

Park-To-Park on the right trail

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by [Jack Tynan](#)

A steady line of snowmobile traffic travelled along Park-To-Park Trail in Seguin Township Sunday afternoon. After starting 2007 with serious financial woes, the trail association finished the year in good financial shape.

North Star photo



PARRY SOUND – One year ago Park-To-Park faced the possibility of bankruptcy, crumbling bridges and doubts about whether it could afford to pay staff.

A year later, the trail association has repaired one of its oldest and longest bridges, jumped a hurdle blocking the final stretch of trail, done an engineering study of all larger bridges and finished with a small budget surplus.

“We’re in a lot different position than we were a year ago,” said association president Steve Alcock during Park-To-Park’s annual general meeting in Sprucedale on Thursday, Jan. 24. “We were in debt, technically bankrupt. We had a bridge we knew we were going to have a problem with ... A year ago we were in a position of not knowing where our paycheques were going to come from, or how we were going to sustain ourselves throughout the year. This year, we have money in our bank account. We know we’re going to be here for an annual general meeting next year, and that’s a powerful statement.”

Park-To-Park manages about 230 kilometres of trail connecting Algonquin Park, Arrowhead Park, Huntsville, Parry Sound and a string of smaller communities. This year, association leaders hope to finish a final link to Killbear Park north of Parry Sound.

Instead of fighting financial ruin, Park-To-Park used grants and donations from almost every town and township the trail runs through, the Ministry of Natural Resources, snowmobile clubs and the Ontario Realty Corporation to make ends meet and improve the trails. Although it had no money for improvements when it met in January of 2007, by December, the association had finished construction of a new steel-frame bridge near Seguin Falls – where a condemned bridge forced a lengthy detour around a central section of trail. Midway through the year, the Canadian army’s corps of engineers did \$20,000 worth of surveying that will allow the association to cut the final mile of trail connecting to Killbear Park this spring. The military did the work as part of a training exercise.

Rising ATV user permit revenue and a long list of other in-kind donations – from a free audit to volunteer bridge repairs and trail grooming, combined with fees for trail activities (including the ATV Spring Jam and World Enduro off-road biking competitions around Parry Sound) – also helped the association turn things around.

"I think the public values the trail system," said Mr. Alcock. "I think the municipalities value the trail system, especially for its tourism potential. There's no question that the support we got from the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario Realty Corporation and municipalities combined allowed us to receive fees for services and get contributions to make it a successful year and a big year. We continue to be a bright light for the trail system, and I think we have a bright future."

Park-To-Park also commissioned an engineer's report on 12 of the biggest or 30 bridges in the system, prioritizing the need for updates, repairs and replacements so the association can set up a bridge renewal plan and avoid having bridges suddenly condemned and closed.

The report highlights a need to replace one, smaller bridge in the Bear Lake area, and repair a handful of others in the next year. The good news, according to board members, is that only smaller bridges need immediate repairs and no bridges have been condemned.

Although a \$13,000 surplus, trail maintenance agreements and trail use revenues will ensure the organization can make ends meet, the association hopes for continued contributions from partners in 2008 in order to start a cycle of bridge repairs and consider other trail upgrades. Association members will approach municipalities over the next few months to request they be considered in budget planning for the year.

"They spend millions of dollars on tourism," said Park-To-Park board member and Seguin Township councillor Everett Jacklin, who hinted his township will continue to spend money on trails. "Surely they want trails and they don't want anymore bridges to be condemned. We've (municipalities) got to put our money where our mouth is."

In March, Park-To-Park will also move to a new office, in an old Parry Sound train station on Church Street next to the Parry Sound Area Chamber of Commerce.

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