



## **TRAIL DEVELOPMENT**

### **POLICY BACKGROUND**

#### **POLICY RATIONAL**

Throughout North America, enthusiasm for trails and support for opportunities they create is growing rapidly. These networks of routes on land or water provide linkages and pathways to natural and open spaces for recreational purposes. By linking open spaces with natural corridors, trail systems provide ecological, economic, and recreational benefits to individuals and local communities.

Support for trail and greenway corridors can be argued on the basis that trail systems contribute to the economy both directly by attracting tourists who spend outside dollars, and indirectly through increased land value. Health benefits that nurture wellness for both individuals and hosting communities is another common outcome associated with trail development. Trail corridors prove to be beneficial to both individuals and to community vitality, and in effect are key components for leading an active and dynamic lifestyle.

Over the last decade, walking has proven to be the most popular physical activity among Canadians. 85% of Canadians are involved in walking for reasons related to recreation and leisure. Furthermore, 82% of Canadians have reported that they would like to walk more often than they have in the past. (CFLRI 1995/Enviroics 1998)

In a similar study, 44% of Canadian participate in bicycling. Moreover, 66% of total Canadians have expressed that if given the proper opportunity, they would like to cycle more often. Trail and Greenway corridors can provide individuals of all ages with this opportunity. (CFLRI 1995/Enviroics 1998)

Trends indicate that interest in participating in trail related activities is increasing and will continue to grow in the future. According to the 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey, walking, bicycling, and camping were among the 4 favorite physical activities of Albertans. Since 1981, these activities have increased in popularity and are the leading recreational activities in the province. As a result of the strong correlation between favorite recreational activities and leisure opportunities provided by trail corridors, it becomes apparent that the demand for trails systems is growing. (Alberta Community Development 2000)

Trail and greenway corridors are key in providing opportunities for Albertans to lead active lifestyles and are increasingly requested by the public.

#### **DEFINITIONS**

Two terms needing definition are "Trail Corridor" and "Greenway".

1. *Trail Corridors* - A network of routes on land or water used for recreational purposes such as walking, bicycling, jogging, hiking, backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, mountain biking, and vehicular travel by motorcycles, four-wheel drive or all terrain vehicles.

2. *Greenways* - A network of linear corridors of protected open space set aside for conservation and recreational purposes. Greenways often follow linear features such as rivers, railroad corridors, canal, scenic roads and valleys.

## **RELATIONSHIP TO THE ALBERTA RECREATION AND PARKS ASSOCIATION (ARPA) VISION**

The ARPA is a non-profit organization that aims to unite province-wide advocates of recreation and parks into an effective force for building healthy citizens, communities and environments in Alberta. More specifically, ARPA envisions "A province, and communities within, that embrace and proactively use recreation and parks as an essential means for enhancing individual well-being and community vitality, economic sustainability and natural resource protection and conservation". ARPA supports and promotes healthy living, active lifestyles, and conservation of open space. Due to the multiple benefits and opportunities associated with trail corridors and greenways, ARPA embraces trail development throughout the province.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to present ARPA's formal position on trail development within the Province of Alberta.

## **BENEFITS OF TRAIL CORRIDORS AND GREENWAYS**

### ***1. Health***

Trails should ideally provide accessible, low cost opportunities for informal, active recreation close to home. Engagement in such activities results in numerous personal benefits. Personal benefits range from psychological, which attribute better mental health, and personal development, to psycho physiological benefits featuring reduced stress and cardiovascular benefits (Driver & Burns 1999).

"The relative risks of the four main Coronary Heart Disease risk factors (physical inactivity, elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure and cigarette smoking) were very similar. However, the prevalence of those risks for the three latter risk factors were small (10-18%) compared with that of failing to perform regular physical activity (59%). Physical activity is therefore a more important concern than the other risk factors, from an overall population perspective"(Casperesen 1989).

Better general health permits individuals to live independently as they grow older while contributing to a higher quality of life. Accessible trail systems motivate people to be active and participate in activities which otherwise would be overlooked due to the lack of opportunity.

In addition to direct health benefits (e.g. reduced obesity, prevention of juvenile diabetes, etc.), trails and greenways, coupled with active physical activity, also generate associated economic benefits. Through the reduction of medical care, health insurance claims, and hospital costs, the cost of institutional care decreases due to the increase of active living (Ministry of Health, Ontario 1995).

### ***2. Community Development and Interaction***

Trail corridors and greenways prove to be accessible to all income groups, particularly to those who cannot afford the cost of alternative outdoor experiences. Common trail activities such as walking, bicycling and cross county skiing prove to be quite inexpensive, providing accessible recreation opportunities to a wide range of people.

“An important by-product of trails is improved self-image and social relationships, reduced crime, a livelier community atmosphere and a lifestyle which encourages young people to find their entertainment in healthier and more wholesome ways” (Active Living-Go for Green 1996).

Trails encourage community participation and infuse pride through neighborhood groups, connecting rural and urban centers and taking ownership of community projects. Partnerships can be built among private companies, landowners, neighboring municipalities, local government and advocacy groups in order to promote community involvement (Warren 1998).

### ***3. Economic***

Trails attract a significant number of tourists contributing to local businesses and economies. Tourists have an increased interest in the outdoors and nature-based activities, and they are willing to travel to pursue special interests and experiences (Active Living-Go for Green 1995). The influx of tourists leads to development opportunities such as additional bed and breakfasts, campgrounds, motels, retail opportunities for equipment sales, outfitting opportunities and special events. Not only do trails attract new businesses, but they also provide job opportunities and lifestyle benefits that hold residents in the area resulting in dynamic changes that support sustainable local economies.

In addition, trails generate part time and full time employment in the respective areas through construction workers and laborers. Furthermore, ongoing maintenance of the trails requires a labor force.

Also, property values along and near trails are expected to rise. According to a report by the U.S. National Parks Service, increases in property value range from 5 to 32%. Increases are particularly noted near greenways that highlight open space rather than highly developed facilities (Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront 1992).

### ***4. Ecological***

Trail systems protect regionally significant natural landscapes and/or significant or unique natural features. Through protection of resources and preservation of open space, trails define zones free of human habitation and development areas. Also, greenways and corridors protect examples of natural resource features.

Outdoor recreation has also proven to be one of the best sources of environmental education. Trails and greenways provide information to visitors about the importance and value of our natural environment. Through personal interactions with vegetation, geology and wildlife, users come to learn and appreciate natural settings.

### ***5. Education***

Visitors are becoming more and more attracted to educational type experiences characterized by cultural and historical sites. Trails often follow historical routes and pass through culturally significant landmarks. Trails provide first hand opportunities to appreciate the value and importance of significant park site heritage themes and attributes.

Trails passing through countryside also provide opportunities for visitors to increase their awareness of rural life and traditions. The appreciation of lifestyles and acknowledgement of different settings and diversification of the nation will be celebrated.

# OPERATIONAL PARAMETERS FOR TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

How do we support the preservation of the quality of life in our communities and the protection of public recreation and green space when developing trails? The answer is found in commitment to the following three operational parameters:

## 1. Comprehensive Planning

Trail conflicts can occur, and may affect user groups, trail operators, adjacent landowners, wildlife, the land base and hosting communities. A comprehensive long term trail management plan should be incorporated into the initial planning process in order to ensure the project is sustainable and will leave a legacy, rather than a burden on future generations of users, trail operators, land owners, and taxpayers. Trail development projects should consider and plan to incorporate the following criteria in their development and management plans, thereby addressing any possible concerns and avoiding conflicts amongst stakeholders, including adjacent landowners.

- The up-front need for trail management should not be underestimated.
- Begin trail management planning before you start meeting with landowners or laying out trail.
- Involve people with management expertise and experience; don't address trail management without this expertise.
- Have documentation for the group's liability insurance policy available at the outset.
- Identify issues and develop solutions that reflect local input.
- Only make commitments that you can reasonably delivery on.
- Address the following points clearly so people have confidence in the management plan:
  - Who will do what, and with what commitment;
  - Costs, and where the money will come from;
  - Who makes decisions and who is accountable, and
  - What is expected of landowners, municipalities, etc who have a trail on or near their land.

## 2. Enhance Communities' Quality of Life

Trail development may have impacts including increased traffic, noise, visual change, and landscape alteration. Prior to development, trail planners should determine possible impacts in consultation with community stakeholders, and incorporated strategies for mitigating these impacts into the trail design, construction and management processes. Once again, local stakeholders input and comprehensive planning process are essential to securing ongoing community support and a successfully managed trail.

Whenever possible, trail development issues should be addressed at the local level, ensuring greater sensitivity to local needs and facilitating the involvement of the people who will be most affected by a trail.

## 3. Ensure That Management Practices Are Sustainable

Trail corridors and greenways form important recreation infrastructure which contributes to the quality of life for all Albertans. Consequently, their structure, maintenance and management have significant

bearing on the level of enjoyment. Accordingly, ARPA states its support to the following general management practices:

- Trail location and design should be planned in consultation with area land managers and knowledgeable sources.
- Trails support diverse and unscheduled recreation activities and can also provide opportunities for enjoying and interpreting diverse scenery, landforms, geological, cultural and historical features, ecosystems and natural communities.
- The needs of individuals with mobility impairments should be considered.
- The environmental impacts of trails, including aesthetic and social impacts, should be minimized through proper planning, location and construction techniques, with special attention to drainage and preserving the natural and human environments.
- Trails should be planned, designed, constructed and maintained to standards established in consultation with area land managers, taking into consideration sensitive areas, approved levels and kinds of use, maintenance requirements, costs, user safety and wildlife issues.
- Trails should be managed in consultation with land managers and area management plans. Management practices should respond to local conditions (e.g. fire hazard, disease, chemical spraying, extreme wet conditions, hunting season, etc.).
- The trail management plan should include a trail maintenance budget with identified source(s) for the required maintenance resources.

## **POLICY STATEMENTS**

### **STATEMENTS OF PRINCIPLE**

#### **ARPA believes that:**

1. Trail corridors and greenways promote health and fitness by providing an enjoyable place for individuals to participate in recreational activities.
2. Trail corridors can play a vital role in enhancing awareness of recreation and the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle.
3. Trail corridors are proactive tools against preventable diseases, cardiovascular problems and physical inactivity.
4. Trail corridors should be accessible to the widest range of individuals.
5. All citizens, regardless of abilities, should have some form of access to trail corridors.
6. Input from affected stakeholders should be an integral part of trail development.
7. Trail corridors provide communities with a wide range of benefits such as building community vitality and promoting healthy lifestyles, interaction, and sustainability.
8. Trail corridors enhance economic conditions in hosting and surrounding communities.

## **POLICY STATEMENTS**

1. ARPA will support recreation and parks organizations in the province in their efforts to ensure that governments and the general public recognize the importance of, and benefits related to, outdoor recreation, trail development and greenways provision.
2. ARPA endorses the benefits associated with trail corridors and greenways.
3. ARPA supports the involvement of land managers, communities and affected stakeholders in a pro-active decision making process for trail development and greenways provision.
4. ARPA will promote greater awareness and understanding of trail opportunities among its members through publications, newsletters and website.
5. ARPA supports the development and promotion of a code of ethics for trail users.

## REFERENCES

Active Living - Go for Green. 1996. Developing Communities for Active Transportation The Active Living and Environment Program.

Warren, N.M.1998. Nova Scotia Hiking Trails Study. Nova Scotia Trails Federation.

CFLRI (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute). 1995. 1995 Physical Activity Monitor. Ottawa

Environics (prepared for Go for Green) 1998. 1998 National Survey on Active Transportation - Summary Report. Ottawa

Capersen, C. 1989. Physical Activity Epidemiology: Concepts, Methods, and Applications to Exercise Science. *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews* (17): 423-473

Ministry of Health. 1995. Benefits and Impacts of Physical Activity for Ontario. Ontario.

National Parks Service. 1990. Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenways Corridors Conservation Fund.

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute 1996 *Popular Physical Activity* Ottawa

Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront 1992 *Regeneration Toronto's Waterfront and the Sustainable City: Final Report* Ontario: Queen's Printer.

Alberta Community Development. 2001. 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey, highlights of results. Alberta.

National Parks Association of NSW Inc. 1987. Tracks in National Parks.

[www.speednet.com.au/-abarca/NPApol08tracks.htm](http://www.speednet.com.au/-abarca/NPApol08tracks.htm)

Driver, BL., & Burns, D.H. (1999). Concepts and uses of the benefits approach to leisure. In E.L Jackson & T.L Burton (Eds.), *Leisure studies: Prospects for the twenty first century* (pp.349-369). State Collehe, PA: Venture publishing Inc.

South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism. 2000.

[www.sctrails.net](http://www.sctrails.net)

Novokwsky and Colley-Urquhart, A provisional Position Paper.