

Leading a trails movement

DISCOVERY ROUTES TRAILS ORGANIZATION




Discovery Routes
There's no end to our trails

**Strategic Plan
2017-2021**

Acknowledgment

This strategic plan exists thanks to the efforts of numerous Discovery Routes volunteers, staff and Trail Partners.

Jovette Morin of Collins Barrow was hired to facilitate the initial process. The Trail Partner survey was circulated electronically in Spring 2016. Thank you to the fifty-eight (58) respondents that completed the survey providing enormously valuable feedback. A diversity of Trail Partners were represented in the survey including volunteers, trail users, trail-action groups and municipal partners. The geographic area represented by survey respondents was also well covered across Northeastern Ontario. The follow-up strategic planning workshop on June 23, 2016 was attended by approximately 20 Trail Partners and presented at the Annual General Meeting on the same day. The survey results and initial planning session helped to shape the plan.

A special thank you to the efforts of Discovery Route Board Member Laurie Bachelder, whom provided on-going support as the lead on the strategic planning team tasked with compiling Trail Partner feedback and refining strategic directions for the Board. Thank you to the Board of Directors for the time and effort put towards finalizing the plan.

The final plan was presented and approved during the Discovery Routes Annual General Meeting on June 28, 2017.



Organization History

The original concept of Discovery Routes evolved in the late 1980's from a group of individuals and representatives of local and provincial agencies who were committed to implementing a recreational trail system in Ontario's Near North area. The goal of enriching community life was presented by linking communities across the region through traditional trails and rights-of-ways. Established in 1992, Discovery Routes Trails Organization was a trails advocacy group, the first of its kind in Ontario taking a regional approach to the development and coordination of a multi-use trail system.

In 1994, a study was completed for Discovery Routes which highlighted the importance of trails not only for their recreational value, but as an activity that contributes to the economic vitality of the region. Facts that remain even more relevant today with increased awareness of the need for healthy, active lifestyles and a new generation seeking active and experiential opportunities.

Discovery Routes was granted its not-for-profit incorporation in 1998 established for the purposes of promoting and coordinating a shared-use recreation trail network in cooperation with Trail Partners across the region. Charitable status followed in 2001.

Trail Partners became the heart and soul of the organization. Trail Partners are community interest groups, including trail users, service suppliers, educators, business operators, health promoters, environmental activists and volunteers that build, maintain and use the vast network of regional trails. Trail Partners active in the organization over the years represent the communities of Loring-Restoule, Mattawa, North Bay, Powassan, South River, Magnetawan, West Nipissing, Callander and East Ferris, as well as stakeholders in the health, environment, tourism, transportation, and recreation sectors.

In the early stages, Discovery Routes defined its role in trail development with the Trail Partners being responsible for the planning, development and maintenance of local routes, and Discovery Routes being responsible for the trail corridors linking the local routes. A primary focus of Discovery Routes since 1994 has been the designation of local trails as part of the nation-wide Trans Canada Trail. Discovery Routes has been actively pursuing funding opportunities for trail development of these corridors and has brought more than \$4 million into the region for various trail projects.

In addition to trail development, Discovery Routes provides its Trail Partners with the opportunity to participate in a variety of trail marketing and promotional programs.

Rooted in the principles that have guided the development of Discovery Routes from its beginnings, Discovery Routes continues to be a leader in trail development locally, regionally and across the Province. Today, Discovery Routes promotes a network of land and water-based trails in excess of 1000km connecting all communities in the region. A new and expanded vision will guide Discovery Routes to serve the next generation of trail users while continuing to support healthy and prosperous communities.



Mission

To facilitate partnerships for the development and promotion of the region's diverse trails systems, to stimulate economic growth and encourage the use of trails to improve quality of life while enjoying the natural beauty and history of Ontario's near north.

Vision

Discovery Routes Trails Organization is a highly-valued leader in trails sustained through partnerships that celebrates a completed and connected regional trails system supporting high quality trail experiences.

Values

Discovery Routes Trails Organization is guided by a set of core values that represent the organization's commitment to the regional trails network. The organization pursues its mission and vision by dedication to:

Leadership: The great work of Discovery Routes is a result of past visionaries who took an idea and made it happen. The organization continues to inspire remarkable contributions from volunteer leaders, professional staff, Trail Partners, and the rest of the Discovery Routes community.

Stewardship: Discovery Routes is committed to the responsible planning and management of the regional trails network through conservation and sustainable practices.

Partnership: Discovery Routes could not exist without partnership: cooperation between trail users, local action groups, communities and government agencies as well as among staff members and volunteers. Partnership and collaboration makes the most of resources available to the organization.

Sustainability: Discovery Routes sustains the regional trails network by fostering community support and growing charitable giving, government funding and revenue to sustain the regional trails network.

Integrity: The success and reputation of Discovery Routes depends on integrity as an organization. Discovery Routes is transparent, honest and ethical in all interactions and recognizes the essential responsibility to use contributions and resources to best support the needs of the trails community.



Strategic Directions

Priority 1: Sustainability

Sustainability is the overarching priority that will provide the organizational capacity to deliver the programs and services that best support the organization's Trail Partners. Like many charitable organizations, Discovery Routes struggles to find the financial resources required to effectively carry out its mission. Building a sustainable organization will be dependent on development of a diverse and sustainable revenue base to support core funding requirements, including staff salaries, office and related overhead costs.

Priority Statement: Ensure financial stability and long term continuity of Discovery Routes activities through a solid and diverse funding base

Objective 1: To establish a reliable and diverse revenue base to support core funding requirements

- Form a Fundraising Committee
- Develop a fundraising campaign that targets private donations, philanthropic giving and sponsorship
- Continue to solicit project-based funding
- Develop partner agreements with stakeholders that assigns monetary value on the programs and services delivered by Discovery Routes
- Develop cost share agreements for Voyageur Cycling Route ongoing implementation and marketing
- Explore opportunities for programming with revenue generating potential

Objective 2: To secure funding and support through increased membership and public engagement

- Develop membership campaign for renewal/recruitment of new members and Trail Partners

Objective 3: To consider the development of a social enterprise

- Study the feasibility of establishing a social enterprise within the organization that could contribute a steady flow of revenue



Priority 2: Governance and Partnerships

The organization is based on a governance structure that what was implemented in 1992. While the trails community has evolved over the past 25 years, the organizational structure has not changed to reflect current trends and realities. Dynamic changes to governance are required to manage challenges effectively and to sustain the trails network. With a focus on renewing Trail Partner communications, engaging new and diverse partnerships and enhancing the support needed to manage the organization, an improved governance structure will include policies, decision-making processes, systems and organizational structure that enhances the support needed.

Priority Statement: Develop and establish a strong governance structure through committed partnerships and improved communication

Objective 1: To establish a governance structure that uses strengths to achieve strategic vision

- Approval of Strategic Plan at 2017 Annual General Meeting
- Evaluate governance structure as defined in Constitution and Bylaws to ensure relevance to current situation. Identify changes required to comply with changes to *Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act*
- Seek Trail Partner input on proposed changes to Constitution and Bylaws
- Clarify role and areas of accountability for Directors, Officers and members/ Trail Partners
- Develop a succession plan for key positions

Objective 2: To establish a strong committed partnership network with Discovery Routes acting as a leader in the trails community

- Develop list of active Trail Partners and stakeholders across the region
- Re-engage former Trail Partners, renew existing partnerships and recruit new members with a diversity in geography, age, trail interest and community connections
- Provide volunteer opportunities for members to feel connected to the organization including opportunities for professional and personal development
- Maintain membership and engagement with provincial and national organizations and agencies with a trail related mandate
- Maintain engagement with provincial and federal governmental agencies and regularly provide organizational updates

Objective 3: To develop and implement a collaborative and coordinated communications plan

- Develop a communications plan that effectively focuses resources to maximize communication impact
- Implement communications plan that communicates mandates and needs of Discovery Routes



Priority 3: Trail Systems and Product

Discovery Routes will continue to work together with Trail Partners to complete the regional trails network and improve the quality of the trail experience. Through careful planning and collaboration, Discovery Routes will fulfill its vision of a distinct trails system of a connected and distinct trails system of provincial and national significance. Physical connections will be made to communities across the region and programming will be developed that celebrates the region's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Priority Statement: Complete, enhance, expand and connect the recreational trails network across the Discovery Routes region

Objective 1: To complete the primary trail corridors that connect in all directions around the region

- Complete the Trans Canada Trail through the near North
- Coordinate implementation of the Voyageur Cycling Route with priority focus on North Bay to Sudbury segment where the route overlaps with TCT
- Work with MTO to implement bicycle facility improvements along Voyageur Cycling Route designated sections of Hwy 17
- Revisit development of trail corridor that connects to the northern reaches of the region
- Explore partnership opportunities to develop trail connections through Almaguin Highlands
- Explore partnership opportunities that will lead to development of a rail trail through to Algonquin Park
- Explore partnership opportunities for rail trail through West Nipissing

Objective 2: To continue in the supporting role for the planning and development of local trail routes with Trail Partners

- Maintain an inventory and up-to-date listing of all trails across the region
- Complete the Voyer Trail between Corbeil and North Bay
- Support the Almaguin Community Trails to develop a competition level facility for cross-country skiing and running
- Work with Laurentian Escarpment Conservation Area committee to develop a sanctioned trail system along North Bay's Escarpment that supports a variety of trail uses
- Develop partnership that will lead to Duchesnay Creek pedestrian bridge completion at Education Center
- Support efforts of Near North Trails Association in the development of the region's snowmobile product
- Support efforts of Voyageur Multi-use Trails (VMUTS) in the development of the region's ATV product
- Continue to support local trail initiatives as they emerge



Objective 3: To establish the region as a trails destination by enhancing the existing trail experiences through trail improvements, interpretation and programming

- Coordinate implementation of bicycle facility improvements along the Voyageur Cycling Route working with municipalities through annual budgetary process
- Review archived reports that document trail values such as colonial roads and unconventional trail routes, historic events and trail values on/ near trails to further trail users connections to the trail
- Integrate trail experiences with local attraction (eg package trails with museums)
- Develop trail amenities for local and visiting trail users such as interpretive signs and potable water stations
- Develop wayfinding aids such as trailheads and navigational products
- Develop itineraries for a variety of user groups (hikers, mountain bikers, road cyclists) to increase accessibility to the trail network and appeal to a broader audience

Objective 4: To expand the regional network of trails to connect to provincially and nationally significant trail networks

- Explore expansion of Voyageur Cycling Route to National Capital Region for provincial and inter-provincial connections to enhance tourism attractiveness
- Explore expansion of cycling route to Sudbury to connect to the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail
- Continue to monitor developing provincial cycling network



Priority 4: Marketing and Promotion

The Discovery Routes are a vast network of land and water-based trails that showcase the diverse and rugged landscapes of Ontario's near north while celebrating the local heritage and culture. By building the profile of Discovery Routes and encouraging the safe and responsible use of the trails, the organization is contributing to the region's economy through local, regional and national tourism and encouraging active lifestyles connected to nature and the outdoors.

Priority Statement: Build profile of the region as a destination for trail activity contributing to the economy and quality of life while increasing the safe and responsible use of trails

Objective #1: To raise awareness of the Discovery Routes network - locally, regionally and provincially

- Develop a communication piece that celebrates 25 years of Discovery Routes and Trail Partners' accomplishments
- Develop a communications plan that effectively focuses resources to maximize communication impact
- Collaborate with Trail Partners and stakeholders to implement regular communications
- Develop special events and participatory activities designed to build profile of the trails

Objective #2: To increase use of local trails and routes in a safe and responsible manner

- Promote trails within schools to increase youth and families use of local trails
- Provide volunteer opportunities for youth and promote through high schools (mandatory high school hours)
- Promote trails through Health Unit programming and regional community health centers
- Identify list of target groups
- Partner with community safety agencies and health promoters to deliver a Community Bicycle Education Program that focusses on safe and responsible trail use
- Continue to support Trail Partner activities and events

Objective #3: To position the Voyageur Cycling Route/ Trans Canada Trail as a "Trail of Distinction" that will help communities reach tourism targets

- Develop marketing plan for Voyageur Cycling Route
- Host special events for sectional launch of Voyageur Cycling Route
- Develop marketing collateral for Voyageur Cycling Route promotions
- Apply to Province for Trail of Distinction status

