

Cypress County Pump Track Proposal

Introduction to Pump Tracks

A pump track is a dirt, asphalt, wood or concrete track with banked corners and rounded obstacles (rollers). Many are probably familiar with the BMX track near the Family Leisure Centre and a pump track, though similar, would have smaller features than a BMX track and is built in a loop so that numerous riders can ride it continuously.

Pump tracks derive their name from the unique way the riders propel their bikes over the bumps, or 'rollers', by shifting their body weight (pumping) rather than by pedaling, thereby maintaining momentum through the course.



What is a Pump Track not?

It is important to note that pump tracks are not skate parks or jump parks. Inherent safety is built into a pump track because only once a rider has gained enough skill to navigate the track more quickly can they start getting their wheels off the ground by jumping between the rollers. There are not any steep ramp faces as in a skate park and not any unforgiving gaps as in a jump park. A pump track is designed for riders of all ages and abilities to have fun safely.

Who can use a Pump Track?

Dirt pump tracks traditionally have been used by BMX or mountain bike riders of all ages and abilities to hone their skills, get exercise, and have an enjoyable recreational experience with others or alone. However, with the advent of wood, concrete, and asphalt surfaces, the ridership has now opened up to those who own skateboards, scooters and rollerblades.

A pump track can be fun to ride for a beginner and also be challenging for an expert. As speeds increase through a “pumping motion” of riding, what were previously individual rollers can now be linked through manoulling (lifting the front wheel off the ground like a wheelie, but without pedaling) and jumping them. With those increased speeds, the amount of lean into the banked corners does as well, bringing a completely new aspect to riding the track. It is not often that a single recreational structure can provide enjoyment for so many ages, abilities, and multiple sports.



How many people can use a Pump Track ?

Because a pump track is built as a continuous loop, it means that many users can utilize it at a single time. . Because they are multidirectional they do not become boring for riders since there are many different potential lines to ride in a single track layout.

How safe is a Pump Track?

Since a pump track is built for all ages and abilities, it does not have some of the features that are found in parks meant just for advanced riders. There are no gap jumps, rails, sharp edges or steep landing slopes. This also means there are no vertical areas to fall off of since all of the features are sloped to be ridden smoothly at any speed. Although the track surface is hard, as even a dirt track is well packed, usually the landscaping adjacent to the track surface is grass or mulch. The height of the rollers is usually around 45 to 60 centimeters, with some of the banked corners approaching 120 centimeters which is much less than many playground structure heights.

Where can they be located and how are they constructed?

Pump tracks require a minimum of 250 square metres and can be built on just about any reasonably flat area of ground. Many are built using whatever soil is in the area. These are very economical but do require maintenance of the track surface and cannot be ridden when wet. Concrete and asphalt tracks, although more expensive, are virtually maintenance free and can be ridden when wet. Wood tracks are almost exclusively found indoors to keep them out of the elements though some are made of composite materials for exterior use. Wood tracks can be portable and modular so can be set up and taken down depending on the season and set up in different configurations to keep them from getting boring. With all types of tracks, drainage is an important issue. Standing water on any surface is never good, and keeps riders off until it dries. Drainage is best dealt with in the planning stages and a good designer will integrate drainage into their design and material selection.

Why should the County look into Pump Tracks?

It fits into the Strategic Plan

Cypress County has a strategic plan that pump tracks can help to accomplish.

Cypress County ensures infrastructure is effectively maintained, enhanced, and evaluated. (Goal 2)

Maintain high quality community facilities.(Strategy 5)

With the exception of cutting the grass bordering the track a paved pump track can be virtually maintenance free. . Because the track is meant to be flowing, the majority of the features are smooth and would not need to be string trimmed after mowing. After initial construction, there are no ongoing inputs like electricity, heating, or machinery to maintain.

Cypress County provides high quality, safe, and affordable services and amenities. (Goal 3)

Support hamlets in providing safe, affordable and friendly environment.(Strategy 1)

Pump tracks provide a community with a low impact but high-energy recreational activity. They appeal to a large age range and many types of users.

Promote a supportive environment for tourism, recreation and leisure activities.(Strategy 4)

A pump track in a community can provide a place for families to gather without needing to organize events, games or meals. It provides a safe place to learn and progress with skills as the rider becomes more proficient. They are a place where multiple ages and abilities can interact and mentor one another, leading to great community spirit. There is a potential for enhanced tourism along the major highways in the County in areas where the Trans Canada passes through towns like Irvine, Dunmore and Suffield, and the Number 3 passes through Seven Persons. Pump tracks in communities with schools could also be utilized as part of school physical education programming or after school activities.

Cypress County is recognized for its strong partnerships and community engagement.(Goal 4)

Enhance relationships/partnerships with neighboring communities and municipalities.(Strategy 2)

Pump Tracks could provide opportunities for Cypress County, the City of Medicine Hat, and the Town of Redcliff to work together to become a destination for biking in Southern Alberta. The area could draw from Southern and Central Saskatchewan and even Northern Montana. The riding season in Southeast Alberta starts earlier and ends later than many other regions on the prairies and by the time the well known biking areas in Alberta and BC are snow free, trails in SE Alberta will already have been dry for 6 weeks or more. Looking towards the east into Saskatchewan, Cypress County and southeast Alberta provides the most diverse riding terrain available until travelers get to the mountains.

Cypress County focuses on economic growth, sustainability and diversification.(Goal 5)

Explore and promote tourism, heritage, and cultural sustainability.(Strategy 5)

The location of much of Cypress County along the main national thoroughfare places it in an ideal location to embark on a regional approach for a non-traditional tourist industry. The region can become a destination for biking and the County can be a part of it.

It can help fulfill goals of the Uniqueness of Hamlets Document

Promote: Dunmore, Desert Blume, Irvine, Seven Persons

Dunmore, Irvine, and Seven Persons are all communities that have been marked for promotion by the County . More recreational activities for families of all ages will help to reach that goal. Because they are also along major national and provincial routes they may attract passers by who want a fun and free physical activity to

break up their drive. The schools in these communities could utilize the pump tracks for physical education or after school programs.

Potential: Suffield, Elkwater, Schuler, Veinerville

Suffield is also along the Transcanada and is a significant distance from other services. Having another reason to stop there could create tourism interest and having Ralston close would help with utilization of a pump track and may help some families consider the community as a home.

Because Schuler has a school and has just lost its Community Hall, it may be a good place for a pump track even though it is not on a major highway. It could act as a community gathering place in the spring, summer, and fall and be used by the school for physical education. Schuler may be a location where a dirt surfaced track would be sufficient.

Elkwater already has a well utilized dirt pump track which serves to promote the trails in the park for more riding opportunities and is well used during camping season by riders of all ages and types.

Maintain: Walsh, Hilda

Because these are the smallest communities, they probably do not warrant a \$150 000 asphalt pump track. In Walsh, even a dirt surfaced track would be a draw to both residents and travelers. Because it could be the first on-highway recreational stop from the east for quite a distance, it may be utilized by travelers more than first thought.

Hilda will be getting a dirt pump track from the local residents in Spring 2020 which could serve as a template for possible tracks in the other smaller hamlets if there is sufficient will to build and maintain them by the local communities.

What does it cost?

Pump tracks can be built for next to nothing or can cost many hundreds of thousands of dollars. It all depends on how involved the local rider community wants to be, what type of surface the track will have, and what other amenities are built with it. Dirt pump tracks can be built on ground with good soil for almost no investment as long as there are community volunteers with knowledge and equipment. Professionally planned and built dirt pump tracks can cost upwards of \$50 000. Paved pump tracks that are professionally planned and built with correct substrates and proprietary asphalt blends can reach into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. This is probably quite price competitive with a moderate to large sized playground, but a pump track will encompass a much larger age range of users than a playground.

There would be plenty of opportunities for sponsorship of the pump tracks in Cypress County to offset some of the costs. The community associations could use

some funds from casino or other fundraiser events. Even though a design and construction contractor does all of the work, the materials and trucking could be donated from local gravel pits. Equipment could be donated for construction from local construction companies or dealers. Naming rights could be sold for individual pump tracks and there could be a list recognizing donors integrated into the signage at the tracks. Grants like the Community Facilities Enhancement Program are available from the provincial and federal governments and there are corporate funds and foundations that could also cover some of the costs.

Who will use the Cypress County Pump Tracks?

Other than mountain bikers, BMX riders, skateboarders, roller bladers and scooter riders from the actual hamlets that the tracks are built in, users would come from the surrounding rural areas of the County to ride the tracks. Tracks near Medicine Hat and Redcliff would also benefit from riders from rural areas. The goal would be to have unique tracks at each location so that they are all interesting to ride. It is important to note that many mountain bikers from the city drive out to the Cypress Hills to ride the trails every weekend, indicating that people are willing to drive a reasonable distance to ride interesting and challenging terrain.

There are two off road bike clubs in the City of Medicine Hat –The 670 Collective Mountain Bike Club and the Medicine Hat BMX Club. These clubs each have about 150 members that are actively involved in riding bicycles offroad. Pump tracks provide places for mountain bike riders to work on their trail riding skills, even when the weather is wet for hard surfaced tracks. For BMX racers, a pump track affords a small and tight track where skills can be gained that directly translate to those required for the large BMX race tracks.

Who else has done this?

Yellowhead County

Yellowhead County west of Edmonton embarked on building asphalt pump tracks in 5 (one pending) of their communities in the past 5 years. The County's Parks and Special Projects Coordinator Kevin Myles spearheaded their pump track project and was happy to answer some questions via email.

They tendered the project and the winner was Velosolutions Canada, which comes highly recommended for a few reasons. They were knowledgeable with building above the frost line by utilizing well draining designs, a compactable base and a proprietary asphalt mix. They also have designed and built tracks worldwide and have the concepts of track building and design perfected. Once designs were finalized, they took care of everything from sourcing materials to machinery without the need for supervision. They also provided demo riders for the grand opening and photos and videos for promotions.

Each track cost about \$120 000 for an 800-900 square meter area including the sod to finish. Later the County added some platforms, signage, garbage bins and bleachers for an additional \$15 000 per track. They are envisioning the cost at \$140 000 for the final track they are building this summer.

He mentioned if there were a large number of scooter or skateboard riders it would be important to communicate this to the contractor in the design stage, as some of their tracks have abrupt rollers that can hang up scooters. He also said that there have been two cracks across their 5 tracks that were easily fixed with standard tools.



Riders from Edmonton will often load up on the weekend and make a day of riding a few of those pump tracks to the west of the city so the Yellowhead pump tracks do draw tourists to the county.

To quote his email in conclusion,

We were blown away by how many of our County kids came out of the woodwork for these. The best way I can explain it is that we provided something they always wanted but never knew existed.

Hilda and Community Association

The Hilda and Community Association members approved a pump track and will be building a dirt surfaced pump track this coming spring in the sports grounds area of town. Numerous community members with children of all ages who have experienced pump tracks at other towns and in campgrounds in Western Canada were vocal in their support to building one in Hilda.

The plans and guide for *Pumptopia* were purchased from leelikesbikes.com, which is seen to be one of the best turnkey plans for pump tracks for those who have never built one before.

As Hilda is a farming community, there are plenty of machines available to hopefully make quick work of a pump track. The plan is to utilize dirt from the former tractor pull track near the mud bog pit and build a track on top of a hill on the north edge of the property to provide good drainage.

Some of the local community people have experience building jumps and berms and are willing to try to do this using just the online plans.

The projected completion date for the pump track at Hilda is early May, weather permitting of course.



Conclusion: Can it turn into something bigger?

With a lot of will and a whole lot of money, Bentonville, Arkansas, has turned itself into a mountain biking destination. The money came from Walton family of Walmart fame, which makes sense since Bentonville is where the Walmart empire began. We may not have a wealthy family to finance a mountain bike paradise in Southeastern Alberta, but we already have a good start without them (although I don't think anyone would be turning down any money!).

There are numerous articles online about how surprised people are to find such an investment in bike trails in NW Arkansas, but the authors always conclude with awe in how well it was undertaken and they always say they will be back.

Southeastern Alberta may not have the benefit of a Supercentre Benefactor, but we do have something that Bentonville does not – diversity of terrain. We often take for granted what is just outside our front door, but the potential for world class trails has barely been tapped in our region. The Cypress Hills, with over 200 meters of elevation, has a pretty substantial trail plan that is slowly being implemented by the

park and the 670 Collective. There are further trails and areas being planned and built in the Redcliff River Valley also by the 670 Collective and plans are being made for trails to be built between the City of Medicine Hat and Echodale.

It may be prudent for the County to come alongside our municipal partners in this venture and, since the County does not own some of the diverse terrain of our partners, a pump track project could fit very nicely into a larger regional recreational plan for biking infrastructure in southeastern Alberta.

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