



Halifax Regional **Trails Association**

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August 29, 2012

Hon. Charlie Parker
Minister of Natural Resources
PO Box P.O. Box 698
Halifax NS B3J 2T9
min_dnr@gov.ns.ca

Dear Minister Parker:

RE: Response to Provincial Parks – Natural Resources Strategy

The Halifax Regional Trails Association (HRTA) is an umbrella group representing 21 separate volunteer not-for-profit associations active in developing, managing and promoting trails in the Halifax Regional Municipality. HRTA members are also members of the provincial trails organization, Nova Scotia Trails.

HRTA's primary purpose is to promote the development and wise use of trails for the benefit of HRM residents, other Nova Scotians and our visitors. Through HRTA's volunteer efforts, over \$6.7M has been raised to build trails in HRM. HRTA members are keenly interested in the development of the Province's Natural Resources Strategy.

Many HRTA members participated in the park consultation sessions held in May and June of this year and in the Voluntary Planning sessions that led up to them. Rather than comment on the limited scope of the park consultations, which focus on park values, improvements and sustainability, **HRTA asks the Minister to fully support the Parks Panel of Expertise's February 2010 final report.**

To this end, HRTA is submitting this report directly to the Minister and encourages the Minister to act swiftly to implement the Panel's recommendations.

Sincerely,

John Hawkins

Chair, Halifax Regional Trails Association

Representing:

Halifax Urban Greenway Association
Chain of Lakes Trails Association
MacIntosh Run Watershed Association
Shubenacadie Canal Commission
Cole Harbour Park and Trails Association
Atlantic View Trail Association
Carolls Corner Walkway Trail
Chezzetcook Musquodoboit Trail Association
Friends of McNabs Island Society
Halifax Urban Greenway Association
Lawrencetown Cole Harbour Trail Connector Association
Penhorn Lake Area Trail Association

Musquodoboit Trailways Association
Porters Lake/Myra Road Wilderness Area Association
Preston & Area Trails Association
Sackville Rivers Association
Second Lake Regional Park Association
Friends of First Lake Society
Beaverbank Kinsac Trail
Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Rails to Trails Association
St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails
The Bluff Trail: Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization

c.c.

Harold Carroll, Director of Parks and Recreation
Parks Opinion Comments - parkopinions@gov.ns.ca

NATURAL RESOURCES STRATEGY – HALIFAX REGIONAL TRAILS SUBMISSION

Halifax Regional Trails Association Background:

HRTA members are active in developing and managing trails through agreements with municipal and provincial governments, and private landowners. Together HRTA members manage **281 km of trails** with the boundaries of Halifax Regional Municipality.

HRTA members follow an **active transportation** philosophy that promotes human-powered activity for the recreation and well-being of all Nova Scotians. The HRTA trail system is well-managed and attracts tourists to our region for a visitor experience in some of the most beautiful landscapes in the country. HRTA trails also bring outdoor education closer to parks and wilderness areas benefiting learners of all ages.

Many trail groups within the HRTA system operate on provincial crown or parkland through letters of authority or management agreements with Nova Scotia Natural Resources. These groups open up crown land, protected areas, parkland and abandoned rail corridors to the public and encourage varied non-motorized uses that embody well-being and healthy lifestyles.

In addition to the benefits for people, trail systems provide important wildlife corridors for deer and other species unencumbered by barriers such as rivers, streams, fences and gates.

HRTA Endorsement of Panel of Expertise Report:

HRTA fully endorses the February 2010 Panel of Expertise Report on Provincial Parks, Trails, Beaches and Protected Areas released to the Steering Panel as part of the Natural Resources Strategy review.

The Panel of Expertise's report concludes that protection is the top priority. HRTA supports this and goes further to advocate that trails that connect wildlife corridors and bring people closer to nature should be protected as parkland.

Some of the HRTA trails are protected within designated or operational provincial parks (Cole Harbour Heritage Provincial Park, Second Lake -Sackville Lakes and McNabs and Lawlor Islands Provincial Park), or in protected areas (Five Bridge Lakes Wilderness Area - Bluff Trail managed by the Woodens River Watershed Environmental Organization) but in other cases they are on crown land or on abandoned trail corridors (Beechville Lakeside Timberlea Rails to Trails Association, St. Margaret's Bay Rails to Trails, and Musquodoboit Trailways Association).

The Panel of Expertise report concludes that protected areas and parkland should be consolidated within one provincial department. HRTA supports this goal which would enable trail groups to work with one department, not many.

The report recommends that the Department of Natural Resources embrace conservation values. HRTA fully supports this recommendation.

The Panel of Expertise recommends improved financial support and sustainability. From its inception, HRTA brings matching funding from other organizations, foundations, individuals and government departments to the HRTA trail system.

Over the past 15 years, **HRTA has leverage over \$6,700,000 in funding** for trail development and maintenance from other provincial department, municipalities and funding partners. Generally, none of this funding comes from NS Natural Resources. HRTA fully supports the panel's recommendation for NS Natural Resources to provide more funding to parks and trails, which in turn can be used to leverage additional funding.

And finally, the Panel of Expertise recommends that Nova Scotians participate in the management of provincial parks and trails and support partnerships. HRTA has been a model of partnership for many years and would like to see strengthened partnership opportunities to protect provincial parks and trails. However, many times, trail groups are stymied by the slow pace of NS Natural Resources approval process.

Also, although trail groups often volunteer to serve as Trail Wardens for their trails, they are NOT able to enforce provincial acts and regulations. NS Natural Resources needs to step-up its enforcement division for the protection of our parks and trails and the people who enjoy them.

Provincial Park Consultations:

Specific to the Goals for Provincial Parks as outlined in **The Path We Share**, the current Park Consultations only focused on park values, improvements and sustainability - with an overarching emphasis on financial sustainability (given the current limited parks' budget). Therefore HRTA will comment on the broader goals as outlined in the **Path We Share** document.

Shared Stewardship – is paramount to HRTA's goals of protecting parkland and trails. Without HRTA, there would be no trail system in HRM. HRTA has brought \$6.7M to the table through volunteer effort and partnerships with other organizations.

Far-sighted Planning – is critical to a sustainable park system. Currently trail groups within HRTA operate under the guidance of many provincial acts and regulations. Amalgamating the Trails, Parks, Beaches Acts would provide for better planning under one umbrella legislation.

Protection – of Nova Scotia’s natural and cultural heritage fits well with HRTA’s goals. Again more enforcement from NS Natural Resources conservation officers would help curtail and eliminate non-park uses.

Education – HRTA members bring their communities together to expand understanding and appreciation for natural and cultural heritage. HRTA members provide outreach for their trail and park areas by offering programming for youth and school groups, guided tours and information to the general public. All of this enriches the lives of citizens and engages them in sharing responsibility for protecting our heritage.

Recreation – HRTA trail systems offer countless opportunities for active transportation and engage a wide range of users from cyclists to hikers. Many trails also offer access to waterways for canoeing and kayaking.

Although it is difficult to gauge the number of people who use the trail system in HRM, many HRTA member groups have gathered quantitative and qualitative data on their trail users, which can be extrapolated to the general population.

In conclusion, the Natural Resources Strategy review has been four years in the making. It is time for the Department to take action and implement the many recommendations related to this review. Nova Scotia is rich in natural and cultural resources and it is time to protect and enhance them for present and future generations.

Report prepared by:

Catherine McCarthy

Board member, Halifax Regional Trails Association