Summary

The *Saskatchewan Rails-to-Trails Conversion Guide* is a handbook developed to help organizations that are interested in converting abandoned rail lines into usable trails. When we prepared this handbook, we reviewed Saskatchewan rails-to-trails projects in all stages of development and interviewed people involved in those projects. We then developed step-by-step guidelines and compiled links to resources to help make your rails-to-trails project a success. This document supports the vision of the Saskatchewan Trails Association to "provide support to local trail clubs including resource materials, education programs regarding trail development, facilitate communication among trail clubs and fundraising."[1]

The goal of this Guide is to:
- Provide real-life perspectives from participants in rails-to-trails projects in Saskatchewan
- Compile a range of resources in one place for interested trail committees
- Address common considerations and questions that arise in rails-to-trails projects with recommendations and strategies

We have broken down the rails-to-trails process from conception to post-construction into eleven steps. Each step lists objectives, possible considerations, and recommendations. The Guide also includes appendices for each step that provide links to documents, example projects, guidelines, and regulations.

The eleven steps are:

Step 1) Establish a trails committee
Step 2) Determine the rail corridor status
Step 3) Corridor valuation
Step 4) Feasibility study
Step 5) Public outreach
Step 6) Planning
Step 7) Liability and trail insurance
Step 8) Financing and funding
Step 9) Considerations for trail building
Step 10) Trail building management
Step 11) Trail design enhancements

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[1] Saskatchewan Trails Association, 2016. *About Us: Our Vision.* [online] Available at: http://sasktrails.ca/about-us/ [Accessed 29 January 2017].

The Guide also contains case studies of real-life, rails-to-trails conversions projects, from the perspectives of local spokespeople who were interviewed for this Guide. The projects range from trails conceived but never built to completed and managed conversion sites. They include a city-wide trail development plan that contains a rail-trail component, a successful urban rails-to-trails intervention, a multi-town connective recreational corridor, a rural hiking trail in an environmentally unique landscape, and trails that lead users out of town for a nature-based respite. These case studies are incorporated into the Guide in two ways. First, excerpts from them provide real-life examples of the steps and recommendations discussed throughout the Guide. Second, at the end of the guide, we include full descriptions of each case study.

This Guide is intended for use by any organization or individual at any stage in the rails-to-trails development process. There is no one way to conceive, build, and maintain a rails-to-trails project, as each project will be unique to the context and conditions in its community, but this Guide discusses some of the considerations common in a built-environment project.

• Chapter Summaries

The Guide is divided into 11 steps. The steps are roughly chronological but many of the individual parts will be discussed throughout the Guide.

1) Establish a trails committee
   This step is for those who are just beginning to consider a rails-to-trails project. Who will, and who should, lead this project? Who else may want to be a part of the trail committee? What are the objectives of the committee and the local community? What is the function of the trail? This section includes examples from Saskatchewan-based case studies, the steps they took to create a trail committee, and how they addressed the above questions.

2) Determine the corridor status
   Is the rail line you're interested in actually abandoned? How can a group determine its legal status? What are the government regulations that lead to abandonment? This step includes links for federal railway companies and an overview of government requirements.

3) Corridor valuation
   If the trails committee must purchase the corridor, this step lists the requirements for the railway company, the federal government, and the

trail committee. It answers questions such as: Who is best to contact? Can we access the corridor before purchasing? How much will the land cost, and how is that determined? What happens to remaining infrastructure such as tracks, bridges, and tunnels? Is the land contaminated and what are the mitigation requirements? This step includes examples of Net Salvage Value Determination, recommended research for the trail committee, and how to evaluate environmental contaminants on and in the corridor.

4) Feasibility study
This step outlines how to conduct a feasibility study for the project. It outlines what to include in a rails-to-trails study, who to share it with, and how to promote the study to build support for your project. The appendices include links to online feasibility studies and guidelines for creating a feasibility study.

5) Public outreach
Public outreach consists of building relationships with public agencies, your community, and the positives and negatives of working with each. Who can help the trail committee with the project? How can we advertise the benefits of converting the corridor to a trail? What happens when there's negative feedback for trail construction, and how do we positively manage it? This section includes recommendations on how to build positive relationships, who to approach, and different methods that Saskatchewan projects have successfully used.

6) Planning
Many communities have created community plans that include recreation and travel. This section highlights the importance of consulting municipal and/or community plans. This section also covers utility companies and the benefits and concerns of working with them.

7) Liability and trail insurance
Questions always arise when planning trail construction. Who is liable for injuries? What protection can the building and managing agencies offer themselves in case of such an occasion? What rights do landowners have in regards to trail use of land? This section contains recommendations on risk management, negligence, occupier's liability, landowner liability, legislation, and insurance. The appendices contain examples of other management strategies from a variety of projects.

8) <u>Financing and funding</u>
As always, money matters and trail projects can be expensive. Who will pay for what? How can we raise funds for land cost, initial tasks, construction, and on-going maintenance? Do we have to? Are grants available, and how do we access them? This section lists various ways to obtain and maintain the necessary funds for trail development and management from events and programming to savings and budgets. The appendix hosts a list of available grants and funding available from provincial to federal sources to start you off.

9) <u>Considerations for trail building</u>
Design and construction variables are covered in this section. How do we handle an environmentally sensitive area and mitigate damages while providing a scenic and interesting trail? Who will use the trail, and how do we build to encourage those users? This section covers many of the construction components to consider: environmentally sensitive areas, user types, surface options, crossings, and infrastructure (bridges, underpasses, and tunnels). The appendices list many resources ranging from design guidelines used by other projects to builder specifications to master plans.

10) <u>Trail building management</u>
What happens once the project is built? Are there additional security considerations? What happens if there is conflict on the trail, such as misuse or opposing user groups? Who's going to take care of the trail from management to funds to general maintenance? This section covers how the trail could function post-construction, including security, trail conflicts, user speeds, and management and maintenance strategies.

11) <u>Trail design enhancements</u>
Once the trail is ready to be built, it may be time to add some elements that will create a unique trail. This section covers inclusions such as the installation of art, community gardens, and lighting, and how to go about finding out from the community if they want these additions.