

**A Report on Issues addressed by Ontario Trails Council and the
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing**



Ontario Trails Council
Conseil des sentiers de l'Ontario



for
**The Honourable Jim Watson,
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing**

Prepared by Ontario Trails Council



BACKGROUND

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. Such was the case in 2005 when Ontario Parks Association and Parks and Recreation Ontario endorsed OTC as the lead for trails at the municipal level. As a result the OTC hears regularly from local organizations seeking Municipal Affairs and Housing support on such issues as:

- Infrastructure issues, such as parks
- Upgrade to shoulders on regional roads to accommodate cycling
- Motorized sector management – licensing, legislation and fees
- Conservation Authority, Outdoor Education Centre support
- Master Plan standardization at the Municipal Level – an MMAH directive
- Innovative trail integration with other municipal services
- Funding options through MMAH
- Northern, Rural Municipal support options

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/ROAD ETIQUETTE

Remember when using trails, as well as roads, understanding the do's and don'ts, expect and respect other traffic, promote safe operation ethics, don't trespass and follow rules of the road. Combine this attitude with the following trail etiquette tips and you will be on your way to an amazing outdoors experience.

USING THE ROAD – DO'S AND DONT'S

- Research the regulations and special concerns for the motorized vehicle you are planning to use. Safe operation and vehicle riding is a rider responsibility.
- Travel on posted roads only, following markings, crossings, intersection and other hazard warnings
- Know which counties have passed ORV allowed by -laws.
- For your safety travel at posted speed limits.
- Please do not use unauthorized or unsafe areas.
- When riding your machine make sure that it is age and power appropriate for the user and passenger.
- Obey the law.

USING THE TRAILS – DO'S AND DONT'S

- Research the regulations and special concerns for the area you are planning to use. 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 TRAIL SAFETY

- Respect the privacy of people living along trails and roads.
- 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 uses 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 Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicle Clubs (OFATV) have produced a use brochure "Know Where to Ride" in conjunction with the MNR and OTC
- The Ontario Federation of Trail Riders (OFTR) and the Canadian Off Highway Vehicle Distributors Council (COHV) have produced and are distributing "Ride the Trails" Video and Companion Literature Suite.

TRAILS AND MUNICIPAL AGREEMENTS

It is the contention of the OTC that the modification of municipal plans with the support of Municipal Affairs and Housing through such actions as the modification of the Municipal Act, such that the creation of trails and the support of the building of trail infrastructure has the potential to provide Ontarians with a quality of community life that encourages the Ontario economy.

The Ontario Trails Council respects the authority of the MMAH and its ability to provide funds and the policy direction to enable municipalities to make positive change in the provision of trails to communities. We appreciate efforts to amend the MA Sections 19 and 20 to positively remove barriers to trail development through modifications to the Line Fences Act.

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

MUNICIPAL TRAILS: FUNDAMENTAL TO QUALITY OF LIFE

- The OTC believes that trails are best served through a master planning process.
- That traditional uses continue to be allowed access to municipal parks, hydro corridors, municipal roads and right of ways, where compatible with traffic other jurisdictional issues
- Trails need to be clearly marked for all uses.
- Clear and comprehensive policy on municipal recreation and infrastructure needs must be developed, especially in relation to cycling lanes on roads, pathways, green spaces and capital costs to ensure broad public access.
- Users have a responsibility to abide by trespass, occupiers liability, conservation and environmental practices as administered or implemented by local or regional authority.
- We believe all motorized vehicles, capable of negotiating both trails and using roads, or right of ways must be properly equipped, safe, insured, permitted and licensed.
- We believe in safe school zones, active transportation, and urban planning practices that see the promotion of trails for use as linear parks.
- Trail user groups should be empowered to provide training to groups such that before they venture onto trails in urban areas trail enthusiasts are able to mentor to the public, children, schools and municipal councils.
- Trail groups should organize themselves into Regional Trail Committees, and that these committees be supported and incorporated through orders in council, which would be enshrined as a practice of the MMAA.
- The Implementation of the recommendations of the MHP Report on Motorized Conflict – 2007 would work for MMAH and OTC.

TRAILS AND ROADS – MUNICIPAL NEEDS

- The completion of the Ontario Bicycling Route such that as existing highways are retrofitted a hard surface cycling lane is added to the shoulder of the road.
- Wherever and whenever possible supporting infrastructure for bridge construction remain intact for pedestrian or other trail traffic outside of the main thoroughfare.
- We wish to work with area offices through a coordinated province wide policy for trails and roads that sees infrastructure for trails at inter -sections, bridges, ROW etc. is provided through joint projects.
- Signage is a necessary component to trail road safety and wish to see it implemented on the 64,000 km of Ontario's trails.
- We request that secondary and regional road signage differ from TOD signs.
- We believe that user safety is paramount, but we believe that various types of traffic can co-exist if enabled to do so in municipal environments.
- Trail design standards such that trails infrastructure is accommodated on municipal or regional road right of ways.
- We wish to see a policy for un-assumed roads as trails, as many users use them as trails without understanding the risk or liability therein.
- Develop with MMAH support an innovation program for alternate transportation that develops green strategies with user groups.
- Alternate trail/road corridors through urban “trail master” plans to see cycling and ORV transportation routes in these congested areas.
- Additional accommodation made for assisted devices and the disabled who regularly use both roads, and trail able vehicles as a form of personal transportation.
- Resolution to the challenges MMAH and OTC face together at the Ontario Trails Coordinating Committee.
- Other based upon negotiation between the MMAH and OTC; i.e. a Provincial MOU between us that enable the OTC to coordinate with MMAH, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, and Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities the trail infrastructure that communities are asking for.

AGREEMENT FROM USERS

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

- Abide by the use policies prescribed by the MMAH through municipal governments.
- Police their groups to abide by the Traffic Act.
- Educate their members on the municipal trail master plans before access or use
- Use local clubs and media to enact positive MMAH practices
- Inform local media of the relationship between the MMAH and the users
- Provide Trail Wardens on trails for which they were granted access and use
- Other based upon suggestion or need from MMAH Management

CONCLUSION

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

We believe that similar processes can be put in place to accommodate these uses on a broader range of MMAH managed areas. In the event that it is a funding issue concerning roads wardenship, land reclamation, or staffing we wish to be an ally in the seeking of funds, adjustment of user behaviour and provider of low cost volunteer supervision such that trail access, tourism promotion and trail development can be maintained.

We believe that similar accommodations can be found in sensitive areas of the MMAH and its effort to balance access with engineering, safety and capital cost. We want to ask the engineers, planners and policy developers at the MMAH to work with us to address these issues.

We also believe that in those areas where there is a concern for traffic or vehicle management where on or off-road accommodation cannot be made, that alternative areas for specific use can be found in urban and rural municipalities.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to accommodating more uses in the public interest through MMAH funding, OTC core support, municipal policy direction and support.