
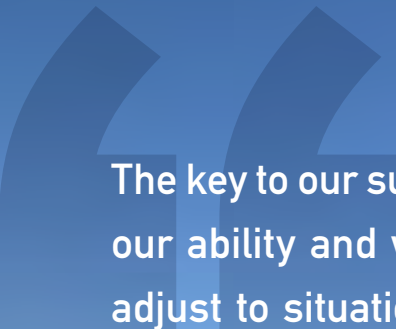




# ANNUAL REPORT | 2023





The key to our success this year has been our ability and willingness to adapt and adjust to situations by focusing on what we could do, with what we had, in the time that we had available.

“The only constant is change” is a quote that comes to mind as I write this introduction to our 2023 Annual Report. This year began with high expectations and lofty goals to be met. We were able to meet some of these goals, but we couldn’t achieve all that was planned. We have faced the challenges of heat and drought, waiting for approvals outside of our control and limited volunteer availability or other resources. Yet 2023 also offered an opportunity to show our flexibility. The key to our success this year has been our ability and willingness to adapt and adjust to situations by focusing on what we could do, with what we had, in the time that we had available. It has been another challenging year but an incredibly rewarding one when we take the time to reflect on the results outlined in this Annual Report.

Our organization asks a great deal from our dedicated volunteer corps and every year, they rise to the occasion to get the job done. Our sincere gratitude is offered to all who stepped up with open hearts and busy hands.

Our partnership with the owner jurisdictions continues to evolve based on mutual respect and trust and FORT is so pleased to continue this effective relationship. We are also grateful for the other organizations in our communities who work collaboratively with us to ensure that the Okanagan Rail Trail continues to be such an amazing community amenity and attraction.

– MICHELLE JEFFERSON | Board Chair, Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail Society



# VOLUNTEERS ON THE TRAIL

## STEWARDSHIP

Plantings at Km 0 continue to do well especially considering the overwhelming challenges of last year's cold spell in the Fall and early Winter and the drought that continued through 2023. The trees at Km 0 appear to be establishing very well thanks to the watering system that was kept in place, however, one tree appears to have suffered and may need to be replaced in 2024.

Although Stewardship hours were down from last year, a dedicated small group continues to remove invasives along the trail, hand water plants when necessary and help with other FORT initiatives. As with many organizations, volunteers are stretched thin at times, but every moment counts towards the vision of continuing to develop an amazing community amenity, and each effort is greatly appreciated.

Looking ahead to 2024, some new developments along the Lake Country portion of the trail will require Stewardship focus, although Km 0 will continue to be monitored particularly if the drought continues into 2024. It is hoped that the indigenous plant training that had to be cancelled in Spring 2023 will take place in Spring 2024.



Every moment counts towards the vision of continuing to develop an amazing community amenity, and each effort is greatly appreciated along the Okanagan Rail Trail.



## TRAIL AMBASSADORS

Trail Ambassadors (TAs) continue to be the “eyes & ears” on the ORT. As they walk, run, scooter or cycle on the trail they keep alert for changes that could decrease the trail users enjoyment of their time on the ORT. From fallen trees or rocks to suggestions from trail users for improvements, TAs communicate their findings to the FORT board. These are then passed on to the owner jurisdiction or the ORT Committee. TAs play an important role in keeping the ORT a world class trail.

Do you remember the goals for the TA program that were in last year’s annual report? Here is a summary of how they were met and plans for 2024.



### Offer training opportunities via Zoom and in person

- All alumni attend a Zoom update or watch the recording before heading out on the trail
- This year FORT Stewards were also invited to attend the update
- Twelve new TAs attended one of 6 on the trail orientation sessions. The on the trail orientation sessions are enjoyed by the new volunteers and committee members and increased interactions and connections among those involved

### Offer mentorship as we partner experienced TAs with new volunteers

- Volunteers initiated more connection by exchanging contact information this year
- Organizing mentorship pairs and time on the trail has not been done by the TA committee and we need to follow up at the spring alumni update to find out if mentorship was increased

### DID YOU KNOW...

Volunteer Trail Ambassadors are the friendly faces you may meet along the trail who are ready to share local insights and hear from you about your experiences on the trail.







## EYES & EARS ON THE TRAIL

### Offer increased opportunities for social experiences among TAs

- TA's attended two volunteer appreciation events, three group rides and a FORT Day on the Trail
- 20 TA's joined the FORT Volunteers GoByBike Week team and logged 1,302 kms which saved 282kg of greenhouse gases!

### Promote safety and respectful trail use by increasing TA volunteer hours on the ORT and planning 3 TA stations on the trail.

- TA hours on the trail are similar to 2022 with 1,207 hours logged on My Impact
- The Spring TA station was changed to FORT Day on the Trail to involve all FORT volunteers
  - Questions about safety and etiquette on the trail were answered for trail users
  - Small prizes were donated by DLC and RDNO and given to trail users. This activity increased interaction between FORT volunteers and trail users and offered an opportunity to talk about trail safety
- For the second year heat and smoke in the summer months affected TA hours on the trail and the number of TA group events such as rides and FORT days on the trail

### Increase TA visibility on the ORT

- We are continuing to work toward increasing the visibility of Trail Ambassadors
- Tracking visibility on the trail is currently done by hours recorded on My Impact where volunteers are encouraged monthly to record their hours





# VOLUNTEER POWER

We currently have **76 registered volunteers**, up from this time last year, however our hours are lower. We are working with our volunteers to encourage them to enter hours by sending monthly reminders over email. The news feed on My Impact is updated regularly with photo submissions and news.

**Volunteers had a very busy year!**

**April 26** – SILGA (Southern Interior Local Government Association) Tour: FORT volunteers hosted, narrated, and led conference attendees on a ride on the Trail

**May 7** – 30+ volunteers attended a Volunteer Appreciation that included a walk to the closed section of the trail. Coffee and snacks were provided

**May 27** – Our first FORT day on the Trail with stations setup at KM 2.7, District of Lake Country boat launch and behind the Parkinson Rec Centre. Many users of the trail stopped by to say hello

**June 4** – 7 volunteers participated in the Go By Bike ride

**June 11** – We participated in the North Okanagan Arts Council Plein Art Event. Volunteers were on the trail chatting to the artists and we had a tent setup in Polson Park. One of the artists prepared a sketch of our tent and volunteers



**June 17** – FORT set up a booth at the Vernon Sunshine Festival

**July 11** – Bike ride around Wood Lake

**September 16** – FORT took part in the Kelowna Community Resources Annual Okanagan Volunteer Fair at Parkinson Recreation Centre. This event was a great way to connect with volunteers from the Kelowna area

**September 23** – Vernon Volunteer Fair; the interest in FORT was very encouraging with the result that we received numerous applications for volunteers

**October 18** – Our 2nd Volunteer Appreciation Event. This was held at Beasley Park in Lake Country and was well attended. New Volunteer name buttons were distributed and were a great hit. Matt Vader, Chair of the Okanagan Rail Trail Committee (ORTC) came and provided lots of information to the volunteers





# COMMUNICATIONS

**Social Media** — Continues to be the main FORT communication channel to keep trail users engaged and informed. We continue to see increased views and followers on both Facebook and Instagram platforms in 2023.

The FORT newsletter in 2023 had 3 editions that were shared to more than 5,000 email followers.

In November FORT board members presented to Men's Shed Vernon, a local community group that supports amenities like the ORT.

Looking ahead to 2024, we are thrilled to launch a social media and communications strategy project, in partnership with Meghan Hindle of 48th Media Co. Starting in January, this work provides a specific vision, education, and support for FORT volunteers, that will ultimately increase the online awareness of FORT and the ORT going forward.







## ENHANCING THE TRAIL

# PROJECT MANAGEMENT

FORT was asked by RDNO to assist with several improvements along their section of the ORT. These were largely driven by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) Interpretive signs, but also included several other improvements at 7 sites along the trail. We started with selection of appropriate sites. Then the work varied from installing bike repair stations to full site development at Km 2 and Km 2.8, where several ONA signs, picnic tables, and stone benches were installed along with split rail fencing that act as bike racks. This work involved getting 8 sign structures fabricated and installed with concealed fasteners. The balance of the sites got a couple of stone benches at smaller pullouts with great lake views! FORT was very pleased to have been involved with this work and believe that the enhancements to the trail will be greatly appreciated by the public.

## COLLABORATION ON THE TRAIL

Working in cooperation with the City of Kelowna, our fundraising dollars this year were used to build a Node kiosk at Houghton Road (Km 44). This kiosk was installed at the site of the new bridge connecting Enterprise Road with the ORT.





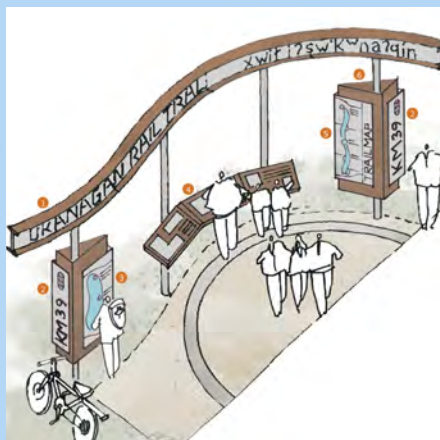
FORT is just beginning to assist DLC with one similar site development called Trehwitt Point along Wood Lake, that will be very similar with one ONA sign, stone benches and a bike rack. FORT has committed some funding and applied for a grant for a portion of this work.

FORT facilitated and interim financed the Donor Recognitions signs from the original trail construction campaign (called Okanagan Rail Trail Initiative or ORTI) that are now installed at 3 locations along the trail.

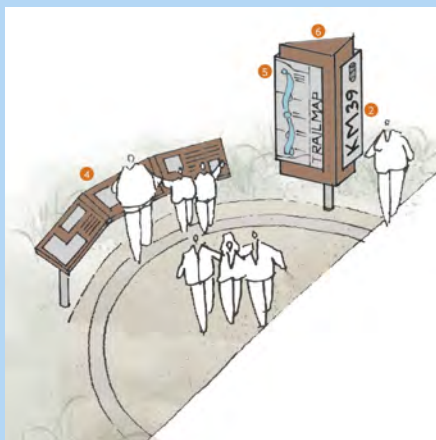
This year much time and effort was spent on the Interpretive signs to be placed at Km 0. Working in collaboration with representatives from OKIB, FORT volunteers carefully developed the content for the signs at this historical syilx location. Messaging and images were designed to support the site design theme of 'syilx summer encampment', site stewardship, and 'movement'. Artists were sourced and a graphic designer was engaged to illustrate the content of the signs. Although the signs are virtually complete, final approval from the OKIB has not been received, much to our disappointment, and this project has been put back to OKIB for further consultation.

# FUND DEVELOPMENT

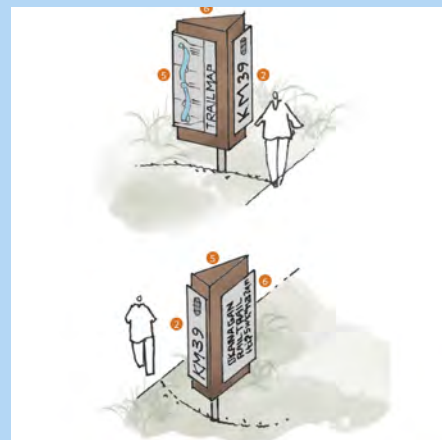
## FIND YOUR WAY FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN



**TIER 1 KIOSK  
GATEWAY**



**TIER 2 KIOSK  
NODE**



**TIER 3 KIOSK  
MAJOR ACCESS POINT**

This year Fund Development took a new focus. After using the Covid years to successfully create the first ORT Gateway Kiosk at Km 0, FORT worked with Bench Design, using Km 0 as a template to develop a three-tier format for other wayfinding kiosks. The plan is that Gateway Kiosks (Tier 1) with the iconic naming banner will be at Km 0, Km 26 and Km 51. Node Kiosks (Tier 2) will be at intersections along the trail which have amenities such as washrooms and parking, and the Major Access Point Kiosks (Tier 3) will be at other entrances and exits.

Kiosks are designed to give information about wayfinding, orient newcomers to their position on the trail, delineate amenities, and outline trail etiquette along with other possibilities for exploring the corridor. It was hoped that the Wayfinding Campaign would launch at about the same time that the central section was going to be under construction, but as this didn't happen, the campaign has been rather muted this year.





## GRANTS FOR 2023

A community grant to help secure the final artwork for the Interpretive signs was awarded to FORT by CFNO (Community Foundation of North Okanagan) in the spring. At the present time, all the interpretive signage is complete and print ready but waiting for wording on land acknowledgment and final approval by OKIB Chief and Council.

An opportunity presented itself in late spring to consider enhancements to the Trehitt Point lake access along Wood Lake in Lake Country. FORT offered to contribute \$5,000 of our fundraising dollars and Lake Country awarded a \$5,000 grant. A design has been drawn up and a grant in the amount of \$15,000 has been awarded from COF (Central Okanagan Foundation) to finalize funding to enhance the beach access and picnic areas at this location.

## FUND DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

In four years of Fundraising, Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail have raised \$134,000 in public funds and \$333,000 in grants.

We thank the generous donors and our community grant funding organizations for their support and dedication to this beautiful trail.







# FINANCIALS

FORT manages financials in two separate streams – **Trail Programs** (FORT operations like Trail Ambassadors, Trail Stewards and Communications) and **Capital Projects** (trail improvement projects determined jointly with ORTC).

## TRAIL PROGRAMS

FORT was grateful to receive \$18,000 in funding from ORTC. FORT has limited opportunities for other revenue and all tax receipted donations are directed to capital improvement projects on the trail. The total expenditures for the year were \$12,000; the current year's excess of receipts will be used in future years on strategic projects.

### 2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

## CAPITAL PROJECTS

FORT tidied up a few outstanding items at Km 0 in 2023 and continued to work on the Phase 3 Interpretive Project. FORT was grateful to receive a \$15,000 grant from the Community Foundation of North Okanagan to assist in the Interpretive Project initiative. To date \$39,000 has been spent on this project. Also in 2023, FORT worked with the City of Kelowna and completed its first Tier 2 Kiosk at Houghton Road. FORT's contribution to this project totalled just over \$17,000.

FORT has committed to work on a project to provide lake access to Wood Lake from the Trail. This work will take place in 2024 and FORT has received \$5,000 from the District of Lake Country and \$15,000 from the Central Okanagan Foundation to help fund this project. The total project is expected to cost around \$30,000.

### CAPITAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

### NEXT STEPS

- Continue to pursue grants in cooperation with the municipalities.
- Investigate other funding opportunities while respecting ORTC policy and preferences.

**THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR CONTINUED  
SUPPORT!**



# MEET OUR DIRECTORS



From left: Phyllis Turner, Trail Ambassador Lead; Gary Noble, Events Coordinator; Toby Frisk, Communications Lead; Betty Beck, Volunteer Management Lead; Dev Fraser, Project Management Lead; Laurie Postill, Fund Development Lead; Anna Dawyd, Secretary/Treasurer; Michelle Jefferson, Board Chair and Stewardship Lead





# THANK YOU

## FORT GIVES SPECIAL THANKS TO THE MANAGING JURISDICTIONS FOR THEIR COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

We are grateful for the continued support of the Community Foundation of North Okanagan including their generous grant to assist with the completion of the Interpretive Project and for funds advanced from their Memorial Funds.

Thank you to all the donors that supported FORT operations or capital fundraising campaigns this year. You can view a full list, posted on the Donor page of the ORT website.

### THANK YOU DONORS

Thank you to Debbie Clarke for her creativity and the innumerable hours input on the Interpretive Sign project.

Thank you to Jay Hack, Davidson Partners LLP for legal advice.

Thank you to Meghan Hindle of 48th Media Co. for donating her time to assist with FORT's newsletters, press releases and media posts.

Thank you to the Galbraith Family Fund for their donation to the Interpretive Project.

Irrigation at Km 0 and Km 3.7 allowed the plants to flourish – thank you to Paul Dick of Paul Dick Excavating and Chris North of Alpine Water Hauling.

Thank you to the Central Okanagan Foundation for their grant to FORT to assist in providing lake access from the Trail to Wood lake.





