



Halifax North West Trails Association – Chair’s Report at AGM

26 March 2013

Good evening and thank you all for coming!

This past year has been an active and productive one for HNWTA!! Before reporting on some of our activities, there may be some here who don’t know much about us. We registered as a Society with the Registry of Joint Stocks in 2003 so we have been a presence for nearly 10 years!

We are a member of Halifax Regional Trails Association (HRTA), a collective of some 20 trails groups within HRM. Bob and Wendy are our HRTA representatives and attend their monthly meetings. Membership in HRTA allows us to apply for Capital and Maintenance funding and we have taken advantage of that as I’ll explain in a moment. We are also members of Nova Scotia Trails, Hike Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Environmental Network. Our membership in NS Trails makes us eligible for directors, general liability and accident insurance. It also makes us eligible to participate in the Trail Metre donors program and, to date, members and friends have donated over 50 metres of trail in our name!!

For the past 3 years we have applied for and been successful in receiving both Capital and Maintenance funding. The Capital funding is aimed at our vision to link the Mainland Linear Trail to the Chain of Lakes Trail. We have been unable so far to undertake an engineering consultant study on the overall project but instead we have been carrying out the extension one piece at a time. Last year we were able to extend the trail from the Church on Main Ave to Washmill Lake Dr, a distance of about 400m. Even this section was not without its temporary setbacks and some remediation (the installation of a culvert and the introduction of a lengthy rock swale) has already been required. This summer we are working with HRM to extend the trail a further 350m in order to connect the southern part of Mount Royale subdivision to the Active Transportation corridor.

Our Maintenance budget was used to provide extensive remediation to the Old Coach Road trail in south Bedford. Our contractor, Cobequid Trail Consulting from Economy, did a great job of repairing the trail bed and, as well, introducing a series of culverts and rock swales so as to prevent further trail erosion. We’ll see how it works.

Our Communications Committee has worked very hard over the past year. Phase 1 of our Signage program was finalized when, in June, we celebrated the successful completion and unveiling of our Kiosk in front of the Canada Games Centre on Thomas Raddall Dr. Several politicians, representing all 3 levels

of government, were present, and we had a beautiful day for the event, which was capped off with a short walk, and cake!

Phase 2 of our Signage program involved the design and fabrication of 40 trailhead signs for 8 of our trails. Many of these are already up, using a wide variety of installation techniques, and the rest will appear this spring. We hope that these signs will encourage more folks to use our trails. I hope that many of you will have noticed our new, much more welcoming sign at the top of Westridge Dr for the Mainland Common. As an aside, new, much needed signs have appeared, thanks to the efforts of former Councillor Debbie Hum, on the Bedford Highway to direct people to Hemlock Ravine Park. Phase 3 of our Signage program involves the preparation of interpretive panels, such as those currently present at Belchers Marsh, Old Coach Road and overlooking the bog in Mainland Common. An interpretive panel is being fabricated for the Cabin Lake Trail, text and pictures being contributed by members and friends of HNWTA, and designed by Bruce Smith. Funding for this panel came from an HRM Community Grant. Installation will take place as soon as weather permits. Another panel may appear soon if our current funding application is successful.

Another outreach activity of the Communications Committee was the organization of a series of guided hikes and walks, from May to December, into many of our trails including Old Coach Road, Cabin Lake, Belchers Marsh, Hemlock Ravine, Mainland Common, and Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area (Susie's Lake, Blue Mountain and Charlie's Lake). Frankly, I lost count of the number of hikes and hikers but I think it is safe to say that in all there were well over 200 participants! And I'm pleased to say that our series of trail hikes is on again this year, the first led by Pat Leader on April 7 along the Old Coach Road!

I mentioned Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area and I should mention that this and the Regional Park have been the focus of our advocacy efforts over the past few years. Several of us became concerned over the potential threat to the water quality of Susie's and Quarry Lakes by expansion of the Bayers Lake Business Park in formerly HRM-owned land west of Chain Lake Dr, in the area of the mountain bike trails called the Whopper Drop. We organized a couple of public meetings to express our concerns and to better inform the public about what was going on. We had over 100 attendees at these sessions and this may have had some influence on HRM, since, shortly thereafter, HRM organized its own public meeting on May 31st at which it described a grand new vision for the Regional Park. We were delighted with the presentation but, unfortunately, there has been no further movement by HRM since then. Frankly, many of us feel that the delay by HRM in moving forward with the acquisition of lands for the Regional Park is problematic! As well, we have been waiting for the release of the Birch Cove Lakes Watershed Study report by the consultants retained to do this work and this has finally been made public. The Report is excellent, recommending very stringent water quality objectives, which would appear to preclude any development of the privately-owned lands around Susie's and Quarry Lakes. Next step should be a facilitated negotiation between these landowners and HRM to delineate the boundary for the Regional Park. The public cannot participate in this process. I hope to have more exciting news to report at next year's AGM.

I might mention at this point that Bruce and I had the opportunity to accompany our current Mayor Mike Savage on a couple of hikes into the Wilderness Area before the October municipal election. Mayor Savage was very impressed with the area and we anticipate that he will be strongly supportive of the Regional Park vision.

We had an interesting meeting with representatives from the Maskwa Aquatic Club regarding the planning of a short loop trail within their leased land and adjacent BMBCL WA. We hope that Maskwa and the NS Department of Natural Resources will support this undertaking. The fact that the Maskwa Trails rep is Olympian Mark de Jonge may provide much support for this process. In parallel, the appearance of some new trails in the Wilderness Area and adjacent privately-owned lands has prompted NS Environment to move forward with trail planning within the Provincially-owned land south of Kearney Lake. We plan to be one of the stakeholder groups involved in this process.

The Trails Group has issued a contract for a complete web site redesign – this process began only a month or so ago and Bruce is going to tell us more about this process and show us some results in a few minutes.

We have closed the books and sent in the final report on our joint Seniors Grant from the Province. To summarize our accomplishments with this funding: we donated 25 copies of Michael Haynes' HRM Trails books to the Library system, we organized and led a series of 12 hikes which encouraged over 150 people on to the trail, three benches were installed on trails in our area, and we had designed and printed our new brochure and membership card, which I believe all of you have seen!

We look forward to working productively with our 3 District Councillors, our 2, and soon to be 3, MLAs and our Federal MP who represent the citizens within our Trails Group Area during the next year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our financial sponsors since work of the type I have described costs money! Our major supporter has been HRM through the Halifax Regional Trails Capital and Maintenance grant programs, and also through its Community Grant program. Provincial support has come through the Department of Seniors, Aging Grant, and through Health and Wellness, Maintenance support program. We are also in receipt of a community grant from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. Many thanks to you all.

Of course, none of these achievements would have been possible without the heroic efforts of the hard-working board. I thank you all for your dedicated service to HNWTA. In particular, I want to express my sincere thanks to the 3 Board members who will not be re-offering next year. Pat Leader and Davena Davis, I believe, have served on the Board since our inception. Pat is our researcher and historian and uncovered much of the information on the cultural history of Belchers Marsh, the Old Coach Road, and the Cabin Lake area. She also leads hikes into Mill Run and Old Coach Road. We hope that she will continue to work with us on future interpretive panels and other things we do which are of interest to her. Davena Davis served as our Secretary for 2 years and is definitely our calm voice of reason at board meetings! In their many undertakings, Davena and Pat work as a team and so I hope that Davena will also continue to be involved. Lea Anne McLeod, although only serving on the Board for the past 2 years, has certainly left a remarkable legacy of accomplishments. Lea Anne has been the voice of the

Communications Committee, sending us monthly reports on our multi-faceted signage program, the web site redesign process, and organized all the hikes last year and most of them for this year. Lea Anne is also our presence on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. I do hope that she is successful in her web site design course at NSCC and that she will continue to be involved with HNWTA, in areas of interest to her.

Thank you!

Bob McDonald, Chair

HNWTA