

Big City Trails: Planning for Forest Protection

Mike Halferty & Scott Laver
City of Toronto, Natural Environment and Community Programs



Introduction

In 2012, the City of Toronto worked with landscape planners, Lees and Associates, to develop a city-wide Natural Environment Trail Strategy (NETS) in order to:

- Ensure the long term protection of natural areas
- Offer safe and enjoyable recreational opportunities for natural surface (dirt) trail users
- Outline best management practices
- Outline policy and management principles to guide planning and management initiatives



Natural surface trail in South Humber Park

The Issues

In Toronto, informally created, poorly routed and poorly designed trails have caused significant areas of environmental degradation including:

- Trail widening and proliferation
- Trampling and compaction
- Decreased infiltration, increased runoff
- Erosion

Trail related environmental degradation is results in:

- Loss of natural habitat and native species
- Degraded environments that invite further vandalism
- Increasing cost of management and remediation



Environmental degradation from unmanaged trails

Context

- 2.6 million residents in Toronto
- 300 km of official paved and granular multi-use trails
- Over 227 km of unauthorized natural surface (dirt) trail in ravines and natural areas
- 8595 ha of natural habitat in Toronto

The Principles



Methods

From 2008-2013, various methods were used to collect trail information in five study areas including:

- Trail inventory using GPS
- Trail counters
- Stakeholder groups including mountain bikers, naturalists, local residents
- Public meetings/Open houses
- Trailhead and online trail user survey



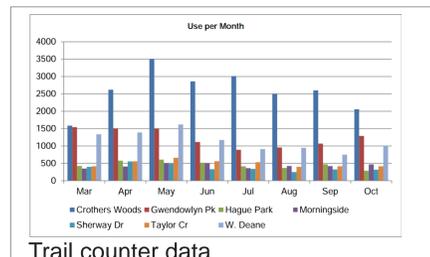
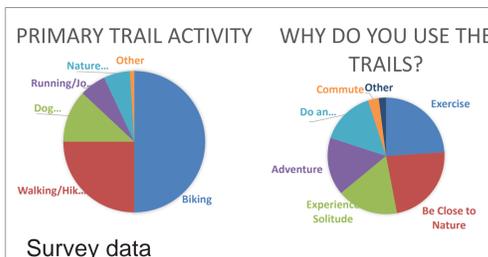
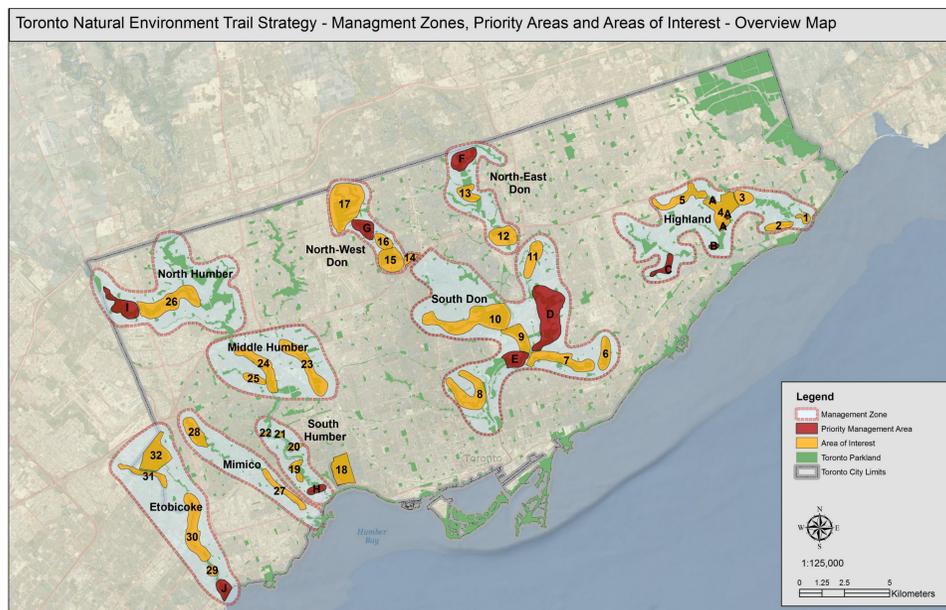
Public consultation meeting



Survey sign on trail



Camouflaged trail counter



Sunnyside Bike Park



Trail area concept designs



Crothers Woods Monday night stewardship team

Recommendations

59 recommendations to create a sustainable multi-use natural surface trail system include:

- Stewardship & Partnerships
- Management
- Marketing & Education
- Planning & Design

Project areas were organized into:

- 9 watershed based *Management Zones*
- 10 *Priority Management Areas* for short term development of management plans
- 32 *Areas of Interest* for longer term implementation

Results so far...

- Data-driven planning in Priority Areas (e.g.):
 - Cedar Ridge Trail
 - The Ridge Trail
 - Bestview Park Trails
- Establishment of regular volunteer stewardship events (Monday nights in Crothers Woods)
- Completion of Sunnyside Bike Park with closure of informal skills area in sensitive forest of High Park
- Continued mapping and monitoring of trails in high use areas

Criteria

The following criteria were used to prioritize areas for management:

- Environmental Protection
- Volume of use
- Connectivity
- Continuity of trail management initiatives
- Community interest
- Other infrastructure projects
- Under-served and/or under-resourced areas

Case Study – Crothers Woods

Crothers Woods, a 52 ha mature forest in the Don River Watershed, designated as an Environmentally Significant Area, has a long history of well-used informal trails leading to environmental degradation. Trail management has largely been successful due to:



Community consultation



Sustainable trail design



Volunteer stewardship

Next Steps...

- Continue data-driven planning in identified areas
- Explore formalized partnership with trail association for maintenance and volunteer engagement
- Establish natural environment trail signage & wayfinding standard
- Improve asset and work management for trails and trail maintenance activities
- Continue advocating for full funding and resource levels recommended by the strategy

To view this award winning strategy, visit www.toronto.ca/trails or email trails@toronto.ca