

# Avon Trail Strategic Plan 2013-2017

Revised November 19, 2012

## Mission of the Avon Trail Association

[what we are here to do; the “business” we are in]

*The Avon Trail Association is a hiking organization committed to securing and maintaining a system of footpaths from St. Marys to Conestogo, promoting enjoyment of the natural environment, and providing leadership in hiking, trail development and environmental education and awareness.*

## Vision for the Avon Trail

[a summary statement of what we would like to see or accomplish by 2017]

*To provide access for the general public and the ATA membership to the natural beauty of the Avon River and nearby watersheds through a high-quality system of footpaths.*

## Values and Operating Principles of the Avon Trail Association

[principles that we keep in mind as we work together]

*The Avon Trail Association is committed to these values and operating principles, always putting the collective good of the Avon Trail and the Avon Trail Association (ATA) as the main objective of our activities:*

- 1 – address concerns of landowners, community partners and members in a timely manner*
- 2 -- provide a safe and high quality hiking experience is a high priority at all times*
- 3 -- engage the membership, especially new members, in the activities of the Board and the Corporation*
- 4 -- practise good governance*
- 5 – treat every person participating in ATA events as a potential member and volunteer*
- 6 -- work cooperatively and network with other agencies / organizations*
- 7 – exchange information with and learn from other trail organizations and Hike Ontario*
- 8 – provide feedback to our volunteers to encourage personal growth and independence*
- 9 -- communicate effectively with all stakeholders*

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## INITIATIVES IN FOUR PRIORITY AREAS FOR NEW OR MORE ATTENTION IN 2013 AND BEYOND

**Priority Area:** A key subject area of work and responsibility to accomplish our vision, that is within our mission; each priority is expressed as an overall goal and has a number of current activities and potential initiatives to achieve this goal.

**Current and Ongoing Work:** A list of work in each priority area of the strategic plan that we already do so that it, and the volunteers and other resources involved in doing it are not overlooked (“resources” include time, money and effort). The ATA groups or positions involved are shown at the end of this section, and in the master list in Appendix A.

**Initiative:** A project or set of actions, expressed as an outcome or result we would like to see by the end of the plan period that is different than the current practice or level of activity.

Some potential examples of early initiatives, starting in 2013, are underlined.

**Priority Area 1:  
To Secure and Maintain Trails in the Optimum Trail Corridor**

**Current and Ongoing Activities:**

- trail monitoring and maintenance; construction and repair of trail structures
- updating and sale/distribution of Trail Guidebook and Map
- training, equipment purchase and trail alerts as needed
- update landowner list and communicate with them collectively individually as required
- joint trail development projects with area groups, e.g. Upper Thames Valley Conservation Authority, Walker's Wood (Township of Wilmot)

**Responsibility:** Board, Trail Coordinator, trail monitors, Trail Maintenance Crew, Conservancy Committee

**Some potential initiatives:**

- o define "optimum Avon Trail Corridor" and other trail locations and follow this when deciding on re-routes, making grant applications, and working with partners
- o more effective landowner relations, including annual recognition event and potential joint conservation projects (e.g. tree planting) on private lands
- o new trail along Avon River from west into Stratford
- o new trail south of Wildwood Lake, in partnership with Wildwood CA/UTCA
- o develop "shovel-ready projects" for grant applications and other funding opportunities
- o annual trail maintenance day for all monitors and Trail Maintenance Crew
- o get more trail off-road (annual targets by % off road)
- o develop more loops along Main Trail
- o trail monitors and back-up monitors selected, trained and in place for whole trail
- o expand pool of trained volunteers for Trail Maintenance Crew and large projects
- o develop and use checklist for trail re-routes
- o develop and maintain records system for AT-built structures
- o adopt high standards for trail structures and maintenance and improve our trail activities through training, borrowed expertise and regular trail/structure audits

**Priority Area 2:  
To Enlarge the Membership and Volunteer Base and to Provide them with Improved Services**

**Current and Ongoing Activities:**

- o prepare and distribute member newsletter and the *Avon Hiker*
- o Avon Trail website, including regular features and member e-alerts
- o organize and publicize hikes on Avon Trail and other trails
- o update trail information/map and website where necessary
- o members meetings and annual general meeting (AGM), including guest speakers
- o identify and support volunteers in all parts of ATA work, including financial support for hike leader training
- o identify member benefits, including retailer discounts and events

- organize special hikes (e.g. end to end, joint hikes with other local groups, e.g. Stratford Field Naturalists)

**Responsibility:** Board; Secretary; Hiking Scheduler; Newsletter Editor; Webmaster; hike leaders

**Some potential initiatives:**

- set overall annual targets: increase membership, from ----- in 2012 to ----- by 2016
- provide hikes with variety of length (including more short hikes), time of day/week, and destination to increase member and public participation in AT hikes
- increase number of certified hike leaders
- look at ways to increase member interest and participation in ATA-led hikes
- contact lapsed members personally and review services available for members
- investigate membership potential in local organizations (children/teens; health providers; schools; outdoor recreation)
- improve retention of members from ----- % in 2012 to ----- by 2017
- increase volunteer base, especially in ----- [potential examples: Board, trail monitors, landowner relations, public events]
- improve public and member information on website and other AT materials
- develop skills amongst Avon Trail volunteers by providing training and other learning opportunities
- stimulate an interest in hiking and support groups and events that contribute to this objective

**Priority Area 3:**

**To Increase Publicity and Promotion of the Avon Trail and the Benefits of Public Trails and Hiking**

**Current and Ongoing Activities:**

- promote hikes, completed major trail projects and other events in local media
- participate in local trail, tourism and municipal liaison groups where ATA interests can be promoted and protected, as Board and ATA resources allow
- participate in parades, community environment/wellness and other events promoting ATA and hiking in general
- participate in Hike Ontario as Member of Hike Ontario board and in training, awards, hiking programs, and other events
- continue to work closely with Hike Ontario and adjacent trail organizations (Grand, Thames, etc.)

**Responsibility:** Board, Conservancy Committee, volunteer teams for each project as required, Webmaster.

**Some potential initiatives:**

- participate in more public events – actions include community health and environmental events and Ontario Hiking Week
- develop new promotional materials and outlets
- develop potential events on Avon Trail, including municipal staff orientation hikes, corporate staff day events, school groups, media and annual Ontario Hike Day
- develop more efficient marketing operations

**Priority Area 4:  
To Ensure that the Organization is Financially Viable and Well-managed and Meets its  
Responsibilities**

**Current and Ongoing Activities:**

- Maintain all elements of ATA's risk management program
- Participate in Hike Ontario insurance (as of late 2012) and training programs
- Corporate, board member and Canada Revenue Agency reporting necessary to maintain ATA's corporate and charitable status
- Efficient and timely financial operations and reports to Board and members
- External review of ATA financial statements for Board and AGM

**Responsibility:** Board, Treasurer, ATA representative(s) on Hike Ontario

**Some potential initiatives:**

- increase fundraising – identify potential specific actions and target donors
- explore potential for HST rebates for past expenditures
- write or update “job descriptions” for key positions (see list in Appendix A)
- annual review of risk management program – give priority attention to areas requiring new or more attention
- provide Board orientation and training
- review insurance coverage at least every 3 years, and as required in between
- review by-laws against model by-law and other requirements of new Ontario *Not-for-Profit Corporations Act* (by 2015 AGM)
- ensure financial sustainability through a combination of membership fees, products and services, a system of grant applications, and a donation program to become a Friend of the Avon Trail.

**Implementation – Putting this Plan into Action**

- discuss status and results at annual and general meetings of members
- each year, Board approves or changes Plan, decided priorities, and monitors results
- each year, Board picks initiatives for work and supports individuals/teams to identify and do the work required
- each year, Board decides how it will participate with partners and other outside organizations and will decide who will represent ATA with these groups – see Appendix B for list for 2013
- ATA annual budget and volunteer recruitment follow the Plan's priorities
- priorities and activities are changed, added to or removed from the Plan as conditions and opportunities change
- a progress report – what has been accomplished – is included at each annual general meeting of members (AGM) and annual report at Hike Ontario AGM

**Appendix A**  
**Avon Trail Association Groups and Positions with Specific Responsibilities**

- \*Board of Directors
- \*Executive/officers: President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer
- \*Trail Coordinator
- \*Trail Monitors
- Trail Maintenance Crew
- \*Communications Coordinator
- \*Newsletter Editor
- \*Hiking Scheduler
- \*Avon Trail Conservancy Committee
- \*Webmaster

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Notes: 1. \* = These positions are named and described in the current by-laws  
2. The organization's legal name is *The Avon Trail*. To avoid confusion, this Plan uses the informal name *Avon Trail Association* for the organization and *Avon Trail* for the physical trail and trail route.

**Appendix B**  
**Avon Trail Association – Participation with Other Organizations**  
**For Year: 2013 (draft)**

**Trail and Hiking Organizations:**

- Hike Ontario
- Thames Valley Trails Association
- Grand Valley Trails Association

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**Municipalities and Municipally-Based Trail or other Stakeholder Groups:**

- “TRAILS” (Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin trails liaison committee)
- Oxford County Trails Council
- Township of Wilmot
- Tourism Stratford
- Perth Active Transportation Committee
- Township of Woolwich

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Not included in this list but equally important to the success of the Avon Trail and the ATA:

- landowners
- distributors of Avon Trail publications
- sponsors and supporters of events that ATA participates in

## NOTES

