

BCARCC COORDINATORS' REPORT FOR 2018

2017/2018 was a year where we saw many changes. Although the number of new repeaters and updates were not surprising, the trends we see give us concern.

Here are some basic facts:

- 15 new repeaters went on air in BC during this past year. By far the majority were digital repeaters.
- 73 coordinations were updated, many because their 5-year terms were up.
- Activity is highest in the South-Central region and on Vancouver Island.

The activity on the repeaters in the Greater Vancouver region has continued to diminish significantly. I have driven around the area for hours, scanning all local repeaters, and never heard more than an id.

This trend is not surprising, but it means that our mission, our objectives and our work needs review.

The reduction of traffic on repeaters has started a long time ago as people find alternate ways to communicate on a personal level: first email, then cell phones. More recently, Twitter, Facebook and the other social media have affected us as they have affected print media and broadcasting.

These trends are the result of “disruptive innovation” and now, our hobby, our activity on VHF and UHF, is the victim of disruptive innovation as well: We, that is, we amateur radio operators, have introduced at least four new digital modes used on VHF and UHF repeaters that disperse the dwindling usage of these facilities. The incompatibility of the modes has broken up the groups of Hams that used to monitor and gather on traditional FM repeaters.

From a frequency coordinator's point of view, the mechanics do not change with the amount of traffic: we still endeavour to accommodate every new repeater operator and strive to optimize the use of our limited spectrum.

But we see changes when it comes to how our user base sees us: The reduced interest in VHF and UHF communication was probably a factor in ARRL's decision to no longer publish their Repeater Directory. This book published the BCARCC database, giving BCARCC the status and credibility as the authority and keeper of the most accurate and timely repeater database. ARRL “passed the baton” to RFinder but I find the result of that move disappointing: the presence of RFinder on the web seems to focus more on marketing DMR rigs. Many other frequency lists are available on the web, although I have not found any that are as accurate or timely as our own. What this tells me is that we need to put even more emphasis on being accurate and timely in reporting and publishing the repeater database.

For this coming year, I see three goals:

1. We need “more reporters in the field”. That is, we need every member club to periodically advise us of what is going on in your areas. And that means not only changes to operations, but activity on all repeaters, as we may not be aware of repeaters or changes to repeaters that you have accepted as established.
2. We need to make the updating process more user friendly on our website: you should not have to fill a complete form to tell us about one minor change while

we should be able to maintain our database with less effort in order to encourage more timely updates.

3. Considering the severe reduction of revenue as we no longer enjoy a fee for providing our database to ARRL, we need to lower our costs of web services. At this time, our web presence is integrated with special software provided by the ISP. We need to find alternatives to the software as well as lower cost Internet services.

To sum up, I feel that we are at a fork in the road:

- One fork
 - will allow us to meet the goals outlined above,
 - will lead us to preserving our status and respect among our fellow Hams and
 - will allow us to continue to maintain an interference-free spectrum on the VHF and UHF bands so that we can all enjoy our hobby.
- The other fork will lead us to becoming irrelevant.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our work of the past year with you.

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