

KNOX MOUNTAIN PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN – PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Project overview

Knox Mountain Park is the City’s largest natural park at 367 hectares. A popular destination for residents and visitors to Kelowna, the park sees more than 40,000 visitors per year. During a typical year, the roadway (Knox Mountain Drive) closes during both the winter and the summer when the fire hazard is extreme. The last Knox Mountain Park Management Plan was endorsed by City Council in November 2011, and development of an updated plan is currently underway. As part of that plan, the City is considering options for the future access of Knox Mountain Drive.

This report provides a summary of the engagement process, what we heard from survey respondents, who we heard from, and next steps.

Engagement overview

The City conducted an online survey in May 2021 to gather resident, user and stakeholder feedback that will contribute to providing a clear path forward for the operation of Knox Mountain Drive.

Feedback was collected through the *Get Involved* engagement portal, which included the survey. Onsite signage along Knox Mountain Drive directed users to the survey. Stakeholders were notified directly by email of the survey opportunity. Promotion included social media ads, organic posts and media releases that were sent as ebulletin to subscribers and posted on kelowna.ca. Local Gift Cards were made available to win as incentive for completing the survey.



8,117
survey responses



over 5 weeks



39
stakeholders
engaged



1,665
People notified
via email



4,035
comments
submitted

Through:



12
Social media posts



3
Prize draw
incentives



3
Social media ads



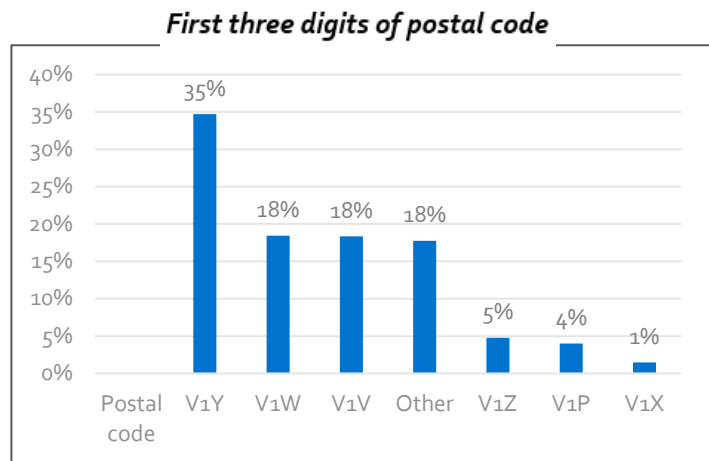
1
News release
generating
5 media stories



11,600
webpage visitors

Respondent demographics

Three quarters of the respondents indicated they were from Kelowna with 35 per cent indicating they lived in Central Kelowna, the adjacent neighbourhood to Knox Mountain. Respondents represented a diverse range of age groups with the majority between 25-44 (40%) and 45-64 (35%). Lower participation was shown from those 65+ (18%) and very few younger than 25 (6.8%) participated. Results from surveys such as this are a collection of opinions and perceptions from interested or potentially affected residents and are not a statistically significant random sample of all Kelowna residents. Due to its opt-in and open methods, results are qualitative in nature.



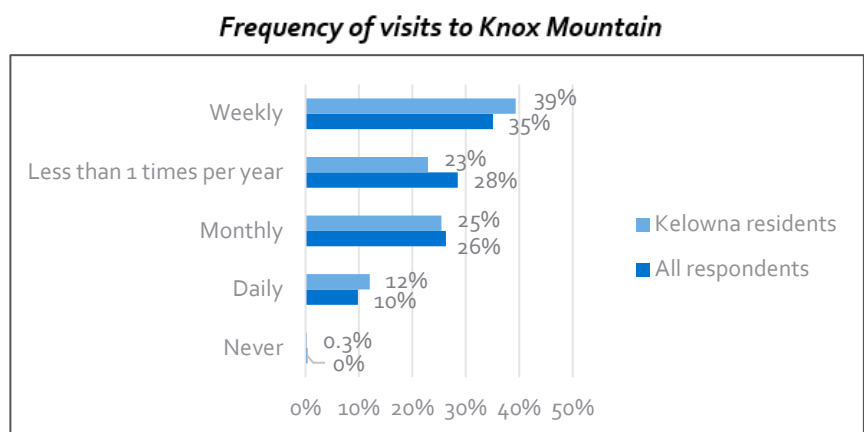
Stakeholders

In addition to reaching out to the public, 20 groups were sent direct emails notifying them of the project and survey opportunity, 39 stakeholders representing 16 groups were consulted by email and two one-on-one meetings with staff were held by request, in addition to direct correspondence with concerned residents. Stakeholders included:

Friends of Knox Mountain Park	Hearing Loops Advocacy
Central Okanagan Naturalists Club	Wheelchair Access Advocacy
Kelowna Disc Golf Association	CRIS Adaptive Adventures
Mountain Bikers of the Central Okanagan	Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
Pathways Ability Society	School District 23
People In Motion	Okanagan Boys & Girls Club
Central Okanagan Disabilities Coalition	Elevation Outdoors
Vision Advocates	KLO Neighbourhood Association
Seniors Outreach Society	Okanagan Mission Residents Association
Dementia Advocates	Kettle Valley Residents Association

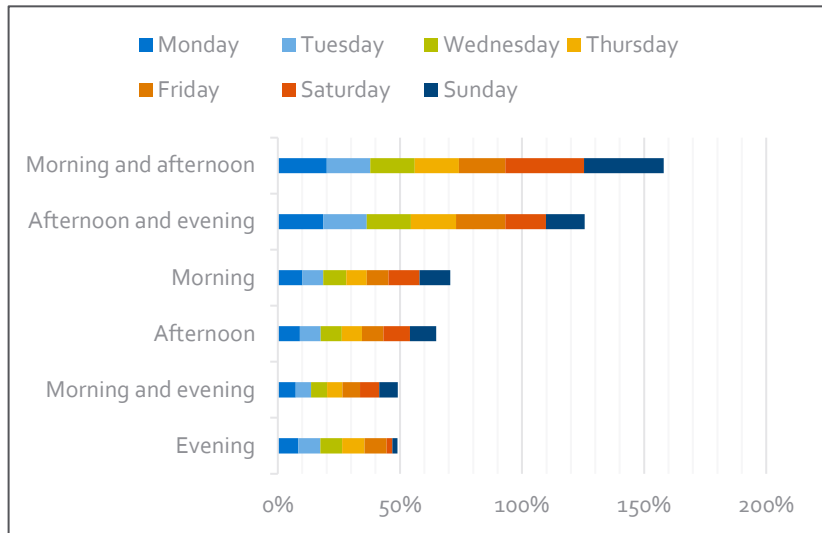
What we heard

Most respondents (87-95%) visit the park in the spring, summer and fall; however, more than one third of respondents visit year-round. Respondents indicated they primarily visit the park weekly (35%), less than 10 times per year (29%), or monthly (26%), with a smaller percentage (10%) visiting the park daily.



The most popular time to visit includes morning/afternoon as well as evening/afternoon, with more respondents selecting morning/afternoon on weekends.

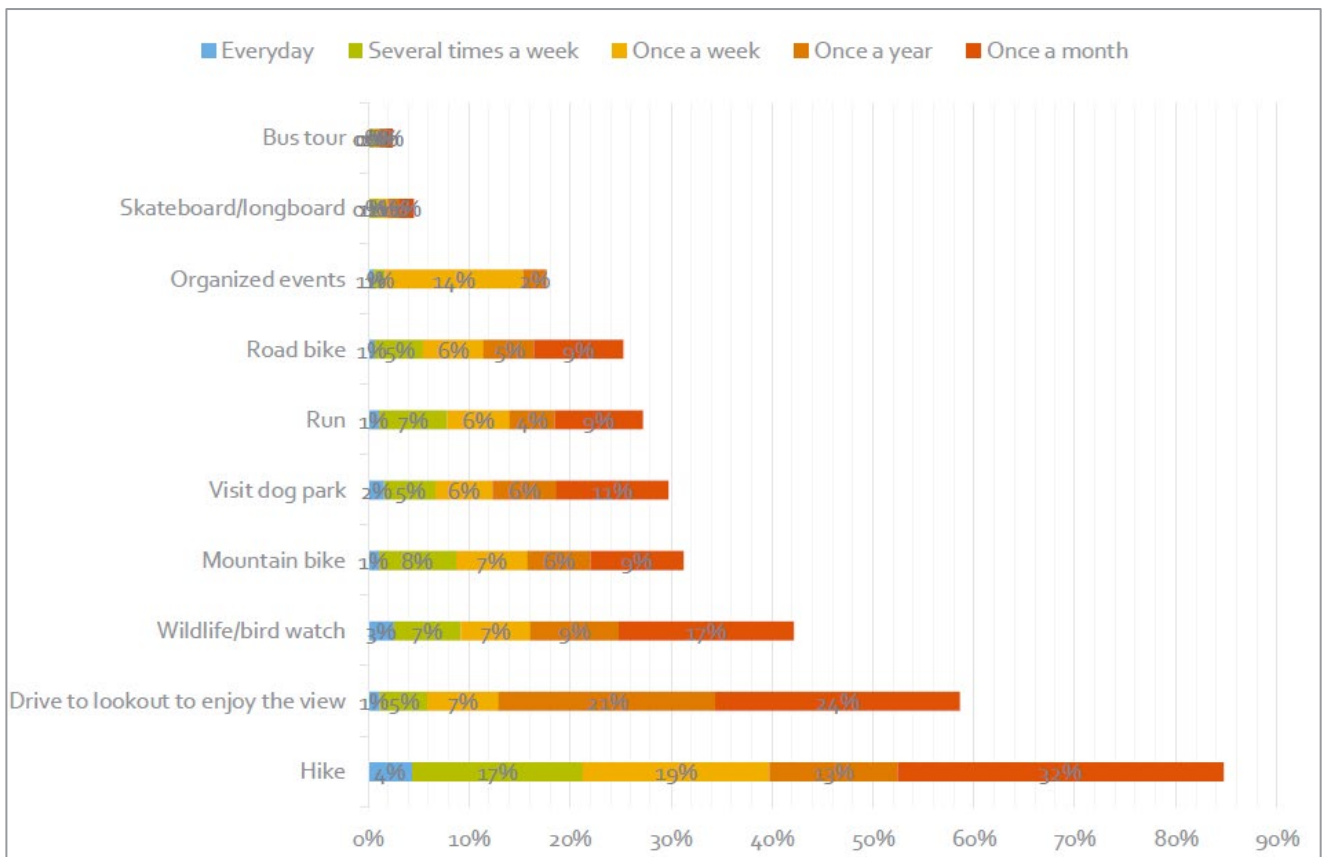
Popular visiting times



"I would love it to be open to first lookout, not all ages are capable or walking up to the lookout and the beautiful views should be open to everyone." – Survey respondent

The survey revealed that the top three activities include hiking (86%), driving to the lookout to enjoy the view (59%), and wildlife/bird watching (43%). Note that each respondent could choose any number of activities that applied.

Frequency of activities



Respondents were asked to rank potential options for the future of Knox Mountain Drive. Options included keeping the road open to vehicles to the lower lookout or upper lookout, keeping it closed to vehicles but with shuttle service, keeping it open only for permitted events, or keeping it closed to vehicles at all time.

The average rankings for each option fall within 0.6 points from the most preferred option to the least preferred option, suggesting a fairly even divide in opinion among respondents.

The overall highest rated option was to keep vehicular access to the Lower Lookout. The second highest rated option was to keep vehicular access to the Upper Lookout, followed by a shuttle service, then vehicles only for permitted events. The lowest rated option overall was closing Knox Mountain Drive to vehicles at all times.

OPTIONS	AVG. RANK
Knox Mountain Drive is open to vehicles up to the lower look out	2.69 ★
Knox Mountain Drive is open to vehicles up to the upper look out	2.93
Knox Mountain Drive is closed to vehicles but a shuttle service is available	3.03
Knox Mountain Drive is open to vehicles only for permitted events	3.06
Knox Mountain Drive is closed to vehicles at all times	3.29

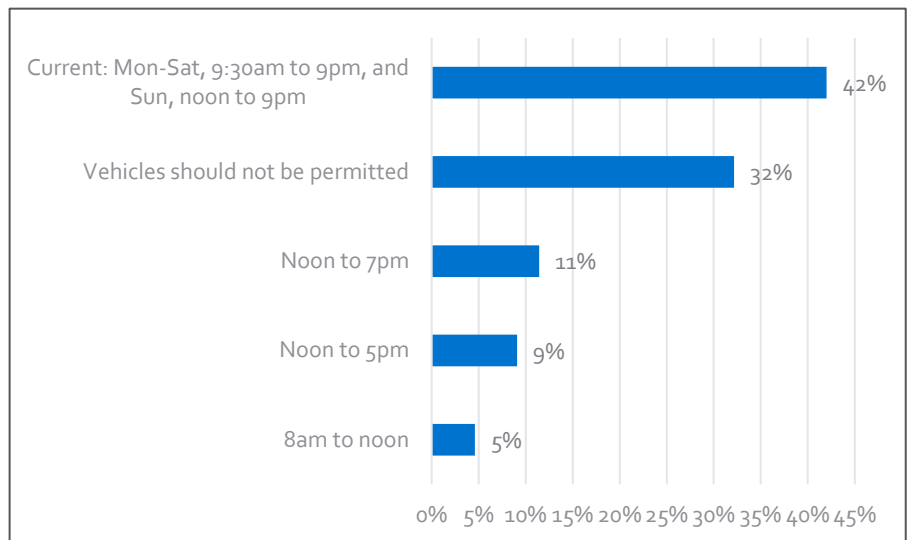
*"Please do not close it to vehicle traffic. It is the only way those with mobility issues also get to enjoy the view."
- Survey respondent*

★ (1 = most preferred 5 = least preferred)

When asked about vehicle access and preferred hours, approximately one third of all respondents said that vehicle access should not be permitted.

Approximately 42 per cent wanted the hours of use for vehicles to remain as it was before the pandemic. The remaining, approximately 25 per cent, preferred more limited hours.

Favourable hours for vehicles on Knox Mountain Drive



"It has been much safer and much more accessible during the last year to use Knox Mountain while the road has been closed. I participate in all sorts of activities on Knox Mountain and they always include using the roadway. It seems that everybody using it currently is enjoying the vehicle-free zone as it increases safety, open space, and contributes to a more natural environment. Keep Knox Mountain vehicle free!" – Survey respondent

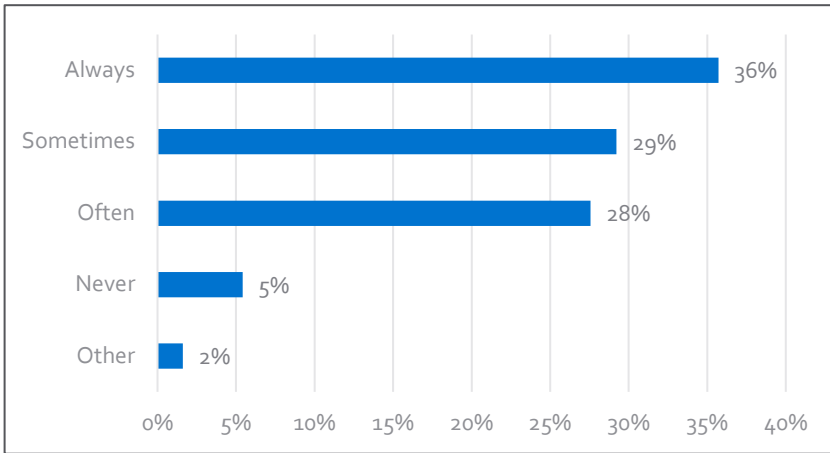
When filtered by demographic, it was interesting to note that the results did not differ dramatically from the aggregate response. However, there were subtle shifts on responses when filtered by age group. Regarding the choice of being closed to vehicles, the percentage varied from a low of 19% (from seniors) to a high of 36% (from the 45-65 age group). For the choice of keeping it open to vehicles with the pre-pandemic hours, the results ranged from a low of 37% (from the 45-65 age group) to a high of 55% (from seniors). Therefore, there were subtle, but not dramatic differences in responses, when filtering by age range. In the middle age ranges (from 25-65 years), the split between closing the road to vehicles and keeping the current hours was almost the same, with each approximately 37% for each choice. Notably, the results from the seniors and the youth were most similar, with 19-23% preferring closing the road to vehicles, and approximately half (55% and 48%, respectively) preferring the current hours of use.

	All Respondents	Over 65	45 - 64	25 - 44	Under 25
Vehicle Access – preferred hours					
Current: Mon – Sat, 9:30am to 9pm & Sun, noon to 9pm	42%	55%	38%	39%	49%
Vehicles should not be permitted	32%	20%	37%	36%	24%
Noon - 7pm	11%	14%	11%	11%	13%
Noon - 5pm	9%	9%	10%	9%	9%
8am - noon	5%	3%	4%	6%	6%
Ranked Options (1/ lightest colour = most preferred, 5/ darker colour = least preferred)					
Open to vehicles up to the lower lookout	2.69	2.43	2.76	2.76	2.62
Open to vehicles up to the upper look out	2.93	2.24	3.04	3.19	2.86
Closed to vehicles but a shuttle service is available	3.03	2.99	2.96	3.08	3.08
Open to vehicles only for permitted events	3.06	3.37	3.06	2.92	2.97
Closed to vehicles at all times	3.29	3.97	3.17	3.05	3.47

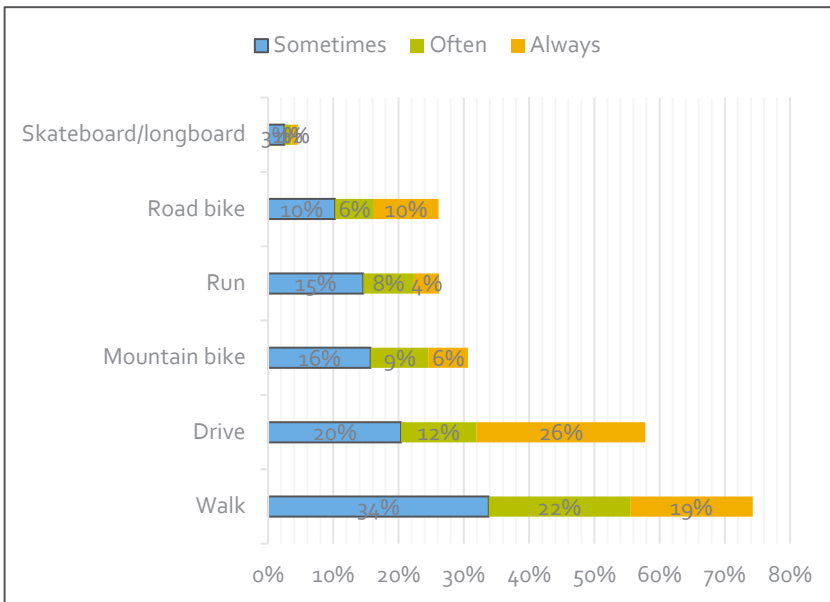
"I love exploring the many pathways. Since the mountain has been closed to cars there are more deer and eagles." – Survey respondent

Almost all respondents indicated preference for use of the paved surface, with 36 per cent “always” using the paved surface. Walking is the most common use (74%) of the paved surface, followed by driving (58%) and road/mountain biking (57%).

Paved surface usage



Paved surface activities



"As a cyclist, Knox mountain road can feel unsafe in the summer months when there is high traffic. Many times people are sight seeing rather than paying attention to the roads". – Survey respondent

Key themes

Key themes based on more than 4,000 open-ended comments included:

- Most of the comments advocating for keeping the road open were also comments raising concerns about continuing to accommodate people with mobility issues that the City should avoid creating barriers for people who already face challenges in accessing recreation and amenities as freely as the rest of the population.
- Many comments expressed that Knox Mountain is a shared community asset and the city should ensure it is as freely accessible to the public (visitors and residents alike) as possible.
- Some users enjoy the flexibility to use the road or the trails for their purposes, but it is recognized by numerous commenters that while some modes have that choice right now, car drivers never do.
- Those comments that advocated safety of users, generally also advocated for no vehicles or restricted vehicular access. This perspective was heard more commonly from resident groups and neighbourhood associations, residents close to Knox Mountain, and people concerned about safety for themselves or their families when visiting Knox by foot or bicycle.
- Some respondents felt that it was better for wildlife and the environment to reduce vehicle traffic on Knox Mountain.
- Many of the comments spoke to a balanced approach, where sharing the road through different hours of the day, or a portion of the mountain, could serve to reduce conflicts while allowing accessible options for those with mobility issues.
- Many additional comments spoke to individual use of the park and events and did not speak specifically to use of Knox Mountain Drive. These will be retained and considered in updating the Knox Mountain Park Management Plan.

Online conversations

During the public engagement period, online conversations – primarily on social media – about closing Knox Mountain Drive to vehicle traffic elicited approximately 2,300 interactions. The online conversations were mainly in response to media coverage, rather than occurring on the City's official channels.

The discourse demonstrated significantly more support for keeping the road open, primarily to ensure accessibility for people with mobility issues. Comments in favour of keeping the drive open were 10 times more prevalent than comments in favour of closing the road to vehicles (1,343 interactions compared to 140, respectively). Those advocating to close the road cited fear of traffic and garbage as their main reasons. Some commenters suggested a compromise (110 interactions), such as alternating days/hours that the road will be open and closed or offering a shuttle service.



Next steps

Knox Mountain Park has undergone a great deal of change in the last ten years. While much of the existing park management plan is relevant to carry forward into the future, the new management plan will provide updated analysis on the ecological needs of the park, as well as provide guidance to decision-making on capital improvements and how we maintain the park through the decade. The City's goal is to preserve the park's environmental health so that it can continue to be enjoyed for years to come.

Staff and Council will consider public feedback and technical data when determining a preferred approach for access to Knox Mountain Drive. Staff will present the survey results for Council direction.

Public and stakeholder feedback will also inform the updated Knox Mountain Park Management Plan, which is anticipated to be completed in 2022.

