



NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: April 4, 2024

TIME: 7:00 pm

LOCATION: Hybrid, In-Person / Zoom Meeting

AGENDA

MEETING: GANARASKA FOREST RECREATIONAL USERS COMMITTEE

MEMBERS: Mark Gardiner, Matthew Robbins, Jim Pearson, Jennifer Jackman, Garry Niece, Randy Cunningham, Lisa Thompson, Amber Panchyshyn, Alex Schmidt, Carolyn Richards, Peter Wood, Steve Brownell, Maureen McDonald, Marven Whidden, Lance Nachoff

1. Welcome, Land Acknowledgement and Call to Order

Land Acknowledgement

The Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority respectfully acknowledges that the land on which we gather is situated within the traditional and treaty territory of the Mississauga's and Chippewa's of the Anishinabek, known today as the Williams Treaties First Nations. Our work on these lands acknowledges their resilience and their longstanding contribution to the area. We are thankful for the opportunity to live, learn and share with mutual respect and appreciation.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest
3. Minutes of Last Meeting – November 2, 2023 - **attached**

4. Adoption of the Agenda
5. Delegations:
None
6. Presentation:
 - a) Dog Strangling Vine Information – **Staff report attached**
7. Business Arising from Minutes:
None
8. Correspondence:
None
9. New Business:
 - a) Conservation Lands Strategy Update – **Staff report attached**
 - b) Ganaraska Forest Trail Modeling Public Consultation Report – **Staff report attached**
10. Adjourn

**MINUTES OF THE GANARASKA FOREST
RECREATIONAL USERS COMMITTEE**

November 2, 2023

RUC 4/23

1. Welcome and Call to Order

The Chair called the Ganaraska Recreational Users Committee (RUC) meeting to order at 7:01pm and welcomed those present.

MEMBER PRESENT: Mark Gardiner, Chair
Jim Pearson, Ontario Trail Riders Association
Jennifer Jackman, Ontario Nature
Garry Niece, Hike Ontario
Randy Cunningham, Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Club
Lisa Thompson, Ontario Federation of Trail Riders
Alex Schmidt, Ontario Cycling Association
Carolyn Richards, Ontario Federation of ATV Clubs
Peter Wood, Ontario Federation of 4x4 Clubs
Steve Brownell, Municipality of Port Hope
Maureen McDonald, Township of Cavan Monaghan

ALSO PRESENT: Ed Van Osch, GRCA Forest Recreation Technician
Pam Lancaster, GRCA Conservation Lands Coordinator

ABSENT WITH REGRETS: Matthew Robbins, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
Amber Panchyshyn, Orienteering Ontario
Marven Whidden, Municipality of Clarington

ALSO ABSENT: Lance Nachoff, GRCA Board of Directors
Cross Country Ski Ontario (position unfilled)
City of Kawartha Lakes (position unfilled)

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interest

None.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

RUC 20/23

MOVED BY: Jennifer Jackman

SECONDED BY: Lisa Thompson

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee approve the minutes of the September 7, 2023 meeting.

CARRIED.

4. Adoption of Agenda

RUC 21/23

MOVED BY:

Maureen McDonald

SECONDED BY:

Randy Cunningham

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational User Committee approve the agenda.

CARRIED.

5. Delegations

None

6. Presentations

None

7. Business Arising from the Minutes

None

8. Correspondence

None

9. New Business

a) Digital Ganaraska Forest Trail Map

Maureen McDonald, inquired as to the possibility of incorporating Ganaraska Forest Trail Digital Map and web application notification in local newspapers. Pam Lancaster, Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) Conservation Lands Coordinator, stated that GRCA uses various media platforms including E-news, social media and provides media releases for news outlets.

Alex Schmidt, inquired about the possibility of incorporating second party mapping data into the Ganaraska Forest Trail Digital Map. Ed Van Osch, GRCA Forest Recreation Technician, indicated that GRCA is developing a Recreational Trail Strategy which includes a modeling approach to identify ideal locations for trail placement. The information collected during modeling studies will be cross referenced with pre-existing trail networks and data supplied by past and present partners.

Pam Lancaster, GRCA Conservation Lands Coordinator, with approval from the Chair, invited all Recreation User Committee members to share their thoughts about the Ganaraska Forest trail system, and what they like/dislike about trail systems related to their use type.

Jim Pearson mentioned that occasionally motorized vehicles utilize non-motorized trails and some corners or hills create visual barriers where horseback riders are forced to leave the trail to avoid possible conflict. Jim stated that signage should clearly identify non-motorized trails adjacent to motorized trails.

Alex Schmidt stated that good signage at intersections creates positive user feeling, and that phone apps are great in combination with signage. Additionally, Alex Schmidt stated the mountain bike community desires attributes that create the ideal post ride culture.

Garry Niece requested clarification as to the need to periodically re-download Ganaraska Forest Mapping. Pam Lancaster confirmed that although the mapping is available online that cell signal is not consistent in all areas of the Forest and GRCA suggests downloading the mapping app to your phone to allow for offline use and that it is imperative to download the map updates each time a user visits the Ganaraska Forest to ensure they have the most recent authorized map.

RUC 22/23

MOVED BY:

Maureen McDonald

SECONDED BY:

Jim Pearson

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee receives the Digital Ganaraska Forest Trail Map Update Staff Report for information.

FURTHERMORE GRCA is requesting that RUC Representatives share the Ganaraska Forest Trail Map information presented during this meeting with their respective organizations and user groups.

CARRIED.

b) Ganaraska Forest Signage Update

Jim Pearson inquired as to the possibility of incorporating volunteers into the signage plan. Ed Van Osch, GRCA Forest Recreation Technician stated that the signage updates are being completed by Staff and GRCA is considering incorporating volunteer opportunities for signage monitoring and maintenance in the future.

Carolyn Richards asked if GRCA would be promoting What 3 Words App on updated signage. Pam Lancaster, GRCA Conservation Lands Coordinator stated that trailhead signage will incorporate What 3 Words App information. Additionally, GRCA is consulting with Emergency Services to understand the how What 3 Words App is used by Emergency Services and how GRCA can incorporate the Application.

RUC 23/23

MOVED BY:

Peter Wood

SECONDED BY:

Lisa Thompson

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee receives the Ganaraska Forest Signage Update for information.

FURTHERMORE GRCA is requesting that RUC Representatives share the Ganaraska Forest Signage Update information presented during this meeting with their respective organizations and user groups.

CARRIED.

c) Environmental Concerns

Jennifer Jackman inquired as to GRCA plans to address invasive Dog Strangling Vine (DSV) in the Ganaraska Forest [in addition to addressing woody invasive species]. GRCA staff continually consider management of various invasive species, including dog strangling vine. Consideration will be given to presenting information about invasive species management at a future meeting.

RUC 24/23

MOVED BY: Carolyn Richards
SECONDED BY: Jennifer Jackman

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee receive the Environmental Concerns Staff Report for information.

FURTHERMORE GRCA is requesting that Recreational Users Committee continue to gather and share Users environmental concerns with GRCA Recreation Technician.

CARRIED.

10. Other Business

None

11. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:52 pm.

RUC 25/23

MOVED BY: Jim Pearson
SECONDED BY: Randy Cunningham

THAT the meeting adjourn.

CARRIED.

The next meeting of the Ganaraska Forest Recreational User Committee is Thursday, April 4, 2024 at 7:00 pm.

Chair



Forest Recreation Technician

STAFF REPORT – April 4, 2024

To: Chair and Members of the Recreational Users Committee (RUC)

RE: Dog Strangling Vine Information

Gus Sauer, Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority Forester is presenting information on the threat and controls of the invasive Dog Strangling Vine in the Ganaraska Forest.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee receive the Dog Strangling Vine Information presentation for information.

Prepared by:



Ed Van Osch, Forest Recreation Technician

STAFF REPORT – April 4, 2024

To: Chair and Members of the Recreational Users Committee

RE: Conservation Lands Strategy Update

Ontario Regulation 686/21 sets out the Mandatory Programs and Services which must be delivered by all Conservation Authorities in Ontario. This regulation was introduced preceding changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* in December 2020. Section 10 of the regulation requires all Conservation Authorities to prepare a Conservation Area [Lands] Strategy as a required component of the *Conservation and Management of Lands* mandatory program and service area. The creation of a Conservation Area Strategy must be completed by December 31, 2024.

Given that the Conservation Areas Strategy must consider all lands owned by the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority, including the Ganaraska Forest, it is in the best use of resources that the Conservation Lands Strategy incorporates the previously proposed Ganaraska Forest Recreational Trail Strategy.

Public consultation is a component of the Conservation Lands Strategy development process. In February 2024, consultation began, related to the development of environmental and trail user criteria to be used in a GIS-based model to help determine recreational trail locations in the Ganaraska Forest.

As development of the Conservation Lands Strategy occurs, the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee members will be provided with opportunities to review and comment on the draft document.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee receive the Conservation Lands Strategy Update staff report for information.

Prepared by:



Ed Van Osch, Forest Recreation Technician

STAFF REPORT – April 4, 2024

To: Chair and Members of the Recreational Users Committee

RE: Ganaraska Forest Trail Modeling Public Consultation Report

By December 31, 2024, a Conservation Lands Strategy must be completed, as required by provincial legislation Ontario Regulation 686/21. The Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA), as part of the Conservation Land Strategy development process, will be undertaking steps to create a GIS-based model to help determine recreational trail locations in the Ganaraska Forest. The Strategy will undergo public consultation, which includes consultation on the environmental and trail user criteria that will be used by the GIS model.

Once created, this multi-criteria, weighted model will be used to run scenarios to recommend and refine recreational trail locations, based on environmental factors, as well as user preferences for trail attributes. This model can also be used to inform trail locations within the nine other conservation areas the GRCA owns.

The GRCA conducted public consultation over 16 days from February 21 to March 7 to seek feedback on the environmental and trail user criteria that will be used by the GIS model. **Attached to this staff report is the Ganaraska Forest Trail Modeling Public Consultation Report.**

An online survey was available during the 16 days, and two open houses were held: February 27th from 3:00 to 7:00 pm at the Ganaraska Forest Centre and February 28th from 3:00 to 5:30 pm at the GRCA Administration Office.

During 2024, results of the public consultation will be reviewed in detailed and considered as they relate to the development of modeling criteria. Comments that are not related to modeling will be considered where applicable during the development of the Conservation Lands Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Ganaraska Forest Recreational Users Committee receives the Ganaraska Forest Trail Modeling Public Consultation Report, and staff report for information.

Prepared by:



Ed Van Osch, Forest Recreation Technician



Ganaraska Forest Trail Modeling

Public Consultation Report, March 2024

Background

By December 31, 2024, a Conservation Lands Strategy must be completed, as required by provincial legislation Ontario Regulation 686/21. The Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA), as part of the Conservation Land Strategy development process, will be undertaking steps to create a GIS-based model to help determine recreational trail locations in the Ganaraska Forest. The Strategy will undergo public consultation, which includes consultation on the environmental and trail user criteria that will be used by the GIS model.

Once created, this multi-criteria, weighted model will be used to run scenarios to recommend and refine recreational trail locations, based on environmental factors, as well as user preferences for trail attributes. This model can also be used to inform trail locations within the nine other conservation areas the GRCA owns.

The first scenario (Phase 1) that will be run in 2024, will be in the Central Ganaraska Forest, to support multi-use, non-motorized activities.

Phase 2, which will begin in 2025, will involve trail design and development to support a tread-width of 1 meter and a total trail-width of 3 metres. The trail will start and end at defined parking lots and will have limited interaction with existing trails. Consideration will be given to multiple loops of various lengths. Future model scenarios will be carried out in the West and East Ganaraska Forest to support multi-use motorized activities.

Model Criteria

The following environmental factors and user preferences for trail attributes criteria were selected and defined to be used by the model to determine recreational trail locations on GRCA lands.

- Wetlands
- Watercourses (intermittent and permanent)
- Ponds and vernal pools
- Forest stands designated to be managed for old-growth condition and/or features
- Tall grass prairie

- Interior forest environment
- Species at risk
- Topography (informed by LiDAR data)
- Looped trails and trail length
- Distance from other trails and neighbouring land uses
- Desirable features / experiences
 - Views from heights of land
 - Hardwood forests
 - Pine plantations
 - Mixed forests
 - Meadows
 - Water features (the ability to see them from a distance)

Natural feature criteria were identified through scientific methodologies and GRCA management documents including the GRCA Ganaraska Forest Management Plan, GRCA Natural Heritage Strategy, Ganaraska River Watershed Plan and published journal articles. Trail user criteria was identified in collaboration with the GRCA Recreational Users Committee in December 2023/January 2024.

Public Consultation on Model Criteria

The GRCA conducted public consultation over 16 days from February 21 to March 7 to seek feedback on the environmental and trail user criteria that will be used by the GIS model.

An online survey was available during the 16 days, and two open houses were held: February 27th from 3:00 to 7:00 pm at the Ganaraska Forest Center and February 28th from 3:00 to 5:30 pm at the GRCA Administration Office.

In order to promote the public consultation opportunities, the GRCA communicated in the following ways:

- Facebook Posts (9,100 Followers, 8,619 likes)
 - February 16: Notice of Upcoming Public Open Houses (858 Reach; 912 Impressions)
 - February 21: Notice of Upcoming Public Open Houses with Survey Link (4,259 Reach; 4,453 Impressions)
 - February 26: Multi-Use Activities Not At Risk in the Ganaraska Forest (764 Reach; 824 Impressions)
 - February 27: Reminder of Public Open House #1 (870 Reach; 895 Impressions)
 - February 28: Reminder of Public Open House #2 (407 Reach; 430 Impressions)
 - February 29 and March 1: Trail Modelling & Development - Complete the Trails Survey until March 7th, 2024 (1,709 Reach; 912 Impressions)

- Instagram (358 Followers) and LinkedIn (269 Followers) was used between February 21 and March 1 and received the same posts as Facebook.
- X/Twitter (1,079 Followers) on February 29

- Constant Contact (email newsletter) was sent to individuals who signed up through the online store (membership and day pass purchases), the media, the GRCA Board of Directors, and the GRCA Recreational Users Committee.
 - February 21: Notice of Upcoming Public Open Houses & Survey (2,905 sent; 1,711 opens; 61.4% open rate)
 - February 22: Notice of Upcoming Public Open Houses & Survey: Update (1,455 sent; 870 opens; 62.4% open rate)
 - February 26: Multi-Use Activities Not At Risk in the Ganaraska Forest: With your input, new and expanded trail networks will be created in the Forest. (1,457 sent; 984 opens; 70.3% open rate)

The GRCA website (grca.on.ca) was updated to host a “Trail Modelling & Development” project page, which contained information on the project, open houses and a link to the survey. Based on website analytics, the project page was visited 805 times between February 13th and March 15th, the survey page was visited 477 times.

Engagement during Public Consultation

The open houses consisted of display boards that communicated the purpose of the project and the model criteria, and was the same information provided on the GRCA website. The only additional information was images of natural feature criteria and a snapshot of responses received from February 21st to 26th. Staff were on hand to answer questions and provide support to access the online survey. 56 people attended the February 27th open house and 12 people on February 28th.

A total of 336 online surveys were submitted between February 21st and March 7th.

Results of the Survey

Demographics

A total of 336 online surveys were submitted from individuals across Ontario (Figure 1).

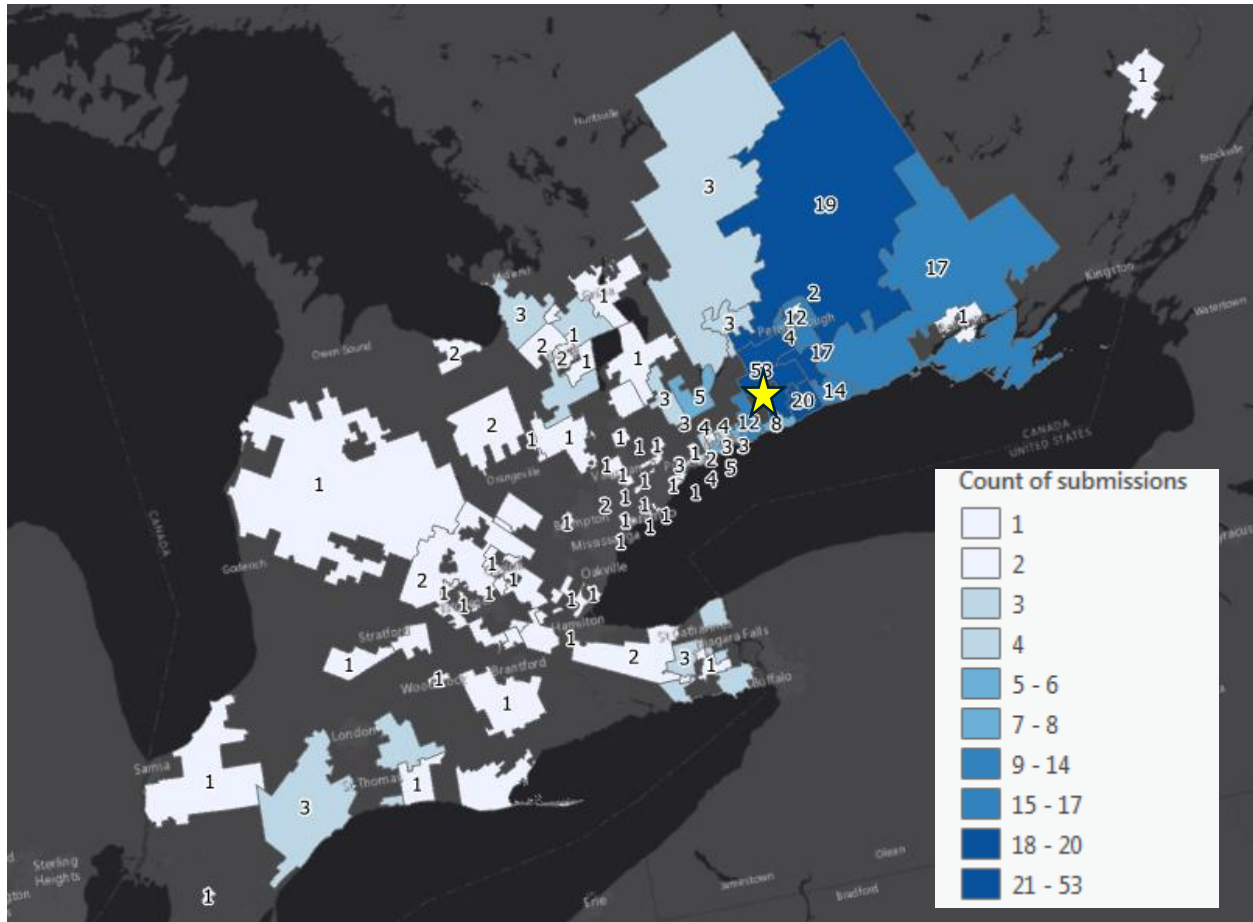


Figure 1: Count of submission by Postal Code

Of the 336 respondents, 179 indicated that they used trails for multiple uses and 157 indicated that they used the trails for one recreational use. The following represents the types of recreational uses that respondents undertake in the Ganaraska Forest.

- Hiking/Snowshoeing:137
- Cross-Country Skiing: 58
- Horse Back Riding: 77
- Mountain Biking: 128
- Off Road Motorcycle; 133
- ATV/Side-by-Side: 54
- 4x4 Off Road Vehicle 14
- Hunting: 22
- Other: 144 (e.g., snowmobiling, orienteering, trail running, nature appreciation)

When asked *How Frequently Do You Visit the Ganaraska Forest?*

- Have never visited: 4
- 2 to 5 times per year: 75
- Once per year: 23
- More than 5 times per year: 234

When asked *How Long Do You Spend On Trails During A Visit?*

- Less than 2 hours: 30
- 2 to 5 hours: 232
- More than 5 hours: 74

Model Criteria Questions

Respondents were asked if they Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree on the criteria statements listed below. The ranking results will be reviewed, and all ranks will be considered when determining the final model criteria.

Natural Features

Natural features may include wetlands, woodlands, watercourses, valleys, plus other biologically and/or culturally significant features.

1. Trails must avoid wetlands

A 30-meter buffer will be applied to all wetlands. This threshold is based on the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Ganaraska Forest Management Plan.

Wetlands are defined as: lands that are seasonally or permanently covered by shallow water, as well as lands where the water table is close to or at the surface. In either case, the presence of abundant water has caused the formation of hydric soils and has favoured the dominance of either hydrophytic plants or water tolerant plants. The four major types of wetlands are swamps, marshes, bogs and fens.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
34%	23%	19%	11%	14%

2. Trails should avoid watercourses (intermittent and permanent)

A minimum 30-meter buffer will be applied. This threshold is based on the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, the Fisheries Act, the Provincial Policy Statement, and the Ganaraska Forest Management Plan. Where a watercourse cannot be avoided, an appropriately engineered trail may be developed.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
27%	19%	22%	11%	21%

3. Trails must avoid ponds and vernal pools

A 30-meter buffer will be applied. This threshold is based on the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Ganaraska Forest Management Plan.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
30%	23%	19%	10%	18%

4. Trails must avoid forest stands designated to be managed for old-growth condition and/or features

Old-growth condition or features are a condition of dynamic forest ecosystems that tend to include complex forest stand structure, relatively large dead standing trees (snags), accumulations of downed woody material, upturned stumps, root and soil mounds, accelerating tree mortality, and ecosystem functions that may operate at different rates or intensities compared with earlier stages of forest development.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18%	13%	18%	21%	30%

5. Trails should avoid tall grass prairie features

However, where tall grass prairie features cannot be avoided or there is a benefit to allowing access for educational and engagement purposes, the trail may be developed but designed appropriately.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
19%	18%	22%	17%	25%

6. Trails can occur within the interior forest environment

However, where large areas of undisturbed forest exist, trail placement will be considered in a way that will reduce impact to that interior forest environment.

Interior Forest is defined as the habitat beyond 100-meters from the forest edge. Within the 100-meter buffer area to the interior forest, the flora and fauna that are present, are exposed to many impacts such as weather, invasive species, and predation due to their proximity to open external areas. Beyond the 100-meter area these impacts are reduced, and habitat improves.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
46%	24%	13%	5%	11%

Species and Habitats at Risk

1. Trails will avoid areas that contain species-at-risk that cannot move, or contribute to a species life cycle (e.g., a den site). Where a setback is defined for that species or habitat, a trail will not be developed within that setback.

2. If required, temporary trail closures and trail detours will occur where a species-at-risk is present but only for a particular length of time.

Criteria	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	38%	26%	19%	8%	9%
2	44%	24%	17%	8%	7%

Topography

Trails may be allowed in areas with a slope of 10% and below.

Where slopes greater than 10% exist, additional trail engineering may be required (e.g. switch-back). A 10% slope has been selected as a threshold based on research provided by the GRCA in 1978, Snyder et al, 2008 and the Ganaraska Forest Trails Project, 1997.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29%	16%	22%	11%	22%

Distance from Other Trails and Neighbouring Land Uses

1. To offer a feeling of immersion within nature and distance from society, trails will be located no closer than 50 meters to a GRCA property edge.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21%	18%	19%	13%	28%

2. To offer a feeling of immersion within nature and distance from society, parallel trails will be separated from one another by 25 to 50 meters. In some situations, parallel trails can be as close as 11 to 25 meters.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
22%	21%	20%	11%	26%

Trail Enjoyment Features

Desirable Features / Experiences

The Ganaraska Forest has many natural features that can be enjoyed. Please select the features you feel are most desirable to experience or see when out on trails.

- Views from heights of land: 287 respondents
- Hardwood forests: 280 respondents
- Pine plantations: 184 respondents
- Mixed forests: 281 respondents
- Meadows: 190 respondents
- Water features (the ability to see them from a distance): 220 respondents

What is an ideal length of a looped trail?

- 2 km or less: 33 respondents
- 2 to 4 km: 94 respondents
- 5 to 8 km: 153 respondents
- 8 to 12 km: 114 respondents
- 12 to 16 km: 107 respondents
- 16 km to 20 km: 85 respondents
- 20 to 50 km: 60 respondents
- 50 km or more: 40 respondents

Specific Comments

A range of comments were submitted that either allowed context to be added to the respondent's agreement or disagreement to the criteria, but also to the following questions:

- In your own words, what is an ideal trail?
- Any final comments, questions or ideas?

All comments will be reviewed in detail. Any comments that can inform model criteria will be considered. Comments that are not related to modeling will be considered where applicable during the development of the Conservation Lands Strategy.

During the time the survey was opened, the public expressed concerns that if existing trails were located within areas where the model indicated they are less favourable, that those trails would be closed. Staff reassured those with this concern that the model is not intended to create "yes" or "no" response, but rather to inform decision making. The decision could range from scenarios, such as, the trail can remain, or that it should be relocated.

The public also expressed concerns that model results would indicate that certain recreational activities should not occur. To alleviate concerns, the GRCA released the following statement on February 26:

The Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) is NOT closing trails to any existing user groups in the Ganaraska Forest. Despite misinformation circulating online, the GRCA remains committed to providing multi-use, recreational trails for ALL to enjoy, including both motorized and non-motorized activities.

The GRCA continues to implement recommendations from the Ganaraska Forest Management Plan, adopted by the Board of Directors in 2017, which remains the guiding document for the Ganaraska Forest. The GRCA also continues to work on access agreements with landowners / municipalities with trails leading into the Ganaraska Forest so they can legally continue.

A Conservation Lands Strategy must be completed prior to December 31, 2024, as required by provincial legislation. This document will undergo public consultations, including the first open houses taking place this week. The GRCA encourages you to attend the open houses (Feb. 27th / Feb. 28th) to learn how new, science-based tools can inform decision making in the Ganaraska Forest, as well as consider filling out the online survey to provide input on these science-based criteria.

Next Steps

During 2024, results of the public consultation will be reviewed in detailed and considered as they relate to the development of modeling criteria. Comments that are not related to modeling will be considered where applicable during the development of the Conservation Lands Strategy. The GRCA will continue with the creation of the GIS model and carrying out Phase 1, which will run scenarios within the Central Forest for trail location identification.