



Responsible Trail Management in Gatineau Park

Consultation Report, April 16, 2015

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I — Project description

Objective

The objective of the project for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park is to offer a varied trail network experience that meets users' needs and allows for new activities. This experience must conform to the NCC's legal obligations toward species at risk and the requirements of the Park's conservation mandate.

- Raise awareness among users about the problem of unofficial trails and their negative environmental impact (habitat fragmentation and sensitive habitats).
- Work with user groups to find and implement solutions for reducing the number of unofficial trails.
- Raise awareness among users about stewardship to have them promote responsible use of the trails.
- Change the trail network to offer the kinds of experiences that users and neighbouring communities are looking for, while mitigating their environmental impact.

Background

This is the second public consultation on responsible trail management in Gatineau Park. Located in the heart of the Outaouais region, this natural environment offers a wide range of year-round recreational activities. The official trail network covers 200 kilometres of trails for hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Over the years, a vast network of unofficial trails has emerged parallel to the official trail network, which is having a serious ecological effect on the Park's sensitive habitats.

The following factors contribute to the growth of an unofficial trail network:

- Multiple points of entry into Gatineau Park exist. Many are unofficial, located in surrounding neighbourhoods.
- A certain segment of users (frequent users and outdoor and sports enthusiasts) create and use unofficial trails for a more solitary experience, or to create travel and recreation routes not provided by the official trail network.
- The public feels a deep attachment to the Park and enjoys the benefits it provides.
- The public frequently asks for new trails to be developed.
- People who create and use unofficial trails are most likely unaware of their ecological impact.

Some of the consequences resulting from unofficial trails are as follows:

- The size of the unofficial trail network is now equal to or greater than the official trail network.
- The environmental damage being caused in sensitive habitats (e.g. Eardley Escarpment) is threatening species at risk and reducing the quality and quantity of habitat in the Park.
- The complex network of unofficial trails does not appear on official maps. These trails are unmarked and no standard signage has been installed on them. This poses a risk to user health and safety.

II — Consultation process

Overview

Date: April 16, 2015

Location: Meredith Centre, 23 Cecil Road, Chelsea, Quebec

Time: 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Format: Workshop

Consultation objectives

- Inform participants about the situation, based on the trail assessment performed in the summer of 2014.
- Discuss the proposed trail management principles.
- Discuss collaborative models and possible solutions for reducing the environmental impact of these trails.
- The outcome of this discussion will help in developing project guidelines and in defining the vision that should be reflected in the final concept.

Consultation procedure and tools

- **Presentation:** The status of conservation and the threats to the ecological health of Gatineau Park were explained in a presentation.
- **Workshop:** Each group was asked to answer a questionnaire. Participants could also write down their ideas and comments on the questionnaire. A map of legally protected habitat was available for consultation at each table.
- **Plenary:** A summary of each subgroup's discussions was presented to all participants, and the written comments entered in the questionnaire were compiled.
- **Note:** An earlier public consultation took place in June 2014. The consultation report from that event is available [here](#).

Invitations and promotion

- A direct invitation was sent by email to the following stakeholders:
 - Interest groups (cross-country skiing, hiking, walking, rock climbing, biking, mountain biking, horseback riding) and environmental groups
 - Community associations
 - Media
- The workshops were also announced on Facebook and Twitter.

Participants

Community

- 56 people, representing over 15 groups

Elected officials

- Caryl Green, Mayor of Chelsea

Media

- CBC/Radio-Canada

III — Comments gathered

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed management principles?

Most of the people who participated in the public consultation agreed with the proposed management principles, but asked for certain clarifications, such as the difference between a closed trail and a seasonally closed trail, and how the NCC determines the priority of the

various principles involved. The respondents also offered their opinion on the various management principles proposed.

- In their opinion, making an unofficial trail official invites risk, since more people will use it. They liked the collaborative approach and the fact that the public and groups are consulted. This would make people more likely to abide by the code of conduct.
- They believed that developing a code of conduct with users and interest groups is a good approach.

Question 2: If not, what changes would you suggest?

- Hiking and mountain biking trails
 - Increase the number of single-track trails that meet International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) standards.
 - Combine two activities on some trails.
 - Set a tentative trail opening/closure date, similar to the practice for opening/closing winter trails.
- Improve connectivity within the trail network.
 - Include abandoned, unmarked routes on existing maps to make them into new trails.
 - Connect year-round trails in Chelsea with others in the NCC network.
- Raise awareness with the general public about the code of conduct on trails.
- Enlist the collaboration of the Park's various users.
 - Have groups and clubs partner in managing the trails.
 - Emphasize trail network management, not trail closures.

Question 3: What approaches would you suggest in order to reduce the ecological impact of unofficial trail usage and backcountry activities?

- Collaborative approach
 - Sensitive species: raise public awareness and share information with various groups.
 - Limit conflicts between the various user groups by assigning them shared tasks.
 - Have various groups of users participate in trail development and maintenance decisions.
 - Inform users when a trail has to be closed and the reason why.
- Awareness-raising and practical steps
 - Install signs about species at risk.

- Raise awareness among the public and user groups about the environmental impact of inappropriate trail use.
- Establish mitigation measures for official trails.
- Improve signage and other measures
 - Conceal entrances to unofficial trails, as well as the blue, yellow and white markings on trees.
 - Respect IMBA principles on the trails.
 - Improve signage on the trails: reduce the distance between signs, especially in winter.
 - Reduce parking fees at official trail entry points, which will reduce traffic on unofficial trails.
- Improve the multi-use trail network
 - Since winter biking and backcountry skiing are incompatible activities, develop trails that combine winter biking and snowshoeing.
 - Ensure that some trails are available to all types of user.
 - Keep horseback riding trails open.

Question 4: How do you see your group's/community's involvement in the implementation of these approaches?

- Volunteers and collaboration
 - Restore and maintain the trails.
 - Have different Park user groups participate in trail-related consultations and decisions.
 - Promote mutual support among the various groups and implement a community ambassador system to promote best practices on the trails.
 - Make single-track mountain biking trails official.
 - Ensure compliance with the trail code of conduct.
 - Gather funds and seek out potential sponsors.
- Promote public and user education through information sharing with and among groups.

Question 5: What management models have you experienced elsewhere that could be used for Gatineau Park?

- Proactive trail management: set restrictions such as “remain on the trail” and close trails when conditions are poor.
- Collaborative approach:

- Among the various groups of Alpine Club of Canada users: manage the maintenance and development of climbing sites by frequent users.
- Between the Ottawa Mountain Bike Association (OMBA) and the City of Ottawa
- Between private owners and mountain biking and downhill ski groups in East Burke, Vermont (Kingdom Trails)
- A few management models recommended by participants: Mont Saint-Hilaire, Pink Lake, Mont Ste-Marie, Adirondacks and Algonquin Park.
- Suggested conveniences and other services
 - Access to radio and cell signals throughout Park territory.
 - Establishment of a shuttle system to reach the trails.

Question 6: Do you have any further comments? (gathered during team discussions)

- Everyone acknowledged the NCC's efforts to involve various user groups in the process (for example, decisions about opening or closing specific trails).
- Year-round trail networks in Chelsea should be connected to the NCC trail network.
- Areas of the Park that are closed should be more clearly identified.
- Too much information about sensitive species places them at even greater risk.
- The presence of mountain bikes on hiking trails threatens the ecosystem.
- The multi-use trails are not amenable to every type of activity.
- The sale of summer passes was recommended to fund trail redevelopment.

Other comments

- In addition to community education, people should be made aware at the Park entrance of the impact of inappropriate trail use through brochures containing maps of the Park showing ecologically sensitive zones.
- The environment must take priority at all times.
- Develop looped trails and connections between trails.
- Close loops rather than make new ones official.
- Develop trails that allow new groups of users, such as BMX enthusiasts, to enjoy the trails.
- Propose mitigation measures whenever possible instead of closing trails.
- The project's purpose lacks definition.

- Use signs to make parking lots more visible.
- Make Chemin de la Montagne and Notch Road safe for cyclists.
- Priority for public access to pioneer roads and trails is important (i.e. Cooper and Cowden roads, and the Hope trail), because they represent our cultural and historical heritage.
- New official trails should not be maintained, which will give users a true nature experience.

IV — Compilation of results

The comments gathered will be taken into account when responsible trail management principles are modified, and the final document will reflect the opinions of participants. Comments about management approaches and group participation in the workshops will be discussed during the next consultation phase.

The results of this analysis will guide decisions about the choice of trails to be added to the Gatineau Park network. The NCC will work in partnership with stakeholders to improve the user experience and ensure sound management while respecting the environment.

V — Next steps

Following this public consultation, four working groups were created to pursue discussions on trail management approaches, management problems and community participation. The themes explored by these working groups include mountain biking, hiking and backcountry activities, winter trail users, and the residents neighbouring Gatineau Park.

Meetings with the working groups will begin in the fall of 2015 and continue for six to eight weeks. More than one consultation may be necessary with some working groups. As needed, a second round of workshops will be organized this winter. The results of these consultations will then be compiled before a third consultation is held with interest groups.

The work accomplished through this project will be used for the review of the Gatineau Park Master Plan.



**Discussion Summary
Responsible Trail Management Workshop**

April 16, 2015

Trail management principles (30 minutes)

1. Do you agree with the suggested management principles?

2. If not, what would you suggest?

Possible types of collaboration and potential solutions to reduce the ecological impact of unofficial trails (30 minutes)

3. What approaches would you suggest in order to reduce the ecological impact from unofficial trail usage and backcountry activities?

4. How do you see your group's or community's involvement in the implementation of these approaches?

5. What management models have you experimented with elsewhere that could be used for Gatineau Park?

Other comments

Thank you for your cooperation.