

**A Report on Issues addressed by Ontario Trails Council and the
Ministry of Natural Resources**



Ontario Trails Council
Conseil des sentiers de l'Ontario



for
**The Honourable Donna Cansfield,
Minister of Natural Resources**

Prepared by Ontario Trails Council



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The Ontario Trails Council (OTC) - Conseil des Sentiers de l'Ontario – is a volunteer-led non-governmental, non-profit charitable organization, promoting the creation, preservation, management and use of Ontario's recreational trails.

The Ontario Trails Council was established in 1988. We started as a coalition of trail user groups such as hikers, cyclists, snowmobilers and equestrians who shared an interest in trails and in the conservation of abandoned rail lines for use as trails.

Membership also includes similar trail organizations and others with compatible interests and values.

OTC SUCCESSES

As a major stakeholder in the development of the Ontario Trails Strategy, the OTC was pleased to see 30 years of hard work represented in this first provincial policy statement for Ontario. We also acknowledge the development of the Ministry of Health Promotion as the lead for trails in Ontario.

We continue to reach out to new stakeholders and create new working groups at the regional level. It supports our goal of making a difference locally while acting provincially. Our membership representation has grown from 30 to over 100 organizations representing over 500,000 trail supporters.

The OTC has successfully consolidated the Trillium Trail Network Blue, Green Gold concept into agreements of support from provincial organizations supporting its lead role. As a result the OTC hears regularly from local organizations seeking MNR support on such issues as:

- Infrastructure issues, such as snowmobile bridges in Parry Sound
- Boardwalk projects, such as in Pre'squelle
- LUP options throughout Ontario i.e. Haliburton
- Access to Crown Lands, i.e. Rail to Trails
- Harmonization of practice and policy, i.e. events and group permits
- GPS Use, training and access
- Land Inventory Ontario, information exchange

OTC GOALS

- To provide government and other public bodies with an informed, credible voice in support of trail interest groups
- To promote the safe and responsible use of trails
- To establish formalized working principles and relationships with government
- To act as a provincial resource centre for trail information
- To establish the Trillium Trail Network

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAILS TO ONTARIO

Many people link trails with recreation and relaxation. But the benefits are far greater. Trails also provide economic, health, social, and heritage, cultural and environmental benefits to Ontario's communities. By reviewing the economic impact for each of the major trail users, as both direct and related expenses, the benefit to Ontario becomes clearer.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS				
USER GROUP	KM OF TRAIL	EXPENDITURE TRAIL USE	EXPENDITURE DAY/NIGHT RELATED	TOTAL
Snowmobiles/ATVs	50,000	\$682 million	\$518 million	\$1.2 billion
Hikers	8,000	\$70 million	\$240 million	\$310 million
Urban Pedestrian	4,000	\$400 million	\$40 million	\$440 million
Cyclists - Shared Use	2,000	\$20 million	\$26 million	\$46 million
X-Country Skiers	2 million	\$134.5 million	\$1.5 million	\$136 million
Dog Sledders	34,000	\$161,000	322,250	\$483,250
Equestrians	71,000	\$3 billion	\$649,000	\$3.7 billion

The trend is for people to take vacations closer to home. Many trail organizations fill that need with activities such as equestrian rides, bicycle and snowmobile tours. As a result, money is pumped into the local economy through retail sales, lodging and food.

Local businesses benefit. For example, the Bruce Trail alone averages 400,000 users annually, 70% of whom purchase nondurable goods during their visit. The average expenditure is about \$20 (that's \$5,600,000). Approximately 75% of this is spent within a 10 km corridor.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Our provincial government's Board of Health guidelines state:

The Board of Health shall work with municipal recreation departments and other community partners to promote and increase access to regular physical activity for people of all ages.

This shall include, as a minimum, to assist community partners to increase the availability of safe and accessible recreation opportunities such as walking trails and cycling routes.

With access to safe and affordable recreation, people can prevent and manage health afflictions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, and circulatory and respiratory problems. Among the 10 most popular fitness activities are walking, biking and jogging, all of which are perfect for trails.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Trails are accessible to people of all income brackets, age groups and cultures. They're open year-round and many trail activities encourage groups and clubs to get together. Creating and maintaining trails builds partnerships that include private companies, landowners, local government, advocacy groups and residents. This brings people together with a common cause which we believe is beneficial for our society.

HERITAGE BENEFITS

Trails link historic and cultural sites, providing opportunities for community festivals, events and competitions. Museums which focus on native heritage have been erected along historical aboriginal trails.

Interpretive signs along trails identify areas of historical interest such as buildings, bridges, canal locks, signalling devices and switching stations. Today, many abandoned rail lines are being converted to trail lines, preserving Ontario's heritage and history.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Many trails help create and preserve green spaces and provide habitat for wildlife. They also provide bike routes so that urban commuters can ride their bikes to work which reduces smog emissions.

TRAIL PLANNING

The Ontario Trails Council realizes that the challenges facing trail managers are many, sometimes complicated and quite often influenced more by policies and regulations than trail organizations.

Whether dealing with the complexities of insurance, landowner relations, trail building, policy, regulation, staffing or funding to keep things going - trail management is actually necessary to ensure the ongoing safety and sustainability of trails in Ontario.

The OTC provides relevant information on management and operational needs for those in the business of managing this huge province wide recreational infrastructure.

TRAIL ETIQUETTE

Remember when using trails, understanding the do's and don't, expect and respect other users, promote environmental ethics, don't trespass and follow management guidelines. Combine this attitude with the following trail etiquette tips and you will be on your way to an amazing outdoors experience.

USING THE TRAIL – DO'S AND DONT'S

- Research the regulations and special concerns for the area you are planning to hike. Hike only along marked routes, especially on farmland.
- For your safety and to protect soil from erosion do not take shortcuts.
- Please do not climb fences; use the stiles.
- Pets are best left at home. If you do bring them, keep them on a leash and away from water sources and please clean up after them.
- Respect the sound of nature. Avoid loud voices and noise such as mobile phones and radios.

TRAIL ENTHUSIASTS PROMOTE TRAILS

- Respect the privacy of people living along trails.
- Keep dogs on a leash, especially on or near farmland.
- Be courteous to other users. Say hello to fellow outdoor enthusiasts as you pass each other along the trail.
- Walk, ride or cycle in single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy.
- Stay to the right of trail and pass on the left.
- If a person is climbing up a hill they have the right of way.
- Bike riders yield to both hikers and horseback riders; hikers yield to horses.
- Visit trails in small groups; split larger parties into smaller groups.
- Unless you are passing someone on a trail, try to maintain a distance between yourself and other hikers.
- Stop for horses, remove your helmets.
- Stay in posted use areas
- Not sure where to ride? – check BEFORE you ride
- Get an event permit
- Stay on the trail
- Work with conservation managers to promote conservation, access and use.

MINIMAL IMPACT APPROACH

- Leave flowers, wood, rocks and plants behind in their place for others to enjoy.
- Avoid tree damage. Do not break branches or strip bark off trees.
- Leave the trails cleaner than you found them. Carry out all litter.
- Fires are not permitted along trails, except in approved campsites.
- Do not build structures, fire rings, furniture or dig trenches.
- Schedule your hiking or camping trip to avoid times of high use. Aim to lessen the impact of human activity on one area.

ECOSYSTEM HEALTHY MANNERS

- When camping set up your campsite at least 60 meters [200 feet] from lakes or streams so as not to inhibit area animals from coming to drink water.
- To wash camping utensils or yourself, carry water at least 60 meters [200 feet] from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap.
- Scatter strained dishwater.
- Garbage disposal is important issue on trails. As a general rule, pack out all garbage. Do not bury it.
- Do not assume all waste will biodegrade. For example, orange peels do not decompose easily.
- Leave your picnic spot or campsite cleaner than you found it.
- Human waste should be packed out including feminine hygiene products and used toilet tissue. But if this is not feasible, dig a 'cat hole' about 10 cm deep and burn the toilet paper after, unless extreme fire hazard. Then refill the hole.
- Take only pictures and fond memories away with you. Leave only a footprint on the path you have respected.

OTHER USERS ALSO HAVE CODES FOR USE

- The Ontario Trail Riders Association, (OTRA) produces a guideline for users to better interpret their interaction with Horses - [download a copy here](#)
- The Ontario Federation of 4 Wheel Drive Enthusiasts (OF4WDE) also produces a guideline for its drivers so that they are aware of and promote trail safety. - [download a copy here](#)
- The OFATV have produced a use brochure "Know Where to Ride" in conjunction with the MNR and OTC
- The OFTR and the COHV have produced and are distributing "Ride the Trails" Video and Companion Literature Suite

PROVINCIAL PARKS AGREEMENT

It is the contention of the OTC that the modification of MNR lands from crown reserves to a managed park adjusts and has the potential to modify traditional use of these lands.

The Ontario Trails Council respects the authority of the MNR and its land management policies, practices and the processes in place to make these changes.

In working with the MNR, and in order to make representation here the OTC has heard from its membership and wishes to convey the following:

- That traditional uses continue to be allowed access to managed lands
- That these use groups have a history of striking use agreements in particular areas to meet the needs of those areas. We would request that as MNR or Park Managers remove forward they meet with these groups and negotiate use areas with the various disciplines; horses, motorcycles, mountain bikers etc.
- Often the environmental concerns trump access. When canvassed many of our groups responded that they were unaware of the environmental protections required for the area and are not sure that these protections, while needed, are achieved through their exclusion. We respectfully request that these materials be provided.
- That use areas ultimately are not accommodated within the MNR managed lands, or park areas we request that a capacity plan for access and use to acceptable user friendly trails be assured.
- That a Friends of Associations' delegation work with the OTC, sponsored by the MNR to facilitate a provincial action plan for these supports.
- That broader Regional Trails Committee is established in each area of Ontario to continue to promote access, find alternatives in the event of exclusion in the vicinity.
- That a canvas with the MNR of existing access agreements be conducted such that a successful one, such as the Simcoe County – OFTR agreement be put in place as a provincial best practice.
- Other based upon negotiation between the MNR and OTC; i.e. Provincial MOU between us

AGREEMENT FROM USERS

In the event that such access is provided to Crown Lands for horses, motorcycles, mountain bikes, 4X4 or ATV or other groups these user groups would agree that the users would:

- Abide by the use polices prescribed by the MNR and its Land Managers
- Police their groups
- Educate their members on the site plan before access or use
- Use local clubs and media to enact positive MNR practices
- Inform local media of the relationship between the Park and the users
- Provide Trail Wardenship on trails for which they were granted access and use
- Other based upon suggestion or need from Park Management

CONCLUSION

The OTC believes that user groups have demonstrated in a variety of regions in Ontario the ability to respect the land, other users, park authorities and the environment.

We believe that similar processes can be put in place to accommodate these uses in the MNR managed areas. In the event that it is a funding issue concerning trails wardenship, land reclamation, or staffing we wish to be an ally in the seeking of funds, adjustment o f user behaviour and provider of low cost volunteer supervision such that access can be maintained.

We believe that similar accommodations can be found in the environmentally sensitive areas of the MNR and its effort to balance access with conservation and preservation. We want to ask the environmentalists, conservationists making comment to the MNR to work with us to address these issues outside of the MNR.

We also believe that in those areas where this environmental accommodation cannot be made, that alternative areas for specific use can be found. It is important to note that one of the reasons we believe this to be the case is that hunters and fishermen, (and we support this too!) retain their ORV access while others do not.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to accommodating more uses on MNR lands with your help.