



Bras d'Or Lake Walking Trail

a project of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association

Final Report from Working Group¹ to Advisory Group - August 2014

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The stage was set during the Advisory Group Session held November 30, 2013 to advance the Trail project through a series of community meetings conducted over the winter of 2014. The Report from that session outlined a procedure for participants to locate on maps what they knew were pathways, old roads, waterways, existing trails, local amenities, and cultural and historical sites of interest. The meetings were held in St. George's Channel, Big Pond, Iona, and Eskasoni. A second meeting of the Advisory Group was held on June 25, 2014 where the purpose was to review the results of the community meetings and to discuss next steps.

This is a report of the principal points that emerged from the community workshops, and the Advisory Group's recommendations for possible next steps. It contains a concluding piece identifying gaps relating to economic development, and to infrastructure support requirements for the trail.

2.0 BACKGROUND – WHAT WE FOUND

The idea of developing a Bras d'Or Lake Walking Trail received unanimous support from participants at each of the four community workshops. There were 52 participants in all, not counting members of the Working Group and group facilitators. The principal points emerging from these meetings follow:

2.1 Existing Trails

Publically recognized and informal trails were identified on maps of the respective Lake areas. The current use of each trail was documented either as a hiking, water route, or multi-use trail. Where possible, ownership of the respective trail (public or private) was indicated. A preliminary map of these trails was presented at the June 25, 2014 Advisory Group Workshop. It will be necessary for each locality where these trails are located to determine which ones may be promoted as accessible to the general public.

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2.2 Proposed Trails

Several developing trails were identified in the watershed. These include the Trans Canada Trail which is currently proposed as a water route around the shores of the Bras d'Or Lake, and a 65 km long trail from Aberdeen to the Seal Island Bridge. The latter is identified as a land route along the northwestern side of the watershed and is currently being proposed as a potential addition to the Trans Canada Trail.

2.3 Special Places

A list of special places was generated by community workshop participants to include waterfalls, beaches, abandoned "back land" communities, ecologically and culturally sensitive areas, and historic sites, including cemeteries. These provide evidence of the watershed's rich cultural heritage.

2.4 Footpath

Without exception, the preference for a "footpath" was expressed by community workshop participants. Most felt this term fitted well with the primary functions of a Biosphere Reserve: *conserving biodiversity; promoting sustainable economic development; and, emphasizing education, health and wellness*. However, the need to respect the current usages of already-established trails (legacy trails) was acknowledged. In future, as portions of trails are connected, including multi-use trails, the ideal would be to have "footpath" connections.

2.5 Trail Mandate

It is important to point out that as a project of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association, the mandate of the Trail initiative necessarily falls within the Association's statements of vision and mission. Those statements follow:

"We envision the Bras d'Or Lake watershed as a special place where communities are joined together in thoughtful promotion of environmental assets and responsible economic development."

"It is our mission to engage all peoples in the balanced and sustainable development of the exceptional, cultural, social, environmental and economic assets within the Bras d'Or Lake watershed."

Thus, the proposed Trail is not just a pathway. It is a vehicle through which communities surrounding the Lake join together in thoughtful promotion of their environmental and community assets as they pursue ways to achieve responsible economic development. Connecting existing and proposed walking trails within this vision will lead to rich recreational, educational, social and economic outcomes for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

A significant feature of the proposed Trail's uniqueness will be interpretive messages incorporating aspects of the area's diverse cultural heritage and values, including the guiding principle of Two-Eyed Seeing². This is a principle for cross-cultural collaboration involving learning to see "the best in the indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing" from one eye, and "the best in the mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing" from the other eye. The community workshops encouraged a gradual move toward "many-eyed seeing" as a way to recognize and reflect the multiplicity of heritages within the watershed.

2.6 Trail Benefits

Recognizing that the proposed Trail will attract visitors to experience the unique features that qualified the Lake and its watershed to merit the UNESCO designation, it was acknowledged by discussants that a trail has great potential to teach permanent residents about the area's exceptional features, thereby recognizing and accommodating the Biosphere Reserve's above-mentioned functions.

Appropriately located, the proposed Trail will serve as an inspirational and economic stimulus. For example, it will be accessible to a range of potential users such as school groups and seniors' groups; and, it will be within reasonable reach of parking facilities, food service areas, overnight accommodation, and various other amenities. As the overall design of the Bras d'Or Lake Trail is being configured it will be imperative to take into account and to promote the use of existing trails.

3.0 RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

3.1 Content

This report is directed primarily to members of the Advisory Group and invites corrections, additional suggestions, etc. The Trail Working Group will modify this document based on that feedback. The resulting document will be available for general distribution, adapted as required to fit specific interests such as prospective funding sources, and organizations/agencies whose mandates include work relating to a trail project.

A watershed trail map is being compiled with assistance from CBRM's Planning Department. Using data gathered to date, the map will show existing and proposed trails (including water routes). These routes were identified by their present usage as single use trails and/or multi-use trails and special trails such as historical and/or cultural walks and guided tours. Places of historical and cultural significance, ecologically sensitive areas, and natural assets such as waterfalls, old growth forests, and beaches are also noted on the map. The map is considered an evolving or "living" document.

² Appendix I provides a description of the Two-Eyed Seeing guiding principle and of a glyph depicting a collective vision for the Trail

3.1.1 The watershed trail map and the final edition of this report will be sent to the community workshop participants via e-mail with a link to Dropbox.

3.1.2 Trans Canada Trail (TCT) –Progress of the proposed TCT water route will be monitored and supported by the BLBRA Trail Working Group. In future it might include land based routes. Partial funding for trail planning with respect to construction, infrastructure, way finding, signage, etc., is available through TCT.

3.2 Communications

If this project is to succeed, individuals and communities will need to adopt a spirit of ownership. Indeed, it is acknowledged that the overall project cannot be realized without having responsibility assumed by local communities for the development of portions of the trail. Information about the work undertaken in respective communities will serve to motivate interest and ensure additional participation in this project in successive years. Communication is absolutely necessary to inform residents of watershed communities. It is therefore necessary to employ a wide variety of communications media. Following are the various means recommended as necessary for effective communication about what the Trail is meant to be, and how it is progressing:

- i. Website as a repository of trail data – Website(s) will form the base of an information distribution system. Information will be kept current with respect to trails, trail related organizations, health and wellness initiatives, and historical and cultural possibilities within the watershed. It will be linked to other trail related websites.
A method to collect and share quality controlled information via website will be determined. Information gathered for the Trail project compliments the community asset information of the already-established BLBRA web-based community atlas.
- ii. Newsletters – Updates on the Trail progress will be kept current through the BLBRA newsletter and will be offered to other relevant community newsletters.
- iii. Social Media – Social media such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs will be employed to deliver time sensitive Trail information.
- iv. Personal Communication – It was agreed that direct personal communication is essential for the success of this project. Because personal communication leads to individual “buy in” attention has to be directed toward enabling Trail information to be shared through informal meetings and encounters.
- v. Brochures - With necessary funding, a brochure on the existing trails in the watershed will be published and distributed to Tourist Bureaus, Community Groups and entry points to the Biosphere Reserve.
- vi. Groups – The BLBRA Trail Working Group will reach out to other community related groups to share the information gathered from all parts of the Bras d’Or Lake watershed community and as a way to gather such additional information as routes and ownership that is known locally.

- vii. Municipalities – A firm liaison is essential with municipal representatives responsible for trail planning. This will help to prevent duplication of initiatives such as signage/branding, information kiosks and funding procurement.
- viii. Symposia / Webinars – As the Trail project develops symposiums or webinars will be featured.
- ix. Public Areas – A map depicting potential and existing trails within the watershed will be printed and posted in such public areas such as community halls, fire halls and schools.

3.3 Youth

It is imperative to establish strong inspirational and creative connections with young people who will be expected to gradually assume responsibility for establishing the Trail and, in the long term, for becoming its principal supporters and stewards. Schools and youth groups (4-H, Scouts etc.) will be encouraged to become involved. Information gathered from the Trail Project will complement the present Grade 4 Curriculum Resource project of the Biosphere Reserve Association. These are mutually supportive projects to ensure provision of reliable and inspiring information for young people residing in the watershed.

3.4 Ownership

Determining the overall form of trail governance is an important next step. As stated earlier, component sections of the proposed trail will be the responsibility of local communities. Ideally, communities will come forward with local trail initiatives that can be planned, built and maintained within the mandate of the overarching BLBRA footpath plan. Ultimately, community trail plans will meet the needs of the respective initiating community, whether they are footpaths or multi-use trails. The potential for positive economic benefit will be a major stimulus for local community action.

3.5 Trail Implementation

At this time the BLBRA Trail Working Group is not in a position to devise a final Trail Plan. It will, however, assist (support) local communities as they undertake development of their trails and related economic development opportunities.

3.6 Organization Structure

3.6.1 The overall Trail initiative is a project of the Bras d'Or Lake Biosphere Reserve Association.

3.6.2 The Trail Working Group will continue to function with the goal of completing the following tasks:

- I. Helping to determine a “soft route” around the watershed based on collected information and additional discussion with local community/interest groups.

- II. With an outline of the “soft route”, an inventory of property ownership and shoreline access will be identified. Ecologically sensitive areas will be delineated with the assistance of the Department of Natural Resources.
- III. Helping to determine what the trail will look like through such estimates as the location of footpaths, and location of multi-use trails.
- IV. Enabling the adoption of existing trail standards through such agencies as DNR and Parks Canada
- V. Compiling and summarizing Provincial Acts that apply to trail development and implementation, through collaboration with Trails NS and other established trail groups throughout the province.
- VI. Compiling information about liability regulations and liability insurance
- VII. Gaining the assistance of a trail planner, e.g., through the Debert Office of the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, to serve as a resource person for this trail initiative.

3.6.3 Advisory Group

The Trail Working Group requires the continued assistance of the Trail Advisory Group as well as other supporting partners such as Parks Canada, DCBA, Tourism Nova Scotia, and municipal planning units. Due to funding limitations, additional meetings of the Advisory Group are not anticipated. Instead, work will be accomplished by e-mail.

3.6.4 Partnerships

Partnerships with municipalities, strong community groups, and trail related interest groups will be pursued. Partnerships are critical to ensure the best possible use of financial, community and professional resources.

3.7 Funding

Funding opportunities will be identified. In future, funding for the Trail Project will be accessed through funding proposals and partnerships with other organizations and municipalities. A record of in-kind contributions will be kept and will serve as support for funding proposals. Partnerships with potential Trail groups outside, but connecting to the watershed, will be pursued as a way to strengthen funding requests.

3.8 Signage

The present opportunity for collaboration with municipalities on their Tourism Signage Strategies will be pursued. Notice will be distributed that the BLBRA Trail Working Group will be available to assist (in kind) with community trail signage and information kiosks. Working with signage partners will serve to raise the profile of the Biosphere Reserve among residents of the watershed.

3.9 Economic Development

The concept of delineating existing trails around the Bras d'Or Lake will celebrate communities and initiate economic (small business) development in rural communities around the watershed. As the concept of the "footpath" comes to fruition, future economic development (B&B's, cafes, local food processors, etc.) will prosper. The possibility of working vacations (science and monitoring and/or trail maintenance) might become a reality.

3.10 Trail Theme

The trail requires a theme, something to make it unique like the Camino De Santiago in Spain. At the community trail workshops, a recurring theme for present trail activity was history and culture as indicated by historical walks in the Boisdale Hills and Mi'kmaq cultural trails in Eskasoni. Another theme suggested for the "footpath" was 'Spirit of the Lake' as described in the CEPI document "*Spirit of the Lake Speaks*".

4.0 GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Many challenges will be faced before this Trail project becomes a reality. Not least of these are the challenges of land ownership, liability insurance and delineating a proposed "soft" watershed trail route based on existing trails and their present usage. Listed below are points gathered at the community meetings related to gaps in economic development and the establishment of infrastructure to support the overall trail product.

4.1 Economic Development – Expert attention is required to realistically estimate reliable estimates of the economic impact of a well-designed and constructed trail associated with the Bras d'Or Lake and its watershed.

The idea of identifying existing trails around the Bras d'Or Lake will celebrate communities and initiate economic (small business) development in rural communities throughout the watershed. As the concept of the "footpath" comes to fruition, future economic development (B&B's, cafes, local food processors, etc.) will emerge. The possibility of working vacations (science and monitoring and/or trail maintenance) might become a reality.

4.2 Trail Theme – see Section 3.10 above.

4.3 Collaborative signage and way finding will be required to indicate points of interest (historical, ecological, topographical, cultural, etc.).

4.4 GPS coordinates and elevations for trail heads and trail routes will be required to indicate interest points on the trail.

4.5 Light camper sites/ fire pits / pit privies and water sources for hikers and/or paddlers are required.

- 4.6 Rest benches and viewing platforms are desirable
- 4.7 Garbage containers (entry/ exit) are necessary
- 4.8 Parking sites are required at various trail entrances/exits
- 4.9 Bed and Breakfasts, cafes, restaurants near trail heads (or along trail) are desirable
- 4.10 Sports outfitters and other entrepreneurial opportunities in communities around the watershed are desirable
- 4.11 Water taxis at community wharves would be convenient

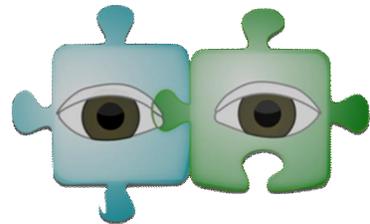
Appendix I

Bringing different cultural strengths together for a Bras d'Or Lake Trail: Two-Eyed Seeing

Two-Eyed Seeing is a guiding principle that strives to encourage a particular, mindful consciousness for collaboration among different worldviews, different cultural perspectives. The phrase was brought forward by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall of Eskasoni First Nation in the early 2000s and he describes the consciousness it encourages as: “learn to see with (y)our one eye with the best (or strengths) in the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learn to see with (y)our other eye with best (or strengths) in the mainstream (or Western) knowledges and ways of knowing ... and learn to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all peoples.”

Two-Eyed Seeing seeks to guide collaboration recognizing that such must be a co-learning journey, one that by definition and then design, involves *on-going* learning together, learning from each other, learning our common, and learning our differences.

When Albert first brought Two-Eyed Seeing forward, it was in the context of collaborations involving Mi'kmaq Traditional Knowledge and mainstream Western science. At that time, however, Albert also recognized the relevance for Two-Eyed Seeing in broader contexts because its key understanding – co-learning – can be readily expanded to include more than just two worldviews or just two cultural perspectives. And thus, one can envision Three-Eyed Seeing, Four-Eyed Seeing, Ten-Eyed Seeing, etc. ... to accommodate as many different worldviews or cultural perspectives as desired. In this way, maximum community inclusivity and diversity, “many-eyed seeing”, can be encouraged.



Two-Eyed Seeing can be represented as an image in which two eyes are positioned behind two connected pieces of a jig-saw. It is important to note that although the two pieces of the jig-saw puzzle fit together, their “fit” is not a perfect match.

Elder Albert Marshall encouraged this image to emphasize that Mi'kmaq understandings, for example, are but one in a rich multitude of Aboriginal / Indigenous cultures and worldviews ... and similarly for the views of the western sciences and other mainstream western knowledges ... and that all of the world's cultures have understandings to contribute in addressing the local to global challenges faced in efforts to promote healthy communities, healthy lifestyles, active living. Again, this leads us to the possibility to recognize and include many pieces of the puzzle such that many-eyed seeing becomes the overall approach.

Furthermore, Elder Albert indicates “the two jig-saw puzzle pieces help remind us that, with respect to Mi'kmaq Traditional Knowledge (as with most Indigenous Traditional Knowledges) no one person ever has more than one small piece of the knowledge. Thus, there is a need to recognize that Mi'kmaq Traditional Knowledge draws upon the community of Elders and other knowledge holders, as well as the collective consciousness of the people.” So, in this sense also, one might wish to talk about many-eyed seeing. And, similarly so for the knowledges of the mainstream, where individual experts each hold but a small piece of the knowledge. In bringing our understandings forward and working in a collective way, the many different pieces of the puzzle are brought together and the picture, i.e. our shared understandings, can grow.

Putting our hearts into a Bras d'Or Lake Trail: Anko'tminew and a glyph

Following the guiding principle of Two-Eyed Seeing whereby co-learning from different worldviews and cultures is essential, a significant understanding from within Traditional Mi'kmaq Knowledge that can be highlighted is the importance of wholism wherein one strives to include and integrate in harmonious ways the four domains of being human, namely the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual. And thus arose the suggestion to consider language and imagery to encourage the understanding that the Bras d'Or Trail will only come about, as well as enjoy long-term stewardship, through efforts that see us put our hearts into a collective vision and into the work that will be required (as well as our heads, etc). Equally important is the understanding that we must do this together (while recognizing that "together" in this sense is not meant to preclude potentially separate or independent efforts by different communities towards the overall, collective vision).

Given these understandings, Mi'kmaq Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall of Eskasoni First Nation offered the Mi'kmaq **Anko'tminew** which can be translated as "to care with your entire being" (hope, love, and possibility) for a Walking Trail around the Bras d'Or Lake. Elders Murdena and Albert further offered the glyph that is depicted and explained below.

