

Briefing Notes:

Recent Evaluations and Discussions Regarding the Proposed KVR Multi-use Trail in the Vaseux-Bighorn National Wildlife Area

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Objective: *This briefing note provides a concise summary of key take-aways from the documents and correspondence listed below in chronological order of development. The focus is on the most recent of these (refs [4][5]) that were produced since September 2025.*

The Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (RDOS) currently does not have any applications for improvements or works along the Vaseux Lake corridor. This briefing note is simply intended to support discussions by several parties within the broader community of interest, and is further intended as the beginning of broader, high-level discussions.

- [1] EBB Environmental Consulting Inc), March 2018. Environmental Feasibility Study - Kettle Valley Railway, South Spur Trail. Report prepared for BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, 203 pp (165 pp. plus appendices).
- [2] EBB Environmental Consulting Inc., June 2019. Vaseux Lake West, Reconnaissance-Level Assessment - Environmental Feasibility Study Kettle Valley Railway, South Spur Trail. Report prepared for BC Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, 15 pp.
- [3] Bright, Doug (Ph.D.). May 2023. Proposed Trail Development Along the Former Kettle Valley Railway (KVR) Line Adjacent to Vaseux Lake and At-risk Species Evaluations. 8 pp.
- [4] Hobbs, Jared (M.Sc. R. P. Bio.: Director: J Hobbs Ecological Consulting Ltd). September 2025. Evaluation of Anticipated Impacts of the KVR Multi-use Trail in the Vaseux-Bighorn National Wildlife Area. Report prepared for the Vaseux Lake Stewardship Association. 37 pp.
- [5] Holody, AI (A/Regional Director, Canadian Wildlife Service – Pacific Region, Environment and Climate Change Canada / Government of Canada). January 2026. Correspondence re potential impacts to Vaseux-Bighorn NWA. Correspondence via e-mail, on behalf of Honourable Julie Dabrusin, Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature.

Summary:

- (i) EBB (2018; report [1]) completed a high-level assessment for the then-constituted provincial Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD), Recreation Sites and Trails BC, of the feasibility of a “*public recreation route connecting much of the South*

Okanagan”, with a focus on the South Spur of the former Kettle Valley Railway. EBB’s assessment included “*four identified routes as identified by the Province and include(d) the KVR South Spur (primary route) and three alternative routes...*” A high-level risk analysis to identify the lowest relative effects on the environment, favoured pursuing a proposed trail development using “*a combination of route segments and including portions of the KVR South Spur, the alternative route along the eastern bank of Vaseaux Lake¹ and the existing International Hike and Bike Trail.*”

EBB’s (2018) assessment and risk analysis was not intended to account for any new and evolving knowledge about at-risk species and critical habitat or other environmental values and protections within the local study area. The assessment and risk analysis also excluded accounting for challenges and costs of potential appropriate avoidance and mitigative strategies for the very large number of specific at-risk and valued species and their habitats, for which the baseline knowledge is generally limited (although Objective 4 of the study was to “*Provide recommendations for a trail development route, mitigation strategies (avoidance, mitigation, compensation), monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management*”). Nor did the study consider other critical decision factors for the alternative project options, including various regulatory/legal, social, and economic barriers and benefits or indigenous nations economic, cultural, and other interests.

Given the large number of currently legally-designated at-risk species and areas of critical habitat along the western shoreline and riparian zone of Vaseux Lake (“Route A”), the ratings of potential risks provided in Table 7-24 appear to be rather low and lacking in supporting rationale.

- (ii) EBB (2019; ref [2]) provided a follow-up report to FLNORD that was more narrowly focussed since –

“The Regional District of the Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) has indicated that they are primarily interested in the development of the former KVR right-of-way (ROW) along the western shores of Vaseux Lake. It is understood that this priority determination is driven in part by health and safety, environmental impact, and the aesthetic considerations of potential routes along Highway 97. There are several environmental constraints on the west side of Vaseux Lake that would need to be addressed in any development proposal and include maintaining habitat connectivity, managing unauthorized off-trail access, monitoring and managing trail traffic frequency, control of invasive

¹ Per Table 2-1 of EBB (2018), the route named therein as “East Side of Vaseux Lake and Okanagan River” (14.9 km route distance) would provide a southerly connector route starting north of Vaseux Lake.

species and mitigating direct and indirect effects on species at-risk, breeding birds, fish, and wildlife.”

Thus, it is important to note that an appropriately fulsome options analysis for the proposed KVR Multi-use Trail has not been completed to the present time.

- (iii) Hobbs (2025; report [4]) provides a brief history of a proposal for a multi-use trail along portions of the former Kettle Valley Right-of-Way (ROW) between Penticton and Osoyoos. The report also summarizes recent historical and current statutory and environmental protection considerations. Changes in regulatory approval processes in various key provincial ministries since the last provincial election have rendered some of the earlier approval discussion dated and potentially irrelevant.

Since the completion of this report, Jared Hobbs received confirmation that the portion of the KVR ROW of interest, which was decommissioned in 1977, is no longer registered as such by the province of British Columbia (the “Province”) and proponents of a multi-use trail along the former KVR ROW would need to apply to the Province for designating a new trail ROW in addition to regulatory/management requirements described in [3],[4],[5] and as may be identified in the future.

- (iv) An overarching consideration for development of a new multi-use trail along the former KVR ROS is the potential impacts to legally recognized at-risk and valued species within the Westside and Northwest Marsh Units of the Vaseux Bighorn National Wildlife Area (VBNWA), which is a formally and legally designated National Wildlife Area (NWA) ([3][4][5]). “The primary objective of all NWAs is to protect and conserve significant habitat to benefit conservation of migratory birds and other wildlife.” ([4]). There are further important considerations for the formally protected status of the Vaseux Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary (VLMBS), as well as for legally protected species in general under the federal *Species at Risk Act* and *Migratory Birds Act* along with various other federal and provincial statutes and management plans ([3][4][5]).
- (v) The primary goals of the VBNWA, as defined in ECCC’s formal management plan for the area, are “*very likely to be compromised by the proposed development of recreational (cycling) activities along the ROW...*” [4]. Further, there would be considerable implications for ECCC’s and provincial recovery plans for legally protected species and their critical habitat in the vicinity of the route area
- (vi) Per the review by Hobbs [4],

“There is mapped critical habitat for 12 species that occur within (either partially or fully overlap) the VBNWA.”

Hobbs concluded that the west side of Vaseux Lake, along the former ROW, where the VBNWA and MBS are located, should not be developed as a multi-use recreational path since it overlaps many important sensitive wildlife habitats, including many areas of federally mapped Critical Habitat. This includes Critical Habitat and sensitive habitats *“documented to support many species at risk that are known to be deleteriously affected by human presence and trail development.”*

The potential for increased recreational use along the KVR within these sensitive habitats raises substantive concerns regarding:

- 1) alienation of sensitive habitats from obligate species that occur in the VBNWA,*
 - 2) increased direct mortality risk to Species-at-Risk,*
 - 3) increased risk of wildlife-human conflict (e.g., humans interacting with the venomous Northern Pacific Rattlesnake),*
 - 4) significant increased risk of human-caused stand-replacing wildfire in the VBNWA, and*
 - 5) increased risk from introduction of invasive plants in habitat adjacent to the trail.”*
- (vii) In his correspondence with VLSA, Al Holody, Assistant Regional Director, Canadian Wildlife Service, Pacific Region, Environment and Climate Change Canada ([January 2026; Ref \[5\]](#)) has affirmed ECCC’s recognition of the *“...several pertinent considerations...”* regarding proposed development of the former KVR ROW along the western shore of Vaseux Lake, *“including the ecological sensitivity of the Vaseux-Bighorn NWA, the presence of protected species and habitats, and the potential impacts of the proposed development on wildlife corridors and conservation objectives. Additionally, the report highlights concerns related to habitat fragmentation, disturbance from human activity, and the introduction of invasive species.”*

Holody [\[5\]](#) also wrote:

“Any proposals that interact with or are adjacent to federal protected lands, including the NWA or MBS, would be subject to the applicable federal and provincial regulatory frameworks. Activities within the NWA, as established under the Canada Wildlife Act (CWA), fall under the Wildlife Area Regulations

(WAR), which specify the requirements and prohibitions for federally protected lands. Proposals outside the NWA boundaries are subject to different jurisdictional authorities but must still comply with relevant regulations to avoid adverse effects on adjacent protected federal areas.

Similarly, under the Migratory Bird Sanctuary Regulations (MBSR) and the Species at Risk Act (SARA), federally protected critical habitats, including habitats for migratory birds and species at risk, must be considered. Proposal assessments will require the appropriate permitting and authorization processes, and such applications would undergo a thorough review of scientific evidence, including reports such as the one you submitted.

ECCC remains committed to partnering with Indigenous Peoples, recognizing the cultural significance of lands and species, respecting Indigenous rights and traditional knowledge, and ensuring their expertise informs conservation decisions, including efforts to protect and recover species at risk. Additionally, ECCC is dedicated to supporting conservation efforts and ensuring that all proposed activities comply with federal legislation and with the management objectives of designated protected areas.”