



# TRAILS in the NORTHWEST TERRITORIES: BACKGROUND REPORT

Submitted to the NWT Recreation and Parks Association by Avens Associates Ltd.

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***Report to:***

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## Executive Summary

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Trail development in the Northwest Territories (NWT) is in its formative stages...with thousands of years of history of trail use. Thousands of kilometres of trails integrated into traditional life are now changing. Motorized transportation, recreation, tourism and competitive use, and urbanization are all changing how trails are developed, used and described.

The Northwest Territories Recreation and Parks Association (NWTRPA) has been part of the transformation of trails. They implemented a trail building fund from 2004 to 2011. The final report on that trail building program recommends developing a trails strategy to co-ordinate efforts to develop, use and promote trails. The strategy should “create or help to galvanize an online NWT resource portal for land and water trails that brings together and helps to promote funding opportunities, examples of successful trail projects, solutions and innovations and user resources like trail descriptions, maps and GPS tracks.”

This report summarizes the state of trails in the NWT, compares our NWT trails and policy frameworks with other jurisdictions, and makes some recommendations from the findings. A summary of recommendations follows:

### ***Protect tradition...through use***

Trails need to be used to be kept in good shape. This means people need to know about them. Many people fear that traditional sites along trails will be endangered by promoting use of trails. This inherent conflict needs to be addressed in a multi-scale, multi-faceted manner.

### ***Recreation...and tourism***

With a low population density and with low tourism number, there is room and need for local recreational use and tourism use. However, tourism used does require some additional planning and design factors.

### ***Funding constraints require longer-term planning***

As funding becomes tighter, two aspects seem clear: a) be prepared for when federal funding is available; and b) plan for and be clear on long-term use.

### ***Develop and maintain a trail inventory before or in conjunction with a trail strategy***

A recommended first step is compiling the purpose-built trails and trails with some public funding.

### ***Sign what's there***

Before adding new trails, programs could emphasis adding trail head, distance and direction signs to existing public trails. Interpretive signs should be included in any sign funding program.

### ***Protect from inappropriate development***

Legal or policy assistance to communities trying to come to grips with inappropriate development is needed. Taking a couple of communities as case-studies, would be a recommended approach.

### ***The destination, the journey...or both?***

Planning needs to more fully consider whether the trail is about the use experience itself or about the destination. This needs to be clearer from the beginning of the development process through to marketing.

### ***Acknowledge multiple users***

The 'multi-use reality' should be made quite clear in tourism promotion of trails, since it is not as common down south. This also needs to be continually part of information about local trails, whether that is through 'club' information or local governments.

### ***Consider land and water routes***

In the NWT, these are very linked, so it is recommended that both land and water routes be considered in trail programs and, if developed, a trail strategy.

### ***Provide on-line access to consistent and accurate information***

The NWT should focus more on on-line resources that can benefit a wide range of trail users: residents, tourists, businesses, industry, managers, and other land use stakeholders.

### ***Require good design***

Much of good design needs to be done on a case-by-case basis because it is so site dependent. However, a graphic description of multiple use trail design for the NWT should be included in a trail strategy.

### ***Promote the benefits of trails***

A trail strategy could more explicitly, and perhaps empirically, pull together information on trail benefits. Then this information could be used to consistently promote trail use to various agencies and users.

### ***Acknowledge and plan for concerns about trails***

A trail strategy should acknowledge the very real concerns that some communities and people have with building trails, such as increased pressure on renewable resources and inappropriate use of cultural sites. A form for trail programs funding through the GNWT should include ways to identify and mitigate concerns.

### ***Discuss and determine 'responsible authorities'***

Improving trail promotion requires agreement on the responsible authority.

### ***Less on building, more on maintenance and promotion?***

Consideration to funding maintenance and promotion of trails, rather than construction of trails, should be considered in a trails strategy.

### ***More information about tourists***

Additional information about tourism use and desires could potentially strengthen these programs and increase the funding available for trails. When the GNWT conducts exit surveys of visitors, specific trail information could be solicited, i.e., 'piggy-back' trail information onto an existing survey.

### ***Improve standard community websites***

Having a 'place holder' to describe trails on the MACA-formatted community websites would be a simple step to acknowledging trails.

### ***Co-ordinate GNWT involvement***

Several GNWT departments are involved in trails. The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) seems an appropriate lead department because local users within communities are, and will likely be, the primary users of trails. Since trails extend well beyond community boundaries and local users, other involved departments should include Industry, Tourism and Investment; Education Culture and Employment; Environment and Natural Resources; and Transportation.