

Final Report

Re-Positioning for the Future



A Strategic Plan Review

November, 2005



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Dear Friend of Short Hills Provincial Park:

Re: Re-Positioning for the Future – A Strategic Plan Review

On behalf of the Friends of Short Hills Park I am pleased to present our Final Report that contains highlights of the above initiative.

In July of 2002, after many months of work, the Friends of Short Hills Park produced a Strategic Plan with input from numerous individuals and groups. Three years have elapsed and it was decided to do a formal, but briefer review of our Plan, to monitor progress and determine any changes in priorities.

This strategic review in 2005 reconfirms our Vision and Mission statements, and indicates the significant progress that has been made on a reorganized listing of issues and opportunities and their related initiatives. In this regard we continue to work closely with Ontario Parks and our many partners to protect and enhance this wonderful park.

Any comments or suggestions would be most welcome.

Sincerely,

George Dewar, Chair
Friends of Short Hills Park

1. Introduction

This report documents the review conducted by the Friends of Short Hills Park, of their July 2002 Strategic Plan. Approximately three years have passed and it was deemed appropriate to conduct a formal re-examination of our vision, mission, priorities and status of initiatives identified.

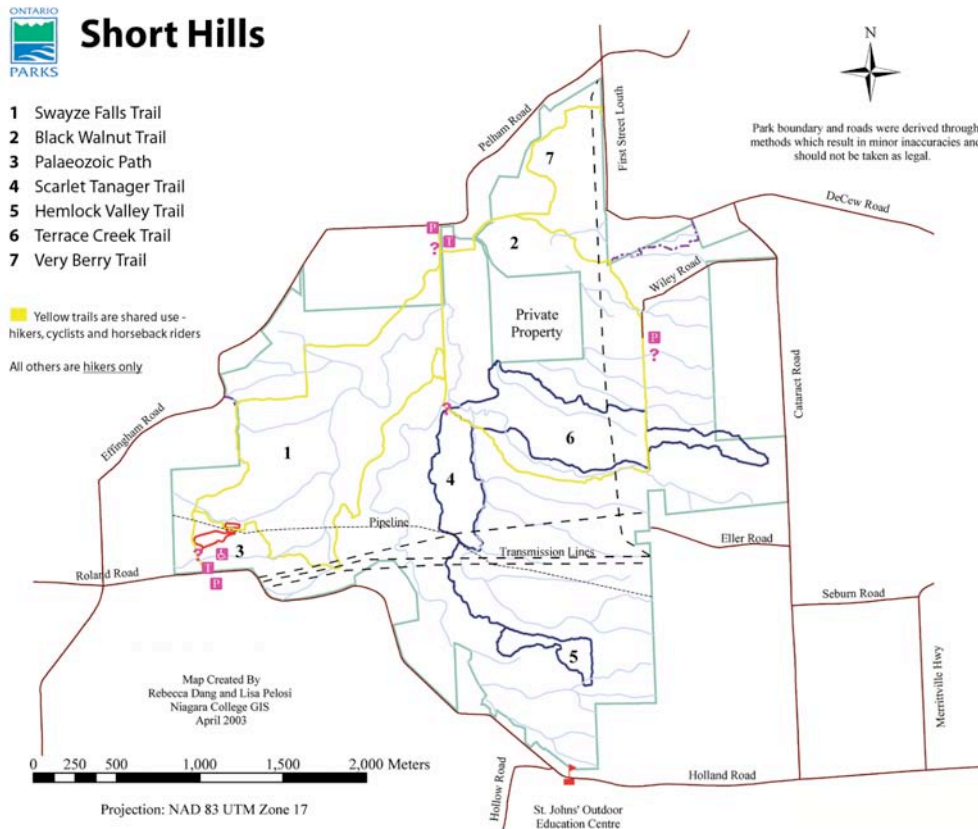
The report updates and draws from the July 10, 2002 Executive Summary *Positioning for the Future, Friends of Short Hills Park, A Strategic Plan*. A background on the 'Friends' organization is provided as well as the results of the strategic plan review.

Who we Are

The Friends of Short Hills Park was incorporated in 1995 as a non-profit, charitable organization to support the implementation of the Park's 1991 Park Management Plan. The 'Friends' group is defined by its organizational structure and the Park which it serves.

Short Hills Provincial Park

As shown below, Short Hills Provincial Park at over 735 hectares in size is the largest single park area in the Niagara Peninsula. It is located in the Regional Municipality of Niagara, within the boundaries of three local municipalities (St. Catharines, Thorold and Pelham).



Since its official creation in 1985, Short Hills Provincial Park has been recognized as an important natural environmental attraction located in the heart of the Niagara region. The Park is recognized for its significant natural features, educational opportunities that include cultural/historical aspects and high quality recreational experiences. It forms part of the core area of the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve and is a nodal park in the eastern Niagara portion of the Carolinian Forest zone of Ontario. An extensive system of seven trails offers recreational and tourism opportunities for walking, birding, mountain biking, horse back riding, sport fishing, cross country skiing and many other recreation activities organized by the 'Friends'.

'Friends' Structure and Operations

The Friends of Short Hills Park has about 60 volunteers and is led by a nine member Board of Directors composed of a chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer and five director positions. A close working relationship has been established with the Assistant Park Superintendent who sits on the Board as an ex-officio member.

A mission statement developed in 1995 defined the 'Friends' purpose as follows:

Friends of Short Hills Park is a community-based, charitable organization dedicated to preserving the cultural and natural integrity of Short Hills Provincial Park through liaison with Ontario Parks, volunteer work, public education and fund raising activities.

General information on activities, membership and meetings can be found on the "Friends" Web site www.friendsofshorthillspark.ca

2. The Strategic Plan Review

The Board of Directors for the Friends of Short Hills Park agreed to begin a formal review of their July 2002 Strategic Plan at the February 28, 2005 Board meeting. The process occurred at 7 Board meetings over a period of approximately 9 months with completion at the November 28, 2005 Board meeting.

Purpose

Strategic planning is a process that examines where an organization is now, defines where it wants to go and then determines how it is going to get there. It is an attempt at direction setting to fulfill a future for the park that the Friends want to happen.

The July 2002 Strategic Plan produced four reports with key products for review in this exercise being the 'Friends' vision, mission, and prioritized issues, opportunities and initiatives.

The future cannot be controlled or predicted, however a strategic plan provides an informed base which will help us to be more proactive rather than reactive. Benefits also

include identifying a common direction, organizing priorities, providing continuity, creating commitment and increasing enthusiasm.

For the “Friends” organization this strategic plan review is seen as a process that can help us do a good job even better.

Process/Steps

The strategic planning review process occurred from February to November 2005 and involved five key steps as outlined below:

1. Vision - review, confirm or modify
2. Mission - review, confirm or modify
3. Prioritized Issues/Opportunities and Initiatives - Review this material in terms of its status, what has been done and what needs to be added.
4. Re-Prioritize the list of Issues/Opportunities and Initiatives - The summary list of 1 to 20 Issues/Opportunities and related initiatives from July 2002 was reviewed to determine any change in priorities.
5. Reports – In addition to this Final Report which represents a summary of the review, a Working Appendix was also documented containing more details of this exercise. These reports would serve to record our efforts, be a base for future reviews and evaluation and could also be used to support grant applications.
6. Consultation – The results of this project were circulated at the 2005 October General Meeting, placed on the ‘Friends’ Website and the final report circulated to interest groups.

Vision and Mission Statements

The Vision and Mission statements below, from the July 2002 Strategic Plan were reviewed, with no changes recommended.

Vision

The Friends of Short Hills Park envision a conserved and enhanced natural area that is noted for its unique geological and distinct Carolinian features, recreational experiences and educational opportunities. This provincial park provides a major focal point for connecting natural and recreational corridors and is a haven for significant land, water and air resources.

Mission

Friends of Short Hills Park is a community based, charitable organization dedicated to conserving the cultural and natural integrity of Short Hills Provincial Park for the people of Ontario, through liaison with Ontario Parks, partnerships, volunteer work, public education and fund raising activities.

Issues, Opportunities, Priorities and Initiatives

The July 2002 Strategic Plan listed issues and opportunities (both external threats and opportunities, and internal strengths and weaknesses) to help understand the many variables that may affect the accomplishment of our vision and mission. With consultative input a total of 34 issues/opportunities were identified and these were then prioritized using a scoring and averaging system that resulted in 20 different priority groupings. A shopping list of initiatives, ranging from activities underway to new ideas, were then identified which were intended to help resolve issues or build upon opportunities.

Most of the plan review time was spent discussing these items in terms of their present status and priority. After a number of drafts, it was decided that the 20 priority issue/opportunity groupings would be placed into three categories (A - Park Uses and Abuses, B - Park Survival/Continuance, and C- Internal Facilities, Assets, Operating). A number of issues were also combined so that the total was reduced to 32. These categorized priorities result in a number of ties across each category and are meant to simplify the list not imply a more detailed prioritization. Any issue or opportunity that is on the list deserves attention, but generally a high concern can be applied to those combined 10 concerns listed from the top 2 or 3 items in each category. A bullet point summary of the results on pages 7, 8, 9 and 10 provides an overview of the re-prioritized issues and opportunities and the status of their related initiatives indicated by check marks

It is noted that the July 2002 Strategic Planning effort produced a shopping list of initiatives that was long term in nature with implementation of any item dependant upon available resources. It is encouraging that of the 155 total initiatives (counting a few duplicates) some degree of progress has been obtained for 96, or about 62%.

Key Messages

Short Hills Provincial Park maintains its unique status in providing an environmental landscape for the region that offers users a special experience to enjoy and enhance their quality of life. No other park area in the peninsula provides such a variety of multiuse recreational experiences over such an extensive area and at the same time protects sensitive environmental areas.

The plan review confirmed however that the Park is still threatened with negative change as identified by the **1st** priority issue **Park User Pressures (Authorized and Illegal)** under category A – Park Uses and Abuses. Trail erosion, soil compaction and plant destruction will occur more frequently as park user numbers increase, especially during the wet spring season. At the same time, use of illegal access points and incidental trails within the park destroy sensitive areas and reduce rare plant and wildlife viewing opportunities. **Low public participation (6th to 2nd rank)** and **Safety (5th to 3rd)** also continue to be one of the top 10 issues.

In category B – Park Survival/Continuance, an elevated threat concern was identified from **Wildlife Overpopulation (9th to 1st priority)** primarily from the increasing numbers of deer that put other **Wildlife and Plant Species at Risk (7th to 2nd)**. **Invasive Species (remains 3rd)** such as garlic mustard and the external **Ecosystem fragmentation (remains 4th)** also stayed as one of the top 10 threats.

Category C – Internal Facilities, Assets and Operating has the largest numbers of issues with **Availability of Grants and Sponsors (2nd to 1st)** remaining high on the list. **Partnerships and Networking (6th and 10th rank to 2nd)** is seen as a critical opportunity to build upon and develop while **Membership numbers** and a sustainable **Board of Directors** were combined to maintain there next place ranking (**3rd and 4th to a 3rd priority**).

Activities and Accomplishments

As in 2002 the ‘Friends’ initiatives over the last 3 years have included a core of ongoing work and a number of new initiatives including:

- Extensive tree plantings for habitat restoration and to reduce ecosystem fragmentation
- The 5th Trail guide update is underway for public education, park promotion and sales
- Deer capacity studies and research ongoing with Niagara College and Ontario Parks
- Continuing a blue bird box program to help re-introduce and diversify park species
- Bird survey census and resulting brochure in 2003
- Trail maintenance work for erosion control and for trail delineation
- Interpretive signs placed on the Palaeozoic Trail
- Public education outings and events have increased from 17 in 2002 to 24 in 2005
- Jackson’s Flats building refurbishment serving as OPP operating base
- Niagara College GPS trail mapping done and drainage mapping underway
- New Privy added at the Wiley Rd. parking lot
- New vandal proof garbage containers added at all three parking lots
- Volunteer website manager and assistant obtained
- Investigation of funding opportunities such as a Trillium Grant
- Board representation expanded to include mountain bike representative
- Friends members leading Brock University courses help raise park profile
- Outdoor recreation needs and opportunities survey by Brock University
- Short Hills History Report was enhanced, reprinted and distributed by others

These projects are often undertaken with the assistance of many supporting partners such as Federal and Ontario Government agencies which issue grants for various undertakings, local municipal support, Land Care Niagara, programs at Brock University and Niagara College involving student projects, Niagara Bruce Trail Club, Hydro One, FON, NPCA, OPP and many others.

These efforts have been recognized by “Environmental” and “Breaking the Barriers” awards in 2001 from the Regional Municipality of Niagara, the Town of Pelham, the Ontario March of Dimes (Niagara) and Niagara Amputees Association. More recently the ‘Friends’ were recognized with a volunteer award from Niagara College.

Plan Flexibility and Review

This revised Strategic Plan represents a view of our future at one point in time. The future however is never predictable, nor is it cast in stone. As the title page suggests, the plan is meant to help “re-position” the Friend’s organization as part of a dynamic process from which we can be more knowledgeable and proactive about future activities. At the same time it is recognized that it will be important to incorporate flexibility to work outside the plan in response to unknown events or opportunities.

Therefore, changes from the plan can occur at any time. In response, the Board will incorporate a review of key aspects of this plan, when it is deemed necessary, in order to formally recognize and acknowledge alterations or refinements. Past experience since July 2002, indicates that a yearly review is too frequent, while a 2 to 3 year period seems appropriate. Progress towards implementing initiatives can also be monitored and evaluated during the review period.

Summary List

Re-Prioritized Issues/Opportunities (1-32) by Category (3) with Related Initiatives

(Previous July 2002 Plan priorities in italics and brackets, 1 – 20)

✓ indicates completion, progress or ongoing work to some degree since the last Plan

A) Park Uses and Abuses

1. Park user pressures increasing (1)

General

- Enhanced enforcement
- Public education programs✓
- Revive Trail Stewards Program
- Post Contact Numbers✓

Authorized Use

- Conditional Mt. Bike rides✓
- Trail maintenance program✓
- Adopt a trail program
- Trail management plan

Illegal Activities

- Trail Guide Update✓
- GPS mapping of trails✓
- Trail delineation study✓
- Trail signage project✓
- Trail barriers across illegal trails✓
- Vandal proof plans/designs✓
- Wider trail guide distribution✓
- Consider more garbage cans✓
- Approach Mun. for road signs and clean-up
- Continue trash bash activities✓

2. Low public participation (6)

- Events Marketing Plan
- Focus marketing✓
- Tie into communications plan✓
- Use news releases & cable TV✓
- Continue recognition awards✓
- Advertise more✓
- Post notices✓

3. Safety (Fires, Trails, Search & Rescue) (5)

- Request local co-ordination✓
- Urge updating of fire response plan
- Emergency numbers distributed✓

- Conduct safety/first aid walks
- Address safety/incident sites✓

4. Trail Etiquette (15)

- Enhance stewardship program
- Produce Trail etiquette pamphlet

5. Accessibility (Aging, Disabled, Handicapped) (17)

- Maintain Palaeozoic Path✓
- Develop a “virtual” tour of Park✓
- Continue “focus” group activities✓
- Research/survey project e.g. Brock outdoor rec. needs and opps. for seniors✓

6. Historical & Archaeological Preservation and Information (17)

- Support DeCew Corridor acquisition
- Reactivate historic walk✓
- Student history project✓

7. Farming Activities in Park (18)

- Continue phase-out for reforestation✓
- Incorporate within any historical review✓

8. Facility Limitations (19)

- Expand facilities (e.g. 3 washrooms, more parking will need Management Plan amendment) ✓
- Use temporary facilities (e.g. Johnny-on-the-spot) ✓
- Consider future parking expansion✓

B) Park Survival/Continuance

1. Wildlife overpopulation e.g. deer (9)

- Monitor impacts with Ont. Parks & others✓

- Investigate natural controls✓
 - Extend deer hunting season outside park✓
- 2. Wildlife & plant species at risk (7)**
- Habitat restoration/reforestation e.g. Blue Bird Program, exclosures✓
 - Controlled burns for natural meadows
 - Adopt a “Species at Risk”
 - Physically cut out invasives
 - Public education e.g. Guide to Breeding Birds in the Park✓
 - Enforce restrictive access to sensitive areas✓
 - Update Veg. Management Plan
 - Inventory/Research Projects e.g. Bird Survey 2003✓
Natural Tree Rehab.
- 3. Invasive species (eg garlic mustard)(3)**
- Work with MNR/Ont. Parks initiatives
 - Physically extract invasives
 - Education materials
 - Restrict sensitive areas access✓
 - Natural controls/pests
 - Monitor natural controls
 - Update Vegetation Management Plan
- 4. Ecosystem fragmentation (4)**
- Continue reforestation efforts✓
 - Update Veg. Management plan
 - Revitalize “Adopt an Acre”
 - Urge continuation of property acquisition for reforestation✓
 - Tree Nursery - declined✓
 - Tree research project
- 5. Water Quality Deterioration (11)**
- Monitor local developments✓
 - Stream bank erosion control✓
- Membership on other Boards & studies✓
 - Adopt-a-tree for erosion sites
 - Education & outreach programs
- 6. Environmental Issues Gaining Importance (13)**
- Look for media opportunities✓
 - Join environmental groups or campaigns (e.g. FON, CONE) ✓
 - Web site links✓
- 7. Air Quality Deterioration (15)**
- Continue reforestation program✓
 - Revitalize “Adopt an Acre”
 - Lobby government/industry
 - Develop tree management program
 - Education & Outreach
 - Retain open vistas, meadows✓
- 8. Surrounding Development Pressures (16)**
- Monitor local developments (e.g. Niagara land use project) ✓
 - Seek membership on local planning Boards✓
 - Lobby for appropriate zoning✓
- 9. Degree of Restoration in Park (13)**
- Review extent of existing activities
N/A viewed as self limiting
 - Require future activities to define their extent N/A, self limiting
- C) Internal Facilities, Assets, Operating**
- 1. Grants and sponsors availability (2)**
- Expand funding sources✓
 - Broaden application responsibility✓
 - Follow up “thanks yous” and project results✓
 - Sale of Trail Guides and T-Shirts✓

2. Build on partnerships/networking, and Strengthen relationships with park neighbours (6 & 10)

Partnerships/networking

- External group contacts✓
- Include in Marketing & Communications plan
- Web page links✓

Park neighbours

- Neighborhood communications plan
- Neighborhood programs e.g. sponsorship for Bird phamlet✓
- Adopt a trail program to include adjacent properties
- Neighborhood membership campaign
- Newsletter distribution
- One-on-one negotiation e.g. Pelham Rd. Winery✓

3. Membership and Board of Director concerns (3 & 4)

Membership

- Membership campaign✓
- Marketing/Communications plan
- Mun. tax bill information
- Ads in newsletter/media✓
- Contact external groups✓
- Review fee schedule✓
- Highlight member benefits✓
- Define roles & responsibilities✓
- E-mail member reminders✓
- Review member categories✓
- Web page manager✓

Board of Directors

- Mention new initiatives as part of membership campaign
- Conduct one-on-one requests✓
- Discuss succession planning
- Share workloads✓
- Orientation package

4. “Friends” credibility opportunities (5)

- Identify accomplishments✓
- Award recognition✓

5. Enforcement limitations (6)

- Education initiatives✓
- Use “Crime Stoppers”
- Increase use of fines✓
- OPP in Jackson’s Flats✓

6. Government Policies, Funding & Staffing (12)

- Support lobby efforts for funds
- Increase government partnerships

7. Project monitoring & evaluation (8)

- Debriefing at end of project✓
- Identify as part of grant funding✓
- Include as part of project funding✓

8. Implementation and operational planning (9)

- Require project planning✓

9. Strong People Qualities (14)

- Continue to recognize efforts e.g. award nominations, certificates of appreciation✓
- Incorporate into marketing and communication plan

10. Education topics wider Diversity (14)

- Seek broader scope for ideas (e.g. general meetings)✓
- Brainstorming sessions✓
- Form speakers committee

11. Diversify Park Activities (15)

- New activities with external groups (e.g. PFN, FON, Bruce Trail) ✓
- Web page links to other groups
- Include “group” membership category
- Keep public activities list diversified✓

12. Lack of External Profile and Awareness (15)

- Enhanced marketing and communications plan
- Trail guide update and wider distribution✓
- Profile in others newsletters
- Youth education programs✓
- Web page links
- Photo contest
- Maintain strong public activity list✓
- Organize conference
- Brock University Courses✓
- Web site enhancements✓

13. Lack of prioritization, direction & goals (9)

- Strategic Plan with priorities✓
- Focus on realistic tasks✓
- Better communication & consultation✓
- Annual review of priorities

14. External Untapped Skills (18)

- Incorporate within membership campaign
- Selected one-on-one requests✓

15. Lack of Resources Information Base (20)

- Inventory and locate documented resources of park
- Establish a central location for park resources

Board of Directors 2005
Friends of Short Hills Provincial Park

George Dewar, Chair

Dave Gonzales, Vice Chair

Barbara Gledhill, Secretary

Dave Baker, Treasurer

Anne Kubu, Director

Christine Wolff, Director

Colin Wolff, Director

David Goodhue, Director

Fred Farnham, Director

Mark Custers, Park Superintendent, Ex-officio Member

Strategic Plan Review Facilitator

David Hunt, Friends Member