



Rolling along. Debra MacDonald, seated, can now continue to enjoy Shuswap area trails, with the help of her friend Cheryl Hill-ocks and the newly acquired TrailRider by the Shuswap Trail Alliance. (Submitted photo)

Shuswap trails opened up to mobility challenged

by Heather Black

Shuswap trail accessibility just increased for people with disabilities thanks to a grant from the provincial government.

A \$7,200 grant from the Parks Enhancement Funding program has enabled the Shuswap Trail Alliance to purchase the first of three TrailRiders, which is a wheeled piece of adaptable equipment with a seat and bars on the front and back so Sherpas can push them along trails.

"The province is partnering with organizations like the Shuswap Trail Alliance to ensure that everyone can enjoy our world class parks system," Environment Minister Mary Polak said in a statement. "I'd like to thank the individuals and sponsors who made donations through the Park Enhancement Fund, and to everyone involved in bringing TrailRiders to the Shuswap."

Debra MacDonald, who spearheaded the effort to bring the equipment here, has been busy championing the cause to service clubs, granting agencies and individuals throughout the region, raising \$1,300 in individual donations as well as \$500 from the Professional Forestry Association.

The cause hits particularly close to home for MacDonald, who is wheelchair bound herself since being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

"My goal is to get people with all disabilities to experience the great outdoors. The province has made that a real possibility for people in the Shuswap," she explained. "We've met our summer goal to raise the first \$7,000, now we're focusing on hitting our second target of \$7,000 for this fall, and the third \$7,000 by next spring."

With \$1,000 of the second goal already in place, and some strong partner requests already out in the community, MacDonald doesn't expect the second TrailRider to be far behind.

The Park Enhancement Fund enables B.C. Parks to enter into partnerships that support various enhancements to the parks system, such as improving information, education and interpretation programs, planning projects, capital investments and restoration. Since its inception in 2008, the fund has contributed around \$8 million to parks and protected areas through partnerships, sponsorships, donations, bequests and revenue from the Discover Camping reservation service.