

# Oak Ridges Trail Association

ANNUAL REPORT

AGM April 2026

*"Building Pathways to an Active Lifestyle"*



# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION –2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## AGENDA

- 7:00 Welcome and call to order
- Adoption of the agenda
- Approval of the Minutes for ORTA AGM 2025
- Recognition of Chapter Chairs & Recognition of Directors, Key Committee Members & Office Staff
- Motion to adopt reports contained in this Annual Report*
- Treasurer’s Report – Anna Sunn
- Motion to adopt Financial Statements*
- Nominating Committee
- Motion to adopt Board of Directors for 2026-2027*
- Awards and Presentations
- Adjournment of the Business Meeting
- 7:45 Break before presentation
- 8:00 Guest Speaker

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Northumberland

Thank you to the many  
photographers who share  
their talents with ORTA  
through our social pages. I  
have borrowed generously  
from your beautiful images.

Directors' and Key Committee Members' Reports:

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## **Minutes of the 2025 Annual General Meeting**

Annual Reports sent by email to all members and by Canada Post to 5 members on April 14, 2025.

Joanne Baker served as Chair and welcomed everyone to the gathering at 7:02pm. Minutes were recorded by Lissa Dwyer.

Each member, including one person from each family membership, was given an orange card at registration to use for voting. Emcee ensured that all members were provided with a card.

48+ members in attendance including singles, family, lifetime and honorary.

The first order of business is to approve tonight's Agenda. Having received no other additions before publication, the motion is to approve the AGM 2025 agenda as presented within the Annual Report.

Moved by David Atkins and seconded by Brian Millage Carried

The second order of business is to approve the official Minutes from our 2024 Annual General Meeting which are also contained in your Annual Report.

The Motion is to approve the Minutes from the ORTA 2024 AGM as printed in the 2025 Annual Report.

Moved by Olivia Petrie and seconded by Tracy Calvert Carried

Volunteers during 2024 were honoured and acknowledged – Board Members, Key volunteers along with Chapter Chairs.

We have quite a few Key volunteers to acknowledge including Trail Talk editor and Office Manager Michele Donnelly, Hike Coordinator Derek Cowbourne, Volunteer Coordinator Gaye Mas, Webmaster Bob Charlton, Membership Coordinator Caroline Schweitzer, Bookkeeper Simonetta Fellin, Publicity Coordinator Karen Graham, and thank you note- writer Denise Chong. We remain very grateful to all the members who serve in other ways.

We thank them also for contributing to the Annual Report to share their stories for 2024.

Motion to adopt reports from Directors, Chapter Chairs and Key Volunteers including Hike and Membership Reports as included in the 2025 Annual Report.

Moved by Derek Cowbourne and seconded by Noel Bain Carried

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Treasurer Bob Alexander shared the financial results from 2024 and plans for 2025.

See the Annual Report for his complete remarks. In Summary - The balance sheet is strong with 70K in the bank, greatly helped by the receipt of grant funds received from the Greenbelt Foundation. Thanks to Anna Sunn for completing the internal review of the financial statements on behalf of the membership. Significant items of note for the Statement of Operations include: fewer corporate donations year over year; cost incurred for the website redesign; the change to monthly rather than annual Wild Apricot payments resulting in a timing difference of \$3k less in cost for 2024; an increase in membership dues year over year; and the deferral of the digital mapping project to 2025.

Anna spoke to the plans for 2025 based on past results. Some other new grants in the pipeline but for very specific projects. Before the relay, 2025 will be flat without a deficit and projections for relay are modest. Admin cost will drop to one day /week. Regular operations will break even. Relay budget is presented in AR, 11 teams registered, we hope to double that. We're expecting as usual that many registrants will be seen in the final weeks. Fees are the same as 2019.. projected revenue is about \$10k.

We will need more volunteers to make it happen. Will need help with the newsletter. Reflected on the long history of volunteers in the beginning who got the trail running in the first place. Please share the message that we need people with skills to improve many of the tasks. Tell your friends. Suggesting a team of people to put together a collection of stories. Also, Discovery Night, we need a coordinator to organize it and it will end, like the newsletter without someone to take over. Website analytics, fundraising ideas and grant proposals are all areas where support is needed.

\$13k allocated to Ganaraska Forest to assist with infrastructure to allow us to continue using their trails.

Suggested by a member that we affiliate with Meet-up to promote ORTA. Anna commented on her concerns with them and noted that they don't support the trails so pay no fee or membership. Meetup tends to be very informal, and they are welcome to participate in our hikes too.

Motion to adopt 2024 Financial Statements as reviewed by Committee included in the 2025 Annual Report.

Moved by Dan Myall and seconded by Dian Connors Carried

Under Ontario's Not-for-Profit-Corporations Act (ONCA), ORTA falls under a category of nonprofits called public benefit corporations. Nonprofits that are charities will always be a public benefit corporation (PBC). As a PBC, ORTA can waive having either an annual audit or a review engagement as long as gross revenue is less than \$100,000.

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In order to waive this requirement, an extraordinary resolution must be passed by a special vote, with at least 80% of members present voting in favour (or all members need to agree to it in writing). When a vote requires more than the usual amount of support from your members, it is called an extraordinary resolution and every extraordinary resolution must be voted on once a year.

Be it resolved that:

WHEREAS:

- a) ORTA is a public benefit corporation; and
- b) A minimum of 80% of the votes cast at the annual meeting of members are in favour;

The directors waive the requirement to appoint either an auditor or a review engagement in respect of the corporation's financial year ending December 31, 2025, but choose to have a review committee of ORTA members.

Motion is to assemble a committee of members to review the financial statements for the upcoming year.

Moved by Bob Alexander and seconded by Olivia Petrie Carried

Wilma as Past President, reminded everyone how much she enjoys the work that she does, but she remains hopeful that someone will relieve her and take care of Discovery Night.

Bob Alexander introduced the directors who have agreed to stand for the upcoming year and thanked the Nominating Committee for their work to bring these folks together. (Wilma, Karen and Gaye)

There are four new people to welcome to the Board this year:

Karen Graham has always enjoyed walks in local conservation areas, but it wasn't until her retirement that she developed a true passion for hiking. As one of our hike leaders, Karen resides in Clarington and is willing to drive an hour or two for a hike. With over 30 years of experience as an executive assistant to senior leaders in the post-secondary sector, Karen now enjoys contributing her administrative skills in a volunteer capacity to support ORTA. She is excited to work with the ORTA Board, members, and volunteers to steward the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail and foster a connection to the Moraine through our hiking program. Additionally, Karen looks forward to collaborating with community leaders to support the Greenbelt Foundation's Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy. Karen joined the Board last summer in an interim capacity and has served as Publicity Director and President since then.

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Olivia Petrie has been a member of ORTA since her retirement from university administration in 2021. Shortly thereafter, she took on the role of co-chair of the Whitchurch Stouffville Chapter and has also been working behind the scenes on a range of ORTA projects, such as the by-law revisions in 2024 and developing an online trail inspection form to be rolled out this spring. She is a lifelong Stouffville resident and an avid hiker, cyclist, skier and gardener. Olivia is delighted to have the opportunity to join the Board and continue to build upon the good work being done to maintain and preserve our wonderful trail system.

Neil Runnalls became a member of ORTA in 2023 and began by leading an End-to-End Series of hikes that was just completed in February. He lives in the Uxbridge area with his family and has been hiking ORTA trails for many years. In fact, the ORTA main trail passes directly past his home. Neil began as a hike leader in 2019 for the Wilderness Club in the Queen Elizabeth Highlands Provincial Park and was proud to have led an End-to-End journey of the Ganaraska Trail. He is a retired elementary principal from the Toronto District School Board, currently serves as a Board Member for Durham Youth Services, and enjoys spending time tending to his farm property.

Anna Sunn joined ORTA in 2017 after moving to Uxbridge and became a hike leader in 2020. Anna is a passionate advocate for getting people outdoors, knowing how vital it is for both our physical and mental health. In her earlier life, she was a certified accountant during which time she worked for KPMG, a private hedge fund company and Scotiabank. Since leaving her professional life to look after her 3 daughters, Anna has volunteered in various of executive positions, particularly as treasurer. She looks forward to working with the many wonderful volunteers and members who are dedicated to maintaining and preserving our trail for future generations.

In addition to these four new candidates, the following familiar members in good standing have agreed to stand for election on your Board of Directors for the upcoming year: Weibo Cheng, Lissa Dwyer, Brian Millage, Wilma Millage, Garry Niece, Jeremy Reesor

Motion to elect this slate of Directors as your ORTA Board for 2025-2026

Moved by Michele Donnelly and seconded by David Atkins

Carried

Michele came up to honour Bob Alexander and thank him for his service after almost 10years. Bob took over from Kim Aagard in April 2016 and has been a well respected member of the Board since. Between golf adventures, Bob has been, greatly supportive and worked well with Michele. She shared messages from other Board members who appreciate his calm demeanor and financial prowess along with his sense of humour recalling his strength guiding us through so many pivots required by the Covid pandemic. Bob's presence on the Board will be much missed.

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Wilma Millage, Gaye Mas and Karen Graham representing the Awards Committee came forward for everyone's favourite part of this meeting.

## Commendation Awards

Bob Charlton – Bob has been our webmaster for several years until the recent redesign this year.

Heather and John Cooper – These are the folks who greet you at the door each evening when you attend Discovery Night. They also take care of sales of hats, etc. at the desk.

Simonetta Fellin – Everyone needs someone to keep the financial books and Simonetta has been volunteering to do that for many years now.

Scott Heaslip – The seating in this room and the food/drinks that you enjoy are all set up early by Scott each evening. Thanks to Scott for our comfort and snacks.

Jane Hu – What would a hiking organization be without its hike leaders? Jane has had a dedicated group of followers over the years.

## Lifetime Achievement Award

Bob Comfort has been a volunteer in many different areas of ORTA for more than 20 years. He is a Hike Leader on the Wednesday hikes and often assists end to end hikers on their treks across the Moraine. He has been involved in the Adventure Relay for many years as both a volunteer on setting up the route as well as a participant. He is a regular volunteer on the maintenance of the trails and particularly active when we have had major storms where there are major trees felled that need to be removed by chainsaw to re-open the trails to hikers.

Bob has also assisted with mapping new trail routes, and posting re-routes on the website.

Unique award – Inaugural year for the SideTrail badge earned by Bill McCullough. There are 35 side trails in the book – and Bill was the first to complete the requisite 15.

Motion to adjourn this 2025 Annual General Meeting of the membership.

Moved by Zana Maksimovic and seconded by Judy Carey                      Carried

Winner of the 50/50 draw was Bill McCullough who won the draw with ticket #9961839 and a prize of \$110.

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## CHAPTER CHAIR AND REGIONAL REPORTS 2025

### WESTERN REGION REPORT

Brian Millage, Regional Director

#### **Caledon, Rodney Harrison/Brian Millage, CO-Chapter Chairs**

This is ORTA's westernmost chapter; where we meet the Bruce Trail, just east of Airport Road. If you haven't walked the winding forest-shrouded trails of Palgrave and Glen Haffey, you have yet to experience another very special part of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. One major bonus of this trail region is the ownership - almost all of our trail there is on TRCA lands, connected by short stretches of road. This means we aren't vulnerable to a land sale that might sever our trail, as has occurred several times in King Township. Several ORTA hike leaders lead occasional hikes at this west end to introduce hikers to the varied trails, one of which winds along the banks of the Humber River headwaters at Palgrave.

You might imagine a strong corps of ORTA volunteers mowing meadow trails, trimming



young bushes back from the trailside and removing fallen trees on occasion- wrong- would you believe that this entire section has been maintained for the past few years by one person? Rodney Harrison has dedicated many hours to maintaining the numerous trails in Caledon, with assists from several other individuals like Paul Glaab, a local landowner, and two or three visits a year by Bill McCullough and Brian and Wilma. If you hike these trails and want to keep them open, adopt and monitor a small section and let Rodney know about any work needed that you can't handle. Please contact us if you can help.

Rodney has added gravel to some wet sections and will be shoring up a section of boardwalk that needs attention this year. We all try to keep meadow trails cut wide enough to keep ticks at a distance- don't forget to check your dog after hikes too. One other special feature along this chapter's trails. On the east side of Palgrave is the Caledon Equestrian Centre where many weekend events are held during spring to fall months. Some of those competitors may even be future Olympians.

Enjoy, and join us on the Caledon Trails.

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## **King, Craig Barnes, Chapter Chair**

Despite progress on construction at the Mary Lake property, the Main Trail - from just west of Sir Henry Pellatt's barn eastward to Keele Street - remains closed. This closure also includes the Millar Side Trail from its junction with the Main Trail eastward to Keele Street. In short - good progress, but still no hiking boots allowed (for now).



The good news is that the Main Trail just west of Sir Henry Pellatt's barn through to Jane Street (including the Pine Farms Side Trail) remains open and ready for your footsteps. Based on prior discussions with the Mary Lake property's legal team, the closed section is expected to reopen in Fall 2026. Until then, patience is a virtue ...and a good excuse to explore other ORTA trail sections. Updates will continue to appear in the Weekly Trekker News and on the website. The ORTA website also outlines reroute options for those determined to keep their end-to-end (E2E) dreams alive.

The Main Trail through the Seneca property received a major re-work in 2025, with new



Seneca Campus Boardwalk  
before & after

boardwalks and viewing platforms added around the lake. The central section is now marked with small orange blazes (resembling tiny shirts), guiding hikers along the 'Path to Reconciliation Trail'. If you haven't visited lately, it's well worth the trip - not just for the scenery, but also for the opportunity to slow down and reflect.

The King Chapter maintenance crew has also been busy widening and raising sections of both the Main Trail and the Millar Side Trail - making tight spots a little less 'duck and

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'squeeze' and more 'hike and enjoy'. A tree did take a swipe at a bridge on the Millar Side Trail, but thankfully it only damaged the handrail. The bridge itself remains sturdy, and handrail repairs are already underway and expected to wrap up in late April or early May.



Pine Orchard Trail  
Before & after

Throughout 2025, bi-weekly (and often weekly) maintenance outings tackled fallen trees, leaning trees and overgrowth across the King Chapter's off-road sections. Significant trail improvements were made in forested sections from Bathurst to Dufferin, Weston to the 7th Concession (including the

Humber Source Side Trail), and from Highway 27 to the 10th Concession. In the middle section, the boardwalk near the 7th Concession continues to show its age despite ongoing repair efforts. Apparently, boardwalks, like the rest of us, don't love constant moisture.

In Fall 2025, Karen Graham and Craig Barnes met with Sara Myers (of NCC) to discuss next steps for the boardwalk. With flooding now less of a concern (given culvert remediation), there is optimism that parts of the boardwalk can be shortened or removed altogether - proving that sometimes less really is more (and easier to maintain).



Craig Barnes and Nancy Kostelac taking a well-earned break.

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Further west, the Salmon Side Trail received improved blazing. While an older version of the trail is still hikeable, the official loop is now better marked to help prevent those 'I meant to go this way' moments. If you're in the area, consider also hiking up the small hill near the parking lot for panoramic views to the east, north, and west - your reward for a little extra effort.

Across the King Chapter, formal spring and fall inspections were completed in 2025, along with the addition of more permanent blazes. Special blazing attention was given to road sections along Dufferin Street and west of Jane Street to the King/Caledon Townline. Work to improve off-road blazing will resume in Spring 2026 during a dry spell - because, as learned the hard way, painting blazes in damp conditions is more of an abstract art exercise than a lasting solution.

As in previous years, the trail west of Highway 27 near the Groombridge property demanded a disproportionate amount of maintenance time. The grasses and weeds in this section seem to grow with unstoppable enthusiasm - clearly not interested in taking a drought year off. Regular mowing and trimming is essential for keeping the trail passable (and visible). The King Chapter maintenance team again extends our sincere thanks to Brian Millage, Bill McCullough and others for their continued assistance.

In addition to these outdoor pursuits, we realized that keeping the King Chapter maintenance team organized required more than good intentions and strong coffee. So, we developed a simple yet comprehensive spreadsheet to track inspections, log issues (and their fixes) and to keep tabs on ongoing maintenance activities - because 'I think we fixed that already' wasn't cutting it.



We also now maintain a photo library of all wooden structures (bridges, stiles, the occasional mystery plank, etc.) across the Chapter, so we actually know where everything is - no more wandering the trail wondering '...wasn't there a bridge here last year'?

Finally, we've established contacts within the York Region office, allowing us to report excessive trash build-up at trailheads. Our 2025 experience has proven that they are quick to respond.



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Let me conclude by thanking Nancy Kostelac, Steve Fisher and the many regular King Chapter hikers for their help (both for their physical work and in reporting issues). It's been a real pleasure working with all of you - and I can confidently say the King Chapter is in much better shape with you involved ...and not just because you made the rest of us look good.



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## CENTRAL REGION REPORT

Brian Millage, Regional Director

### **Aurora, Bruce Corbett, Chapter Chair**

In 2025, the Aurora Chapter got its usual maintenance with all four sections submitting their TCRs through our new on-line reporting program. Thanks to captains Mike and Nancy O'Reilly, Kevin Prins, Jody Raffensperger and Mel Rosenfeld.

The Case Woodlot got its annual spring clean-up thanks to a group of avid bush tidiers.

In June, at the annual Aurora Street Festival along Yonge Street, Lissa Dwyer and her loyal volunteers did a great job of introducing ORTA and our hiking trails to the general public as several thousand people strolled by their ORTA booth.



As ORTA Chapter Chair for Aurora, I have had meetings with Town of Aurora personnel. These meetings have yielded progress on our long-awaited project to connect the Oak Ridges Trail as it passes through Aurora with the new trails now available within the Highland Gate development. In spring 2026, we plan to map out a new side trail link from the Case Woodlot on Henderson Drive and north to Kennedy Street. The new side trail will provide options for either an “express” or a “scenic route” through Aurora. Like the traditional trail, the new route will connect to Yonge Street but will offer significantly more off-road trail through the town.

On the Klaus Wehrenberg Trail, we got wished a Happy New Year by this guy. (His name is probably Bill Post.) We offered our best wishes in return and enjoyed a giggle.



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## **Richmond Hill, John Weston, Trail Captain**

In 2025, I continued spring and fall inspection and garbage/recycling clean-up on the section between the Bethesda Rd and Old Colony Road parking lots. Standard ORTA trail reports were submitted including photos and description of deficiencies.

The trail is a multi-use section in a semi urban area and is part of the TRCA Corridor extending from Bethesda Rd to Bathurst St. The eastern section has been renamed Dave Barrow Trail after a former mayor of Richmond Hill. The gravel trail is generally well maintained with two exceptions. There are sections with considerable erosion due to increasingly frequent heavy rainstorms, and large amounts of litter and trash at both parking lots typically as shown here. The erosion is a particular problem for cyclists.



The trail has been developed over the years and includes detailed trail maps expanded parking and numbered posts. The adjacent trails are heavily used by mountain bikers who groom about 27km of side trails during winter using “snow dogs”. This makes hiking easier and more enjoyable. Parking restrictions are in force along Bethesda Rd

From a hiking perspective, trail use has continued during 2025. Thanks to Linda Weston who continued to lead evening hikes during the summer, to Amir who led weekend hikes and to Jane Hu for various other hikes.

## **Whitchurch-Stouffville, Scott Heaslip & Olivia Petrie, Co-Chapter Chairs and Deputy Co-Chairs Tracy McNaught and Ryan Zylstra**

### **Trail Inspections**

The Whitchurch-Stouffville Chapter of ORTA looks after eleven Oak Ridges Moraine trail sections, extending from the York Durham Townline to Highway 404. In all, there are eleven trails, nine are part of the York Region Forest and two are part of the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.

Our twenty-one volunteer trail captains and co-captains continue to be committed stewards for these trails – conducting inspections twice annually, keeping the trails clear of branches and undergrowth, and maintaining the blazes and signage throughout the trails. This year we welcomed Brian Beech and his family who have taken on the main trail on the Hall Tract, and we are grateful to Tracy McNaught for guiding them through their first inspection.

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Specifically, a big thank you is extended to the following dedicated volunteers for their work in 2025:

1. Christine Ugarenko and Daniel Braganza, Clarke Tract, Main and Side Trails
2. Mel Young and Rob Young, Dainty Tract, including Jesse Thompson Road
3. Ryan Zylstra, Eldred King Tract, Main Trail
4. Rob Robotham and Daniel Robotham, Eldred King Tract, Side Trail
5. Brian Beech and family, Hall Tract, Main Trail
6. Caroline Schweitzer and Vicky Edgell, Hall Tract, Side Trail
7. Noel Bain, Yvonne Field and Dave Hogan, Hollidge Tract, including Ninth Line, Hillsdale Road and Tenth Line
8. Ruth Patterson and Scott Heaslip, Patterson Tract
9. David Smith and Josie Klostranec, Porritt Tract and Pangman Springs Side Trail
10. Evan Ryness and Jim Ryness, Robinson Tract, Main Trail including Warden Road, Slater's Road and Whitchurch Museum Grounds
11. Janet Billard and Bob Murray, Robinson Tract, Side Trail and Whitchurch Conservation Area

The trails in our chapter remain in great shape and some of the inspections were highlighted by owl and deer sightings, early spring flowers and beautiful fall colours. For the most part, the inspections involve touching up the blazes, loosening trail signs (to protect growing trees), collecting litter, trimming branches and clearing the path of fallen branches.

This year, during the Spring inspection period, our trail captains paid special attention to making sure the treadway was in tiptop shape for ORTA Adventure Relay that was held in June. Many of our captains also spent a lot of time clearing the trails of branches that had come down in the high winds we had through the spring and winter, and the extra effort is greatly appreciated.

In addition, some recurring issues were addressed by the team in 2025. On Clarke Tract, the north-south section of the trail had become overgrown and unsafe, and so Christine and Daniel undertook to reroute the trail to follow a larger trail that ran parallel to it. At Eldred King, we have been monitoring the erosion on a portion of the trail on the north side of the parking lot, but found that it had degraded to the extent that it was becoming unsafe and so, in collaboration with the Forestry team, we have taken steps to open a gate and reroute the trail away from the eroded section. As well, we improved the navigation on Oak Ridges Trail section where the Clarke Tract connects with the Patterson Tract.

The Chapter also works closely with the team at the Region, and the larger issues noted through the inspections are reported to York Forestry and Conservation Authorities for follow up. In 2025, these issues included fallen trees, erosion and drainage issues, plus garbage and construction rubble in the parking lots.

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## Of Note

**Thank You Janet, Bob and Christine!** – Janet Billard and Bob Murray have stepped down after many years of looking after the Robinson Side Trail and Whitchurch Conservation area. As well, Christine Ugarenko has stepped down after two years serving as Co-Captain of the Clarke Trail. Our deepest thanks to you all for your dedication to ORTA over the years.

**National Forest Week Festival** – This year ORTA participated in York Region's Forest Week Festival held at the Bill Fisch Stewardship and Education Centre on July 18 2025, attended by over 400 nature enthusiasts. Scott Heaslip and Olivia Petrie staffed a booth providing information about ORTA and our hikes, and Scott also provided a number of guided hikes throughout the day.



Tracy McNaught at Clarke (left)

Rob Young trimming branches (right)

Mel Young painting blazes (below)



Josipa Klostranec at Porritt Tract (left)

Caroline Schweitzer trimming branches (right)



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## EASTERN REGION REPORT

Brian Millage, Regional Director

### **Uxbridge, Co-Chairs Jon McPhee & Brian Millage**

ORTA hike leaders were active in Uxbridge this past year as numerous slow/mod, moderate and mod/fast hikes were offered to members and non-members. There was a fair response to Saturday morning moderate hikes which allowed working members to attend. Some of the favourite trailheads were Secord Forest, Pathways at Pleasure Valley and the Brock Tract (both on Brock Rd.), and North Walker Woods, as these are free parking areas. Glen Major and Walker Woods with pay parking also saw increased use.

Maintenance crews appreciated the lack of major storm damage along our trails this year, but were still kept busy by the occasional fallen tree and the constant need to trim and mow meadow trails from May to late August. Once again, the popular Secord Forest trails demanded the most attention as older boardwalks needed repairs. We welcomed Tomasz Solkowski, ORTA's new Trail Director, who will solicit and organize volunteers to replace sections of the existing boardwalks on the Secord blue trail. For many years, Martin Earle and other Uxbridge trail captains have worked hard to keep this scenic trail open, forming a 4km loop with the main trail. Similarly, there will need to be upgrades to the boardwalks on the scenic road allowance between the town line and the second concession, maintained by Jon and Dian McPhee.

As Jon and I attended several Uxbridge Stewardship meetings during the year, we were kept up to date on progress of the new Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park. The core section located on the Old Stouffville Rd. west of the 6th concession was officially opened. It has several marked trails and some roadside parking. Several ORTA hike leaders have led introductory walks through this area and the adjacent forests.

We welcomed the resumption of the Adventure Relay which had been interrupted by the covid epidemic. Many thanks to the Trail Hub Resort for allowing their property to serve as the finish line for the half Relay, and a checkpoint for the full Relay. Once again, they have offered their excellent facilities for the June 13, 2026 Relay.

In summary, the trails of Uxbridge are scenic and wander through a variety of forests and meadows with occasional stream headwaters and former mill ponds. The Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, the Trans Canada Trail and the Rouge National Urban Park all meet here. The trails are maintained by a partnership among the TRCA, LSRCA and a small group of ORTA volunteers. These volunteers and chapter chairs have trimmed brush, cut fallen trees and mowed meadow trails for 15 to 20 years to provide safe walking routes for a wide variety of trail users- hikers, cyclists, equestrians and skiers, to mention a few. It is time for another generation of trail users to step forward, to maintain safe hiking trails, and to share the enjoyable but responsible task of leading hikes. Please consider joining the ORTA Team.

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### **Clarington, Chapter Chair, Karen Graham**

I would like to extend my thanks to my sister-in-law Debi for joining me for a short but much-appreciated stint as Co-Chair of the Clarington Chapter.

My gratitude also goes to Debi, Sheila, Barb, Becky, Dan, Kevin, Bob, and Russ for their support in ensuring the trail was inspected and maintained in advance of the June 2025 Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay. Your efforts made a significant difference.

The Clarington Chapter continues to require additional leadership and Trail Captains to help cover the twice-annual inspection requirements. Even a modest contribution of time can have a meaningful impact.

On a lighter note, I still regret not retrieving the fallen sign I noticed at the Old Swamp Road trailhead. When I returned, it had disappeared entirely. Many of you may remember that sign well—perhaps someday someone will feel inspired to recreate it.

In early 2025, ORTA finalized an agreement with a new landowner west of the Hwy 35/115 tunnel. Thanks to volunteer Kevin's help, we were able to blaze the route and install private-property signage to officially open this new section of trail. We also benefited from the new equipment acquired through a Greenbelt Foundation grant, which greatly assisted in clearing and maintaining several overgrown areas of trail.

Looking ahead, we hope to build stronger relationships with landowners in the Clarington area—many of whom are understandably protective of their properties and take neighbourhood watch responsibilities seriously. Warm, respectful engagement will be essential to improving trust and cooperation.

Please refer to the Northumberland Chapter report for additional detail on our ongoing challenges with the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA). In brief, beyond the gap in our trail, the GRCA is currently preventing us from removing old blazes or marking the new re-route. This has unfortunately led to through-hikers becoming lost or unintentionally following outdated trail sections.

The GRCA has also proposed introducing a new wayfinding system that would require ORTA to pay for, install, and maintain over 300 markers along a 10 km section of the Ganaraska West Forest. This level of maintenance far exceeds the capacity of our volunteer base.

We remain hopeful that through the Greenbelt Foundation's Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy, we can continue to foster improved relationships with landowners and move toward workable solutions for the Clarington and Ganaraska trail sections.

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### **Scugog, Chapter Chairs Mike & Joanne Baker**

The Scugog section of the ORTA trail provides hikers with a variety of opportunities to explore the region situated North of Whitby and Oshawa from Lakeridge Road to where the trail meets the Clarington section at Long Sault. Continuing in our role as chapter co-chairs for the 2025 season has provided us the opportunity to meet fellow hikers, get our feet and hands dirty, and generally feel a sense of community within the greater ORTA organization.

With the 2025 return of the Adventure Relay, we were tasked with refreshing and confirming blazes along much of the Scugog section of the Relay route. Travelling west, we were able to repair/repaint/replace all blazes and make sure they were visible for racers. The plan for spring 2026 is to do the same travelling east from the western end to Long Sault. 2025 also saw the installation of ORTA “busy hwy crossing” signage where the Scugog section crosses Simcoe Street (north of Oshawa).

Once again, and due to significant seasonal precipitation, we found that the grasses and vegetation required multiple trimming sessions. Mid-summer and a fall clean-up of the grasses especially along the trail edges in the eastern half of the Lakeridge-Ashburn trail were completed. The need for consistent trimming makes it obvious that a consistent effort is required on this well-used trail throughout the summer months. Our quest for volunteers will continue and now that we have new equipment, the job at hand will be swift!

The ORTA table at the Brooklin Harvest Festival in October provided us another great opportunity to meet with curious hikers. For the 3rd straight year, many curious Brooklin-ites stopped by the table and we were able to advise folks about the trail in general, advocated for memberships, and pumped up the Adventure Relay. We will be putting in our 4th application to secure our spot at this great street festival in 2026.

## OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

### **Northumberland, Chapter Chair Scott Cecchin (submitted by Karen Graham)**

Thank you to Scott Cecchin for his dedicated stewardship as Chapter Chair for the section of trail extending from the Ganaraska Forest Centre eastward to both the Warkworth and Castleton termini—a distance of approximately 75 km. While Scott is stepping down from the Chapter Chair role, we are grateful that he will continue to support the trail as a Trail Captain.

Thank you to Trail Captains in Northumberland - Val, Jenna, James, Holly, Dan and Scott who will be assisting with trail oversight and maintenance.

In addition, Scott has worked closely with staff from the Nature Conservancy of Canada to ensure the blue side trail through the Hazel Bird Nature Reserve is clearly marked. Although the Northumberland Chapter is geographically distant for many of our members, we encourage anyone who can spare the time—even once or twice a year—to assist with inspections and maintenance in the east. Northumberland County is a truly beautiful section of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail and greatly benefits from this support.

### **Trail Access Challenges**

While ORTA has signed an agreement with the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) for the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, we are currently facing significant access issues that are distressing for many long-time stewards. In Northumberland, we have lost access through the east forest and around Robb's Hill in the Municipality of Port Hope. Long-standing trail stewards advise that this route lies on road allowance; however, we are now being told it is private property.

It has been suggested that ORTA may need to obtain legal counsel to help resolve these issues and restore the trail gaps on both the east and west sides of the Ganaraska Forest. We are currently waiting for GRCA to clarify what information or documentation they require before we explore potential legal costs and next steps. We also reached out to the Municipality of Port Hope over a year ago seeking guidance and have not yet received a response.

These challenges are considerable—particularly for a volunteer-driven organization.

### **Northumberland Forest Agreement**

We are also working toward an agreement with Northumberland County regarding the trail route through the Northumberland Forest. Unfortunately, the terms currently proposed require monthly or bi-monthly inspections depending on the season. With very few volunteers in Northumberland, these inspection requirements are not feasible. Our Trail Director is actively negotiating to find a more realistic alternative.

### **Work with the Township of Alnwick/Haldimand**

Finally, Bob Comfort and I met with the Municipal Clerk for the Township of Alnwick/Haldimand to discuss a formal trail agreement for the ORM Trail and the possibility of rerouting a section of the trail off-road. We are now awaiting their review and consideration.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## HIKE PROGRAM

Derek Cowbourne, ORTA Hike Coordinator

I am pleased to report that the 2025 hike program was busy and very popular. There were:

270 hikes led by 29 hike leaders.

2937 hike participants (2793 Members & Guests, 144 Non-Members)

290 individual members (and occasional guests) went on hikes.

2842 km covered on the hikes, or 29,417 km if you sum the individual hikers.

All the numbers are similar to 2024's and thank you to everyone who participated. But my special thanks go to ORTA's hike leaders, your time and efforts are very much appreciated by all our hikers.

All ORTA hike leaders are required to be Hike Ontario certified, and, in 2025, two members successfully took an on-line course run by Hike Ontario: Angela Barbetta and Liz Elliot.

With the increasing number of hikers, we can always benefit from more active hike leaders and more hikes: there seems to be a growing demand for more Moderate paced hikes and, with a changing of the guard, new leaders for the Monday slow-mod hikes would be a big help. More courses will be offered throughout the year, so please let me know if you are interested in becoming an ORTA hike leader.

Completing the End-to-End of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail is a major accomplishment, whether it takes a year or more to complete it or it's done within a few weeks. So many congratulations to the following E2Eers who received their badge in 2025: non-members Bonnie and Rob Langille, and members David Atkins, Don Hatch and Galina Szlapetis.

My continuing thanks to Michele in the office and on her own time, to Bob Comfort for managing the post-hike database, and to Karen Graham for her on-going support.

I look forward to a continued growth in ORTA hikes in 2026, enjoyed by an increasing number of members, led by an increasing number of leaders, from end to end of the Oak Ridges Trail.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION –2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## ADVENTURE RELAY 2025 Jeremy Reesor, Relay Coordinator

On June 7, 2025, the Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay returned after several years on hiatus, marking a significant milestone for ORTA. The nearly 160 km, 14-stage, multi-discipline event ran from Gore’s Landing in the east to Aurora in the west, bringing together 139 racers and mobilizing volunteers, partners, sponsors, and landowners across the Moraine.

The day began just before 8:00 a.m. on Rice Lake and concluded shortly after 9:00 p.m. at the Aurora Family Leisure Centre. In between, teams paddled, mountain biked, and ran through forests, farmland, and trail systems that represent the breadth of the Moraine landscape. Weather cooperated, and the energy from participants was palpable from start to finish.

The relay featured both Full and Half course options, as well as an Elite division in which checkpoint time counted toward overall results. The top Full team (Jefferson Crew) completed the course in 11:04:54 time on course, while Dracula’s Shtafengers Strike Back took on the Elite category. The Half Relay concluded at Trail Hub, providing a strong mid-course focal point and an accessible entry point for new teams.

More important than podium placements was the clear enthusiasm from participants. Many expressed deep appreciation for the event’s return, reinforcing the Relay’s reputation as one of ORTA’s signature programs and a meaningful community tradition.



### Organizational Mobilization

Bringing the Relay back required a whole-organization effort.

The race committee (David Atkins, Weibo Cheng, Bob Comfort, Val Dodge, Karen Graham, Gaye Mas, Mark Mueller, Anna Sunn, and Karla Warkentin) divided responsibilities across logistics, safety, communications, course design, and checkpoint coordination. Several members were new to the Relay but assumed significant operational roles in a

short timeline.

Michele Donnelly played an especially critical role in the relaunch. Her institutional knowledge, past documentation, landowner relationships, and volunteer network provided the operational backbone necessary to revive a complex event. Her leadership and persistence were instrumental in coordinating permits, course revisions, and volunteer recruitment.

## OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION –2026 ANNUAL REPORT

On race day, checkpoint captains and their teams were the operational engine of the event. Each captain managed local logistics, including route marking, volunteer coordination, racer timing, refreshments and hydration, safety oversight, and participant support. Participant feedback once again highlighted the quality and hospitality of ORTA’s volunteer teams as a defining feature of the event.



The team at Checkpoint 13

### **Partnerships and Community Support**

The Relay would not have been possible without collaboration across multiple municipalities, conservation authorities, regional forests, and private landowners. Several partners waived fees, expedited permits, or provided in-kind support to enable the course. This cooperative framework underscores

ORTA’s trusted relationships throughout the region.

Key sponsors and supporters included The Greenbelt Foundation (whose significant grant supported relaunch costs and some trail infrastructure upgrades), as well as sponsors and prize donors Rouge River Farms, SAIL, Skratch Labs, Brimacombe, and Turf Care Canada.

### **Impact and Looking Ahead**

The 2025 Relay successfully demonstrated ORTA’s ability to coordinate a large-scale, multi-jurisdictional event that showcases the Moraine, engages hundreds of participants and volunteers, and strengthens regional partnerships.

Beyond race results, the event:

- Reactivated a flagship program after several years’ absence
- Generated renewed participant momentum for 2026
- Strengthened relationships with landowners
- Reinforced ORTA’s volunteer-driven model of leadership and stewardship

The return of the Adventure Relay reaffirmed its role as both a community celebration and a strategic organizational initiative. Planning for June 13, 2026 is well underway, building on the operational framework and partnerships re-established with the relaunch.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## TREASURER'S REPORT

Anna Sunn, Treasurer

Thank you to members Russ Burton and Bob Comfort for completing this year's internal review of the financial statements.

### Statement of Operations

The results are very positive for 2025 with ORTA having achieved a Total Surplus of \$14,593, our first surplus in 5 years. This compares to a Total Shortfall for 2024 of \$13,744, for a total increase year-over-year of \$28,337.

Significant contributing factors include an increase in donations of approx. \$8,000; the reduction in administration payroll overhead of approx. \$12,500; and a Net Surplus achieved on the Adventure Relay of approx. \$6,700.

Compared to budget, the Total 2025 Surplus exceeds plan by approx. \$4,300. This increase is largely due to the increase in donations of approx. \$8,000; a larger allocation of grant funding to Relay administrative overhead than anticipated; offset by approx. \$3,000 less earned on the Relay over plan. Although Relay revenue came in approx. \$7,900 under plan, tight control of expenses resulting in total Relay costs approx. \$4,900 under plan.

Grant revenue and expenditures: ORTA received generous grant funding for operations of \$29,000 from **The Greenbelt Foundation** and \$1,000 from **The TransCanada Trail Foundation**. These grants funded:

- The digitized mapping of our trail on the Ondago app now available at no cost to users
- Significant new equipment purchases including a Kombi powerhead and hedge trimmer, three cordless chainsaws, a cordless brush cutter, loppers, pruners, and a trailer hitch and basket
- A comprehensive trail audit including GPS and photographic documentation of all trail assets available in a GIS-ready asset database, and
- Substantial support of administrative costs to aid in the re-launch of the Adventure Relay

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## Statement of Financial Position

ORTA ended the year with a strong Net Asset position of \$73,358. The Cash and Short-term Investments balance of \$133,522 is high over prior years and budget as it includes the Deferred Grant Funding balance of \$59,323, as discussed below.

In addition to the grant revenue received for ORTA operations as discussed above, ORTA is administrating the funding for the **Greenbelt Foundation's Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy**, a long-term initiative to revitalize and enhance the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. The Trail Strategy and the implementation thereof represent a partnership between the Greenbelt Foundation, ORTA, the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, municipalities, conservation authorities and First Nations communities. ORTA received \$96,983 in funding for this initiative in 2025. The Deferred Grant Funding balance of \$59,323 as at December 31, 2025 represents grant funds received for which there have not yet been expenditures.

## 2026 Budget

Our 2026 Budget reflects donation and membership income consistent with normal receipts for the past 2 years.

Administration payroll expense reflects paid administrative support continuing at 1 day per week. All other recurring expenses are budgeted in-line with actuals for 2025. Additional budgeted items for 2026 include: Increase in D&O Insurance - \$440; Professional fees for tax consultation - \$1,500; Chainsaw training - \$2,500; First Aid re-certification training for hike leaders - \$1,000; and a contract position for a volunteer & executive recruiter - \$4,500.

The projected Relay Net Surplus of \$12,437 reflects an anticipated increase in entry fees of \$1,600 over 2025 results and the allocation of \$10,000 from the Trail Strategy Grant to support Relay operating expenses. Expenses are largely held consistent with 2025 actuals, with the exception of the Race Director fee of \$4,500, new for 2026.

The projected result of the above is a Total Surplus for 2026 of approx. \$1,150, being a Shortfall from normal operations of \$11,290, offset by a Relay Surplus of \$12,437. The Operations Shortfall represents the spending of the 2025 Surplus. The result over the 2 years would be a Total Surplus of \$15,740, resulting in a projected Net Asset position at the end of 2026 of approx. \$74,500.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION - 2026 ANNUAL REPORT

**Oak Ridges Trail Association  
Statement of Financial Position**

As at December 31	Actual 2024	Actual 2025	Budget 2025	Budget 2026
<b>Assets</b>				
Cash and short term investments	\$ 70,038	\$ 133,522	\$ 64,340	\$ 72,055
Prepaid expense	-	1,419	-	-
Guidebook inventory	7,600	4,900	5,100	2,400
HST receivable	1,242	1,544	1,000	1,000
	\$ 78,880	\$ 141,385	\$ 70,440	\$ 75,455
<b>Liabilities</b>				
Deferred grant funding	\$ 18,000	\$ 59,323	\$ -	\$ -
Accounts payable and accruals	713	474	714	500
Payroll taxes payable	1,402	8,230	700	450
	20,115	68,027	1,414	\$ 950
Net assets beginning of year	72,508	58,765	58,765	73,358
Operations (shortfall) surplus for year	(13,743)	14,593	10,261	1,147
Net assets end of year	58,765	73,358	69,026	74,505
<b>Total liabilities and net assets</b>	<b>\$ 78,880</b>	<b>\$ 141,385</b>	<b>\$ 70,440</b>	<b>\$ 75,455</b>

Approved on behalf of the Board:

  
 Lissa Dwyer, Secretary

  
 Anna Sunn, Treasurer

March 31, 2026

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION - 2026 ANNUAL REPORT

**Oak Ridges Trail Association  
Statement of Operations**

For the year ended December 31	Actual 2024	Actual 2025	Budget 2025	Budget 2026
<b>Operations revenue</b>				
Membership dues	\$ 19,315	\$ 18,875	\$ 18,000	\$ 18,000
Donations	9,884	17,837	10,000	10,000
Grants	-	21,191	25,750	2,000
Discovery nights income	3,749	3,370	3,500	3,500
Guidebook sales	4,242	2,665	2,500	2,500
Promotional sales	1,585	195	-	-
Interest income	2,351	2,040	1,600	1,200
Other income	1,496	426	-	-
<b>Total operations revenue</b>	<b>\$ 42,622</b>	<b>\$ 66,598</b>	<b>\$ 61,350</b>	<b>\$ 37,200</b>
<b>Operating expenses</b>				
Administration - payroll	\$ 27,176	\$ 14,617	\$ 17,300	\$ 13,000
Administration - other	1,431	1,897	1,114	1,400
Guidebook costs	7,689	3,156	2,500	2,500
Membership database and support	2,516	5,514	4,800	5,400
Rent	2,400	-	-	-
Communication costs	2,118	1,628	1,700	1,700
Insurance	2,092	2,407	2,100	2,840
Association membership costs	931	673	1,050	700
Trail maintenance	859	2,044	1,000	4,250
Discovery nights expense	874	347	1,000	400
All other	3,923	2,699	1,950	2,500
Public Relations	461	824	500	800
Professional fees - IT	-	1,731	-	1,500
Professional fees - tax	-	-	-	1,500
Training - chainsaw and first aid	-	-	-	3,500
Executive and volunteer recruiter	-	-	-	4,500
Website modernization	3,895	-	-	-
<b>Grant allocation:</b>				
Volunteer appreciation	-	-	-	1,000
Digital mapping - Ondago	-	5,959	6,000	-
Equipment purchases	-	6,118	6,750	-
Ganaraska forest trail infrastructure	-	-	13,000	-
Trail building and audit	-	9,114	-	1,000
<b>Total operating expenses</b>	<b>\$ 56,366</b>	<b>\$ 58,728</b>	<b>\$ 60,764</b>	<b>\$ 48,490</b>
<b>Operations surplus (shortfall)</b>	<b>\$ (13,744)</b>	<b>\$ 7,870</b>	<b>\$ 586</b>	<b>\$ (11,290)</b>
<b>Adventure Relay surplus</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 6,723</b>	<b>\$ 9,675</b>	<b>\$ 12,437</b>
<b>Total surplus (shortfall)</b>	<b>\$ (13,744)</b>	<b>\$ 14,593</b>	<b>\$ 10,261</b>	<b>\$ 1,147</b>

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION - 2026 ANNUAL REPORT

### Oak Ridges Trail Association

#### Statement of Operations - Adventure Relay

	Budget 2025	Actual 2025	Budget 2026
<b>Operations revenue</b>			
Entry Fees	\$ 15,000	\$ 7,615	\$ 9,250
Greenbelt grant applied to Relay	5,500	8,809	10,000
Donations	2,175	250	200
Sponsorship	1,450	2,900	3,000
	<u>\$ 24,125</u>	<u>\$ 19,574</u>	<u>\$ 22,450</u>
<b>Operating expenses</b>			
Administration	\$ 4,000	\$ 8,315	\$ 4,500
Advertising	-	300	300
Marketing and promotion	2,000	494	500
Banner/signage	-	195	200
Race Roster fees (5%)	750	396	413
Travel expense	2,000	198	200
Meals	250	-	-
Insurance	1,250	1,350	1,350
Participant tracking	500	-	-
Competitors' ID	-	262	300
Awards & prizing	200	-	650
Permit and facility rental	-	705	700
Volunteer t-shirts	-	414	400
Other	3,500	222	500
	<u>\$ 14,450</u>	<u>\$ 12,851</u>	<u>\$ 10,013</u>
<b>Adventure Relay surplus</b>	<u><u>\$ 9,675</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 6,723</u></u>	<u><u>\$ 12,437</u></u>

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## **TRAIL DIRECTOR**

Tomasz Solkowski

I joined ORTA as Trail Director in late 2025 and am grateful to the ORTA community for the warm welcome and continued support as I continue to learn the organization and contribute to its trail stewardship goals.

Since taking on this role, my work has focused on supporting semi-annual trail inspections, building strong relationships with Chapter Chairs and volunteers, identifying priority areas and tools for improved trail management, and advancing initiatives that strengthen stewardship across the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. I am excited by the opportunity to help make the trail a jewel of Ontario and to expand its benefits for nature enthusiasts across the province and beyond.

### **Looking Back at 2025**

#### **Partnership with the Greenbelt Foundation**

In 2025, ORTA's continued partnership with the Greenbelt Foundation played a vital role in strengthening trail stewardship across the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. Grant funding supported a productive year marked by collaboration and tangible, on-the-ground improvements.

A key outcome of this partnership was the acquisition of dedicated trail maintenance equipment, addressing a longstanding need for shared tools across the east, central, and west sections of the trail. Funding enabled the purchase of three battery-powered chainsaws, two string trimmers, and a range of pruners. These lightweight, shared tools have significantly improved efficiency during periods of rapid vegetation growth. ORTA extends sincere thanks to Bob Comfort for his assistance in sourcing this equipment.

The partnership also supported the digitization of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail map through the Greenbelt Foundation's Accessible Greenbelt funding stream. All trail sections are now available on the Ondago app, allowing users to navigate the trail in real time at no cost. This initiative represents an important step toward improving accessibility and ease of navigation. ORTA thanks Bob Comfort and David Atkins for their leadership in bringing this project to completion.

#### **Trail Inspections and Stewardship Activities**

I am pleased to report that the entire Oak Ridges Moraine Trail was inspected in both spring and fall 2025, with all inspection reports submitted online. These inspections were made possible through the dedication of ORTA's Chapter Chairs, Trail Captains, and trail maintenance volunteers, whose ongoing efforts are essential to keeping the trail safe, enjoyable, and well maintained.

## OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION –2026 ANNUAL REPORT

ORTA also extends its appreciation to the Green Durham Association for generously lending equipment, including mowers, chainsaws, and trimmers. Additional thanks go to members who donated building materials and volunteered their time to repair trail structures throughout the year.

### **Looking Ahead**

Building on the progress made in 2025, the coming year will focus on strengthening the systems and leadership capacity that support effective, long-term trail stewardship.

A key priority is the establishment and initial use of a shared online inventory system to manage equipment, signage, and other trail-related materials across the entire trail. This system will improve visibility of available resources, reduce duplication, and support more timely maintenance and repairs.

ORTA also plans to introduce a centralized process for recording and tracking work arising from semi-annual trail inspections, as well as reports submitted by hikers and other trail users. A consistent, centralized approach will help ensure that identified issues are documented, prioritized, and addressed more efficiently, while improving communication among volunteers, chapter leadership, and trail users.

Volunteers remain essential to ORTA's success. Current priorities include recruiting a Co-Chapter Chair for Uxbridge, and Chapter Chairs for Northumberland, Clarington and Caledon. Those leadership roles play a vital part in coordinating inspections, organizing work days, mentoring new volunteers, and serving as local points of contact with partners and communities. There is also a particular need for active volunteers at the east and west ends of the trail, where on-the-ground support are critical to maintaining trail quality and continuity. Efforts are also underway to expand the trained chainsaw volunteer team to increase ORTA's capacity for more complex maintenance work.

### **Special Thanks**

ORTA recognizes Brian Millage for his many years of dedicated service as Chapter Chair for Uxbridge and for his contributions to trail stewardship and volunteer leadership.

Thank you to everyone who supports ORTA through volunteering, partnerships, donations, and trail use. Your involvement helps ensure the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail remains a valued and well-cared-for resource for generations to come.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## Side Trail Badge Challenge

John McCuaig and Tessa Shelvey

The Oak Ridges Trail Association was thrilled to see such enthusiastic participation in our new [Side Trail Badge Challenge](#) this year. Designed to encourage hikers to deepen their connection with the Moraine by exploring its many side trails, the challenge invited participants to complete **15 ORTA side trails within a 12-month period**. Hikers embraced the adventure wholeheartedly, demonstrating dedication, curiosity, and a shared commitment to trail stewardship. The program has quickly become one of ORTA's most engaging initiatives, inspiring people to step off the main trail and discover new landscapes, ecosystems, and points of interest across the Moraine.

This year's response exceeded expectations, with hikers of all experience levels taking part. Many shared that the challenge motivated them to explore new sections of the trail system, hike more frequently, and connect with others completing the badge. For many, the Side Trail Badge became a meaningful symbol of personal accomplishment and a shared appreciation for the natural beauty and diversity of the Oak Ridges Moraine. The positive feedback speaks to the strength and appeal of the program, and we look forward to expanding its reach in the coming year.

We extend our warmest congratulations to the following individuals who successfully completed the challenge and earned their **Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Side Trail Badge: Joanne, Joan, Lillian, Tessa, John, Ruth, Jonathan, Bill, Yvonne, Dave, Heather, Mary Ellen, John, Sheila, Pat, Jackie, Margret, and Sandra**. Their achievements reflect the spirit of exploration and community that defines ORTA. Special thanks to the Toronto Bruce Trail Club and Ganaraska Hiking Trail Association for organizing group hikes to complete the challenge. Thank you to all who participated and helped make this year's challenge such a success—we hope to see even more hikers take part next year!



# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION –2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## PUBLICITY

Karen Graham, Publicity Coordinator

Thank you to everyone who contributes to promoting our Association and the Trail. Together, we're spreading the love for hiking and the Oak Ridges Moraine to even more people!

### Website

- Special thanks also to Steve Fisher and Hannah Sweet for their ongoing support in keeping the website fresh and up to date.
- Over the winter, interest in the ORTA website naturally slowed, but as spring approached, visitors began returning quickly. The website continues to be an essential resource for people looking to explore the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, learn about events, and find practical information.
- Most people who visit the site already know ORTA or are returning members, which shows strong community connection. At the same time, many new visitors continue to find us through Google searches, confirming that the website remains a primary point of discovery for those learning about the trail for the first time.
- Trail-related content—such as maps, route changes, and information about the Moraine—draws the strongest engagement. Events, particularly the Adventure Relay, also attract a lot of attention. This reflects what we see on the ground: people are looking for ways to explore, participate, and stay informed.
- As more visitors browse from their phones, improving the mobile experience will help everyone access information more easily. The site performs well overall, and a few simple updates—like clearer navigation for newcomers, stronger membership prompts, and better tracking of online activity—will help us understand our impact and support future growth.
- In short, the website is working well as the digital front door for ORTA. With a few improvements, it can do even more to welcome new hikers, support members, and strengthen awareness of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail.

### Social Media

- Our Facebook and Instagram accounts are regularly updated with new posts, thanks to our wonderful hike and nature photographers.
- ORTA's Facebook page 567 followers
- ORTA's Facebook group 1,700 members
- ORTA's Instagram 396 followers

### Exhibits and Promotion

- In 2025, ORTA had a booth at the Aurora Street Festival, Brooklin Fall Festival and Uxbridge Active Living Fair. Thank you to our volunteers that gave their time to promote ORTA.
- If you'd like to promote ORTA at a community fair or event, we can supply you with a display board, promotional cards, and other materials.
- We also have a supply of promotional rack cards. If you know of a local library, community center, or store (e.g., MEC, Sail) that would allow us to leave some cards, please let me know, and I'll send them over.

## OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

### Ongoing Initiatives

- **Weekly Trekker News:** Do you receive this email every Monday? Over 400 members receive the weekly email via WildApricot membership system and over 200 people receive the same message via MailChimp. This is a brief email overview of the hikes in the coming week and upcoming events. Email if you would like to be added to the email list.
- **Quarterly Trail Talk Newsletter:** Thank you to Neil Runnalls for organizing the newsletter. If you'd like to help with content, photos, liaising with advertisers, or editing, please reach out.
- **Community Website Event Calendars:** Thank you to Kathy Hilts for promoting our hikes and events on various community event calendars, including Durham Tourism, Municipality of Clarington, Northumberland Tourism, Uxbridge, York Region, and more. If you know of any other websites where we can promote our events for free, please let us know.
- **Guidebooks:** Thank you to Cathy Souch for continuing to support the distribution and sale of our guidebook inventory.

Contact us at [publicity@oakridgestrail.org](mailto:publicity@oakridgestrail.org)

### Note from Volunteer Coordinator Gaye Mas

When you renew your membership, please update how you would like to volunteer. We have many wonderful volunteers in our association, but we can always do with a few more to lighten the load.

We are looking for someone to look after Discovery Night. If you are interested, please contact me at [gayemas@rogers.com](mailto:gayemas@rogers.com)

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## MEMBERSHIP

Michele Donnelly / Caroline Schweitzer, Membership Coordinator

ORTA membership totalled 639 in 2025 (single, family x 1.25\*, lifetime and student members) compared to 633 in 2024.

Family: 287 (74 new)  
Single: 189 (41 new)  
Lifetime: 90 (1 new)  
Student: 1

As the graph (below) illustrates, our 2025 new membership and overall total numbers stayed essentially the same as 2024.



I (Michele) would especially like to thank Denise Chong who continues to volunteer with ORTA as part of the membership team. Denise is responsible for those lovely notes and cards you receive when a donation has been made either in memory, in honour or in recognition of significant donations. Thank you Denise.

As your membership coordinator, I (Caroline) encourage you to share any thoughts, concerns or ideas with me. I can be reached at [membership@oakridgestrail.org](mailto:membership@oakridgestrail.org).

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## GREENBELT FOUNDATION

Karen Graham

### **Creating and Strengthening Partnerships to Support the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail**

We are excited to share that ORTA has received a two-year partnership grant from the Greenbelt Foundation in the amount of \$193,966. This support builds on our 30-year legacy and helps us look ahead to the next chapter guided by the [Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy](#). It also provides important support for ORTA's ongoing work, including the Adventure Relay.

This partnership is about people and place. It's about reconnecting with the many partners, volunteers, and trail users who love and care for this landscape, while also building new relationships across the region.

This summer, we will be coming together to listen and learn. Through engagement with landowners and trail users, we are seeking input on the preferred trail route, the kinds of experiences people hope to have, and the amenities that help make time on the Trail meaningful and memorable. This will build on the 2003 Optimum Route and support our shared goal of securing the Trail and ensuring more off-road experiences. We are also deepening our relationships with First Nations whose treaty lands the Trail travels through. These conversations will help us honour and share Indigenous histories, voices, and cultural experiences, ensuring the Trail tells a richer and more complete story of the land it passes through.

Guided by two Trail stakeholder and Indigenous-led working groups, we are bringing together a wide range of voices and perspectives to help us along this path. The strength of this collaboration reflects the care and commitment of the many organizations and communities who share a passion for the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, and who are helping us to shape its future for generations to come.



Possibility grows here.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

**Karen Graham**

This past year, ORTA experienced the loss of treasured members whose passion and dedication helped shape our organization. Their contributions live on in every part of our trail community. I encourage those who knew them well to share their stories and memories — hearing how they inspired others reminds us why this work matters so deeply.

I would also like to extend a special thank you to Brian and Wilma Millage for their overwhelming contributions to ORTA over many years. As they step away from the Board of Directors, we acknowledge not only their leadership but their unwavering passion for the trail and for ORTA's mission. It is difficult to express the depth of their contribution. Please join me in thanking them personally for the leadership they have provided ORTA over the years.

We also celebrate a significant win for ORTA with the addition of Tomasz Solkowski. Tomasz has hit the ground running—connecting with Chapter Chairs, completing trail inspections, and helping identify priorities with remarkable dedication. He will be a tremendous asset to ORTA. My gratitude also goes to Garry Niece, who served as Trail Director for several years and guided this important work with care.

Finally, to all of our volunteers: thank you. ORTA thrives because of your time, energy, and commitment. Every hour you give ensures the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail remains a treasure for all who walk it.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION –2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

Gino Pulla, Reza Farmand, Cita Wong

The Nominating Committee is pleased to introduce two new candidates this year:

**Ron Mantay** – Ron brings extensive leadership experience and a lifelong passion for outdoor recreation. For more than eight years, he has explored many parts of the Oak Ridges Trail, developing a strong connection to the Moraine and its landscapes. Ron has served on the Canadian Solar Industries Association Board of Directors and held senior leadership roles at Alectra Utilities. He also enabled many operational and financial improvements at the Richmond Hill Camera Club over a six-year period while a Board Member (two years as President and two years as Vice President). Ron is a longstanding volunteer involved in hiking, canoeing, and nature photography communities. His blend of governance experience, organizational skill, and outdoor enthusiasm will be an asset to ORTA.

**Tomasz Solkowski** – Tomasz is an avid hiker in Canada and abroad. In October 2025, Tomasz began volunteering as our Trail Director and we are benefiting from his leadership. He brings hands-on knowledge of the trail (completed the end-to-end journey of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail), a strong commitment to environmental stewardship, management and professional experience as an IT specialist. His skills support ORTA’s efforts to improve operations, strengthen systems, and engage volunteers. Tomasz will also contribute to work related to the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy.

The following persons have consented to Nomination as Directors-at-Large for the year 2026-2027:

Weibo Cheng	Richmond Hill	Olivia Petrie	Stouffville
Lissa Dwyer	Aurora	Jeremy Reesor	Uxbridge
Karen Graham	Bowmanville	Neil Runnalls	Uxbridge
Ron Mantay	Sharon	Tomasz Solkowski	Newmarket
Garry Niece	Brooklin	Anna Sunn	Uxbridge

Sincere thank you to Brian & Wilma Millage for their long-time service on the Board and endless hours of volunteer work for ORTA. Additionally, thank you to Garry Niece who was in the Trail Director/Vice-President role for several years and will remain on the Board in a Director role.

At their first meeting, the Directors will appoint Officers in accordance with the applicable By-Law.

# OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION -2026 ANNUAL REPORT

## RECOGNITION AWARDS

Wilma Millage, Gaye Mas

Thank you to everyone who took the time to submit nominations for the 2025 awards. We hope that you'll be with us to learn about this year's honourees. If not, they will be published in Trail Talk and on our website after the AGM.

Commendation Award – a maximum of 6 are awarded each year to members who have made specific contributions to the management and development of ORTA and its programs.

Trail Builders Award – a maximum of these are awarded each year to individuals who have made significant contributions to the building and/or maintenance of the trail.

Member of the Year Award – one award can be presented to the member who in recent years has done the most to advance the purposes of ORTA

Lifetime Achievement Award – An occasional award for a recipient who has made a significant contribution of their time and expertise to the work of ORTA over a sustained period of five – ten years.

**HAPPY TRAILS!**

**HOPE TO SEE YOU OUT ON THE TRAIL!**

