



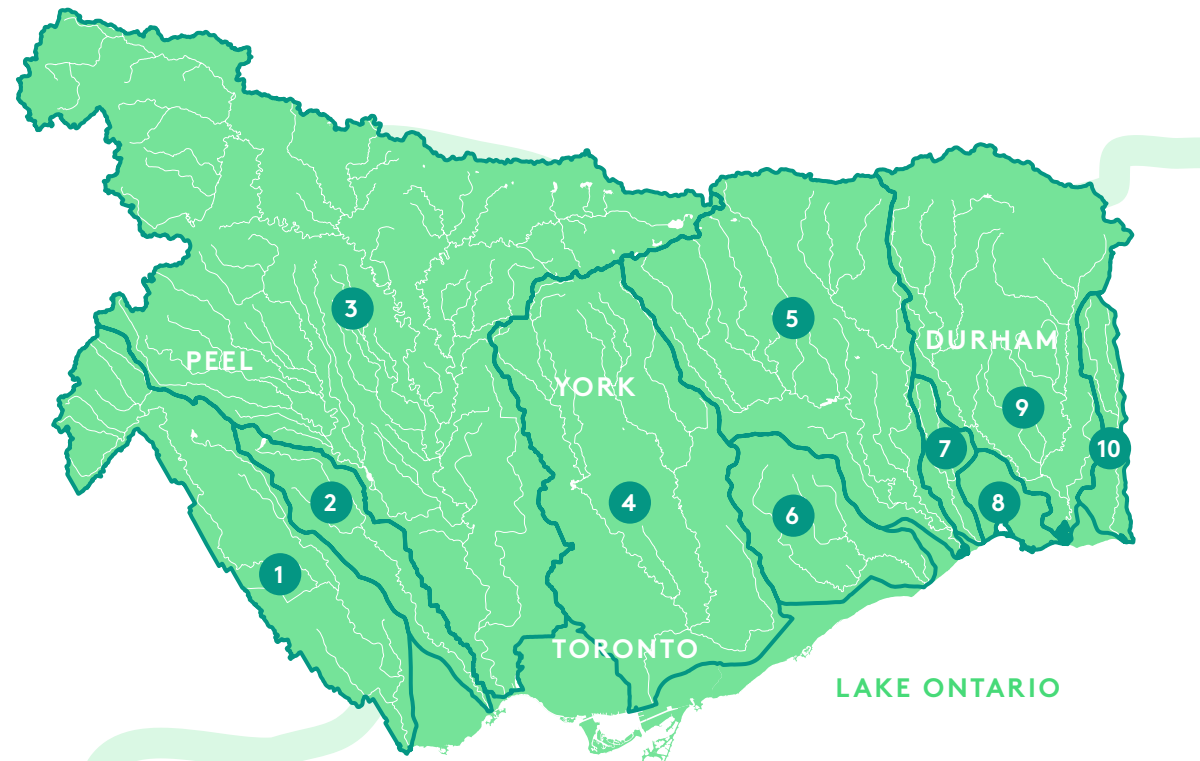
## Context

The context of our regional trail system can be described through the landscapes that frame them, the destinations that define them and the policies that guide their planning, development and management. This context provides the necessary groundwork for an informed Trail Strategy.

## Landscapes

The geological origins of the nine watersheds within the TRCA jurisdiction formed the unique geographic characteristics that define the landscapes of our region (see Figure 6.a: Context Map: TRCA Jurisdiction Watersheds). Approximately 12,000 years ago, advancing and retreating glaciers formed the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM), a pair of large ridges composed of four elevated wedges. The Moraine is bounded to the west by the Niagara Escarpment, which was critical to the formation of the Moraine, and contained in the east by the Trent River and Rice Lake.

From these upland areas, water flows through our nine watersheds, from Etobicoke Creek in the west to Carruthers Creek in the east, eventually draining into the northwestern shores of Lake Ontario. The relationship between land form and hydrology creates the natural ecosystems and biodiversity on which we depend, performing vital ecological functions, supporting cultural experience and creating the natural conditions necessary for a successful regional trail network.



- |              |                    |
|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. Etobicoke | 6. Highland        |
| 2. Mimico    | 7. Petticoat       |
| 3. Humber    | 8. Frenchman's Bay |
| 4. Don       | 9. Duffins         |
| 5. Rouge     | 10. Carruthers     |

Figure 6.a:  
Context Map: TRCA  
Jurisdiction Watersheds

## Context

### Natural System


TRCA recognizes the natural system as the natural green infrastructure of the Toronto Region. Natural green infrastructure includes water resources, natural features and areas, natural hazards, restoration areas of potential natural cover and buffers. Built green infrastructure also contributes to the health of the natural system and includes urban forests and woodlots, bioswales, rain gardens, engineered wetlands and stormwater ponds, agricultural lands, green roofs and green walls, urban agriculture and open parklands. Together, this natural and built green infrastructure reduces flooding and erosion, filters water and air pollutants, provides additional ecosystem services (such as moderating the urban heat island effect) and provides opportunities for recreation and community aesthetics. This integrated system is fundamental to the quality of life in our region and provides ecological functions and benefits known as Ecological Goods and Services (EG&S). EG&S provide the base resources that sustain our lives, including our health, social, cultural and economic needs.

Land areas of natural cover most significantly contribute to the health of our natural system. Natural lands play a vital role in flood and erosion control, groundwater recharge and discharge, biodiversity and in the overall health and well-being of urban dwellers. The sustainability of communities and economies depends upon our ability to maintain or restore the ecological functions of the natural cover in both urban and rural landscapes.

However, the quantity, quality and connectedness of natural cover in our region is declining (TRCA, 2016). TRCA's *Terrestrial Natural Heritage System Strategy (TNHSS)* recommends a minimum of 30 per cent natural cover – including forests, wetlands and meadows – to maintain healthy watersheds (TRCA, 2007). Currently, only 25 per cent of our regional landscape has natural cover – and only 17 per cent of that amount is forest and wetland cover, which provides the greatest ecological value. These natural spaces continue to be fragmented by expanding urban development, reducing their ability to function as meaningful habitat. (TRCA, 2016).

It is in our urban and urbanizing areas where natural systems and the delivery of EG&S are under the greatest pressure. Achieving the TNHSS natural cover targets will require an expansion of the natural system. As the population of the GTA continues to increase and the demand for trails grows, it is imperative that the diverse greenspaces of our natural system are increased, protected and enhanced.

When used as rationale to acquire greenspace, trail development can provide a means to increase the natural system. When sited within the natural system, trails should be located to minimize impacts to significant natural features. Within our natural system, our region features a range of environments, which can be described by four landscape types: **headwaters**, **river valleys**, **waterfront** and **tablelands**.

An aerial photograph of a vast, dense green forest. A light-colored, winding path or road cuts through the trees, starting from the bottom center and curving towards the left. In the far distance, a city skyline is visible under a clear sky. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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## Headwaters

Our region is framed by headwaters on the rugged Niagara Escarpment and the rolling hills of the Oak Ridges Moraine (ORM). The Niagara Escarpment is a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve, designated for its unique characteristics and a provincial land use plan guides development in its area. The landform is a largely forested ridge of fossil-rich sedimentary rock that extends through the northwest portion of TRCA's jurisdiction, where it is overlain by glacial drift of the ORM.

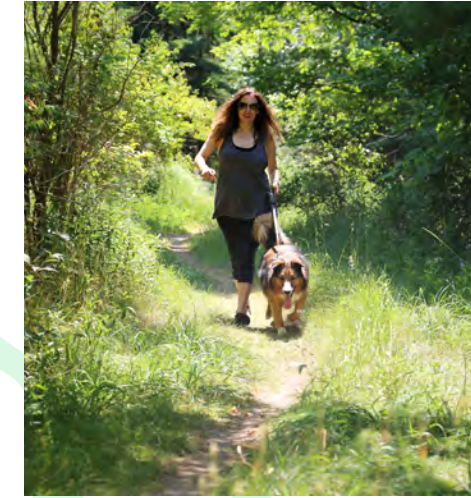
The Escarpment is an important area for groundwater recharge as well as forming the headwaters of the main branch of the Humber River. The Escarpment encompasses wildlife habitats, farms, scenic views, mineral resources and historic sites and towns.

The ORM is a geologic feature that encompasses 190,000 hectares of land and water. It is 160 kilometres in total length and located north of and parallel to the Lake Ontario shoreline. The ORM is an irregular ridge of sands, gravels and tills towering up to 300 metres higher than Lake Ontario and was deposited by the melt waters between two receding glacier lobes some 13,000 years ago (TRCA, 2014). Within TRCA's jurisdiction, the ORM serves as the headwaters for the Duffins Creek and Rouge, Don and Humber river watersheds. From the headwaters, water flows southward through our river systems, woodlands, meadows and wetlands toward Lake Ontario. Our headwaters require significant protection and enhancement to maintain their ecological function and the health of the downstream reaches.



Glen Haffy Conservation Area

Both the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine converge at Glen Haffy Conservation Area, forming high, forested hills and deep, wooded dells (called dingles). Each year, Glen Haffy raises 60,000 rainbow trout at its on-site fish hatchery and releases them into the fishing ponds at Glen Haffy, the Glen Haffy Fly Fishing Club and Heart Lake Conservation Area. Glen Haffy's hiking trails offer some of the most panoramic vistas in southern Ontario.



Boyd Conservation Area

Situated in the undulating Humber River Valley, Boyd is a quiet, green oasis. Framed by steep slopes, the heart of the open space is situated in the valley, offering a parkland setting with views of the meandering river for visitors to enjoy. From spring through fall, Boyd offers programmed outdoor activities and experiences in nature. Scouts and Guides often have their first overnight camping experience here and it's a popular spot for picnics. In the fall, the park is used as the venue for cross-country running events, bringing together some of the best runners in the province. Rich in natural character, Boyd offers respite from the fast pace of the urban life.

## River Valleys

The river valleys that carve through our watersheds provide lush, forested landscapes that vary in scale and terrain from steep, dramatic valleys to wide, open floodplains. Our river valley and stream corridors are the foundation of our greenspace system, creating a network of open space that is among the largest in the world. River valleys connect the Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment to Lake Ontario and act as a greenway for water, wildlife and people through rapidly urbanizing communities. They also connect us with our region's rich Indigenous heritage and settler history. Ravines offer trails that lead through secluded natural areas in some of the most urbanized areas of our region.

## Waterfront

All of the nine rivers and streams in our watersheds flow toward the waterfront of Lake Ontario, stretching over 70 kilometres from Marie Curtis Park in Etobicoke to Lakeside Park in Ajax. Prior to the infilling and industrialization of the waterfront dating back to the 1800s, the shoreline existed as a marshland estuary in the west and central sections and a beach bluff landscape in the east. Over the course of 200 years, the majority of the shoreline evolved from natural beaches, bluffs, wetlands and marshes to man-made edges, harbors, industrial parks and ports, with only some small remnants of natural beach, bluff shoreline and wetland river mouths in the eastern waterfront.

In the 1970s, the TRCA and the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto developed a Lake Ontario Waterfront Plan to establish a series of waterfront parks and to revitalize the shoreline. TRCA led the implementation of the plan by working to actively rehabilitate and restore the natural shoreline habitat, while providing water-based recreational opportunities and public access.

Despite these efforts, public dismay over the state of the waterfront properties led the Government of Canada to establish in 1988 the Royal Commission on the Future of the Toronto Waterfront, with Honourable David Crombie as Commissioner. Through this commission and the ongoing efforts of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, Waterfront Toronto, the City of Toronto and TRCA, the waterfront is continuing to undergo a dramatic revitalization to become a healthier and more vibrant destination for all.



### Tommy Thompson Park

Toronto's urban wilderness is found at Tommy Thompson Park (TTP). Entirely human-made, TTP was constructed out of millions of cubic metres of concrete, earth fill and dredged sand to create a 250 hectare site of lagoons and sand peninsulas that now extends about five kilometres into Lake Ontario. This accidental wilderness evolved through both natural processes and a concerted effort by TRCA to restore and enhance this aquatic park to support public access, nature interpretation and wildlife.

## Tablelands

Below the headwaters and outside of the river valleys are elevated and generally level plateaus called tablelands. Tablelands feature the greatest concentration of built features and urban development. However, they also contain areas of natural features, which contribute to the health of our natural system. The successful management of our natural system is dependent on good tableland management.

**Highlighting local history helps share experiences between past and present populations, increases enjoyment of the trails and instills appreciation for the community in which we live.**



## Cultural Heritage

Our region exhibits a rich cultural heritage that intertwines the lives of Indigenous people, European settlers and immigrants from all over the world. Each of these populations has had an impact on – and, in turn, has been influenced by – the natural environment. Exploring the history of the people who lived here highlights their experiences and the importance of the environment in their daily lives. Trails provide an ideal avenue to explore spatial and temporal connections across landscapes. Highlighting local history helps share experiences between past and present populations, increases enjoyment of the trails and instills appreciation for the community in which we live. These connections can be explored through our cultural heritage resources and destinations, which reflect four common themes: **transportation**, **settlement**, **industry** and **co-existence with nature**.

### Transportation

The natural environment has influenced the mobility and settlement of people, as well as patterns of exploration and trade, across the landscape and over time. Natural features have dictated paths of cultural routes/roots, networks of connectivity and channels of communication. Cultural heritage resources tied to transportation include trails, roadways, watercourses, railways and bridges.



### The Carrying Place Trail

Exploration and fur trade activities were carried out along well-established trails linking Lake Ontario to the Holland River, Lake Simcoe and Lake Huron. The Passage de Toronto – also known as the Toronto Carrying Place Trail – was part of a series of interconnected trails with two main branches: the western branch along the Humber River and the eastern branch along the Rouge River. These trails originated thousands of years ago and were used by Indigenous bands travelling to seasonal camps along the Rouge and Humber rivers. The routes consisted of a mix of overland and water travel and would have been introduced to early European explorers and traders by local Indigenous people.

### Context



### The Seed-Barker Site

Situated on a steep-sided plateau eight metres above the flood plain and surrounded by the deep valley walls of the East Humber River, are the remnants of a large Iroquoian village occupied approximately 475 years ago. The village, strategically located along the Carrying Place Trail, was in a highly defensible location with panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. Built during a period of heightened conflict, this farming village was a haven for up to 2,000 individuals whose smaller villages relocated and amalgamated in this location. A truly multicultural community, people in this village traded, hunted, fished and grew crops in the rich valley.

### Settlement

Areas of settlement where people have established communities inevitably leave a mark upon the landscape. Human settlement presents some of the most visible and recognizable types of cultural heritage resources, such as agriculture, historic buildings, heritage districts and the remnants of Indigenous villages. They reveal clues to local history, relationships between communities and how past people adapted to their local environments.

## Industry

The development of industry led to technical innovation, economic development and the expansion and evolution of villages into thriving towns and cities. The exploitation of natural resources to feed and power mills ultimately impacted the surrounding environment: forests were clear cut for lumber and agriculture, gravel and clay were extracted for building materials and waterways modified for hydraulic power. An examination of past industrial processes and their environmental impacts highlights the need to balance economic progress and natural heritage today.



The Haight Site

The site of a thriving textile industry in the late 1800s, this woolen and carding mill complex would have required significant hydraulic power to run the machinery. This power was harnessed by damming nearby Duffins Creek to form a large mill pond and provide a steady supply of water to the mill along a constructed mill race. While the dam and mill pond are no longer present, the scars to the landscape remain visible to this day.

## Context



Bolton Camp

In 1922, Family Services Toronto opened Bolton Camp as a Fresh Air Camp for low income, urban families to enjoy nature. During WWII, the site was also used as a Cadet Training Centre for the Oakville High School Cadet Corps. When the war ended, the facility continued to serve as a camp for underprivileged children. Although the camp shut its doors in 1999, the local community and municipal partners have since repurposed the camp into an animated community cultural hub. As part of this revitalization, Bolton Camp will feature a new Indigenous youth program for land-based learning with Elders and traditional knowledge keepers. Once again, people are coming together to learn, play, create and explore the environment, supporting beliefs, traditional ways and experiences only possible in an outdoor setting.

## Co-Existence with Nature

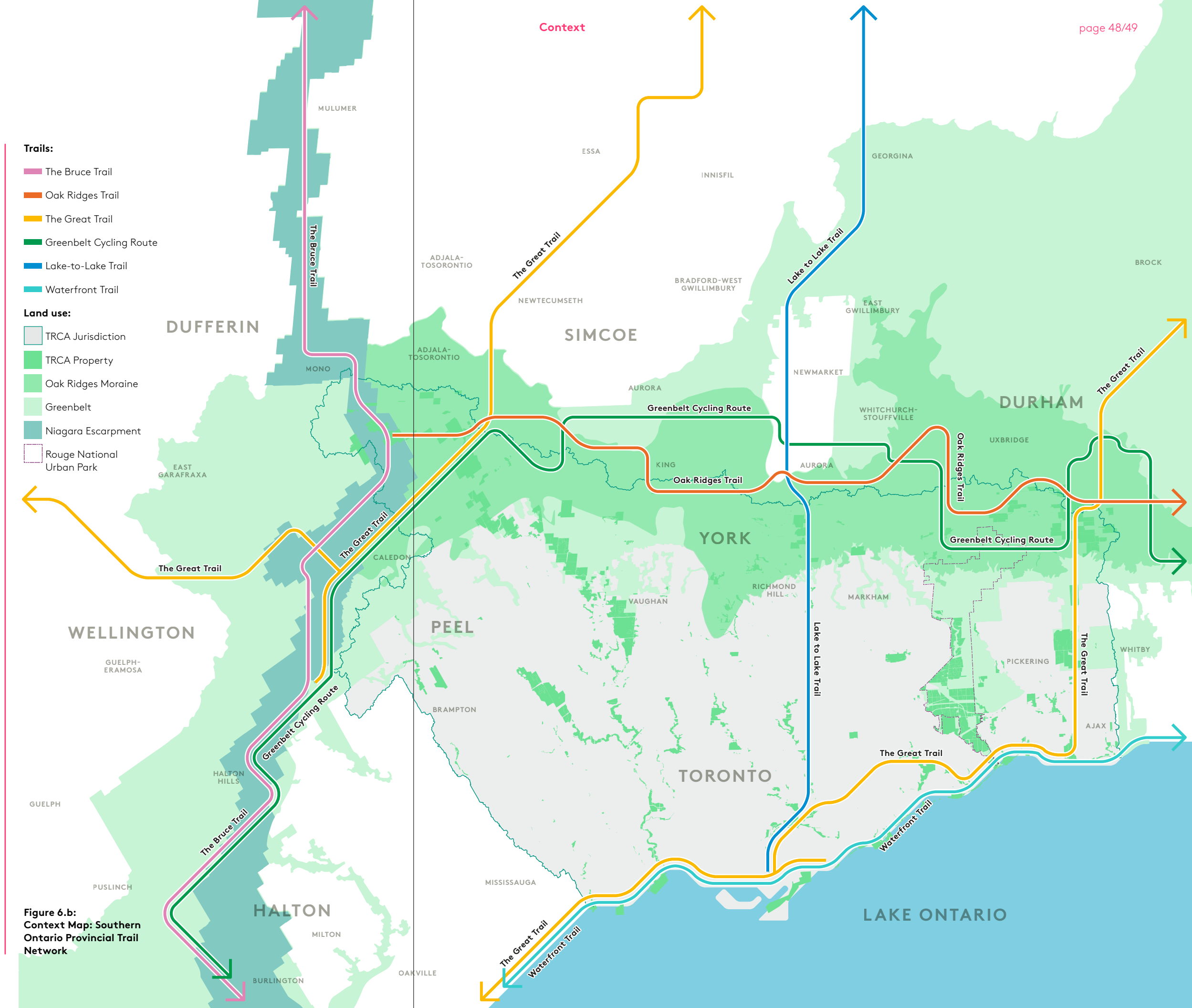
Our co-existence with nature is a fundamental relationship for all people and a constant source of inspiration and wonder. Every culture has expressed this bond through various traditional, spiritual, artistic or cultural associations with the land.

## Trails

Trails weave through every community, passing through a myriad of neighbourhoods and landscapes. They connect residents of Canada’s largest city region and improve cohesion between our distinctive communities. Our jurisdiction is a key nexus point within the larger provincial trail system where significant inter-regional trails converge, including the Bruce Trail, The Great Trail, the Greenbelt Route, the Oak Ridges Trail, the Lake-to-Lake Trail, the Pan Am Path and the Waterfront Trail. These larger regional trails facilitate conservation and co-existence with nature, while also serving as a major cultural and socio-economic force.

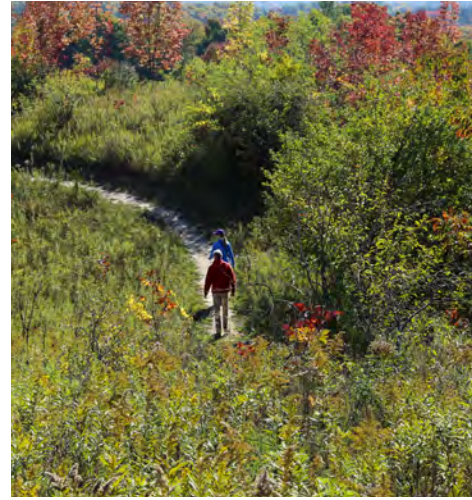
### Context: Southern Ontario Provincial Trail Network

This surrounding context is illustrated in Figure 6.b: Context Map: Southern Ontario Provincial Trail Network. Many of these national and provincial trails form key connections in the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network.



## Typologies

The Greater Toronto Region Trail Network features a wide palette of regional trails that reflect the landscape context in which they are situated. These five major recreational and active transportation regional trail typologies are: **ridge**, **valley**, **corridor**, **waterfront** and **blue**.



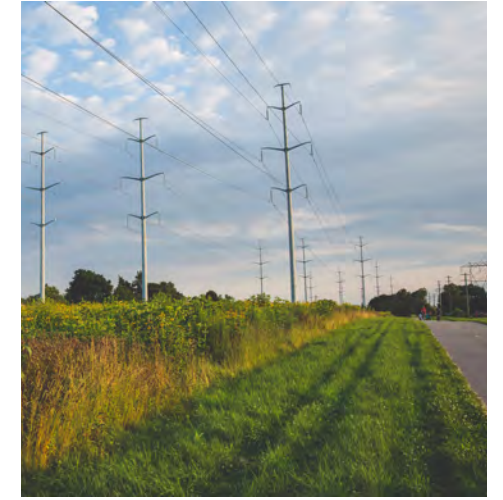
### Ridge Trail

Ridge trails weave their way along the elevation profiles of the Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine. These trails tend to follow rugged terrain and often require maneuvering around large obstacles, steep inclines and sharp drop-offs. They generally have natural surfacing and smaller width clearances. An example of a ridge trail is the Oak Ridges Trail, which traverses the Oak Ridges Moraine.



### Valley Trail

Following the paths of major rivers and streams, valley trails fall within our valley corridors. Depending on their location within the terrain of the valley corridor, valley trails can either be undulating footpaths along forested slopes or flat, wide multi-use trails within open meadows or agricultural fields. In the GTA, the majority of valley trails flow in a north-south direction, connecting Lake Ontario to the upper reaches of our watersheds. An example of a valley trail is the Humber Trail, which follows the Humber River Valley.



### Corridor Trail

Corridor trails are linear, multi-use pathways within or adjacent to roadways or infrastructure corridors. Infrastructure corridors can include hydro, pipeline and railway land uses. Corridor trails provide active transportation-based greenways linking our watersheds from east to west. Where corridors align in a north-south direction, they provide additional connectivity between neighbourhoods in our municipalities and regions. An example of a corridor trail is The Meadoway, which is located within the Gatineau Hydro Corridor in Scarborough.



### Waterfront Trail

In the TRCA jurisdiction, the Waterfront Trail parallels over 70 kilometres of shoreline along Lake Ontario. It is one section of a larger route that stretches over 2,000 kilometres along the Canadian shores of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, Lake Huron and the Niagara, Detroit and St. Lawrence rivers. In our region, it connects hundreds of communities to TRCA's waterfront parks, such as Marie Curtis Park, Humber Bay Park and Ashbridge's Bay Park and natural areas including wetlands, forests and beaches. Linking the waterfront communities, the Waterfront Trail is a multi-use path for recreational and active transportation use.



### Blue Trail

Blue Trails are a relatively new concept to the Greater Toronto Region Trail system. These trails are the paddling routes on our navigable waterways, which include the southern segments of the Humber, Don and Rouge rivers, as well as Duffins Creek and certain areas of the Lake Ontario waterfront that allow paddling access. TRCA has a celebrated tradition of supporting water-based activities and recreation in harmony with the protection and enhancement of natural systems. There is established water access at the various waterfront parks and, once a year, TRCA provides a unique opportunity for people to explore the Don River Watershed and "Paddle the Don" from Ernest Thompson Seton Park to the mouth at the Keating Channel.

## Context

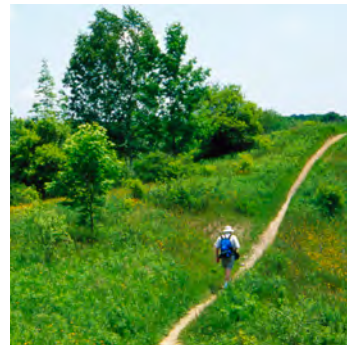
Blue Trails build on this experience as a way of providing special access to view our shorelines from the water and travel to various destinations along the waterfront. Further study of navigable routes is recommended as part of this Trail Strategy. TRCA will work with our waterfront municipal partners to establish conceptual safe paddling routes, subject to various conditions, that will link our lakes, rivers and shorelines together. Blue Trails offer the perspective to reflect on all the benefits we derive from the natural environment – air, water, resources, recreation and spiritual renewal – that are integral to the health and function of our region.

**Blue Trails build on this experience as a way of providing special access to view our shorelines from the water and travel to various destinations along the waterfront.**



## Descriptions

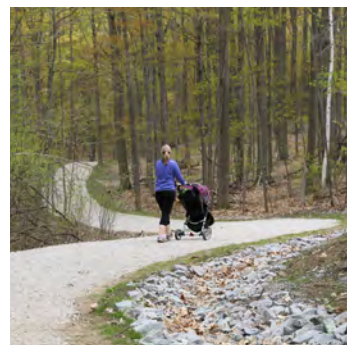
The Trail Strategy offers the following trail descriptions to reflect the variety of trail surface types and uses found in the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network:



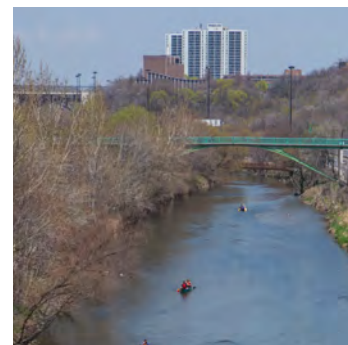
**Single-use hiking trails** with natural surfaces and/or manufactured surfaces



Dedicated **bicycle routes** within road right-of-ways

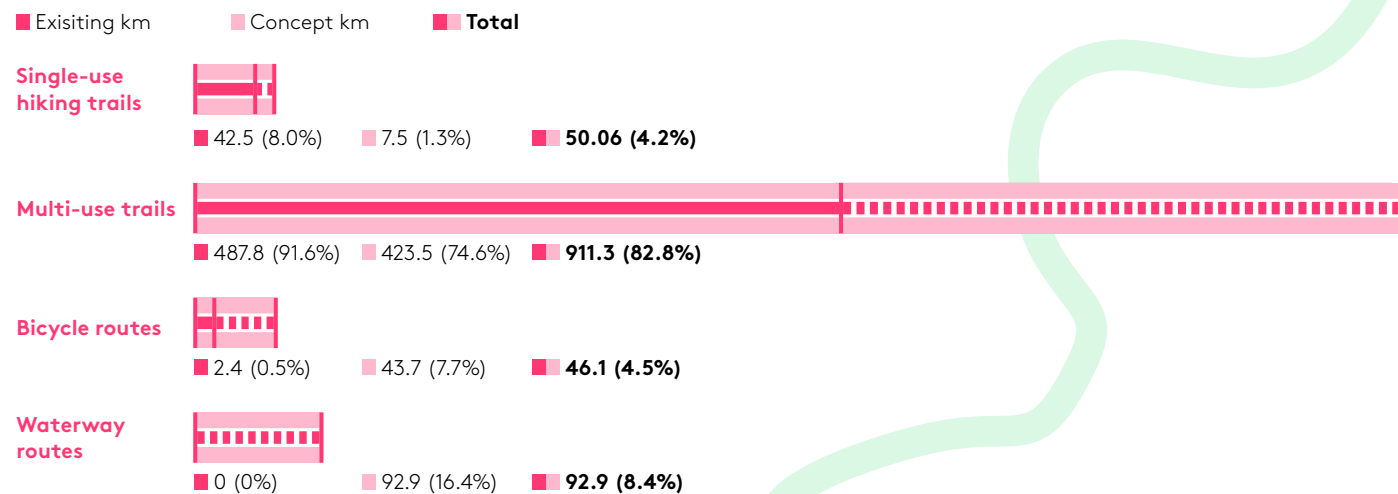


**Multi-use trails** with natural surfaces and/or manufactured surfaces



**Waterway routes** on navigable rivers and lakes

Figure 6.d: Trail descriptions



## Context

### Activities

**The Greater Toronto Region Trail Network supports a diversity of activities across the seasons. Understanding activity use for specific trails informs appropriate trail planning, design and maintenance so that impact to the environment is minimized. Trail activities supported by this Strategy include:**

**Active Transportation.** Walking, jogging, cycling or using a wheelchair to travel to transit, workplaces, schools, community centres and other daily destinations supports climate change mitigation, healthy living and complete communities, while also addressing the first-and-last-mile regional transit issue.

**Cross-Country Skiing and Snowshoeing.** Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing allows people to embrace the elements and explore our magical winter landscape while being active and outdoors.

**Culture.** Trails support the exploration of nature through art. Photography, painting, dance and other arts can be enjoyed in the fresh air while on a trail.

**Dog Walking.** Dog owners enjoy numerous health and social benefits by walking their leashed dog on trails a few times a week. Benefits include improved cardiovascular fitness, lower blood pressure, stronger muscles and bones and decreased stress.

**Events.** Trails and related facilities support community building, including social gatherings, community events, races, guided walks, sponsorship opportunities, cultural heritage programming and public art.

**Hiking, Running and Walking.** Single-use hiking and multi-use trails provide recreational access to the natural wonders of our region, thereby instilling appreciation and stewardship.

**Horse Riding.** Riding is a great way to get outdoors and observe the surrounding landscape, bringing the rider closer to nature and boosting well-being.

**Mountain Biking and Road Cycling.** Mountain biking and road cycling offers opportunities for both recreation and active transportation. Designated mountain biking trails provide mental and physical challenges for all skill levels, while paved cycling routes connect people and communities.

**Observing Wildlife.** Quietly observing bird species, such as songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors in their natural environment is a great way to relax and learn while on a trail. Small mammals, such as coyotes, deer, fox and rabbits can often be safely observed from the vantage of a trail.

**Paddling.** Recreational water activities such as fishing, kayaking, canoeing and stand-up paddle boarding connect people to the water.

## Trends

National trends overwhelmingly indicate a growing demand for trails. Residents of and visitors to the Greater Toronto Region desire to use trails for recreation, active transportation, healthy living, community building and eco-tourism. Some key trends around trails are:

1. [activeswitch.ca/files/docs/2015%20Walktober%20Workplace-Workplace-Walktober-%20FactSheet.pdf](https://activeswitch.ca/files/docs/2015%20Walktober%20Workplace-Workplace-Walktober-%20FactSheet.pdf)

2. Summary Report, 1998 National Survey on Active Transportation, conducted by Environics International on behalf of Go for Green

3. Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016329.

4. Bull FC, Armstrong TP, Dixon T, Ham S, Neiman A, Pratt M. Chapter 10: Physical inactivity. In: Ezzati M, Lopez AD, Rodgers A, Murray CJL, editors. *Comparative quantifications of health risks. Global and regional burden of disease attributable to selected major risk factors*. Volume 1. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2004.

5. [thestar.com/yourtoronto/2014/06/27/plans\\_to\\_shift\\_torontos\\_bicycle\\_strategy\\_into\\_high\\_gear\\_in\\_the\\_works](https://thestar.com/yourtoronto/2014/06/27/plans_to_shift_torontos_bicycle_strategy_into_high_gear_in_the_works)

6. [sharetheroad.ca/opinion-poll-data-s17022](https://sharetheroad.ca/opinion-poll-data-s17022)

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. [rto12.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Ontario-Trail-Tourism-2014.pdf](https://rto12.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Ontario-Trail-Tourism-2014.pdf)

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.



## Benefits

Trails are overwhelmingly beneficial to our lives. They improve our health, contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation, boost the economy and support environmental conservation. Some key benefits of trails are:



A **daily walk** in nature can be as effective in treating mild depression as taking an antidepressant.<sup>1</sup>



Regular use of nature for physical activity can **reduce the risk of mental health problems by 50%**.<sup>3</sup>



The experience of walking and bicycling helps us **connect people and places**. Walkers move at slower speeds and have more time to perceive and comprehend the details of the environment and the community.<sup>2</sup>



Trails are associated with **increased physical activity and improved public health**, especially in rural places without other safe places to exercise. In many places, access to trails in low income or minority neighborhoods is much less than in high income or mostly white neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>



From a social well-being perspective, trails in greenspace provide enormous benefits to neighbourhoods, communities and individuals by **improving social cohesion and security** while enhancing the enjoyment of the local environment and creating a sense of place.<sup>5</sup>

## Context



**Cycling 3 hours** a week to work reduces the risk of death from all causes by 28%.<sup>6</sup>

**Walking 29 minutes** 7 days a week reduces the risk of death from all causes by 22%.<sup>7</sup>



Trails tourism has made significant contributions to our economy. In 2014, hiking expenditures by Ontarians added \$559 million to Ontario's GDP and created more than 18,000 jobs across the province with an annual economic benefit of nearly \$1.4 billion.<sup>8</sup>



Active transportation reduces the cost of living in the GTR. **Walking and cycling costs approximately \$0.03/km on average**. In comparison, Transport Canada estimates the average mid-size car is driven 16,000 km in a year and costs about \$0.46/km (or \$7,574 for the year)\*<sup>9</sup>



Trails are often associated with **higher property value**, especially when a trail is designed to provide neighborhood access and maintain residents' privacy.<sup>10</sup>



Active modes of transportation are often less expensive compared to motor vehicle use. It is estimated that it costs \$0.58/km to operate a car compared to \$0.06/km to cycle.<sup>11</sup>

1 [moodwalks.ca/about-mood-walks/infographic-the-benefits-of-nature](http://moodwalks.ca/about-mood-walks/infographic-the-benefits-of-nature)

2 Active Living – Go for Green. 1995. Linkages: Built Environment Wellbeing and Active Living.

3 [ecohealth-ontario.ca/files/Greenspace\\_and\\_Ecohealth\\_Toolkit\\_2.pdf](http://ecohealth-ontario.ca/files/Greenspace_and_Ecohealth_Toolkit_2.pdf)

4 [headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trails-pathways/trails-research](http://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trails-pathways/trails-research)

5 [ecohealth-ontario.ca/files/FO\\_8.5x11\\_EH\\_TOOLKIT\\_nocrops\\_FA.pdf](http://ecohealth-ontario.ca/files/FO_8.5x11_EH_TOOLKIT_nocrops_FA.pdf)

6 Andersen LB, Schnohr P, Schroll M, Hein HO. All-cause mortality associated with physical activity during leisure time, work, sports, and cycling to work. Arch Intern Med 2000; 160(11):1621-1628.

7 Kahlmeier S, Cavill N, Dinsdale H, Rutter H, Gotschi T, Foster C et al. Health economic assessment tools (HEAT) for walking and cycling. Methodology and user guide. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2011.

8 [news.ontario.ca/mtc/en/2016/06/province-passes-act-to-support-ontarios-trails](http://news.ontario.ca/mtc/en/2016/06/province-passes-act-to-support-ontarios-trails)

9 Transport Canada, 2011, p.16

\* Including gas, oil, maintenance, tires, insurance, license, registration, taxes, depreciation & finance charges.

10 [headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trails-pathways/trails-research](http://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/trails-pathways/trails-research)

11 VTPI, 2011. Transportation Cost and Benefit Analysis II – Vehicle Costs. \*Based on the median of the figure given by VTPI (5–15 cents per mile)

## Partnerships, Policies and Plans

There are 14 municipalities and more than 20 NGOs with an interest in building trails in the GTA. All have developed policies and plans in support of trail planning, development and maintenance. Partnership between these entities is critical for prioritized trail investment.

### Conservation Authorities

TRCA approaches trail building in collaboration with all partners, including trail organizations, municipal and regional partners, the provincial and federal governments and the public. In addition to partnering on the realization of regional-level trails, TRCA plans, implements and manages recreational trail networks within its own conservation parks and areas.

TRCA is the first urban Conservation Authority in Ontario to develop a comprehensive regional trail strategy that proactively plans for and services massive regional growth. In 1992, TRCA released the *TRCA Trail Planning and Design Guidelines: A Handbook for an Inter-Regional Trail System in the Greater Toronto Area* (Handbook). Over the years, this technical handbook has successfully assisted TRCA and partners in the planning, design and maintenance of trails in our region. An update to the Handbook to reflect current best practices will follow the release of the Trail Strategy.

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In 2014, TRCA released *The Living City Policies* document to guide the implementation of TRCA's legislated and delegated roles and responsibilities in the planning and development approvals process. *The Living City Policies* introduced several trail-focused policies and goals, such as supporting recreational and sustainable active transportation trails, promoting increased public access to greenspace through trails, developing a continuous regional trail network and collaborating with partners to develop trail networks that connect communities, parks and greenspace. In particular, Recreational Use Policies outline TRCA's environmental planning objectives, goals and policies for non-motorized trails. Existing and proposed trail alignments within TRCA-owned and regulated areas will be developed and maintained in a manner consistent with TRCA's *The Living City Policies*.

### Local and Regional Municipalities

Local and regional governments recognize trails as essential green infrastructure through the inclusion of recreational and active transportation trail policies in Strategic Plans, Official Plans and Transportation Master Plans. These policies set out standards for new communities, managing growth and development and protecting the environment. All of the municipalities in the Greater Toronto Area make recommendations to prioritize walking, cycling and transit to meet the needs of residents and develop complete communities. Several Official Plans also include policies to improve connectivity between greenspaces and cover the role of trails in active transportation, recreational service delivery, community engagement and ecological enhancement.

In response to population growth and changing community needs, municipalities are constructing significant regional trail routes. For example, York Region, the City of Toronto and the City of Richmond Hill are implementing the Lake-to-Lake Cycling Route and Walking Trail. New trail segment construction along the Humber Trail, the Etobicoke Creek Trail and the East Don Trail are also recent examples of successful trail building partnership projects between TRCA, the regions and the municipalities.



In addition to helping plan, build and maintain trails, volunteers are also valuable partners in grant applications, hosting trail building events and leading stewardship activities.





## Trail Organizations

Volunteer trail organizations were instrumental in formalizing some of the primary trails in the Greater Toronto Region Trail Network, including the Bruce Trail, the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail and the Humber Valley Heritage Trail. In addition to helping plan, build and maintain trails, volunteers are also valuable partners in grant applications, hosting trail building events and leading stewardship activities. Most recently, a partnership between TRCA, Green Durham Association and Parks Canada has established the foundation for a key link and gateway to Rouge National Urban Park near the Town of Uxbridge.

A number of national organizations are working to advocate, fundraise and contribute to the establishment of trails in our region. These include: The Trans Canada Trail Foundation (TCTF), the National Trails Coalition (NTC), the Canadian Trails Federation, the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) Canada, Hike Canada and the Transportation Association of Canada (TAC).

Provincial-based groups advocating for trails in Ontario include the Ontario Trails Council, Hike Ontario, the Trails for All Ontarians Collaborative (TAOC), Cycle Ontario Alliance, Cross Country Ontario, the Ontario Heritage Trust, the Oak Ridges Trail Association, the Bruce Trail Conservancy, the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and the Waterfront Regeneration Trust.

Local groups that support trails in the GTA include the Humber Valley Heritage Trail Association, Durham Outdoors Club, the Outdoor Club of East York, Durham Mountain Biking Association, York Hiking Club, Durham Trails Coordinating Committee, Green Durham, the Toronto Bruce Trail Club, Cycle Toronto, the Toronto Field Naturalists, the Toronto Outdoor Club, the Toronto Off-Road Bicycling Association, the City of Toronto's Crothers Woods Stewardship Team and The Wild Bettys.

## Provincial Agencies

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the Government of Ontario played an instrumental role in developing a legacy of provincially-significant trails in

the GTA. In the 1970s, the Seaton Trail was created by the Government of Ontario in partnership with Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (now TRCA). Built by high school and university students, the trail was maintained for many years by local Boy Scouts. In 1992, the Government of Ontario established the Waterfront Regeneration Trust to implement 80 recommendations from Regeneration, a Royal Commission report produced with Honourable David Crombie as Commissioner. One of these recommendations was to create a continuous waterfront trail along the Lake Ontario shoreline. Now known as the Waterfront Trail, this route has expanded to reach all of the Great Lakes.

In 2005, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport produced the *Ontario Trails Strategy (OTS)* to formulate a long-term proposal for the planning, management, promotion and use of trails in Ontario. That Strategy envisions a coordinated approach to meeting the challenges facing the trails community. The province increased its commitment to the improvement of trails by enacting the Ontario Trails Act 2016 (S.O. 2016, c.8, Sched. 1) to permanently protect trails. The act also established an annual Trails Week to coincide with International Trails Day. Both events strive to promote public access to Ontario's world-class trails system for recreation, tourism and active transportation, while building a network of trail stewards.

In 2008, Metrolinx published *The Big Move* to transform regional transportation through nine Big Moves and ten Strategies aimed at implementing an integrated, multi-modal transportation plan for the

GTHA (Metrolinx, 2017). One of Metrolinx's Big Moves is to advance active transportation initiatives. In 2017, Metrolinx released the *2041 Regional Transportation Plan*, which includes additional recommendations to improve active transportation options, including the completion of a regional commuter cycling network.

In 2017, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs published *The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*. The goals of the plan are to manage growth, build complete communities, curb sprawl and protect the natural environment. To achieve these goals, policies are aimed at expanding access to trails and greenspace and coordinating our approach to trail planning and development. Furthermore, the plan cites trails as key elements of our cultural heritage landscape for recognition. *The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe*, together with the *Greenbelt Plan*, *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* and the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, build on the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) to establish a unique land use planning framework for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) that supports the achievement of complete communities, a thriving economy, a clean and healthy environment and social equity.

Ontario Parks, a branch of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), manages trails within our provincial parks. Other ministries that support trail projects include the Ministry of Infrastructure, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks.

**In 2017, Metrolinx released the 2041 Regional Transportation Plan, which includes additional recommendations to improve active transportation options, including the completion of a regional commuter cycling network.**

### Federal Agencies

Parks Canada manages trails within our National Parks. In the GTA, Parks Canada oversees the trail network in Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP). RNUP is the result of decades of effort and collaboration by various governments, organizations and community leaders. In 1994, the Rouge Park Alliance (RPA) was formed and an \$8.5 million federal endowment fund was created to initiate the park. Through a collaborative effort between the federal and provincial governments and the municipal governments of Toronto, Markham, Pickering, York and Durham, Rouge Park was initially formed in 1995. Ten years later, RNUP was formalized as the largest urban wilderness park in North America.

The federal government has also contributed funding to The Great Trail and a number of municipal active transportation projects. For example, the *Economic Action Plan* (2009) funded some 500 recreational trail projects across the country and Infrastructure Canada launched the *National Recreational Trails Program* in 2014, a \$10 million initiative to expand and rehabilitate Canada's non-motorized, snowmobile and all-terrain vehicle trail system (National Trails Coalition, 2009). The federal government has provided significant support to trail building in Canada through funding for the National Trails Coalition, The Great Trail and active transportation projects through co-investments with municipalities.

## Challenges

**The Greater Toronto Trail Network community must address a number of challenges to successfully achieve the vision of the Trail Strategy:**

### Prevent Environmental Degradation.

The stresses on our ecological systems will only increase as our population grows and urbanization increases. Many well-loved trails are currently exceeding their carrying capacity. Overuse of trails leads to deterioration of both the trail and the surrounding environment, negatively impacting habitat and undermining the natural experience many people seek. In addition to overuse, trails that bisect critically-sensitive habitats, areas of species at-risk and/or natural hazards negatively impact our natural system. Keeping trails out of sensitive locations and carefully planning their extent and configuration will help prevent environmental degradation.

**Meet Growing Demand for Trails.** Trail use is on an upward trend. People are seeking trails that offer opportunities for recreation and active transportation in their communities. Land use planning must accommodate integrated, multi-modal trail networks in existing and future community design.

### Resolve Trail Network Disconnection.

While there are many trails in our region, they often fall short of operating as an integrated system. A lack of comprehensive connectivity and the absence of a consistent wayfinding signage system results in a missed opportunity to connect people to significant destinations.

**Build Capacity.** Trails operate successfully when there are dedicated local stewards and volunteers who care for them. Cultivating a robust stewardship mentality in the trail community requires investment, time and support from all partners.

### Ensure Trail Accessibility & Inclusive Design.

Diverse trail experiences should be available for persons of all abilities. An exception to accessibility is defensible only where accessible design would require modifications that would cause substantial harm to natural or cultural resources, fundamentally alter the nature of the setting or the purpose of the trail, require construction methods prohibited by local laws, or would simply not be feasible due to terrain or prevailing construction practices. Barring these exceptions, trail planners should strive for accessible design and construction of any trailhead and trail segment.

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**Address Trail Safety & Maintenance.**

Trail maintenance is critical to delivering a safe and enjoyable trail experience. An ongoing feedback loop of inventory, monitoring and maintenance is required to adaptively manage for risks, hazards, safety and aesthetics. This responsibility will increase with more trail users.

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**Promote Active Living.** The positive influence of greenspaces on human health is well documented. With our increasingly car-oriented lifestyles, opportunities for physical activity are diminishing. Principal barriers to walking to a destination include distance, time, weather, inconvenience and disability. To support active living, integrated trail and transit networks must be designed to address these obstacles.

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**Build Effective Relationships & Partnerships.** Regional trail networks are achieved through partnership. Fostering relationships with the trail community requires ongoing investment. Innovative partnerships must be advanced to maximize budgets, resources and opportunities to make shared trail connections.

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**Manage Trail User Conflicts.** Conflicts between different activities on trails pose issues for trail planning, design and management. These conflicts can undermine the trail experience for all users. The demands of different activities must be balanced both on individual trails and across the broader network.

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**Increase Communications & Marketing.**

Our regional trail network is one of our greatest green infrastructure assets. We must increase communications and marketing efforts to generate greater use and awareness while improving orientation, wayfinding and trail etiquette. We must convey the value of our network and support appreciation for and stewardship of nature. Improved communication also encourages responsible trail use and protects the environmental health of the trail network.

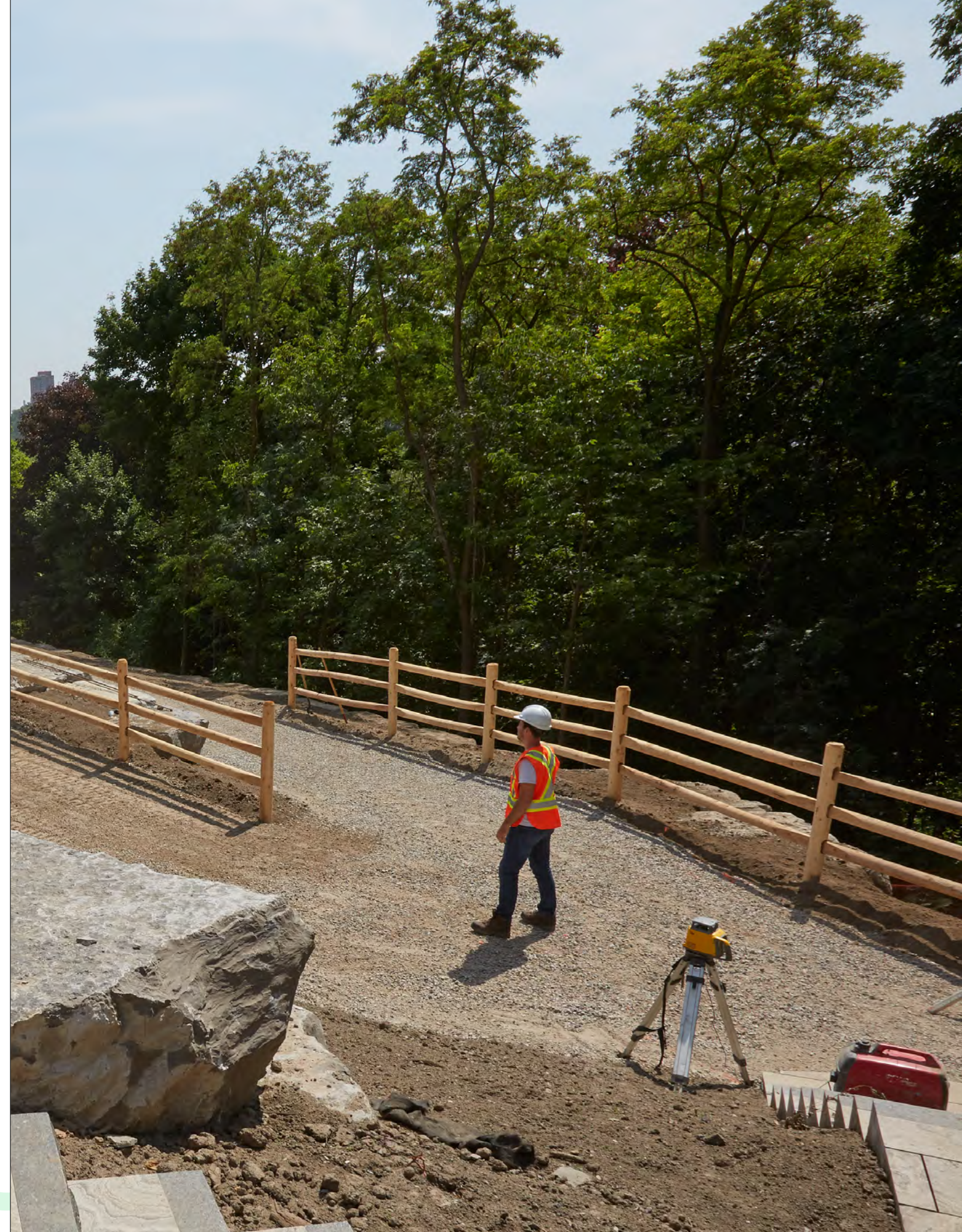
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**Prevent Depreciation of Built Heritage.**

Trails offer avenues to explore and preserve our built heritage. Many heritage assets are in a state of disrepair, unrecognized, underutilized or unprotected. Without recognition, these valuable destinations will disappear from our collective history.

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**Ensure Long-term Funding.** Trails are essential public infrastructure and require ongoing funding to account for their full lifecycle costs. Increasing trail use will result in greater costs associated with trail planning, design, implementation and maintenance. Investment must be coordinated between trail building partners to make the most efficient use of limited funding for trails. All levels of government need to prioritize investment in trails to highlight their commitment to supporting healthy living, active transportation, climate change mitigation and complete communities.



## Destinations

The Greater Toronto Region Trail Network features an abundance of significant regional destinations. Ten areas, in particular, provide the essential combination of conservation area properties, regional trails, places of interest, amenities and transit access. Investment in these destinations will further enrich the trail experience.



### Hills of the Headwaters

At the convergence of the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Niagara Escarpment, the Hills of the Headwaters are the source of all rivers in the Humber Watershed in Peel Region. Glen Haffy and Albion Hills conservation areas and the Bolton resource management tract are linked by the iconic Bruce, Oak Ridges and Humber trails. Rugged nature is contrasted with charming restaurants, shops and amenities in the nearby communities of Palgrave and Bolton, in the Town of Caledon. The area is supported by The Hills of the Headwaters Tourism Association, a regional, non-profit organization that supports local tourism.



### Forested Headwaters

A trail lover's paradise, the Forested Headwaters contain over 100 kilometres of trails in the largest interior forest habitat in the GTA. This destination in Durham Region is comprised of a cluster of conservation lands, known as the East Duffins Headwaters, totaling over 1,400 hectares. As Durham's most popular destination for hiking and mountain biking, the internal trail system is well-established and carefully maintained by several trail organizations. The Town of Uxbridge, "Canada's Trail Capital", features amenities and services which support the high-quality trail experience of the area.



### Kettle Lakes

Encompassing over 600 hectares of open space, parks and conservation lands straddling the Humber and Rouge watersheds, the Kettle Lakes are one of the most picturesque destinations in York Region. Formed by retreating glaciers over 13,000 years ago, this destination features a distinctive undulating topography known as kame-and-kettle. Centered around the Oak Ridges Corridor Conservation Reserve (ORCCR), this landscape is dotted with wetlands, ponds and lakes, including Wilcox Lake and Bond Lake. Hiking or cycling along the Oak Ridges Trail allows people to experience this rich, moraine landscape in Richmond Hill.



### Humber Valley Wilderness

In the wide valley of the Humber River, a magnificent corridor of forests, valleys and meadows is formed by the Nashville Resource Management Tract and the Kortright and Boyd Conservation Areas in York Region. This landscape features upland and bottomland forests, meadows, former agricultural fields, wetlands and small tributaries that feed the main stem of the upper Humber River. The historic town of Kleinburg and the renowned McMichael Canadian Art Collection draw residents and visitors to the community of Woodbridge to experience this iconic scenery connected by the celebrated Humber Trail. Significant investment in this destination area is currently underway.



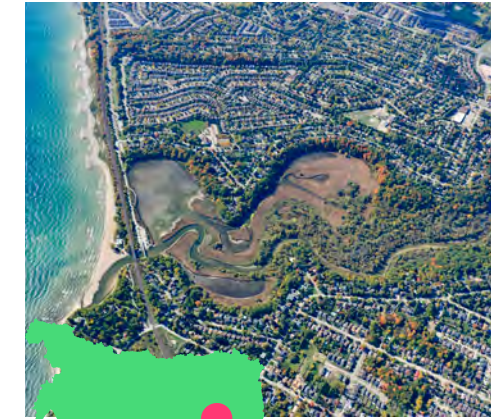
### Black Creek Parklands

Located within the naturalized section of the 45-kilometre Black Creek Ravine System, the Black Creek Parklands are a greenway of trails, forests, parks and open space. Bisecting industrial lands and residential neighbourhoods, the Parklands are located within easy walking distance of Black Creek Pioneer Village station, eight schools and thousands of local residents in one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods in Canada's largest city. The Black Creek Trail provides a well-established multi-use trail connection through the Parklands to York University, Tennis Canada, Black Creek Farm, Black Creek Pioneer Village and the future Head Office of TRCA.



### Forks of the Don

Situated within the Don River Valley in the City of Toronto, the Forks of the Don is an oasis of water and wildlife carving through the urban landscape. The forested ravine slopes feature a mature canopy of oaks, maple, birch and cedar. The Lower Don Trail, the Pan Am Path and Taylor Creek Trail wind through the ravine, connecting communities around the Don Valley to a network of greenspace linking Sunnybrook Park, Taylor Creek Park and Crothers Woods. Located within walking distance of Broadview Station and the future Sunnybrook Park Stop, this destination also features cultural destinations, including Todmorden Mills, the Ontario Science Centre and the Brick Works community hub.



### Rouge National Urban Park

Canada's first national urban park and the largest urban park in North America, Rouge National Urban Park (RNUP) is a unique mosaic of natural, cultural and agricultural landscapes in York and Durham Regions and the City of Toronto. Over 8,000 hectares, the park stretches from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine and features working farms, Carolinian forests, marshes and beaches that may be explored along the Rouge Trail and the Blue Trail through the Rouge Marsh. In close proximity to RNUP, the historic Seaton Trail hiking trail and the active transportation corridor of The Meadoway provide linkages to the growing communities of Scarborough, Markham, Pickering and Uxbridge. At its southern extent, the Waterfront Trail connects into RNUP and is easily accessed by the Rouge Hill GO.

## Lake Ontario Waterfront

The Lake Ontario Waterfront is a wondrous linear destination featuring dynamic waterfront parks that are like jewels along the green and blue necklace of the Waterfront Trail and Blue Trails.

The shoreline is undergoing natural habitat restoration and revitalization to support public access and waterfront recreation. In our region, this trail links over 70 kilometres of lake frontage from Etobicoke to Ajax, connecting the western reaches of the Arsenal Lands and Marie Curtis Park through Humber Bay Parks across the Central Waterfront, the Beaches and Tommy Thompson Park past Ashbridge's Bay, the Scarborough Bluffs and East Point Park to the eastern reaches of Port Union Waterfront Park, Rotary Frenchman's Bay and Paradise Park. Within this waterfront experience, three areas stand out as remarkable regional destinations: **Humber Parklands**, **Scarborough Bluffs** and the **Toronto Harbour**.

There are also a number of new and evolving destinations in our growing region. The New Seaton community in Pickering, Claireville Conservation Area in Brampton, Bolton Camp in Caledon and the northern reaches of Rouge National Urban Park in Markham are all destination development hot spots experiencing current or coming intensification. In the near future, these locations will require investment in trails and amenities to support the increasing nature-based recreational needs of the surrounding communities.



### Humber Parklands

Formed by a corridor of greenspace in the Humber River floodplain that culminates in two peninsulas along the mouth of the Humber River, the Humber Parklands provide an idyllic greenspace in the west end of Toronto. The parklands stretch from the parks and sports fields of Eglinton Flats in the north through the wildlife-rich Humber Marshes toward the constructed headlands of Humber Bay Park along the urban waterfront of Lake Ontario. Easily accessed by Mimico GO, Old Mill station or the future Mount Dennis station along the Eglinton Crosstown, this urban destination offers places to picnic and recreate in nature. The Humber Parklands are enjoyed by thousands who traverse the picturesque routes of the Waterfront Trail and the Humber Trail, part of the official route of the Pan Am Path. In addition to land-based recreation opportunities, the area also offers water-based activities including boating, canoeing, kayaking and fishing.



### Toronto Harbour

Protected by the Toronto Islands in the downtown core of Toronto, the Toronto Harbour is a bustling marine landscape. The Waterfront Trail, The Great Trail, the Lake-to-Lake Trail and sections of the Pan Am Path carry thousands of residents and visitors to major natural and cultural attractions along the harbourfront. Fort York National Historic Site, The Harbourfront Centre, Queens Quay, Sugar Beach, The Distillery District, and Corktown Common animate the lakefront harbour and beachscape with endless opportunities for cultural engagement. Extending into Lake Ontario, the Toronto Islands and Tommy Thompson Park connect us to nature and some of the best opportunities in the city to view wildlife.



### Scarborough Bluffs

The Scarborough Bluffs are an iconic natural wonder located at the doorstep of Canada's largest city. Soaring up to 90 metres above the Lake Ontario Waterfront, they offer strikingly beautiful natural greenspaces and support increasingly rare habitats for a wide variety of fish, birds and other wildlife. Linking over 11 waterfront parks across 15 kilometres of bluffs, the Waterfront and Highland Creek Trails offer opportunities for people to safely explore this unique segment of the Lake Ontario shoreline. Atop the Bluffs is situated the newly restored Guild Park and Gardens, featuring a historic sculpture garden, restaurant and event centre. Accessed by Eglinton and Guildwood GO stations, the Scarborough Bluffs offers some of the best beaches, gardens, sports and recreation facilities and parklands for trail users, including paddlers, to enjoy.