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Newfoundland, Canada



NEWS RELEASE

Study Shows the East Coast Trail is an Economic Success Governments to Fund Additional Construction

St. Johns, Newfoundland and Labrador, May 26, 2006 – A report released today at an event at St. John's City Hall shows that the East Coast Trail has proven itself an economic success. Among the highlights of the study, conducted by DW Knight and Associates, include the fact that over 26,550 trips were made on the trail by out-of-province and local hikers in 2004, with these hikers contributing \$2.3 million a year to the province's economy.

Representatives of the East Coast Trail Association (ECTA), the federal, provincial and municipal governments and hiking enthusiasts gathered today to highlight these successes and to announce continued growth of and investment in the trail network.

Randy Murphy, President of the ECTA, said the Knight study demonstrates the trail is fast becoming an important tourist destination. "An estimated 5,000 visitors to the province hiked the trail in 2004 – a 44.6 per cent growth since 2001 – and almost half of the out-of-province hikers interviewed said the trail was the main reason for their visit. Those who over-night along the trail hiked for an average of 4.4 days. Moreover, because of the trail, a significant number of residents now vacation closer to home instead of traveling elsewhere. These people also spend money in communities along the trail."

Given the 2004 benchmark and the forecasted value of the trail, a 20 kilometre extension of the trail north of St. John's will begin construction in 2006 (nine kilometres from St. John's to Logy Bay to be constructed with the planning and design for an 11 kilometer section from Flatrock to Pouch Cove).

This extension is made possible through investments from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (\$277,992), along with, for the first time, the City of St. John's (\$176,574), and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (\$22,666).

"ACOA has made significant investments in this trail network and the ECTA since in was formed in 1994," said Norm Doyle, MP for St. John's East, on behalf of the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of ACOA. "And with the solid proof of positive economic return we are delighted to be able to further invest in its growth and expansion. Infrastructure, including tourism and recreational infrastructure, is the foundation of our well-being, our economic progress and our environmental sustainability."

ACOA also previously invested more than \$100,000, in partnership with Service Canada, for an Economic Impact Study and marketing initiatives, including the latest volume of the trail guide book series on “Petty Harbour to Bay Bulls” launched in December 2005.

“The East Coast Trail is a wonderful addition to the soft adventure tourism mix for this part of the Province,” added the Honourable Jack Byrne, Minister of Municipal Affairs, on behalf of the Honourable Tom Hedderson, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation. “We see its importance reflected in the enquiries we receive on our tourism website and the phone lines and in our visitor satisfaction surveys. We are delighted to be able to invest further in its growth and applaud the volunteers who put in countless hours to build this world-class attraction.”

“This is a great day for tourism and recreation development in and around the City of St. John’s,” said His Worship Andy Wells, Mayor of City of St. John’s. “We knew the trail meant real economic benefit to our businesses but now we have the piece of paper to prove it. And building the trail to the North of the City will allow for those benefits to extend even further and to increase our potential to bring new people in and to improve the quality of life of our residents.”

The East Coast Trail is unique in the world of hiking as it combines natural, historic and cultural attractions. The trail offers Newfoundland’s magnificent coastal and in-land wilderness environment, including whales, sea birds and icebergs, as well famous attractions such as the Spout and the LaManche suspension bridge. In addition a hiker periodically experiences one of the 30 unique coastal communities. Here they will find accommodations, food and supplies served with the hospitality for which this province is justly famous.

The East Coast Trail follows established community paths, traditionally used for berry picking, hunting and travel between communities. The study found that by re-opening, maintaining, signposting and publicizing the trail, the volunteer-run East Coast Trail Association has achieved a significant economic payback. The trail is also bringing a number of intangible benefits for communities. It provides a free facility that is open and available to all contributing to improved public health, increased environmental protection, community pride and the enhancement of local cultural heritage.

For further details on the report, see attached backgrounder or visit the website at www.eastcoasttrail.com.

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