



Introduction

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For more than 10,000 years, trails have woven through the forests, valleys and meadows of what is now known as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). They were used by traders, hunters and fishers during the migration of Indigenous people and, later, by waves of settlers and immigrants. In the process, trails have become a defining feature of our urban landscape. Trails connect residents to nature and to each other and provide opportunities for community, recreation, active transportation and healthy living. They form a network of mobility, linking neighbourhoods in the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Greenbelt to the growing suburban and urban centres that frame Lake Ontario.

Situated in the largest metropolitan area in Canada, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) area of jurisdiction is uniquely positioned with some of the most remarkable natural areas in our region. Making these special places accessible through trails – while growing, enhancing and protecting our greenspace system – is essential to preserving a high quality of life.

TRCA has a long history of nature-based trail planning, development and delivery. Over the past 60 years, TRCA has worked in collaboration with its regional trail community partners to provide responsible access to nature through scenic recreational trails and greenways. In 1989, TRCA proposed the concept of a regional trail network in greenspace that would connect the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment to the shoreline of Lake Ontario (see Figure 1.a: Greenspace Plan). Inspired by the successful establishment of the Bruce Trail, this proposed trail network would provide continuous public

access through conservation corridors to the magnificent landscapes of the TRCA region.

TRCA has developed this network in partnership with community groups and all levels of government. Within our jurisdiction, there are currently over 500 kilometres of regional trails in greenspace connecting the municipalities of Mono, Peel, York, Durham and the City of Toronto, including sections of the Bruce Trail, the Lake-to-Lake Trail, the Oak Ridges Trail, The Great Trail and the Waterfront Trail. This network has become an important conservation mechanism to secure greenspace, mitigate climate change, improve human health and well-being, promote responsible public access and inspire environmental stewardship.

Our region is experiencing unprecedented urban growth. By 2041, our population is projected to increase by 40 per cent to reach close to 10 million residents (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2017). Twelve of the Urban Growth Centres in the *Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs, 2017), including 25 new communities, are in TRCA's jurisdiction. Increasing the amount of greenspace in our natural system is a primary means to accommodate this projected urban growth while maintaining user experience and ecological function. We must proactively and sensitively locate our trail infrastructure to support these new communities while preventing environmental impact with this coming intensification.

Figure 1.a: Greenspace Plan (1989)



Expanding greenspace and providing trails more equitably across our jurisdiction will provide nature-based amenities and recreation opportunities to underserved communities while improving our collective health and well-being. The creation of new trails, trailheads and neighbourhood linkages to our regional system will facilitate access to incredible destinations, allowing people to experience nature through the seasons. We must target our efforts and capitalize on development opportunities to realize these possibilities and service this growth according to our environmental planning policies and objectives. We must also secure adequate and sustainable investment in this community infrastructure that accounts for the full lifecycle costs of trails to maintain assets in a state of good repair to our desired level of service.

In response, TRCA has developed the *Trail Strategy* to provide a strategic vision for a complete regional trail network in greenspace that facilitates sustainable living in this next generation of trail building. As development accelerates, TRCA will employ this Strategy and partner with municipal colleagues, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the development industry to continue to acquire, protect and enhance natural assets while connecting people to nature. Through this collaboration, ongoing public procurement of greenspace and the provision of scenic trail greenways will occur. At our doorstep, we have a precious hinterland network of nature-based recreation trails across the Oak Ridges Moraine, the Niagara Escarpment, our nine river valleys and the waterfront. By working together strategically, we can grow and maintain this legacy in support of complete communities, a thriving economy and a healthy environment.

