

## Questionnaire Response: Ontario Trails Council

**OUTDOORS - There are over 80,000 km of trails in Ontario in 430 communities, these communities may not have an arena, a pool, a library or a church, but they have a trail. Your government has worked hard to promote infrastructure development. If re-elected, what types of improvements would your government continue to make in the outdoor development sector?**

The Wynne government recognizes that trails provide health, economic, tourism, environmental, social, and community benefits. That is why we developed the Ontario Trails Strategy in 2005, in collaboration with the Ontario Trails Council and other stakeholders. We have also invested more than \$80 million since 2009 in support for trails.

Most recently, we have committed \$3.56 million to the Pan/Parapan American Trails as part of our legacy strategy for the Pan/Parapan American Games. This investment will include completing 254 kilometers of trail gaps along the Trans Canada Trail in Ontario.

In addition to these new investments, the Wynne government will continue to support the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund and the Tourism Development Fund. These programs, together with grants from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, will continue to provide direct financial support for trails.

**Active living is an issue, in both the health benefits from activity and the negative effects of inactivity. Ontario has over 2,600 useable active living trails. Premier, you are obviously active, and trail running is one of the fastest growing uses of trails. How would you and your government work with the Ontario Trails Council to promote trail use?**

Ontario Liberals recognize that participating in sport and recreation is vital to the health and well-being of all Ontarians, and that our trails play a key role. That is one of many reasons why we are committed to continuing and strengthening our support for trails by:

- Establishing a stand-alone Trails Act, with complementary legislative amendments. The proposed Act would:
  - imbed the Ontario trails strategy in legislation;
  - proclaim a trails week;
  - allow eligible entities to hold trail easements;
  - allow for the recognition of trails of distinction and establishment of a classification system;
  - amend as necessary other legislation as necessary to deal with trespassing, occupier liability, fines and public lands issues; and
  - provide the Minister responsible with the authority to establish targets.

The legislation would be accompanied by an education and communications plan to increase awareness of our trails in collaboration with all trail partners.

The Wynne government will develop a trails tourism promotion plan highlighting specific regions and signature trails, and develop a research plan to better inform the decision-making process as it relates to trail development, management, promotion, and capacity.

**Ontario has gone to great lengths to develop the GTA Greenbelt, UNESCO Biospheres, the CyclingON Strategy, promote transportation alternatives through funding of increased GO and other mass transportation supports. Would you and your government work with the Ontario Trails Council to develop a layer of inter-connected trails to rails, trails to bus, trails to trains as advocated by individual trail uses, at the provincial level so that all Ontarians would value know of this inter-connectivity?**

Inter-connectivity is critical in realizing the full value of trails as both recreation and commuter arteries. As emphasized in the #CycleON strategy, "Increasing cycling as a daily activity will require more bike paths, cycling routes and cycling-friendly transit connections." The #CycleON strategy also emphasizes the importance of boosting inter-modal cycling connections as a key aspect in promoting cycling tourism. Quebec's Route Vert is an ideal model for this.

The Wynne government will continue to work with the Ontario Trails Council in delivering a renewed Trails Strategy and associated Trails Act.

**Madam Premier, since 2009 the government invested 70 million in trails and trail related activity across some 12 ministries of government. Ontario Trails Council Membership is made up of land management groups that work with volunteer groups to make trails. Premier access to funds for trail development is sometimes difficult and programs often change. The Ontario Trails Council did this in 2009-10, and will again in 2014-16 with the federal announcement of funds in the last budget for the National Trails Coalition. Would your government consider creating a dedicated trail infrastructure development fund that could be managed by voluntary sector leaders?**

Ontario Liberals see our Trails Strategy as being the best window through which we can plan and organize our trail infrastructure spending. We are not able to dedicate funds for trail infrastructure at this time. But we are committed to continued funding to key funds that support trail build out, including the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund, the Tourism Development Fund, and the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Additionally, the Wynne government's Plan for Ontario identifies our intent to designate and build 135 km of paved shoulders on provincial roads and highways over the next three years.

**Since 2005 Ontario has had an Ontario Trails Strategy. With this came a planning process called the Ontario Trails Coordinating Committee. This partnership won the Province's highest award for intergovernmental cooperation "The Amethyst Award" and developments, these developments include, trail safety by managing user conflict (motorized and non-motorized harmony); a legislation review, and an award winning website for trails. Madam Premier if re-elected would you and your lead Ministry for trails make a commitment to ensure that the OTCC meets monthly to manage the affairs of trails?**

Better policy coordination is essential and would be achieved through our commitment to enact a stand-alone Trails Act and more frequent and regular meetings of the OTCC.

**Premier, there are issues with liability and operational costs for land owners, or groups that own or operate a trail. The costs of litigation and the process of litigation fails to bring case resolution since often cases are settled out of court. Would your government consider a fund to support trail groups, such as the fund they have in Nova Scotia, or the legal tort reform they brought in in 2009 through the National Trails Act in the USA - that offer relief to trail groups and trail operators and land managers that promote the public good through trail activity?**

The Wynne government's proposed stand-alone Trails Act contemplates necessary amendments to other acts in order to address liability concerns, including allowing many trails to be designated for "lower standard" of care in cases that the landowner does not charge money for use of the trail and there is no pre-determined expectation of a certain level of maintenance. Ontario Liberals would also increase maximum fines for trespassing on private property off a trail.

**Premier, through the support of the government of Ontario nearly 1 million individuals use the Ontario Trail Website to plan or find a trail. We estimate trails to be a value between \$2.5 - \$4 billion dollars to the economy each year. We believe that this number is low. Many Regional Tourism Organizations promote outdoor activity, but have not defined the product range for trails. Would your government work with the OTC to ensure that each RTO promotes trails through a joint trail promotion program so that this trail economy could be expanded and developed throughout the whole of Ontario?**

The Wynne government is absolutely committed to working closely with the OTC and other stakeholders to maximize trails promotions: developing a trails tourism promotion plan for specific regions and signature trails, and developing a research plan to better inform the decision-making process on trail development, management, promotion, and capacity.

Our proposed Trails Act will also assist with trails expansion, by making it less burdensome for landowners to contribute to trail expansions.

This could include accessing the Tourism Development and Ontario Sport and Recreation Funds noted above, in addition to more effective coordination with and between Regional Tourism Organizations, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, and municipalities.

**Waterfront development is of value to all. The OTC works with communities in Northern Ontario, Georgian Bay, promoted the development of the Windsor Riverfront Trail, Carolinian Canada, Waterfront Trail Rides, and the Trans Canada Trail. Recently we offered comment to the Ontario Place Revitalization plans. Premier, there are 100's of significant destinations and experiences people can enjoy on trails in Ontario. How would your government work to ensure the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation and other government departments engaged Ontario Trail leaders in developing destination marketing with world-class trail tourism products as a result?**

As noted above, Ontario Liberals are committed to working closely with the Ontario Trails Council, and other stakeholders to maximize trails promotion. This would also apply to product development, and could include accessing the Tourism Development and Ontario Sport and Recreation Funds, in addition to more effective coordination with and between RTOs, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation and municipalities. The proposed Trails Act could also play a key role. \*Note: this response is somewhat repetitive, as per above response\*

**The Pan-Am Games are coming to Ontario in 2015. The Ontario Trails Council has worked with Hamilton, McMaster, the Trans Canada Trail, and other communities such as Thunder Bay, and the Pan-Am Path in Toronto to make the games a reality on trails. Premier, there are many benefits to communities through world class events. At the OTC we often hear from Centurion, X-terra, Tough Mudder etc. but there is not enough variety for these event planners to use Ontario. - do you see an opportunity going forward to promote more trail events in more places through an OTC/Ontario/Private sector partnership?**

Yes, Ontario Liberals believe there are significant opportunities to promote trails, trail events, and innovative partnerships.