



Policy and Procedures

Subject Title: Recreational Trails Strategy

Corporate Policy (Approved by Council):

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GREY COUNTY RECREATIONAL TRAILS STRATEGY 2009

Introduction

The County of Grey acquired rural properties for forestry purposes under the Agreement Forest Program with the Ministry of Natural Resources from 1938-1965. The County of Grey formally enacted a by-law on March 5, 2002 to formally end the Agreement with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Since 1996, the County has been solely responsible for the management of these forest properties. The County currently owns 45 forest properties containing approximately 8200 acres of forested land.

The County of Grey Forest Tracts are currently used for a diverse range of recreational activities. Hunting is currently permitted in all County Forests with other activities such as hiking, cycling, snowmobiling, equestrian, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing permitted in many tracts depending on the length of trail and terrain contained within the Forest Tract. There are well-marked trails throughout many of the Forest Tracts with permitted use signage at entrances to the trails.

The County of Grey acquired the CP Rail Trail in October 2004. This is a former Rail Right of Way that runs 77 kilometres from Owen Sound to Dundalk. Currently the trail is used for hiking, cycling, skiing, equestrian and snowmobiling. There was an ATV trial period from May 1 to November 30, 2008 that has been reviewed by the Committee for further consideration. The approved section of the CP Rail Trail now approved for ATV's runs from Dundalk south to Sunny Valley Road inclusive. The trail itself is mostly large dark gravel left over from the former railway that has been graded annually starting in 2007. Signage noting ownership and permitted uses have been installed at every entrance with gates placed at many roadway entrances along the trail. Stone dusting of the trail commences in 2008 starting in Owen Sound. Annually, stone dusting will be completed, working south down the rail trail.

Objectives

A County of Grey Forest Management Plan was completed by GWS Ecological & Forestry Services Inc. in association with the Grey County Forest Advisory Committee in 2001. The Plan provided a couple of objectives:

- The 20 year general management plan
- A five year plan to provide the operational details from January 1, 2003 to December 1, 2007
- An annual work plan was also provided for the first year of implementation

The Forest Management Plan touched on areas such as:

- Current forest resources inventory data
- Socio-economic needs of the County residents and industries
- Compatible and education uses
- Requirements for environmental protection

Recreational Policy

Purpose:

The County of Grey recognizes that hunting and fishing are valuable heritage activities that will continue to be allowed in all County Forest tracts. County Forest Tracts are only intended for day use recreation activities. There are currently no facilities for overnight camping etc. All other activities have developed over a number of years, particularly within the last 10-15 years. The current atmosphere of encouraging the public to get out and get active including the present ACTIVE 2010 endorsement by the Ministry of Health Promotion has increased the number of trail users substantially and therefore trail usage has been on the rise.

The County has permitted most types of recreational activities provided they are not damaging the forest in any way. However, there are no approved current agreements with any All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Clubs to permit ATVs to ride on any County Forest Tract trails.

Trails play an important role in promoting a healthy lifestyle and more prosperous communities. The development and promotion of trails of all kinds has received provincial attention with the development of the Ontario Trails Strategy in 2005 as well as the ongoing Ontario Trail Network Initiative jointly undertaken by the Ministry of Health Promotion and the Ministry of Natural Resources in an effort to build a map of all Ontario Trails.

The other aspect the County recognizes is the economic impact trail development can have within the County. Healthy lifestyles and the acknowledgement and advantage of having an abundance of “green space” within Grey County can provide numerous advantages for the County relating to economic spin-off from trail development. The County has several prime forest properties that have well defined trail systems with numerous groups taking advantage of them depending on the season.

With this aspect of continued trail development and economic advantages the County has to gain, there may be some consideration given to limiting certain activities within well used County Forests in order to benefit from this activity. There may also be a benefit in promoting some of our County Forests as “Recreational Properties” in addition

to Managed Forests to encourage continued trail development and usage. In these heavily used forest trails, it would be suggested to limit particular activities within these forests, even during certain periods of the year. For example, the County's Derby Forest Tract is close to the City of Owen Sound and is heavily used by cyclists and hikers. Hunting on this property may be considered as an incompatible use. The St. Vincent Tract is another example where the trail is not compatible for cycling due to high cliff features in the area.

Assumptions:

Further to the Objectives above, the following assumptions have been utilized:

- The forests are to be considered working forests and not parkland, preserve or for single-use only; however some areas may not be suitable for all activities.
- The County Forests are owned by the Corporation of the County of Grey and is not crown land.
- Recreational pursuits are a privilege and not a right.
- Forest health, management and associated operations take precedence over recreational activities.
- The CP Rail Trail has the capacity to be used as a utility corridor by one or several approved companies in conjunction with a recreational trail.
- There is also a possibility of rail use coming back to the rail line in the future.

Criteria for Analysis of Recreational Activities

All activities on Grey County trails have some impact on other users. While assessing the level of impact is subjective, the following criteria were applied to each:

- Activity must have minimal environmental impact
- Activity must not have significant impact on other trail users
- Activity must be compatible with forestry operations
- Activity must not pose significant liability concerns to the County
- Activity should not require significant County staff intervention for administration or policing

Recreational Activities

Grey County Forests and trails are currently used for a diverse range of recreational activities. Passive uses such as hunting, hiking, snowshoeing, wildlife viewing, nature study and photography do not require maintained trails and are commonly carried out to some extent on virtually all County properties. Where forest access roads and /or well maintained trails are available, non-motorized trail uses include walking, hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding in some specific tracts.

1. Low Impact Activities

Hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, geocaching, photography, nature study, dog sledding and horseback riding are considered low impact activities that leave little to no evidence within the County trails. They are compatible with forest, fish and wildlife management operations. Tracts like the Glenelg Klondyke and Massie interconnect County Forest trails with other established and maintained trails on other public or private property. There are a series loops provided to allow for casual users and experienced users alike. Improving access to the Grey County trails through signage, development of a loop system, consistent maintenance of trails and improved mapping along with a partnership of existing trail organizations will strengthen the overall trail system.

2. Dog Walking

Many residents accessing Grey County trails enjoy accessing the trails not only for themselves but other family members including dogs. This is generally an accepted activity on most trail systems. However, dog walkers and trail users alike need to be aware of aggressive or overly large dogs that may appear intimidating to other trail users. As well, dog walking on cross country ski trails can damage trails that have been groomed and maintained at a club's expense. Uncontrolled dogs may cause serious issues when equestrians are using the same trail systems. Hunting dogs will be exempt from this provision.

3. Mountain Biking

Cycling and/or mountain biking is a sport that has grown in popularity over the past several years. As with some low impact activities, there is minimal damage to the County trails due to mountain biking. Within several of the County Forest trails, there is some very challenging terrain that provides the excitement of the sport to these users. However, unauthorized trail structures such as ramps, bridges and platforms have crept up periodically within the County Forests. This type of structure is not permitted at the present time unless formal approval from the County of Grey is received and the group/club requesting permission enters into a Land Use Agreement with the County to formalize the agreement and any liability concerns. Mountain bikers are not permitted to venture off the identified trails for their own safety.

4. Snowmobiling

A good working relationship with several snowmobile clubs within Grey County, as well as the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) has been established over the past several years. The clubs not only use the trail loops within the County Forest tract, but count on the CP Rail Trail as a linking trail to numerous other trails both within Grey County and neighbouring Counties. These clubs must make a request annually for

permission to use County property as well as receive prior approval from the County for any new trails or trail modifications.

Trail permits continue to be a requirement in order to have access to official OFSC trails including those situated on Grey County property. It is important to note that key members from both the Eastside Snowmobile Club and the Klondyke Trail Groomers Snowmobile Club sit as members on the CP Rail Management Committee and are open to issues and concerns when they are raised. Both clubs have done a tremendous amount of work on the trails in order to maintain the enjoyment of riding them.

5. All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs)

ATVs have become increasingly popular over the last few years. Currently there is one club, the Dufferin Grey ATV Club, encompassing members from both Grey and Dufferin Counties who have requested use of Grey County trails. At present, ATVs are permitted on certain sections of the CP Rail Trail running from May 1 to November 30, 2009 for a two year period effective May 1, 2009. At this time, ATVs are not permitted in any of the Grey County Forest tracts.

While most ATV users respect the land and use their machines accordingly, ATVs can cause significant damage to flora and fauna located with the County Forests. Areas can become wet and rutting damage can cause significant problems within a forest environment. There are also concerns about the conflicts that may arise between ATVs and non-motorized trail users in regards to safety and noise concerns. ATVs will not be permitted at any time, in areas where their usage conflicts with Niagara Escarpment Plan policies. These County Forest tracts include the Kolapore Tract #9, Pretty River Tract #5, Derby Tract #10, Copper Kettle Tract #31, and Massie Tract #44.

If ATV's are permitted on County Trails in the future, it should be strongly suggested that they follow a similar permit system to that of the OFSC, allowing only riders with permits on OFATV (Ontario Federation of All Terrain Vehicles) and EOTA (Eastern Ontario Trails Alliance) sanctioned trails and at a designated speed of no greater than 40km/hour.

6. Hunting and Fishing

The County of Grey recognizes that hunting and fishing are an integral part of the County's activities. Both hunting and fishing will continue to be permitted in all County Forest tracts. Ministry of Natural Resources hunting season regulations and licensing requirements are to be strictly followed. As well, no permanent tree structures of any kind are permitted on County owned land. It should be noted that fishing opportunities are available in approximately 15 of Grey County's Forest tracts. Hunters are also reminded that there may be other trail users enjoying the same area, and safety is of the utmost priority.

7. Trapping

Similar to hunting, trapping is an integral part of the heritage of Grey County. While trapping is not likely a full time activity for most people, it does provide some profit for

those trapping on a part time or leisure basis. There continues to be a need and/or demand for the trapping of nuisance beavers on many Grey County properties and therefore trapping will continue to be permitted on Grey County properties. However, trappers must be licensed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and as per By-Law No. 3274-91, trappers residing outside of Grey County and wishing to trap in Grey County must receive written permission from Grey County Council prior to any trapping taking place.

8. Outdoor Education and Research

Ongoing outdoor education by both primary and secondary schools continues to be a permitted activity within Grey County properties. There is no better place to learn about the environment than from the environment itself.

As well, from time to time, there are ongoing Ministry of Natural Resources research projects taking place on County property. New research proposals must be submitted to the County prior to the start of the project for written approval from Grey County Council.

9. Unacceptable Outdoor Recreation Activities

Grey County properties are intended to be used for day use only. There are no facilities to accommodate overnight campers or overnight use of any kind. Camping and open fires are not permitted on any Grey County property at any time.

Paintball activities are also not permitted on any County property at any time. This type of activity is incompatible with forest management operations and may cause issues related to the safety of other trail users.

Dirt bikes, trucks and any other off road vehicles are not permitted on any Grey County property. Again, this type of activity is incompatible with forest management operations and may cause trail damage impacting not only the safety of other trail users, but damage to environmental areas within the County properties from rutting.

10. Special Activities

There may be times throughout the year where groups such as Guides/Scouts, special interest groups or the militia may make a special request to Grey County for the overnight use of its property for certain functions. Any request of this type must be submitted in writing well in advance of the date of the event in order to be thoroughly reviewed by the Planning and Community Development Committee. Legalities, liability and event details must be available to Grey County staff prior to the event taking place. The County must also be added as an additional insured on all insurance documents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ That walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, geocaching, photography, nature study and dog sledding be permitted activities on Grey County Trails.

- ❖ That horseback riding be a permitted activity on certain County Forest Trails as outlined in Appendix A
- ❖ That dog walking be a permitted activity on County Trails as long as they are under control or on-leash at all times. Please note-Dogs are not permitted on groomed cross-county ski trails. Hunting dogs will be an exemption to this provision.
- ❖ That mountain biking/cycling be a permitted activity on certain County Trails as outlined in Appendix B
- ❖ That the construction of unauthorized structures be prohibited unless prior written approval from Grey County is received. A Land Use Agreement is also required.
- ❖ That snowmobiling be a permitted activity on Grey County Trails when there are official OFSC sanctioned trails. And that all snowmobiles must have a valid OFSC permit to be permitted to ride on Grey County Trails. Land Use Agreements must be in place annually prior to the snowmobile season.
- ❖ That ATVs be permitted on certain portions of the CP Rail Trail as indicated in Appendix C and that ATVs or any other off road vehicles are not permitted on any Grey County Forest trails.
- ❖ That hunting and fishing remain a permitted activity on Grey County Trails and that hunters must be licensed under the Ministry of Natural Resources licensing program and follow designated hunting periods as established by the Ministry of Natural Resources with the exception of the Derby and St. Vincent Tracts where hunting would be prohibited.
- ❖ That portable or temporary tree structures be permitted during the designated hunting season only. No permanent tree structures will be permitted.
- ❖ That trapping will be a permitted activity in Grey County Forests. And that trappers residing outside of Grey County must apply to Grey County Council for permission to trap and must received written approval from Council prior to any trapping taking place pursuant to By-law 3274-91.
- ❖ That outdoor education and research be a permitted activity in Grey County Trails, and that any new research projects require written permission from Grey County prior to implementation.
- ❖ That the following activities be prohibited from Grey County Trails:
 - All Motorized Vehicles with the exception of snowmobiles on OFSC approved trails and ATVs where approved on the CP Rail Trail
 - Paintball activities
 - Open fires
 - Camping
 - Unauthorized structures
 - Permanent tree stands
 - Unauthorized signage

County of Grey Trail Etiquette Guide

Trail etiquette can be described as a polite way to use the trails. Trail etiquette will provide guidelines for all users of the trail on the important aspects of trail use. Trail use is a privilege that should not be abused or disrespected by any user. Safety and enjoyment of the trail is the priority of trail users.

Trail Etiquette for All Users

- Read trailhead signs noting permitted uses and trail rules.
- Observe posted trail rules
- Pedestrians always have the right of way
- Be aware of other users on the trail
- Stay to the right of the trail (except when passing)
- Move to the right to let others pass
- Give a clear warning signal when passing. Call out "Passing on your left"
- Always look ahead and behind when passing
- Always travel at a reasonable speed
- Slow down at corners
- Always clean up-take out what you take in
- Keep pets on a leash and clean up after them
- Yield to other trail users when entering and crossing a trail
- Do not disturb wildlife
- Do not venture off the trails; respect the environment
- Respect wildlife; your surroundings are home to many plants and animals-YOU are the visitor
- Respect private property
- Be courteous
- Travel at a consistent and predictable manner
- Don't block the trail
- When stopping, move off the trail
- Obey all traffic signs and signals
- Don't use a trail under the influence of alcohol or drugs

Hikers, Walkers/Snowshoers and Backpackers

- Walk on the right when possible
- When meeting someone riding a horse, step off the trail and speak calmly
- Avoid ski tracks in the winter time

Trail Users with Animals

- Clean up after your animals
- Keep them on a leash or a lead and in control when encountering other trail users
- Give larger animals the right of way
- Do not let your animals disturb wildlife
- Keep them on the trails

Cyclists and Mountain Bikers

- Know your ability, equipment and the area
- Move to the side of the trail for less mobile users
- Do not ride under conditions where you leave evidence of passing i.e. after rain or snow
- Stay on the trail
- Make your presence known at corners or blind spots
- Control your bicycle

Equestrians

- Practice minimum impact techniques
- Observe speed limits
- Always clean up after your horse
- Never tie your horse within 20 feet of lakes, streams or springs
- Always have control of your horse
- Stay off groomed ski trails
- Never leave your horse unattended

ATVS

- Approach pedestrians slowly, pull over and turn off your engine
- Stay on trail
- When passing someone, follow at a safe distance until you reach a safe place to pass: pass slowly
- Minimize noise with proper care of your vehicle
- Respect trail closures
- Do not ride on areas that are either wet, have loose soil, steep slopes, meadows or swamps
- Avoid sudden stops and starts and quick directional changes with acceleration
- Remove your helmet when talking to other trail users

Cross Country Skiers

- Ski on the right side of the trail
- Yield to those coming downhill or who are faster
- To step out of the track, lift your skis so you don't disturb the track
- When breaking trail, keep skis wider than normal

Snowmobilers

- Operate at appropriate speeds
- Do not ride on tracks made for skiers
- Avoid running over vegetation
- Respect trail closures
- Avoid late night riding

RESOURCES

Trail maps and information on directions, length of trails etc. can be found on the Grey County website at www.greycounty.ca or on the Tourism website at www.visitgrey.ca .

Other resources for trails within Grey County can be found at:

www.brucegreytrails.com

www.greysauble.on.ca

www.tomthomsontrail.com

www.svca.on.ca

www.brucetrail.org

www.georgiantrail.ca

A Grey Bruce Tourism Map is included for your interest noting trails within Grey and Bruce Counties. Grey County works closely with several other groups to keep an updated list of trails within Grey County. As well, several groups have embraced consistent signage throughout the County to indicate the location of public trails as well as outline permitted uses at each destination.

WHO TO CONTACT

If you witness non-permitted uses on the trails within Grey County, the police contact information is included for your information.

Grey County OPP-519-794-7827 (Chatsworth Office), 519-534-1323 (Bruce Peninsula Office), 519-986-2211 (Markdale Office).

West Grey Police Services 519-369-3046

Hanover Police Services 519-364-2411

City of Owen Sound Police Services 519-376-1234

GREY COUNTY RECREATIONAL TRAILS STRATEGY 2009 APPENDIX A

Horseback Riding Permitted on the Following Trails:

- CP Rail Trail
- Camp Oliver Egremont-Grey County Forest 12
- Collingwood Osprey Townline-Grey County Forest 7

- Glenelg Klondike-Grey County Forest 24
- Grey Main-Grey County Forest 19
- Harkaway-Grey County Forest 16
- Lily Oak-Grey County Forest 29
- Pretty river-Grey County Forest 5
- Fish Hatchery-Grey County Forest 41
- Massie-Grey County Forest 44

GREY COUNTY RECREATIONAL TRAILS STRATEGY
2009
APPENDIX B

Cycling Permitted on the Following Grey County Trails:

- CP Rail Trail
- Camp Oliver Egremont-Grey County Forest 12
- Derby Tract-Grey County Forest 10
- Dornoch-Grey County Forest 20

- Glenelg Klondike-Grey County Forest 24
- Grey Main-Grey County Forest 19
- Kolapore-Grey County Forest 9
- Pretty River-Grey County Forest 5
- Quarry-Grey County Forest 35
- Sullivan Klondyke-Grey County Forest 43
- Taylor Road-Grey County Forest 28
- Fish Hatchery-Grey County Forest 41
- Massie-Grey County Forest 44

DUFFERIN GREY ATV CLUB Approved / Proposed Trails April 6 2009

-  Proposed Grey Roads, Rail Line and Forest
-  Municipal Roads (Approved)
-  Grey Roads (Approved)
-  Grey County Forest
-  Staging Area

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