

## HDTI gets \$15,000 grant from Ontario Highlands Tourism Organization

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By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Cathy Trimble, the chair of the Hastings Trails Destination Inc., issued a press release on Jan. 20 to announce that HDTI had received a grant of \$15,000 from Ontario Highlands Tourism Organization through their Tourism Recovery and Innovation Program Partnerships Program. This money will assist HDTI with their 2021 trail initiatives, which will eventually lead to a county-wide non-motorized recreational trail network.

Trimble has given presentations to multiple township councils in the area over the past couple of weeks, including Carlow Mayo, Tudor and Cashel and Limerick. In these presentations, she provided a history of the HDTI, she went over its accomplishments in 2020, most notably getting an OTF grant worth \$145,800 to refurbish 18 kilometres of trails at Eagles Nest Park, McGeachie Conservation Area and the Gut Conservation Area, managing 1,593 volunteer hours, securing in-kind contributions in the amount of \$28,000, getting \$52,375 in additional funding, providing risk management education, creating a strategic plan and governing documents and working to develop partnerships with various organizations.

Trimble also told the councils what HDTI hopes to achieve going into 2021, including connecting with trail landowners, conducting trail assessments, identifying opportunities for collaboration to expand their trail network and generally increasing awareness of non-motorized trails in Hastings County.

Trimble asked the councils to commit to having a representative complete a survey of their current trail assets or lack thereof, to participate in a virtual focus group to discuss ways to collaborate and to pass a motion of support to recognize HDTI as their regional trails committee. Some townships have already given their support for HDTI, and Trimble said that Hastings County has also given them a letter of support. HDTI aims to build a collaborative non-motorized recreational trails strategic action plan, create a collaborative non-motorized recreational trail master plan for Hastings County, research regional trails committee financial models and to assist with launching Safe Travels Stamp and promise programs in Hastings County. The ultimate goal is to provide a county-wide non-motorized recreational trail network for residents and tourists to enjoy.

The OTHO's TRIP Partnerships Program, which HDTI received \$15,000 from, is a project offering up to \$30,000 in financial support for collaborative projects to increase the quantity and quality of outdoor experiences in the region. According to the OTHO website, the program also aims to increase collaborative promotional initiatives around travelling safely and locally, increase community understanding of and support for the visitor economy, increase the quality and availability of the region's tourism workforce, increase diversification in the tourism industry and support strategic planning and research to promote sustainability.

OTHO was founded in 2010 and is one of 13 Regional Tourism Organizations created by the province of Ontario to effectively coordinate tourism development efforts and attract tourists to the province. It has been working with its communities at the grassroots level to look into collaborative and innovative initiatives to address the needs of the region.

Nicole Whiting is the executive director of OTHO and is pleased to support the HDTI initiative and commends all the partners involved in this project.

"Our trails have always been a strong attractor to the area and this initiative will better prepare our communities to collaboratively enhance non-motorized experiences," she said in the HDTI press release.

Trimble is also excited to lead the community collaborative regional trail network across Hastings County.

?Trails promote safe and liveable communities. Developing recreational infrastructure and the resulting tourism and economic benefits are a key factor for moving forward with destination development in Hastings County and showcasing our ?Wildly Authentic' nature.?