



COMMISSION DE LA CAPITALE NATIONALE  
NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

# Responsible management of Gatineau Park trails

CONSULTATION REPORT  
MARCH 8, 2017

Canada

## I. Project description

### A. Background

Since 2014, the National Capital Commission (NCC) has held three rounds of consultations with interest groups, with the aim of articulating a set of principles for the responsible management of trails in Gatineau Park. 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 consultation that took place on March 8, 2017, was the fourth round of public consultations on responsible trail management in Gatineau Park.

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 for a more solitary experience, or to create travel and recreation routes not provided by the official trail network.
- The public feels a deep attachment to the Park, and enjoys the benefits it provides.
- The public frequently asks for new trails to be developed.
- People who create and use unofficial trails are most likely unaware of their ecological impact.

Some of the consequences resulting from 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 unmarked, and no standard signage has been installed on them. This poses a risk to user health and safety.

## **B. 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:

- Raise awareness among users about the problem of unofficial trails and their negative environmental impact (habitat fragmentation and sensitive habitats).
- Work with user groups to find and implement solutions for reducing the number of unofficial trails.
- Raise awareness among users about stewardship to have them promote responsible use of the trails.
- Change the trail network to offer the kinds of experiences that users are seeking, while mitigating their environmental impact.

## **II. Consultation process**

### **A. Overview**

#### **a. Objective**

To present the plan for the renewed 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.

- b. Date**  
Wednesday, March 8, 2017
- c. Location**  
Meredith Centre, Chelsea, Quebec
- d. Time**  
7 pm to 9 pm
- e. Format**  
Presentation, followed by a question period and small group discussion.

## **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 and NCC project managers took part in a 30-minute question period.

### **c. Discussion**

After the question period, the project managers met with the participants to provide more specific answers to some of their questions. Maps of Gatineau Park were used to present the proposed new trail network. Participants formed four subgroups, with NCC representatives in each group.

### **d. Survey**

After the consultation, participants were sent a survey on responsible trail management and development of the proposed trail network.

## C. Invitation and promotion

A direct invitation was sent by email to the following groups and stakeholders:

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

## D. Participants

### a. Community

A total of 57 people participated in the consultation.

### b. Elected officials

Caryl Green, Mayor of Chelsea

## III. Highlights of the March 8, 2017, consultation

- After the presentation by NCC project managers and the question period, participants seemed to have a good understanding of the NCC's proposed approach. The vast majority of people approved of the NCC's proposed plan to change the trail network.
- Most of the points raised during the question period were aimed at clarifying the specific changes to be made.
- Some people stated that they were confused about the layout of the new network, because they had not had the opportunity to see the maps before the consultation. During the presentation, it was difficult to see the details on the maps projected on-screen.
- Participants understood that the development of this new trail network would take about five years, that users would have to take part in implementing the project and that a lot of work in awareness building among users would have to be done.

- Some participants expressed doubt as to the NCC's ability to achieve its objectives in terms of monitoring the Park to ensure that users comply with the new regulations.

#### **IV. Analysis of survey results and comments from the public**

A survey was sent to the consultation participants on March 9, 2017. They were given until March 23, 2014, to respond.

- The survey was viewed 121 times.
- Forty-two people completed the survey.

##### **A. Analysis of results (*Complete results available in Annex 2*)**

- a. **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 specific seasons. When responding, please consider how often you practise the activity during the season(s) it is available.**

The most popular activities practised (one to three times per month to once a week) in Gatineau Park are walking and hiking, cross-country skiing, road biking, mountain biking, snowshoeing and swimming.

- b. **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.**

A large majority of respondents (over 60 percent) stated that they use unofficial trails most of the time when practising their activities, and 27 percent indicated that they always use these trails.

- c. **Question 3: How do you get to Gatineau Park to practise the above activities? Please select all that apply.**

More than 40 percent of Gatineau Park users travel to the Park by car. The other means of transportation most frequently used are cycling and walking.

**d. Question 4: How familiar are you with the plan proposed by the NCC for the responsible management of recreational trails in Gatineau Park?**

Ninety percent of respondents said that they are somewhat familiar or very familiar with the proposed plan for the responsible management of a renewed recreational trail network.

**e. Question 5: How satisfied are you with the plan for the responsible management of recreational trails in Gatineau Park as proposed by the NCC?**

Over 70 percent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the proposed plan.

**f. Question 6: Have you participated in any of the public consultations?**

More than 90 percent of respondents had already participated in one meeting or one previous consultation on the renewed trail network.

**g. Question 7: How satisfied are you with the consultations held by the NCC prior to the development of this plan?**

More than 70 percent of respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the NCC's consultation process leading up to the proposal of this plan for the responsible management of recreational trails in the Park.

**h. Question 8: How would you rate the plan for the responsible management of recreational trails in Gatineau Park with regard to achieving Gatineau Park's conservation mandate to protect natural ecosystems and endangered species?**

More than 70 percent of respondents thought that the proposed new trail network respected the conservation mandate to protect ecosystems and species at risk.

**i. Question 9: How would you rate the plan for the responsible management of recreational trails in Gatineau Park with regard to offering quality outdoor recreational experiences that are respectful of the natural environment?**

More than 80 percent of respondents thought that the plan for the responsible management of recreational trails in the Park respects the natural environment in its offer of quality recreational experiences.

**j. Question 10: Are you a member of one or more of the following organizations? Please select all that apply.**

Gatineau Park trail user groups were quite varied: groups engaged in various sports, residents' associations, environmental groups and others.

**k. Question 11: Do you have any other comments regarding the responsible management of recreational trails in Gatineau Park?**

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

**l. Question 12: 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?**

Sixty percent of respondents indicated that they would like to help the NCC in implementing the plan for the responsible management of the new trail network, and 30 percent indicated that this might interest them.

**m. Question 13: Which of the following areas would you be interested in helping with? Please select all that apply.**

A third of respondents indicated that they would like to support the NCC in implementing the Park's plan for responsible trail management by helping with field work.



## B. Respondents' comments

- Several respondents appreciated the NCC's efforts to improve the trail network in collaboration with users and interest groups. However, some felt that the project would be very challenging and thought that it would be difficult to get user participation.
- Emphasis should be placed on awareness building and ensuring that users are better informed about the renewed trail network and the protection of natural areas (plants and wildlife).
- Some people suggested that all "new" trails should not be indicated on official maps of the Park.
- Restricting access to the Park was a factor of concern for some, because they felt that it could potentially keep even more people away from nature.
- Some people had doubts regarding the process and the NCC's ability to close or truly eliminate all unofficial trails, especially in certain areas, such as those surrounding the Park. Should it be specified where, for example at the Relais plein air or elsewhere?
- It will be necessary to propose a trail network that is interesting for all types of users.
- It is important to clearly define the type of activities that are to be encouraged in the Park versus those that can be harmful.
- Some comments suggested that the renewed trail network favoured nature and animals to the detriment of users.
- Suggestions were made to establish programs to promote responsible trail use, such as an "Adopt a trail" program.
- The addition of infrastructure on trails, such as wooden bridges, would help further preserve adjacent lands that could be harmed when the official trail is muddy or impassable (wetlands, mitigation measures).
- Development of the renewed trail network must take the trails' historical and cultural importance into consideration. It was suggested that the NCC install interpretation panels that relate the history of these trails and the region's pioneers.

- Some of the users of unofficial trails said that they could be tempted to create other trails to ensure an undisturbed outing.
- It will be necessary to develop better collaboration with the Park's neighbouring municipalities to ensure the successful development of the renewed trail network.
- The possibility of developing one or several trails along the roads in the Park could be evaluated.
- Participants criticized the fact that the consultation process did not always take place in both official languages. The answers of some project managers were not translated.

## **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 goal of this last public consultation was 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 network and 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 and ensure sound management of the renewed Gatineau Park trail network.

## **VI. Next steps**

A public consultation is planned for April 27, 2017, during which the plan for the responsible management of Gatineau Park trails will be presented and public comments will be received.

# Gatineau Park Recreational Trails Survey

**Thank you for participating in the consultation on the responsible management of Gatineau Park trails. We are seeking your input on the recreational trails in Gatineau Park. The results will help us to better understand the recreational habits of 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 and you have until March 23, 2017 to complete the survey.**

**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 specific season. 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	Many times a week	Every day
a) Hiking/walking							
b) Dog walking							
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 recreational trails in Gatineau Park?**

Very familiar..... Continue  
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 for the responsible management of recreational trails in Gatineau Park as proposed by the NCC?**

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

**Q6a. Have you participated in any of the consultations on responsible trail management?**

1. Yes
2. No

**Q6b. How satisfied are you with the consultations held by the NCC prior to 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 recreational trails in Gatineau Park with regard to achieving Gatineau Park's conservation mandate to protect natural ecosystems and endangered species?**

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

**Q8. How would you rate the plan for the responsible management of recreational 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 recreational 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

Maybe..... Continue

No ..... Go to end

Don't know / not sure ..... Go to end

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

Communication

Outreach

Field work

Patrol

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Don't know / not sure

Thank you very much for participating in this survey!

