



Strategic Plan 2025-2030

A community of engaged hikers; a legacy of enduring trails

Introduction

The Rideau Trail Association Strategic Plan outlines the strategic goals of the organization for the 2025 to 2030 timeframe and details the objectives that will be addressed in this period to focus efforts.

Background – Mission and Vision

Background

The Rideau Trail Association (RTA) is a charitable, volunteer-run organization with two main roles, both of which are important:

- ▶ First, the RTA coordinates and promotes self-propelled activities such as hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and other outdoor activities. Hikes and other activities are led by certified and experienced leaders. Hikes are conducted for beginner, intermediate and advanced hikers. In addition to hiking our own trails, activities are conducted throughout (and some outside) the region so that members have the opportunity to explore all of the wonderful nature areas available.
- ▶ Second, the RTA stewards over 40 trails that span over 450 km. The main trail, known as the Rideau Trail, is roughly 325 km in length, and goes between downtown Kingston and downtown Ottawa. These trails roughly parallel (and cross) the Rideau Canal; passing through the UNESCO recognized Frontenac Arch Biosphere; and overall includes two provincial parks, multiple conservation areas, several historic towns and cities as well as private farms and woodlots. Portions of our trails are shared with Rails and Trails, city trails and the Trans Canada Trail.

The idea of establishing a hiking trail between Kingston and Ottawa was proposed by high school teacher Doug Knapp during a 1971 meeting of the Kingston Field Naturalist group. Throughout the summer and fall months, numerous volunteers, supported by students from Queen's University, surveyed, obtained permissions, and marked the initial trail, much of which passed through remote areas. None of the property was, or currently is, owned by the RTA. Three hiking clubs collaborated to form the Rideau Trail Association. The Rideau Trail was officially opened by Provincial MPs at a ceremony in Foley Mountain near Westport in November 1971, attracting a crowd of 200 people.



Over the years, many portions of land have evolved, including the establishment of parks and conservation areas, new trails, changes in ownership, and the expansion of developed areas. RTA volunteers have rerouted, re-signed, and obtained new permissions to keep the main trail accessible for members and public use. Connector trails, side loops, and additional scenic loops were added to create the Rideau Trail network. RTA volunteers continue to manage the trails, promoting "leave no trace" principles and maintaining natural trails for public enjoyment. The RTA is initiating efforts to identify and record invasive species to assist other organizations in mitigating their threats. The RTA consists of three Clubs, all of which organize a wide range of hikes, challenges and other outdoor activities; frequently averaging over 50 activities per month across the Association.

Mission

To promote, encourage and conduct responsible hiking and similar self-propelled activities while stewarding the Rideau Trail network.

Vision

A community of engaged hikers; a legacy of enduring trails.

Strategic Goals

Strategic Goal 1. Strengthen Association and Clubs

The RTA maintains a membership base of over 1000, with active and varied activity programming in addition to trail maintenance. Like most volunteer organizations, there are difficulties in obtaining sufficient motivated and capable volunteers; a situation exacerbated by the high average age of volunteers and members. Mentorship practices need to be strengthened, and losses of key personnel can have severe impacts. Part of the issue can be improved with increasing membership and widening the age demographics somewhat, but for a more stable situation it will be necessary to foster a culture of mentorship and volunteering. Care must be taken to spread the workload and to not overburden volunteers. To attract, and keep, members we need to offer the variety of activities, and at a variety of difficulty levels, that will keep all members interested and happy to stay engaged.



Strategic Goal 2. Enhance and Secure the Trail

The RTA does not own any of the lands that our trails pass through. It is therefore critical that we know all our landowners and partners and that we stay current with, and strive to support landowner wishes, restrictions and concerns. This is a far larger task than most people understand.

Trail marking and care are important to both members and non-members who use the trails. The current environment is also more complex, as trails need to be checked for environmental resilience, widened in some areas to reduce tick threats, and monitored for the spread of invasive species. Maintaining trails to a high standard, along with monitoring trail resilience and environmental protections will require additional efforts in the future.



Strategic Goal 3. Expand Awareness of the RTA

Regretfully, the Rideau Trail Association role in maintaining our network of trails is not that well known, even by hikers that are using some of the trails. On top of that, even when people have knowledge of the Rideau Trail, they are often unaware that we are an outdoor club that conducts a very large number of activities. Our predominant activity is hiking, but we also conduct cycling, canoeing, kayaking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing, and social events; as well as offering regular challenges for different ability levels.

In many respects this is a supporting goal, as expanding awareness of all aspects of the RTA is considered vital to increasing membership and to gaining and maintaining support from partners and allies.



Strategic Goal 4. Continue to Improve Governance

The RTA Board of Directors has recently made numerous efforts to improve the long-term health of the Association, while also improving our management of ongoing Association activities. While improvements have been made, further refinements, adjustments and improvements will no doubt be required in the future – especially as Strategic Plan implementation efforts start.



Objectives

Strategic Goal 1. Strengthen Association and Clubs

Objective 1.1

Improve the knowledge base of RTA Directors, Association Committees and Club Executives concerning responsibilities, policies, practices, procedures and support tools.

Association Lead – RTA Chair/President
Club Leads - Club Chairs

Relative Importance – **VERY HIGH**

Objective 1.2

Develop and implement a Marketing Plan, with a range of marketing materials and display items that appropriately highlight the key aspects of the RTA to appropriate audiences.

Lead – RTA Marketing Officer

Relative Importance – **HIGH**

Objective 1.3

Further improve and implement new member welcoming programs.

Club Leads to be appointed by Club Chairs
Association Level Lead – RTA Membership Officer

Relative Importance – **VERY HIGH**

Objective 1.4

Improve awareness of RTA with key partners and potential allies looking to recruit (members and/or volunteers) discussions and/or briefings to chosen locations at key locations throughout sector/region. Leverage the relationships where possible to reduce the RTA workload, improve relations, strengthen partnerships, and/or to gain access to funding and support.

Association Lead – RTA President
Club Level Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – **HIGH**

Objective 1.5

Conduct activities where non-members can participate and learn, firsthand, about the RTA and RTA opportunities.

Leads – Club Chairs
Association Lead – RTA President

Relative Importance – **MEDIUM**

Objective 1.6

Tailor the activity and challenge schedules to meet the needs and desires of the membership (Club and Association levels).

Association Lead – Activities Officer

Club Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 1.7

Improve the capabilities, and the willingness, of RTA Hike /Activites Leaders to conduct activities.

Association Lead – Activities Officer

Club Leads – Activity Coordinators

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 1.8

Initiate mentorship practices and develop depth capabilities for all Association and Club positions and key capability sets.

Association Lead – RTA Chair/President

Club Leads - Club Chairs

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 1.9

Foster a culture of engagement and volunteerism, where volunteers aren't constantly overburdened.

Association Leads– President, Committee Leads

Club Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 1.10

Study, and implement, ways of reducing overall and/or individual workloads at all levels, while maintaining similar or higher output capacities.

Board Lead – Chair

Association Lead – all Committee Leads

Club Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 1.11

Review such membership categories and Association policies as are identified to determine if changes could be made to improve in completing mission tasks and/or vision objectives.

Association Lead – Governance Committee

Relative Importance – MEDIUM

Strategic Goal 2: Enhance and Secure the Trail

Objective 2.1

Maintain geographic boundary information and right of access (relative to the trail) that links into other landowner information for all RTA landowners.

Association Lead – President, with assistance from Trail Coordination Officer

Club Level Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 2.2

Maintain friendly and cooperative relationships with all landowners/ representatives; ensuring that the RTA is aware of landowner restrictions and desires.

Association Lead – Trail Coordinator (or appointed Landowner Liaison Coordinator)

Club Leads – Landowner Liaison Representatives

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 2.3

Improve trail signage, so that trail users are aware that they are on a trail that is maintained by the RTA.

Association Lead- Trail Coordinator

Club Leads – Club Trail Maintenance Coordinators

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 2.4

Update, and expand, the use of RTA Trailhead signs at applicable locations and other special trail signage (not trail blazes or standard trail markings). This signage will not only enhance the trail experience, it also contributes to Strategic Goal 3.

Association Lead – Assn level Ad Hoc Committee

Relative Importance – MEDIUM

Objective 2.5

Maintain a network of clearly marked, safe and well maintained trails.

Association Lead – Trail Coordinator

Club Leads – Club Trail Maintenance Coordinators

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 2.6

Increase sustainability by establishing and leveraging appropriate partnering practices.

Association Leads– President, Trail Coordinator

Club Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – MEDIUM

Objective 2.7

Continue to embrace environmental stewarding practices, with a specific focus on developing the means to monitor and limit the spread of invasive plants.

Association Lead – Trail Coordinator

Club Leads – Club Trail Maintenance Coordinators **Relative Importance – MEDIUM**

Strategic Goal 3: Expand Awareness of the RTA

Objective 3.1

Develop and implement a Marketing Plan that targets the identified audiences for both expanding general awareness of the RTA and attracting new members/volunteers across a slightly wider demographic.

Association Lead – Marketing Officer

Club Leads – Club Marketing Leads **Relative Importance – HIGH**

Objective 3.2

Develop, and maintain, a set of marketing tools for use by Clubs and anyone doing presentations or sessions about the RTA. This should include outline presentations on the RTA, information brochures (bilingual), and displays, potentially videos; as well as formats that permit postings on social media. These tools will also be used in support of **Objective 1.2**.

Association Lead – Marketing Officer and Committee

Club Leads – Club Marketing Leads **Relative Importance – HIGH**

Objective 3.3

Improve website use for both members and non-members, simplifying navigation and forms wherever possible.

Association Lead – RTA Website Committee **Relative Importance – HIGH**

Objective 3.4

Expand awareness of the role that the RTA can play in working with partners and allies, through communications with partners and allies, as well as civic officials, and selected schools and educational institutions/groups (also supports Objective 1.4).

Association Lead – Chair/President

Club Leads – Club Chairs **Relative Importance – MEDIUM**

Strategic Goal 4: Continue to Improve Governance

Objective 4.1

Maintain efforts to ensure appropriate consideration for all aspects of the long-term health of the Association in fulfilling both Mission and Vision.

Association Lead – RTA Board
Club Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 4.2

Utilize the fact that the RTA is part of a hierarchy of similar organizations (in particular Hike Ontario and the Ontario Trails Council) to exchange best practices and ideas and to leverage available resources.

Association Lead – RTA Chair/President,
Appointed Liaison Representatives

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 4.3

Establish a Governance Committee as part of the RTA Board of Directors (that includes non-Directors as members) with appropriate Terms of Reference.

Association Lead – RTA Chair

Relative Importance – HIGH

Objective 4.4

Establish practices and procedures whereby key Governance Committee efforts are fed back into the RTA Board for approvals and actions;.

Association Leads – RTA Chair and Chair of the Governance Committee
Club Leads – Club Chairs

Relative Importance – HIGH

