

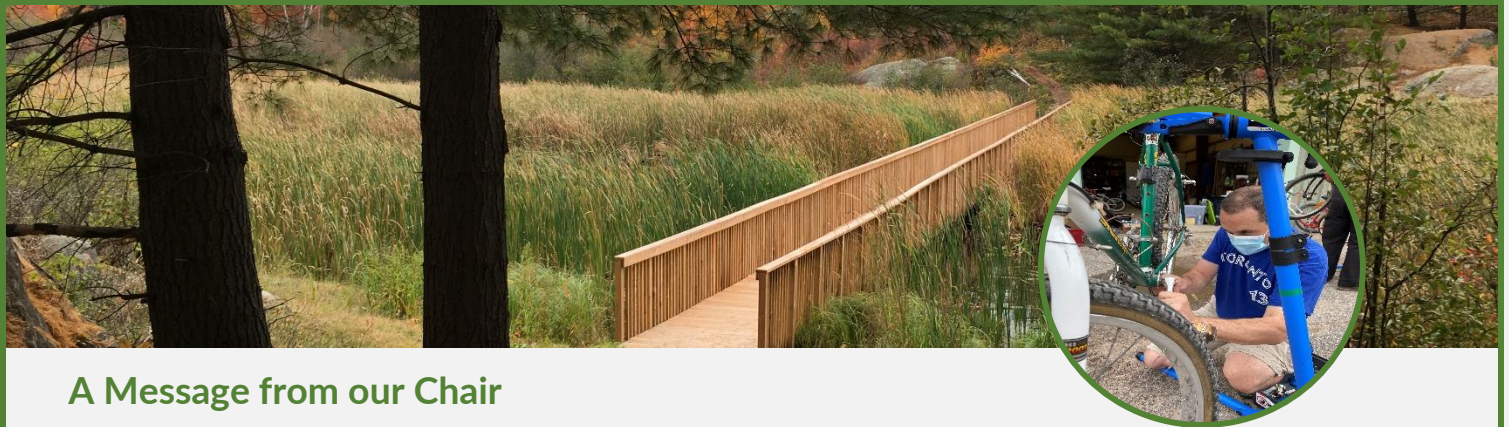
Discovery Routes

# 2020-2021 Impact Report

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## Creating Connections





## A Message from our Chair

The past year has been one like no other. As public health orders and restrictions continue to affect daily life, so many have found solace in time spent outdoors on the trails, bicycle paths and waterways. Across the Near North, we have a thriving community of volunteers that provide stewardship for this vast and diverse trails network.

To continue to support the trails community in a meaningful way, the Board of Directors took time to evaluate its vision and mission this year. The exercise resulted in a renewed vision that speaks to the power of trails to create connections; not only the physical connection that trails create within and between communities but also their ability to deepen our connection with nature, to our communities and to each other.

To better understand the impact the dramatic increase in demand for outdoor activities has put

on the local trails community, Discovery Routes undertook a trails community consultation. This consultation will guide the Board as we begin work on a new strategic plan in 2022 to address some of the challenges brought on by the pandemic and to ensure we continue to move forward in our mission. We want to provide the best support possible to the trails community, as we work together to ensure that every person across the region has equitable access to a safe network of well-maintained trails.

In the post-pandemic recovery, trails will continue to play an important role in our health and well-being as well as revitalizing communities and local economies. Discovery Routes will continue to provide the supports needed for our thriving trails network.

Lance Belanger, Board Chair

## Our Renewed Vision

*A thriving trails network connecting communities and meeting the diverse needs of trail users in the Near North.*

## Our Renewed Mission

*To invest in partnerships for the development and promotion of sustainable multi-use trails and active transportation systems throughout the Near North. Our collaboration and support through the sharing of resources, raising awareness, education and technology connects citizens and visitors while stimulating economic growth, encouraging an active, healthy lifestyle and appreciation for the natural beauty and history of the region.*

### Board of Directors 2020-2021

Lance Belanger, Chair  
 Paula Loranger, Vice-Chair  
 Peter Rooney, Treasurer  
 Susan Christian, Secretary  
 Rod Bilz, Member-at-Large  
 Donna Maitland, Member-at-Large  
 Hannah Wolfram, Member-at-Large  
 Alan Korell, Member-at-Large

**1000+**

We support a vast and diverse trails network with over 1000km of land and water trails

**40+**

We support more than 40 communities across the Near North

**56+**

We work with 56 community trail partners

**\$3.8M**

We have secured over \$3.8 million for infrastructure and programming since 2000



## Connecting Communities and People

Across the Near North, we have a thriving community of volunteers who provide stewardship for a vast and diverse trails network. Supporting our community-based trail partners through collaborations and resource sharing is our strategy to keep growing and improving the trails network.

### Trails Community Consultation

In the Spring, an online survey and interviews were completed with 20 community-based trail groups and 30 municipalities and First Nations. The results will inform Discovery Routes' strategic plan by providing a better understanding of the needs of our trails partners, how they are supported, the current and forecasted organizational and trail infrastructure needs, and the impact COVID-19 has had on trail use and trail management practices.

### New Boardwalks at Laurier Woods

We are working with the **Friends of Laurier Woods** to secure funding for improvements to two 20-year-old deteriorating boardwalks.

### Fundraising for Almaguin Community Trails

The organization continues to support the **Almaguin Community Trails** through a Land Use Agreement with the Near North District School Board for access to the property that hosts the trails. We also collect donations on behalf of the volunteer stewards of the trails for trail maintenance and improvements.

### New Trail Signs at Three Towers

We are assisting the **North Bay Mountain Bike Association** to secure funds to sign the new Three Towers Trail Network.

### Beachburg Rail Trail

Working in partnership with the **Near North Trails Association** and **Trans Canada Trail**, Discovery Routes is helping to secure public access to the former CN rail trail known as the Beachburg Line. A feasibility study has been completed and land transfer negotiations are ongoing.

### Bicycle infrastructure improvements

We have supported funding applications through the **East Ferris Active Transportation Committee** to pave the shoulders of Lake Nosbonsing Road as part of the Voyageur Cycling Route and province-wide cycling network.

### Physical Trail Connections

We continue to act as a regional coordinator to 340km of the **Trans Canada Trail** and are the coordinating agent of the **Voyageur Cycling Route** connecting 29 rural and northern communities.

### Advisory Role to Municipalities

With expertise in cycling infrastructure, Discovery Routes has an advisory role on the **North Bay Active Transportation Advisory Committee**.

### Mapping Trails and Special Places

**Explore South River** is an innovative project connecting people to the special places of the South River area. As experts in trail mapping and partner to the **Forgotten Trails Association**, we helped create their map.



## Inspiring Trail Use for Health and Well-Being

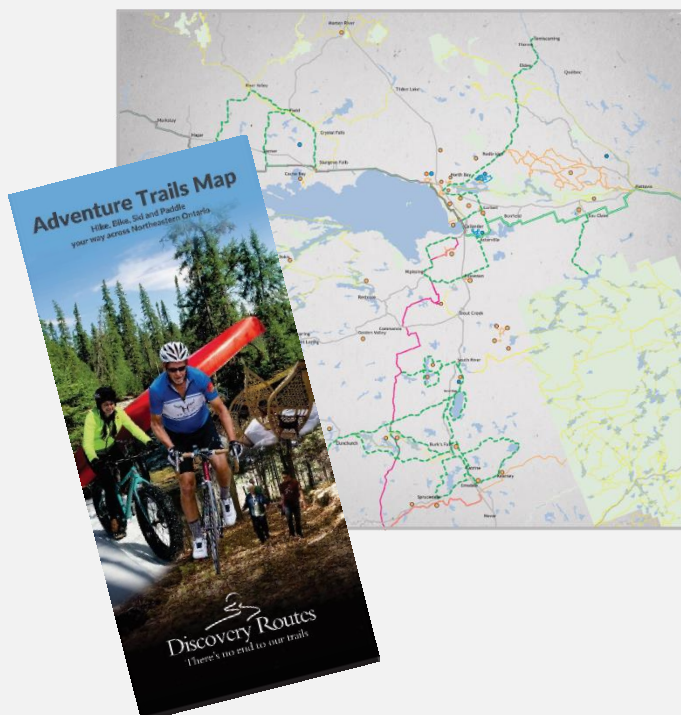
More people than ever are seeking new trails across the Near North where they feel safe for exercise, for fresh air, for well-being and for connection. Discovery Routes works with agencies like the **Health Unit**, local **school boards** and **municipalities** to provide the resources to find local trails, close to home.

### DiscoveryRoutes.ca

Our website continues to be a source of trail information with close to 40,000 visitors to the site this year – that’s a 42% increase in visitors over the same period last year. We are working on a new, refreshed website that will provide even more detailed information on the trails themselves and also the volunteers that steward the trails.

### Discovery Routes Adventure Trails Map

Our newest map out in 2020 continues to be in high demand. It celebrates close to 1000km of recreational trails for hiking, cross-country skiing, paddling and cycling.



### Sharing our Stories

We are endeavouring to have a more active presence on Facebook and Instagram, to connect trail users to trail stewards, share our stories and engage with the trails community.

### Community Trail Mapping Project

One unexpected outcome of the pandemic was where we found places to walk and ride. Our streets became our trails and all over the region informal trails popped up as our neighbours welcomed us onto their property to walk and get reprieve from the stress of the pandemic. We have begun to catalogue and map these informal trails and are working on a strategy to make these trails find-able to others. This effort helps to ensure equitable access to trails in every neighbourhood, in every community.





## Promoting Safe, Responsible and Equitable Access to Trails

We believe that access to a safe place to walk or ride a bike is a right. Working closely with our municipal and community partners, Discovery Routes helps to inform on the integration of trails and active transportation infrastructure into sustainable community planning to bring the benefits of trails to all communities across the Near North.

### ReCycle Bikes Program

With support from the North Bay Community Foundation the program reached even further this year. A satellite program in Powassan brought new volunteers. 220 bikes were donated with 120 repaired, tuned up and given to those in need. 323 volunteer hours were logged with 6 student volunteers were mentored by our veteran mechanics. We worked with the **North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority** and **Laurentian Ski Hill** to run the program and at least 10 separate **community service organizations** to ensure the bikes got to those in need.

*“Thank you for all the joy you are helping to provide for Hands clients in helping them get bikes.”*

Hands The Family Help Network

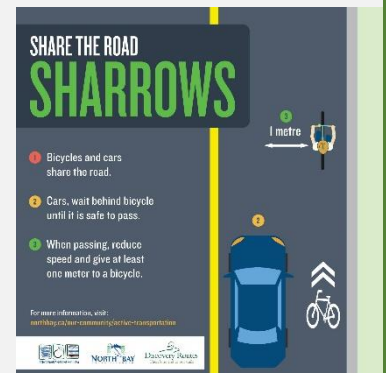


### Community Bicycle Education

We partnered with the **Near North District School Board** to deliver bicycle safety training sessions to Grade 7 & 8 educators in East Parry Sound. These teachers gained the knowledge to teach their students safe cycling skills.

### Road Safety Campaign

Working through the **North Bay Active Transportation Advisory Committee**, Discovery Routes led a road safety campaign in May that helped inform all road users of how to use new cycling infrastructure in North Bay.



### Advocacy for Active Transportation Facilities

We continue to advocate for improved road conditions for the safety of all road users. As highway rehab projects and municipal roadways are redesigned, Discovery Routes provides comments to ensure cycling infrastructure is included in the design phase. Sections of HWY 64 and HWY 17 will receive cycling facilities as a result of our advocacy. We have also provided comments to **MTO's Transportation Plans** for Northern Ontario and Eastern Ontario to ensure active transportation remains an important part of provincial policy.



## Supporting the Local Economy

We believe trails are good for business. Trails and safe cycling facilities get us moving around our community, attract visitors from across the region and tourists from farther away. Trail experiences provide an invitation to explore, discover and deepen connection with nature, to our communities and to others.

### Trail Experiences Program

Working with local storytellers and trail enthusiasts, a series of engaging and inspiring experiences are under development that blend culinary, local agriculture, history, nature and culture with a cycling and trail adventure. The experiences will be shared through a new and improved website, tourism blogs, social media and other advertising. Discovery Routes works closely with our tourism partners to achieve the greatest reach including local municipalities, **Tourism North Bay, Almaguin Communities Economic Development, Northeastern Ontario Tourism, Destination Northern Ontario** and **Destination Ontario**.

### Trail Event Support

Events like the **Ghost Gravel, Almaguin Harvest Spin** series and the **Great Powassan Farmstand Tour** attract visitors to the region and get people out exploring their own backyards promoting regional tourism. We support these events through resource sharing and promotion.

### Bicycle Friendly Business Certification

We work with local businesses to promote cycle tourism in the Near North. 43 bicycle friendly businesses across the region have registered with the **Ontario by Bike Network**. Congrats to 1886 Lake House Bistro for winning best bicycle friendly business in the northeast.

### Signature Trails

We bring national attention to the region by promoting and improving 340km of the **Trans Canada Trail** and the 645km **Voyageur Cycling Route**.

### Trail Use Tracking Program

We maintain 6 portable Eco-counters that move throughout the region annually to count cyclists. The data we track helps make the case for continued investments in trails and cycling infrastructure.

