

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION
COMMISSION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE

Responsible Trail Management in Gatineau Park

PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT
APRIL 27, 2017

Canada

Table of Contents

I.	Project description.....	4
A.	Background.....	4
B.	Project objective.....	5
II.	II. Online public consultation process, April 27, 2017	6
A.	Overview	6
a.	Objectives	6
b.	Date and time.....	6
c.	Location.....	6
d.	Format	6
B.	Consultation procedure and tools.....	6
a.	Presentation	6
b.	Question period.....	6
c.	Discussion	6
d.	Survey	6
C.	Invitation and promotion	7
D.	Participants.....	7
a.	Community.....	7
b.	Elected officials	7
c.	Media.....	7
III.	Public consultation highlights	8
IV.	IV. Analysis of survey results and main comments received	8
A.	Analysis of results.....	9
Question 1	9	
Question 2	10	
Question 3	11	
Question 4	12	
Question 5	13	
Question 6	14	
Question 6b.....	14	
Question 7	15	
Question 8	16	
Question 9	17	
Question 10.....	17	

Question 11.....	18
Question 12.....	18
B. Main comments received.....	19
V. Integration of results	21
VI. Next steps.....	21
VII. Appendix 1: Survey	22

I. Project description

A. Background

Since 2014, the National Capital Commission (NCC) has held five rounds of consultations with user groups, with the aim of articulating a set of principles for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park.

- The objectives of the targeted consultation held between June and October 2014 were to initiate discussion and present the issues related to trail management.
- A targeted consultation in April 2015 allowed for discussion of protected habitats and collaboration options.
- In October and November 2015, targeted consultation focused on the needs of specific user groups.
- In March 2017, targeted consultation focused on a proposed new trail network.
- On April 27, 2017, the first general public consultation on responsible trail management in Gatineau Park was held.

This process has enabled us to do the following:

- Make users aware of the issues related to unofficial trails;
- Discuss the interests and practices of the different users;
- Assess the willingness on the part of the community to contribute to the management of a renewed trail network.

The official trail network covers 200 kilometres of trails for hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Over the years, a vast network of unofficial trails has emerged, parallel to the official trail network, and this is having a serious ecological effect on the Park's sensitive habitats.

The following factors contribute to the growth of an unofficial trail network:

- Multiple points of entry into Gatineau Park exist. Many are unofficial, located in surrounding neighbourhoods.
- A certain segment of users (frequent users and outdoor and sports enthusiasts) create and use unofficial trails to enjoy a different type of experience, route or trail that is not provided by the official trail network.
- The public feels a deep attachment to the Park, and enjoys the benefits it provides.
- People who create and use unofficial trails are most likely unaware of their ecological impact.

Some of the consequences resulting from the creation of unofficial trails are as follows:

- The size of the unofficial trail network is now equal to or greater than the official trail network.
- The environmental damage being caused in sensitive habitats (e.g. Eardley Escarpment) is threatening species at risk, and reducing the quality and quantity of habitat in the Park.
- The complex network of unofficial trails does not appear on official maps. These trails are unmaintained, and no standard signage has been installed on them. This poses a risk to user health and safety.

B. Project objective

The objective of the project for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park is to offer a varied trail network experience that meets users' needs and allows for new activities. This experience must conform to the NCC's legal obligations toward species at risk and the requirements of the Park's conservation mandate. The following are the specific objectives:

- To raise awareness among users about the problem of unofficial trails and their negative environmental impact (habitat fragmentation, legally designated species and sensitive habitats).
- To work with user groups to find and implement solutions to reduce the impact of unofficial trails.
- To raise awareness among users about stewardship to have them promote responsible use of the trails.
- To change the trail network to offer the kinds of experiences that users are seeking, while mitigating their environmental impact.

II. Online public consultation process, April 27, 2017

A. Overview

a. Objectives

To present the plan for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park and proposed new trail network, which takes into consideration the type of experience that Park users are seeking, as well as the environmental obligations that the NCC must meet; answer any questions and gather participants' comments.

b. Date and time

Thursday, April 27, 2017
6 pm to 8:30 pm

c. Location

The NCC's Urbanism Lab, 40 Elgin Street, Ottawa, Ontario

d. Format

Presentation, followed by a question period and discussion.
Online survey

B. Consultation procedure and tools

a. Presentation

A review of the consultation process, project background and project objectives was presented, followed by a status report on conservation in Gatineau Park and the threats to its environmental health. The proposed new trail network was then presented, along with an analysis that provided the rationale for this proposal.

b. Question period

After the presentation, participants took part in a 30-minute question period.

The presentation and question period were broadcast on YouTube.

c. Discussion

After the question period, the project managers met with the participants to provide more specific answers to some of their questions about the proposed new trail network. Maps of Gatineau Park were used to present the new trail network and facilitate discussion.

d. Survey

After the consultation, participants and people on the NCC's distribution lists were sent a survey on responsible trail management and development of the proposed trail network. People had from April 27 until May 15, 2017, to respond to the survey.

C. Invitation and promotion

An email invitation was sent using Public Affairs distribution lists which include the following stakeholders:

- User groups (cross-country skiing, hiking, walking, rock climbing, biking, mountain biking, horseback riding) and environmental groups
- Residents' associations
- Individuals

Messages were posted on social media (Facebook and Twitter), and an ad was published in the *Ottawa Citizen* and *Le Droit* daily newspapers on April 19, 2017.

D. Participants

a. Community

More than 110 people participated in the public consultation, and 1,033 people completed the survey. A total of 2,120 people watched the presentation on YouTube.

b. Elected officials

Caryl Green, Mayor of Chelsea

c. Media

CBC/Radio-Canada
La Revue Info07

III. Public consultation highlights

- Most of the consultation participants agreed with the objectives of the plan for responsible trail management and the proposed new trail network.
- Several people praised the consultation process and the NCC's openness to seek satisfactory solutions to meet recreational needs while also respecting its stewardship role.
- The participants felt that education and awareness on the part of trail users are of utmost importance to the plan's success.
- Several expressed the desire that mountain biking trails be more technically challenging and be made unidirectional. The recommendation was made to focus specifically on trail design, development and maintenance with the assistance of specialists such as members of the Ottawa Mountain Bike Association (OMBA).

IV. Analysis of survey results and main comments received

The survey was posted on the NCC website from April 27 to May 15, 2017.

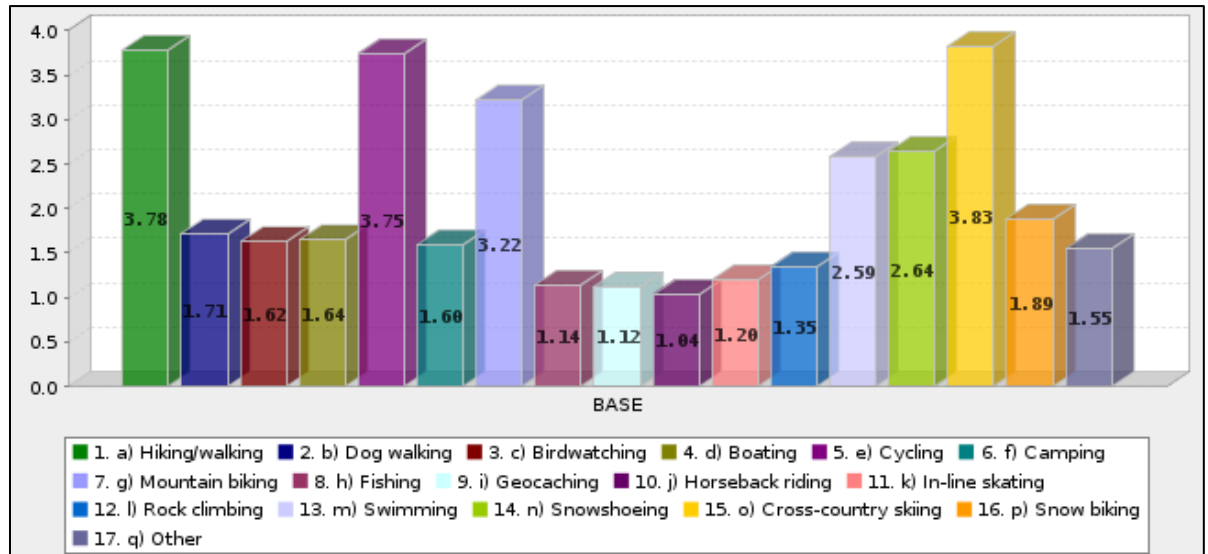
- The survey was viewed 1,900 times.
- The survey was started 1,319 times.
- The survey was completed 1,033 times.

A. Analysis of results

Question 1

How often do you practise the following activities in Gatineau Park? Some activities can be practised year-round, and some can be practised only during a specific season or seasons. When responding, please consider how often you practise the activity during the season(s) it is available.

Results

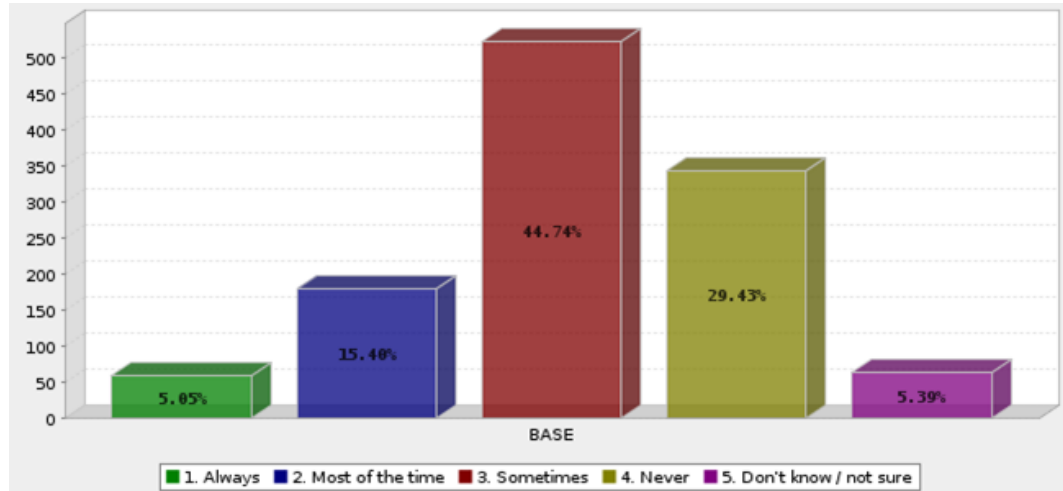


The most popular activities and those practised most frequently in Gatineau Park are cross-country skiing, walking and hiking, road biking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, and swimming. These activities are practised between once a month or a few times a year up to several times a week.

Question 2

When practising your activities, how often do you use unofficial trails in Gatineau Park? Unofficial trails are those trails in the Park that have not been formally created, have no signage and are not maintained by the NCC.

Results

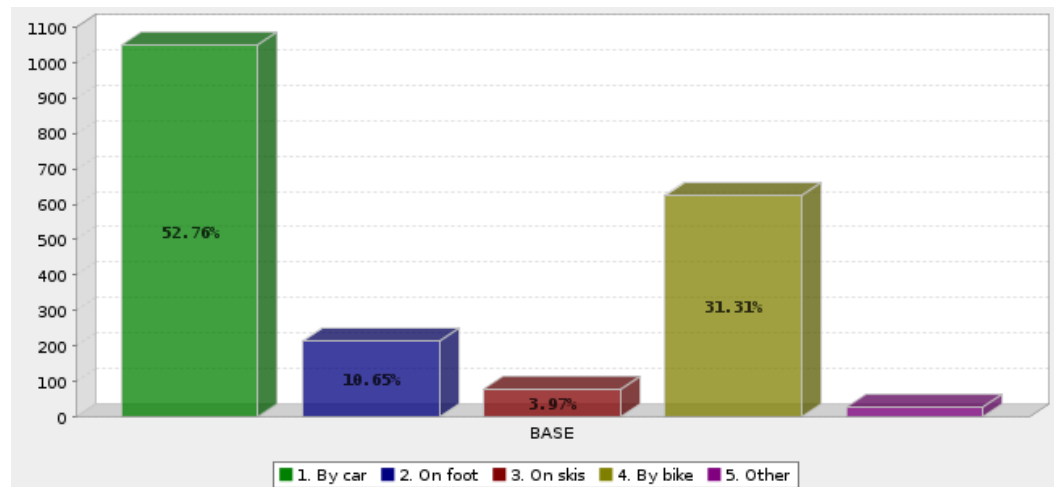


Almost 45 percent of survey participants indicated that they sometimes use unofficial trails when practising their activities, while 20 percent said that they use these trails most of the time. A little more than 29 percent of respondents said that they never use unofficial trails.

Question 3

How do you get to Gatineau Park to practise the above activities? Please select all that apply.

Results

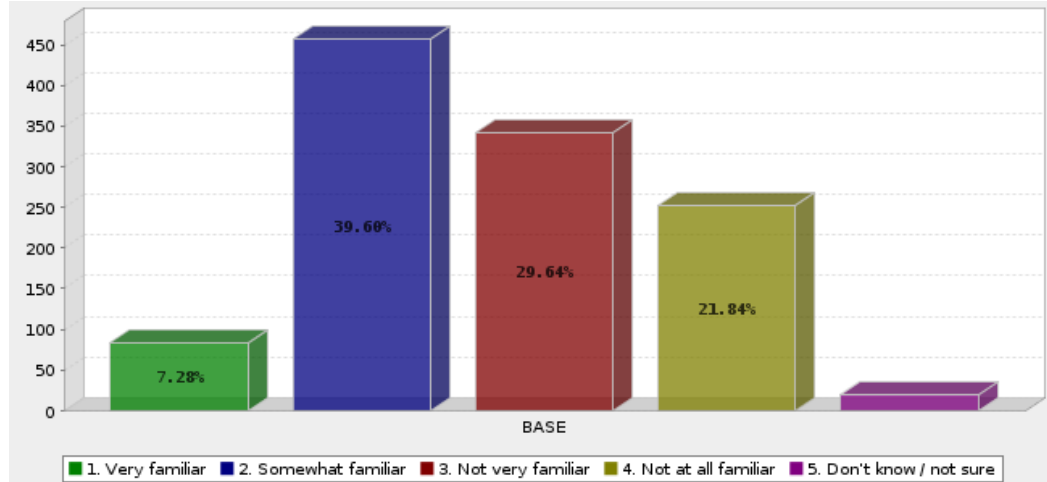


Close to 53 percent of respondents said that they travel to the Park by car in order to practise their activities. A little more than 31 percent go by bike, and 11 percent walk there.

Question 4

How familiar are you with the plan proposed by the NCC for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park?

Results



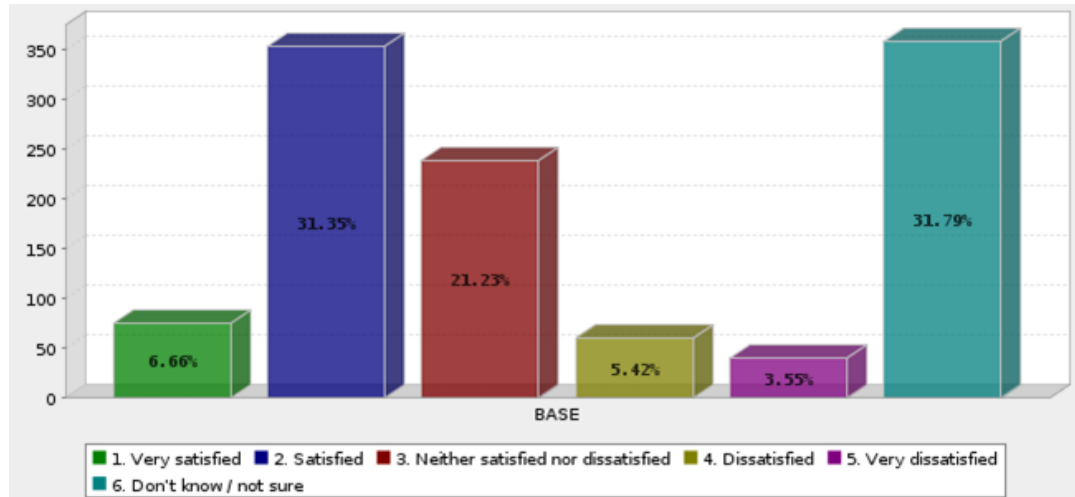
Slightly more than 43 percent of respondents said that they are somewhat familiar or very familiar with the proposed plan for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park. Over 50 percent said that they were not very familiar or not at all familiar with the proposed plan.

It should be noted that the consultation on April 27, 2017, was the first consultation with the general public on the Gatineau Park trail management plan.

Question 5

To what extent are you satisfied with the plan proposed by the NCC for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park?

Results



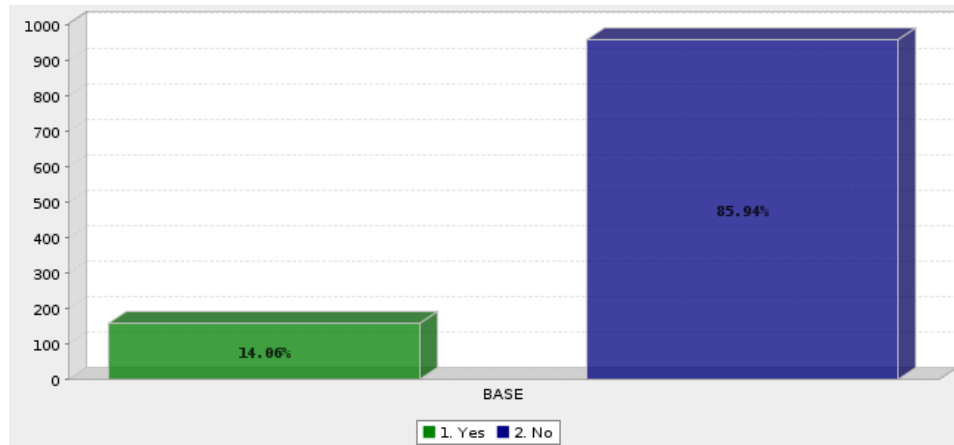
Some 38 percent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the proposed plan, while a little more than 21 percent were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied. Almost 32 percent said that they did not know or were not sure.

It should be noted that the consultation on April 27, 2017, was the first consultation with the general public on the Gatineau Park trail management plan.

Question 6

Have you participated in any of the public consultations?

Results

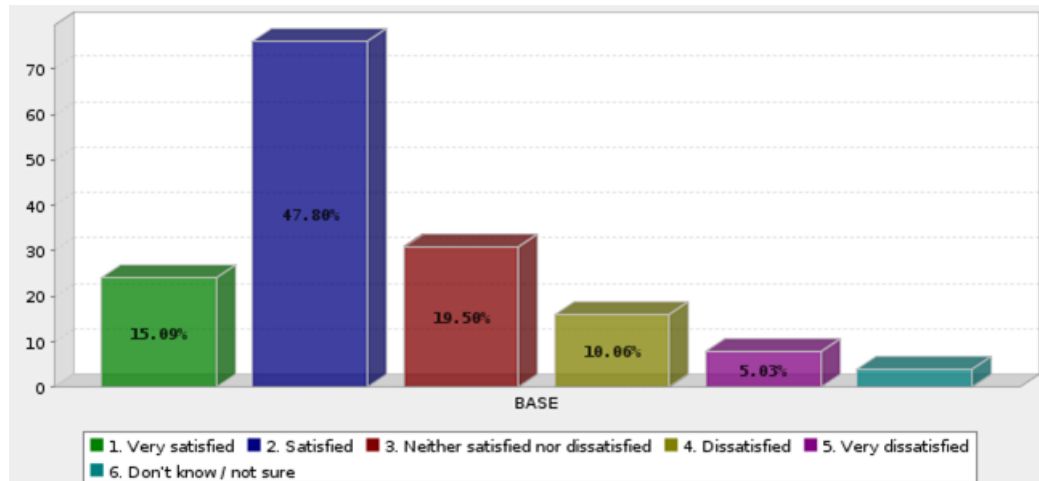


More than 80 percent of respondents had never participated in a public consultation on the plan for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park.

Question 6b

How satisfied are you with the consultations held by the NCC prior to the development of this plan?

Results



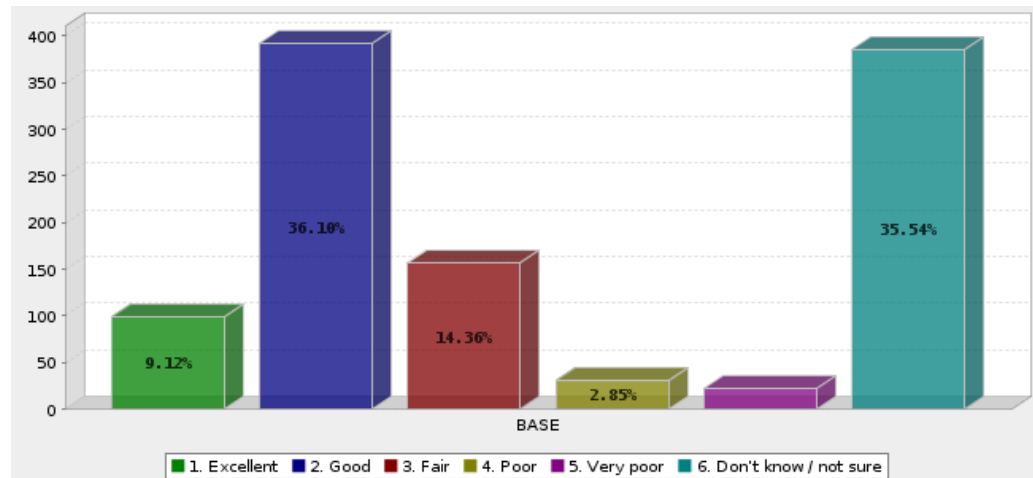
Over 62 percent of respondents who had already taken part in one of the consultations on responsible trail management said that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the public consultations that the NCC had held in developing this plan.

It should be noted that the consultation on April 27, 2017, was the first consultation with the general public on the Gatineau Park trail management plan.

Question 7

How would you rate the plan for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park with regard to achieving Gatineau Park's conservation mandate to protect natural ecosystems and species at risk?

Results

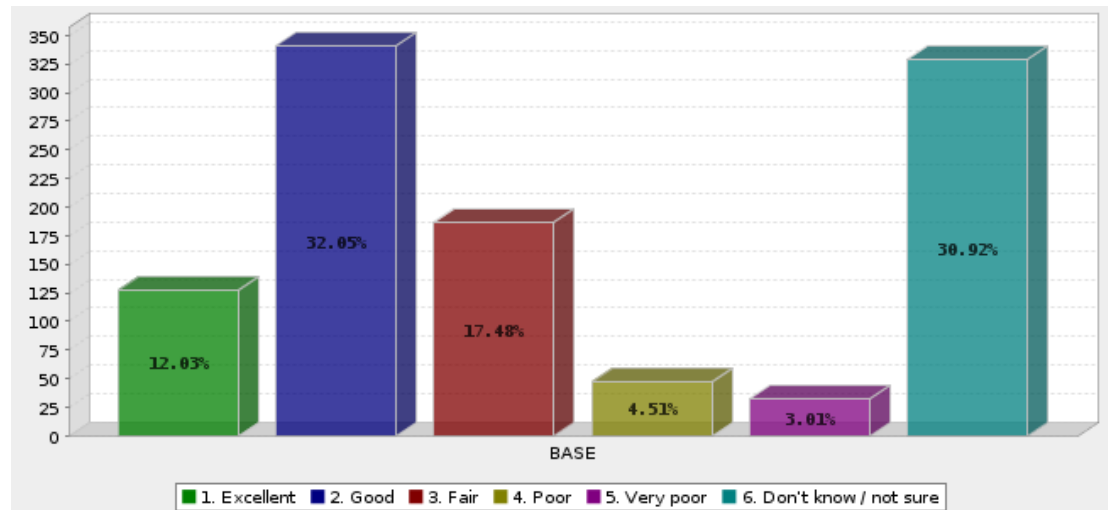


Over 45 percent of respondents felt that the plan for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park respects the Park's conservation mandate to protect ecosystems and species at risk, and 35 percent did not know or were not sure.

Question 8

How would you rate the plan for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park with regard to offering quality outdoor recreational experiences that are respectful of the natural environment?

Results

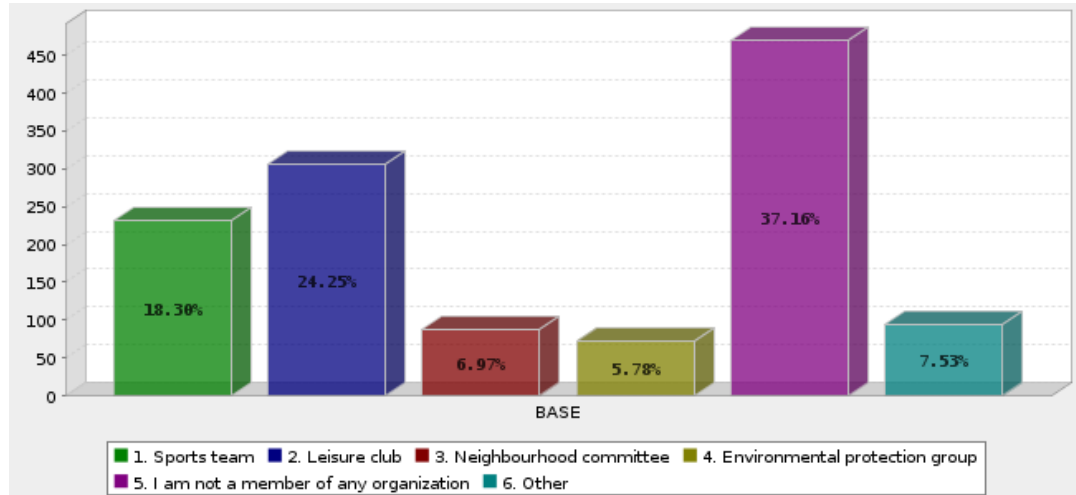


Over 44 percent of respondents felt that the plan for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park is excellent or good with regard to offering outdoor recreational experiences that are respectful of the natural environment, and over 30 percent did not know or were not sure.

Question 9

Are you a member of one or more of the following organizations? Please select all that apply.

Results



The majority of respondents are members of one or more sports, leisure or environmental protection organization, or a community association, and 37 percent do not belong to any organization.

Question 10

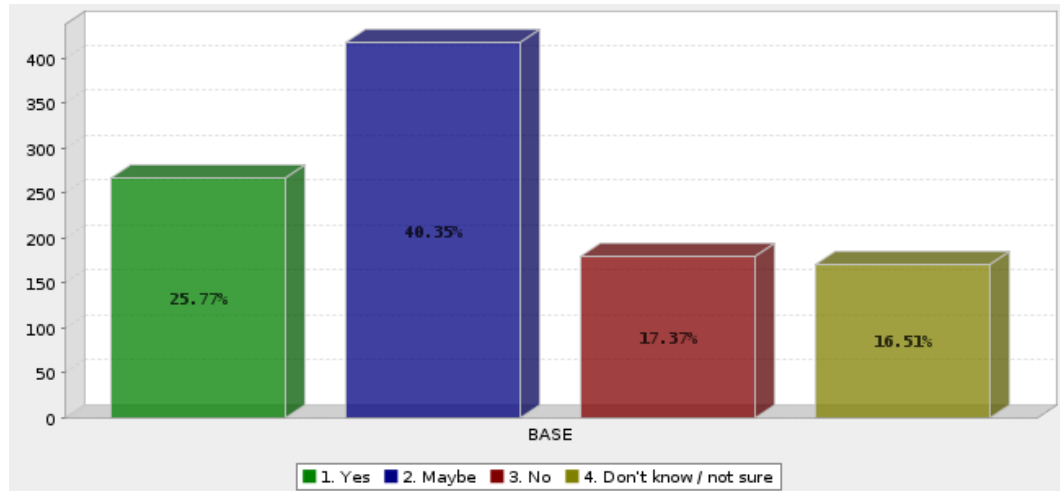
Do you have any other comments regarding the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park?

The responses to this question are analyzed in the next section of the report, "Main comments received."

Question 11

The NCC alone cannot ensure the implementation of the responsible trail management plan. Would you be interested in working with the NCC to help implement this plan?

Results

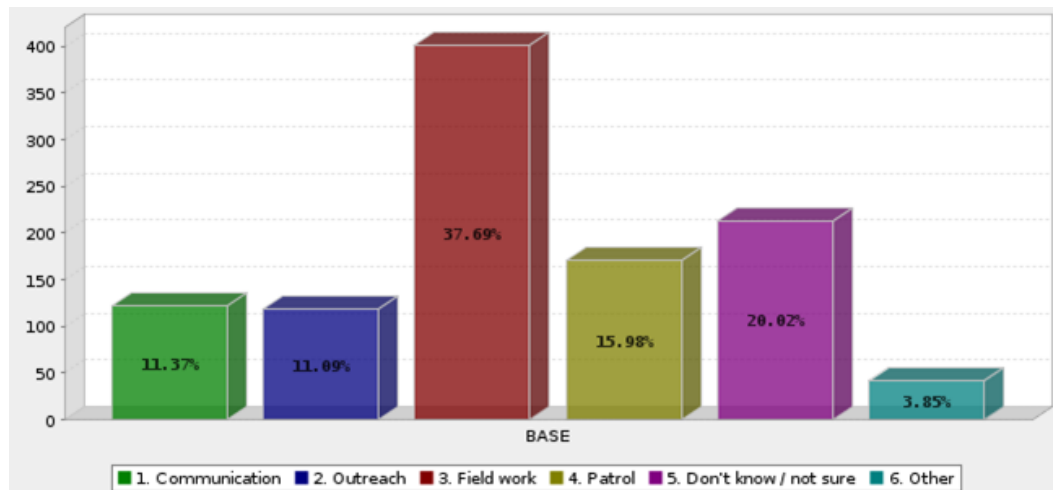


Two thirds of the participants said that they would like to work with the NCC to help implement the plan for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park.

Question 12

Which of the following areas would you be interested in helping with? Please select all that apply.

Results



Over 37 percent of respondents said that they were interested in working in the field. The next most frequent responses were patrol, communications and outreach.

B. Main comments received

- Several people felt that better awareness and education on the part of users would contribute to the success of the plan for responsible trail management in the Park. Various suggestions were made: information on the NCC's website and in social media, signage, information posted at trail starting points about the protection of species at risk and sensitive habitats or conservation areas.
- Several people suggested that the NCC develop partnerships with organizations that specialize in the development (design, construction and maintenance) of mountain biking trails, such as the Ottawa Mountain Bike Association (OMBA) or the International Mountain Bike Association Canada (IMBA Canada), to develop mountain biking trails that meet the needs of mountain biking enthusiasts.
- Several examples were given indicating places where trails were developed in sustainable ways: East Burke (Kingdom Trails), Adirondacks, Coaticook, South March Highlands conservation area in Kanata.
- According to several people, the unofficial trail network developed partly because Gatineau Park's service offer does not present the technical challenges that mountain bike enthusiasts are seeking.
- Some people claim that it doesn't matter how many trails are closed. Mountain bikers will continue to create unofficial trails.
- Maps of the new trail network should indicate which activities are permitted there.
- Trail signage needs to be improved to indicate the level of difficulty, and it should follow Parks Canada standards.
- Some people mentioned the importance of highlighting heritage trails to help increase awareness of the Park's history.
- There should be limits to the number of people allowed in a given area.
- Several people were in favour of volunteers participating in the implementation of the plan for responsible trail management (development and maintenance of the trails, communications, etc.).
- Information posted on the NCC website should be more accessible and complete. Ensuring that users are better informed will contribute to compliance with the rules. Information on the plan for responsible trail management in Gatineau Park should be easily accessible. Several people would have liked to have been able to access this type of information before responding to the survey.
- Some people want to know what mitigation measures will be established.
- Several people would like to see an increase in the number of snowshoeing and winter hiking trails.
- Several people would like to see trails where dogs are permitted.
- Several people called for a trail linking McKinstry Shelter and the Philippe Lake area (former trail no. 10).

- Some people criticized the maps of the new trail network posted on the NCC website, because, they feel, either that the maps are not clear, intentionally, or that they should not be publicly distributed.
- Invasive plant species are a threat to the Park's ecosystems, and their management is important for ecosystem conservation.
- Some people would have liked to have been able to consult reference documents on the plan for responsible trail management before responding to the survey. .

V. Integration of results

The NCC will take the comments into consideration, which will help in making any adjustments to the final plan, when possible. The goals of this last public consultation were as follows:

- To confirm that the NCC had clearly understood the comments provided during the consultations leading up to the selection of trails for Gatineau Park's new trail network;
- To present the plan and issues to the general public;
- To find out users' opinions about the proposed network.

It was of utmost importance for the NCC to work in close collaboration with stakeholders in order to improve the user experience, protect sensitive habitats and ensure sound management of the new Gatineau Park trail network.

VI. Next steps

The consultation process has now come to a close, and the plan for responsible trail management will be implemented over the next three to five years. For some of the proposed trails, there will have to be more in-depth environmental assessments to determine whether or not the trail can be developed. The NCC will establish volunteer working groups with the aim of developing the proposed trails in a sustainable way and in such a way as to meet its environmental obligations. The opening and the restoration and naturalization of trails will be undertaken gradually, according to the pace of work of the volunteer working groups and budget availability.

VII. Appendix 1: Survey

Survey on responsible trail management in Gatineau Park

We are seeking your input on this issue. The survey results will help us to better understand the recreational habits of Gatineau Park visitors, and will inform the management of the trails to ensure the right balance between ecosystem protection and recreational use. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes. Please return it by May 15, 2017.

Q1. How often do you practise the following activities in Gatineau Park? Some activities can be practised year-round, and some can be practised only during a specific season or seasons. When responding, please consider how often you practise the activity during the season(s) it is available.

Activity	Never	Once a year	Once a month or few times a year	Two or three times a month	Once a week	Several times a week	Every day
a) a) Hiking/walking							
b) b) Dog walking							
c) c) Birdwatching							
d) Boating							
e) Cycling							
f) Camping							
g) Mountain biking							
h) Fishing							
i) Geocaching							
j) Horseback riding							
k) In-line skating							
l) Rock climbing							
m) Swimming							
n) Snowshoeing							
o) Cross-country skiing							
p) Snow biking							
q) Other (please specify)							

Q2. When practising your activities, how often do you use unofficial trails in Gatineau Park? Unofficial trails are those trails in the Park that have not been formally created, have no signage and are not maintained by the NCC.

- Always
- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never
- Don't know / not sure

Q3. How do you get to Gatineau Park to practise the above activities? Please select all that apply.

- By car
- On foot
- On skis
- By bike
- Other: _____

Q4. How familiar are you with the plan proposed by the NCC for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park?

- Very familiarContinue
- Somewhat familiar..... Continue
- Not very familiar Continue
- Not at all familiar..... Skip to Q9
- Don't know / not sure Skip to Q9

Q5. How satisfied are you with the plan proposed by the NCC for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know / not sure

Q6a. Have you participated in any of the public consultations?

- Yes
- No

Q6b. How satisfied are you with the consultation process for the development of this plan?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know / not sure

Q7. How would you rate the plan for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park with regard to achieving Gatineau Park's conservation mandate to protect natural ecosystems and species at risk?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor
- Don't know / not sure

Q8. How would you rate the plan for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park with regard to offering quality outdoor recreational experiences that are respectful of the natural environment?

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor
- Don't know / not sure

Q9. Are you a member of one or more of the following organizations? Please select all that apply.

- Sports team
- Leisure club
- Neighbourhood committee
- Environmental protection group
- Other: _____
- I am not a member of any organization

Please, name the organization(s) (optional): _____

Q10. Do you have any other comments regarding the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park?

Q11a. The NCC alone cannot ensure the implementation of the responsible trail management plan. Would you be interested in working with the NCC to help implement this plan?

- Yes.....Continue
- MaybeContinue
- NoGo to end
- Don't know / not sureGo to end

**Q11b. Which of the following areas would you be interested in helping with?
Please select all that apply.**

- Communications
- Outreach
- Field work
- Patrol
- Other:____
- Don't know / not sure

Thank you very much for participating in this survey!