

# north shore news

## Ranger service urged for Grouse Grind

### N.Van trail user wants resort to pay for, not just profit from attraction

[Gordon McIntyre](#) / The Province

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North Vancouver resident Richard Kinar at the base of the Grouse Grind. Photo Ric Ernst, PNG

Grouse Mountain Resort doesn't pay anything to maintain the North Shore mountain's world famous trail.

The Grouse Grind is a public trail owned and maintained by Metro Vancouver; the land around it is owned by Grouse Mountain Resort.

The two parties have negotiated for years to have Grouse Mountain take over the trail, but - unable to agree on liability - have never reached an agreement.

"Metro (Vancouver) has to assume all the capital costs, all the risk, while Grouse Mountain continues to reap all the commercial profits," said hiker Richard Kinar, an outdoor enthusiast and former professional freestyle skier.

"I think the public needs to know that Grouse Mountain Resort doesn't pay a penny."

Grouse does pay Metro for leased land that its trams traverse. But the lease agreement was in place decades before the Grind became popular.

Kinar said maintenance of the Grind puts a tremendous tax burden on local residents and it's time citizens understand what's going on from an economic perspective: "Metro pays for a trail that Grouse Mountain profits from."

Metro Vancouver owns the trail, while Grouse Mountain owns the land below the Grind at the trail entrance - and where the parking lot is - as well as the land on top at the end of the Grind trail.

Metro Vancouver, a governance board representing 21 local municipalities, maintains the trail, getting it ready when the snow melts and doing upkeep - building new steps, removing rebar that might be sticking up, responding to public input - throughout the season.

Metro also pays \$4,000 per month to North Shore Search and Rescue to do a sweep of the Grind each day at dusk to ensure there aren't any stragglers or waylaid hikers left behind in the dark.

The District of North Vancouver, meanwhile, pays to respond to emergencies on the Grind - which Outside Magazine last year said was the fifth most dangerous hiking trail in the world.

About 150,000 people do the Grind yearly, putting more than \$1 million into Grouse Mountain's coffers through the \$10 fee levied for taking the tram down and for seasonal passes.

When the original lease was signed long ago between what is now Metro and Grouse, the tram ride down was free. It went to \$5 years ago and is today \$10.

Some parking used to be free, but as of this year all the lots are paid parking. It costs \$4 to park in the newly paved lot.

All the traffic on the Grind trail can tie up half the resources of the North Vancouver district's fire department when they're called to respond to emergencies.

Wayne Kennedy, the district's deputy fire chief, says he responds to about 20 emergency calls from the Grind a year.

The district sends two of its five pump-and-ladder trucks, its only rescue unit, a duty chief and 12 of its 27 firefighters for each call.

Even when not needed, the call can take longer than three hours.

"We respond based on the assumption that we'll have to execute a rescue of some sort," Kennedy said. "We've seen people who are in cardiac arrest, then there are people who are just wearing sandals or high heels, or they're winded."

Grouse Mountain Resort emergency services also responds to incidents on the Grind, including 15 incidents in 2013.

David Stuart, North Vancouver district's chief administrative officer, has called on Grouse Mountain Resort to help pay for "some kind of ranger service" to assess emergencies on the Grind.

"We're tying up half our fire department for calls that, in our view, are for an assessment of medical issues."

The fire department should only be called in an emergency, according to Stuart.

Bob Cavill, watershed manager with Metro Vancouver, said he recognizes there is a problem when it comes to emergencies on the Grind.

"We are talking with the municipality and we recognize the problem. We are seeing if there are solutions. And we are talking with Grouse Mountain and exploring other models that might work more effectively than the one we have."

The president of Grouse Mountain Resort is Stuart McLaughlin. He and his two sisters own the business through a parent company.

Grouse Mountain spokeswoman Jacqueline Blackwell said the resort does not charge people to hike the Grouse Grind and noted "the mountaintop can be accessed in a number of ways."

Blackwell also defended the decision to charge for parking at the bottom of the Grind, which is becoming more popular every year. "Grouse Mountain developed a plan to upgrade our parking facilities as a response to customer feedback," she said. "We resurfaced the parking area, installed lighting and now provide additional security and service patrols."

Grinders such as Kinar understand that Grouse is a business. But because Grouse does lease some land from Metro, Kinar, a past board member of the Brain Injury Association of Canada and a safety advocate, thinks Metro should play hardball when the lease comes up for renewal in three years, or if Grouse seeks to expand.

"It's Grouse's tram," said Kinar. "It's their parking lot. But there are consequences when you look at the overall picture."

"For a family of four, that's more than \$40 to take a trail that you own as a Metro Vancouver taxpayer."

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