

# TrailRider project forges ahead

## Access: Fundraising continues for devices that assist the disabled.

By Barb Brouwer

OBSERVER STAFF

The notion of opening forest trails up to everyone is two steps closer to reality as the Shuswap Trail Alliance is helping raise funds to purchase a TrailRider – and the local Professional Forest Network contributes \$500 to the cause.

Developed by the British Columbia Mobility Opportunities Society (BCMOS), the TrailRider is a specially designed wilderness-access vehicle.

“With one wheel, and ‘sherpas’ back and front, the TrailRider can tackle any terrain,” says the BCMOS website.

Former forester and outdoors enthusiast, Debra McDonald has been forced off the forest trails she loves so much by MS, a disease that has severely restricted her mobility.

But the condition that restricts her to a wheelchair has not dampened her enthusiasm for the outdoors.

A large part of her daily routine is focuses on efforts to raise funds to buy three TrailRiders for the Shuswap, work that makes it easy for the alliance to support her dream.

“They’re really awesome to work with,” she says. “Phil (co-ordinator McIntyre-Paul) is very driven to getting the trails adapted to get a program here,” says a grateful McDonald. “He’s very optimistic and so is Joan Mitchell, the treasurer.”

McIntyre-Paul is equally impressed by McDonald’s efforts.

“Deb is doing the homework – she has insurance sorted out, an instruction manual, she’s spoken to other organizations in Kelowna and Vernon and knows how people can sign them out and be safe,” he says, noting McDonald will be the one signing the TrailRiders out and making sure that riders and sherpas know what they’re doing.

“She’s not just saying, ‘I want it,’ she’s championing it and she’s so, so passionate about it. That’s what makes it work and that’s what makes the Trail Alliance able to support it.”

McIntyre-Paul says the concept of making trails accessible to people with mobility issues has been on the Trail Alliance’s radar for a long time – since the late outdoors enthusiast



OBSERVER FILE PHOTO

**Test drive:** *Grant McDonald and Cheryl Hillocks take Debra McDonald for a ride on a specially designed TrailRider along the trails at Little Mountain Park.*

Dirk Key had ALS.

“He was into wheelchair at the time and said, “So what’s the plan on accessible trails?”” says McIntyre-Paul.

He says that contrary to the belief of many, the Trail Alliance’s mandate is not to build trails.

“We’re about building relationships within the natural environment and building relationships with each other,” he says. “It gets people outside, but it also takes a community team. It’s right on all levels.”

And while he under-

stands how daunting raising \$6,900 is from McDonald’s perspective, he says the TrailRider is very cost-effective in terms of a piece of infrastructure.

“We’re encouraging people to contribute,” he says, noting that if people are considering making a donation to the Trail Alliance, he would recommend earmarking it for a TrailRider. “Let’s get it in place so by June folks can start working with it. We need one to see how best to use it and train people to use it safely.”

Donations can be made by writing a cheque to the Shuswap Trail Alliance – clearly marked for a TrailRider, and mailing it to PO Box 1531, Salmon Arm, V1E 4P6. Or call the alliance at 250-832-0102.