remain low impact within the Nature Preserve.

AVMBA suggests we need to carefully re-evaluate "environmental impact" and put it into perspective. It is being suggested that narrow trails through the wilderness in which no trees were actually cut that support self-propelled, non-polluting, health promoting recreation such as bikes creates a significant impact on the environment - the same property that has a man-made dam, rusted pipes and debris, wide access roads for gas powered utility vehicles, the likelihood of a parking lot, and one where the majority of people (cyclists are the least likely to drive a car to the watershed) will be driving from town in their greenhouse gas emitting vehicles to the "nature" preserve. Let's put this into the bigger picture. A narrow trail through the woods that allows any type of recreationalist to enjoy the wilderness, experience and appreciate the natural landscape and get exercise is in our opinion a very small sacrifice to the environment in comparison to the rewards that it provides.

It is also worth noting that our organization is in the process of applying for third party liability insurance which will help protect both cyclists and landowners in the future.

We think this proposal provides some viable alternatives to the current recommended course of action and that it effectively serves the interests of both the environment and the public's recreational desires. We look forward to your response. We are simply looking to be given the opportunity to show you what we can achieve by working together.

Happy Trails,

Glenn McMullen

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See enclosed "Letters of Support" from Mountain Equipment Co-Op, Cobequid Trail Consulting, Valley Stove and Cycle and Gaspereau & District Recreation Commission (\*originals available)