

Deputation to Dufferin County Council

Thank you for the opportunity to present.

The Ontario Trails Council is a charity promoting the management, development, conservation and use of recreational trails in Ontario.

As the provincial trails association, we have over 200 member organizations made up of economic development, regional tourism, user clubs and provincial use federations, land management organizations such as conservation authorities, crown and county forests, regional trail councils and committees, and individual enthusiasts.

Since 2005 we have been the main influencer in the development of the Ontario Trails Strategy, the Ontario Trails Implementation Plan (2014), and the Ontario Trails Act in 2016. The latter significantly reduces liability exposure for land managers through clarity in the Occupiers Liability Act, and no cap on private property loss through trail user trespass.

We were asked by land managers and private property owners, and use groups to ensure greater user responsibility in the use of trails, owned and managed by other authorities, on private or public land. We have done that.

Ontario Trails Council also trains professional staff and volunteers in trail skills and practices through our 14-module certification course via Algonquin College. Our modules cover the use of volunteers, and management best practice including regional trail councils.

Since 2004 the OTC has stated some fundamental tenants:

- Expect and Respect other users
- Mixed use trails can function but they must be managed
- Regional trail committees are inclusive of all uses, motorized and non-motorized.
- Trails are an outdoor recreational infrastructure and must be managed with equal resources like arena and pools etc.
- Signs are the best method to ensure risk management
- Conflict can be engineered out of trails and trail systems, and this is achieved in part through recreational use plans, trail master-plans and solid design build of sustainable trails.

In sum, the OTC has written the trail operations manual for regional trail committees, and we have developed some 54 in Ontario, with 11 of these having a focus on active transportation and trails.

All this to say, we educate partners to manage trails between staff and volunteer resources, where each group has a role to play.

We expect that use groups organize themselves so there is a focus group for planners and land managers to work with.

Further, we expect all users to work together to promote all uses. We do not expect one group to shut out another. At OTC, in the interest of trail uses, we expect use groups to work together and we have found a municipally supported trails committee facilitates this awareness of each other, and a communication hub for all.

We agree that not all geography supports all uses, but we encourage alternate capacity. If a trail is better suited for passive use and motorized are curtailed, we don't expect closure, we expect planning and management plans to accommodate diversion and transplantation to an alternate site of similar or equal value.

We expect that the county, a full supporter of our regional trail committee development process on May 10 this year, and the county forest management team, (also a participant in that day of development), to work with the horse people in this area to facilitate their awareness of meetings, opportunities to communicate, and (support the betterment of) their organizational capacity, so they can fulfill the expectations of the county forest recreational plan.

I cannot stress this enough, that at OTC, we expect the use groups to work together, AND that the individual horse riders to look for ways to consolidate their singular riding into a group function, as a focal point for both other riders, and for the county planners.

In closing, the OTC would be happy to work with the county, the use groups of Dufferin, and our member partners, the Canadian Recreational Horse and Rider Association and Ontario Equestrian Federation, to facilitate horse club development as a benefit to all stakeholders in this region.