

Ontario Trails of Distinction (OTD) Program Overview

- The Ontario Trails of Distinction (OTD) Program showcases and celebrates the most distinctive trails, including trail networks, in the province.
- The purpose of the program is to:
 - Identify and promote trails of the highest degree of distinction that would:
 - Raise awareness of Ontario trails;
 - Encourage today's generation and future generations to use trails; and
 - Further the development of trails in Ontario.
- The OTD Program targets trails that demonstrate the best of what Ontario has to offer, helping to establish Ontario trails as a world-class system of diversified trails, planned and used in an environmentally responsible manner that enhances the health and prosperity for all Ontarians and attracts visitors.

Recognition

- Proposed trails of distinction would undergo an application and evaluation process to determine their suitability with the OTD Program.
- Applicants of proposed trails of distinction would need to build a strong case for why the trail should be considered among the best trails in Ontario.
- Trails of distinction would be recognized for five (5) years provided the trail and trail manager/operator continue to meet program requirements.
 - At the end of the five years, there would be an option for the recipient to renew the recognition.

Context

- Supporting trails continues to be a priority for the Ontario government:
 - In 2005, the Ontario Trails Strategy, an all-stakeholder strategy, was released, which sets out strategic directions for the planning, management, promotion and use of trails in Ontario.
 - In December 2015, the government released a Trails Action Plan to support the ongoing implementation of the Ontario Trails Strategy.
 - In 2016, the *Ontario Trails Act, 2016* and supporting legislative amendments were passed, which will help the trails community more effectively develop, operate and promote trails while enhancing the trail experience for all trail users.
- Trails are widely available in all regions of Ontario, are inexpensive to use and can be enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities, including children, youth, seniors and people with disabilities.
- Trails can be on land and/or water and are used for a variety of activities, both motorized and non-motorized for recreation, tourism and transportation purposes.
- As described in the Ontario Trails Strategy, trails can be:
 - Footpaths with natural surfaces;

- Multi-use tracks with manufactured surfaces;
- On-road bicycle routes;
- Walkways, boardwalks and sidewalks;
- Utility corridors or former rail lines;
- Forestry and mining access roads designated as trails; or
- Waterways and portage routes.
- The OTD Program supports the Ontario Trails Strategy, Trails Action Plan and is authorized pursuant to the *Ontario Trails Act, 2016*.

OTD Application Requirements

To be considered for the OTD Program, a trail must be distinctive and meet one or more of the following distinction reasons:

- Connectivity
 - Examples of distinction reasons within “Connectivity” include a trail that provides a vital connection between communities; a long-distance cycling trail; a trail that connects numerous communities across the province.
- Recreational Experience
 - An example of a distinction reason within “Recreational Experience” includes an outstanding trail experience.
- Heritage
 - Examples of distinction reasons within “Heritage” include regional/provincial cultural or natural heritage value, interpretation and protection.
- Environmental
 - Examples of distinction reasons within “Environmental” include ecological or biodiversity value, interpretation and protection; conservation.
- Indigenous
 - Examples of distinction reasons within “Indigenous” include cultural significance; historical trade route.

To be considered for the OTD Program, a trail must:

- Be of interest to visitors from outside the province and/or country
- Be in Ontario and be open for public use (this does not necessarily mean free access)
- Be actively managed as appropriate for the trail type/use(s), in a manner that reflects sustainable management principles
- Have appropriate way-finding and trail signage for the trail type/use(s)
- Have trail information available online or through an app

In addition, to be considered for the OTD Program, the trail manager/operator is required to:

- Actively market and/or promote the proposed trail to attract visitors/trail users from within Ontario; tourism marketing beyond the province would be an asset
- Have a website with clear information on the proposed trail of distinction that is reviewed and updated regularly
- Carry appropriate liability insurance and all required operating permits

Requirements of OTD Recognition

If selected into the OTD Program, the trail manager/operator would be required to:

- Provide annual feedback and/or data about the trail of distinction
- Advise the ministry of any changes/upgrades to the trail of distinction
- Be willing to present and showcase the recognized trail
- Consider sharing trail data with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's Land Information Ontario (LIO) trail mapping initiative
- Agree to the OTD Terms and Conditions
- Fulfil any other requirements as negotiated with the ministry

OTD Program Benefits

- Prestige, credibility and peer recognition
- Potential for increased marketing by Destination Ontario and Regional Tourism Organizations (RTOs)
- Increased cross-promotional opportunities with other OTD Program members
- Use of a program logo on the trail manager/operator website or signage
- Trail named on a government website
- Letter of recognition from the minister of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and sport (MTCS)

Contact

For more information contact:

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