



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Success Story

Youth helps plan and create mountain-bike trails to enhance the sport he loves

SIXTEEN-YEAR OLD KOBE MCGEE HAS been an enthusiastic mountain biker for about three years and appreciates the opportunity he has been given to help plan and create interesting mountain-biking trails for him and his friends to enjoy.

Kobe, who is in grade 11, lives in the First Nation community of Waywayseecappo close to Russell, Manitoba. The community also borders the Rural Municipality of Rosburn, and in 2021, the Rosburn Subdivision Trail Association (RSTA) hired Kobe as Trail Management Assistant. The RSTA was undertaking a project to build a new trail connecting its section of the Trans Canada Trail (Canada's longest linear trail) with the Riding Mountain National Park, adjacent to Waywayseecappo.



ROSSBURN SUBDIVISION TRAIL ASSOCIATION, ROSSBURN, MANITOBA

Canada

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Kobe McGee and his mentor Eric Mentuck

“It’s all part of the importance of helping our young people get more connected to the land”

Eric Mentuck, RTSA Board Member

The association partnered on the project with Neebawi Youth Non Profit, Inc. and its chair, Eric Mentuck, a member of the RTSA board. Eric’s group delivers outdoor education, cultural programming and other activities in Waywayseecappo First Nation and coordinates a cycling team through the local school.

He has worked with Kobe and other young people in the community to encourage and cultivate their biking skills, and Kobe has helped him in the past to develop and maintain trails.

The young man was able to join RSTA and continue to develop his trail expertise thanks to support from CPRA’s Youth Employment Experience program. The program provides funding to municipalities and associated recreation and sport organizations so they can give young people job experience in the sector, while completing important projects.

Eric’s role for the RSTA project was to continue to mentor Kobe and work alongside him in the work.

“Kobe is a top cyclist in our community and is a dedicated volunteer. He understands the importance of building trails with interesting features and returning to maintain the trails so everyone can continue to use them,” Eric says.

“I enjoy having biking trails right in my back yard, and it’s great that we have different types, like downhill trails and hill climbs,” says Kobe. “Working on trails with Eric has given me the opportunity to learn and also boosts my confidence when building more challenging trails. He has also helped me learn more about being a good, reliable worker.”

Having Kobe and Eric work with her association to move forward with the link extensions was certainly helpful, says Ilse Ketelsen, Secretary/Treasurer at RTSA. “Kobe travelled the trail and helped us determine where directional signs should go so people don’t get lost,” she says.

“He was able to learn more about the factors to consider when creating natural and sustainable trails and to gain insight into what it takes from the point of a stake out on the ground to a detailed map on paper.”

The COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of some businesses supporting the project did slow the process down somewhat, Ilse explains, and the group wasn’t able to get as far on building the extension as it had hoped. Plans were revised to allow the setup of signs in the spring of 2022, and the official opening of the new trail, called the Flying Eagle Link Trail, is tentatively planned for June 2022.

Ilse says she’s excited about the impacts the trail work will have on tourism and economic development in the region. “Interpretive signage has been developed to tell the stories of the early Ukrainian settlers in the area and the First Nations history of Waywayseecappo. We expect that both local residents and travellers on the Trans Canada Trail will be attracted to all the enhancements we’re making, including by adding more mountain-bike trails in the future.”

And those cycling trails bring much value to the children and youth of Waywayseecappo, says Eric. “It’s all part of the importance of helping our young people get more connected to the land and to become more active.

“We often take groups of students from the school out on trips where they can use the trails, as well as sit by a fire and learn the traditional Ojibway language. They love the experience, and we know it’s nurturing their healthy development.” 🍁