



## **Halifax North West Trails Association – Chair’s Report to the Annual General Meeting – 16 June 2014**

The 2013-14 year was yet another busy and productive one for HNWTA! We are one of about 22 community-based volunteer trail groups within Halifax, formerly HRM. We are active members of Halifax Regional Trails Assoc, NS Trails and Hike NS. Through HRTA, we receive annual funding in the form of Capital and Maintenance Grants. Our Capital Funding in 2013 allowed us to further extend the Linear Trail along the power line corridor from

Washmill Lake Dr to Ramsbrook Court, a distance of only 275 m but at a cost of \$70,000!! The Linear Trail from Parkland Dr to Ramsbrook is now 4.5 km long! Whether our vision to further extend this trail to connect with the Chain of Lakes Trail ever comes to fruition is anyone’s guess; it may be too big a project for HNWTA since one component of the project will be a pedway over Highway 102 at an estimated cost of \$1.5-2 million!! Our remaining capital of \$38,000 from 2013-14 has been recently transferred to another group with a shovel-ready project. However, we are eligible to receive \$50,000 for 2014-15.

The focus of our Maintenance project in 2013 was the Mainland Common Loop trail. Here we distributed 2 large loads of hemlock wood chips, installed a new culvert and a short section of boardwalk and replaced the damaged hand rail at the bog lookoff. We also moved the original Bog Interpretive Panel near the lookoff and installed a new copy of the panel at the original site. It looks great!! Our contractor worked with a group of Halifax Grammar School students for one morning at the beginning of the project. The kids did accomplish some work and they had a great time, according to their teacher!! Our maintenance funding also pays for our incidental costs like insurance, food for our Board meetings, and the purchase of small tools and equipment.

In May 2013, a pair of trail counters was installed by the city along the Linear Trail. One counter detects both cyclists and walkers, the other only cyclists. We were amazed by the results - from May to October nearly 10,000 persons per

month used the trail, about 80% of whom were walkers. We await the final report.

A year ago, we launched our new web site which is getting a lot of traffic according to the host's counters. We have information on most of our trails along with numerous pictures. If you have not yet visited the site, I encourage you to do so at the address on our brochure. We also have a Facebook presence and our webmaster, Lea Anne McLeod, is the administrator of both of these.

We continue to be involved in several annual events – a clean-up at Belchers Marsh Park in early spring and a series of guided hikes or walks along many of our trails. In 2013, we hosted hikes in Hemlock Ravine, Susies Lake via the Whopper Dropper trails, Belchers Marsh, Blue Mountain, Old Coach Road, Cabin Lake, the Mainland Common Loop and Fox and Ash Lakes. In total over 100 hikers were involved, including a bus load of Dal students.

Our trail signage program also continues. The Trail Metre Donors panel on display in our kiosk has been recently updated. An interpretive panel on the Cabin Lake Trail was designed by Bruce Smith with text written and pictures taken by our members. It was installed in August and we had the official unveiling in mid-September. The celebration was well-attended and included one of our sponsors, TD. Another interpretive panel is in the works, for the Mill Run Trail, in Bedford. Funding is coming from an HRM Community Grant and a donation by Councillor Tim Outhit. Pat Leader has done the research on this and it should be completed during 2014.

Hopefully, we are nearing the end of a 4-year saga during which we have attempted to have the name of Cabin Lake recognized as an official name by the Province. It seemed that the Province was making up the rules as the process progressed. Of course, we have already named the trail, The Cabin Lake Trail. We must be close to the end. In addition, Maureen has been working with the City in an attempt to have the name of the Geizer Hill Trail officially recognized. This must be close as well!!

We attempt to keep in touch with members and contacts through occasional newsletters but, for a variety of reasons, the size of our Board has gradually decreased over the past year and now there are only 5 of us. The saddest note of the year was the very sudden demise of one of our most active board members, Gerald MacAlpine. Even though we had known Gerald for only about 2 years, he quickly became one of our most reliable hike participants and contributed considerably to our Board discussions. I still miss him greatly! The Board has authorized the purchase of a metre of trail in Gerald's name and also in the name of Emma van Nostrand, the grand-daughter of long time Board member and membership secretary, Shirley McIntyre. Emma collapsed and died while participating in the Toronto marathon last year.

In order to increase board participation, we have written articles for inclusion in the newsletters of several Councillors and our MLA, Diana Whalen. I have had a couple of expressions of interest and am hoping that this will lead to some firm commitments, perhaps this evening.....

Just over a year ago, Peter Bush of the Protected Areas Branch of Nova Scotia Environment hosted a meeting of stakeholders regarding the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area. Over the past several years, there has been a proliferation of new but unofficial trails built in the northern part of the WA. His concern was that the trails had not been built following the guidelines established by NSE for trails in WA's. He wondered if a community group or a coalition of groups might be interested in taking on a proper trail planning initiative. After several small group discussions, HNWTA along with Maskwa Aquatic Club and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society formed such a coalition and have begun the first steps in the trail planning process. We have prepared an RFP document for the trail planning and public consultation work but first must do some fund-raising. We hope the local Councillors will be able to support this initiative. Stay tuned for further news during the year! We want your input and feedback.

Our Treasurer Maureen provided guidance as we began a Strategic Planning initiative; however, as the number of Board members decreased, this mainly served to remind us that perhaps we were trying to do too much! Maureen has

also done considerable work behind the scenes as she completed the Revenue Canada forms in order to get a partial rebate of the HST we paid during 2011 and 2012. However, we were informed that in order to be eligible for an HST rebate we had to complete Corporate Tax returns for 2003 to 2012!! This turned out to be a daunting task for those of us without an accounting background but we have secured the services of a volunteer accountant to do this task. We hope to be able to send in the returns before the end of the month!! Thank you, Allan!

Another important activity has been attendance at HRM Planning meetings and Public Hearings to ensure that trails are a part of all new developments. This is by no means a given in our experience. We have also attempted to ensure connectivity between various developments, often overlooked when different landowners are involved. We attended a public event hosted by Active Transportation staff and a final report will soon be considered by Council. We continue to be interested in water quality of the Birch Cove Lakes and safe, walkable communities.

Finally, I want to thank all past and continuing Board members for their service to HNWTA. Fabian Boone, Mille MacCormick and Bruce Smith have resigned due to work pressures or other reasons and so we have some Board positions to be filled. I do hope that a couple of you present this evening might be willing to offer your services to the Board or to HNWTA by taking on some tasks. We do need a membership secretary, a trail hike coordinator and perhaps a maintenance organizer. I'd be pleased to talk to anyone about these tasks after the meeting or by phone or email.

**Bob McDonald, Chair**

**16 June 2014**