

STRATEGIC PLAN

2024-2030





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1.0 Introduction

Congratulations to everyone on the Golden Anniversary of Hike Ontario!

We would like to recognize and thank all the Board members over the years, the member clubs, the Executive Committee members, volunteers, hike leaders, and the course instructors for their contributions to reaching this milestone. Volunteers' commitment has been instrumental in helping Hike Ontario achieve its mandate across the province. Throughout this journey, strong support from the hiking communities and guidance from experienced, knowledgeable, and dedicated leadership have helped Hike Ontario advance its core organizational activities and to achieve its objectives.

The last Strategic Plan for Hike Ontario was completed in 2010, with a mandate to the year 2015. It is timely to complete this plan in order to address new trends, reaffirm valuable programs which are successful and in demand, refine work completed by the organization and identify key recommendations which need to be undertaken in order to ensure the organization remains relevant.

Hike Ontario has updated its by-laws to comply with the Ontario Non-profit Corporation Act (ONCA) and finalized this Strategic Plan. Completion of these projects will help Hike Ontario move forward with a more focused mission, vision and objectives in the coming years. During the facilitation sessions, a need for further collaboration among the clubs has been repeatedly discussed by the participants. Let us all adopt the spirit of collaboration, work together, support each other, and reflect on our commitments through partnering with the organizations that have complementary mandates to ensure Hike Ontario's future milestones are met along with the larger community achievements.



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1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to provide high level direction to the Hike Ontario Board for the next 5 years. Hike Ontario currently offers and operates a number of valuable programs to the member hiking clubs of Ontario. The intent of this plan is to focus the direction of the organization and identify key recommendations for the Executive to undertake to implement the plan.

The document presents the updated Mission, Vision, Guiding Principle, Strategic Directions and Objectives that will guide the organization from 2025 to 2030. The key summary section at the end of this document identifies the important recommendations that will direct the implementation of the Plan.

1.2 Planning Process

A strategic planning process was started in 2020 and a number of documents, questionnaires, and a SWOT analysis was completed with Board input and this information has been reviewed and considered during this planning process. Over the past year the Board and Executive Committee has reviewed and provided comments on an updated draft SWOT analysis and draft plan content as it was developed. During the facilitation sessions, a need for further collaboration among the clubs has been repeatedly discussed by the participants.

The final draft plan was circulated to both the Board and the Executive Committee for review and comment prior to its approval.

2.0 Mission

To Preserve, Protect, and Support Hiking and Walking in Ontario's Natural and Urban Landscapes.

3.0 Vision

A fulsome Network of sustainable Hiking Organizations across Ontario that provides users with the best and safest natural experience possible.

4.0 Guiding Principle

To ensure safe and appropriate hiking with a purpose to protect nature, educate users, promote healthy living, engage youth and respect all individuals.

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5.0 Values

Integrity We conduct ourselves in accordance with the highest standards of professional and personal behaviour and ethics.

Respect We show respect for all individuals and groups with whom we interact, recognize our special relationship with hiking organizations and acknowledge the traditional homeland of the Indigenous peoples of Ontario.

Collaboration We work cooperatively with all hiking organizations, funders and other partners, share knowledge and best practices, and recognize our volunteers.

Commitment We are committed to supporting all hiking organizations, members, volunteers, donors, and users to achieve our mission and vision.

Education We embrace our role in responsible use of hiking trails by providing courses, training and certification to individuals who will be leading hikes and other outdoor activities. We will ensure there is a focus on youth, nature and for the benefit of all including future generations.

Safety We ensure safe and best risk management practices in everything we do. We offer and manage group insurance to member groups to reduce their risk of liability and ensure continued operation.

6.0 Strategic Directions

Our seven strategic directions are to:

1. Build a sustainable organization and create value for member clubs across the province through education, information sharing, risk management guidance and provision of liability insurance.
2. Develop and deliver education and training programs for all stakeholders.
3. Promote hiking and walking trails.
4. Prepare, Manage and Maintain a Risk Management Plan for the organization that is to be shared and promoted to Hiking Clubs in Ontario.
5. Coordinate, Manage and Offer a Group Liability Insurance program to Hiking Trail organizations in Ontario.
6. Coordinate and Support a Hiker Waiver program with Ontario Hiking Trail organizations.
7. Foster and Provide Outreach Communications to Ontario Hiking organizations as well as members of the public and youth about the benefits of hiking, health and nature.

7.0 Objectives

1. Encourage walking for recreation, transportation and health.
2. Provide courses in introductory safe hiking and hike leadership in both wilderness and non-wilderness settings to people of all ages.
3. Support and facilitate trail development for walking and hiking throughout Ontario.
4. Enable good trail maintenance and hiking practices and the enhancement and quality of the walking experience.
5. Encourage and facilitate the development of appropriate trail building and hiking clubs in Ontario.
6. Advocate for a club or clubs when requested or when an initiative is deemed necessary.
7. Promote education and research into the health benefits and other aspects of recreational walking.
8. Encourage conservation and appreciation of the natural environment.
9. Maintain and disseminate information on hiking and hiking trails.

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8.0 Organization and By-laws

8.01 By-laws

Hike Ontario has completed the process to update its By-laws to be compliant with the Ontario Not for Profit Corporations Act (ONCA). This update ensures the proper operation of the organization is in place and will be followed. The following relevant information identifies the requirements for the Board of Directors and the organizations Committees.

8.02 Board of Directors

Directors and Directors-at-Large shall consist of the following persons, each of whom shall have one vote at its meetings:

- a. The total board of Directors shall be composed of a maximum of 27 members. 15 Director positions from Trail Building organizations and 9 Director-at-Large positions who are either individual members or from member organizations, and 3 Director positions from Other Hiking Organizations in the Province of Ontario.
- b. Up to nine persons, who are Directors-at-Large will be the Hike Ontario Executive and committee chairs and if necessary, may also serve as representatives of Trail Associations or Hiking Clubs.

8.03 Committees

Committees may be established by the Board as follows:

1. The Board of Directors shall elect from its members an Executive Committee consisting of a Chair, Vice Chair, President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. Additionally, the Chairs of Standing Committees shall be considered to be members of the Executive Committee.
2. Standing Committees shall consist of a, Advocacy and Policy Committee, Risk Management and Insurance Committee, Education and Certification Committee, Communications Committee.
3. Additional Standing Committees shall be considered to be members of the Executive Committee and confirmed at a future Annual General meeting.

9.0 Risk Management and Insurance

9.01 Risk Management

Managing risk is a task that all trail organizations take very seriously. At Hike Ontario, we are dedicated to pursuing best practices, sound advice and proactively engaging in and encouraging safe practices and education.

Trail organizations minimize their exposure to risk through proven trail management practices. These are management actions that minimize the possibility of damage or injury (e.g., signs, barricades, supervision), minimize the impact of an accident (e.g., first aid posts, rescue equipment) and transfer liability to the trail user (e.g., disclaimers, user education).

Hike Ontario has developed and approved a Risk Registry, Risk Assessment Matrix and a series of Risk Categories that are being followed as part of the Risk Management and Insurance program. This program is being administered by the Hike Ontario Risk Management Committee.

In order to minimize these risks, trail organizations pay for general liability insurance. This defends the trail organization in the event they are sued. If blame is assigned to the trail organization, the insurance pays damages. In almost every case, general liability insurance extends to the defence of owners of land adjacent to and over which the trails pass.

9.02 Insurance

Trail insurance is an important component to the successful and safe development and management of trails in Ontario. Trail clubs are faced with increasing insurance costs that help protect them from liability. The pressure of higher insurance rates has placed great burden on many of the hiking and walking clubs and trails of Ontario, which has resulted in many of the treasured recreational resources of Ontario at risk of closure.

Hike Ontario continues to work diligently with its trail partners and insurance providers to provide the best possible policy conditions to suit the needs of its trail clubs. This in turn is working towards managing for safe and sustainable trails systems throughout Ontario for the pleasure of walkers and hikers. Hike Ontario plays a key role in risk management assistance with trail clubs, thereby assisting in insurance provision.

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It is important to recognize the importance of this issue in the Ontario trails community. Everyone from trail users to advocacy groups needs to be aware of this issue. Membership contributions, public campaigns of support and agency or government lobbying can all play key roles in the support of the sustainability of trails in Ontario.

9.03 Insurance Program for Member Organizations

The insurance program for Hike Ontario provides coverage to Hike Ontario as the provincial association. Coverage is available on a buy-in basis to member clubs who have applied and been accepted for coverage.

Hike Ontario's insurance program includes the following coverage:

- Commercial General Liability Insurance (CGL) - \$ 5 million with \$1000 deductible
- Errors and Omissions (E&O) – included with CGL coverage
- Directors & Officers (D&O) - \$2 million or \$5 million with \$0 deductible (D&O insurance is only available in combination with CGL insurance and not all member organizations elect to take out D&O insurance).

Activities covered:

- Hiking activities
- Member training events
- Sanctioned non-hiking activities
- Trail maintenance/trail building
- Open houses
- Membership meetings
- Fundraisers
- Certification programs
- Promotion of sport
- Publication of newsletters
- Annual awards ceremonies/wind-up banquets



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9.04 Waivers

Waivers are a key part of running a province wide trail organization such as Hike Ontario and also for Trail Clubs who provided guided hikes to club members and the general public. Throughout the development of this strategic plan Hike Ontario has invested considerable time and reasonable legal costs to ensure appropriate waivers can be used for Hike Ontario and that Hike Ontario can recommend an appropriate waiver for member clubs to use.

Hiking clubs are required to electronically submit all the waivers they have signed throughout the year to Hike Ontario on an annual basis. Hiking Clubs are to retain these waivers electronically for an indefinite amount of time and Hike Ontario will also retain these waivers for an indefinite amount of time. Hike Ontario will also retain its own waivers that the organization uses for an indefinite amount of time.

9.05 Hike Ontario Waiver - Sample

I understand that there can be risks associated with any recreational pursuit and, in consideration of the Hike Ontario permitting me to participate in this activity I, for myself, my heirs and personal representatives, hereby release the Hike Ontario its clubs, leaders, members and other volunteers from all claims and demands for any loss, damage or injury, however caused and whether or not contributed to by the course instructors negligence, in connection with my participation. I have read this, and am voluntarily signing below.

9.06 Recommended Club Waiver - Sample

I, and all those I am registering, acknowledge that this activity in which we are participating, organized by The Trail Club, involves risks which are beyond the control of the Trail Club. Notwithstanding the acknowledgement of such risks, we hereby release the Trail Club, contractors, employees, agents, assigns and executors from all claims for damage however so arising as a result of our participation in this and any other activity organized by the Trail Club. We agree to pay the cost of the emergency evacuation of all persons or belongings that may be necessary. We affirm that we are aware of the nature of this activity, its length, duration and degrees of difficulty and that we are properly equipped and physically able to participate. We have no medical or other condition which might preclude our participation. We agree to follow the directions of the leader and any assistants at all times.

10.0 Education and Certification

Hike Ontario has developed standards and training programs for Hike Leaders that are used by community colleges, universities, hiking clubs and outdoor training organizations for course delivery. Currently, Hike Ontario offers Safe Hiker, Certified Hike Leader, Wilderness Day Hike Leader, and Wilderness Trip Hike Leader training courses. At present there are over 500 Certified Hike Leaders from across Canada who have taken the Hike Ontario Certification program.

These courses are recommended by Hike Ontario for any individuals and/or groups interested in leading organized hikes and walks in Ontario. They are excellent forums for learning some of the necessary and important tools in leading hikes or walks.

Hike Ontario will continue to provide and offer this range of courses and training to interested parties and individuals as requested.

11.0 Mood Walks Program

Mood Walks is a provincial program that provides training and support for community mental health organizations across Ontario to launch educational walking programs for youth and adults who experience mental health issues. It is an initiative of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, in partnership with Hike Ontario and Conservation Ontario, with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries.

Mood Walks promotes both physical and mental health by reducing barriers and creating new opportunities to be physically active. All participants receive Safe Hiker training from Hike Ontario and participate in trail hikes and educational events organized by their local Conservation Area during the next Healthy Hikes Challenge.

Hike Ontario will continue to partner with and be involved with this very important and transformative program.

12.0 Young Hikers Program

The Young Hikers Program was created to foster an appreciation of Ontario's hiking and walking opportunities amongst young Ontarians and to inspire young people to take action in the protection, preservation and growth of Ontario's footpaths.

The Young Hikers Program provides activities for youth leaders and curriculum-focused lessons for Kindergarten -12 educators, as well as links to resources for parents, with one goal in mind: to get youth outside and onto the beautiful trails of Ontario.

Hike Ontario is dedicated to cultivating the healthy hikers and leaders of tomorrow. Hike Ontario offers the following resources for classrooms and clubs.

Activity Resource Kit

The Hike Ontario Young Hikers Program Activity Resource Kit for Grades K-12 is available for use in classrooms and youth groups! Designed to align with the Ontario school curriculum, each lesson is prepared in a consistent, easy to use format.

Specialist High Skills Major

Hike Ontario is a suggested supplier for training and certification to support the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program goals. Hike Ontario offers Safe Hiker and Certified Hike Leader courses to SHSM schools.

Hike Ontario will continue to partner with and be involved with this very important and transformative program that will engage the youth of Ontario in hiking.

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13.0 Award Program

13.1 Long Distance Hiker Awards

Hike Ontario has a mandate to encourage hiking for all ages and all athletic levels throughout Ontario. The Long-Distance Hiker Awards celebrate dedicated hikers who have logged long distances on multiple Ontario trails by making available high-quality, embroidered patches. Hike Ontario will continue to offer these important and meaningful long distance Hiker Awards.

Red Pine Award

The red pine is noted for its two needles, representing two trail systems to be hiked extensively. People must hike a total of 550 kilometers with at least 150 kilometers hiked on at least two trails.

Trillium Award

The trillium is Ontario's provincial flower, with three petals. These represent three trails that people must hike for at least 150 kilometers and you must log a total of 950 kilometers.

Tamarack Award

The tamarack is known for its multiple needles, representing the multiple trails that people need to hike to log the required 1500 kilometers. You must hike at least 150 kilometers on each of at least three trails.

13.2 Volunteer Awards

Hike Ontario has developed a consistent and thoughtful strategy for recognizing volunteer achievements as an important part of promoting Hike Ontario's mandate across the province. Recognizing volunteer's value for their work often tends to make the volunteers more satisfied, productive, and motivated. Recognizing the volunteers for their dedication and unique contributions could encourage them to serve longer as volunteers.

Hike Ontario would implement several recognition programs that acknowledge various achievements, the dedication and hard work of the Executives, the Members of the Board, and the Member Clubs.

The Objectives of the Program have been identified based on a few selected ways that volunteers' recognition can positively impact Hike Ontario.

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Encourages engagement: Volunteer recognition programs can greatly influence volunteers' engagement in their work. This can ultimately lead to increased productivity and innovation.

Boosts performance: Volunteers who feel recognized and appreciated by their fellow volunteers are more likely to feel valued and important to Hike Ontario. In addition to greater satisfaction, this boosted morale can result in greater productivity and performance.

Enhances Hike Ontario culture: Recognition from leaders and peers helps volunteers feel seen and promotes a sense of belonging, which can lead to better peer connections, stronger communication, and boosted organizational loyalty.

Attracts new talent: Attracting top volunteers to Hike Ontario is vital to growing within the hiking community, and people want to contribute to organizations that recognize their volunteers for their successes. Implementing volunteer recognition programs and sharing them with potential talent can have a positive effect on Hike Ontario's recruiting efforts.

The general purpose of a volunteer recognition program is to express thanks to those who deserve it the most.

Some common areas of consideration include:

- Years of service
- Strong individual performance:
 - Overall or specific projects or issues
 - Innovative ideas
 - Significant actions that embody Hike Ontario values
- Strong contribution and co-operation by the Member Clubs

Volunteer Recognition Award

1. **Award of Excellence**
Recognizing Executive Members for their service to Hike Ontario.
2. **Award of Special Recognition**
Recognition of the outstanding service by a member on Hike Ontario's Board.
3. **Volunteer of the Year**
Recognition of an outstanding volunteer from all the Member Clubs.

13.3 Volunteer Appreciation

Hike Ontario volunteers should be recognized at the Annual Meeting. One volunteer from each category will be selected. Using Hike Ontario's Award Nomination Form, nominations should be submitted by May 31 each year via email to Hike Ontario's Vice Chair. The Hike Ontario Executive Committee will review the recommendations and make the final selections for the award recipients.

Shout-outs on social media

Hike Ontario will post the recognitions on social media platforms and via email to all Hike Ontario contacts along with the descriptions of what makes them such valuable volunteers, list their positions, affiliated clubs, accomplishments, and meaningful contributions. With the award winner's consent, Hike Ontario can also post a picture of them.

Certificate of Volunteer Recognition Awards

Hike Ontario will present the volunteer with a framed recognition certificate at the Hike Ontario Annual Meeting and Summit. If the volunteer is unable to attend the event, then Hike Ontario will mail the framed certificate to the volunteer recipient immediately following the event.

Summary

Hike Ontario aims to make recognition part of its culture and ensure that the organization's goals and core values align with the significant contributions of the dedicated volunteers. The deserving recipients will be rewarded, their contributions recognized, and a clear connection and appreciation will be communicated.

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14.0 Key Recommendations

This section of the plan highlights a number of key recommendations and actions that are required to ensure the Strategic Plan is achieved and implemented over the next 5 years.

Business Plan

The Executive Committee, under the leadership of the Chair and Vice Chair, should prepare a 5-year Business Plan for the organization, which will ensure sustainability and appropriate financial spending. Prior to completion of the plan the Hike Ontario Board will have an opportunity to provide input and comment on the plan.

Action Plan with Targets

The Executive Committee, under the leadership of the Chair and Vice Chair, should prepare a 5-year Action Plan with Targets for the organization, which will ensure actions are being taken to implement the Strategic Plan. Prior to completion of the plan the Hike Ontario Board will have an opportunity to provide input and comment on the plan.

Communications – Website, Emails and Newsletter

Communications are always a very important way to stay connected, be updated and share information. For an organization such as Hike Ontario, it is key to ensure the information is accurate, professional, relevant and disseminated. To this end, it is recommended that the Hike Ontario website be regularly updated and emails to Hike Ontario are professionally responded to. An additional recommendation is to restart the production of the Hike Ontario Newsletter, which will be circulated electronically.

Hike Ontario Trust

It is recommended that the officers of Hike Ontario and Hike Ontario Trust work together to determine the best approach and key next steps for moving the two organizations forward.

Let us all adopt the spirit of collaboration, work together, support each other, and reflect on our commitments through partnering with the organizations that have complementary mandates to ensure Hike Ontario's future milestones are met along with the larger community achievements.