

# Saskatchewan Trails Strategy

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**M**ulti-purpose recreational trail use is a growing outdoor activity that many Canadians are turning to for a variety of reasons, including health, exercise, sport, educational experiences, community building, economic development, and much more. Unfortunately, recreational trail use in Saskatchewan tends to be isolated and limited to parks, both urban and rural, and there is a general lack of a provincial trails network. The exception is seasonal snowmobile trails that are supported by communities across Saskatchewan that are committed to, and are frequent users of, the trails. That is why the Saskatchewan Trails Association (STA) proposes to develop a provincial trails strategy in conjunction with provincial government departments and other trail stakeholders.

Increasing public interest in trails both in Canada and internationally is putting pressure on existing trails, increasing risks to public safety, and leading to conflicts between different kinds of users and adjacent landowners. The interest in trails is growing in Saskatchewan for the same reasons as in other parts of the world. Along with it are increasing demands for better trails, more trail networks, a trail ethic, calls for new legislation (e.g., public liability), appropriate signage and other supporting infrastructure.

Until 2004, a provincial body whose sole mandate was to promote the development and use of multi-use trails in Saskatchewan did not exist. Thanks to the support of the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association, the STA has coalesced public interest in multi-use trails and is in the early stages of establishing necessary links, partnerships, funding opportunities and building a membership base to promote the many benefits associated with trails.

One of the STA's driving influences is the development of the Trans Canada Trail in Saskatchewan. Throughout the province, this trail is about 1,300 km in length, but only approximately 40 per cent of it is finished. This trail may be used as the route for the Olympic torch relay in Saskatchewan during the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver. As you can see, a lot of work still needs to be done to complete the trail on time.

The Trans Canada Trail project has also demonstrated that there is a gap in the ability to effectively serve the trail community in Saskatchewan. To fill this gap, the proposed provincial trail strategy will provide an overall vision and plan of action to coordinate the many agencies, communities, businesses and individuals who play a role in advancing the development and use of trails in our great province.

## **Purpose**

Although the STA is a relatively new organization, it has managed to identify some major challenges that are currently facing the trail movement in Saskatchewan. It is STA's view that the most significant obstacle facing recreational trail development in Saskatchewan is the lack of a trail building strategy. Other provinces – including Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick – have developed provincial strategies for recreational trail development, with the goal of increasing active living among its residents.

## **Why Are Trails Important To Saskatchewan?**

Most of Saskatchewan's urban communities have embraced the trail movement. These communities understand that trails provide their citizens with accessible recreational opportunities. The Alberta Government recently conducted recreation surveys, and the respondents indicated that "Walking for pleasure and cycling are among [the] top recreation activities." Trails provide more than just recreational benefits to trail users; they also provide the following benefits:

### **Better health**

Trail systems support an active lifestyle. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, physical activity helps prevent heart disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, colon cancer and depression. Trails promote physical activity, and they are an inexpensive way for people to become active.

### **Economic generators**

Studies have proven that trails can be economic generators. Trails attract tourists, and increased tourism creates jobs. Snowmobile trails in particular inject millions of dollars into communities every year. A study by the Ontario Trail Council, estimates that their provincial trails contribute approximately \$2 billion dollars a year to the Ontario economy.

### **Strong people build strong communities**

Volunteerism is one measure of a healthy community. Volunteer groups that commit to enhancing their communities, build the majority of rural trails in Saskatchewan. Urban and rural trails also provide trail users with the opportunity to visit and experience varied landscapes, such as forests and wetlands.



### **Ecological benefits**

Trails can serve as buffers around wetlands and watersheds, provide access to rivers and lakes, and with increased active transportation, they can even help reduce the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases that are produced in Saskatchewan.

### **Educational benefits**

Many of our trails run along historic routes and connect historical sites in Saskatchewan. Trails – including those in North Battleford and around Wanuskewin – are also used as resources for museums and interpretive centres. As a result, users are exposed to Saskatchewan and Canadian history while they exercise.

## **Challenges**

If there are so many benefits, why are there not more trails in Saskatchewan? STA has identified some of the major challenges facing recreational trail development in the province. It is important to note that these challenges are not unique to Saskatchewan; most provinces face similar, if not all of these, obstacles.

### **Liability insurance**

Increases in insurance premiums have made it almost impossible for trail groups to continue to build and maintain trails. Liability concerns are the main reason most landowners will not allow trails on their property. Saskatchewan currently does not have Occupier's Liability legislation, which would protect landowners. As a result, property owners are hesitant to allow

trail users on their property. The Governments of Manitoba and Nova Scotia have found a solution to this problem by playing an active role in helping to mitigate liability issues for both trail groups and landowners.



### **Vast expanses of land**

Saskatchewan is blessed with great open expanses of land that are perfect for recreational trail development. However, the large distances between communities discourage the most dedicated trail groups from trying to link them with trails. It is a complex and expensive venture, and most trail groups can afford neither the time nor the money to develop trails outside their communities.

### **Developing and coordinating trail groups**

Many trail groups in Saskatchewan have come together through development of the Trans Canada Trail. However, these groups often face insurmountable challenges including access to government owned land and lack of funding. There is a strong need for the groups that do exist to work together as they need to develop provincial trail codes of conduct and minimum trail standards. There must also be easy access to information about trail locations, types of trails, approval processes, etc.

### **Lack of funding**

Provincial funding for trail development, such as the Trans Canada Trail, is limited to provincial parks along the proposed trail route. Funding to connect segments of the Trans Canada Trail is needed, in addition to the contribution of the Trans Canada Trail Foundation. Other regional trail networks receive limited funding through the Culture, Youth and Recreation department, but this is inadequate to the growing demand for multi-use trail.

### **Need for education**

Saskatchewan residents need to be aware of the health and economic benefits that our trails provide. STA believes that public awareness campaigns must also advise residents on how to use the trails in a manner that both respects property owners and protects the environment.

### **Identifying and accessing new trails**

A significant challenge we face is identifying and accessing ready made trail corridors, such as abandoned rail lines and irrigation canals, that can be easily transitioned into user-friendly trails.



## **Achieving Government Mandates**

### **Why the font size change?**

Developing a Saskatchewan Trails Strategy works well with the Department of Environment's Green Strategy, that identifies 'Green Tourism' as a potential area for action. There is a synergy that exists between trails and this particular action plan. The Green Strategy is also a long-term Provincial Parks Strategy, and since trails are considered linear parks, they should be included in any strategy that involves parks. The Green Strategy charges the government with making it easier for its residents to 'go green,' and trails can play a key role in helping to achieve this objective.

Trails can also play an important role in the province's *in motion* program. An improved trail system will entice more individuals to get outside and get active, thus helping the Government of Saskatchewan to achieve its mandate of encouraging residents to get healthy by increasing their levels of physical activity.

## **Additional Beneficiaries**

STA has identified the following government departments, organizations and stakeholders that will benefit from the Saskatchewan Trails Strategy:

### **Provincial Government Departments**

Department of Health

Department of Environment

Department of Culture, Youth and Recreation

Department of Highways and Transportation

Department of Regional Economic and Co-operative Development

Department of Healthy Living and Seniors

this is a federal department  
Department of Learning

Watershed Authority

Forestry Secretariat

Members of Legislative Assembly

Opposition Members of Legislative Assembly

### **Federal Government**

Department of Fisheries and Oceans

Department of Environment

### **Non-Governmental Organizations**

Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association

Nature Saskatchewan

Ducks Unlimited

Saskatchewan Snowmobile Association

Saskatchewan Horse Federation

Saskatchewan Ski Federation

Saskatchewan Physical Activity Council

Saskatchewan *in motion*

SaskPower Corporation

SaskWater

Tourism Saskatchewan

Tourism Saskatoon

City of Saskatoon – Leisure Services  
Tourism Regina  
City of Regina – Leisure Services

## **Other Stakeholders**

Saskatchewan Cycling Association  
Lumsden Bike Club  
Rock n' Road Cycling Club  
Wascana Freewheelers Bicycle Touring Club  
Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities  
Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association  
Meewasin Valley Authority  
Wascana Centre Authority  
Waneskewin Park  
Saskatchewan Nature and Eco-tourism  
Road Map 2020 (Saskatoon)  
Saskatchewan Triathlon Association  
Whitecap Dakota First Nations  
Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations  
Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Advisory Committee  
Law Reform Commission  
CN Rail  
CP Rail  
Information Services Corporation  
Canadian Trails Federation  
Go for Green  
Local Trail Groups (Three Rivers, Great Plains, Parkland Trails Association)  
Adventurehers  
Regional Health Associations  
Saskatchewan Lung Association  
Heart and Stroke Foundation  
Saskatchewan Osteoporosis  
Saskatchewan Diabetes Society  
Alzheimer Society of Saskatchewan  
Saskatchewan Physiotherapy Association  
Saskatchewan Medical Association  
Chronic Disease prevention Alliance of Saskatchewan  
Saskatchewan Outdoor Environmental Educators Association

Saskatchewan Association of Recreational Professionals

Saskatchewan Physical Education Association

University of Saskatchewan – Faculty of Kinesiology, Faculty of Nursing, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Medicine, School of Physical Therapy

University of Regina – Faculty of Education, Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies

SIAST

First Nations University of Canada

Saskatoon Nordic Ski Club

Saskatoon Roadrunners

Stantec

Canoe Ski Discovery Company

Saskatchewan Environmental Society

YMCA

YWCA