



PATHWAY TO SUCCESS:

A STRATEGY FOR TRAIL DEVELOPMENT IN SASKATCHEWAN

Provided by: Saskatchewan Trails Association in consultation with The Government of Saskatchewan,
Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association & Trail Stakeholders
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The Saskatchewan Trails Association further thanks the numerous individuals and organizations who contributed to the knowledge and research upon which this strategy is built.

Special thanks to the Strategic Planning Committee: Curt Schroeder, Greg Swanson, Ed Spratt, Jo-ann Carignan-Vallee and John Firnesz.

A full list of contributing stakeholders is provided in **Appendix B** of this document.

Photos in this document courtesy of Curt Schroeder, the Saskatchewan Trails Association, Trans Canada Trail and Microsoft Office Online.



A MESSAGE FROM THE SASKATCHEWAN TRAILS ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Saskatchewan Trails Association, I want to thank members of the trail community both in and outside of the Province for their unselfish efforts to share knowledge and contribute to the completion of Saskatchewan's first provincial trail strategy document.

Pathways to Success: A Strategy for Trail Development in Saskatchewan will accelerate the efforts of trail builders to build more and better trails for those who like to walk, cycle, snowmobile, dog-sledding or trail ride, among other forms of motorized and non-motorized trail-based activities.

Built and designed properly, trails add life to a community much like other types of green space such as parks and playgrounds. Trails are part of our provincial heritage, including early Aboriginal cultures, and are currently experiencing a renaissance in their construction and use. Trails enable sport development, promote physical fitness, support urban commuting, and enhance tourism and economic development. For these reasons, trails deserve wide public support.

Implementing this strategy is the next step but involves the commitment of many stakeholders and interested parties. The door is open for you to contribute to making this vision a reality. I encourage you to contact the Saskatchewan Trails Association to discuss how you may become a trail champion in our province.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Curt Schroeder".

Curt Schroeder
President, Saskatchewan Trails Association
January 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pathway to Success: A Strategy for Trail Development in Saskatchewan is a strategy intended to guide the actions of all trail stakeholder organizations. This is neither a strategy of the Saskatchewan Trails Association alone nor is it a government strategy. It is an overall vision supported by principles, goals and actions broadly accepted by all stakeholders, designed to align and coordinate the work of stakeholder groups in the coming years.

As Saskatchewan's population grows and becomes increasingly urbanized, so too does the desire of Saskatchewan people and tourists to enjoy outdoor pursuits. Many of these outdoor activities take place on trails or with trails as a means of accessing a destination where an outdoor experience occurs.

Vision Statement for Trails in Saskatchewan:

A sustainable, coordinated network of rural and urban trails through Saskatchewan which are designed and maintained to standards that meet a diversity of user needs and enhance the health, tourism and economic prosperity of Saskatchewan communities while respecting the natural and cultural environment and highlighting the beautiful attributes of our land.

Trails are no longer just for adventurous and seasoned outdoor adventurers. Trails have become part of the lives of a significant and growing proportion of our population. There are increasing expectations that trails are designed to provide a standard, safe and maintained environment with interesting and educational information along the way.

A trails strategy can enable Saskatchewan to benefit from the extensive social, economic, environment, health and tourism opportunities accrued from well designed and maintained trail system. The number of volunteer organizations and governmental agencies with an interest in trail design, building and maintenance are increasing but lack coordination and alignment. A trails strategy provides the mechanism for these groups to work cooperatively and collaboratively toward common ends in a non-competitive manner. With limited resources, it is only logical to provide an overarching plan to coordinate the efforts of many toward the accomplishment of a few important goals.

This strategy was founded through extensive stakeholder consultation including trail users, community leaders, government representatives, and national experts. It is informed by extensive literature review of strategies and trails practice theory.

For the purposes of this strategy, a trail is defined as either urban or rural including:

- Foot and horse paths with natural surfaces
- Multi-use paths with manufactured surfaces
- On-road and off-road bicycle routes
- Walkways, boardwalks and sidewalks
- Former rail lines
- Rails with Trails
- Road shoulders and ditches
- Designated active transportation routes
- Historical and cultural transportation corridors
- Road allowances and machinery tracks
- Forestry and mining access roads designated as trails
- Winter paths for snowmobiles
- Waterways
- Canal/irrigation service roads

Trail users are diverse, including but not limited to: walkers, hikers, joggers, cyclists, inline skaters, horseback riders, cross-country skiers, mountain bikers, snowshoers and dogsledders. People with disabilities or mobility challenged and those who use motorized scooters can also use trails. Included also are those who use specialized recreational vehicles: snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, 4X4s and dirt bikes. Waterways are enjoyed through kayaking, canoeing, and rafting.

Trails benefit our health, economy, social interaction, community identity, environmental conservation and preservation of natural heritage. However, Saskatchewan's trail network lacks a provincial strategy, local planning, resources to build and maintain trails and in many communities, volunteer resources to support trail development. Too few trails are available to satisfy the growing numbers of users with increasingly diversified uses (e.g., ATVs, snowmobiles, cycling, etc.), which consequently creates escalating safety concerns.



Trail development and maintenance in Saskatchewan is faced with many challenges. Those cited in the literature and the consultations include:

- Lack of planning for trails
- Integration with municipal planning
- Multiple trail uses
- Declining volunteerism
- Increased use of motorized vehicles on trail
- Lack of public policy
- Lack of applied research and evaluation of trails
- Education on trail use
- Awareness and promotion of trails
- Lack of resources
- Inconsistent trail maintenance
- Risk management
- Bureaucratic “red tape”
- Lack of standardized trail protocol
- Abandoned rail lines
- Northern Saskatchewan trail development bureaucratic “red tape”

Pathways to Success sets forth seven guiding principles upon which all future planning and action must adhere. These principles are drawn from the consultations and best practices as observed in the literature.

1. Ensure cooperation and collaboration of stakeholders;
2. Facilitate trail use diversity;
3. Promote safety, health and social development;
4. Respect land ownership;
5. Provide stewardship of the environment and natural/cultural heritage of trail sites;
6. Foster economic and tourism development;
7. Incorporate best practices in planning and development.



To move forward, *Pathways to Success* provides a set of recommended actions/initiatives for the trails community in Saskatchewan. Recommendations are categorized into six primary themes:

1. Mobilizing leadership and organizational support to trails:
 - Identify trail champions
 - Develop a provincial governance structure
 - Ensure provincial government leadership
 - Establish an inter-ministerial collaborative mechanism
 - Foster local trail group development
 - Develop policies to support trails
 - Establish a conflict management mechanism
2. Building and sustaining quality trails:
 - Develop a five-year provincial trail plan
 - Establish building, maintenance and operating guidelines
 - Establish environmental impact assessment guidelines
3. Adequately funding trails:
 - Secure sustainable funding for trail governance
 - Secure core funding for maintenance and operations
 - Source funding for new trail development
 - Establish a special initiative funding mechanism
 - Maintain charitable status for donations
4. Providing education and awareness:
 - Provide accessible information about Saskatchewan trails
 - Provide public education about trail use
 - Offer stakeholder information and support
5. Managing risk:
 - Assess liability for trail builders, owners, and stewards
 - Develop guidelines accordingly
6. Evaluation:
 - Determine best practices for trail development, maintenance and governance
 - Facilitate evidence-based research in partnership with post-secondary institutions

Each action/initiative is supported by a suggested lead, involved stakeholders and timing over a four year period.

Pathways to Success is an overall vision for trails in Saskatchewan. Its success is contingent upon the engagement and support of many stakeholders and the leadership of the Saskatchewan Trails Association and the Province of Saskatchewan.

FOREWORD – OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

In the spring of 2007, the Saskatchewan Trails Association met with the former provincial Department of Community, Youth and Recreation to discuss possible projects to be funded under the Community Initiatives Fund. This meeting led to an application to develop a provincial trails strategy.

In the meantime, the STA hired its first part-time administrator to provide the association with more support. A CIF application for funding was successful that, in part, proposed a provincial trails symposium to be held in 2008. In the fall of 2007, the STA President attended the SPRA Annual General Meeting in Estevan, where the first details of a major new granting program were unveiled which encouraged SPRA member organizations to launch larger programs to serve the community.

A grant from the new Recreation Investment Partnership Program was secured in January 2008, which substantially expanded the original CIF grant and proposed a more exhaustive process of engaging multi-stakeholders in the development of a provincial trails strategy. A consultant was hired in January 2008 to facilitate the strategy development process.

The Saskatchewan Trails Association wanted to ensure that the strategy was truly representative of the interests of all trail stakeholders in the province. It was determined that the process would begin with a series of consultations representative of health, economic development, tourism, environmental organizations and user groups. Stakeholders were interviewed to determine their priorities, issues and hopes for trail development. An extensive review of literature and best practices in other Canadian and international jurisdictions was also undertaken. A draft strategy was presented to stakeholders for final feedback at the Saskatchewan Trails Conference in Regina, September 19 & 20, 2008.

Pathway to Success: A Strategy for Trail Development in Saskatchewan is a strategy intended to guide the actions of all trail stakeholder organizations. This is neither a strategy of the Saskatchewan Trails Association alone nor is it a government strategy. It is an overall vision supported by principles, goals and actions broadly accepted by all stakeholders designed to align and coordinate the work of stakeholder groups in the coming years.



Saskatchewan trails are a provincial asset. This strategy lays the foundation from which to draw the greatest return from this important asset for our health, our economy – including the tourism industry – and our environment.

INTRODUCTION

Before the prolific use of the automobile, Saskatchewan was criss-crossed with an abundance of transportation routes. Pathways used by trappers, canoe routes mapped by voyageurs and nomadic patterns used to follow buffalo migration carved their way into the geographic past of our province. Footways, cattle trails and horse paths used by farmers, ranchers, merchants and their families to conduct work, visit neighbours and enjoy nature evolved as communities were built and European migration increased.

As the population grew and automobiles became the primary means of transportation, natural pathways were subsumed by paved roadways; natural areas became urbanized with sidewalks and streets to facilitate transportation. Today's trails mimic the natural pathways by providing logical routes for non-automobile transportation. Through appropriate planning and designing, we accommodate a natural means of transportation, create opportunities to enjoy the nature environment and places for social interaction.



DEFINING TRAILS

Trails can be a variety of things to a variety of people. Trails can be as simple as footpaths to the local convenience store or as complex as either a national or international trail system such as the Trans Canada Trail or Appalachian Trail. For the most part, trails can be urban and rural and include:

- Footpaths and horse trails with natural surfaces
- Multi-use paths with manufactured surfaces
- On-road and off-road bicycle routes
- Walkways, boardwalks and sidewalks
- Former rail lines
- Rails with Trails
- Road shoulders and ditches
- Designated active transportation routes
- Historical and cultural transportation corridors
- Road allowances and machinery tracks
- Forestry and mining access roads designated as trails
- Winter paths for snowmobiles
- Waterways¹
- Canal/irrigation service roads

Trail users are diverse. They include, but are not limited to, walkers, hikers, joggers, cyclists, inline skaters, horseback riders, cross-country skiers, mountain bikers, snowshoers and dogsledders. People with disabilities or mobility challenges and those who use motorized scooters can also use trails. Included as well are those who use specialized recreational vehicles: snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, 4X4s and dirt bikes. Waterways are enjoyed through kayaking, canoeing, and rafting.²

Although some trails are intended for a single use, for example the Trans Canada Snowmobile Trail, others accommodate multiple uses such as the Meewasin Valley in Saskatoon or Wakamaw Valley in Moose Jaw. Some trails are seasonal, such as the snowmobile trails in the winter and waterways in the summer, while others are operational year long. The Trans Canada Trail, for example, is designed to serve five core activities: hiking/walking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.³

¹ Adapted from Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy, Ministry of Health Promotion, Government of Ontario

² Adapted from Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy, Ministry of Health Promotion, Government of Ontario

³ Adapted from Active 2010 Ontario Trails Strategy, Ministry of Health Promotion, Government of Ontario

A CASE FOR TRAILS

Trails are important to the well-being of communities. Trails positively impact our health, our economies, our social interaction, community identity, the conservation of the environment and preservation of natural heritage.

Healthy Communities/Healthy Living

The connection between healthy physical environment, healthy communities and people is undeniable. Evidence suggests that children and adults benefit from contact with nature that green strategies can now be viewed as public health strategies.

- In a 2002 study conducted by Australian researchers on urban environments and physical activity, it was found that the most utilized recreation facilities were informal and located within close proximity to the user. The most frequently used facilities were streets and public open spaces. The study recommended that communities invest in creating streetscapes that enhance walking and active transportation.⁴
- Researchers in England (Pretty et al, 2005) and Sweden (Bodin and Hartig., 2003) have found that joggers who exercise in natural green settings with trees, foliage and landscape views feel more restored and less anxious, angry and depressed than people who burn the same amount of calories in gyms or other constructed settings.⁵
- Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth conducted annually by Active Healthy Kids Canada identifies active transportation to school, access to and use of parks and playgrounds, access to and use of facilities and municipal regulations, or bylaws, that support active participation as a primary benefit to overall health.
- In 2008, Canada received a "D" on its report card, indicating much work is required to increase activity levels in children.⁶



⁴ Gilles-Cort, B & R. Donavon. The Relative Influence of Individual, Social and Physical Determinants of Physical Activity. Social Science & Medicine 54 (2002).

⁵ Fromkin, H & R. Louv. The Powerful Link Between Conserving Land and Preserving Health. Land Trust Alliance Special Anniversary Report 2007.

⁶ It's Time to Unplug our Kids. Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. 2008.

Economic and Tourism Benefits

The economic and tourism benefits of trails have been quantified and support that trails, without question, contribute significantly to local economies and tourism business.

- In a study conducted in 2006, it was found that snowmobilers contributed direct expenditures of \$56.3M - \$65.2M to the Saskatchewan economy with associated revenues accruing to the Government of Saskatchewan through sales tax, fuel tax and liquor taxes of \$4.8M to \$5.5M annually.⁷
- An economic impact study completed by Smith Gunther Associates Ltd. reported that in 2005, Canadians spent \$3.3 billion on activities directly related to ATVing, which involved an estimated 975,000 all-terrain vehicles and over three million Canadians.
- Current Canadian research indicates that people are taking shorter, yet more frequent, vacations closer to home with a more family-oriented focus. Trails can meet this demand.⁸
- An economic impact analysis of the Trans Canada Trail in Ontario found that a total of \$2.4 billion will be generated annually in value-added income in the province through the trail, and a total of \$152.8 million will be continuously injected into the economy by either non-local user expenditures or new money.⁹ Benefits were attributed in part to job creation, construction costs, trail maintenance, non-local or tourist expenditures and tax revenue.

Stewardship of the Environment

Trails guide human interaction with the environment to maximize enjoyment while minimizing impact on sensitive areas and protecting natural areas. Trails facilitate greater use of human powered transportation.

- Trails provide environmental stewardship in two primary ways: protecting natural areas from development and minimizing the negative affects of automobile transportation.
- Trails centralize the impact and facilitate the management of outdoor recreation. These linear parks can serve as buffers around wetlands, watersheds and accesses to rivers and lakes.
- Active transportation is the use of human powered modes of transportation – such as cycling, walking, in-line skating, skateboarding, ice-skating and cross-country skiing – to take us to work, school, shopping or social events.¹⁰ Well-connected urban trail networks provide options for commuting and decreasing the use of motorized vehicles, therefore, reducing the production of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Trails provide an opportunity for outdoor education programs, which can be utilized by schools and community groups. Such programs, in turn, encourage the preservation of natural and cultural heritage sites and facilitate a better understanding of the environment.

⁷ Estimated Economic Impact of Snowmobiling in Saskatchewan, Regional Economic and Co-operative Development, Government of Saskatchewan 2006.

⁸ Schutt, A.M. 1997 *A Comprehensive Economic Impact and User Study of the Bruce Trail, Ontario, Canada*. Hamilton, Ontario, The Bruce Trail Association.

⁹ Price Waterhouse Coopers. 2004 *Economic Impact Analysis – Trans Canada Trail in Ontario*.

¹⁰ City of Winnipeg Active Transportation Study 2005

Social Impacts

Trails facilitate positive community interaction and a sense of pride in one's place.

- Physical activity trends are moving away from organized sport and towards more unstructured recreational activities where families and communities exercise and interact together.
- Trail activities facilitate participation and interaction between a diversity of community members, age groups, individuals and families. Trails provide opportunities for social interaction such as: community walking groups, voluntary trail maintenance and conservation work. With appropriate design, trails can also accommodate the recreational needs of the elderly and people with disabilities.¹¹
- Participation in trail activities is inexpensive and easily accessible to community members. Community members grow a sense of pride in their community through the beauty of their trail network.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Trails enable human interaction with areas of cultural significance to maximize learning while minimizing impact on sensitive sites.

- Trails complement efforts to protect and preserve cultural heritage by providing a defined access to sites of either cultural or community significance.
- Trails provide educational and interpretive opportunities and increase environmental, cultural awareness and appreciation. For example, Wanaskewin allows trail users to connect with the land in a way that First Nations people may have viewed it over a period of several hundred years prior to colonization.



¹¹ South Australia Recreational Trails Strategy 2005

CURRENT STATUS OF TRAILS

Trails are built and maintained largely by the efforts of volunteer-driven, not-for-profit organizations with varying levels of support from either their community or local, provincial and/or federal governments. In many instances, municipal recreation departments, municipal or provincial government agencies, and urban, regional, provincial or national park authorities are responsible for trail operations. Trail development is often made possible through the support and cooperation of private landowners, who make their land available at no cost for others to enjoy. Trail development and management is a working example of how good things happen when volunteers, landowners, local businesses and government organizations work together for the public good.¹²

Although these situations do occur in Saskatchewan, the reality is that trail development is negatively affected by the absence of a provincial strategy, a lack of local planning and resources to build and maintain trails, and in many communities, declining volunteer resources to support trail development. Too few trails are available to satisfy growing numbers of users and increasingly diversified uses (e.g., ATVs, snowmobiles, cycling, etc.). This raises serious safety concerns. Stakeholders lack information about relevant government regulations and liabilities. Generally speaking, trails in Saskatchewan are underfunded, underdeveloped and under promoted.

In the last few decades, all provinces/territories' developed trails, mostly on Crown lands, have active provincial and local trail building groups and users. The 1992 Trans Canada Trail proposal to develop a national trail linking all provincial/territorial capitals appears to have contributed to accelerated interest in trails generally, especially hiking and cycling. In 2002, the Canadian Trails Federation was federally incorporated to provide national leadership and coordination to the trail community. In the winter of 2008, the Canadian Trails Federation, Canadian Council of Snowmobile Organizations and the Canadian Off-Highway Vehicle Distributors Council proposed a joint initiative called the National Trails Coalition, which is an early attempt to coordinate trail development and use at the national level. The initiative is anticipating federal funding for a national conference on trails in 2009.¹³

¹² Adapted from National Trails Coalition: United for a Stronger Trail System, 2008

¹³ National Trails Coalition: United for a Stronger Trail System. 2008. Request for funding submitted to the Government of Canada by the Canadian Trails Federation, Canadian Council of Snowmobile Organizations and the Canadian Off-Highway Vehicle Distributors Council.

CHALLENGES

Trail development and maintenance in Saskatchewan is faced with many challenges. The following is a summary of those challenges most consistently cited in the consultations and literature.

Planning of Trails – Planning a trail is more than designating a worn foot path through a natural area. Trail planning involves feasibility assessment, environmental impact assessments, negotiating rights of way, assessing liability and insurance needs, and engaging and sustaining volunteers. The development phase is most often more onerous and time consuming than the actual trail building process. Human and financial resources do not currently allow for appropriate planning and development of trails.

Integration with Municipal Planning – Trail development is most effective when planned in tandem with community developments. When included with community infrastructure planning, trails can complement new and renewed neighborhoods, parks and transportation corridors. Unfortunately, recreational infrastructure is often an afterthought.

Multiple Uses – Multiple trail uses create issues of safety and enjoyment. For example, the use of ATVs cannot be combined with horseback riding; even combining cycling and walking requires appropriate design, signage and trail etiquette. Although shared use is desired, it must be done so in a planned manner.

Increased Use of Motorized Vehicles – There is a national trend toward demand for trails that accommodate snowmobiles, ATVs and dirt bikes. These trails require specific attention to building and safety standards and environmental impact assessments. Furthermore, there is currently no formal mechanism to resolve conflicts either between motorized and non-motorized users or impacts on adjacent lands.

Volunteerism – Although Saskatchewan enjoys the highest volunteer rate in Canada, volunteer rates are declining as is the number of people in many Saskatchewan rural communities. As trail needs expand, greater amounts of work must be spread across fewer people who are, overall, volunteering less of their time.¹⁴

Risk Management – Concerns about liability deter many land owners from allowing trail development on their property. The cost of insurance threatens the sustainability of current trails and discourages trail expansion and new trail development.

Lack of Standardized Trail Protocol – The safety and attractiveness of trails is negatively affected by a lack of standardized trail building and operating protocols. Saskatchewan trail users cannot assume either uniform signage or communications about trail usage such as trail conditions, challenge levels or accessibility.

Education – Trail etiquette is not well understood. Education is required to ensure safe, appropriate use of trails that is respectful of others and the environment. Trail stakeholders also require more access to educational resources on issues pertaining to the planning, development and maintenance of trails. There is currently no single definitive source from which to receive accurate guidance on trail development.

¹⁴ 2000 National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participation, Statistics Canada

Awareness and Promotion – There is a general lack of awareness about trails and related issues in Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan people need to be informed about the trail network that is available to them, the social, physical and health benefits accrued from trail use, and the availability of trails within their communities.

Lack of Resources – A lack of an adequate long-term funding mechanism threatens the sustainability of existing trails and discourages new trail development. Overall governance of trails also requires sustainable funding to ensure leadership, coordination of trail users, a province-wide code of trail conduct, minimum trail standards and coordinated education and awareness efforts.

Trail Maintenance – Trail maintenance is dependent upon trail operators. Trail stewards range from community volunteer organizations to government organizations. As a result, trail maintenance can be inconsistent and unpredictable. Timely response to environmental issues – for example, damage caused by either weather or seasonal affects on wildlife – may not be addressed appropriately.

Bureaucratic “Red Tape” – Land ownership can vary from private ownership to public, from Crown ownership to First Nations ownership. Trail developers may become frustrated with the variety of ownership rules and regulations, as well as the protocols involved to navigate through development across the various ownership structures. There is no one source of guidance to assist in this process.

Public Policy – Provincial legislation and policy needs to be reviewed within the context of trails. There is currently no collaborative/inter-ministerial mechanism with a mandate to address trail development, maintenance and use. Duty to consult must also be considered when developing trails on traditional and Crown land. Efforts to improve federal policy are ongoing though the National Trails Coalition, but to date there has been little contribution from Saskatchewan on this front.

Rail Lines – Rails-*to*-Trails is a worldwide movement to convert abandoned rail lines to trails. Abandoned rail lines present challenges due to maintenance costs, road crossings and impacts on adjacent lands. Rails-*with*-Trails is another approach that facilitates the use of land alongside rail lines for trails, but it must also address safety issues in the design and maintenance of the trail. With over 5,000 km of abandoned rail in the province, there is now opportunity to convert sections into multi-use community owned trails (**Appendix C**).

Northern Saskatchewan – Trail development in Northern Saskatchewan is a unique challenge due to vast distances and limited population from which to draw volunteer trail operators. Trails provide a livelihood to some Northern residents; therefore, promoting multi-use trails can also impact their livelihoods.

Applied Research – Funding for feasibility studies to inform trail building is required as is the evaluation and monitoring of trail usage and trail user satisfaction. The impact of trails on the health, economic and social well-being of communities is limited and requires further insight. Research provides the basis for effective public policy, e.g., the economic impact of specific trails, monitoring number of users, etc.

A TRAILS STRATEGY TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

As Saskatchewan's population grows and becomes increasingly urbanized, so too does the desire of Saskatchewan people and tourists to enjoy outdoor pursuits. Many of these outdoor activities take place on either trails or with trails as a means of accessing a destination where an outdoor experience occurs.

Trails are no longer just for seasoned outdoor adventurers. Trails have become part of the lives of a significant and growing proportion of our population. There are increasing expectations that trails are designed to provide a standard, safe, maintained environment with interesting and educational information along the way.¹⁵

A trails strategy can enable Saskatchewan to benefit from the extensive social, economic, tourism, health and environment opportunities accrued from a well designed and maintained trail system. The number of volunteer organizations and government agencies with an interest in trail design, building and maintenance is increasing, but lacks coordination and alignment. A trails strategy provides the mechanism for these groups to work cooperatively and collaboratively toward common ends in a non-competitive manner. With limited resources, an overarching plan must be provided to coordinate the efforts of many toward the accomplishment of a few important goals.

Properly planned, constructed, signed, mapped and maintained trails provide a safe environment for trail activities to occur. The alternative is a risky environment where trespass, unsafe practices and dangerous behaviour go unchecked. Through proper governance, guidance and collaboration facilitated by a comprehensive trails strategy, we have the potential to develop an enviable trail system in open space that would be second to none in North America.¹⁶



¹⁵ South Australia Recreational Trails Strategy 2005

¹⁶ Adapted from National Trails Coalition: United for a Stronger Trail System, 2008

VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Vision

A sustainable, coordinated network of rural and urban trails through Saskatchewan that are designed and maintained to standards that meet a diversity of user needs and enhance the health, tourism and economic prosperity of Saskatchewan communities, while respecting the natural and cultural environment and highlighting the beautiful attributes of our land.

Guiding Principles

Pathways to Success sets forth seven guiding principles upon which planning and actions must adhere. Principles are drawn from consultations and best practices as observed in other jurisdictions.

Cooperation and Collaboration of Stakeholders

Trails involve a multitude of local, regional, provincial and national interests. Stakeholders from all levels contribute meaningfully to the planning, development and maintenance of trails.

Trail Diversity

An effective trail network accommodates a diversity of trail uses from walking and cycling to snowmobiling and ATVing. Consideration should be given to ensure a balanced network accommodating a sufficient quality of easily accessible trails for all uses is available.

Safety, Health and Social Development

All trail development must maximize the potential for social and health benefits accrued through effective trail design and maintenance. Such benefits as increased physical activity, psychological wellbeing, safety and interaction between community members should be realized and measured.

Respect for Ownership

Trails utilize a variety of lands, including those used for agricultural, commercial, mining, logging and parks. Trails cross private land, Crown land and First Nations Reserves. Trail development must respect land ownership and traditional land uses – e.g. hunting, trapping and berry picking – or culturally significant areas, such as burial grounds and sacred sites, may be affected.



Stewardship of the Environment and Natural/Cultural Heritage of Trail Sites

Trail development, use and maintenance must serve to protect the environment and natural heritage while facilitating human use and enjoyment. Approved trail usage must take into consideration environmental sensitivity. For example, ATV use should be directed to appropriate geographical areas. Linear parks may best run adjacent to particularly fragile areas, thereby diverting all foot traffic within the area but providing enhanced appreciation for the fragility of the region.

Economic and Tourism Development

A trail network can and should contribute to the economic diversity and prosperity of Saskatchewan communities through tourism, employment and business development opportunities. At a broader level through trails, we must realize cost savings generated by fostering healthier communities. Trail development and operations must also protect economies by ensuring there is no negative impact to either adjacent land values or uses. Economic effects should be measured.

Best Practices in Planning and Development

Capitalizing on the potential benefits of trails is dependant upon good planning, development and maintenance. There is no need to “reinvent the wheel.” Best practices are available in Saskatchewan and other jurisdictions; such knowledge should be gathered and shared to increase the success of trail development efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommended actions are categorized into six primary themes:

- Mobilizing leadership and organizational support to trails;
- Building and sustaining quality trails;
- Adequately funding trails;
- Providing education and awareness;
- Managing risk; and
- Evaluation.

Each theme is supported by a set of actions/initiatives. These actions/initiatives do not represent a “wish list” of activities; they are the actions that are required to ensure success in each of the themed areas.

1. Mobilizing Leadership and Organizational Support to Trails

Identify Trail Champions – Identifying strategic champions will go far to accelerating trail development efforts in the short term. Champions may include individuals, organizations and/or companies; by securing their support and engaging them in early advocacy efforts, returns may be realized more quickly. Establishing MOU’s with champions is one way to clarify involvement, roles, expectations and place measures on support.

Provincial Governance Structure – A provincial coordinating body for trails representative of the public, stakeholder organizations, Aboriginal organizations, and the private and public sector is required. This body is required to ensure adequate trail leadership, advocacy, research, planning, policy and evaluation as well as the coordination of stakeholder interests.

The Saskatchewan Trails Association serves as the “*de facto*” leader for trail development in Saskatchewan, although this role has not been formalized by the provincial government. If the STA is to provide a provincial coordinating body, legitimacy in its role is required. The development of a MOU with relevant government stakeholders is seen as vital for trail development in Saskatchewan.

Provincial Government Leadership – Trails cross the interests of a variety of Ministries within the provincial government. Environment; Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport; Health; Highways; Municipal Affairs; and Education all have a role to play and benefits to accrue from trail infrastructure. However, no single department serves in a designated lead role, and there is no single Ministry as such to champion trails within the provincial government and serve as a subject matter expert in this area. Determining leadership within the provincial government is necessary to grow and sustain a provincial trails strategy; a dedicated trails consultant within government is needed.

Inter-ministerial Collaboration – Because trails impact a variety of public interests and sectors, a collaborative inter-ministerial mechanism is necessary to advance a provincial trails strategy. The mechanism is required to review existing and monitor upcoming federal and provincial legislation, policies and programs from a trails perspective.

Local Trail Group Development – Community-based leadership is critical to trail development and maintenance. A strategy to foster local action by forming and supporting volunteer trail groups is required. Where possible, linking groups to existing economic, tourism, social and/or health mechanisms will assist in advancing the trails agenda through the use of longstanding and successful bodies.

Policy Development – There is currently a lack of policy for trail development, maintenance and operations. Policies are needed to define stakeholder roles, trail use and ownership structure and to ensure clarity in the development and management of trails. Policy must set forth the obligations of stakeholders to the public including consultation and the provision of information regarding trail use and trail conditions.

Conflict Management Mechanism – Evidence from other jurisdictions suggests that stakeholder/landowner/trail user conflict is inevitable. A mechanism that identifies and addresses conflict must be in place before conflict arises. Such a mechanism can serve to identify conflicts as early as possible in the planning stages, facilitate solutions to competing interests and provide third party dispute resolution services.

2. Building and Sustaining Quality Trails

Provincial Trail Plan – A comprehensive long-term plan for trail development in Saskatchewan is required. The plan must build upon existing trails, identify lands designated for trails, and map projected trail development and use. The planning process and outcomes must contribute to the social and economic well-being of communities and the protection and preservation of the environment and natural history. Ease of access to urban and rural populations is critical as is attention to accommodating a multitude of trail use interests.

The plan must capitalize upon opportunities such as abandoned rail lines (**see Appendix C**), canals and other corridors, including Trans Canada Trail initiatives, with the intent to develop linear parks.

Building, Maintenance and Operating Guidelines – A provincial trails network is dependent upon consistent building, maintenance and operating principles that users can depend on for safety and ease of use. The development and implementation of a trail building and operating guidelines manual is necessary to ensure resources are invested in trails that are safe and facilitate maximum enjoyment. Building guidelines must address protocols in locating, designing and constructing trails. Operating guidelines must include standardized mapping, signage, maintenance, monitoring the safety of trails, and communicating hazards and closures (e.g., farmers spraying fields, flooding).

Environmental Impact – Development of a standardized protocol requiring trail builders and stewards to ensure trail building and maintenance efforts are consistent with preserving and protecting the environment, natural heritage and wildlife habitat of the trail area and adjacent land is required.

3. Adequately Fund Trails in Saskatchewan

Governance – Governance of trails requires sufficient resources to implement the recommendations provided within this strategy in a consultative manner with trail stakeholders from across the province. The annual cost to provide appropriate leadership and governance to trails can be quantified using business planning processes and benchmarks derived from other jurisdictions. Adequate and predictable support over the next five years from funding sources, including the Province of Saskatchewan, is required.

Core Funding for Maintenance and Operations – The aggregate cost to maintain and operate Saskatchewan’s existing trails is unknown. The quality of the current trail infrastructure in relation to anticipated trail standards is also unknown. An inventory of existing trails and their state of repair is required. From this information, annual operating costs can be determined and adequate public and private funding sources established.

New Trail Development – As emphasized throughout this strategy, new trail development requires appropriate planning with consideration to the environment, economy, and health of our communities. New trails must be considered within the context of either a trail network or system across Saskatchewan. Funding for new trail development should be separate from other funding programs and ensure evaluation against a set of metrics that ensure the long-term success and contribution of new trails.

Special Initiative Funding – There are ongoing needs for planning and consultation, special maintenance programs, educational and awareness programs and leadership development. Adequate resources to address special project needs are required.

Charitable Status – Trails are a viable option for charitable donations. Maintaining charitable status and promoting awareness of trails as a worthy charitable cause is a worthy cause.

4. Providing Education and Awareness

Accessible Information About Saskatchewan Trails – Development of an online resource providing accurate and timely trail information to Saskatchewan residents, tourists, funders, partners and stakeholders is required. Paper-based information resources including maps, trail signage guides and trail etiquette is necessary for tourist trail use.

Public Education – The development and implementation of a trails education program on the respectful use of trails is recommended. The program should involve key messages including the safe use of trails, trail etiquette, interpreting trail signage, etc. Program information should also be delivered on and off the trail through signage, brochures, school-based presentations, community organizations and public service announcements.

Stakeholder Information and Support – Trail stakeholders require a consistent source or “go-to” for accurate information from the Saskatchewan Trails Association. Resources are required to provide consultative support and information to trail stakeholders, including individuals, trail groups, non-governmental and governmental organizations involved in trail building, operating, advocacy and promotion. Educational resources should include best practices, governance suggestions, funds development approaches and community engagement/consultation how-to’s.



5. Managing Risk

Trail Builder, Owner and Steward Liability Assessment – There is an immediate need to investigate risk (i.e., risk to users, stewards and land owners) and take actions to manage risk, while still maintaining an interesting trail system. The need for legislative/policy changes that place either the onus and risk primarily on the user or a cap/limit on liability for trail operators should be investigated. Recommended levels of liability insurance for all stakeholders should be provided.

6. Evaluation

Best Practices – Information on best practices in trail development and maintenance through ongoing surveillance of trail literature and collaboration with trail groups in other jurisdictions must be investigated and defined.

Evidence-Based Research – There is a need to actively engage in research to assess the impact of trails on the social and economic well-being of communities, mental and physical health of individuals, on the environment, on natural history and wildlife habitats.

CONCLUSION: A CALL TO ACTION

Pathway to Success: A Strategy for Trail Development in Saskatchewan sets forth a direction and priorities for the future. This alone is not sufficient.

A plan is provided in **Appendix A**. The plan provides a suggested set of actions, lead agencies and involved stakeholders to encourage action over the next four years. The plan is intended to encourage further dialogue with key stakeholders.

The process to develop this strategy has mobilized a community of trail stakeholders across Saskatchewan. The challenge now is to maintain the enthusiasm, hope and energy that these stakeholders have to offer by providing effective leadership and evidence of progress. The development of this strategy involved two rounds of community consultations. The first round involved interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders. Data from the first round of consultations provided the basis for the draft strategy. The second round of consultations involved a two-day forum where trail stakeholders provided feedback on the draft strategy.

APPENDIX A: PLAN OF ACTION

Primary Initiative	Suggested Lead(s)	Key Stakeholders	Timeline			
			2009	2010	2011	2012
1.0 Mobilizing Leadership and Organizational Support to Trails						
1.1 Identify trail champions	TPCS, STA	All stakeholders	X			
1.2 Establish a provincial mechanism for trails governance	STA	TPCS, STA members	X			
1.3 Define provincial government leadership	TPCS	Government of Saskatchewan	X	X	X	X
1.4 Inter-ministerial collaboration mechanism	TPCS	Related Ministries, STA	X			
1.5 Local trail group development	STA	TPCS, REDAs, Sask Tourism	X	X	X	X
1.6 Policy Development	TPCS, STA	Related Ministries, SUMA, SARM	X	X	X	X
1.7 Conflict management mechanism	TPCS, STA	Related Ministries, SUMA, SARM		X		
2.0 Building and Sustaining Quality Trails						
2.1 Development of a five year provincial trail development plan	STA, TPCS, TCT	All Stakeholders	X	X		
2.2 Development of building, maintenance and operating guidelines (trail standards)	STA, TPCS	Related Ministries, SUMA, SARM	X	X		
2.3 Development of a standards protocol for environmental impact assessment	STA, TPCS, Environment	Related Ministries	X	X		

TPCS - Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport
 STA - Saskatchewan Trails Association
 TCT - Trans Canada Trail

Primary Initiative	Suggested Lead(s)	Key Stakeholders	Timeline			
			2009	2010	2011	2012
3.0 Adequately Fund Trails in Saskatchewan						
3.1 Establish adequate resources for ongoing trail governance and support.	TPCS, CIF, STA, SPRA	Related Ministries	×			
3.2 Establish core funding support for ongoing maintenance and operations	TPCS, CIF, STA, SPRA	SPRA, SUMA, SARM, STA members	×			
3.3 Establish funding support new trail development	TPCS, CIF, STA, SPRA	SPRA, SUMA, SARM, STA members		×		
3.4 Establish special initiative funding for new projects	TPCS, CIF, STA, SPRA	SPRA, SUMA, SARM, STA members		×		
3.5 Maintain charitable status	STA		×	×	×	×
4.0 Provide Education and Awareness						
4.1 Development of information resources for trail uses	STA	STA members, Sask Tourism, Trail Users		×	×	×
4.2 Development and implementation of a trails education program	STA	STA members, Sask Tourism, Trail Users			×	×
4.3 Development of resources to support and inform trail stakeholders	STA	Related Ministries, SUMA, SARM		×		
5.0 Managing Risk						
5.1 Develop a task force to investigate risk and recommend actions to manage risk and inform stakeholders	STA	All Stakeholders		×	×	
6.0 Evaluation						
6.1 Monitor and implement current best practices	STA	All Stakeholders	×	×	×	×
6.2 Facilitate research to investigate the impact of trails	STA	All Stakeholders			×	×

TPCS - Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport
STA - Saskatchewan Trails Association
TCT - Trans Canada Trail
CIF - Community Initiatives Fund
SPRA - Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association

APPENDIX B: CONSULTATIONS

Round One Consultations – Interviews and Focus Groups

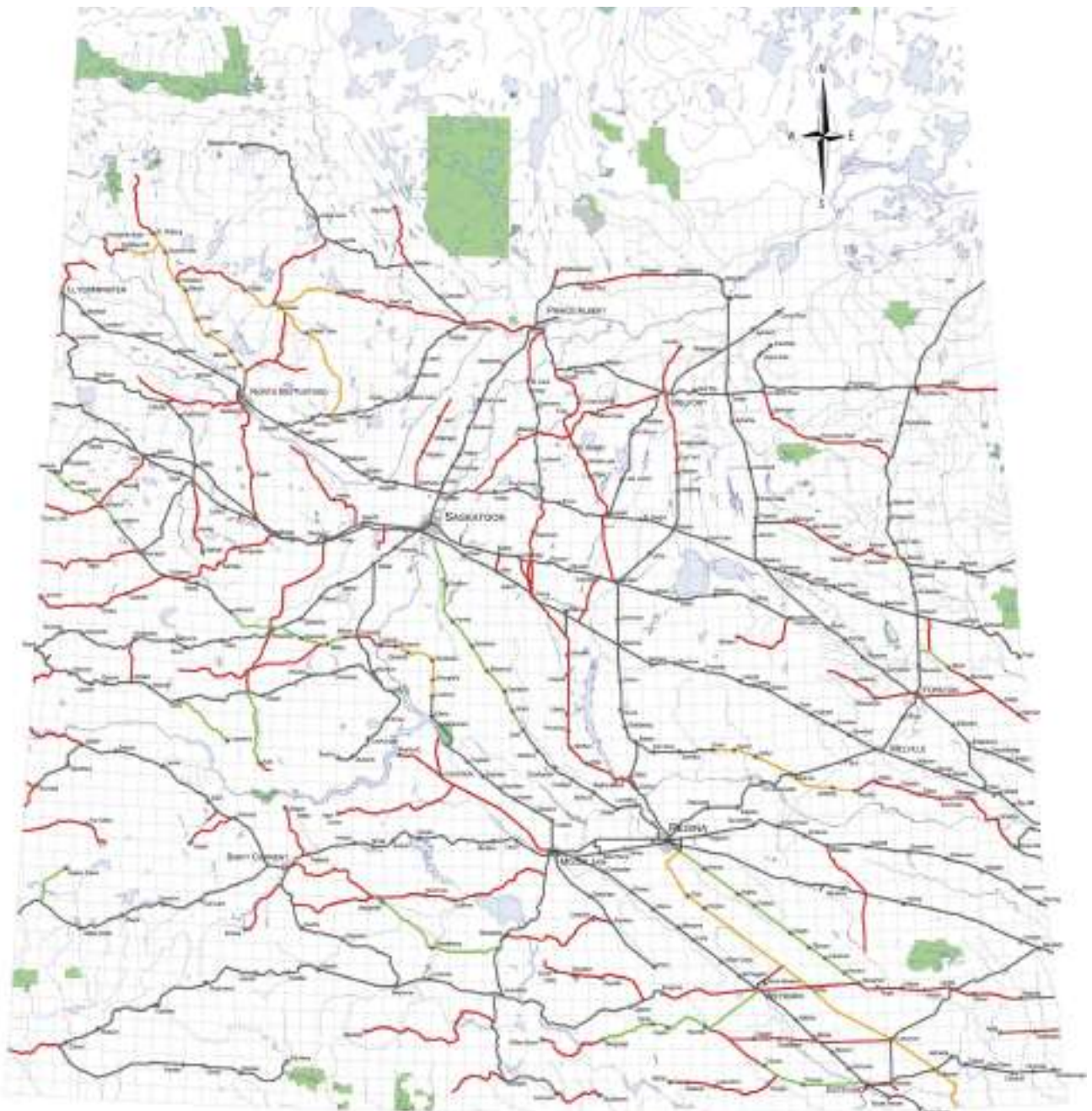
Barber, Muir	Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association
Barber, Brian	Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association
Brewer, Chris	Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association
Buchan, Jordana	Canadian Diabetes Association
Callander, Doreen	Canadian Cancer Society
Carignan-Vallee, Jo-ann	Trans Canada Trail - Saskatchewan
Colliar, Bob	Saskatchewan Trails Association Board of Directors
Cox, Roberta	Regina Partners for Healthy Living
Crone, Jacqueline	Government of Manitoba
Dahl-Ritco, Corinna	Saskatchewan <i>in motion</i>
Eberle, Denise	Saskatchewan Cycling Association
Firnesz, John	Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association
Gatin, Peggi-Lynn	Prince Albert Parkland Health Region
Giddings, Arnold	Saskatchewan Trails Association Board of Directors
Glan, Erin	Prairie North Health Region
Harvey, Dale	Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities
Hofer, Faye	Heartland Health Region
Josza, Joseph	Saskatchewan Wildlife Association
Kardynal, Dion	Prairie North Health Region
Kirkland, Clare	Regina Regional Economic Development Authority
Lytle, Kim	Saskatchewan Kidney Foundation
Martin, Linda	Saskatoon Health Region
Mayotte, Amanda	Mamawetan Churchill River Health Region
Milligan, Joseph	Saskatchewan Nature and Ecotourism Association
Morrisette, Miguel	Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport, Government of Saskatchewan
O'Grady, Ashlie	Saskatchewan Health
Ottenbreit, Alana	Sask Ski
Pedersen, Linda	Keewatin Yatthe Health Region
Rediger, Pat	Saskatchewan Trails Association Executive Director
Rhead, Dorothy	Saskatchewan Trails Association Board of Directors
Rogers, Candace	Kelsey Trail Health Region
Roth, Abbie	Saskatchewan Trails Association Board of Directors
Schroeder, Curt	Saskatchewan Trails Association President
Shanks, Naomi	Saskatchewan Health
Shinkewski, Lynn	Saskatchewan Horse Federation
Sinclair, Marnie	Saskatchewan <i>in motion</i>
Smith, Mae	Saskatchewan Horse Federation
Spratt, Ed	Saskatchewan Trails Association Board of Directors
Strong-Watson, Linda	Alberta TrailNet Society
Swanson, Greg	Saskatchewan Trails Association Board of Directors
Whiting, Cheryl	Saskatchewan Cancer Agency
Wolfe, Donna	Sun Country Health Region

Round Two Consultations – Stakeholder Forum





Anderson, Sylvia	Saskatchewan Trails for Rocanville Area
Apps, Deborah	Trans Canada Trail
Bayer, Jennifer	Parks Service
Besplug, Wendy	Kindersley Community Walking Trail
Bossaer, Keith	Oasis Insurance
Brewer, Chris	Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association
Campbell, Norm	Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association
Campbell, Doug	Hike Canada
Carignan-Vallee, Jo-Ann	Trans Canada Trail
Colliar, Bob	Prairie to Pine Regional Economic Development Authority
Davies, Todd	Moose Mountain Provincial Park
Dekok, Ashley	Saskatchewan South East Tourism Association
Denomie, Tami	Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association
Durocher, Peter	N.V. Ile La Crosse
Elliot, Jim	
Ewan, Sandy	Kelsey Trail Health Region
Gardner, Rob	Trail Planning Consultant
Gosselin, Wayne	Saskatchewan Environment
Kealy, Monique	Associated Engineering
Kerr, Harry	City of Yorkton
Leeson, Tony	St. Walburg
Leeson, Merrill	St. Walburg
Lipton, Saul	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Longfellow, Lynda	Trans Canada Trail Association
Lutz, Huguette	Town of Carlyle
Morrisette, Miguel	Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport, Government of Saskatchewan
Mossing Murray, Karyn	
Murray, John	Saskatchewan Boreal Forest Learning Centre
Ostrop, Elisabeth	Manitoba Recreational Trails Association
Rediger, Pat	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Rhead, Dorothy	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Rosenbluth, David	
Roth, Abbie	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Schafer, Sarah	South East Park Area
Schroeder, Curt	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Shurniak, Bill	Trans Canada Trail
Spratt, Ed	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Spratt, Donna	Saskatchewan Trails Association member (representing people with disabilities/handicapped trail accessibility)
Strong-Watson, Linda	Alberta TrailNet
Swanson, Greg	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Taylor, Don	Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities
Trenaman, Bill	Saskatchewan Highways and Infrastructure
Watts, Cathy	Saskatchewan Trails Association
Wilton, Fred	Government of Alberta
Woolhouse, Chelsea	Gravelbourg Economic Development
Zimmer, Troy	Mollard and Associates
Zsombor, Ed	

APPENDIX C – MAP OF ABANDONED RAIL LINES IN SASKATCHEWAN

Saskatchewan has a considerable network of abandoned and discontinued rail lines, and the abandonment process continues. There is an international movement to reuse abandoned rail lines for trail purposes, commonly referred to as rails-to-trails, and every Canadian province boasts rails-to-trails sections. Some provinces even designate this land base as a linear provincial park that is dedicated to trails, and more of this land base in Saskatchewan could be integrated into a provincial trails network. Trans Canada Trail currently owns roughly 700-800 km of abandoned track in Saskatchewan, and some of it could provide a basis for developing that trail network. The following map is provided to the provincial trail community and communities along abandoned rail lines, so that they may consider their role in using trails to promote tourism, economic development, healthy living, sport, culture and the appreciation of nature in their communities.



ABANDONED RAIL LINES IN SASKATCHEWAN AS OF SEPTEMBER 2008

-  **In-Service:** rail line that is still in service with a Class 1 or short-line railroad company, and for which no notice of intent to discontinue has been entered on the railroad's 3-year plan.
-  **To Be Discontinued:** rail line currently in-service but for which a notice of intent to discontinue has been entered in the railroad's current published 3-year plan.
-  **Recent Discontinuance:** rail line which has been discontinued within the past 3 years (2006 - 2008).
-  **Abandoned:** rail line which has been discontinued / abandoned longer than 3 years ago. Note that in some cases the lines were abandoned decades ago; rail beds may no longer be intact.

CATAGORY	MILEAGE	KILOMETRES	% TOTAL
In-Service	5,115	8,231	58.4%
To Be Discontinued	496	799	5.7%
Recent Discontinuance	423	680	4.8%
Abandoned	2,727	4,389	31.1%

Abandoned Rail Lines in Saskatchewan. © 2008 Troy A.M. Zimmer.

This map is an attempt to document all railway lines, both historic and present, within the province of Saskatchewan. The rail lines presented here are a combination of railway centre line data from National Topographic Series (NTS) topographic maps and from visible rail beds mapped from medium- or high-resolution satellite imagery. Current status of individual rail lines is based in part on The Saskatchewan Rail Network 2006 map, © 2006 Saskatchewan Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure, and from Notices of Discontinuance of rail lines received by the Canadian Transportation Agency as of July 2008. 'To Be Discontinued' line status based on Schedule A of the 3-year rail network plans of Canadian National and the Canadian Pacific Railway. Please note that although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the data presented herein, neither the author nor the Saskatchewan Trails Association are responsible for any loss or inconvenience suffered as a result of errors in this map. Suggestions, corrections or additions to the map data are appreciated, and can be directed to the map author at Email zimmer@jcmoland.com.

This map was compiled for the Saskatchewan Trails Association for use in trails planning and discussion. For more information on the association and its activities please visit <http://www.sasktrails.ca>.

Created on MicroImages TNTmips 2008/v7.4 14 September 2008
Cartography by Troy A.M. Zimmer, B.Sc., Dpl (Hons), MCRSS

Universal Transverse Mercator, Extended Zone 13 North, NAD83 (CSRS 98)
Scale is 1:2.5 million (approximately 1 inch = 40 miles)

General reference only - not for survey or legal use