



Date: August 25, 2021
To: Full Authority Board
From: Katrina Furlanetto, M.Env.Sc
General Manager

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item for Board Consideration

2.0 Topic

Cataraqi Trail Funding Support

3.0 Recommendations

That Report IR-077-21, Cataraqi Trail Funding Support, **Be Received.**

4.0 Purpose

To inform the Board of the financial requirement to sustain and maintain the Cataraqi Trail moving forward while highlighting the opportunity to engage and discuss partnerships with local and regional government and trail partners to build financial resilience.

5.0 Background

Cataraqui Conservation has pursued the development of the Cataraqui Trail since acquisition in 1997 following the guidance of the Cataraqui Trail Management Plan (2000). The management and maintenance of the Cataraqui Trail was the responsibility of the Cataraqui Trail Management Board from 1997 to 2019. In 2019, through report IR-105-18, Proposed Governance Changes - Cataraqui Trail Management Board and Lemoine Point Advisory Committee, the Board approved the transition of the Cataraqui Trail Management Board to the Friends of the Cataraqui Trail, with responsibility of trail management and maintenance by Cataraqui Conservation.

The Cataraqui Trail is a year-round 104 km non-motorized trail built upon the former CN rail line and crosses through several communities within the Town of Smiths Falls, Township of Rideau Lakes, Township of South Frontenac and Township of Stone Mills. The recreational trail is used by cyclists, runners, horse back riders, snowmobilers (with a valid Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs permit), cross-country skiers, hikers, walkers, and all who enjoy nature appreciation and wildlife viewing.

Over the past decade, and especially within the last 18 months, there has been significant trail use creating a high demand for operational maintenance, increased amenities, and enforcement to ensure an enjoyable experience for users of all ages and abilities. In addition, through structural assessment reports, it has been identified that many of the assets on the trail (e.g., bridges) require significant repair and renewal for which the organization has not previously been planning for financially.

The Cataraqui Trail has become a valued asset to the communities within the watershed connecting people, places, providing sustainable transportation options and opportunities for conservation, education, and environmental protection. For example, the Township of Rideau Lakes Trail Strategy dated September 2019 includes the Cataraqui Trail, and Cataraqui Conservation has been invited to participate in local transportation strategic planning sessions with neighbouring Counties and Townships.

To ensure the Cataraqui Trail continues to be an economic and recreational asset to the watershed, staff recommend initiating discussions for enhanced funding and maintenance partnerships.

There are several major trail connections across the Cataraqui Region watershed that intersect with the Cataraqui Trail. For example, the K&P Trail, which may provide opportunities for economy of scale discussions pertaining to maintenance, capital works, and consistent managements standards.

6.0 Strategic Plan

This report supports Goal D in the Strategic Plan, Cataraqui 2020.

To facilitate protection of natural resources in order to conserve, restore, develop or manage them.

- Implement a land management program reflecting the different types of properties under CRCA ownership.
- Enhance the Authority's technical advisory program to member municipalities and the public to protect or enhance natural areas and functions.

7.0 Input from Other Sources

The General Manager has discussed the financial need and opportunity to support the Cataraqui Trail with the Manager, Conservation Lands and Coordinator, Operations Planning. Cataraqui Conservation's Chair, the Chair of the Friends of the Cataraqui Trail, and Board Members for South Frontenac and Rideau Lakes Townships have also been engaged in preliminary discussions. Frontenac County has also identified there could be an economy of scale opportunity when considering the needs of the K&P Trail.

8.0 Analysis

Over the last year it has become evident that the demand for recreational trails and public spaces has increased and is valued across the watershed. These assets provide social and physical health benefits, connect communities through sustainable transportation, protect local environments, and provide educational opportunities for public awareness and appreciation.

Despite the trail being a valued asset in the watershed, trail liability is top of mind for Cataraqui Conservation and its users. It is the organization's responsibility to properly define, construct, manage, inspect and maintain the trail to mitigate risk and provide a quality recreational experience for all users. Portions (approximately 9km) of the trail runs through private landowner property either through a Right of way agreement or use agreement

Conservation Authorities Act Regulatory Requirement

In May 2021, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks released a Regulatory Consultation Guide which outlines conservation land recreational amenities such as trails for passive use as a non-mandatory activity. This means to continue to operate the trail, municipalities may be required to sign agreements outlining the funding arrangement and maintenance requirements to support the trail as an economic development and environmental conservation property for the community. At the time of this report, provincial regulations have yet to be released defining this requirement in detail.

Economy of Scale Opportunities

Frontenac County and local partners have recently released a K&P Trail Management Plan which identifies similar strategies and maintenance priorities for their asset that would be comparable to the needs of the Cataraqui Trail. There may be an opportunity to partner with the County and lower tier municipalities to provide maintenance and management of both trails. Further investigation and discussion is warranted.

9.0 Financial Implications

There has been substantial in-kind work provided by municipalities and over the last year \$250,000 in capital funding support through government partnerships grants, municipal support and private donations (in-kind and financial). Conservation authorities are not often eligible to lead external grant applications therefore municipalities have stepped up and collaborated to support the organization in acquiring needed funds. This source of funding is valuable for one-time maintenance to resurface the trail and address major capital challenges; however, the capacity of the organization to implement significant capital works is low and operationally there are insufficient funds to support annual maintenance requirements. In addition, there are 12 bridge structures that cross the trail and approximately 260 culverts with substantial capital updates required to ensure safe and sustained use.

The current approved annual operating budget for the Cataraqui Trail is ~\$35,000, which includes a \$3,500 transfer to the Cataraqui Trail Reserve. The balance of the Cataraqui Trail Reserve as of January 1, 2021 was \$41,412. The expected annual cost to maintain the trail is approximately \$2,000 per square kilometer which includes operating and capital needs including staffing and equipment. This could be phased in through a multi-year funding arrangement with local partners.

The Friends of the Cataraqui Trail group have made a strong effort to engage the community, hold fundraising and cleanup events, volunteer their time for maintenance, and provide eyes on the ground to support the organization and community asset. They are motivated and are immensely valued for their support. However, the financial contribution of the group is insufficient on its own to address the operating and maintenance needs of the trail.

Without additional annual operating funds and municipal agreements to support this asset, Cataraqui Conservation will not be able to safely maintain or keep the trail operational moving forward and will need to consider alternative options.

10.0 Conclusion

The Cataraqui Trail is a valuable asset to the watershed providing connections and opportunities for community enjoyment. To maintain the trail moving forward, Cataraqui Conservation will need additional annual operating support through local and regional funding partnerships. Staff recommend investigating the opportunity to partner with municipalities and Counties on trail maintenance and seek financial arrangements to ensure an enjoyable experience can be sustained within the watershed.

Approved for circulation,

(Original approved by)

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