

ACTIVE2010

Ontario Trails Strategy



Ontario Trails Strategy
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A Message from the Minister of Health Promotion

The Ontario Trails Strategy is a long-term plan that establishes strategic directions for planning, managing, promoting and using trails in Ontario. Developed in collaboration with other ministries and a wide range of stakeholders in the community, the strategy supports continued cooperation among governments and the not-for-profit and private sectors as we work towards a shared vision for trails. All stakeholders will be important partners in the success of the strategy.

Trails play an important role in building a healthier, more prosperous Ontario. This document provides the framework to guide future decision-making and will help strengthen Ontario's trail system.

It was clear from the beginning that a trails strategy would be able to make a major contribution to *ACTIVE2010*, the government's strategy to increase sport participation and levels of physical activity among Ontarians. Trails also support other government strategies, including the *Ontario Tourism Strategy*, the plan for *Strong Rural Communities*, the *Provincial Policy Statement*, the *Northern Prosperity Plan*, the *Healthy Weights Strategy* and the *Greenbelt Plan*.

Thank you to the many stakeholders and other ministries that contributed generously throughout the development of this Ontario Trails Strategy.



Honourable Jim Watson
Minister

Foreword

In July 2003, the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation established an Inter-ministerial Working Group on Trails, to help shape the process for developing an Ontario Trails Strategy.

In December 2004, a Minister's Advisory Committee (refer to the Appendix for a list of member organizations) was established to support the development of the strategy. The committee involved stakeholder organizations representing trail groups, environmental and heritage organizations, property owners, the tourism industry, Aboriginal communities and municipalities.

Over the winter of 2005, stakeholders with special expertise attended workshops to provide input on the following trail-related topics:

- > Active living and other health benefits
- > Environmental and heritage impacts and opportunities
- > Safety and road / highway rights-of-way
- > Landowner concerns
- > Multi-use / four-season use
- > Tourism potential
- > Insurance
- > Economic sustainability
- > Promoting access to all Ontarians

Following the workshops, the ministry held regional consultations to elicit community feedback on the information received through the issue-specific workshops. Consultations were held in Chatham, Woodstock, St. Catharines, Hanover, Peterborough, Kingston, Ottawa, Barrie, Sault Ste. Marie, North Bay, Timmins, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Toronto.

The ministry also received many written briefs, e-mail comments and research documents that were taken into account in developing the strategy.

Information about the strategy was posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry as required under The Environmental Bill of Rights Act. Feedback from the stakeholder workshops and regional consultations was posted on the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation's website, to ensure full disclosure and transparency.

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Introduction

Trails in Ontario

Ontario's rich and varied landscape is criss-crossed by over 64,000 kilometres of trails.

Trails can be:

- > footpaths with natural surfaces
- > multi-use tracks with manufactured surfaces
- > on-road bicycle routes
- > walkways, boardwalks and sidewalks
- > utility corridors or former rail lines
- > forestry and mining access roads designated as trails
- > waterways and portage routes.

Walkers, hikers, joggers, cyclists, inline skaters, horseback riders, cross-country skiers, mountain bikers, snowshoers, dogsledders and users of snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, 4x4s, and dirt bikes enjoy land-based trails. Water railways are used by canoeists, kayakers, etc.

Some trails are intended for one purpose only. The Bruce Trail, for example, is a public footpath with off-road sections closed to all vehicles. Other trails are intended to be used in a variety of ways. The Trans-Canada Trail is designed to accommodate five core activities: hiking/walking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

According to the **Ontario Trails Council**, Ontario has over 64,000 km of trails used for:

- > walking, hiking, cycling, horseback riding, snowmobiling, all-terrain vehicle use, dogsledding, trail biking, bird watching, and other nature-based activities.



Why are good trails important?

Trails play a vital role in our well-being.

Better Health. Trails support an active lifestyle that improves health. Physical activity helps prevent heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, colon cancer and depression¹. An increase in physical activity can save millions in health care spending. Physical activity also reduces stress and improves mental health.

Trails are exceptionally well suited to helping Ontarians become more physically active. Many are designed for the recreational activities Ontarians most enjoy, including walking, cycling and jogging. They are readily accessible to most Ontarians and inexpensive to use. They are found in a variety of attractive settings and can provide moderate activity or challenging outdoor adventure. They can provide physical activity for the widest range of people, including persons with disabilities, children and youth, the elderly and others who are known to be less physically active.

Strong People, Strong Economy.

Trails attract tourists to Ontario communities. Tourism creates jobs and puts money into local economies. Many trail users buy goods such as snowmobiles, mountain bicycles, equestrian equipment and hiking boots. Canadians are taking shorter vacations, closer to home.² Vacation

dollars are being spent on local restaurants, accommodations, retail purchases and day trips. The Ontario Trails Council estimates that trails contribute at least \$2 billion a year to the provincial economy.

Trails increase property values. A home near a trail can offer a pleasing view, quieter streets, recreational opportunities and a chance to get in touch with nature. Studies find that properties located near trails generally sell for five to thirty two percent more than those farther away.³

Strong Communities. Trails strengthen the social fabric. Volunteering is one measure of the vitality of a society. People working together, giving their time freely, and sharing in socially valuable, meaningful activities – these are practices that create strong communities.

Ontario's trail system was largely built by volunteers, such as the members of trail clubs and other not-for-profit organizations. Trails continue to provide abundant opportunities for volunteering in the community.

Ontario's trail system also depends on the generosity of private property owners. Many trails cross private lands, with access freely given by property owners who are willing to share their property with trail users. Some property owners have even donated their land to trail organizations.

According to the Ontario Trails Council:

- > 525,000 people use snowmobile and ATV trails.
- > 800,000 people use hiking trails.
- > According to the *ACTIVE2010* strategy, 52 per cent of Ontarians are insufficiently active to benefit their health.



¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 1996. *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the U.S. Surgeon General*, Atlanta Georgia, U.S.

² Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, 2004. *Travel Intention Survey*.

³ Dunbar, Peter G. 1999. *The Economic Impact of the Georgian Trail on the Town of Collingwood*, Collingwood, Ontario.



- > In 2000, over one-half of children aged 5 to 17 did not meet recommended levels of physical activity.⁴
- > The annual economic burden of physical inactivity in Ontario is \$1.8 billion.⁵
- > ACTIVE2010 recommends that all adult Ontarians walk a minimum of 30 minutes daily or participate in some other equivalent activity.

Trail construction and maintenance builds and solidifies partnerships among community groups, businesses, property owners, local government, community residents and trail club members. The province as a whole is also strengthened as people of all income brackets, all age groups and all cultures travel throughout Ontario for trail-based recreational experiences.

Conserving and Appreciating the Environment. Trails lead users through the incredibly varied landscapes to be found in Ontario. They lead people to diverse plant and animal habitats like wetlands and forests, and historic places like old mills, canal locks or the homes of famous Canadians. Trail guides and interpretive signage can identify the special features along a trail and enhance our appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage.

Trails often cross lands which are environmentally sensitive in many ways. By leading users along well-worn paths, trails keep users away from more sensitive

features that might not be able to withstand traffic. Well-developed trails provide environmental buffers, such as boardwalks and bridges, that protect delicate wetlands while allowing users to experience varied plant and animal wildlife.

Trails in Northern Ontario often give users access to remote wilderness areas. Indeed, the chance to experience wilderness is one major appeal of remote tourism in the north. Consequently, the need to preserve wilderness is well understood by northern trail stakeholders.

Trails provide meaningful and satisfying outdoor experiences for many users. These experiences reaffirm a sense of connection with the natural environment and provide opportunities for an appreciation of Ontario's natural heritage. With a trails system that traverses many of Ontario's natural regions, trails play an important role in supporting environmental education and building a public commitment to environmental conservation.

⁴ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2001. *Physical Activity Monitor*.

⁵ Dr. Peter Katzmarzyk, Queen's University, 2001. *The Economic Cost Associated with Physical Inactivity and Obesity in Ontario*.



Challenges

Recent trends affecting trails in Ontario

There is evidence of serious issues facing Ontario's trails community:

- > Stakeholders report that the cost of liability insurance for trail organizations is becoming prohibitive.
- > Although ownership of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) in Ontario has increased, the development of ATV trails has not kept pace with the growth in demand. With few designated ATV trails, many ATV users frequent trails that are not suitable for their vehicles.
- > Fifty-two per cent of Ontarians are still not active enough to realize optimum health benefits.⁶
- > A 2001 study found that 28 per cent of Ontarians cited lack of pleasant places to walk and/or bicycle as a barrier to participation in physical activity⁷.
- > While Ontario's trails have traditionally been developed independently, trail organizations increasingly recognize that they must work together to use their resources more efficiently, make the most of their investment in trails and effectively educate the public and trail users.
- > There are increasing pressures on the natural and cultural heritage features of trails because of growing population densities around the province and increasing numbers of off-road vehicles, many of which are used off-trail as well.

Challenges facing the trails community

During the Ontario Trails Strategy consultation process, stakeholders raised the following topics as challenges facing the trails community:

- > **Coordination of trail groups.** Trail stakeholders recognize the need to work together to effectively establish a province-wide code of trail conduct, minimum trail standards, better ways of sharing knowledge and coordinated trail marketing.
- > **Need for easily accessible information.** A "one window" access point is required to ensure users, property owners and organizations can easily locate information on trail location, types of trails, trail management, trail development and approval processes.
- > **Cost of liability insurance.** The cost of liability insurance threatens the long-term viability of trail organizations. Concerns about liability discourage many public and private property owners from permitting trails across their properties.

- > Hike Ontario's database lists 25 hiking clubs with 13,000 members (Hike Ontario).
- > The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs supports 248 community-based snowmobile clubs, and thousands of volunteers that groom and maintain 41,290 km of snowmobile trails across land generously made available by 15,902 property owners.



⁶ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2005. *ACTIVE2010 strategy*.

⁷ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2001. *Physical Activity Monitor*.



> More than 100,000 snowmobiles access the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs' trail network each season.⁸

The Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicle Clubs has 10 clubs, 6 chapters and over 2,100 km of mapped trails across Ontario.⁹



- > **Lack of funding and land resources.** The sustainability of trails is uncertain due to rising costs (e.g. infrastructure, maintenance and insurance), the insecurity of funding sources and concerns about long-term access to private lands.
- > **Inadequate trail access for off-road vehicles.** Off-road vehicle operators want access to a network of suitable trails around the province. However, mechanisms are lacking for resolving conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users over incompatible uses of trails, as well as issues associated with the use of surrounding lands.
- > **Access to land.** Many property owners, including owners of agricultural and other rural operations, hesitate to give access to property because of concerns related to liability, trespassing, damage to property, interference with agricultural operations, noise pollution, and the introduction of biohazards and invasive species.
- > **Need for education.** Ontarians need to be aware of the health and economic benefits of trails and ways of using trails that respect property owners and protect the environment. They need to understand the potential adverse impacts users might have on activities near the trail including agricultural, forestry, trapping, angling, hunting and fish and wildlife harvesting operations. Education on protecting ecosystems and natural and cultural heritage features through environmentally sensitive trail practices is also needed.
- > **Review of public policy.** Many provincial statutes and areas of public policy need to be reviewed with respect to their impacts on trails. Aboriginal communities need to be consulted when trails are planned through lands identified as traditional areas for hunting, trapping and other uses.
- > **Increase trail use.** Trail organizations are looking for ways to increase and diversify the use of trails with an emphasis on attracting children and youth, women, new Canadians, low-income groups and persons with disabilities by making opportunities accessible to and inclusive of a broader spectrum of the population.
- > **Need for improved trail safety.** In order to appeal to some user groups it will be necessary to adopt measures to increase trail safety and improve the enforcement of trail use standards.
- > **Challenges for Northern Ontario.** Northern Ontario trail stakeholders face added challenges due to enormous distances, rugged topography, and smaller populations from which to draw volunteers.
- > **Abandoned rail corridors.** Abandoned rail corridors, while serving as a potential land base for trails across Ontario, can present challenges due to the cost of infrastructure maintenance, fencing etc. and impacts on adjacent property owners.

⁸ Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs July 2005. www.ofsc.on.ca.

⁹ The Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicle Clubs July 2005.

Vision, Goals and Values

In the future . . .

A world-class system of diversified trails, planned and used in an environmentally responsible manner, that enhances the health and prosperity of all Ontarians.

> **A world-class system**

The trails community will work together effectively.

> **Diversified trails across Ontario**

Trails in all parts of Ontario will meet the needs of varied users.

> **Environmentally responsible**

Trails will be planned and used in a manner that preserves and appreciates the environment.

> **Enhanced quality of life**

Trail use will help improve the health and prosperity of all Ontarians.

This means

- > Ontario will have a sustainable network of urban, rural and wilderness trails that are safe and accessible.
- > Trail planning and usage will support environmental protection and contribute to the responsible use and appreciation of natural and cultural heritage resources.
- > Trail-based recreation will contribute to an active lifestyle for Ontarians.
- > Trails tourism will boost the economic prosperity of communities.
- > The Ontario government will be actively engaged with trail stakeholders, providing coordination and strategic leadership to ensure the vitality of trails in Ontario.
- > Trail users will respect property owners and adjacent land uses including those of the agricultural sector, resource industries, remote tourism operators and Aboriginal communities.



> Studies of trail users find that 70 to 85 per cent of trail users live within 40 km of the trail.¹⁰

> An important by-product of trails is improved self-image and social relationships, reduced crimes, a livelier community atmosphere and a lifestyle which encourages young people to find their entertainment in healthier and more wholesome ways.¹¹

¹⁰ PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2004.

¹¹ Active Living Go For Green, 1996. *Developing Communities for Active Transportation: The Active Living and Environment Program*



Framework for Action



> A study of the Georgian Trail found that approximately 36 per cent of users live within 20 minutes of the trail.¹²



Strategic directions

The Ontario Trails Strategy envisions a coordinated approach to meeting the challenges facing the trails community. Through a collaborative approach within a common framework, stakeholders can achieve greater successes.

The strategy focuses on key strategic directions, designed to respond to the challenges facing the community. It requires the active involvement of all stakeholders.

The provincial government can play an enabling role and show leadership in various areas.

The commitment of local government, trail organizations at all levels, and the corporate sector will determine the strategy's ultimate success.

There are five strategic directions that comprise the Ontario Trails Strategy:

- > Improving collaboration among stakeholders
- > Enhancing the sustainability of Ontario's trails
- > Enhancing the trail experience
- > Educating Ontarians about trails
- > Fostering better health and a strong economy through trails.

Core values

In addition to these strategic directions, trail stakeholders identified a number of shared, core values to guide all future efforts relating to trails:

- > Respecting private and public lands, including agricultural lands, Crown lands and the traditional land-use areas of Aboriginal communities

- > Protecting, conserving and appreciating the environment and cultural and natural heritage features
- > Providing a variety of trail opportunities in keeping with the diverse nature of Ontario's population
- > Valuing regional differences and supporting local decision-making
- > Adopting good planning principles and approaches.

Improving collaboration among stakeholders

Ontario's trail clubs and organizations have built a vast network of excellent trails, offering outstanding experiences. Federal, provincial and municipal governments have often supported or partnered in trail development.

Today, as Ontario's trail system matures, stakeholders are finding that the challenges they face require them to work together. Trail organizations need to develop common standards to guide the development and use of trails. The trail system as a whole must evolve to meet the particular needs of new users. Trail organizations want more effective tools and better ways of distributing information to more Ontarians.

These challenges require coordination at all levels. Enhanced cooperation between federal, provincial and local governments, stronger linkages between provincial ministries and trail organizations, and broader collaboration among trail organizations and local and regional levels of government will help to address the challenges of the trails community.

¹² Dunbar, Peter G. 1999. *The Economic Impact of the Georgian Trail on the Town of Collingwood*, Collingwood, Ontario

Through identifying gaps, overlaps and opportunities in the system, it will be possible to invest in future trail development in a more strategic way.

This plan will enhance the ability of trail stakeholders to work together through several strategies:

- > Improving collaboration among stakeholders
- > Rationalizing trails

Improving collaboration among stakeholders

GOAL

New coordinating mechanisms to improve trail stakeholders' ability to work together.

STRATEGIES

- Form an Ontario trails coordinating committee, representing public, not-for-profit, Aboriginal and private-sector trail stakeholders to increase collaboration
- Encourage the development of a framework for collaboration among trail coordinating bodies at the regional and local levels
- Review the impact of new provincial policies and programs on trails.

Rationalizing trails

GOAL

A coherent, rational trail system for Ontario.

STRATEGIES

- Develop an Ontario Trails System framework to guide the development of new trails and management of existing trails to meet the diverse needs of Ontarians
- Seek opportunities to develop a framework for trail categories, allowed uses, amenities, access etc.
- Nurture the development of standards to guide trail development and management, giving Ontarians access to high quality, diversified trail experiences.



GOAL

New coordinating mechanisms to improve trail stakeholders' ability to work together.

GOAL

A coherent, rational trail system for Ontario.





GOAL
Support for the development of an environment that is conducive to the development and operation of trails.

Enhancing the sustainability of Ontario’s trails

The economic sustainability of Ontario’s trail system is not guaranteed.

High costs threaten to undermine the viability of clubs and the trails they manage.

Funding is an issue for many trail groups. Financial support is received from the government, charitable foundations, user and membership fees, merchandise sales and Ontario businesses. Government funding has traditionally consisted of project-based, one-time grants. Innovative funding models should be explored to provide trail organizations with the certainty required to sustain existing trails and develop new trails within the province.

Trail clubs rely on volunteers to plan, build, maintain, operate and promote trails. The survival of the trail system depends on a thriving volunteer base. Trail organizations need to explore new approaches to recruit and recognize their volunteers and develop ways to prevent volunteer “burn-out”.

Private property owners are another group whose generosity underpins Ontario’s trail system. Much of the land base for trails is privately owned, particularly in southern and central Ontario. Trail clubs have access to

the land through agreements with property owners.

Many stakeholders feel it is time to look for ways of introducing more stability into trail agreements that balance the needs of trail organizations and private property owners.

Many stakeholders consider provincial parks and Crown lands to be ideal settings for trails, since they are publicly owned, and are governed by policies which respect recreational uses. Ideally, they say, public properties, such as utility and transportation corridors, should be retained in public hands for trail use, and private properties should be acquired, where possible.

This strategy will seek to ensure the sustainability of Ontario’s trails through a variety of strategies:

- > Removing roadblocks to sustainability
- > Stabilizing resources for trail organizations
- > Stabilizing trail routes.

Removing roadblocks to sustainability

GOAL
Support for the development of an environment that is conducive to the development and operation of trails.

STRATEGIES

- Review legislation to determine whether opportunities exist to better support the trail environment
- Review best practices and risk management tools related to liability issues
- Examine education and awareness opportunities that address liability and insurance matters.



Stabilizing resources for trail organizations

GOAL

A diversified, enlarged and stable financial and volunteer base for trails.

STRATEGIES

- Have regard for the Ontario Trails Strategy in all government funding decisions on trails
- Explore innovative funding and investment models for the support of trails and trail-related organizations
- Explore opportunities to increase private support of trails, working with the manufacturing and tourism industries
- Plan innovative volunteer programs and develop new strategies for recruiting, training, supervising, motivating and recognizing volunteers
- Develop volunteer opportunities for women, new Canadians, youth and people with disabilities.

Stabilizing trail routes

GOAL

A toolkit of reliable methods for stabilizing trail rights-of-way.

STRATEGIES

- Support long-term planning to identify properties needed for future trails
- Review potential incentives for private property owners to allow the use of their properties for trails
- Facilitate Internet-based access to information on best practices in building long-term relationships with property owners
- Explore the feasibility of using easements to stabilize trail rights-of-way
- Encourage the long-term retention of utility and transportation corridors on public lands, in public jurisdiction.



GOAL

A diversified, enlarged and stable financial and volunteer base for trails.

GOAL

A toolkit of reliable methods for stabilizing trail rights-of-way.



GOAL

The needs of varied users are managed, and met by a comprehensive system of single-use, multiple-use, single-season and four-season trails.



Enhancing the trail experience

Trail use subjects the trail system in Ontario to a variety of stresses.

While some trails are intended for one type of use (e.g. hiking) or seasonal use (e.g. snowmobiling), others are intended for many different uses. Conflicts can arise from competition among trail users, when, for example, ATVs use trails intended for snowmobiles. Conflicts detract from the enjoyment of the trail experience.

Trail use and off trail use can have significant environmental impacts. Both motorized and non-motorized uses can degrade sensitive landscapes and disrupt plant and animal habitats. Motorized uses can be particularly disruptive. The equipment is capable of having a significant, longer term, cumulative impact on sensitive areas such as creeks, wetlands and the habitats of endangered species. Off-road vehicles reportedly can produce excessive levels of noise and emissions.

Stresses caused by trail users can alienate property owners who have permitted trails on their properties. Individuals who use trails inappropriately can be seen as nuisances or can damage agricultural operations.

The desire of trail operators to open trails to non-traditional users creates challenges for trail design. Increased use by women and children may require more attention to personal safety concerns, while increased use by persons with disabilities may require accommodations in trail design.

Many trail organizations feel they are dealing with situations that call for tougher enforcement. They have indicated that revised minimum age requirements, safety

equipment standards, mandatory driver education programs, increased trail patrols and stiffer penalties for inappropriate behaviours would help address many of the issues.

This plan will enhance the trail experience through a variety of strategies:

- > Accommodating multiple uses
- > Managing user impacts
- > Improving accessibility and safety

Accommodating multiple uses

GOAL

The needs of varied users are managed, and met by a comprehensive system of single-use, multiple-use, single-season and four-season trails.

STRATEGIES

- Support the development of a framework, tools and strategies for addressing the needs of multiple users, resolving the conflicts that arise among competing uses and promoting a comprehensive system of trails that meets the needs of varied users
- Undertake a study of needs and issues related to the recreational use of off-road vehicles
- Develop a province-wide code for the responsible use of trails that respects other users, property owners and adjacent land uses, including those of the agricultural sector, resource industries and Aboriginal communities
- Enhance tools and strategies for enforcement.

Managing user impacts

GOAL

Trail clubs help protect ecosystems and natural and cultural heritage features from adverse user impacts, and maintain close relationships with property owners to resolve issues arising from trail use.

STRATEGIES

- Research and share best practices for environmental protection and natural and cultural heritage preservation on trails
- Facilitate Internet access to information on best practices in environmental and natural and cultural heritage conservation
- Facilitate Internet access to information on best practices in property owners relations
- Encourage the development of a trail planning process that considers social, environmental, cultural, economic and cumulative impacts of trail use
- Recognize the values of non-trail users of the landscape (e.g. agriculture, forestry, trapping, and remote tourism) in the planning process.

Improving accessibility and safety

GOAL

Ontario trails welcome non-traditional users and accommodate special needs safely.

STRATEGIES

- Nurture the development of an overall approach to trail design that accommodates the widest range of user abilities
- Facilitate Internet access to information on best practices in trail user accommodations and safety
- Encourage communities to inventory trails and identify gaps in provision for non-traditional users
- Encourage outreach initiatives to target non-traditional users.



GOAL

Trail clubs help protect ecosystems and natural and cultural heritage features from adverse user impacts, and maintain close relationships with property owners to resolve issues arising from trail use.

GOAL

Ontario trails welcome non-traditional users and accommodate special needs safely.





GOAL

Ontarians understand the benefits of trails and know how to use them properly and safely.

Educating Ontarians about trails

Education is the key to the future of trails in Ontario.

Ontarians need to learn about the health and economic benefits of trails. They should learn to use trails in ways that respect the property owner, protect the environment and preserve appealing trails for the future. The public should be educated about diverse ecosystems and become aware of the significant natural and cultural heritage features that can be appreciated through trail use. Educating young people about trails and giving them trail experiences will build a network of trail stewards for the future.

People want to be able to find trails that meet their individual interests. Ontarians want ready access to information about trail location, types of activities permitted, type of terrain, level of difficulty, special facilities, equipment needs, parking, fees and other practical matters.

Trail design and management practices are constantly evolving. At the same time, most trail planning, fundraising, construction and maintenance is undertaken by volunteers. Trail organizations and their volunteers need to access best practices in trail design, management and safety.

A coordinated web-based approach could provide trail users with easily accessible information. It could also give stakeholders an enormously increased capacity to share and gain access to the information they need to play their part in managing Ontario's trail system.

This plan will aim to educate Ontarians about trails through a variety of strategies:

- > Developing a Trails Education Plan
- > Providing easy access to information about trails
- > Providing information to trail organizations

Developing a Trails Education Plan

GOAL

Ontarians understand the benefits of trails and know how to use them properly and safely.

STRATEGIES

- Develop a Trails Education Plan incorporating the health and economic benefits of trails, the diversity of trail types, property owners' rights and the responsible use of trails on public and private lands
- Focus trails education on infrequent users including women, youth, new Canadians and people with disabilities
- Promote widely an Ontario code for the responsible use of trails
- Develop a framework for advancing environmental education and interpreting natural and cultural heritage features along trails.



Providing easy access to information about trails

GOAL

Internet-based, one-window trail user access to maps and information about trails in Ontario.

STRATEGIES

- Establish a website to provide one-window access to trails information and linkages to websites
- Include trails in the Land Information Ontario electronic database and mapping system
- Give potential trail users web-based access to information about, and maps of, all rated trails in Ontario.

Providing information to trail organizations

GOAL

Ready access to information on trail management.

STRATEGIES

- Provide information and best practices on trail planning, development and operations through the Internet
- Encourage stronger linkages between college and university research on trails to the trails community
- Help develop training programs on trail planning and operations.



GOAL

Internet-based, one-window trail user access to maps and information about trails in Ontario.

GOAL

Ready access to information on trail management.





GOAL

Ontarians embrace the active lifestyle choices offered by trails of all types.

GOAL

Ready access to trails near Ontarians' homes, schools and places of work.

Fostering better health and a prosperous economy through trails

With effective public education, trails will make a real contribution to the health and economic prosperity of Ontarians.

Trails support an active, healthy lifestyle. Trails provide accessible, widely available and low-cost opportunities to meet the physical activity needs of most Ontarians. For this reason, the Ontario Trails Strategy is linked to the *ACTIVE2010* initiative, and its target of raising the percentage of Ontarians who engage in physical activity to 55 per cent by 2010.

Trails-based tourism can provide economic benefits to many Ontario communities. It has proven particularly beneficial to smaller, rural, northern and remote communities, especially during winter months. The "outdoors" is recognized as a key defining feature for Ontario in the domestic market and defining images of Ontario for out-of-province markets. Ontario trails can attract both

Ontarians and out-of-province visitors. Short trails tourism excursions with brief overnight stays are compatible with a trend toward taking shorter, more frequent vacations over the four seasons.

Building stronger trails tourism will require the identification and promotion of specific trails tourism opportunities around the province. Furthermore, the trails community would benefit from expanding its partnerships with the tourism industry at all levels – locally, regionally and province-wide. Industry, for its part, will need to understand the particular needs of the trails community to preserve and maintain trails properly and to use trails appropriately.

This plan will use trails to foster better health and a strong economy through a variety of strategies:

- > Promoting active, healthy lifestyles
- > Encouraging community design for active living
- > Enhancing trails tourism.



Promoting active, healthy lifestyles

GOAL

Ontarians embrace the active lifestyle choices offered by trails of all types.

STRATEGIES

- Promote trails as low-cost, readily available opportunities to adopt a healthy, active lifestyle
- Undertake pilot projects to increase trail use by children and youth, women, new Canadians, low-income groups, and persons with a disability
- Promote “active transportation” such as walking, hiking, cycling, jogging, inline skating and cross-country skiing
- Proclaim a “Trails Day” to be celebrated annually.

Encouraging community design for active living

GOAL

Ready access to trails near Ontarians’ homes, schools and places of work.

STRATEGIES

- Encourage municipalities to provide an adequate supply of trails for current and future populations
- Encourage municipalities and conservation authorities to engage trail organizations in their planning processes.

Enhancing trails tourism

GOAL

Trails are recognized as key economic and tourism assets for Ontario communities.

STRATEGIES

- Nurture the development of trails promotion and marketing plans to expand branding of trails and identify consistent messaging and signage
- Assist with the identification and assessment of market-specific, high-quality, day trip and overnight trails tourism opportunities
- Help build partnerships with local and regional tourism industries and identify hospitality and service providers in trail literature.



GOAL

Trails are recognized as key economic and tourism assets for Ontario communities.





Voluntary and not-for-profit organizations, businesses and all levels of government share the responsibility for implementing the Ontario Trails Strategy.

A shared responsibility

Voluntary and not-for-profit organizations, businesses and all levels of government share the responsibility for implementing the Ontario Trails Strategy.

About 600 **local and regional trail clubs** build, maintain and promote individual trails or sections of longer trails. These might be trail user organizations such as hiking or snowmobile clubs, or trail management associations that are responsible for managing public trails.

Many of Ontario's 447 **municipalities** and 36 **conservation authorities** build and maintain trails. Local governments set the context for trails through Official Plans and by-laws, enter into agreements with trail clubs, and play a role in policing and controlling trail use.

Businesses sponsor trails and contribute money and in-kind resources to trail clubs. Businesses also support trails by selling users the goods and services they need to enjoy trails. Crucial trail partners are the thousands of **private property owners** around the province who voluntarily agree to allow trails to cross their lands.

Provincial **umbrella organizations** represent a diversity of trail interests. They encourage trail development, provide a voice for trail groups, promote the safe and responsible use of trails, and act as resource centres for trail information.

Also at the **provincial level**, **trail user organizations** work to advance the interests of particular types of trails and trail users. They offer their members training, tools and information on best practices.

The **provincial government** role is one of leadership, as a coordinator, facilitator, educator and promoter working in collaboration with the stakeholder community.

Policy lead for trails has been assigned to the **Ministry of Health Promotion** to coordinate the development of government trails policy.

Other provincial government ministries such as Agriculture and Food, Culture, Environment, Municipal Affairs and Housing, Natural Resources, Northern Development and Mines and Transportation oversee areas of provincial policy that have an impact on trails.

Some **provincial government agencies** also share the responsibility for trails. The Ontario Trillium Foundation financially supports trail development. The Ontario Heritage Trust (formerly Ontario Heritage Foundation) undertakes land securement and supports conservation/trail easements.

The Ontario Trails Strategy can only succeed through a collaborative approach, whereby all sector partners share information and work together to achieve the shared vision for Ontario's trails.



Afterword

Ontario is fortunate to have an outstanding network of diverse and attractive trails.

The Ontario Trails Strategy is a framework designed to bring all stakeholders together to focus their efforts strategically and take advantage of the many collaborative opportunities available to enhance Ontario's trail system.

As this strategy evolves, the provincial government and the public, not-for-profit

and private sectors will continue to collaborate on priorities, roles and responsibilities, timeframes, and methods to strengthen and enhance existing and future trails in Ontario.

The strategy is a living document. Progress will be monitored to ensure that it continues to evolve to meet the needs of Ontarians. To this end the strategy will be reviewed at the end of a five-year period to ensure goals are being met.



As this strategy evolves, the provincial government and the public, not-for-profit and private sectors will continue to collaborate on priorities, roles and responsibilities, timeframes, and methods to strengthen and enhance existing and future trails in Ontario.

Appendix

Minister's Advisory Committee Members

Chair: Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Tourism and Recreation

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability – Ontario

Bruce Trail Association

City of Thunder Bay – Community Services Department - Recreation Division

Conservation Ontario

Go For Green – Ontario

Green Tourism Association

Haliburton Highlands Stewardship Council

Hike Ontario

Nature & Outdoor Tourism in Ontario

Northern Ontario Native Tourism Association

Ontario Equestrian Federation

Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicle Clubs

Ontario Federation of Anglers & Hunters

Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs

Ontario Heritage Trust

Ontario Nature

Ontario Trails Council

Trans Canada Trail Ontario

Trent University - Trail Studies Unit

Waterfront Regeneration Trust

Notes

Notes

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www.active2010.ca

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