Historic train engine hit by vandals

A train engine donated to the city of Kalispell by Mission Mountain Railroad sits inside a fence along a span of track above Woodland Park that will be developed into the Kalispell Trail on June 9. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

A train engine donated to the city of Kalispell by Mission Mountain Railroad sits along a span of track above Woodland Park that will be developed into the Kalispell Trail on Saturday, March 28.

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By
Bret Anne Serbin

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Sitting stationary along the defunct railroad track east of Kalispell, a decommissioned historic train engine doesn't have anywhere to go to escape vandalism.

In late March, Mission Mountain Railroad dedicated one of its out-of-use train engines to the city to use as a historical display along the long-awaited Kalispell Core Area Trail. But lately, the piece of transportation history has fallen victim to vandalism that has become prevalent in and around Woodland Park.

For several months, city officials have been contending with various acts of vandalism in Woodland Park, including destruction of benches and smearing mud—or possible something a little nastier—on the Community Spirit Monument in the park. Now the old Mission Mountain train engine, located on decommissioned tracks to the east of Fourth Avenue East, has also been tagged with spray paint, boarded up to keep visitors out and fenced off in an effort to preserve the locomotive.

"We kind of knew it would probably get vandalized," Kalispell Planning Director Jarod Nygren acknowledged. He said the location of the locomotive was carefully chosen based on input from community members and the Kalispell City Council before being put in its final resting place. They deliberated on the placement for about a year and a half before facing a "now or never" situation for the removal of the tracks in March.

Despite its current appearance, Nygren is optimistic further vandalism can be deterred for the locomotive as the trail starts to come to life.

Nygren pointed out there will be a much lower likelihood of the train continuing to be vandalized when more foot traffic comes through the area once the trail is completed.

In the meantime, everything is going more or less according to plan with regards to safety measures to protect the engine. Nygren said they had always anticipated needing to board up and fence off the train until it can be refurbished and hopefully opened up to visitors.

Those developments will likely be left up to the responsibility of the community. Nygren and other city officials would like to see the train refurbished, repainted and opened up for visitors to climb onto and into the car. He said they hope the engine can serve as a "recreational component" of the new trail, but restoring the train will probably become a project for a community group to undertake, rather than the city. Nygren reported there has been considerable community interest in revamping the train car in some capacity as the trail progresses, but the engine's future is still uncertain, for now.

"Ultimately, it's going to depend on how it gets restored," he explained.

Reporter Bret Anne Serbin may be reached at (406)-758-4459 or bserbin@dailyinterlake.com.

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