

October 23, 2014

Winter Trail Task Force Committee Progress Report

Background

Controversy over the use of “fat bikes” on the Vasa Pathway has arisen due to rapid popularity of fat bikes and their use of the groomed Vasa trail during the winter. In practice, the Vasa trail has been a groomed and community supported, ski specific trail in the winter since its construction in 1991. However, the DNR maintains that the Vasa is, and has always been a non-motorized, multi-use trail.

The DNR announced on April 28, 2014 that they would not ban fat bikes from the trail given the absence of hard data indicating that the uses were incompatible. A coalition of ski and bike representatives sought the DNR’s permission to work with them to propose solutions to reduce conflict and improve trail experiences for both user groups, principally through the establishment of a trail system designed to be attractive to fat bikers. The DNR accepted that offer and empowered the coalition to proceed accordingly. The coalition has been working in good faith since that time to propose solutions and implement a new trail for the upcoming winter season.

Implementation

A proposal to create a groomed fat bike trail system was submitted to the DNR on September 16, 2014. The DNR has “conceptually approved” this work and is fast-tracking the process. It is our hope that actual approval will be granted very soon. The initial phase will primarily use existing single track. The intent is to reduce fat bike use of the Vasa trail through the development of a viable, attractive alternative. The new eight mile trail will include points of intersection and overlap with the Vasa Trail and will be ready for the winter season of 2014-15.

Subsequent phases could potentially include:

- Connectivity to the groomed single track trail from the Supply Road, Timber Ridge, Mt. Holiday and Bartlett Road facilities.
- Improving the Vasa Pathway including reduction of choke points, blind turns, and creating passing zones
- Developing classic-only ski trails

A communication strategy will be created to:

- Encourage fat bike use of new eight mile trail
- Educate all users of trail etiquette
- Highlight economic benefits of a comprehensive trail system