

# Unplanned trail creation in Gatineau Park, Canada: engaging users in finding a sustainable solution

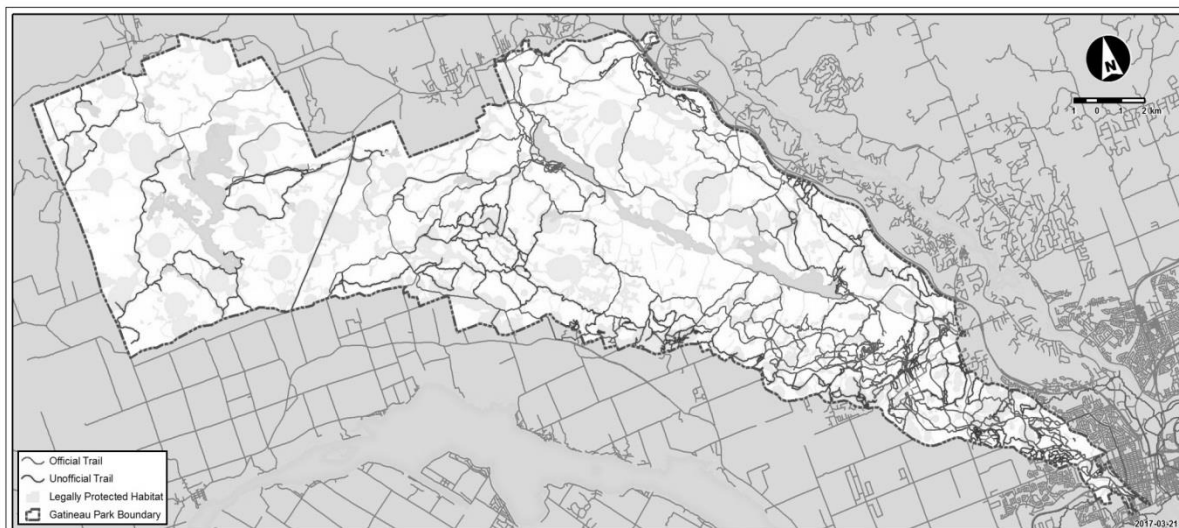
*Catherine Verreault, National Capital Commission, Canada catherine.verreault@ncc-ccn.ca*  
*Christie Spence, National Capital Commission, Canada*

---

## Unplanned trail creation in Gatineau Park, Canada: engaging users in finding a sustainable solution

### *Gatineau Park responsible trail management initiative*

Gatineau Park, Quebec, Canada, receives 2.6 million visits per year. Visitors enjoy hundreds of kilometres of hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, and cycling trails. While the official trail network has remained essentially the same, unauthorized new trails have been continuously created by users, such that the network of “unofficial trails or social trails” has become larger than the official network: 330 km of unofficial trails vs 200 km of official trails. Unofficial trails are created and used by users seeking experiences not offered on the official trail network. Studies conducted on the Park’s ecosystems indicate that habitat fragmentation created by trails conflicts with habitat protection for species at risk and have become significant problems for the Park’s ecological health. The cumulative impact of the trails and the access they provide reduce the overall amount and quality of habitat available for the park’s wildlife. The National Capital Commission, the federal Crown corporation managing Gatineau Park, has initiated a series of consultations with over eighty user groups and adjacent communities to engage them in finding a sustainable solution. Awareness of the negative environmental and public safety impacts caused by unofficial trails was enhanced among user groups and solutions to reduce these impacts were found collaboratively and are now being implemented. Recreational, operational, and natural resource management requirements have been taken into account to arrive at a sustainable solution.



The problematic: Map of Gatineau Park, Québec, Canada showing official (in blue) and unofficial (in red) trail networks, with species at risk legally protected habitat (yellow circles).