



2025

ANNUAL REPORT | 2025



OKANAGAN RAIL TRAIL | WHERE WILL IT TAKE YOU?

The Okanagan Rail Trail means many different things to the diverse community of people who enjoy it. At Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail, we continue to listen to both trail users and the owner jurisdictions to ensure we are enhancing the trail experience for everyone. This includes new access improvements, expanding wayfinding signage, reporting maintenance needs, and supporting a safe, and welcoming trail for all.

It is a labour of love provided by our dedicated volunteers who continue to step up and contribute to the Okanagan Rail Trail's success. We hope you've had many opportunities to enjoy the trail throughout all our beautiful seasons, and we are grateful for your continued support of the work we do on your behalf.

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

VOLUNTEERS ON THE TRAIL

TRAIL AMBASSADORS

Trail Ambassadors (TAs) continue to be the largest & most active volunteer group supporting the Okanagan Rail Trail. This year, **47 of our 52 Ambassadors contributed an impressive 1,569 volunteer hours on the trail**, with TAs present in every jurisdiction and on the trail every month of the year.

ON THE TRAIL

TAs serve as the trail's essential "eyes and ears," connecting with users, identifying issues, and reporting concerns to jurisdictions and the Okanagan Rail Trail Committee. When needed, they also contact dog control for incidents involving aggressive dogs or unsafe behaviour. Beyond monitoring, Trail Ambassadors model safe trail practices and encourage others to do the same. Summer brings near daily incidents, and TAs are often the first to step in and assist.

OVER THE PAST YEAR, THEY HAVE:

- Loaned tools to fix flat tires and adjust bike seats
- Helped coordinate bike transport when cyclists required ambulance care
- Provided directions to guide vehicles safely off the trail
- And, of course, happily taken countless group photos!



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Trail Ambassadors also play an important role at community events, promoting **Go By Bike Week in Lake Country and Kelowna**, and representing FORT at volunteer fairs, FORT Days on the ORT, and other outreach activities.

Their dedication not only enhances the trail experience but also strengthens the community connections that make our trail special. We extend our heartfelt thanks to every Trail Ambassador for their enthusiasm, reliability, and year round commitment.



Volunteers at FORT's Go By Bike station and TA's out for a TA Ride on the trail.

TRAIL STEWARDS

Our dedicated volunteer stewards continue to monitor and manage the ongoing challenges posed by invasive species along the trail. As any gardener knows, weeding is a continual effort—and the Rail Trail is no exception.

Over the past year, we've organized multiple weeding sessions and participated in educational events focused on controlling priority invasive plants, with a special focus on Scotch Thistle. While our work along the trail makes a meaningful difference, Scotch Thistle remains a widespread regional concern. That's why, during Earth Week (April 22, 2026), Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail will join a larger regional initiative encouraging trail users, community members, and school groups to help remove thistle rosettes before they can form seed heads.

If you'd like to get involved, keep an eye on our newsletters and social media channels for upcoming event details and volunteer opportunities. Your participation helps protect the trail's natural beauty—and keeps invasive species in check.



Stewards stayed busy at KM 0 pulling weeds, with Scotch thistle being the main culprit.



DID YOU KNOW...

A single Scotch Thistle plant can produce thousands of seeds that remain viable in the soil for decades (up to 30+ years!), meaning eradication is a long-term fight.





CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

VOLUNTEER POWER

The year 2025 brought us good fortune, with a virtually smoke-free summer and moderate temperatures thanks to several cooler days. Unfortunately, by the end of 2025, our volunteer numbers had declined. Several individuals were unable to participate and have been marked inactive. However, we still have 62 active volunteers who together contributed over 2,400 hours of service.

Every month, volunteers receive emails prompting them to log their hours and keeping them informed about upcoming events and other important news.



JOIN US! You can be a friend of the trail by volunteering with Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER

2025 PROVED TO BE AN EVENTFUL YEAR FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS!



Our first FORT Day on the trail took place on April 26th under sunny skies. More than 160 cyclists, about 80 walkers or runners, and many leashed dogs joined the festivities. We showcased our new flag stand and pull-up map, which was very popular among trail users.



On June 3rd, several volunteers participated in Go By Bike week in both Kelowna and Lake Country. That same week, the Okanagan Arts Council Civic Park hosted the Plein Air event. FORT Volunteers rode or walked the trail, greeting artists and then welcomed artists and visitors at our tent at Civic Park in Vernon.

2025 PROVED TO BE AN EVENTFUL YEAR FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS!



The Sunshine Festival was a mixed bag of weather for the event on June 21st. Many volunteers staffed our tent and shared information with friendly visitors.



In December, our volunteers gathered at Fairytale Cidery for a festive get-together. Sheila Fraser, our Events Lead, prepared a holiday gift for everyone.

On September 27th, volunteers gathered for a thank-you lunch at OKF Grill in Oyama—a wonderful opportunity to reconnect and socialize.

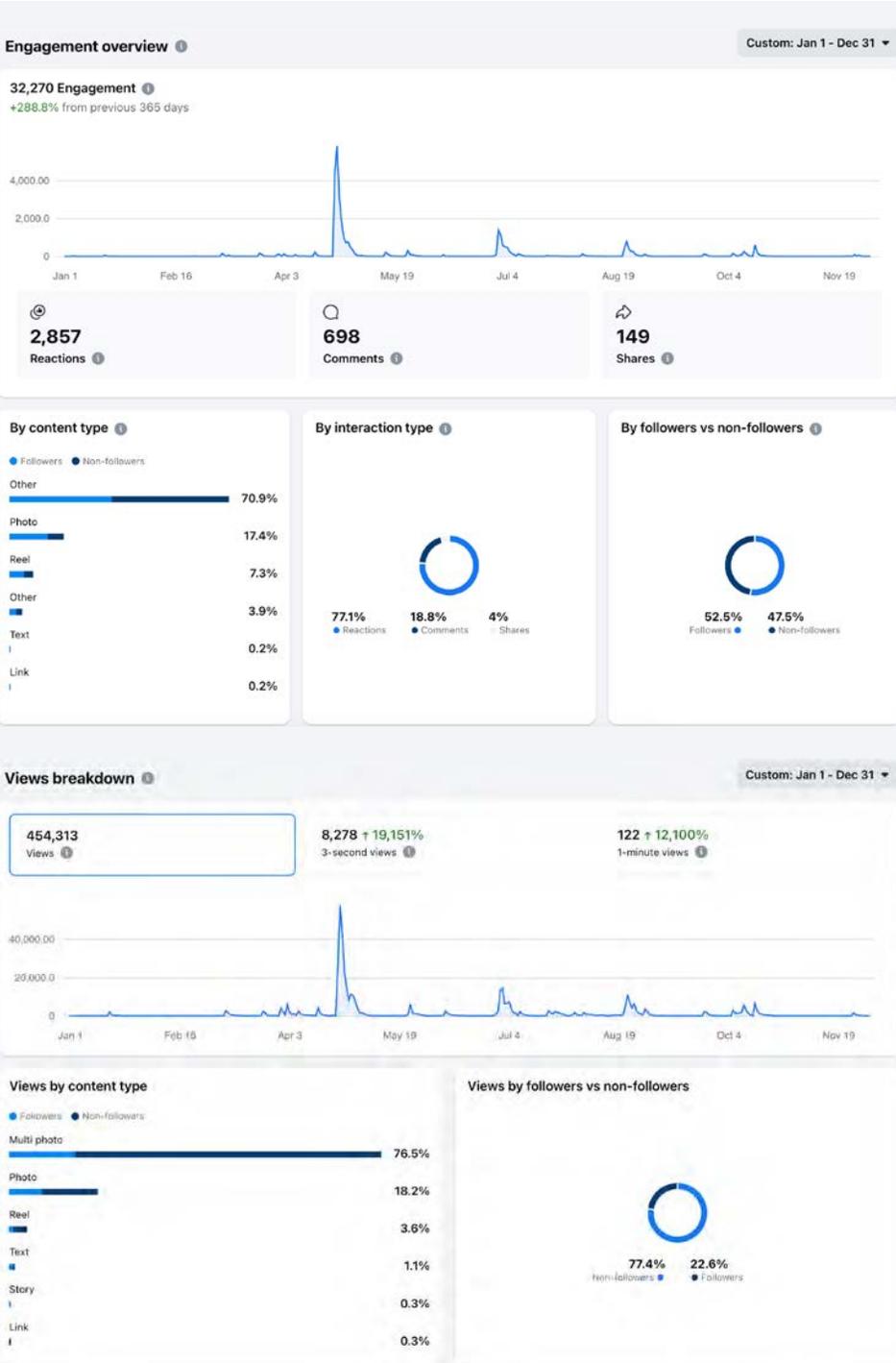
THANK YOU

To all Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail, thank you for sharing your time and energy in 2025, giving back and helping make the trail the best it can be.

COMMUNICATIONS

Social media remains a vital tool for connecting with trail users and supporters. We leveraged the 100-year history of the original rail line from Vernon to Kelowna as a theme to educate and engage our newsletter subscribers and social followers throughout the year. In 2025, we introduced our “Volunteer Profile” segment, featuring a range of FORT volunteers on social media to recognize and celebrate their contributions to the Okanagan Rail Trail.

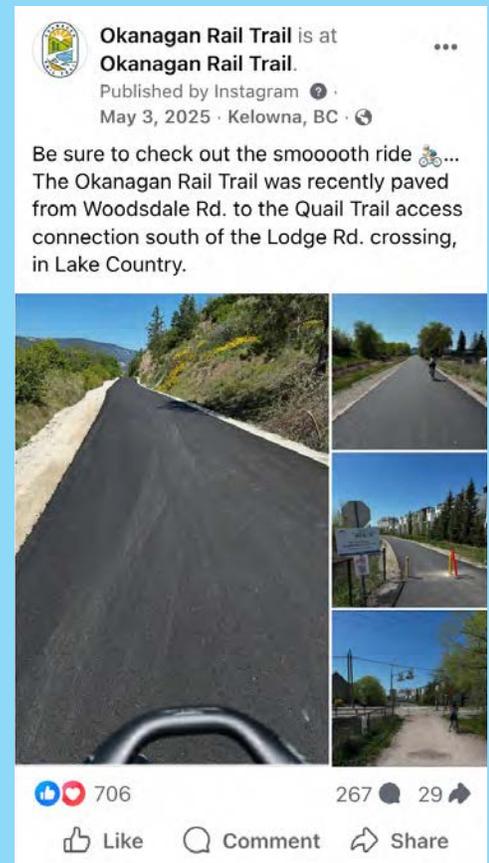
Analytics suggest our users are engaged in relevant information about the Okanagan Rail Trail, and communication plans are in place to continue interacting with our social followers.



2025 TOP SOCIAL POST

The Lake Country Trail Paving post saw a total of 191,000 views.

3,560 Instagram / 187,735 Facebook

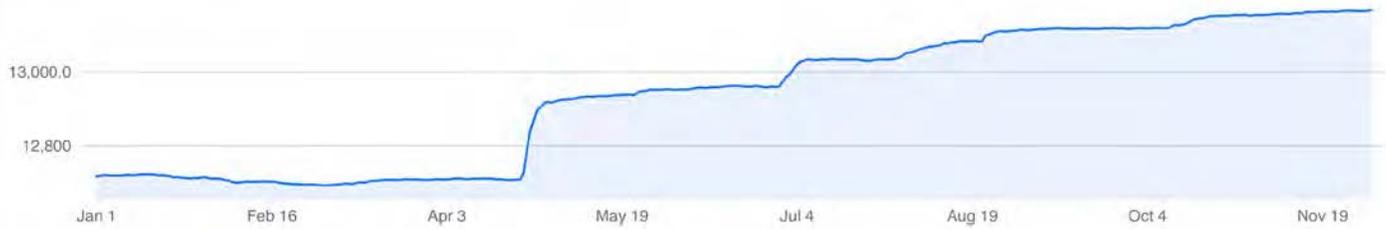


Click to follow and keep up with life on the trail

Audience overview

Custom: Jan 1 - Dec 31

13,177 Total followers
+3.5% from previous 365 days



469

Net follows



247

Unfollows

Net follows by content type

Lifetime



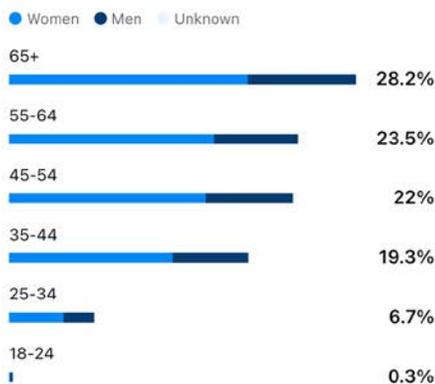
How people find your content

Traffic Source



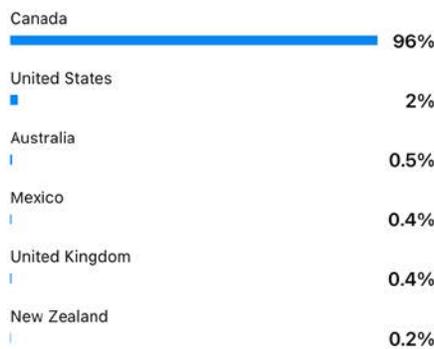
Age & gender

Lifetime



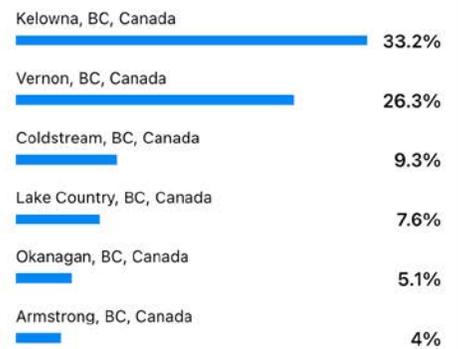
Country

Lifetime



Cities

Lifetime



GET SOCIAL WITH US

Follow us on [Facebook \(Okanagan Rail Trail\)](#) and [Instagram \(@okrailtrail\)](#) for trail updates and more.

CLICK TO FOLLOW →



← CLICK TO FOLLOW



FUND DEVELOPMENT

Our **Find Your Way** campaign continues to make steady progress as we raise funds to build wayfinding kiosks along the Okanagan Rail Trail. These kiosks will play an important role once users can ride the full 52 km from Coldstream to Kelowna—something we're all eagerly anticipating.

Thanks to the generous support of donors, partner jurisdictions, and grant funding, we were able to complete **one Tier 2 kiosk and two Tier 3 kiosks** this year.

GRANT SUPPORT

We are grateful for the continued partnership and financial support that help move these projects forward.

- Completion of a Tier 3 kiosk at Kekuli Bay was possible thanks to contributions from **Greater Vernon Trails and Natural Spaces**
- A grant from the **Outdoor Recreation Council of BC** supported the construction of the Tier 3 kiosk at Kickwillie.

To sustain our momentum, we are building an ongoing list of potential grant opportunities that may support future kiosk builds, trail projects, and broader FORT initiatives.

DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Our dedicated donor community continues to champion our mission, with many supporters giving year after year. Every donor dollar is invested directly back into enhancing the trail experience. Their continued trust and generosity help bring these improvements to life.



ENHANCING THE TRAIL

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

KM 1.1 AT KICKWILLIE

A Tier 3 Kiosk was constructed at the busy northern section, Km 1.1 at Kickwillie, which will provide location and planning information for this very popular section of the trail.





KM 8.4 AT KEKULI BAY

At Km 8.4 in Kekuli Bay, a new kiosk has been added to the existing bike station. It will provide location details and planning information for this important access point from Kekuli Provincial Park. With this addition, the kiosk area on the south side is now complete.



KM 39.6 AT UBCO JUNCTION

At Km 39.6, a new Tier 2 kiosk and widened gathering space create a welcoming meeting point, featuring seating stones, a garbage bin, and maps with interpretive signage. These additions provide trail users with key information, helping make their experience safer and more meaningful.

This was a cooperative effort between FORT and the City of Kelowna.



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 the Okanagan Rail Trail Committee** this year. As an organization with limited opportunities for generating revenue, this support plays an essential role in sustaining our work.

All **tax-receipted donations** are dedicated exclusively to **capital improvement projects** on the trail. Our **total expenditures for the year were \$10,331**, and the **excess of receipts will be carried forward** to support future strategic trail projects.

CAPITAL PROJECTS

In 2025, FORT proudly completed **three new wayfinding projects** along the Okanagan Rail Trail, enhancing navigation and user experience across key access points.

TIER 2 KIOSK AT THE UBCO JUNCTION (KM 39.6) — \$42,000

Funded in part by the **City of Kelowna (\$20,000)**, this Tier 2 Kiosk provides improved orientation at one of the trail's busier intersections.

TIER 3 KIOSK AT KEKULI BAY (KM 18.4) — \$10,000

Supported through a **Greater Vernon Trails and Natural Spaces grant (\$5,000)**, this Tier 3 Kiosk offers helpful information for visitors to this scenic lakeside area.

TIER 3 KIOSK AT THE KICKWILLIE ACCESS (KM 1.1) — \$10,000

Completed with funding from the **Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (\$5,000)**, this kiosk enhances wayfinding at an important northern trail access point.

Additional funding for each of these projects came from the generous contributions of FORT donors, whose support ensures ongoing improvements to the trail experience.

MEET OUR BOARD AND ADVISORY MEMBERS



From left: Betty Beck, Volunteer Management Lead; Sheila Fraser, Events Lead; Susan Wultz, Grants Lead; Michelle Jefferson, Board Chair and President; Laurie Postill, Fund Development Lead; Dev Fraser, Project Management Lead; Phyllis Turner, Trail Ambassador Lead; Anna Dawyd, Treasurer; Keith Bepple, Project Management; Toby Frisk, Communications Lead.

THANK YOU

TO OUR PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

FORT extends sincere thanks to the managing jurisdictions and the **Okanagan Rail Trail Committee** for their ongoing collaboration and support throughout the year.

We are grateful for the funding that made our 2025 wayfinding projects possible:

Outdoor Recreation Council of BC — for providing a grant to install a wayfinding kiosk at Km 1.1.

Greater Vernon Trails and Natural Spaces — for providing a grant to support the kiosk installation at Km 18.4.

City of Kelowna — for providing funding to assist with the installation of the UBCO junction kiosk

We also greatly appreciate the continued support of the **Community Foundation of North Okanagan**.

Heartfelt thanks to all donors who supported FORT Operations and Capital Campaigns this year. A full list of donors is available on the [Donor page](#) of the Okanagan Rail Trail website.

THANK YOU, DONORS & COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Jay Hack, Davidson Partners LLP — for providing expert legal guidance.

Meghan Hindle, 48th Media Co — for generously donating her time to support FORT's newsletters and media content.

Your generosity, expertise, and commitment make a meaningful difference. Thank you for helping us ensure the Okanagan Rail Trail remains a safe, welcoming, and vibrant space for all.



