

Trails Director Annual Report: Summary of 2020-2021

2020-2021 saw a large increase in membership and therefore trail use during COVID. These trail networks are vital to our larger community's health and wellbeing, our members' physical activity and social lives, our ski team's training, competition, and success as well as hosting sport and tourism events. Increased use also requires increased maintenance, and potentially changes the social and physical trail conditions members experience. The 2020-21 ski season was a tremendous success, with many new and returning members discovering new trails and areas of the club through events such as the Grand Tour.

The year also saw some turmoil and transition, but with significant accomplishment and expansion of the ski trail network. Nordic trails were well-served by expansion of the snow making system that enabled better trail conditions, responses to freeze and thaw cycles, and continued skiing into the spring. Jim Burbee did important work consolidating and clarifying the club's tenure and land use agreements, and he helped reach a new agreement between CNSC and Terus Construction Ltd. to use their private land for CNSC trails. This enabled a significant trail building project that has resulted in 7.6 km of new ski trails and access to ~ 2 km of existing informal and unsanctioned trails, for a total of close to 10 km of new trails for members to explore this winter. The trails improve access to/from the upper trail network, include a portion of a touring trail (Ridgerunner), as well as an additional upper trail through beautiful scenic woodlands. These trails are new, and we therefore ask for patience and caution as we work out precisely how to integrate, groom, and use them. They are a significant and impressive addition to our club, and we look forward to hearing about members' experiences skiing them.

This trail building project also resulted in some members voicing significant and diverse concerns to the Board of Directors seeking clarification, information, and protection of some of the single track trails. The Board of Directors halted further expansion of the project, and hosted two open zoom meetings to address the issues and answer questions. Member engagement strongly suggested the need to:

- Appoint a Trails Director
- Re-establish the Trails Committee and reform its function
- Integrate single-track trails into trail use, planning, and development considerations
- Develop a trail building policy applicable to all trail types
- Reaffirm the importance of environmental stewardship at/of Otway
- Attend to a diversity of trail users (e.g. families, athletes, learners etc.), recreation activities (e.g. skiing, hiking, mountain biking, etc.), and desired experiences (e.g. fitness, solitude, socializing)
- Communicate openly with members about trail planning, maintenance, projects, and development
- Improve data collection from members to better inform and communicate decisions.

Following this, I was asked to serve as Trails Director and began doing so in May of 2021. Since that time the Board and I have worked hard to:

- Develop and approved the description of the Trails Director position
- Developed and approved Terms of Reference for a new representative trails committee
- Formulate a new Trails Committee with an open call for representative positions,
- Begin working with the Trails Committee, approve our terms of reference, and establishing our norms of practice,
- Connect the new trails to the upper trail network at the main Sawmill loop junction with Lynx.

- Ensure the strategic plan continues to recognize diverse recreational experiences and multi-use/multi-activity trail networks for year-round use congruent with our club's focus on Nordic skiing.
- Increase communication with members regarding trail development and trail use decisions.

The Trails Committee continues to work on:

- Integrating the new trails into our grooming and patterns of use
- Ensuring effective ski trail conditions, grooming, directionality, and naming practices
- Advising on trails-related policy and operations

Looking ahead, the following require work and attention:

- Hiring a new Trails Manager
- Improved and renewed maps and signage
- Improving mechanisms for communication about trails
- Developing an effective and representative survey of members regarding their trail use to gather the data needed to inform decision making
- Establishing trail building policy applicable to the whole network
- Working towards a trails master-plan as a living document informed by members to (a) guide development and management of trails, (b) provide transparency and predictability, and (c) enable strategic responses when opportunities and funding arise.

Importantly, trails hold a lot of significance for members, who are thankfully passionate about them. The building and ongoing maintenance of our trail network depends on the passion, dedication, and personal contributions of volunteers. Although not widespread among our 2000+ members, club and interpersonal politics related to trail building, maintenance, and use has emerged as a significant detriment to the club and impediment to achieving our collective mission. Such politics make volunteering unappealing, significantly less effective, and unsustainable; the health, work, and retention of club employees is also challenged. The club suffers as a result. I urge members to engage respectfully, openly, and constructively with our management and governance structures, and to dial down the interpersonal and club politics. We are a non-profit club supported by a small dedicated staff, and members who volunteer disproportionate time and talent. We are generally like-minded folk focused on wonderful recreational activities in a superb setting and world-class facility.

Furthering the theme of transition, our outgoing Trails Manager, Mike Palangio, deserves sincere thanks for the superb contributions he has made to the club, particularly in terms of providing the excellent trail conditions we all enjoy, his expertise in snow making and its installation, and his building and maintenance of the club's trails and equipment. His joy, engagement with members, and leadership will be missed, and we wish him well in his next adventures. Thanks Mike!

Sincerely,



Phil Mullins

CNSC Trails Director, Oct 28, 2021