



ANNUAL REPORT | 2024



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND CONNECTING PEOPLE. The Okanagan Rail Trail was created from connections, and it demonstrates how important connections are whether they be with people or places.

This annual report provides FORT with an opportunity to connect with our supporters and describe the many activities that have taken place in 2024. It always touches my heart to see the dedication of all the FORT volunteers whose efforts ensure that the Okanagan Rail Trail (ORT) continues to improve for all users and that we care for the land. The commitment of our volunteers, the owner jurisdictions, and local businesses has established the ORT as a major draw for both residents and visitors to our beautiful region and it helps inspire other trail groups to continue their valuable work in establishing more trails.

The projects and activities described in this report have increased not only the chance to learn more about the trail, adjacent waterways and its ecology but also to help users understand the vital connection that we can have with our landscapes. If you were lucky enough to see kickininee (Kokanee salmon) spawning along shoreline of Kalamalka Lake this fall, hopefully you got a taste of what that connection can feel like.

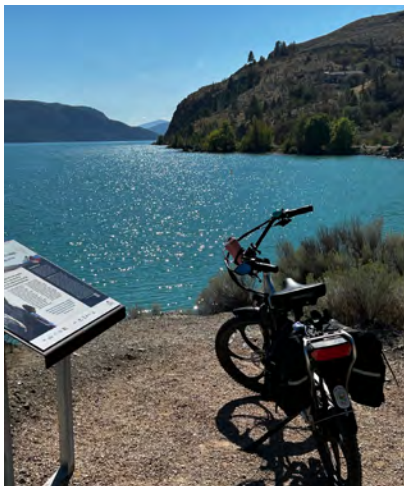
FORT will continue connecting through our newsletters, our social media postings, the interactions on the trail with our Ambassadors and Stewards and through this annual report and we invite you to connect with us at hello@okanaganrailtrail.ca

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

FORT CELEBRATES 5 YEARS!

MARCH 12, 2024, MARKED THE FIVE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY FOR FORT

A lot has been accomplished since FORT became a society in 2019. The Okanagan Rail Trail has made a huge impact on community recreation, encouraging active transportation opportunities and connecting communities. Over the past five years, Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail (FORT) has worked along with the owner jurisdictions to enhance all aspects of trail development. Even though we are still waiting for completion of the Addition to Reserve of the Okanagan Indian Band to be able to finish the central section between Lake Country and the airport, the trail has become a busy place for all its users!



TREWHITT POINT

VOLUNTEERS ON THE TRAIL

STEWARDSHIP

In 2024, Barb Marcolin took on the lead role for Stewardship for FORT. It can be challenging working full time and leading such a critical committee, but after her initial training in May, she jumped right in. Barb was motivated to help because she grew up on a farm and spent many hours assisting her grandfather in their garden.

In 2024, six weed pulling dates were organized but due to the heat, two of them were cancelled. The safety of our volunteers is always the number one priority, and they remain enthusiastic and eager to learn. We will continue to work on a schedule that can work for our Steward volunteers.

Supplemental watering had to take place on a couple of occasions in two locations due to the dry conditions this summer and we are very grateful for the quick response by our water contractors.

We lost three trees at Km 0 over the winter and during the dry Spring, but they have been replaced. Most of the other trees and plants are doing very well.

Thanks again to all the Steward volunteers.



Trail Steward volunteers work hard to protect waterways, restore habitats, water plants and preserve the natural beauty of the trail.

TRAIL AMBASSADORS

THE ROLE—Volunteer Trail Ambassadors (TAs) are the “eyes & ears” on the Okanagan Rail Trail. They wear high visibility yellow vests with FORT ID so trail users can identify them as volunteers.

Their role is to model respectful safe trail behavior, and they report incidents, trail issues (trees down, rocks on the trail) and other observations to the owner jurisdictions.

Several Trail Ambassadors also volunteer in other roles for FORT, including board members, committee members, volunteer fairs, FORT days on the ORT and other special events.



The numbers

- 67 people volunteer as Trail Ambassadors
- 52 or 77% of volunteers were active on the ORT in 2024
- 1,359 hours “On the Trail” recorded in My Impact
- 360 hours is the increase recorded for “On the Trail” from 2023
- 12 new volunteers in 2024
- 3 volunteer rides in Lake Country, Kelowna and RDNO with 26 participants

The people who volunteer

- Ages range from 16 to 80+
- Live in Kelowna, Lake Country, Vernon, and Coldstream
- Enjoy cycling, running and/or walking on all sections of the Okanagan Rail Trail
- Are friendly, love the outdoors, and are committed to making the Okanagan Rail Trail a world class experience for visitors and local citizens

DID YOU KNOW...

Volunteer Trail Ambassadors are easy to spot; they're the eyes, ears, and heart of the trail, eager to share local insights and hear from you about your experiences.





CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

VOLUNTEER POWER

2024 was a good year. We were very fortunate in that we had a virtually smoke free summer. However, the summer months were quite warm.

Our volunteer numbers increased in 2024. At the start of the year we had 75 volunteers and on Dec 31, 2024, our numbers were up to 82 accepted volunteers with 2 more in progress.

Emails are sent to volunteers once a month reminding them to input their hours as well as updating the volunteers on events that are happening and other pertinent news. Recorded volunteer hours for 2024 were in excess of 2,200 hours.

2024 was a busy year for volunteers!

April 21 – Volunteers attended a Volunteer Appreciation Event at Beasley Park in Lake Country. Those in attendance received a Thank You coaster.

May 25 – A FORT Day on the Trail was held with stations setup at KM 2.7 in Vernon, at the District of Lake Country Boat Launch and behind the Parkinson Rec Centre in Kelowna.

May 31-June 6 – Volunteers participated in a Go By Bike Week ride.



June 9 – We participated in the North Okanagan Arts Council Plein Air Event – volunteers rode the trail and interacted with the artists. Our tent was set up in Polson Park.

June 17 – FORT set up a booth at the Vernon Sunshine Festival (which was actually the Rain Festival).

July 27 – FORT Day on the trail at the same locations as in the spring.

September 14 – FORT took part in the Vernon Volunteer Fair.

September 21 – FORT took part in the Kelowna Community Resources Annual Okanagan Volunteer fair.



COMMUNICATIONS

FORT continues to inform the community and followers by way of social media and with two digital newsletters in 2024.

With over 5,000 social media followers, our communications committee has taken on new volunteers this year to help us leverage our social channels and provide prudent, engaging information while building awareness of our society and the ORT.

We were pleased to be a guest presenter at the Trails of the Okanagan annual general meeting this fall. We shared updates, successes, challenges, visions, and passions from various community groups with one common goal: creating and enhancing active transportation corridors that connect communities throughout the Okanagan.

Our communication goal for 2025 is to become more active with our social media audience and provide fun, meaningful and informative content.



ENHANCING THE TRAIL

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

TREWHITT POINT ACCESS ON WOOD LAKE COMPLETE

There is a new and exciting access to Wood Lake at Trehwitt Point. In 2023 FORT Volunteers came up with the idea of improving this area and with support from District of Lake Country, Central Okanagan Foundation and FORT Fund Development a collaborative effort has created a lovely spot to stop and enjoy the scenery or have a quick dip in the lake. Bike racks, rock benches, and an Okanagan Nation Alliance sign are now installed, and a marker stone has been added at the entrance and a Km marker will be attached to define this stop on the trail. This new access proved to be a very popular stop for trail users this summer with its bike racks, sloping beach, rock slab seating and porta potties. Thanks to our Project Management team for their efforts and for keeping this project on budget!

In 2023, FORT spent much time and effort on the Interpretive signs to be placed at Km 0. Although the signs are virtually complete, much to our disappointment final approval from the OKIB was not received in 2024, and this project continues with the OKIB for further consultation.

The Project Team has been working with Bench Design on a site design for the UBCO junction at Km 40. The proposed site will include a Tier 2 kiosk which is 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 is hoped that FORT will be able to work with the City of Kelowna and have this site completed in 2025.

In addition, the Project team and the Grants team have put together a proposal for a Tier 1 kiosk at Kekuli Bay to provide much needed wayfinding at that point. It is hoped that this project will also be completed in 2025.



FUND DEVELOPMENT

The Fund Development team continued with the Find Your Way campaign to raise funds to build informational wayfinding kiosks at key locations along the ORT. We have worked with Bench Site Design to have design and cost estimates ready for the approval process and for grant funding opportunities.

TREWHITT POINT LAKE ACCESS

In addition, our fundraising project this year was working with the District of Lake Country with support from the Central Okanagan Foundation to provide funding for this first lake access project (description and details of the project are included in Project Management above). Over the years, trail users have noted lake access as one of their priorities for improvements along the trail and FORT was excited to have the opportunity to spearhead the project and see it to completion.

GRANTS

We are evaluating a list of available grants for trail groups so that we can be proactive in our application process for priority projects along the trail.

A grant report was submitted to Central Okanagan Foundation providing a summary and outlining the use of funds for the Trehwitt Point project.

DONORS

All donors are recognized on our virtual donor wall on the ORT Website along with their messages and dedications. Thanks to our dedicated community of supporters and our Community Foundations who continue to contribute to trail enhancements.



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 Okanagan Rail Trail Committee FORT has limited opportunities for other revenue. All tax receipted donations are directed to capital improvement projects on the trail. The total expenditures for the year were \$12,050; the current year's excess of receipts will be used in future years on strategic projects.

[2024 TRAIL PROGRAMS FINANCIAL STATEMENT](#)

CAPITAL PROJECTS

In 2024 FORT completed a project to provide lake access to Wood Lake from the Trail. This project was funded in part by grants received in 2023 from the District of Lake Country (\$5,000) and from the Central Okanagan Foundation (\$15,000). The remainder of the funds to complete the project came from the generous donations of our FORT donors.

[2024 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: Anna Dawyd, Treasurer; Phyllis Turner, Trail Ambassador Lead; Betty Beck, Volunteer Management Lead; Dev Fraser, Project Management Lead; Laurie Postill, Fund Development Lead; Michelle Jefferson, Board Chair and Stewardship Liaison; Toby Frisk, Communications Lead; Susan Weltz, Secretary and Grants Lead.

THANK YOU

FORT THANKS THE MANAGING JURISDICTIONS AND THE OKANAGAN RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE FOR COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT THIS YEAR.

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

We are grateful for the continued support of the Community Foundation of North Okanagan.

Thank you to all the donors that supported FORT operations or capital fundraising campaigns this year, all posted on the Donor page on the ORT website.

THANK YOU DONORS

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.

Irrigation at Km0 and Km3.7 allowed the plants to flourish – thank you to Paul Dick of Paul Dick Excavating and Chris North of Alpine Water Hauling.



