



June 30, 2025

A Joint letter from:

*Regional District of Kootenay Boundary Area C: Christina Lake Director Grace McGregor
Christina Gateway Community Development Association
Christina Lake Tourism Society
Christina Lake Trail Alliance*

Re: Columbia Western Rail Trail

Dear colleagues and community partners,

We are reaching out because a situation is unfolding that threatens one of our region's most significant natural and tourism assets — and we need to act together.

In 2019, a 67km section of the Columbia Western Rail Trail (CWRT) — from Castlegar to just north of Christina Lake — was disestablished as a recreation trail by the Province of BC. At the time, Recreation Sites and Trails BC assured the public that recreational access would continue. We were told there would be “no impact to the Great Trail designation” and that “public use and access are expected to remain as they have been.”

Fast forward to today, and those assurances are no longer being upheld.

We've now received notice that this section is being treated as a **non-status rail grade**, with **no funding, no maintenance, and no management plan**. Hazard signage will be posted this summer warning of unsafe trestles, active rockfall zones, and tunnel instability. The Province has stated that the trail is **being managed to “wilderness status.”**

Let's be clear: this is not stewardship. This is abandonment — and it directly contradicts the commitments made in 2019.

Once again, rural communities are expected to market themselves as tourism destinations while being denied the very infrastructure that draws visitors. **We cannot attract visitors or investment when the Province is quietly stepping away from its role as steward. We cannot pretend this trail is an asset if we allow it to crumble into disuse.**

(cont'd on page 2)



A Stark Contrast: Othello Tunnels

To highlight the inconsistency in how trail infrastructure is treated, consider the **Othello Tunnels** in Coquihalla Canyon Provincial Park. After flood damage in 2021, the site was closed due to safety concerns. Unlike the CWRT, which lies outside a park and sees shared use by recreation and industry, the Province:

- Conducted detailed engineering and geotechnical assessments,
- Initiated a multi-phase restoration and stabilization project, and
- Committed public funding to restore access — with transparency and regular public updates.

While the CWRT is more complex due to its mix of users, including important contributions from forestry companies like Interfor and Celgar who have helped maintain culverts and clear rockfalls, this complexity makes the **case for better planning and coordinated stewardship — not for abandonment or a lack of oversight**. Recreational users should not lose access by default simply because other uses exist.

Both the Othello Tunnels and the CWRT are historic rail corridors, central to BC's heritage and outdoor recreation economy. But only one is receiving the care and coordination required to protect its future.

A Call for Coordination

We are reaching out to potential allies who believe that:

- Access to recreational infrastructure in rural areas matters
- Government commitments to local communities should be upheld; and
- By working together, we can push for better — not just for ourselves, but for future generations.

We cannot lead this effort alone — nor should it fall solely on small, rural communities to defend infrastructure of provincial and national value. This letter is our communities' way of reaching out: we need the support of larger organizations who recognize what's at stake.

(cont'd on page 3)



Christina Lake does not have all the answers or resources to address this, however we are committed to supporting better coordination, amplifying local concerns, and helping ensure that communication between communities, advocates, and decision-makers is not lost.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this issue. Let's work together to ensure the Columbia Western Rail Trail is not quietly lost — but rightfully restored as a core part of our shared tourism, recreation (and industry) landscape.

Sincerely,

Grace McGregor
Area C/Christina Lake Director: Regional District of Kootenay Boundary

Tracey MacGregor
Economic & Community Development Manager: Christina Gateway Community Development Association

Byron Houston
President: Christina Lake Tourism Society

Kristin Parsons
Chairperson: Christina Lake Trail Alliance