

June 12, 2020

The Honourable Rod Phillips
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Z1

Dear Minister Phillips,

We would like to extend our sincere congratulations to you, our Premier and to the many dedicated public servants for the swift and strong actions being taken by the Government of Ontario to meet the needs of Ontarians in the face of this unprecedented global crisis.

Over the last few weeks, the undersigned provincial organizations participated in Minister Yurek's virtual Ministerial Advisory Council consultation sessions with the Ontario parks and conservation sector to assess broader economic and societal impacts of government actions to address the COVID-19 pandemic and Minister MacCleod's Ministerial Advisory Panel on Festival, Events, and Local Community Attractions.

The undersigned organizations represent the nature based outdoor recreation and health sector and a collective of more than 10,000 non-profit organizations and partners throughout Ontario dedicated to ensuring a future for Ontario where every person has equitable access to vibrant and sustainable trails, parks, greenspaces and personal wellbeing.

Each of the signatories has made detailed proposals for specific actions related to their respective sectors and stakeholders. Building on those, this letter highlights three joint recommendations that can be undertaken rapidly and incorporated into recovery plans to maximize benefits to Ontarians.

1. Proposed Recovery Mechanism: Outdoor Infrastructure Funding

Government investment in nature based outdoor infrastructure is essential. A government economic stimulus program that prioritizes and supports trails, parks and greenspace infrastructure will not only address an existing deficit but also address new infrastructure needs in a post-COVID-19 setting.

The way the public uses and engages with outdoor spaces and trails post COVID-19 will require significant infrastructure improvements. Some of the key investment priorities include new trails to meet the increased visitor demand, one-way trails to ensure physical distancing, widened trails, signage and hand washing stations.

Stimulating jobs and the economy through investing in trails, parks and greenspace infrastructure addresses multiple economic and social government priorities and would be an investment that the public would prioritize and value in a post-COVID-19 environment.

2. Proposed Recovery Mechanism: Base Funding for not-for-profits

The economic impact of COVID-19 on not-for-profit organizations in Ontario is monumental. The cancelling of conferences, fundraisers, programs and training courses for the foreseeable future has major financial impacts, as these are often the only generator of income for organizations. While the federal wage subsidy program has been a critical first step, without additional federal and provincial/territorial government stimulus, there will be many not-for-profits (including in the trails, parks and greenspace sector) that will not have the financial capacity to survive after the COVID-19 crisis.

To stabilize the sector and help rebuild the province, the government must provide an emergency and stabilization fund for non-profits and charities to help rebuild the economy and local communities.

3. Proposed Recovery Mechanism: Trails and Parks Tourism Portal

The development of a single online portal (database and mapping) for nature based outdoor recreational opportunities and pursuits in the province of Ontario does not currently exist. A provincial searchable database would provide Ontarians and visitors quick access to numerous outdoor recreation activities in a variety of urban, rural, and remote areas.

Increased tourism potential, business attractiveness, tax revenues, and economic spinoffs are only some positive economic benefits to the development of a Parks and Trails Tourism portal. The portal would also serve to address issues that have been magnified by COVID-19 such as the need for visitor dispersion across trails and parks and the need to be able to provide common and timely messaging to the sector during urgent times.

Trails, parks and greenspaces are economic engines and can be powerful tools for both economic development and revitalization. However, much work and investment are needed to implement a provincial database tailored to achieve maximum usage and benefits.

We urge you to work with your colleagues – primarily the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development to invest in nature based outdoor infrastructure, to provide base funding for non-profits that recognizes the unique situation facing charities and nonprofits, and to invest in a Trails and Parks Tourism Portal to help spur economic development, recovery and revitalization.

The nature based outdoor recreation sector is a strong partner that is available to the government to consult with, collaborate with and leverage in support of a recovery for Ontario.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jeff Payne, Chair Elect
Parks and Recreation Ontario



Jim Pittman, President
Ontario Parks Association



Wayne Terryberry, President
Ontario Trails Council



Mike Bender, Chair
Trans Canada Trail Ontario



Terri LeRoux, President
Hike Ontario



Pegan Walsh, Executive Director
Ontario Public Health Association



Parks, Trails and Recreation Not for Profit Sector Alignment with Ontario Ministries

“What we do, how we contribute and how we can help the COVID-19 recovery in Ontario”

Parks and Recreation (Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks)	Tourism and Sport Industries (Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries)
<p>What is the sector connection?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trails, parks, and outdoor recreation sector own, manage and operate vast trail and park land holdings and recreational assets in the province of Ontario • The membership of our connected not for profit agencies invest in and maintain Ontario’s recreational infrastructure <p>What is the economic Return on Investment (ROI)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating outdoor recreational assets that include 80,000+ kms. of trails and 10,000 ha. of land, we maintain key public assets for Ontarians to enjoy • Through investment in outdoor recreational and green infrastructure, we work to make the natural environment accessible and support innovative community growth <p>What is the recovery opportunity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in trails, parks and outdoor recreation assets that Ontarians value and need post COVID 	<p>What is the sector connection?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trails, parks, and outdoor recreation run by the sector are treasured destinations that attract Ontarians and visitors alike • The sector through events, attractions, sport, programs, heritage, tourism and passive recreation contribute to a thriving and diverse recreation industry <p>What is the economic ROI?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sector membership employs tens of thousands of professionals in the public and private parks and recreation sector in Ontario • We are a critical part to the economy of Ontario through the delivery of events, festivals, tournaments and recreational attractions in Ontario that attract people from next door and around the world <p>What is the recovery opportunity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a sector recovery fund will help restart this critical sector
Health and Wellbeing (Ministry of Health)	Training and Development (Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development)
<p>What is the sector connection?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor recreational spaces contribute to improved physical health, reducing costs for the health care system • Recreational spaces, especially outdoor spaces, contribute positively to mental health and wellbeing <p>What is the economic ROI?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investments in recreational assets such as trails and park infrastructure encourage people to be active and have fewer health issues • Having a variety of accessible green spaces and recreational assets contributes to positive mental health and improved personal wellbeing <p>What is the recovery opportunity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support safe and healthy outdoor spaces for Ontarians in Ontario 	<p>What is the sector connection?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The industry in Ontario represents tens of thousands of trails, parks and outdoor recreation professionals in the private, public, education and volunteer sectors • The not for profit organizations act as a key point of contact to the sector <p>What is the economic ROI?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organizations provide their memberships with professional training and development ensuring a skilled workforce for Ontario • The sector provides training that has a direct impact on mitigating risk and educating all members on current best practices • The sector ensures legislative changes are communicated across the sector and act as a valuable resource to inform policy <p>What is the recovery opportunity?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can help mobilize and train the sector to adapt to the new ‘normal’

