



Reinvesting in the New Brunswick Trail System: A Long-Term Management Strategy



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The province of New Brunswick has three major trail networks:

1. Sentier NB Trail – 1,200 km of completed and partially completed trails, predominantly non-motorized with 165 km used seasonally by members of the New Brunswick All-Terrain Vehicle Federation and 700 km used seasonally by members of the New Brunswick Federation of Snowmobile Clubs;
2. the snowmobile trail network – approximately 7,600 km; and
3. the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trail network - approximately 3,450 km.

There are a number of government and non-government stakeholders involved in the management of the three trail networks:

- the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is responsible for Sentier NB Trail and has an agreement with the New Brunswick Trails Council for the maintenance of Sentier NB Trail;
- the New Brunswick Federation of Snowmobile Clubs is the designated trail manager for the snowmobile trail network;
- the New Brunswick All-Terrain Vehicle Federation is the designated trail manager for the ATV trail network; and
- other Provincial Departments involved in trail management are the Department of Tourism and Parks, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Safety.

While there are some mechanisms in place, such as the Trail Management Trust Fund Advisory Board and the Technical Committee for Motorized Trails, where some of the stakeholders interact and address certain trail management issues, there has not been an overall coordinated approach by all stakeholders for the joint management of the three trail networks.

In its *Charter for Change*, the government recognized the importance of reinvesting in the New Brunswick trail system. In order to determine the direction that reinvestment will take, it is important to formulate a new vision for trails in New Brunswick. This **vision** must ensure the New Brunswick trail system will be **strategically located, safe, and sustainable**.

Strategically Located

The trail networks (non-motorized and motorized) will connect communities and provide access to amenities. Priority will be given to the development of Sentier NB Trail in or near communities to address the concept of active transportation and provide access to schools, work places, etc. Trail development will also take into account the need for users to access amenities and be linked to tourism potential e.g. focus on the snowmobile tourism product and on the development of a provincial ATV trail system.

Safe

User groups and government agencies will ensure the controlled access and intended use of the trail networks. Amendments to the *Off-Road Vehicle Act* are being implemented and enforcement and awareness campaigns are being put in place. Trail user groups and government agencies will develop and adopt standards for trail development, maintenance and signage.

Sustainable

The size of the trail networks will be in line with the financial capabilities of the user groups and the government agencies to develop and maintain the networks. The user-pay principle will be applied to the development and management of motorized trails; e.g. Federations maintain the trail they develop. The cost of developing and maintaining Sentier NB Trail will be shared with communities and user groups; e.g. responsibility for Sentier NB Trail will be transferred to communities where possible and user groups will be responsible for the maintenance of the sections of Sentier NB Trail they use. Rationalization of the trail networks and prioritization of repairs will be in accordance with the expected annual budgets of all trail partners.

The **strategy** for trails in New Brunswick will address the following operational issues: **infrastructure, enforcement, and access**.

Infrastructure

The trail infrastructure is aging. A three-year inspection program indicated that many of the Sentier NB Trail bridges require major repairs. Seven trail bridges had to be closed in 2006 because they presented a safety hazard and no funding was available to repair them. A recent estimate suggests that it would cost approximately \$10.2 M in infrastructure repairs to bring the Sentier NB Trail back to an acceptable state. It is further estimated that at least another \$10.2 M is required to repair bridges and culverts on non-Sentier NB Trail snowmobile and ATV trails as well as on trails on private land. In the 2007/08 fiscal year government dedicated \$1.2 M in capital funding for DNR to undertake repairs to Sentier NB Trail bridges; approximately 40 bridges were repaired. Another \$1.2 M has been provided in capital funding for 2008/09. The trail networks need to be rationalized to line up with the financial capacity to maintain existing infrastructure.



Actions:

- Complete the required bridge repairs with capital funding allocated by government by the year 2014.
- Develop a master plan for the trail system that addresses the requirements of the three user groups by 2008.
- Assess long term trail maintenance costs by 2009.
- Establish a maintenance/decommissioning plan based on the outcome of the assessment by 2009.
- Partner with municipalities and Local Service Districts (LSD) for the management of trails within municipal/LSD boundaries by 2010.

Enforcement

All trail user groups have historically believed enforcement on New Brunswick's trails was inadequate. The New Brunswick Federation of Snowmobile Clubs has expressed concerns over the enforcement of trail passes and vehicle registrations, while the New Brunswick Trails Council has expressed concerns over the public safety risk caused by unauthorized motorized traffic on Sentier NB Trail and the damage it causes on the trails. Municipalities have also expressed their concerns with unauthorized ATVing on municipal streets and two fatal ATV accidents in New Brunswick in 2006 brought to the forefront the need to establish a strong public awareness campaign

In the 2007-2008 budget, Government allocated \$1 M for the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to establish an Off-Road Vehicle Enforcement Unit. In June 2007, the *Off-Road Vehicle Act* was amended to give authority to the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General to appoint any person employed under the *Civil Service Act* to be an Off-Road Vehicle Enforcement Officer. The dedicated Off-Road Vehicle Enforcement Unit is now in place.



Actions:

- Continue the operation of the Off-Road Vehicle Enforcement Unit.
- Develop a stakeholder-led provincial education and awareness program promoting safe, responsible and environmentally sound riding practices by the year 2009.

Access

In order to develop a useful trail system for off-road vehicles and to create an attractive tourism product, access to amenities within communities has to be secured. To achieve this, access to the Department of Transportation (DOT) rights-of-way may be required. After consulting with a number of jurisdictions across Canada and the United States, DOT has developed a draft policy to allow off-road vehicles on designated rights-of-way.



Actions:

- Adopt and implement a DOT policy to allow off-road vehicles on designated rights-of-way, by the year 2009.
- Develop an access plan to link motorized trails to amenities, by the year 2009.
- Finalize agreement with Federations for shared use of DOT rights-of-way and other trail corridors, by year end 2008.

The New Brunswick trail system provides New Brunswickers and visitors with a unique opportunity to enjoy New Brunswick's landscape and scenery. Trails support health and wellness, family activities and tourism. If the New Brunswick trail system is to continue to be a source of pleasure and economic generation, it needs to be well maintained and in strategic locations. To accomplish this goal requires a coordinated and planned approach to trail infrastructure, enforcement, and access. Accordingly, the Department of Natural Resources is proposing to work with its partner departments to implement this strategy.