

Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network Trails Strategy

2012



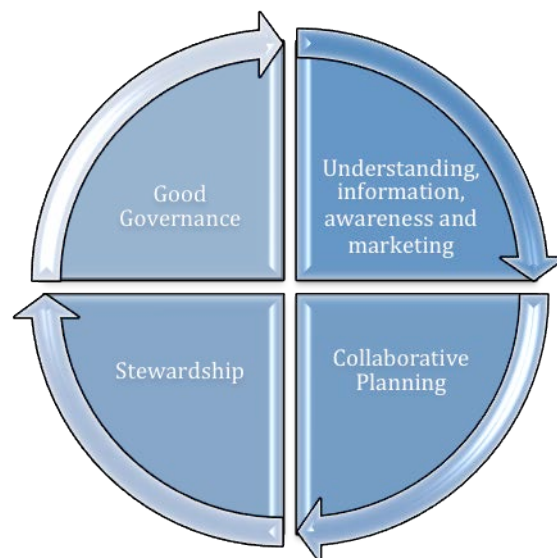
An Ongoing Collaboration of the Biosphere Trails Council

A Trails Strategy for the Region of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere

Introduction

The development of this strategy was made possible through the financial support of the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion, and the 1000 Islands Community Development Corporation. It was developed by the Biosphere Trails Council through a series of consultations and surveys in order to provide those who live in this unique part of our land and going forward view of the role that trails, their development and sustainability, play in building the meaning of living in a world-recognized biosphere. Trails resonate with us all. They mold the landscape, provide outlets for recreation and health, contribute to our economic wellbeing and heighten our awareness of where we live and how we live there. What follows, first in summary form and then in more detail, is a vision for how we within the Frontenac Arch Biosphere can make trail work for us, our visitors and the generations to follow.

Key Themes of the Trails Strategy



Biosphere Trails Strategy - Summary

This strategy is an active document that guides, and does not dictate, future regional trail-related developments. It does not impose obligation or authority, and does not impinge on the autonomy of any group, agency interest or organization. It does not lay out a timetable, and is not intended to be a financial document.

The **Biosphere Trails Strategy** is, however, a suggested course of action that with partnerships and collaboration, will likely lead to the establishment of this region as a world-class trails destination, with significant benefits for the sustainable development of this region for a healthy environment, an enriched culture, a healthy society, and a prospering economy. The way forward will require steps to take place in a timely manner. The success of the Strategy will depend on openness, inclusiveness, participation, respect, and collaboration.



The
Gananoque
Trail – Local
Initiative

Vision: This Trails Strategy is intended to be a shared vision to connect the broad range of organizations and initiatives, drawing them together to effectively and consistently develop and manage a world-class trails network throughout the Biosphere and region, for our economic prosperity, health and quality of life. Only through collaboration will this succeed. Each partner is respected and honoured. The strategy envisioned services the Biosphere and surrounding region, and its residents and visitors. All will benefit from access to more and safer trails. Children and youth in particular will be encouraged to live healthy active lifestyles.

Objectives: The Biosphere Trails Strategy will provide a shared vision to connect the broad range of organizations and initiatives, drawing them together to effectively and consistently develop and manage a world-class trails network throughout the Biosphere, for our economic prosperity, health and quality of life. The Biosphere strives to promote health and fitness within this region, as it is clear that the use of trails greatly benefits the health of a community. An underlying objective is to promote stewardship and conservation of the region’s globally significant natural and cultural resources and heritage. The objectives of this strategy are to:

1. Facilitate trails development in ways that accommodate a broadest possible range of users; and in ways that accommodate health benefits;
2. Consult with the public on trail development, and community needs;
3. Provide consistent information about the presence and characteristics of trails in and around the region’s communities;
4. To improve the overall trail governance related to regional collaboration;
5. To enhance the trail information available on www.explorethearch.ca and to better integrate health information into data about specific trails; and
6. To promote and encourage collaboration among all partner organizations.

Below are highlights of the recommendations of the Strategy.

1) Broaden the base of the Biosphere Trails Council.

The Biosphere Trails Council has been established as a Regional Trails Council member of the Ontario Trails Council. It has been composed of organizations, agencies and interests closely related to trails ownership, operation and/or user groups. Discussions during the development of the Strategy suggest that the council should be broadened to include representation by tourism interests, the Ministry of Transportation, health units and health interests, and municipal and regional government. A broadened consortium would be better equipped to inform the extensive trail community, and to facilitate collaboration and communication.

In addition, surveys of both organizations and the public clearly state a need for municipal involvement in trails programs and development, and to incorporate such into planning. Therefore, this Strategy recommends that each municipality offers a person approved by Councils – either staff or a community member - to be their representative on the Biosphere Trails Council, similar to the Conservation Authority model. All municipalities of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere have previously endorsed the formation of the Biosphere Trails Council to the Ontario Trails Council. Municipal representation would provide an invaluable liaison for all parties. Potentially, municipalities could view their representatives as a “Trails Advisory Committee” to the Biosphere Trails Council.

2) Governance.

The Biosphere Trails Council is not a governing body, as all participants are autonomous organizations. The Biosphere Trails Council is a committee of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network. The Biosphere Network does not direct the activities, goals, discussions or interactions of the Council. The Biosphere Network facilitates discussions, and assists in hosting Council meetings, communications and interactions. The Council is not a constituted body, and does not have a Board or Executive. It has a Chair, nominated and elected by consensus by the body of Council participants. The role of the Chair is to act as facilitator of discussions, and to coordinate meetings and workshops as the Council may determine. A Board member (s) of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network will sit as participant in the Biosphere Trails Council, to act as liaison between the Council and Network.



New
Launching
docks – a
FAPA
initiative

The Council will function on the principals of openness, inclusiveness, participation, respect, and collaboration. A statement of these principles will be developed in a Code of Ethics, drawn up by the Biosphere Trails Council. This Code may be accompanied by an additional Code of Conduct for trail users, as a step towards stewardship of natural and cultural heritage as may be associated with trails and trail use.

The role of the Council will be to provide communication and reporting on trails programs and developments, as may be discussed at meetings of the council, among all participants, and to the community at large. It will make certain that all processes connected with the implementation of the Trails Strategy are communicated to all parties, the public and to all relevant municipal departments.

As an unfunded committee of the non-profit Biosphere Network, resources are extremely limited. Each trail organization in the Biosphere is encouraged to provide operational support, such as staff resources, management and administrative functions as they may be able to volunteer from time to time.

3) **Compile an annual regional trails project plan document.**

An annual summary of trails projects and priorities would be assembled, to inform all partners, municipalities and the community of larger works to be undertaken. This document would serve to communicate trails development, and would potentially assist in municipal/regional planning, and in partnerships for both work and in developing and leveraging funding applications. The regional trails project plan document would be assembled through the conduit of the Biosphere Trails Council, annually, in late fall and made available online through a partner's page on the Explore the Arch website.

4) Compile a trails priority needs list.

There are project areas and focal points that have especially large importance in developing this region as a significant trails destination. Through discussion with all partners and participants in the Biosphere Trails Council, a list of specific regional trail needs would be compiled and shared to establish and assist in setting priorities. As example, there are gaps and upgrades to be addressed in cycling transit-type routes of the region. Road-shoulder paving would assist cycling route development, aid in active transportation strategies and address safety issues. Portages at some locations are limits to the connectivity of regional paddling routes. Accessibility issues are currently under addressed. The list is, potentially, extensive.

5) Active transportation.

Currently, trails are generally discussed under headings of recreation and tourism. In sustainable community development, including healthy living and quality of life, trails can as well contribute to address health, transportation and greenhouse gas emissions issues. Active transportation is any self-propelled form of travel, and can contribute to sustainability planning in communities.

Active transportation is a component of a regional trails strategy, and would be an on-going component of trails strategy development. Particular attention would be made to collaborate with municipal and county governments and planners. This recommendation area associates strongly with recommendations 3, 4 and 6.

6) Interactive Trails.

This type of trail would be geared towards exercise, but not specifically called a 'health trail', because that excludes other reasons for using a trail. An 'interactive trail' would encompass all uses for trails, with physical activity challenges incorporated into the trail. It would also include interpretive information about nature and heritage. These types of trails in communities feature stations with instructions and basic aids for workouts of those following the paths. Currently, there are few 'health or exercise trails' in the region – Bay of St. Lawrence and Seeley's Bay, both in the Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands, are examples. Such trails cost little to build and maintain, with no fee to use, and no

travel costs to access. Also, these 'Interactive Trails' should be developed with children in mind, to make them fun.

Establishing such trails in communities throughout the region is a component of a regional trails strategy. This is a major step to providing a means of active, healthy living that is broadly accessible. Particular attention would be made to collaborate with municipal and county governments and planners, with community input to assist in promoting buy-in by community residents.

- 7) **Collaborate to create a regional identity for the region as a trails destination.** Central to this is consistency of approaches for trail information and awareness of trails locations within the community. The high calibre trails of all and many types that make up the trails system in this region should be viewed as a valuable regional asset. This trails system should therefore be promoted in collaboration with broader initiatives such as the province's regional tourism organizations, in this case The Great Waterway.

- 8) **Develop a consistent signage program.**

With numerous trails organizations and agencies responsible for trails properties, it is difficult for trail users to locate trails, and to ascertain the trails degree of difficulty, length, surfacing, opportunities and so forth, in relation to others trails. A consistent trails sign program is not intended to replace the current signage of trails organizations and agencies, but rather to supplement it by providing some commonality that would become recognizable by users. This approach relates to the previous recommendation, to 'collaborate to create a regional identity for the region as a trails destination'.

A handbook would be developed, building on existing standards and practices currently in use, researched from other Ontario Trails Council members' standards and practices. The handbook would be made available to all parties, on-line through a partner's page on the Explore the Arch website, and updated as needed.

- 9) **Provide a community education and information platform.**

An important aspect of a regional trails strategy is that the public at large has a way in which to be informed about trails use opportunities, benefits and events. As well, the public should have a means to bring forward their observations, suggestions, issues and contributions. The "News and Events" section of the Explore the Arch website could be such a platform, but will rely on input for content from trails partners and participants. This is an opportunity to relate healthy, active living and community engagement to trails users. The Biosphere Trails Council may determine discussions which may appear in this forum.

- 10) **Assistance to regional marketing efforts.**

The Biosphere Trails Council would develop an outline of programs, events and related trails activities to assist regional marketing efforts. The Explore the Arch website is designed to promote regional trails and activities. Council participants are encouraged to inform tourism marketing offices of events, well in advance of event dates. At the same time, tourism marketing offices are encouraged to participate in the Biosphere Trails Council, and to communicate with the Council and Council participants to inform of marketing programs and opportunities. The Regional Tourism Organization is encouraged to collaborate with the Council on program and product development funding applications.

11) Risk management.

Participants in the Biosphere Trails Council would share information on risk management and best practices with all other participants. The Biosphere Trails Council does not own, manage or direct programs or activities on any trail in the region, and thereby assumes no responsibility for trails programs, trails infrastructure or activity of the region. Each organization is advised to address its own needs and obligations.

12) Promoting a healthy and active lifestyle by being outdoors and eating nutritious food.

As part of the Biosphere's Healthy Communities Partnership, there has been much research done by the Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Health Unit about the positive benefits of being active while being outdoors. It is important to be in the natural environment because it has been shown that people who have regular contact with nature are less anxious, depressed and angry, cope better with stress, and are more creative. Children are also able to better focus and learn. Moreover, other positive health benefits include a better immune system, stronger bones and muscles and being better able to cope with stress.

Being healthy outdoors also ties into eating healthy foods. Eating a variety of healthy foods allows you to get the nutrients needed to be active, build strong bones and muscles, and feel good about yourself. Vegetables and Fruit, and Grain Products provide carbohydrates that are needed to fuel an active person. Milk and Alternatives, and Meat and Alternatives provide protein to build and repair muscles.

Conclusion

Trails are an important and key feature that highlights the unique region of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere. It is therefore imperative that they are a coordinated, well-developed and properly maintained system. The basis of a sustainable (long term)

strategy will be the sense of collaboration among the partner groups, to increase the sense of ownership. In conclusion, the outlined Trails Strategy will provide a foundation and a framework for the communities of the Biosphere region to be fully engaged with their surrounding trail systems.



Detailed Strategy: Introduction

A Word About the Biosphere

The Frontenac Arch Biosphere works towards promoting sustainable development within the communities that covers not only the 2700 km² region within its boundary, but the nearly 5,000 km² of the region involved in programming. The Biosphere Trails Council envisions this Trails Strategy as a unifying document for all stakeholders within this region.

Trails in the Biosphere

a. Defining Trails

What is meant by trail? The Biosphere Trails Council views trails as not just the typical hiking trail, but trails are also viewed as routes for heritage exploration, paddling, cycling, food and arts destinations, as well as diving areas. Trails are not just places to walk: they are experiences. For that reason, the Council is promoting the growth of arts and food trails linked to the many ways we can move around this beautiful area. As well, trails are about information—where they are, what they signify and what other resources are present to enrich the trail experience for home-based or travelling users. The Biosphere Network has focused considerable effort to date on building the website www.explorethearch.ca to provide users with information about different trail types.

Detailed Information on Summary Recommendations

1. Broaden the base of the Biosphere Trails Council.

The Vision: The Trail to Health and Prosperity:

a. Where we want to be: Trails for All.

This Trails Strategy is a 10-15 + year commitment and investment for the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network. This commitment will require a long-term vision towards sustainability and healthy active living that the Biosphere and partner organizations will need to support. In order for our vision of 'Trails for All' to be accomplished, the Biosphere, along with partner organizations must continually strive to educate communities about the importance of trails and being active.

b. Who has to be there together?

It is very important to recognize the connection people have to the landscape. There are numerous trail organizations in this area, and all manage their own data. In a broader

strategy, there may be similar ways of describing things. There is a flow of information online about trail systems, but the information is disconnected. The Biosphere Trails Council can be the key organization to link all of the trail groups together and assist in putting a system and discussion forum in place. To illustrate, Explore the Arch website should include an explanation for how trail information was gathered from various organizations.

Volunteers form the basis of Ontario's trail system. This vast network of trails was largely built by volunteers, such as the members of trail clubs and other not-for-profit organizations who have spent many hours building and maintaining trails. Trails continue to provide abundant opportunities for volunteering in the community, which is one measure of the vitality of a society¹. However, trail organizations must be observing their volunteers so that the volunteers do not become burned out or overburdened. Thus, the role of the municipalities in the trail initiative must become greater, in order to encourage all people and possibly provide funding for the work that is being done.

c. What binds us together in this?

All trail stakeholders are bound together in trail projects from a vision and goal to enjoy the beauty of the natural world, while preserving the environment and educating others to do so. In effect, we are all hoping to accomplish the same goals, and therefore should be united together in our causes. Patrick Connor, who represented the Ontario Trails Council at the Trails Summit in February, warns organizations and the BTC of developing trails and a strategy out of sync with other organizations. It has become evident that collaboration is a key factor in the success of this strategy. Also, it has been noted that the Biosphere has a huge potential in terms of promoting healthy active living and being a hub of doing so. The main age group that trails can have a significant impact on are children and youth. Thus, the Trails Strategy will aim to focus on children and youth, as they are often left out of other trail interests and planning.

i. What is here now.

The communities within the Frontenac Arch Biosphere are home to many networks of trails with the future possibility of developing more. There has been a great amount of work done in the past to recognize these trails and promote them among the various trail users and communities. However, there still remains a vast opportunity and potential to further develop and enhance the trail systems, highlighting the natural outdoor beauty of each community.

There are numerous local, regional, provincial, and national trail systems that are available within the Biosphere region. There are trails for hiking, cycling, paddling,

¹ Ministry of Health Promotion. 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

driving, and touring, all of which can be found described in more detailed on the Explore the Arch website (www.explorethearch.ca). The work on trails is on-going on the Explore site, and mapping is not complete. However, if trails development keeps going it may never be fully complete, which is a good thing.

2. Governance

It was discussed at the February Biosphere-led Trails Summit that municipal involvement will be critical for the success of the Trails Strategy.

Several key steps are needed in order to engage municipalities;

- A policy to include trails in planning and development;
- Partnering and Leverage – working with other sectors, including organizations and businesses, as well as across municipal boundaries;
- Sustainability plan– including trails integrated into health, active transportation, community development etc.;
- Amendments in the Municipal Plans, as appropriate; and
- Active trails groups to be encouraged.

a. Governance of working together

The key for success in this strategy is to have consistency. In each organization, everybody has a role to play. There should be a focus on leveraging roles and ideas as opposed to separating roles. For instance, it could be proposed to the government, that ‘we are doing this on your behalf’. This process gives mechanism for municipal engagement. There needs to be a way of bringing experiences, people and knowledge together. The goal is to fit hundreds of trails into a coordinated experience, which can then be taken to a municipality as a collaborative structure.

b. Information – for whom and how?

The Ontario Trails Strategy states that approximately 70 to 85% of trail users live within 40 km of a trail². However, many of these people are not aware of the trails near them. Thus, it is clear that more public awareness is needed. Following the successful North Grenville Community Integrated Trails Strategy, the Biosphere Trails Council should organize ‘Public Information Centres (PIC)’ within the communities of the Biosphere region³. A PIC would be held at a community event such as a festival, and the Biosphere Trails Council would have a separate booth describing the Trails Strategy and the

² Ministry of Health Promotion. 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

³ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

process that has been involved in implementing it throughout the region. This would be a way to engage the local community at an event they are already attending. The goal of the strategy is ultimately to get all people within the Biosphere involved, thus it is imperative to have public information sessions.

c. Building the trails we need.

The Biosphere has many trails already in existence. So the next few years of the Trails Strategy will not be building trails, but using the current trails and uniting them as a system. The Integrated Community Trails Strategy of North Grenville states that a properly maintained and well-designed trail system is a critical part of the trail user's experience. They imply that "the better the quality of the design and construction, the more attractive it will be to users, the more it will be used, and the longer it will be before requiring upgrades"⁴. This has significant implications for the trails of the Biosphere, as we are trying to make our existing trails more attractive to visitors.

Moreover, the North Grenville strategy states that it is central to try and match the trail design and type with the type of experience that its trail users desire, as there is a wide range of experience that trail users have. The North Grenville strategy states that "a recognizable and consistent high quality design will create a community asset where user experience, enjoyment and safety are maximized"⁵. This pertains to our ideas and visions about a new signage system.

From the online survey that was solicited by the Biosphere via an email broadcast, we have learned that the public requires proper trail location information and adequate direction finding signs along the trail route to maximize their experience and they also would like more information regarding trail difficulty information. Furthermore, a suggestion was raised about having multi-use trails, in order to accommodate people with walking difficulties. One solution for this concern would be to have 'all-terrain' wheelchairs made available at municipal centres or conservation areas where trailheads are⁶. These would be for the use of individuals who need a scooter or wheelchair to travel around but would also wish to experience some of the multi-use accessible trails in the Biosphere.

3. Compile an annual regional trails project plan document

This strategy is multi-dimensional with many different factors involved. Key factors in developing this strategy are; collaboration, consistency, on-going consultation, stakeholder engagement, and coordination among diverse interest groups. It was

⁴, ⁵, ⁶ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

suggested that informal facilitation would be an ideal way of facilitating change, which points to the Biosphere as a natural organization to fulfill this role. The steps towards informal facilitation are; define the terms of reference, to define the needs and priorities of the group, and to find the resources and expertise to address the highlighted needs and priorities.

Trails are owned by many people, groups and governments throughout this region, so we have to work collaboratively to get things done. The Biosphere functions as an organization where people are ready to work hard in a true community spirit. As such, there has been much effort done in regard to developing this Trail Strategy. It is therefore imperative to compile an annual regional trails project plan document to outline to all stakeholders involved what projects must be done annually. A significant portion of this project plan will involve outlining ways to solve operational challenges which relate to access, funding, expertise, maintenance and liability.

i. Accessibility Concerns:

The access to trails is a significant issue. There are many barriers preventing people from using the trails within the region. One of them is awareness, as people might not be aware of the trails systems. Another barrier is transportation. For instance, many people do not have the transportation available to drive to a rural destination to hike, or they cannot afford to. A third barrier is the appeal of trails. Many people just do not see the importance of trails because it does not appeal to them. This may be the case for many children and youth. To illustrate, “social media play an increasingly important role in marketing. Particularly for the younger generations, there is a shift away from traditional to social media and they spend a significant amount of time with this new form of communication”⁷. Children and youth are generally drawn to things that are deemed ‘cool’ by their peers, and often trails do not have that appeal. A goal of the Strategy is to promote trails and make them available particularly to youth. The question that we face is *how to get children and youth away from their screens and in the natural environment?*

ii. Funding

This section details a collaborative approach to funding strategies for future trail development. There is more logic of coordinating efforts to find funding as opposed to each organization finding funding separately. This requires a good Trails Strategy, where the gaps and needs are clearly outlined. Then, trail organizations could collaborate and support one another. This will require finding out if there are certain things in common, generally agreeing what some basic needs are within the region and recognizing those needs.

⁷ Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, 2010. *2011-2012 OTMPC Marketing Plan*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

Patrick Connor has suggested to the BTC at the Trails Summit in February that the National Trails Council will make decisions for the funding priorities of various trails projects based on how organized and responsible the trail groups are. He advised that a set of priorities must be made by the BTC in order for plans to be effective. Most importantly, trail organizations in this region need to be proactive and collaborative in order for their proposed projects to be accomplished. Furthermore, Patrick said that organizations should be more proactive in their project promotion in order to gain provincial support.

iii. Expertise

There are numerous trail organizations involved in the Biosphere that represent a significant body of expertise. The coordination of these trail groups is noted to be a key challenge in moving forward with a trail strategy⁸. There is a diverse range of expertise among represented trail interest groups of the Biosphere, which is a very useful tool. The Biosphere Trails Council meetings are therefore meant to be a platform at which this wide range of expertise can come together to harness energy and ideas. The Biosphere Trails Council will continue to provide this platform, as it is a prime organization to do so.

iv. Trail Maintenance

It is important that trails are designed and managed appropriately. Where trails are currently located in natural areas, or to be built there, the area should be monitored regularly for the effects of misuse and/or overuse. People will often create their own trail routes if trails are not carefully designed, planned, constructed and maintained in natural areas, and thus may damage sensitive habitats. The balance between use and protection can be achieved through design, planning, and construction of trails united with public education⁹. Also, this operational challenge may involve partnering with private landowners to have access to their land.

Trail maintenance is a continual effort, which requires participation from various people. "Many of Ontario's 447 municipalities and 36 conservation authorities build and maintain trails"¹⁰. Some trail associations are very thorough with trail maintenance and others may not be, depending on funding and volunteer involvement. It will take a more

⁸ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

⁹ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

¹⁰ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

focused effort from all parties involved in the Trails Strategy to properly maintain the trails within the Biosphere.

v. Liability

The issue of liability is one that is difficult to deal with in broad strategies such as this. The cost of liability insurance often threatens the feasibility of trail organizations remaining in operation¹¹. Unfortunately, there is no way to get around this issue. There are 88,000 km of trails in Ontario, many of them have varying degrees of difficulty and possibly danger and thus there is great liability¹². In order to minimize liability issues, appropriate risk management and documenting efforts must be implemented. Risk management will require user groups to be well educated and should include advocating for user responsibility, properly and clearly explain risks on trail signs, incorporating the practice of due diligence, having documents dealing with insurance, and also having enough regulation in place to allow accountable groups to manage the trails. Moreover, there should also be an access agreement with private, conservation, crown, and volunteer organizations, as appropriate.

4. Compile a trails priority needs list

The Trails Council Strategic Master Plan began in December 2011. There has been a significant effort in the past four months to propose and develop this project of the Trails Strategy. These efforts so far have included;

- Researching other trail strategies from various trail organizations across the province;
- Two online surveys were developed for both the general public in the Biosphere and interested trail organizations;
- Meetings were held with 6 representatives from trail and health interest groups,
- A Trails Summit was held on February 16, 2012 in Rockport to address the survey results and plan the next steps for this project;
- A Summary Report was written of the Trails Summit and made available to the public on the main page of the FABR website under 'Trail News' (<http://www.fabr.ca/Trails%20News.htm>);
- The Final Review Meeting was held on May 3rd in Elgin, with the successful goal of presenting the proposed Trails Strategy and figuring out the next steps in this process;
- There have been meetings held with representatives from the Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Health Unit to develop healthy eating plans and well being articles, which have been put on the Explore the Arch website;

¹¹ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

¹² Patrick Connor, February 16, 2010. *Biosphere's Trails Summit*. Rockport, Ontario.

- June was labelled as ‘Trails Month’ throughout the Biosphere where various trail activities and organizations in the region were promoted: the goal was to promote various events throughout the Biosphere to expand community involvement and knowledge;
- A different type of trail has been highlighted on Explore the Arch for each week in June, beginning with cycling, then paddling, hiking, and ending with a driving tour;
- There has been a social media (Facebook) post about the Trails Strategy to inform the public and to receive feedback; and
- There will continue to be updates added to the Explore the Arch website about the Summit Report on the ‘News & Events’ section of the main page.

Surveys

During the consultation process, two online surveys were sent out to trail stakeholders within the Biosphere, which included the general public and trail organizations or interest groups. The public survey was sent out to over 1000 people and there were 68 respondents. The trails organization survey was sent out to over 100 people and there were 24 respondents. Clearly, there is interest and involvement from the general community, however these numbers show that there is room for more involvement and interaction regarding trails in the Biosphere. The BTC is very thankful to all those who have participated in these surveys and thank you for your input and suggestions.

Through the online survey results associated with the development of the Trails Strategy, we have found that the top three uses of trails in the Biosphere for partner organizations are;

1. Walking/Hiking
2. Paddling
3. Cycling & Fitness

Similarly, the top three uses of trails in the Biosphere for the general public are;

1. Walking/Hiking
2. Paddling
3. Cycling

The public stated that trails were most important for them for the purpose of physical health and well-being. Secondly, access to public space, the outdoors and the natural environment were the next top priority, while discovering new places came in third. The public also stated that the most important thing that needs improvement in order to maximize their experience of trails is adequate direction finding signs along the route,

and trail location information. Thus, the focus of the Trails Strategy will be to develop and implement a plan to improve these two factors.

Interestingly, organizations involved in the Biosphere Trails Council stated that the most important challenges that they face are in regards to maintenance and funding. Moreover, approximately 77% of organization responders said that there are underserved areas in the Biosphere region, and that the types of trails that are lacking are mainly cycling, paddling and hiking/walking trails. Swimming trails were also noted as lacking.

The surveys proved to be a very useful tool. We gathered that the main point from the public survey was that there needs to be clearer information regarding trails; their location, gradient information, and more concise signs. In comparison, the main point raised from the organization surveys is that trail organizations need to work in greater collaboration with one another.

From the public consultation process, there were several common themes and trends addressed that were very similar to the ones outlined in the North Grenville Integrated Community Trails Strategy;

- Safe routes to and from school as well as to recreational areas;
- Funding and costs – for the trails to be built, programmed and maintained; consulting, collaboration and partnerships among organizations and governments are needed;
- Develop safety, promotion and education campaigns;
- More signage, particularly signs that are visible from the road;
- The issue that motorized users need a place to go, but some people don't want them in urban areas or areas where there are a lot of non-motorized users;
- Leisurely activities were found to be popular – dog walking, horseback riding, running/jogging/walking for exercise, are used for regular exercise;
- Collaboration and cooperation is required, particularly between different user groups, various levels of government and community groups (offers of help for grooming and so on);
- Need to promote this region as tourism opportunity;
- Need a clear set of trail standards; and
- Development of trails over private land – there are issues with maintaining agreements when ownership changes, etc¹³.

This list of needs within the current trail system shows us that there must be a clear 'trails priority needs list' that will allow all interest groups to fully participate and understand the trails systems of the Biosphere.

¹³ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

5. Active Transportation

Active transportation is any mode of travel that is self-propelled. This includes cycling, walking, running, etc. The concept and function of active transportation has been a main concern of many municipalities, as it is clear that there are numerous benefits to designing communities that have easily accessible trails. These benefits include a healthier community, safer roads, and greater environmental sustainability. It is therefore imperative to encourage people to be active and partake in active transportation, as well as the recreational use of trails. The vision that the Biosphere Network holds is that a healthier, more sustainable community actually increases the quality of life for each person in that community. A more sustainable community refers to not only being economically efficient, but also environmentally sensitive and aware. Clearly, decreasing the amount of motor vehicles on the road corresponds to a decreased amount of pollutants released into the atmosphere. Thus, promoting the use of and partaking in active transportation is a significant step towards a community being more environmentally sustainable.

The Ministry of Health Promotion is really encouraging active transportation among all of Ontario's municipalities. Thus, the development and use of all types of trails is a major provincial initiative. The Ministry seeks to make Ontario's Trails "a world-class system of trails that captures the uniqueness and beauty of Ontario's vast open spaces and natural and built cultural/heritage resources"¹⁴. As the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve covers such an extensive region of Eastern Ontario, it is important for all trail stakeholders in this region to join together to promote trails in a unified way, which will most likely bring more success to the Ministry's goal. This also includes people and places being "connected through quality, diverse, safe, accessible and environmentally sensitive urban, rural and wilderness experience trails for recreational enjoyment, active living and tourism development"¹⁵. The Biosphere is working in collaboration with Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Health Unit to develop support for healthy active living within our communities. Thus, the Biosphere has been trying to collaborate with existing trail organizations to really unify and develop existing trail systems, with plans for future trail development.

¹⁴ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

¹⁵ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptonville, Ontario.



Figure 1: 65% of survey respondents in North Grenville wanted to improve walking and cycling as transportation options¹⁶.

A concern that was brought up in the public consultation process was the need for paved shoulders for cyclists. The picture above shows a cyclist in North Grenville cycling on the road, indicating that there is a need for improved cycling lanes in the area.

The BTC will follow North Grenville's example in advocating for paved shoulders and clear signs for cyclists. Thus, we will work with the Ministry of Transportation to assess the feasibility of developing these plans. This step will include; hardening the surface of existing unpaved sections of the 'Trail' with an expanded shoulder with 'Share the Road' signage, widening the paved sections of the route, with paved shoulders and 'Share the Road' signage, and adding 'Sharrows' markings on paved roads where expanding or paving the shoulder is infeasible¹⁷. A more comprehensive cycling infrastructure will surely encourage more people to cycle and thus promote active transportation.

As communities in this region become more active and sustainable, tourists who are also active will be attracted to the area. For the future, the Biosphere is looking towards developing tourism packages, where there could be several tourist attractions previously set up for tourists to take part in. For instance, cyclist could cycle a particular route, stop at a B&B on the way, and also attend a festival in the area. The packaging strategy is one that the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council has had much success in promoting. They have packages for wine tasting, golf events, and B&B selections¹⁸. These have been successful for the Adirondack region; however, the Biosphere could be the leader in developing cycling packages within Eastern Ontario. In short, the concept and practice of Active Transportation is an important goal for the trails strategy.

¹⁶ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

¹⁷ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

¹⁸ Adirondack Region Tourism Council, 2012. *Adirondack Getaway Packages*. Lake Placid, New York. <http://visitadirondacks.com/where-to-stay/packages.html>

6. Interactive Trails

This section proposes that there be trails developed that promote interaction with the natural environment and also being physically active. The health of our children and youth is a significant concern for the Biosphere Trails Council. Unfortunately, children are no longer as active in the natural outdoors as they have been in previous decades, as well as being physically active all together. For instance, over one half of children aged 5 to 17 in 2000 did not meet recommended levels of physical activity¹⁹. This statement shows us that children need to be more active in order for their health to improve. Health decline can be directly related to inactivity. For instance, the occurrence of overall obesity in Canada is known to have increased over the previous decades²⁰. This is greatly impacting our health care system.

To illustrate, studies show that in 2001 approximately \$2.8 billion was spent on health care due to physical inactivity in Canada, which could be reduced by \$280 million if physical activity was increased by 10%²¹. This statement presents a startling image that we can in fact improve our health care system and overall health if we become a more active society. Being inactive puts a burden on the health care system. According to a study done in 2010, the “annual economic burden of physical inactivity in Ontario is \$1.8 billion”²². Therefore, it is important for organizations and municipalities within the Biosphere to make investments in both infrastructure and outreach to promote healthy active living for both recreational purposes and active transportation for commuting purposes. Having interactive trails in each community would be a way to promote active lifestyles.

The concept of an ‘Interactive Trail’ is to promote healthy, active living, and multiple forms of exercise. Trails improve not only physical health, but also emotional and mental health as well. An Interactive Trail would encompass all uses for trails, with physical activity challenges incorporated into the trail. It would also include interpretive information about nature and heritage. They should be developed with children and parents in mind, to make them fun. For instance, it would incorporate a walking trail with exercise stations, while also including heritage information or ‘nature searches’ as a game to spot certain plants or birds while walking on the trail.

The physical activity component of the Interactive Trails in communities would feature stations with instructions and basic aids for workouts of those following the paths.

¹⁹ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

²⁰ Katzmarzyk, P.T., and Mason, C., 2006. *Prevalence of 1, 11, and 111 Obesity in Canada*. Queen’s University, Kingston, ON.

²¹ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

²² Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario. Toronto, Ontario.

Currently, there are a few ‘health or exercise trails’ in the region– Bay of St. Lawrence and Seeleys Bay, both in the Township of Thousand Islands, are examples that the structures on the Interactive Trails could be modeled after. Such trails cost little to build and maintain, with no fee to use, and no additional travel costs to access. The structures could involve a wooden bar for chin ups or several steps to walk up and down. The use of trail systems by walking, cycling, skiing, etc., has a significant and positive impact upon the health of communities. The FABN trails survey done earlier this year indicates that approximately 78% of public respondents state that using a trail for physical health and well-being is very important to them. Thus, it is clear that people in this region understand how important trails are to their health.

Interactive Trails would be geared towards children, though beneficial for all ages. There is a health term called ‘Nature- Deficit Disorder’²³, where children, and even adults, do not have enough exposure to the natural environment and thus are not as healthy as they could and should be. As seen from evidence given earlier, there is great need for children and youth to be more engaged in the natural environment so that they do not develop ‘Nature-Deficit Disorder’. The goal of these Interactive Trails would be to build life-long habits in children and their parents to be in the outdoors and active. They should be designed for the whole family.

Another way to engage children in youth in trails and healthy active living is to have set times where they are encouraged to walk throughout their local community. For instance, students from South Crosby Public School participated in a “Pitch-In Week” where they walked through the village of South Crosby on April 20th, 2012, and collected garbage from the sidewalks and streets²⁴. This event was not necessarily geared at ‘trails’, however it is an example of the type of activities that can encourage youth to be more engaged and involved in their local community and also in the natural environment.

7. Collaborate to create a regional identity for the region as a trails destination

There are over 80 organizations that the Biosphere works with in order to achieve all of the initiatives that are underway. A full list of Network Members and partners can be found at: <http://www.fabr.ca/Network%20Members%20Directory.htm>. Moreover, there are also many trail organizations that the Biosphere works directly with, as well as health and transportation organizations. Here is a list of further contacts and potential partners that would help achieve the goals of the Biosphere’s Trail Strategy; the Ontario Trail Council (OTC), Ontario Cycling Association (OCA), Lanark, Leeds & Grenville District Health Unit, Child and Youth Wellness Centre of Leeds and Grenville, Eastern Ontario

²³ Louv, R. *The Nature Principle*. 2011. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. Chapel Hill, North Carolina, US.

²⁴ Lower Beverly Lake Park Management Board, 2012. *Delta Pilot*.
<http://www.beverlylakepark.com/newsletter/delta-pilot-vol2-3-2012.pdf>

Trails Alliance (EOTA), Hike Ontario, Ontario Federation of Trail Riders (OFTR), Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs, and the Ontario Bike Route (OBR).

A goal of the Biosphere's Trail Strategy is to promote this region as a prime trails destination. We will face challenges though, as "Ontario continues to have little profile as a potential destination and there is very low knowledge of Ontario as a travel destination"²⁵. Thus, it is important to actively promote the trails within our diverse area.

To encourage and promote healthy active living within the communities of the Biosphere, municipalities should organize community events where the focus is the use and exploration of trails. There are numerous events that take place on trails and can be the spring board for engaging the local community with trails. This list of events is taken directly from the North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy and includes;

- **International Trails Day:** Held on the first Saturday of June annually. Events take place in Canada and the United States primarily (sample website: www.americanhiking.org/NTD.aspx);
- **Bike to Work:** There are daily and weekly events nationally. Bike to Work takes place typically during the first week of June (sample website: www.smartcommute.ca/en/whats-happening/bike-workday);
- **Walk to School:** There is an international movement to promote children walking to school. There are day events and month-long programs, usually held in October, supported by a provincial and national organization (sample website: www.saferoutestoeschool.ca/iwalk.asp);
- **Jane's Walks:** Held in the first week of May every year, Jane's Walks are held internationally in communities to explore neighbourhoods and meet neighbours. Although primarily urban-focused, they include off-road components in many communities (sample website: <http://www.janeswalk.net/>); and
- **Terry Fox Run:** In a number of Canadian communities, the Terry Fox Run is held on a local trail. In addition to this particular activity, trails are used widely to hold fund-raising walks, runs, and bikes throughout the region²⁶.

Another way to promote healthy active living and therefore trails use is through Community Based Social Marketing. This involves promoting trails as a prime mode of transportation and recreation. It has been noted that the use of community based social marketing (CBSM) techniques create an increased awareness and greater use of the trail system. It is more than a simple marketing and advertising initiative, but it is a way of life. It is directed at altering behaviours and mindsets over a period of time through

²⁵ Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, 2010. *2011-2012 OTMPC Marketing Plan*. Queen's Printer for Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

²⁶ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

changing social norms, prompts, pledges and direct contact²⁷. This involves a change of mindset and making distinct choices. A suggestion gathered from the Final Review Meeting on May 3rd in Elgin was to have a ‘carbon footprint reduction challenge’, where people are encouraged to walk, bike, or carpool for a certain amount of time (a few days or a week). This is a type of activity that could be considered social marketing because it is promoting healthy active living through social events like a ‘challenge’.

In terms of trail development and collaboration among organizations, it has been noted that organizations should connect or link their websites, which would be a platform for information sharing. In effect, this is part of Explore the Arch’s functional purpose. The Biosphere has also developed an Explore the Arch Trails Guide, which has been distributed throughout the Biosphere in the months of May and June. This guide will include trail maps, as well as advertisements of various businesses and trail organizations within the Biosphere. It is important to continue marketing the trails within the Biosphere as a collaborative effort so that people are aware that it is a trails destination.

Stewardship is a key principal that is part of the Biosphere’s mandate- to conserve and preserve the natural environment. The reason that the Trails Strategy is being developed is because the Biosphere Network and partner organizations appreciate the beauty of the natural environment and understand the importance of conserving it. Interestingly, a high percentage of respondents from the public survey said that it was very important to promote environmental awareness and create an environmentally conscious community. In effect, a healthy community will result from people being more sensitive to and aware of the environment. These factors are critical in acting as stewards of the land of the Biosphere for all organizations involved.

Forming partnerships and collaborating among organizations will be a key feature in the success of the Trails Strategy. Through the Healthy Communities Fund, the Frontenac Arch Biosphere is working in partnership with the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville District Health Unit. They are important players in promoting healthy active living in the Biosphere region.

8. Develop a consistent signage program

The Ontario Trails Strategy implies that there is a great need for easily accessible information²⁸. One of the main comments from the online survey that the Biosphere Trails Council put forth was that it was difficult to find information about the trails and

²⁷ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

²⁸ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

where they are located. Thus, a significant goal of the Trails Strategy is to develop a consistent signage program.

A suggestion to deal with the issue of information availability is that organizations can maximize information available ahead of time online, and minimize the information to key items on the ground. The Explore the Arch website provides such information. Moreover, “consumer behaviour for travel information is rapidly shifting away from print to digital mediums with over 93% using the Internet during the travel planning process”²⁹. Thus it is important to further develop our website database to provide as much information about trails as possible online.

This Trails Strategy is proposing that signs should be consistent regarding the information about the trail, such as; distance of trail, level of difficulty (eg. 1, 2, or 3), distance to facilities (beaches, washrooms, hospitals), outline the rules and regulations (what can and cannot be done), and possibly have colour codes. Even with web technology, it was noted at the Trails Summit that people do enjoy using paper maps, so they must be incorporated into information systems.

Suggestions from the Trails Summit in February relating to signage are;

- To have ‘you are here’ points at certain stop points, GIS referenced. Also, there should be distance markers and time estimates;
- Along trails, there could be species at risk identifiers ;
- To avoid aggravation and conflicts, signs as appropriate should also indicate private properties;
- It would be ideal if a trail user had gone online and gathered all of the trail information ahead of time; and
- To have a ‘murmur project’, where there is a picture of an ear on a sign, and the trail user would call in and hear a story or a bird call.

Having effective and concise signage is critical to marketing or promoting a trail. This involves;

- Having a distinct logo: this could be a Frontenac Arch Biosphere or other organizational logo that is consistent for each sign;
- Use frequent directional signage: many comments from the survey related to there not being enough directional signage about a trail, coming from the road or while on a trail;
- Interpretive Signage: Parks Canada has many interpretive signs, as visitors to an area are interested in the cultural and natural history of an area. Thus, it would

²⁹ Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation, 2010. *2011-2012 OTMPC Marketing Plan*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

be beneficial to have more interpretive signage in other parks or trail areas that do not have interpretive signs;

- Trailhead Signage: the trailhead sign is perhaps the most important sign for a trail, indicating important information about the trail, species that might be viewed, and directional information. This should include information about the trail network, how long the trail will take, distances to key features, the path of the trail and important landmarks; and
- Road Signage: a significant amount of people learn about a trail while driving past a sign on the road. Thus, these signs should be distinct and should clearly indicate when the trail is on-road, to mark an up-coming trailhead, and when an off-road trail crosses a highway³⁰.

Signs need to be distinct and clear, entailing; trailhead and orientation, 'rules of the trail', regulations, interpretive information, route markers and trail directions. A primary goal for the Biosphere's Trail Strategy is to have consistent signage throughout the region. This will be a challenge because there are so many current signage programs, which we hope to unite. A suggestion that was brought up at the Trails Summit in February is that the Biosphere needs to develop a type of brand or logo to market the trails in this region. This would be an effective way to coordinate and promote the trails network. Forbes Simon, a respected planner from North Grenville, has suggested a very practical solution: to have one main sign at the top of a post with consistent symbols for trail difficulty such as green, blue and red. Then, a description would involve something like; 'This section of the trail is brought to you by... (the municipality of..)' . That way, the top part of the signs will be consistent, and then there can be different bottom signs beneath depending on the trail organization involved.

The signs could also indicate that a particular organization is a 'proud partner of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network'. In the future, the signs could possibly evolve towards 'Friends of the Trail', or 'Adopt a Trail'. Parks Canada signs might be the standard, but regardless, it will involve some sort of coordination and branding. "A strong destination brand is the best response to the competitive pressures facing us all"³¹. The trails signage system would contribute to a strong logo that people recognize and become familiar with.

One suggestion brought up at the Final Review Meeting on May 3rd in Elgin was that the Trailhead signs should be consistent, regardless if the individual trail signs may be different. This would require funding to have consistent trailhead signs. Another issue and concern was that an organization should not impose their brand on any community or organization. Communities and organizations all have their own distinct and unique

³⁰ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

³¹ Canadian Tourism Commission, 2011. *Experiences*. Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication. Vancouver, British Columbia.

identities, which are important to preserve. Thus there is a significant challenge in dealing with the topic of signage and branding.

One example of a very coordinated trail system is the East Coast Trail in Newfoundland, Canada. This trail network covers an area of 540 km along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. 265 km of this trail has been noted to be a world class hiking standard and the route is made up of a series of 21 paths each with a northern and a southern trailhead that is marked with unique signage³². The information on these signs is consistent and clear, with an assigned difficulty rating of either 'Easy, Moderate, Difficult, or Strenuous' for each path. The accompanying (ECTA) maps are greatly recommended for locating trailheads, understanding how the level of difficulty for each individual paths are determined and learning about distances.

In terms of rating the trail, the East Coast Trail Association has used the following conditions to rate their trail;

- Easy - Good trail conditions. Typically minor elevation changes (less than 25 meters). Usually less than 7 kilometers in length;
- Moderate - Average trail conditions. Moderate elevation changes (less than 75 meters). Usually less than 12 kilometers in length;
- Difficult - Rugged trail conditions. Significant elevation changes (up to 150 meters). Usually less than 20 kilometers in length; and
- Strenuous - Poor trail conditions. Major elevation changes (over 150 meters). Trail usually covers a very long distance³³.

Clearly, it is very important to have a well developed and consistent signage program. As stated previously, the BTC is not looking to develop new signs entirely, but to supplement them so that they will be concise across the region. This will aid the goal of promoting this region as a trails destination because people will be able to follow the signs more clearly.

Another signing suggestion has been given by Stephen Kapusta, a Transit Service Project Manager with the City of Kingston. He has given the Biosphere Trails Council some valuable suggestions for future logo and sign development plans. Mr. Kapusta suggested that for a walking trail, the Biosphere Trails Council may want to use a symbol of the Biosphere that is easily recognized at a distance and that is kept to two colours, which could be a symbol of the wind swept pine tree. It is important not get too elaborate, or the sign will be indistinguishable and not well seen. The proposed sign

³² East Coast Trail Association, 2012. *Explore the East Coast Trail of Newfoundland, Canada*. <http://eastcoasttrail.ca/trail/>.

³³ East Coast Trail Association, 2012. *Explore the East Coast Trail of Newfoundland, Canada*. <http://eastcoasttrail.ca/trail/>.

could then be framed with the FABR name at the top of the sign or the name of the trail and then the wind swept pine with a directional arrow at the bottom³⁴.

For more information about Mr. Kapusta's suggestions, please view the 'Sign Report' under the 'Trail Strategy Appendices' on the FABR website.

9. Provide a community education and information platform

It is very important to provide a community education and information platform so that people are aware of what the BTC is doing and what the goals of this project are. Also, throughout the development of the Trails Strategy, many people have become more interested and involved in the trails of this region. The development process and future plans for this project are outlined below.

Strategic direction: Three Phases

- vi. Understanding, information, awareness and marketing,

The first phase of the Trails Strategy was to undergo a public consultation process. Primarily, the goal of this phase was to understand the gaps and needs within the current trail system. This work involved developing two online surveys geared towards both the general public, as well as to organizations involved in the Biosphere, to serve as a gap and needs analysis for trail improvement. Also, there were meetings held with 6 trail and health group representatives. The main points from these meetings were geared towards promoting healthy active living through trail use, encouraging organizations to work together, developing tourism packages to market this region as a tourist destination, and to encourage municipal involvement.

Part of this first phase involved holding the Trails Summit in Rockport, Ontario, on February 16th, 2012, where the Biosphere Trails Council met with representatives from partner organizations to present the finds from the surveys and to discuss the next steps in the Strategy development.

The second phase of the Strategy involved developing the actual Strategy itself, to address technical concerns such as signage, and strive for collaboration and involvement from the municipal government. The Biosphere Trails Council held another meeting on May 3rd, 2012, where the Trails Strategy was presented and the next steps were decided. As stated previously, the Biosphere Trails Council also named the month of June will be 'Trails Month' in the Biosphere, to encourage the public to participate in trails events throughout the Biosphere.

³⁴ Stephen Kapusta, MCIP, RPP, Transit Service Project Manager. City of Kingston. Adapted June 6, 2012.

The third and final phase will involve actually implementing the Strategy into existing trail standards and practices. This phase will involve regular meetings of the BTC, including recognized representatives from each municipality and/or township, to ensure that the municipality is engaged and informed. This phase will also involve promoting active lifestyles within the communities, attracting economic growth to the region related to trail adventure packages, and also increasing the tourism-related potential trails. These outlined phases and proposed events will help to bring the community together in implementing this Trails Strategy and providing an educational platform for future trails development.

10. Assistance to regional marketing efforts

The BTC has recognized that we need to see trails as a whole asset to the community. Moving forward therefore means that we are challenged to avoid segmenting our thinking into one set of interests. Rather they coalesce as shown in the diagram below.

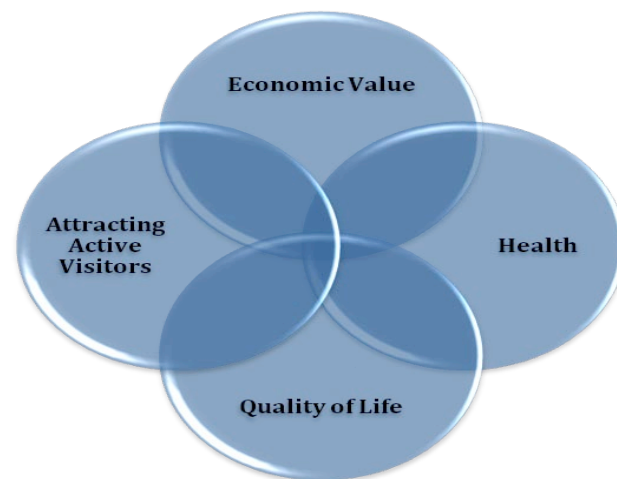


Figure 2: The Value of Trails: An Interactive Opportunity

The use of trails provides significant benefits for individual and community health, sustainable economic growth, environmental health, and active transportation. Many trail organizations and municipalities across Eastern Ontario are implementing strategies to promote and encourage healthy active living within communities, focusing especially on trail use and active transportation, as well as describing the economic value of trails.

Trails play an important role in building a healthier, more successful Ontario. The economic value of trails is mainly based upon the tourism industry. “The Ontario Trails Council estimates that trails contribute at least \$2 billion a year to the provincial economy”³⁵. Trails attract tourists to communities in Ontario and so jobs are created

³⁵ Ministry of Health Promotion, 2010. *Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy*. Queen’s Printer for Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.

which support local economies. Tourists partaking in recreational activities such as hiking or cycling will need to purchase amenities in communities, thus bringing capital to local businesses. The Frontenac Arch Biosphere Network seeks to help local businesses grow and prosper, promoting local arts and art venues, local food producers, and local stores to tourists coming into the area. Approximately 35% of respondents from the public survey stated that using trails as a low-cost and family-friendly activity was very important to them. Clearly, trails represent an affordable activity and yet they greatly contribute to local economies.

A study done by 'Go for Green' in March of 2004 indicated that there are many economic benefits to active transportation (cycling). For instance, active transportation promotes a reduction in fuel, repair and maintenance costs to users, and a reduction in health care costs due to increased physical activity and reduced respiratory and cardiac disease³⁶. Also, another positive impact of active transportation is the growth of bicycle tourism, which corresponds to an increase of bicycle sales and manufacturing profits, and an increase in property values along greenways and trails. Perhaps most relevant to the case for active transportation in regards to economic value in this region, is that with improved cycling pathways (such as paved shoulders), there is a decrease in road construction, repair and maintenance costs. It has been shown by the U.S. Federal Highway Administration that two-lane, rural roads with paved shoulders have been known to actually decrease the amount of head-on, sideswipe and run-off-the-road collisions by 30%-40%³⁷. This point was also brought up and discussed at the Final Review Meeting.

Most importantly, a well-developed and maintained trail system brings tourists into a region which may not otherwise come there. For instance, approximately 70% of Bruce Trail users state that the trail is the main reason for visiting the Greater Toronto Area, and they spend approximately \$20.00 per user per visit within a corridor of 10 km on either side of the trail³⁸. Thus, trails are a significant draw for tourism in a region.

A consistent theme for a region helps to attract tourists as well. It was suggested at the Final Review Meeting that there should be a strong identity for this region as a trails destination, which would make it appealing for tourists. For example, Prince Edward County is known as 'Wine County'. It would take a key message such as that to market this region as a trails destination. For example, this phrase could be located on the Explore the Arch website. This marketing strategy could also involve having signs indicating things that make this region unique.

³⁶ Go for Green, 2004. *The Economic Benefits of Walking and Cycling*. Gloucester, Ontario. http://thirdwavecycling.com/pdfs/at_business_case.pdf

³⁷ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

³⁸ Go for Green, 2004. *The Economic Benefits of Walking and Cycling*. Gloucester, Ontario. http://thirdwavecycling.com/pdfs/at_business_case.pdf

11. Risk Management

Risk management is a critical component of any trails strategy. The below list of recommended standards and safety items are taken directly from the North Grenville Integrated Community Trails Strategy:

“Minimum recommended” conditions typically reflect a situation that is at the lower end of the spectrum in terms of user level of service and in some cases user safety. The minimum recommended condition may be considered a threshold that the design or condition should not fall below, and the minimum recommended condition may be considered in locations where anticipated use is very low, and/or significant constraints do not enable the provision of the preferred condition. **“Preferred”** conditions or treatments reflect conditions that typically serve a broader range of uses and a greater number of trail users. Achieving the preferred condition or treatment may also provide a longer service life span. The application of these guidelines in the development, implementation, and operation of individual sites will require specific consideration of a number of factors including public safety, local, regional and/or provincial jurisdictional requirements, building codes and by-laws. Where existing on and off-road community trails and facilities are to be incorporated as part of the (North Grenville) trails system but do not meet the minimum recommended conditions described in these Guidelines, the following approach should be considered³⁹:

1. Examine the community trail or route to identify any design issues, or areas that may be seen as a potential risk to users;
2. Assess whether the trail is reasonably capable of handling anticipated levels of use;
3. Set up a monitoring program to identify emerging problems;
4. If necessary, establish an upgrading program to address areas of risk and/or emerging problems, as this helps to create awareness and appreciation towards the issue(s), and determines ways in which they can be resolved so that at least the minimum recommended guidelines can be achieved over time; and
5. Set up a maintenance program to ensure that all designated trails are in the best possible condition to achieve the objectives of this strategy⁴⁰.

^{39, 40} The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

The table below indicates a set of minimum and preferred requirements gathered from North Grenville's Trail Strategy⁴¹.

Operating Condition by Trail User Type

Trail User Type	Minimum (metres)	Preferred (metres)
One way travel (one wheelchair user)	1.2	1.5
One way travel (two pedestrians)	1.5	2.0
One way travel (one cyclist)	1.2 (in constrained areas)	1.5 +
One way travel (one in-line skater)	2.3	3.0
Two way travel (two cyclists)	3.0	3.0 +
Two way travel (two wheelchair users)	3.0	3.0 +

The Biosphere Trails Strategy recommends that these standards are put in place in the municipalities of the Biosphere.

Timeline

A practical suggestion gathered from the Final Review Meeting was that the Trails Strategy needs to be a 'living document framework, which identifies projects and timelines'. A timeline for the next 6 months would involve;

- The Biosphere Trails Council (which also should include municipal members) reviewing the Trails Strategy. This would be a way of having accountability among Trail Strategy participants;
- Moving into the sign development stage: a discussion with a representative from the MTO in Kingston was held in late May to discuss signage possibilities and future discussions in the fall should be held;
- Developing a Code of Ethics for trail use at the next BTC meeting; and
- Updating the Explore the Arch website with relevant health facts about healthy eating and exercise, provided in partnership with the Health Unit. This will be reviewed as the BTC would recommend.

⁴¹ The Municipality of North Grenville, 2011. *North Grenville Integrated Community Trail Strategy*. Kemptville, Ontario.

12. Encourage people to embrace a healthy active lifestyle.

One of the key reasons for developing a regional Trails Strategy is to encourage people to embrace the practice of having a healthy, active lifestyle. This section will include suggestions on how to have a healthy and active lifestyle, in terms of what foods should be eaten while being active in the outdoors.

Some people may ask *what is so important about being active and being outdoors?* Well, being active, or moving your body, has a benefit far beyond what most people imagine. The below list demonstrates the many personal health benefits to being active and being outdoors.

- Our brains feel better, more creative, less stressed, less anxious, less depressed and better able to cope with life;
- Our immune system is better able to both resist and cope with infections.
- Our bones are stronger and less prone to fractures and osteoporosis;
- Our muscles are stronger, more flexible and agile which makes us feel better and less prone to injuries including falls;
- Our heart and lungs are stronger with better blood flow and are able to provide more oxygen to the brain and rest of the body. The risk of a heart attack, angina, hypertension and stroke is reduced; and
- The risk of dementia, diabetes, and breast and colon cancer is less⁴².

The Canadian Guidelines suggest that adults be active for 150 minutes each week. This could be 30 minutes 5 times a week, or 50 minutes three times a week or any other combination that suits your lifestyle. School-aged children and youth should be active 60 minutes every day⁴³. For more information, visit the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines can be found at : <http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>.

The important thing is to find some activity you enjoy doing and do it often! If your activity takes place in nature you will be getting more positive benefits. Human beings evolved living with nature all around us, and so being in nature is where our brain feels most relaxed and happy. People who have regular contact with nature are less anxious, depressed and angry, cope better with stress, and are more creative. It has been noted that children are able to better focus and learn. For more information, visit <http://richardlouv.com>⁴⁴.

^{42, 43} Dr. Paula Stewart, Medical Officer of Health at the Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Health Unit. June 15, 2012.

⁴⁴ Dr. Paula Stewart, Medical Officer of Health at the Lanark, Leeds & Grenville Health Unit. June 15, 2012.

There is more detailed information regarding healthy eating in the online Appendix found at: www.fabr.ca under 'Trail News'.

Conclusion

Trails are an important and key feature that highlights the unique region of the Frontenac Arch Biosphere. It is therefore imperative that they are a coordinated, well-developed and properly maintained system. The basis of a sustainable (long term) strategy will be the sense of collaboration among the partner groups, to increase the sense of ownership. In conclusion, the outlined Trails Strategy will provide a foundation and a framework for the communities of the Biosphere to be fully engaged with their surrounding trail systems.