

SAULT STE. MARIE REGION CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

FORT CREEK ROUNDTABLE NOTES

Thursday, January 28, 2016

Civic Centre, Russ Ramsay Room

The meeting commenced at 7:00 p.m.

Welcome

Marchy Bruni, SSMRCA Chair welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. He introduced Rhonda Bateman, SSMRCA General Manager.

Rhonda Bateman, SSMRCA General Manager commended Mr. O'Flanagan for proposing the idea of holding a roundtable discussion with trail users and neighbours of the Fort Creek Conservation Area.

Trail Status

Rhonda gave a brief backgrounder on the erosion of the ravine and subsequent removal of the bridge on the Plateau Trail in 2014.

Signs and a snow fence have been erected for public safety however, both were either vandalized or removed. In November of 2015 the Board directed staff to close the trail for all use.

Engineering bids on the "engineering only" portion of the work required to replace the bridge with a new expanded structure. From the bids received it was estimated that the cost for engineering the bridge would be \$12,000 – 23,000. Those bids did not include the physical bridge structure which could bring the cost to \$100,000+.

It was stated that public safety is the SSMRCA's primary concern.

Meeting Protocol

Mr. Bruni outlined the meeting protocol: Be respectful, only one person speaks at a time, no side conversations, all ideas and opinions will be respected, before the meeting ends next steps will be determined.

Introductions and Discussion

All participants were given an opportunity to introduce themselves and state their concerns with regard to the closure of the Plateau trail.

Views expressed included:

- People have a deep history and love for the Fort Creek Conservation Area and surrounding nature trails.
- The trails are well used.
- People who use the trails regularly are not going to stop using them.
- Trails are used for a variety of reasons including healthy living and lifestyle choices.
- Advocates of the nature trails could form a volunteer committee to assist with fundraising and trail maintenance.
- Perhaps local post-secondary students could contribute to trail maintenance.
- Participants asked why there is little money in the SSMRCA budget for trail maintenance.

It was stated that trail budgets differ across the province. Many of the conservation areas in Southern Ontario are gated and charge fees for entry. That is not a feasible model for Sault Ste. Marie. That is a revenue stream that is not available for the SSMRCA. We encourage residents and visitors to use and enjoy our conservation areas.

Rhonda outlined the CA's primary mandate of flood control and flood warning. Provincial funding is allocated for flood related programs and has not increased since 1996. The province ceased funding for recreation at that time.

Next Steps

Recommendations from participants included:

- Wording for signage:
 - Dangerous Area
 - Use At Own Risk
 - Unmaintained Trail
- Post signs up high so they can't be tampered with.
- Board members were encouraged to visit the site.
- Examine the potential for connecting trail be created to address the concerns with the Plateau Trail.

Mr. Bruni told the participants that the Board will consult insurance and legal counsel regarding signage and liability.

There were also concerns about the beavers being trapped. Rhonda explained that the area where the beavers are currently located was a flat area which use to be forested, it was not a natural wetland. The beavers are trapped as part of our regular maintenance to ensure that the CA's emergency access road remained viable and is not affected by dam breakage. This type of maintenance program is necessary to remove animals like beaver who create flooding and/or drainage obstructions. Relocation of beavers is not feasible.

Outcomes

- As a result of the meeting the SSMRCA Chair confirmed that new signs will be produced and erected after consultations with legal counsel and the insurance company.
- The SSMRCA supports the idea of a committee being formed to assist with fundraising and possible trail maintenance, citizen contributions are appreciated.
- Another meeting will take place in approximately one month to discuss any updates to the current situation.

The meeting ended at 8:09 p.m.