

Report Card - Kincardine Trails

- As of 1Sep2024 -

Prepared by: Kincardine Trails Association (KTA)

Purpose: to describe

What is going well

Improvement Opportunities

Status of our community Trails

Summary:

What is Going Well:

- Community and Volunteer Support for our trails system
- Trail Inspection Program (Annual, Monthly); finding and fixing issues, managing risks
- Reactive Trail Maintenance (removing fallen trees, clearing vegetation, repairing washouts)

Improvement Opportunities

- Hazardous Tree Removal - implement a proactive program
- KIPP Trail Completion (Signage) and Maintenance
- Level and Timing of MoK Operational Support

Trails Status - Subjective Ratings by Topic

Rating	Area
8	Trail Safety and Usability (excluding issue of Hazardous Trees)
2	Hazardous Trees
7	Maintaining What We Have
3	Upgrading What We Have
2	Extending What We Have
7	Leveraging What We Have
8	Trail Volunteers

Ratings: 7-10 = GREEN; 4-6 = YELLOW; 1-3 = RED

- ratings are subjective scores, from 1 to 10, based on the considerations outlined in the "Details" section below.

Ratings Details:

Rating	Area
8	Trail Safety and Usability (excluding issue of Hazardous Trees)

Trail Safety and Usability

- This rating is based on an overall assessment of the following:
 - Condition of:
 - walking / biking surfaces - width; tripping hazards; overhead clearances
 - steps / staircases
 - trailside benches
 - gates / fences
 - signage
 - bridges (23 permanent and 3 seasonal) - decking, guardrails (structural integrity and code compliance are evaluated elsewhere, in a bi-annual engineering assessment)
 - erosion / wash outs / flooding
 - need for vegetation control
 - availability of up to date trail maps

Rating	Area
2	Hazardous Trees

Hazardous Trees

- The low rating for this category reflects that a proactive tree felling program is not in place, and that a significant number of trees continue to fall on our trails.
- As shared with Council in Nov2023, the greatest safety risk associated with trail use is from Hazardous Trees (predominantly dead or dying White Ash).
- This risk can be mitigated by implementing a proactive tree felling program. Very preliminary work has begun to establish such a program.
- There is a lower risk to trail users, resulting from trees that have already fallen on the trail. These typically involve low levels of safety risk, or often just trail usability reductions, until they are cleared.
- This risk is mitigated by clearing downed trees from our trails. From Jan-Mar2024, the KTA cleared 159 trees from the trails, which represents an all-time high for our trails.
- Note that there are also risks associated with proactive tree felling programs. These will need to be monitored and managed. Some can be anticipated:
 - fire loading - forest fire risk may rise as deadwood and brush accumulates on forest floors
 - proliferation of invasive species as the forest canopy opens up

- community reaction once proactive cutting begins
 - interruption in trail use during tree cutting / removal
 - change in appearance after cutting completed
- the need to rebuild / repair damaged trails from heavy forestry equipment

Rating	Area
7	Maintaining What We Have

Trail Maintenance

- we have approximately 45 km of trails, with maintenance duties divided between:
 - MoK - KIPP trail and boardwalks on Pink Trail
 - KTA - remaining trails
- The rating for this category is based on:
 - our ability to maintain the items in the “Safety and Usability” category above to a high standard
 - our ability to promptly clear downed trees from our trails
 - the degree to which maintenance efforts are proactive (preventing problems) vs reactive (fixing problems)

Rating	Area
3	Upgrading What We Have

Trail Upgrades

- The low rating for this category is based on:
 - Green Trail Upgrade
 - stalled - no progress over last 12 months; RFP not yet issued
 - decision to upgrade trail 7 years ago (Cycling Plan)
 - donated funding available for last 4 years (Bruce Power)
 - MoK resources not available to progress this work
 - Trail Counter Installation
 - installation of 2 counters has been delayed and slow
 - currently awaiting parts, and awaiting purchase of additional counters
 - limited MoK resources available to support this work
- On the plus side for this category, we have piloted the use of a plastic grid material (EcoRaster) for erosion control - with the active support of the MoK.

Rating	Area
2	Extending What We Have

Trail Extension Projects

- The low rating for this category is based on:
 - an inability over the last year (missed fall 2023 planning cycle) to obtain cost estimates for the following, which are needed to support budget requests and potential fundraising efforts, as well as all subsequent project stages
 - Queen St - paved path
 - Russel St - paved path
 - an inability to secure a Landowner Agreement for the Gary St trail extension (which will then require cost estimates, etc)
 - these initiatives are impacted by available MoK resources

Rating	Area
7	Leveraging What We Have

Leveraging - Considerations

- this rating is based on the work being done, understanding that considerable potential remains to be realized:
 - we have a trail system and a group of trail volunteers that are being leveraged to engage with trail users, community groups, and related initiatives
 - Special events / Fundraisers
 - Tour of Kincardine Trail Bike Race (annual event, community engagement, fundraiser)
 - 7 Km Trail Run (annual event, community engagement, fundraiser)
 - Spooky Trails (annual event, community engagement, fundraiser)
 - Hike For Hospice (annual event, community engagement, fundraiser)
 - Community Living Volunteers - first year for this initiative, youth engagement in trails under supervision of Community Living staff
 - Themed Hikes - just starting this up
 - Invasive Species - mutual collaboration with groups championing mitigation efforts
 - there is potential to further leverage trail efforts:
 - from just recreation based trails to community transportation
 - to formally collaborate with Cycling and Active Transportation initiatives

Rating	Area
8	Trail Volunteers

Trail Volunteers

- this rating is based on the current status of our strong team of committed volunteers:
 - have a strong base of experienced volunteers
 - numbers continue to increase, including some younger volunteers
 - active volunteers sign the MoK Volunteer Forms
 - formal training provided to volunteers doing higher risk work (chainsaw work)
 - thorough orientations and over the shoulder training for volunteers conducting inspections
 - there is potential to more fully engage trail volunteers

What is Going Well

- **Community and Volunteer Support**
 - both continue to remain very high
 - feedback from hikers, community members, and tourists is very positive
 - trail maps continue to be a major request from our Tourism staff
 - we have an expanding team of committed volunteers
- **Trail Inspection Program** (Annual Inspections, Monthly Inspections)
 - there is a healthy program in place for finding and fixing hazards (except for standing hazardous trees)
 - helps demonstrate due diligence for the MoK, and useful information for KTA regarding targeting of resources, enhances trail experience for trail users
 - annual inspection (May)
 - provides comprehensive understanding of the state of our trails and the issues that need to be addressed
 - report shared with MoK,
 - a structured inspection program, using check sheets and performed by KTA veterans
 - monthly inspections (Jun-Oct)
 - provide ongoing picture of the state of our trails, and identifies issues we can tackle to enhance the experience for trail users.
 - a structured inspection program, using check sheets
 - performed by volunteers who received orientation and 'over the shoulder' training on the trails
 - reports and summaries shared with MoK
 - The community feedback for our efforts to find and fix problems continues to be extremely supportive.

Improvement Opportunities

- Hazardous Tree Removal

- need to implement a proactive program to begin addressing the greatest safety risk on our trail system
- some initial work has occurred but no contractor or start date confirmed

- Kipp Trail Completion and Maintenance

- a crown jewel of the trail system
- considerable effort for a decade was required to lobby for, fundraise and construct the asphalt pathway along the B-line
- the paved surface along the B-line was installed in 2022; signage installation still not complete
- has been difficult to maintain this trail to a high standard over the second half of the summer
 - gravel on the surface, and overhanging weeds
 - can narrow the unobstructed surface by half
 - are impediments to all trail users, and perhaps especially for those with mobility restrictions

- Level and Timing of MoK Operational Support

- the focus of this item is the level and timing of Operational Support that the MoK is able to provide for trails-related work programs
- the **level** of support available does not align with the volume of required work. This results in:
 - key work and key projects not progressing
 - inability to use volunteer resources effectively
- the **timing** of available support (mostly after mid-August in 2024) does not align with getting our trail usage. This results in:
 - missed opportunities to improve trail conditions before the peak summer season
 - inability to use volunteer resources effectively
- Observation: senior trail volunteers have remarked that the level of support was higher in the past when Trails was part of Public Works. An obvious question, and not likely a new one, would be whether resources followed work program ownership during restructuring.
- working relationships between Parks and Facilities (MoK) and the Kincardine Trails Association are very positive, and the P&F staff are motivated to help, but are constrained by competing work program demands.