

Saturday June 7, 2014

Ontario Trails Council – 2014 Election Letter

Ontario NDP Response

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. If elected, what types of improvements would your government continue to make in the outdoor development sector?

The Ontario NDP is committed to supporting Ontario's vibrant trail network. We will put an end to damaging Liberal cuts to our parks and ensure that sufficient infrastructure funding is available to maintain and expand our trail network. We are committed to working with municipalities and those involved with Ontario's trails to determine the best manner to improve existing trails and further expand the network.

ACTIVE LIVING - Active living is an issue, in both the health benefits from activity and the negative effects of inactivity. Ontario has over 2600 useable active living trails. How would you and your government work with the Ontario Trails Council to promote trail use?

While we believe that promotion through our tourism sector is important, the Ontario NDP believe that it is important for Ontarians to know about the trails present in their own communities. We will encourage educators to introduce children to Ontario's trails system to encourage active living and appreciate of Ontario's natural beauty.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION - 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?

Yes. The Ontario NDP believes that our transportation, transit, and trail infrastructure should be as interconnected as possible, allowing for Ontarians to easily travel the province and enjoy its natural beauty.

PROVINCIAL MATCHING FUNDING - Ontario Trails Council Membership is made up of land management groups that work with volunteer groups to make trails, 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 create a dedicated trail infrastructure development fund that could be managed by voluntary sector leaders?

Liberal cuts have undermined many of the supports for Ontario's trail. For example, the government announced in 2012 that it would be slashing 10% of the Ministry of Natural Resource's budget by 10% over 3 years, which includes support for Ontario's parks. The Ontario NDP has committed billions of dollars to infrastructure development and we will ensure to work with the Ontario Trails Council to ensure sufficient support.

POLICY COORDINATION - 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 nonmotorized harmony); a legislation review, and an award winning website for trails. If 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

Yes. The Ontario NDP will ensure that the Ontario Trails Coordinating Committee meets on a regular basis, barring unforeseen circumstances.

BUSINESS COSTS - 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 fail to bring case resolution since often cases are settled out of court. Would your government consider a fund to support the costs or trail litigation, (as they have in Nova Scotia), or the tort (such as the 2009 National Trails Act in the USA) – for trail groups, trail operators and land managers that promote the public good through trail activity?

The Ontario NDP would consult with stakeholders and would support a committee study of the issue to determine whether such a fund is the right solution for Ontarians.

TRAIL JOBS - 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?

We would work with Regional Tourism Organizations to ensure that they have all the information they need to promote Ontario's trails.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT - 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. There are 100's of significant destinations and experiences people can enjoy on trails in Ontario. How would your government work to ensure the OTMPC and other government department's engaged Ontario Trail leaders in developing destination marketing with world-class trail tourism products as a result?

The Ontario NDP understands that tourism is an important sector of Ontario's economy. Ontario's trails are one of the province's gems and we would encourage direct communication between OTMPC and Ontario's Trail Council.

WORLD CLASS EVENTS - 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. 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?

The Ontario NDP believes that the best trails are trails that Ontarians get to use. We will work with all parties to ensure that we maximize the ability of Ontarians to enjoy their trail network while preserving the natural beauty of the system.