

# **Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area**

**Trails planning  
Public summary document**

**June 2015**



*Forest along the shore of Charles Lake (photo: Irwin Barrett)*

**Prepared by:**

**Maskwa Aquatic Club  
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society  
Halifax North West Trails Association**

## **A note from BMBCL trails group**

Thank you!!

Thank you participating in the public review process. Thank you for caring about Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area. And, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to help shape and improve the trails planning that is underway. It is very much appreciated.

The Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area is a special place, with no shortage of individuals and volunteers interested in looking after it. Together, we are striving to ensure that the trails planning is of a high quality, produces a proposal that is fitting of the place, and when implemented allows residents and visitors to the city to appreciate this spectacular forested area in a way that does not degrade future generations from experiencing it as well.

All public feedback received to date has been collected and passed along to the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and the Department of Natural Resources, who manage the lands at Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area. The feedback received is also helping to shape the design of the trails plan and a draft proposal will be available for an additional round of public consultation in the near future, once the provincial government approves the draft proposal to proceed to the next stage.

Once again, thank you for participating in this public review process for trails planning at Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area. We hope that you will continue to stay involved.

Sincerely

Maskwa Aquatic Club  
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society  
Halifax North West Trails Association

## **BMBCL trails project: public feedback summary**

### **Purpose:**

This document summarizes public comments received during the review period in Fall 2014.

### **Project background:**

Maskwa Aquatic Club, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), and Halifax North West Trails Association (HNWTA) are proposing to establish a system of frontcountry and backcountry trails within the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness in Halifax. This includes trails within the existing Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area, and undesignated Crown lands on the adjacent Maskwa lease area. Our primary focus is on public lands roughly between Kearney Lake, Ash Lake, and Blue Mountain Hill. No trail planning is occurring on privately-owned lands.

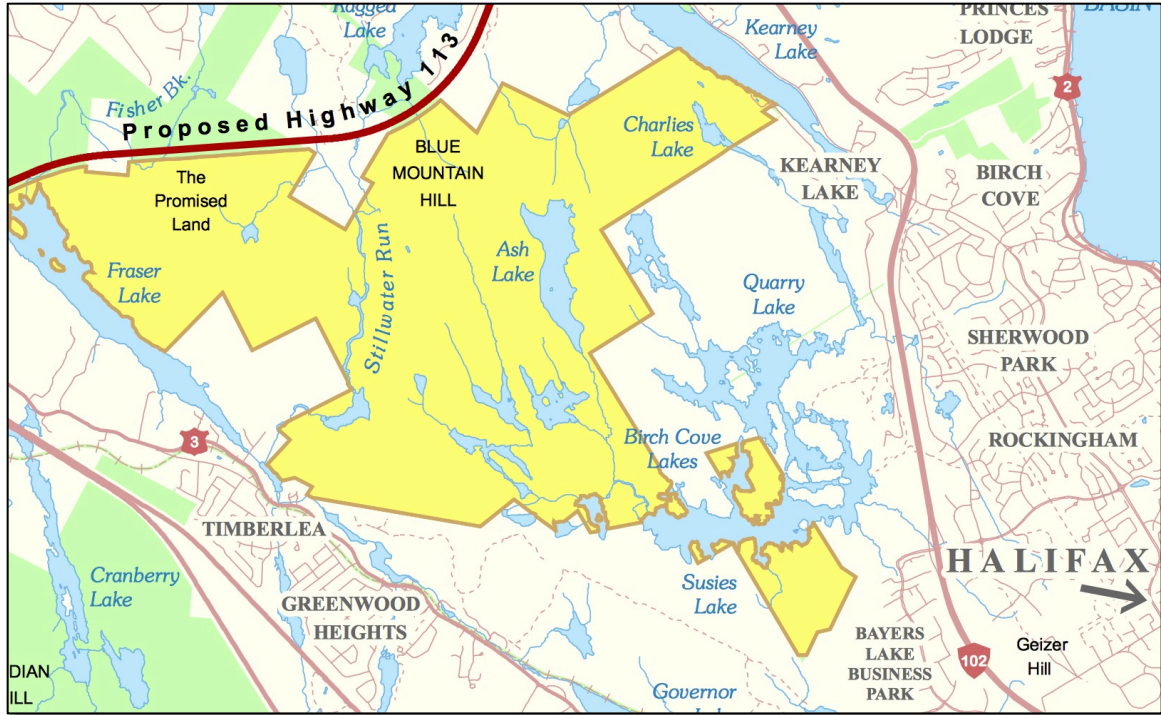
Collectively, our three organizations have received necessary approvals from the provincial government (Nova Scotia Environment and Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources) to proceed with this trail planning process. We have hired *Cobequid Trail Consulting* to assess the lands for their trail potential and to develop scenarios that would include possible alignments for the trails. The majority of the public lands under review occur within the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area; conservation lands administered by the Nova Scotia government under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*, so any trail proposal must be compatible with this piece of legislation.

### **Scope of work:**

This project is only looking at the potential for trails within the northern portion of the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area, and adjacent Crown lands within Maskwa lease. It does not deal with any other management issues related to the protected area, or proposal for an associated municipal regional park. Separate government processes are required to deal with those management issues.

### **Next steps:**

A second round of public consultation will be commencing in the coming months, to gather feedback from the community on the trail proposal developed by *Cobequid Trail Consulting*. The final plan will need to be approved by the Nova Scotia government before any trail work can begin on public lands.



*Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Areas (shown in yellow) (Map: Nova Scotia Environment)*



*Spring time in the Birch Cove Lakes (photo: Irwin Barrett)*

## **Public feedback:**

Based on the feedback received from the public consultation, we have grouped the comments into the following general categories; 1) interest in trails, 2) concern for the environment, 3) diversity of trail types, 4) accessibility, 5) access points, 6) parking and traffic, 7) safety, 8) signage, 9) activities (*dog-walking, mountain biking, canoe/kayaking, and skiing*), 10) trail design, 11) multi-use, 12) rest stations, 13) fitness stations, and 14) trail & park management.

### 1.) Interest in trails

Overall, there was considerable interest in the proposed trail planning project. We received nearly 300 submissions, many with detailed comments and first-hand knowledge of the area. Most comments were about the types of trails people wanted, what activities should be allowed on them, and where the trails should be located. A few comments indicated that the existing non-authorized trails were good enough.

#### *Specific comments received:*

- *The terrain in this area and the proximity to the highest population in the province makes for tremendous opportunity to promote wonderful outdoor activities that can be enjoyed by all, from early years to late into life.*
- *Thank you! Cool project!*
- *Initiative and perseverance! You won't please all the people so get some things going and be prepared to adjust mid stream. Anticipate a mid way point and be prepared to change course at that time. Many people will only believe some planning is taking place when the shovels have been in the ground for a year or two. Thank you for your efforts!*
- *Hope to see more people made aware of this and excited to see it developed into an amazing trail network, conveniently located so close to the city.*
- *My understanding is that the current trail planning project is intended as an interim management measure, to address existing issues around informal (as in, unplanned) trail establishment and consequent problems relating to absence of "official" access points, lack of signage, wayfinding challenges, and general management/maintenance considerations in light of the current pattern of unstructured use. Interim management to address existing problems and issues should be the clear focus.*
- *I believe this wilderness area is a beautiful place for people to explore and is also home to wild life. I do not believe there is any need nor is there any right for people to further develop or groom this area.*
- *At entrance D all down to Susie Lake is already an awesome trail system. The reason it is so great is because it is NOT developed whatsoever and isn't a boring planned hiking trail. Why develop it? Why can't we just leave it be and*

*respect people's intelligence enough not to develop it and make the trails super obvious? It's a place for locals to explore - not tourists to mosey around. We have those trails elsewhere. Please don't ruin this place by turning it into a family friendly bore.*

- *Input of people who already use the trail - it doesn't need development, it needs maintenance but not interference*
- *Inclusion of any citizen of Nova Scotia with an interest in exploring the outdoors via HUMAN powered modes.*
- *Our women's hiking group found out about it recently and we enjoyed a beautiful half to three quarter day hike.*
- *We have lots of this in the city. What we have a dearth of is wilderness areas with interesting and challenging hiking with off leash dog walking opportunities.*
- *Leave it undeveloped - rough trails for real hikers are limited, so less groomed trail is my preference for this area*
- *There are a number of trails that are currently used and should be preserved.*
- *Do not alter the back country trails.*



*A wilderness for all seasons (Photo: Irwin Barrett)*

## 2.) Concern for the environment

Many of the comments received indicated the importance of the natural environment of Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area and that the trails need to be designed so as not to impact the environment. Many comments had specific suggestions on how this could be achieved.

*Specific comments received:*

- *keep it natural as possible.*
- *Should be a variety of trails for all. Keep it in one area. Leave the bulk of the wilderness area alone & natural.*
- *This is likely the last chance to get this right so please do so. Wilderness is a fragile, and too quickly disappearing, thing.*
- *Keeping the area in it's natural state would be ideal as there are few areas within or near the city that haven't been developed (spoiled).*
- *Should we turn such an unspoiled wilderness into another urban park?*
- *As a photographer, I appreciate the natural beauty and what felt like a hidden gem in the city, and I'm excited to get back to do a little shooting.*
- *Ecological integrity of the chosen area needs to be considered. Cause as little damage as possible. The only reason I do support this is that it is a great way to get people out in nature and bring further awareness to the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness. Just please respect the ecosystems within the area!*
- *This type of trail is not really compatible with my concept of wilderness., and should only be considered as part of a management planning process for the entire Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Wilderness Area/Regional Park -- not as part of a trail plan which, in effect, puts the cart (i.e. the trail) before the horse (i.e. the management plan).*
- *Not changing the area, it is nice that it is a wild piece of land.*
- *I strongly believe we have a duty to preserve it for future generations to enjoy just as we have. It is there for everyone to enjoy just the way it is and there is no need to change it. I don't think the want of a group of people is reason to destroy a beautifully preserved piece of land.*
- *We have to secure the wilderness areas closest to the city from private commercial interests and make these places public parkland before it's too late.*
- *Must be multipurpose with as little environmental impact as possible and open to all.*
- *preserving nature*
- *Impact on the environment of a wide, flat, high-use trail*
- *Ensure these developments do not compromise the natural environment.*
- *Preservation & keep it the way it is*
- *Need to get more people to realize the beauty of the area that is so close to home*
- *Land conservation and multifunction trail accessible year round.*

- *good design in keeping with nature*
- *Traditional trails & Points of Interest; Preservation of wilderness*
- *Not to disturb peacefulness/natural beauty of the area*
- *Protection of nature*
- *Please keep it wild. I'd prefer minimal trails, but potential changes would be good to protect the environment.*
- *Protect lakes and watershed*
- *Plan proper trails in proper places, some sensitive areas, put trails in the right place*
- *Environment protection*
- *Multi use, drainage, retaining wilderness appeal*
- *Don't disturb the natural state of the area too much*
- *This kind of attraction brings visitors to the area with a different appreciation for nature..which essentially pushes the less-disturbed forest, farther back.*
- *As long as we aren't jeopardizing anything that naturally occurs in the area/respect the natural environment I'm certain any new additions will be welcome.*
- *Blending into the surrounding*
- *environmental impact, sustainability*

### 3.) Diversity of trail types (frontcountry/backcountry concept)

We received quite a few comments about the need for different types of trails; some that are easy and available for a wide range of trail users, and others that are steeper and more challenging. The concept of dividing the trail types into frontcountry and backcountry trails was generally well received.

*Specific comments received:*

- *I think having terrain / paths that catered to everyone, a mix of steep / narrow and wide + crusher dust / flat trails, would be fantastic.*
- *Also, a front-country trail(s) will appeal to an older population that may be reluctant to take on the more aggressive walks behind Maskwa and elsewhere.*
- *Different trails should accommodate the different age groups, kids, teens, adults, seniors etc.*
- *Mix of trail types from groomed (e.g. Point Pleasant Park) to rough and challenging should be possible. It's a big area!*
- *Best trail is a mix of trails - Done lots of different trails in NS*
- *Ability to get off trail into "less-serviced", quieter areas - or at least separation between busy running trails and quieter hiking paths.*
- *The trails must consider what future generations will want from a back country trail.*
- *That if a front-country trail was developed other trail could be left in a natural state.*



- *Back country trails should remain difficult- Trails should be clear (no more getting lost!) - Trails should remain wild - not like Point Pleasant Park*
- *It would be great to have all levels of hiking to suit all types of walkers/hikers, but the people I hike with prefer the natural trails more than paved or board-walked trails. It would also be great for the site to have trails listed by different levels.(if they will exist).For instance: easy boardwalk or paved trails, natural easy trails, moderate trails, more difficult, very challenging. Also define what the type of terrain on each trail is. If you include trail map links attached to each trail by definition, then it would be an easy way to organize hikes.*
- *great idea particularly the front country loops with fitness stations*
- *It's always nice to have rolling hills in front-country trails. Too many times front-country trails are designed to be completely flat, which takes much of the interest and challenge out of the trail.*

#### 4.) Accessibility

Several comments received expressed an interest in ensuring trails were accessible, including wheelchair access and trails that are suitable for seniors or people with limited mobility. A few comments were received expressing concern that fully accessible trails will be too easy and take away from the wilderness experience.

*Specific comments received:*

- *do make it for all i.e. seniors, disability, people who don't have a car, so have public transit. have benches, way and distance markers.*
- *Accessibility - especially in front-end.*
- *I visit rarely because it's not exactly accessible!*
- *Handicapped access - mobility issues*
- *Wheelchair access to all or portions of the trail.*
- *Needs to be accessible for persons with disabilities ( I am visually impaired).*
- *There has been a recent trend to make wilderness areas and trails into crusher dust paths fully accessible to everyone which unfortunately takes away from the wilderness. I want there to be places I can go see the leaves change with my grandmother, but I also want this wilderness area to look like a wilderness area.*

#### 5.) Access points

The main access points to the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area are from Maskwa/Collins Road, Bayers Lake Industrial Park, Highway 102, and Kingswood subdivision. Comments received indicate all of the access points are being used, but Maskwa/Collins Road and Bayers Lake Industrial Park most frequently. An additional access point at Fraser Lake was also identified from one of

the comments. Many comments were about the challenge accessing Quarry and Susies Lake, and that many of the destination points in use are outside of the currently designated protected wilderness area (e.g. Fox Lake). Several comments indicated an interest in seeing several access points established, with access points containing a proper trailhead with signage and public washroom facilities. Difficulties accessing public lands were also identified as a challenge. It should be noted that the above-access points have no history of formal management and most cross private lands.

*Specific comments received:*

- *Additional trail heads to take some people away from these heavy use trails from the parking area, if they are looking to be with nature and not on a trail-highway.*
- *Access, access, access - most areas hard to reach safely and without crossing private lands. This comment pertains to the overall wilderness area (excluding Maskwa which is easily accessed).*
- *Need access from highway to lakes fairly close*
- *Bayers Lake is slated for further development as the city has sold land to a developer. The border of the wilderness area to the south of Susies Lake should be considered as an opportunity for public access as further private development takes place. i.e. Work with developer to incorporate a planned wilderness access point.*
- *Susies Lake and Quarry Lake are the easiest to get to coming from downtown - Focus on easy entrance/parking. Note: I spend more time on the land adjacent to what is already protected such as Fox Lake, Susies Lake area. Trail planning needs to include future connections into these areas!*
- *We need more access points- Access points were promised back in 2009 - I am environment chair for Canadian Association of Retired Persons (5,000 members) we need safe, access with signage (i.e. Bluff Trail).*
- *Access point from Maskwa Club property - trail head, parking, bathrooms, exercise equipment*
- *More than one trail head access to public*
- *Initial plans for trail heads & bathrooms to be defined before trails and access*
- *Proper trail head - Whopper Dropper, some bad people hanging out, better lighted*
- *Access from 102 Highway to Susie Lake*
- *Fraser Lake access is available & We'd be glad to help. We are residents of Goldeneye Dr. (Fraser Lake). Contact us if we can help. :)*
- *Public washroom;*
- *Civic address for trail head for 911 services*
- *Access to swimming beyond Maskwa.*

## 6.) Parking and traffic

Several comments were received about the need to consider parking for trail users, particularly if the trails become more popular and frequency of use increases. Traffic in local communities was identified as a concern, particularly Hamshaw and Saskatoon Ave. where streets are narrow and no sidewalks exist. Lack of a parking area in Kingswood subdivision was also identified.

*Specific comments received:*

- *Parking*
- *Parking will need to be planned because increase in trails will lead to increase in use*
- *Access and parking*
- *Traffic on to Hamshaw and Saskatoon Ave - increase, streets, running now by canoe club, took many cars may over use the streets*
- *Traffic in local communities - Streets are narrow, no sidewalks, etc., and are over loaded already with the Maskwa traffic*
- *good parking*
- *more parking area at Anahid area.*

## 7.) Safety

Several comments were received about the need for improved safety on the trails, and a need for trails to be less confusing.

*Specific comments received:*

- *Safety, obstacles must be off the main part of trails*
- *Excited. Marked trails will really increase the use in this area. I've only hiked with a group because parts seem very confusing with all the bike trails.*
- *Safe access for all levels of users*
- *Safety. Diff levels - young and other ages. Clear signs.*
- *Safety*
- *safety.*

## 8.) Signage

The need for proper signage was identified in several comments, including maps, and signs at trail head and at locations within the trail system. Several comments flagged the lack of current signage as a challenge. Interpretive panels were

suggested and a permanent web page established with information about the trail system.

*Specific comments received:*

- *Proper signage and instructions are a must.*
- *more maps and signage would be helpful.*
- *Decent signage is critical. Both for people finding the trails in the first place, but also to find their way while in the trail system.*
- *maps along the route, pack it in pack it out guidelines*
- *We visit the trails near Maskwa to walk our dog in all seasons and would like to explore deeper into the trails past Charlie's lake but haven'tt latelt because the trail signs have been removed. The signs really helped to orient hikers as to where they are/how to get back to Maskwa so permanent signs that can't be ripped off trees would be helpful.*
- *Would go more often if better signage on trails.*
- *Good signage*
- *Posted Maps of back country trails at regular intervals;*
- *Interpretive Panel at trail head featuring history of Maskwa, flora/flauna of the trail etc. with a map and qrp to permanent web page about the trail.*
- *well marked trails*



*Look off near Charlies Lake (Photo: Andrew Chow)*

## 9.) Activities

A wide range of activities were identified for Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area, including hiking, walking, dog-walking, mountain biking, canoeing/kayaking, swimming, birding, snowshoeing, camping, and nature photography. Most people providing comments indicated they visit Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area a few times a year, with many indicating frequency of visits as a few times a month and weekly visits. The main reasons for using the trails were predominately exercise, nature appreciation, activities with friends/family, adventure, and solitude.

### *Dog walking*

Several comments were received related to dog-walking. Several people indicated their interest in using the area for off-leash dog walking, while several others indicated their concern for having dogs off-leash. Please note, the BMBCL trails group has no authority to make any decisions on whether areas are on-leash or off-leash, but will be passing along any comments received to government who are responsible for such decisions.

### *Specific comments received:*

- *Keeping the area dog friendly with largely off leash area*
- *Dogs must be on leashes always*
- *Off leash dogs*
- *NO off-leash dog areas.*
- *encouraging on-leash dog walking (no off lease areas)*
- *NOTE ON DOGS: Dog friendly/off-leash trails must be part of the greater, BMBCL plan and part of the discussions early on. Dogs are, and will continue to be taken into this area. We don't need access to everything but allowances will be necessary if this area is to receive broad-based support.*
- *There are many of us that use this trail respectfully. We walk dogs off leash in a controlled environment, clean up after said dogs and even clean up trash others have left behind. It is important to us that this remains a safe place where we can continue to walk dogs off leash while still being respectful to others needs or objections. We are happy to accommodate those who do not want to interact with our dogs and we fully understand this need by non-dog friendly residents. It is a very large area and we would be devastated if this area became completely dog free area. If you choose to have sections designated for other activities, please consider those of us who use this trail 5-7 days a week and are able to maintain the beauty that it has.*
- *Off leash trails for dog owner who are the majority of trail users. It can be estimated that over 75% of trail users are responsible dog owners.*

- *Make this for people first (NOT dogs)*
- *Finally, this is one of the last places for off leash dog walking - please do not create rules against dogs being off leash.*
- *Trails should be dog-friendly - preferably off-leash so long as they are under control*
- *Off leash dog trails maintained except the front country trail to popcorn island for on-leash.*
- *Off leash dog areas*
- *Dogs off leash will do more damage than mountain bikes*

### Mountain biking

We received many comments from individuals who have an interest in mountain-biking within Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area. Mountain biking is an activity that has been occurring within this area for many years and several commentators expressed an interest in maintaining this use. Most of the current mountain bike use within the protected area seems to occur on the Whopper Drop system of trails, based on public comments received. Several comments were received from people opposed to having mountain bikes on the same trails as hikers and walkers. Of the comments received in support of mountain biking within the protected area, many indicated an interest in having well-designed single-track trails.

Please note, the BMBCL trails group has no authority to determine if mountain biking is allowed to occur within the protected area, but under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*, bicycle use can be authorized on trails designated for that purpose. That authority lies with Nova Scotia Environment. It is clear from the many detailed comments received, that mountain-biking is an activity that many people are interested in for Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area, and we have brought this forward to the attention of the Nova Scotia government accordingly and have been in contact with Bicycle Nova Scotia to discuss options.

#### *Specific comments received:*

- *I would like to see mountain biking trails in the area.*
- *I have been mountain biking this area for years and want to continue to do so.*
- *Mountain bike trails, if new trails are built people are going to want to ride them, regardless of whether they are permitted or not. There are many examples worldwide of properly desinged backcountry multi-use trails where there is no user conflict. Nova Scotia needs to develop trails with a progressive attitude toward all types of wilderness enjoyment, not just hikers.*
- *Singletrack trails should be included as part of the overall trail system. Similar to the trails recently approved for Spryfield's McIntosh Run Watershed area.*

- *To me, allowing cyclists and ATVs on a nature trail defeats my purpose for being there, i.e., to enjoy peaceful and natural surroundings while getting some exercise.*
- *Mountain biking is a wonderful activity for many to enjoy in our natural environment. Mountain bikers are very respectful of the land and are trail builders and maintainers. You want to build trails by IMBA standards and so do we. So if we are included in using trails we will help to maintain these trails and be advocates of these wilderness areas. To exclude us would be sad and make us feel left out. Thank you.*
- *Mountain biking needs to be considered as a activity and the trail network needs to be multi-use.*
- *Mountain biking needs have to be considered. Bikers developed the existing and very popular "Whopper" trail system which was/is being used by hikers and runners.*
- *Preservation of the current Mountain Bike trail infrastructure.*
- *Mountain bike access, including single track mountain biking trails should be included.*
- *Keep them off the mountain biking trails, please. The trails are fast and narrow with drops and pedestrians would be a hazard to the mountain bikers.*
- *Please include mountain biking infrastructure as we need more of these opportunities in the area.*
- *Mountain biking. Several areas of the wilderness section have been used for trail riding for 15+ years. We are quite capable of getting along with hikers. I feel like this survey ignored us as a group.*
- *Please consider developing a trail system suitable for mountain biking.*
- *please consider Mountain biking. Many residents have been riding in and around these trial systems and would like to continue to do so*
- *technical back country single track mountain bike trails*
- *Mountain biking is a huge part of our outdoor community, both financially and logistically. It provides great exercise and a level of resources available for volunteer trail work that is not usually associated with other users. Mountain Biking can be an environmentally and user friendly activity if done properly with the input of mountain bikers.*
- *Allow mountain bikes. Design trail for shared use. Note that mountain biking does not require wide graded and gravel-surfaced trail - main concerns for mountain biking are clear sight lines to avoid conflicts. Climbs, descents, corners all make trail interesting to ride. Skills sections to side of trail would add interest as well.*
- *Cycling access for various levels.*
- *Keep cycling access for all current and future users.*
- *Keep motorized vehicles out; If allow bike - they must have dedicated trails;*
- *I think it is important that motorized vehicles are not allowed to bring noise and pollution (and soil compacting) to the area. I am not opposed to separate dedicated bike trails*
- *To exclude mountain biking would be very short sighted.*

- *You need to allow mountain bikers to have access to the future trail network same as all other trail users. Even though bikes are "non-motorized" they are different from ATVs and should be allowed.*
- *Mountain bikers have been excluded from this dialogue - very important as they are key recreators, build, maintain trails and support young athlete development - something grossly lacking in Nova Scotia. Critical. Thank you.*
- *Construct formal mountain bike path/trails*
- *Access for mountain biking - main entrance Quarry Lake; Mountain bikes - want to be included in planning process; Evil birch, Whopper trail/suggestible,*
- *Do not want to let out of planning for mountain bikers, to be part of the planning*
- *Allow dogs off leash - but not allow mountain bikers is wrong*
- *Single track mountain biking wants to be supported*
- *Mountain bikes don't go out on trails on rainy days*
- *It is important for the committee to be open-minded about mountain biking on these trails since this will attract many volunteers and enthusiastic trail users of all ages. Please review the published literature regarding shared trails: can be designed and built for safe, enjoyable shared use by bikes and peds; bikes have no higher impact than peds; bikers stay on trails, etc.*
- *Mountain biking! There is a long history of mountain bike use in the area, with resulting informal trails that are often not well routed.*
- *There is an obvious bias against mountain biking in this survey, not being considered as an option for future uses. This is a significant and growing activity in our community, allowing many more users to experience great local outdoor areas. It is disappointing that uses for only hiking seems to be considered - there are opportunities to incorporate both in this large area, as there are many geographical features to provide challenges to both bikers and hikers.*
- *These trails (especially those around Suzie's Lake) are popular mountain biking trails and have been used for such for a long time. I moved to Halifax 10+ years ago and have been mountain biking there the entire time. Mountain biking needs to be incorporated into the wilderness area uses. ATV trails have been incorporated into wilderness areas or have had designated trails excluded from wilderness areas. The tourism industry around mountain biking is growing on the east coast. It would be an incredible asset to have a planned and well maintained mountain biking trail network close to Halifax.*
- *Your deliberate exclusion of mountain biking is disgraceful. This area has a long history of use by the local MTB community, who have been outstanding stewards of this area, and have long supported maintaining this as a protected area. There seems to be some confusion that mountain biking is destructive on the local area, and has been grouped in with ATV and other motorized off road vehicles. I would encourage members of this group to look at areas such as Spider Lake - compare the MTB-only single track such as Skull and Replicator with the trails that can be accessed by ATV. We share your common goal of preserving the Birch lands for non motorized use, but also ask that you include*



*MTB as a valuable outdoor recreation activity and a part of active living in Halifax.*

- *Many of the trails developed on the Suzie Lake side have been developed and maintained (as often as possible) by volunteers. I mtn bike with many people of all walks of life and ages in these areas and bikers are always careful and respectful of hikers/dog walkers and most importantly the environment. No mtn biker wants to go off trail and bushwack... no fun there! Also, due to the challenging and technical nature of the trails, bikers are working on skill/technique and not speed and therefore are not accidentally running into walkers/hikers or speeding past them disrespectfully. There are few places to mtn bike in HRM and we treasure these locations. I worry that if mtn bikers are banned from this area, there will be a great deal of animosity (which is reasonable considering they have built and biked these trails for years) and this could result in unnecessary vandalism of the wilderness area/new trails. I've seen it happen before and it's always upsetting and disappointing to me. I understand that bicycles are considered vehicles but perhaps this terminology should be changed to differentiate between road biking and mtn biking. Two bike tires have much less environmental impact than two people dragging a canoe down to the lake. In any case, good luck with the project.*

### Canoeing/kayaking

Several comments were received by individuals interested in ensuring canoeing/kayaking is considered when planning for trails. In particular, the current condition of existing portages was flagged as a concern, plus challenges with access to the Birch Cove Lakes for canoeing/kayaking.

#### *Specific comments received:*

- *Make sure backcountry trails and canoe access are also part of planning process.*
- *I would love to see some better access for canoes to enter the lake system. The "lot" on the side of the HWY 102 is quite scary and not really a reasonable access point for smaller cars. I'd also love to see better marking and maintenance of the existing portage trails.*
- *Parking for canoe access to various lakes e.g. Susies Lake; Maintain canoe portage trails within the plan.*
- *Place to offload canoe safely and close to road/lake access point-*
- *In future developments, would like to see development of better portages between Ash and Crane Lake, in particular. All need improvement.*
- *Consider canoe route (access points & portages)*
- *Although not within current planning scope: some other things to consider in the future: - Would like to see portages between Ash & Crane & from there,*

- toward smaller lakes between Three & Susies (current portages exists, but some are horrendous).*
- *Canoed Susies/Ash Lake loop three times many years ago. Very memorable. Intend to again in coming year. Guided hike with NW Trails Association last year. I'd like to see shorter portage and improved parking for access to Susie Lake canoe loop and well marked portages (I haven't been on the loop in years. maybe they're well marked by now but in 1970's 1980's they were a little hard to find as I recall).*
  - *Keep canoe loop portage in tact, don't let them be lost*
  - *Mountain canoe routes*
  - *Canoe portages over hiking trails to protect them*
  - *Lot of canoers and fishermen use Ash Lake a lot.*
  - *Canoeing - need a canoe launch area*
  - *Canoe off loading/trail head, parking*
  - *Canoe access from 102 area to Susies Lake for canoe unloading to Susies Lake*
  - *Kent building supplies - long hike to go canoeing - too long*
  - *Sorry this is not on point, but I'll take this chance to say it's great to have good locations to launch a kayak. I'd love to kayak around Suzie Lake, if it were more accessible. However, I would not want this to jeopardize the preservation of nature.*



*Canoeing on Susies Lake (photo: Andrew Chow)*

## *Skiing*

Several comments were received about cross-country skiing and an interest in designing trails for this winter activity.

### *Specific comments received:*

- *Would like trails suitable for cross-country ski. Not necessarily all trails but some of them*
- *Make such a trail ski-able*
- *Would like to see some trails from cross-country skiing - the running trail could double as this in the winter.*
- *Surface of trail should be wood chips - no melting for cross country skiing - surface won't melt*
- *Cross country ski - good near blue mountain due to high elevations*

## 10.) Trail Design

Many comments were received with specific suggestions for the design of a trail network. Many of these suggestions were recorded on the maps available at the public open house. There appears to be broad support for an interesting trail system with a variety of trail types, including a combination of easy and challenging trails, and an interest in using natural trails particularly in the backcountry. Charlies Lake, Ash Lake, Fox Lake, Blue Mountain Hill, and the shoreline of Kearney Lake were identified as popular destination points for the trail system.

### *Specific comments received:*

- *One long loop. No spider web network of trails.*
- *Mixture of easy and challenging trails*
- *Building wilderness sidewalks is an insufficient use of trail building resources.*
- *Well it needs to be way more narrow than the likes of First and Second Lake trails in Sackville, or the Bedford Sackville trail, or the Shubie trails. It makes no sense how wide those trails are. The amount of forest destroyed isn't really necessary when building a trail.*
- *If you go to Nine Mile River trails (Elmsdale Road) you will see what these trails should look like. They used half of the material and rock as a trail like First/Second lake... And made a real all purpose trail! There are gravel sections as well as lightly groomed natural features. It should NOT be another 8ft wide road through the woods. That is a backwards and lazy approach. And its no fun to hike or ride a bike on. We already have plenty of road sized trails in HRM.*
- *I would like to see hiking trails connecting all the lakes in this wilderness area so as to enjoy their beauty. Right now there are only hiking trails( unauthorized) that go to the closest lakes around Charlies, Susies, Hobsons, Fox,*

*and Ash lakes. There are so many other lakes and stillwaters, brooks and wetlands that are in the more remote back country that Never get seen or that you have to have a canoe and portage to see.*

- *We are happy with the boardwalks over wet spots so as long as those are kept up we don't need huge improvements to trails. Thx!*
- *Trail running behind Maskwa. In one hour I can cover many km - I want long loops that go around lakes (I like many of the trails that already exist).*
- *Narrow trails are the best because you can make more with limited money.*
- *Narrow trails without steep sections or challenging features.*
- *Level of challenge for users. Would make for an interesting fitness/hiking/orienteering/adventure competition.*
- *Like narrow trails with some steep sections and challenging features equally.*
- *Low impact trails- Narrow trails.*
- *Wood chips on surface of trails-*
- *Different trail lengths and difficulties for varying experience levels- New runners.*
- *Would like to see narrow, challenging trails remain elsewhere in area.*
- *Also like narrow trails with many steep sections and very challenging features*
- *Maybe a "big loop" with convenient access to transit on both ends.*
- *Like all types of trails.*
- *Likes all types of trails; A range of activities for various abilities.*
- *Not sure I understand "front-trail." Prefer natural terrain: no pavement, no wood chips, no boardwalks.*
- *Single tracks.*
- *Like both: Narrow trails with some steep sections and challenging features; Narrow trails with many steep sections and very challenging features; Single track type trails as well. Trail runners, hikers and mountain bikers love the single track.*
- *Show running water and streams and how they connect the lakes*
- *Access to connection to Five Bridges Wilderness Area*
- *IMBA - International Mountain Bike Association and "The Whistler Standard" are used for sustainable accessible trail building*
- *In winter - you can hike the lakes due to ice - winter recreation and tourism*
- *Trails in some cases be steep and challenging*
- *Trail along Kearney lake*
- *Build trail from Lakeshore Drive to Blue Mountain*
- *Lake loop & greenmile trail, access from BLT trail, area for six mile lake BLT trail*
- *Connect green mile trail to Evil Birch Trail*
- *Viewpoints.*
- *In general (also trails must be narrow "simple track" with no crusher dust - natural tread only except for where the fitness station is) I think it is important to include all non-motorized, human-powered activities, and to design the trails with this in mind.*

- *Recommendations:- Long loops (10-15+ km routes)- Separation of trails to spread users- "Easier" low gradient trails near trail heads- Mountain bike access- Narrow, rough simple track trails that minimize speed difference between bikes and pedestrians*
- *Access to lake for swimming at Popcorn Island*
- *Make the trail as 'natural' as possible. Do not make a crushed gravel manicured trail. Just some proper signage as well as a few simple bridges to traverse water crossings*
- *Rain-proofing so that the trail doesn't flood easily*
- *For the entire system, just maps and a better/clean connection from ash lake to the whopper system on the west side of ash lake.*
- *I will be very happy when I no longer have to bushwhack to blue mtn look off from Ash lake but can take a designated trail instead :) I would also like to note the fantastic trail work near the fox lake look-off and hobsons lake. Someone has added in beautiful treasures such as the t-pee stand, johns lunch and coyote bog. They have also made fantastic rock steps and proper board walks in the wet areas. I understand that some of these trails are not in the wilderness area but rather on private land; however, if you know this individual, I would highly recommend bringing them along on the trail building process. I guide groups of hikers through this trail system and people always comment on how fantastic the trail work is and love the "treasures." It's a real favorite with the group. Additionally, the old cabin on Charlies Lake loop is also a real treasure and hit with the group. I would love to know the history of it and hope that it does not get demolished. I am very interested in this project and would be willing to volunteer time/learn trail building skills (so long as I can fit it into my schedule).*

## 11.) Multi-use

Many comments received specifically mentioned an interest in maintaining multi-use on the trail system, particularly hikers, walkers, mountain bikers, and trail runners.

*Specific comments received:*

- *multi use trails*
- *Must be multipurpose with as little environmental impact as possible and open to all.*
- *A rideable narrow single track trail runners, hiking, and mountain bikers can enjoy together.*
- *This is a beautiful area for hiking and cycling.*
- *Trails which accomodate both hikers and mountain bikers need to be considered in the plan for this wilderness area.*

- *I think it's important to consider all trail users when embarking on a development plan such as this. Besides hikers, mountain bikers play a large role in the use of Nova Scotia's wilderness.*
- *It's amazing and gives people living in Bedford / Clayton Park (and throughout Halifax) a place to go hiking, biking, cross country skiing, horseshoing or just spend an afternoon walking the dog.*
- *This concept should include consideration for multipurpose single track trails that would support mountain biking, hiking/trail running and snowshoeing with varying levels of trail difficulty including: easy, moderate and difficult (the first two at the very least).*
- *multi-use hiking and mountain biking*
- *share with other groups such as mountain biking, fitness running, wheeled access for seniors and disabled (front-end only).*
- *Ban on motorized vehicles MUST be maintained - Mountain biking (pedal-powered) could be considered with sufficient safeguards for foot traffic. Special designated areas/trails? Even these must be shared with hikers/walkers/families*
- *Multiple users*
- *All physical activity needs to be allowed to use this system. Limit the use to non motor powered vehicles. Allow for hiking, walking, snow shoeing and most of all mountain biking.*
- *Multi use, trail signs*
- *Well-built and routed trails open to bikes and pedestrians (hikers, trail runners) would be a positive vision for the area. Cycling is the fastest growing outdoor activity for kids: if you work to encourage them, and provide much needed outdoor activity in a natural setting, then include bikes in the planning process. The use is compatible with wilderness: the peer reviewed literature indicates effects on erosion and wildlife are comparable to hikers on well designed trails. Please consult with Parks Canada who have recently (2 years ago) made mountain biking an allowable activity in National Parks, including areas with wilderness designation, because of recognition that it is simultaneously compatible with protection and encourages users to be involved. The key is appropriately designed trails. In closing, I'm excited about this wilderness area and park. Non-motorized trails! Yay!*
- *While I like hiking trails to be somewhat challenging, I am also an avid cyclist and would like to see some back country trails that can be navigated by mountain bike.*

## 12.) Rest stations

Incorporating rest stations into the trail design was suggested.

*Specific comments received:*

- *Benches for little old ladies on challenging trails*
- *Rest stations (benches) along the way.*

## 13.) Fitness stations

Comments received about the proposal for fitness stations along the frontcountry trails was mixed, with some people supporting this concept and others raising concerns. Questions were raised about the costs and maintenance, and the need for this to be discrete and blend-in with the natural surrounding.

*Specific comments received:*

- *Very supportive of a running trail, but ensure fitness stations don't take away from wilderness experience*
- *Natural obstacles/exercise equipment should take priority, if the Aquatic Club is determined to include these stations. Rather than putting in items that may rust or take away from the natural setting, consider natural items (think of TreeGo or OnTree for ideas).*
- *Also having obstacles or fitness related elements mixed in throughout the trails would be a fantastic idea ... I see this whole area being great for cross country runners, races, or general fitness.*
- *Name each station uniquely after local shrubbery.*
- *FITNESS TRAIL: This type of trail seems to start off with considerable enthusiastic use and then taper off. Equipment too would need to be maintained. However, with the considerable numbers of youth that exercise c/o Maskwa, more intensive use over the long term might be expected.*
- *Addition of new elements, such as a fitness trail, without benefit of a management plan( which is needed to clearly articulate goals and objectives for the wilderness area/regional park and establish the land use framework within which the area will be managed), become a constraint that future management planning processes.*
- *Equipment is not going to last as long as the trail and will be harder to maintain. Adding features such as hills or ridges may be more useful for those wanting to do more than running on flat ground.*
- *I strongly disagree with the interests of the Maskwa Aquatic club to develop groomed fitness trails or fitness stations.*
- *How receptive public is to the idea. No sense developing it unless it is to be put to "reasonable" (to be defined!) use. I doubt I would use it myself.*

- *Depending on how much real estate is used.*
- *Any equipment should blend in with the surroundings (no plastic or bright coloured features).*
- *The fact that similar HRM fitness stations (including the one at Lake Banook) are under-used. Trails are good. Fitness equipment is an unnecessary expense.*
- *This is an extreme waste of money which needs to be spent on more important things. Health care is in crisis especially mental health care.*
- *I am not sure, however I would like to use it for running*
- *cost vs. other options.*
- *Something for leg strength - for seniors!*
- *Will fitness stations take away from "nature" experience;*
- *There are a lot of dog walkers in that area that may not work well with trail runners/fitness stations. If exercise area has a well marked distinct loop I would welcome such a concept.*
- *Ok if not in the protected area. Otherwise, NOT*
- *Big yes to the fitness stations.*
- *The fitness stations must be discrete;*
- *Ability to be used by all ages. i.e. different heights for a chin up bar for shorter users.*
- *If the fitness stations are built well into surroundings, then yes.*
- *Any features such as fitness stations would need a clear plan for who would maintain them. Should they fall into disrepair it would have a negative impact on the fantastic area.*
- *Maintenance plan and ongoing funding - fitness stations deteriorate.*
- *Yes to fitness stations only on the DNR land - a mini Prov. park? (the side of, e.g., McCormicks P.P.) - Not chrome plated looking like a fitness club gym*
- *Trail running can be accommodated in the trail system. Adding fitness stations takes away from the natural beauty and ability to "get away" from development and into nature.*
- *The fitness stations should try to blend with the wilderness, no garish bright coloured plastic monstrosities. Use sustainable and natural materials whenever possible. Make the stations work for both adults and children, so they can workout together at the same time.*
- *not something I would use. Such fitness stations have been vandalized in other locations, even if in open park areas. Do people really use them?*
- *Used in the Maskwa area, not the wilderness area.*
- *Abuse/vandalism. Items have to be engineered to withstand this.*
- *I think the fitness stations should be made of natural features, or made to look as natural as possible so they blend in with surroundings. Also at start of trail should be some kind of user guide that people who are new to the trails/fitness activities could pick up, so that they know how to use them. Maybe include suggested loops - i.e. "for a good upper body workout, take this trail and try stations A, C, and D" or "if you are a beginner, take this trail and try stations B and E".*



- *Equipment maintenance to ensure safety. Also any instructions on how to use equipment to prevent injury. And that no trees will be destroyed to implement the features :)*
- *If fitness stations are to be installed, please also install appropriate garbage cans (that are emptied!) for energy bar wrappers, water bottles and dog waste.*
- *Simple exercise equipment is more versatile than complicated machines. There is a famous fitness installation at Bondi Beach in Sydney Australia that you might want to Google. I would also suggest those playground recycled crushed rubber tiles on the ground under the equipment.*
- *Regular maintenance of equipment, consideration of types of equipment currently in fashion and that weather well*
- *It would be nice if the fitness stations were natural ones - using more wood, rather than the metal ones you see around the city. I saw this concept used in a park in Quebec*
- *outdoor gyms/fitness stations are fantastic, however often they are not maintained and end up as unsightly garbage in the woods - lets do it and keep it maintained*

#### 14.) Trail/park management

Several comments were received that dealt with the future management of the trail system and the park itself. Many of these comments are beyond the scope of our specific project to undertake trails planning, but all comments received have been collected and passed along to the government departments of Nova Scotia Environment and the Department of Natural Resources.

##### *Specific comments received:*

- *Perhaps a garbage collection plan ie: bear proof garbage cans*
- *I would also like to request some attention be made to accessing the Bayers Lake access areas (ie: known as the whopper dropper"). There is already a lot of garbage there and seems to be an unchecked dumping site.*
- *An actual on paper agreement with the city about who will be maintaining this area, along with real time lines. There are too many "plans" just sitting on shelves.*
- *Washrooms are needed, safe water to drink where available. Trails should be monitored.*
- *Other Concerns: 1) Make WA Park Plan first, the trail plan. 2) Build 3 fishways over dams there must be fishways over the 3 dams to allow wild fish to access lakes like they are doing in Federal Parks. 3) Acquire road access land, no road thru park. 4) HRM must buy out all adjoining lands for park protection. 5) All near by Crown Land to be acquired for W Park. 6) Create corridor to Long Lake Spryfield and Cox Comb Lake. 7) Maintain water quality, divert all storm water to treatment ponds.*

- *Make sure no ATVs*
- *To acquire the lands around Fox & Quarry Lake.*
- *Park Management Plan first then Trail Plan, Trail Plan should come after Park Management Plan*
- *Ash Lake becoming a party place. Little Brook from Ragged Lake to Stillwater Lake being infilling to allow ATV access, DNR won't do anything*
- *good management*
- *Many garbage cans and regular garbage pick up.*
- *Build three fishways over the three dam (native fish to their homes, spawning)*
- *No highway through park*
- *Make application to rezone and to replan*
- *Park management*
- *Increase park budget*
- *Buy all in holdings and make park*
- *Treat all stormwater*
- *Connect/buy land between Gov's Lake and Maple lake area*
- *Fill gateway Quarry for storm water management from Bayers Lake*
- *Wetland and river before discharge to gateway lake, storm water treatment*
- *Expand wilderness areas to make park bigger! especially HRM properties*
- *HRM to buy private land to expand park & regime park*
- *Acquire Gateway rock Quarry lands and make part of park!*
- *Acquire long lake area for park*
- *Relocate 118 road out of park*
- *Trail and park operating and maintenance budget*
- *Connect to long lake in Spryfield*
- *All yellow crown land to be park of park*
- *Buy all edging private lands to make park bigger*
- *Connect all trails near the park - connect trails existing*
- *Keep press on HRM to acquire private property to expand size of park*
- *Protect moose/bears in park*
- *Bird Count - Top of Blue Mountain looks for spruce grouse - protect*
- *Keep HRM property in public ownership - prevent intensive development*
- *Underpass for animals to cross - under new roads*