

STAFF REPORT: RECREATION DEPARTMENT

REPORT TO: Infrastructure & Recreation Committee
MEETING DATE: July 12, 2011
REPORT NO.: DOR.11.45
SUBJECT: The Blue Mountains Stewardship Program
PREPARED BY: Shawn Everitt
Director of Recreation

A. Recommendations

THAT Council receive Staff Report DOR.11.45 entitled "The Blue Mountains Stewardship Program" for information purposes.

B. Background

Town Staff has developed a Land Stewardship program manual that outlines the proposed stewardship program. The purpose of the Stewardship program is to recruit community volunteers to take some high level responsibility for Parkland and or Trails. Ultimately, these volunteers will allow for ongoing care and inspection of properties and trails and become the eyes and ears for the Community. Similar in nature to the local adopt a road program, this concept allows for additional care and inspection.

The document was developed in review of several other stewardship guides and as outlined in the stewardship guide. Properties and trail sections will be identified as potential stewardship opportunities. Staff will ensure that only appropriate locations will be eligible for stewardship to ensure appropriate levels of safety are in place, a property or trail section specific document/binder will be developed upon recruitment of volunteers.

Training will be delivered to trail stewards by Town staff. It is suggested that "Captains" be identified as key contacts as well as train the trainer type individuals. Captains could then deliver additional training for their stewardship groups to increase the capacity of the overall program.

This program will not eliminate maintenance of public space, repairs or works that are minor in nature and it may be possible for stewardship groups to undertake by way of approval of works by the Manager of Parks and Trails. Most repairs will be undertaken by Town Staff to ensure appropriate measures have been taken.

Typical inspection forms will be submitted to the Manager of Parks and Trails at the end of each year, in the case of repairs or concerns stewards will contact the Manager of Parks and Trails as soon as possible where a work order will be completed and follow up reports will be completed once the repairs or concerns are remedied where possible. Recreation Staff have also been in discussions with the Town's insurance provider and have their support.

C. The Blue Mountains' Strategic Plan

Preserving and enhancing natural and environmental features, and cultural heritage of the community.

D. Environmental Impacts

The development of sustainable and effective inspection and maintenance of Public spaces.

E. Financial Impact

Staff time will be required to provide training to Stewardship Volunteers

It is expected that this Stewardship program will allow for significant efficiencies in ensuring public safety within Town Public Spaces.

F. Attached

- 1) The Blue Mountains Stewardship Program

Respectfully submitted,

Shawn Everitt, Director of Recreation

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DOR 11 45 Attachment # 1

Introduction

This document to Land Stewardship is intended to guide The Blue Mountains volunteer Land Stewards in the care and management of Town owned lands. This guide is the basis for the training of new volunteer Stewards. It should be read by all Land Stewards. The Town will provide guidance to all Stewards and cover the items in this guide before Land Stewards complete their first annual monitoring report.

What is the Stewardship Program

The Blue Mountains Council and Staff have been diligent over the past number of years in particular during the strong years of residential development in acquiring lands and funds from the development community to ensure that lands for parks and trails were accessible to the public for the Towns overall public benefit. The Town has a total of approximately 900 acres of Public access Land and approximately 250 kilometers of Public access trails through Public agencies such as Ontario Parks, Grey Sauble Conservation Authority, Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, Ministry of Natural Resources, Grey County, Bruce Trail, Georgian Trail and other agencies.

Land Stewardship Plans

A Plan will be developed by the Towns Recreation Department for Parks and Trails. These Plans will include information on wetlands, watercourses, vegetation, wildlife, property history, and so on. The Plan will also list recommendations for short term and long term care of the property. They are intended to guide property stewardship.

Included in these Plans, Staff will also develop land stewardship policies to help direct the management of Town lands. Policies addressing issues such as;

- ▶ vegetation management;
- ▶ water quality protection;
- ▶ habitat management;
- ▶ property boundary marking; and,
- ▶ unauthorized uses

that pertain to Town lands will be included in these Plans. New Policies will be prepared by Staff as the needs arise.

Ongoing monitoring by volunteer Land Stewards

As part of the Stewardship program volunteerism is the key aspect of the program's success. Individuals, groups, service clubs will be recruited to act as caretakers of some Parks and Trails where these are deemed suitable. In accordance with the information and recommendations in the Land Stewardship Plans, the volunteer Land Stewards are responsible for monitoring and caring for their assigned properties. Each Club has a Land Steward Director to coordinate activities of the Land Stewards within the Club.

The purpose of this manual is to describe the responsibilities of the volunteer Land Stewards and their Club Land Steward Directors.

Who Owns the Land and how was it acquired

Properties within this program are either owned by the Town or are managed by the Town on behalf of other government agencies. The Town has acquired a number of properties for Parks and Trails through Development processes, the Town has also acquired lands for specific reasons such as soccer pitch development as well the importance of securing waterfront lands. The Town also works closely with the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Parks, Grey County, Grey Sauble Conservation Authority as well as the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority in the management of lands. Trails often are secured through Trail easements where 6 meter corridors are placed in the ownership of the Town to allow connectivity and trail access throughout the Town. Other uses are through land use agreement with agencies as well as the use of unopened road allowances, former railroad beds and right of ways.

What is the Role of the Land Steward

The Land Stewardship is not all about maintenance work. General Maintenance works and general repairs will continue to be completed by Town Staff. However if a Land Steward identifies easy to remedy concerns such as smaller fallen tree branches near play equipment being removed, loose tennis netting being tighten etc, these tasks could be completed by the steward if they felt comfortable with that task. The main task completed by the steward is the inspection of the Park and or trail. If damage, vandalism, growth of noxious weeds, playground equipment safety is identified, the stewards role is to contact the Town's Manager of Parks & Trails and staff would be scheduled to perform those works. The Stewardship program will provide efficient use of Town Staff and ensure repairs are completed in a timely fashion.

Who can be a Land Steward

Land Stewards are, ideally, local or seasonal residents of the area in which their property is situated, although this is not required. Volunteers do not have to be expert ecologists or property managers each individual's interests and experience will bring valuable view points to observations of property. The job of the Land Steward is to act as the "eyes and ears on the ground".

The Property/Trail Binder

The Land Steward will be provided with a Land Steward Binder for the property or trail section to which you are assigned. These binders contain the following:

- Contact information
- Map of Property
- Volunteer Orientation Booklet
- Inspection Reports
- Request for Repair
- General request forms

Site Visits

The main task of a Land Steward is to visit the property at least once per week. The Land Steward is to provide written inspection reports provided in the Property/Trail Binder to the Towns Manager of Parks & Trails. When an inspection report has identified work being required, that specific inspection form must be given to the Manager of Parks & Trails as soon as possible.

Site visits involve walking the property to its full extent, it is recommended and encouraged to bring someone along during your site visits. Viewing a property in the winter when all foliage has fallen can give a completely different impression than in spring, summer or fall seasons. Staff encourages you to take photos of all seasons as well as particular points of interest or concern.

Health & Safety and Liability

While inspecting the properties, Land Stewards should look for potential safety risks to property users (e.g. tripping hazards, hazardous trees, unstable slopes, etc), or risks to neighbouring landowners (e.g. trees likely to fall onto neighbouring properties). If the issue is too large to be remedied by the Land Steward, or involves specialized help, the Town Manager of Parks & Trails should be informed.

Park/Trail Inspection Report

Date of Inspection: _____ Time of Inspection _____

Park/Trail Inspector Name(s) and

Title: _____

Park Name/Trail Section: _____

Appearance

Note conditions of Park/Trail. Is it adequate to standards? If no, explain.

Hazards

List hazards and potential hazards below. If repairable, note time, location, what maintenance actions were taken to correct the problem(s).

If one or more of the hazards are not repairable, example missing sign, list below what material, actions and size of work party needed for follow up maintenance.

Maintenance

List any basic maintenance work accomplished and at what section. Example, clearing brush, picking up litter.

Has any follow up maintenance/repairs from previous Park/Trail inspections been corrected? If yes, what was corrected and what actions taken?

Are any other areas of concern observed? Example: Trespassing onto landowner property, trail section to be rerouted?

Additional Comments:

Upon completion of Park/Trail Inspection season, please hand report to the Town's Manager of Parks and Trails. If repair or additional care is needed, please notify Manager of Parks and Trails as soon as possible at 519-599-1231 or email at tgreen@thebluemountains.ca