

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE NIAGARA BRUCE TRAIL CLUB  
ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION 401 KING STREET, NIAGARA ON THE LAKE  
APRIL 27, 2024**

**Board Members Present:** Alicia Aitchison, Janet Davey, Vince Zvonar, Sam Rutherford, David Kelly, Marion Hanover, Marinus Koole, Kathleen Orth, Tammy Morris, Ellen Savoia, Faye Perkins, Robin Garrett, Joanne Krupa, Sharon Summerhayes

**Nominated Board Members:** Kristin Hanson, Trevor Price (absent)

**Regrets:** Jessica Ranalli, Alan Laver, Rick Waters

President Janet Davey opened the meeting at 3:10 pm and welcomed 75 members and 2 non members. Janet welcomed everyone and introduced the board members. She then outlined the agenda for the meeting.

***A motion to accept the agenda was made by Dian Wright and seconded by Diane Marlett. Carried.***

***A motion to approve the minutes from last year's Annual General Meeting held on May 7th , 2023 was made by Lauren Doig and seconded by Alicia Aitchison. Carried.***

## **DIRECTORS' REPORTS**

### **President – Janet Davey**

This past year has been another successful one for the Niagara Bruce Trail Club. I've had the privilege of working with an outstanding Board of Directors and group of volunteers. However, we could not do any of this work without you, our members. Your membership fees allow us to promote, conserve and maintain this wonderful ribbon of wilderness we have right in our backyard. *Currently there are 1214 members and 183 volunteers.*

I'm going to briefly mention just a few of the highlights from this past year, which will be covered in more detail in the directors' reports. We welcomed four new directors to the board – Ellen Savoia as Vice-President, Faye Perkins as Media Relations Director, Joanne Krupa as Social Events Director with assistance from Sharon Summerhayes. We were also fortunate to have Robin Garrett become our club's director for the Bruce Trail Conservancy board.

We established a Niagara specific Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging committee to promote a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the club and our communities.

Our biodiversity committee continued their outstanding work protecting and educating trail users about the environment on and around the trail. Our hike leaders offered new and educational hikes featuring black history month, night hikes with different moon phases, the solar eclipse, Yoga, the history of the Welland Canal, just to name a few. We held one of our most successful Bruce Trail Days, welcoming newcomers to the trail. And our landowner relations team hosted the first Landowner Appreciation event since Covid with a different format this year and it was a big success.

There is a large group of volunteers working to develop, promote and maintain these and many other activities for our club and I want to express our appreciation to all of them.

### **Vice President - Ellen Savoia**

An ad-hoc Diversity Equity and Inclusion Committee was formed to determine goals and objectives for the club. We will be looking for volunteers to join this new committee to help advance the Diversity Equity and Inclusion goals from the BTC strategic plan and ensure we are a welcoming club for all.

The club email continued to be a primary place for communication with members and non-members. The email is checked several times a week to ensure timely response to inquiries. The most common inquiries are regarding ordering a badge, reporting a problem on the trail, event hike information and joining the club.

This coming year will include a review of the club's by-laws to ensure alignment with the BTC's by-laws which were amended late last year.

### **Past President - Alicia Aitcheson**

Over the past year I've continued to Chair the NBTC Biodiversity Committee who meet quarterly & whose purpose is to facilitate the protection and enhancement of biodiversity along the NBTC corridor. This past year our club's Biodiversity Committee along with so many volunteers have accomplished great things – some of the highlights include:

Applied for and received a grant from the **Invasive Species Council Grant** for \$1890 to purchase 7 extractigators.

**Invasive Species Removal** – we hosted several invasive species removal work parties & with the help of the extractigators were able to make exceptional progress in removal of invasive honeysuckle, buckthorn and continue with our garlic mustard removal.

**Monitoring of Nature Reserves:** the committee monitors high priority Nature Reserves for both native plants and invasives and this information is used to prioritize our work parties. Based on the results, as well as how much progress has been made on the current target properties, we have been able to expand our efforts to include more nature reserves.

**Niagara Club Seed Orchard** was founded! This will be a source of seeds from native plants and seeds to be used along the Niagara Bruce Trail to improve biodiversity. Particularly where we have removed invasives we can start to plant natives instead.

NBTC Bluebird Trail was created at our Woodend Nature Reserve. Our bluebird volunteers built the boxes, created the trail & will monitor and maintain the boxes on a weekly basis during the season.

So many volunteers have participated in so many different ways to make all of these amazing initiatives happen. Together we will continue to work to preserve and share this incredible footpath that we are lucky to have in Niagara. "Preserving a ribbon of wilderness for everyone forever". Volunteers make a difference!

## **BTC Representative - Robin Garrett**

It's an honour to serve as your new Niagara Club Nominated BTC Director! Thank you to Corrie Kellestine for her many years of dedicated service as our former BTC Director.

Now in our second year of the 2030 Strategy, the BTC is progressing well toward our goals as outlined in the Annual Impact Report. Of note, we increased the acres of protected Niagara Escarpment land by 4% over the previous year – now 19,637 acres and 70.6% of the Trail is permanently protected. This year the BTC has included a new measure of success by monitoring our ecological impact. According to the Ecosystem Services Calculator that was developed by the Suzuki Foundation, the annual ecological value of all BTC lands is equal to \$33.1 million. This includes 999 acres of wetland, 11,636 acres of forest, 10 acres of grassland, 28 acres of rivers, 829 acres of cropland, 2513 acres of idle land, and 22 acres of hedgerows. This equates to \$5,100/hectare or \$12,602/acre. These numbers, and their cumulative value, will increase with every new property we secure. The recent announcement about the creation of the 463-acre MapleCross Nature Reserve at Hope Bay will significantly add to our impact. Clearly a highly successful organization, the BTC has been named one of Canada's Top 100 Charities by Charity Intelligence every year since 2018.

I serve on the Governance Committee and have worked with my peers on updating our bylaws, evaluating our Board effectiveness, improving communication with our Clubs, and recruiting fabulous new Board members. Clubs can play an important role in helping to identify future Board members based on the required competencies.

I'm also responsible for Board Education and have engaged management to help the Board take a deep dive on key priority areas including: our government relations work; and, a discussion on how Board Members can be great Ambassadors. Future topics include further ingraining diversity, equity and inclusivity into our organizational DNA; learning from the best trails in the world; and our conservation efforts.

Thank you for sharing your love and support for Canada's oldest and longest marked footpath. Together we are creating a lasting legacy – preserving a ribbon of wilderness for everyone, forever.

### **Our impact:**

- 19,637 acres of Niagara Escarpment land protected
- 70.6% of the Bruce Trail within a protected natural corridor
- 1,375 km of Trail maintained and ready to explore
- 7.9 km of Trail removed from roads this year
- 91 species of conservation concern recorded on BTC land
- 37,067 trees planted to restore forest canopies along the Bruce Trail

### **Our Growth:**

- \$1M donated by our community was matched by Environment & Climate Change Canada
- 336 new Canadians became BTC member with the Canoo app

36 legacy gifts confirmed

1,600 hikes led by BTC Clubs across our trail system – thank you for joining my hikes ☺

12,831 members

1,500 volunteers!

### **Media Relations Director - Faye Perkins**

With the ever- changing media landscape, I see my role as Media Relations Director as an Outreach Volunteer who shares stories to connect more people to one another and to the Bruce Trail.

I am grateful to everyone who makes the magic happen. The list is long, and it includes all the hike leaders, the event coordinators, the board directors, the trail maintenance team, the biodiversity committee members, and all the members of the Niagara Bruce Trail Club. If you were missed on this list, then you need to let me know.

I take the concept of “Preserving a ribbon of wilderness for everyone, forever” seriously, so my personal interests are leading me into the development of accessible hikes and nature preservation initiatives. For me, accessible hiking means more hikes in the area where I live, so more of us can ride our bikes or take public transit to the starting point.

I work closely with different communities to set up presentation tables and am looking forward to our next Bruce Trail Day. Bruce Trail Day is the day that we get to act as hosts and to invite our partners to celebrate the importance of nature in our daily lives.

It is a joy to share the goods news of the Niagara Bruce Trail Club’s volunteers and members through the E-blasts, social media posts and working with the website director. We have an active Facebook presence because of the dedication of our volunteers and our active hiking calendar keeps us all engaged. As the person who helps to organize communication on behalf of the hike leaders and the board directors, I am the voice behind the E-blasts and the promotional social media posts. Communication only works when it is two-way, so if you have some suggestions or want to get more involved in promotion and marketing, please email me at: [nbtccommunications@gmail.com](mailto:nbtccommunications@gmail.com)

### **Hike Coordinator - Alan Laver,** presented by Lauren Doig

The hiking program continues to expand with over 40 organized hikes on the schedule each month catering for all the needs of our membership including short leisurely hikes to the longer more technical hikes.

In addition to the existing themed hikes such as the Black History Month hikes, Witch Hunt Hikes and Plant and Tree Identification Hikes, we have also introduced the Welland Canal and Benchlands hike series. These hikes are becoming increasingly popular and the feedback from BTC members at all clubs is extremely positive.

A Niagara E2E in 7 fundraiser was also introduced which is designed to enable hikers that prefer shorter hikes to complete this challenge.

Event hikes remain popular and a modification to the Merrithon Badge brought out many additional hikers for this grueling challenge with over 80 finishing the event. The end to end, Fort to Fort and Laura Secord event hikes were also successful primarily due to our wonderful volunteers without which we could not stage these events so a special thank you to them.

During the weekend of November 24-6, we organized a hike leader certification program with a total of 11 graduates of which 9 are from the Niagara region. This gives us a healthy selection of hike leaders and will ensure that the Hiking Program in Niagara can continue to diversify and expand.

### **Landowner Relations Director - Sam Rutherford**

2023 marked the return of the Landowner Appreciation Celebration! Traditionally an annual potluck dinner was held to connect with our landowners to express our thanks for allowing trail access across their private properties. This past year we took a new approach and held an open house social/drop-in event in The Glen Elgin room of the Balls Falls Conservation Centre on Sunday October 29 from 2-5 pm. The celebration was a showcase of many activities such as the biodiversity table, landowner stewardship, nature hikes, NBTC merchandise and raffle draws. Each landowner was presented with a native tree to take home. Food was catered and our talented baking volunteers provided many delicious desserts for all to enjoy. Of the 150 in attendance, nearly 50% were Niagara landowners! The celebration was an overwhelming success and we look forward to our next one in the fall of 2024.

Many thanks to our hard working planning committee, all the volunteers, BTC staff and the NPCA for making this day a special one for our landowners.

This year our team of Landowner ambassador volunteers were able to confidently connect with landowners, distributing the 2024 Bruce Trail wall calendar packages to Niagara's approximately 130+ landowners, whether private, business, institutional and municipal:

Landowners allowing access to the Main Trail, Side Trails, and/or on the Optimal Route all received calendar packages.

Thank-you letters and handwritten cards expressed our deep gratitude for continuing to provide Trail access.

Many thanks to this year's team of Landowner Ambassador volunteers, without whom these crucial relationships with landowners would not be maintained:

Michele Altobelli

Ineke Brinkman

Debbie Demizio

Mary Ann Enns

Irma Giese

Elaine Kelly

Teri Kramer

Anne Kubu

Jean Lucente

Robert Maclellan

Terry Mactaggart  
Vince Mayne  
Fran Mortiboys  
David Munford  
Judy Pihach  
Cassandra-Leigh Wilson  
Victoria Steele

This past year we were able to continue to build on the excellent work done by my predecessor in this role, Klari Kalkman. The role descriptions, LOA routes, route kits, LOR committee, landowner surveys and the organization of all relevant materials on Google Drive proved invaluable resources to me as the new Landowner Relations Director. I am extremely thankful to Klari and for the Board and Executive support I received this year while transitioning to the Landowner Relations function. Clearly our focus is on building positive relationships with landowners, with the immediate goal of maintaining good relations and the long-term goal of land acquisition.

Finally, miscellaneous activities included: responding to landowner queries, requests and concerns; working with others to understand local trail issues; working with Conservancy staff on various matters; and other outreach activities.

### **Treasurer - Marinus Koole**

Thanks to all our volunteers for another great year! Our event hikes raised good money again, and without all the volunteer work completed in our club we would need to spend more of that on trail maintenance. This year we could again forward our highest ever, \$56,724 surplus funds to the Conservancy, some of that during the year and a great final cheque for \$41,000 at our year-end.

- You can see our event Hike Revenue reported of over \$28,000, led by our May End to End and including, Fort to Fort, Laura Secord and Merritthon,
- We received another significant donation of \$11,100 from the St. Catharines Roadrunners & Walkers, so generous over the years! Thanks so much!
- There were other large and small donations from local supporters making our total direct donations received \$15,000, including \$810 received specifically in thanks for our Trail Angels. Thanks Diane and Team!
- As noted on the second Expense line on the Income Statement, this year we sent \$56,724 to the Bruce Trail Conservancy.
- Badge and Merchandise sales continue to generate interest and revenue for maintaining and improving the trail, almost \$7,000 this year.
- Finally, as demonstrated on the Balance sheet, we still maintain a good reserve to keep our club activities operational through the coming year.

We could not do any of this without your support and encouragement, both as active volunteers and in various other ways. We thank all of those renewing their memberships throughout the year! We encourage every member to share our story and invite others to become members, as we would love to increase our membership base next year.

***A motion to accept the financials was made by Margaret Northfield and seconded by Diane Marlett. Carried.***

### **Land Acquisition - David Kelly**

The last year was very successful for the Conservancy as a whole with 3.59 km of the Optimum Route (OR) being secured. A total of 7.9 km of trail was removed from roads and onto new trails this past year. This means that 70.6% of the Bruce Trail is now on permanently protected land. In the Niagara Region, the BTC secured 11 acres and 505m of OR trail on the Vineyard's Edge Nature Reserve land adjacent to the BTC Cherry Ridge property in the Town of Lincoln. Several other properties in the Niagara section are being actively considered for potential securement.

Thank you to the NBTC Board, volunteers and members for your continued vision, hard work and collaboration.

### **Land Stewardship Director - Vince Zvonar**

NBTC manages 23 properties which are looked after by 15 land stewards. I made about 20 visits to different properties for various reasons which I will not bore you with. Three boot brushes were installed on our managed properties. Last year BTC acquired an 11 acre property off Cherry Ave. We have four new land stewards. Most of our properties were inspected last fall by land stewards and submitted their reports. It's been a pleasure working with all the land stewards, board of directors and BTC staff over the years. I still plan to be involved with trail maintenance, that is if I'm wanted. Thank you.

### **Director Trail Maintenance & Development - Rick Waters**

#### **Trails**

Total distance of the main Bruce Trail Queenston to Grimsby in 2024 - 81.8 km

Total distance of the Side Trails in 2024 - 45.7 km

Total number of Side Trails - 23

The last 12 months has been a busy one for Trail Captains, Trail Monitors, Sawyers and Trail workers. The cleanup and trimming of vegetation growth, trees and branches that fall on the trail never ends. Replacing signs, adding signs, painting blazes, reporting trail conditions and completing Trail Status Reports 2x per year keeps our Trail workers busy.

The BTC conducted a Trail Audit of the Niagara Section May/ June 2023. This happens every 5 years and 2023 was our turn. There were 126 items that required attention in Niagara from this audit. No structure number, repaint blazes, missing blazes, turns not clearly marked and missing signs are some examples of the 126 items. These items were addressed, and a response was sent to the BTC audit committee on actions taken on these items Feb 3, 2024.

#### **New Trails and ReRoutes**

In July 2023 Section #19 Kinsmen Park to Quarry Rd a reroute of the main Bruce Trail took us off private property onto Town of Lincoln Property.

At Queenston Heights November 2023 the main Bruce Trail was rerouted to go past General Brock's monument and the Landscape of Nations This has allowed hikers to get closer to these important historic monuments from the War of 1812.

August 2023 a new side trail 530 meters long was created connecting the main Bruce Trail with the terminus of the Heritage Trail. This gives hikers the choice of a loop hike with the main Bruce Trail This new trail is called the “Major Teyoninhokarawen John Norton Side Trail” John Norton was a Mohawk Chief who played a key role in defeating the Americans at Queenston Heights.

September 2023 a new side trail “Lock 24 First Welland Canal” was introduced to take hikers to a lock that was constructed between 1824 and 1827 This was one of 39 locks that took ships from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. The 1st Welland Canal was built 200 years ago.

### New Trail Captains

David Wyllie Sect 10 ST-11

Bruce Hogg Sect 8

Lorraine Rodrigues Sect 19

Rob Stevens Sect 1 ST-19 ST-22

Ed Froese Sect 2

Steve Grochot Sect 21 ST-12 ST-14 ST-15

Ellen Savoia Sect 16 ST-20

Joe Maloney ST-5

Mary McLaren and Don Matheson Sect 22

Ryan Niclasen Sect 13

The NBTC appreciates all the time and effort put in by the retiring Trail Captains and we look forward to working with this new group of Trail Captains in Niagara.

### Projects 2024/2025

Reroute the main Bruce Trail from Warner Rd to Woodend Conservation Area. This will take the main Bruce Trail off of Warner Rd.

With the cooperation of the NPCA created a new side trail connecting Lower Balls Falls and Upper Balls Falls to the main Bruce Trail.

### Newsletter Editor - Kathleen Orth

The Grapevine appears quarterly: Spring 2023, Summer 2023, Fall 2023 and Winter 2023/2024. In 2023, issues ranged from 10 to 16 pages. Issues are posted on NBTC’s website, the BTC site, and emailed to NBTC members.

NBTC’s Board of Directors supports the newsletter by providing updates and photos that keep members informed of BTC and club activities, volunteer awards, and trail maintenance. Board members Alicia Aitchison, Janet Davey, Alan Laver, Faye Perkins, Jessica Ranalli, Margaret Northfield, Sam Rutherford, and Rick Waters provided regular updates.

In 2023, contributors included Lauren Doig, Susan Gammage, Mary-Lyn Hopper, Angela Lyttle, Sheila Massey, Bill Russell, and Helen Hermansen. While we think this past winter was unusually mild, the Spring 2023 issue featured Sheila Massey’s “Winter, What Winter?” story, and Alicia Aitchison gave tips on “Hiking in Mud Season.” Alicia Aitchison and Mary-Lyn Hopper kept NBTC members informed about the NBTC Biodiversity Committee’s work parties, the NBTC Bluebird Trail, and NBTC’s Seed Orchard.

The Grapevine introduced new board members Ellen Savoia (Vice-President), Faye Perkins (Public Relations & Publicity), Robin Garrett BTC Board Representative), Joanne Krupa (Social Convenor), and board support Sharon Summerhayes (Social Convenor), and Cathy Berkhout-Bosse (Public Relations).

NBTC trail ambassadors, Megan Colombe and Kayla Jakobszen, gave an update on their role in the Fall 2023 issue.

The Grapevine gets the word out about new badges: Niagara Benchlands Badge, the Welland Canals Badge, the redesigned Winter badge, and the My First Hike badge.

Fundraising initiatives are acknowledged and thanked

Summer issue, page 2, Alicia Aitchison presents BTC's Adam Brylowski with a cheque for \$46,305 - NBTC's contribution to the BTC.

Winter 2023/2024, page 3: a photo to recognize \$10,000 donation to the NBTC from the St. Catharines Road Runners & Walkers, a long-time supporter.

Long-time advertiser Brown Rabbit continued to support NBTC and The Grapevine, and DeNure Tours came on as an advertiser.

The Editor thanks the board members and all contributors to the newsletter for their support that ensures the success of The Grapevine. Congratulations for a successful year!

### **Membership/Volunteer Coordinator - Jessica Ranalli**

The Niagara Bruce Trail Club now has 1213 members, compared to 1238 from last year. This marks a 2% decrease in membership. While a decrease in membership was observed through late 2022 and the first half of 2023, there has been steady increase each month since November 2023 with an increase of 49 members from November 2023 to March 2024. New members are added to the club email distribution list on a monthly basis to keep them informed with club news and special events.

The past year there were 183 active volunteers across the club, to which we are very grateful to each and every one. This is up from 178 volunteers last year, marking a 3% increase. Many of the club's volunteers hold multiple roles, volunteering at club and community events, on various committees, leading hikes, and contributing to the successful operation of the organization through trail maintenance, landowner relations, land stewardship to name a few.

Each year, three volunteers' outstanding achievements are recognized through the annual Volunteer Awards. The recipients are chosen from nominees submitted by current club members. The Lifetime Achievement Award is awarded to a member(s) who has made a significant volunteer contribution to the organization at the club level over many years. The Volunteer of the Year Award is awarded to a member or committee whose volunteerism has gone above and beyond in the year just completed. And the Unsung Hero Award is awarded to a member(s) who can always be counted on to lend a hand and volunteer at the club level over many years.

I am pleased to announce this year's winners:

**Corrie Kellestine** for the NBTC 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award

**Diane Marlatt** for the NBTC 2024 Volunteer of the Year Award

**Bill Russell** for the NBTC 2024 Unsung Hero Award

### **Social Events Director - Joanne Krupa**

Upon joining the board in the fall I was immediately impressed by the professionalism of the board and dedication of its members. It is my great pleasure to join the team and contribute as and where I can. Intimidating as it is to follow in the footsteps of the unstoppable Diane Marlatt, I am comforted by the other board members' assurance that each member interprets the role they take on "in their own way". My interpretation of the Social Director role is to foster and build the sense of community and fun within the club. I am excited to create new opportunities for us to connect on and off the trail. If you have ideas of how we can build on our wonderful community please approach me on or off the trail.

Finally, I would not have taken on this role without the assistance of Sharon Summerhayes, thank you Sharon!

Here's to a fantastic 2024!

### **Member at Large/ Archivist/ Website - Tammy Morris**

The Archives for the Niagara Bruce Trail Club are housed at Brock University Library in Special Collections and Archives. Anyone can access them, and an appointment must be made to view the collection. The archives are updated every two years, the next update being this coming May, 2024.

The website is updated regularly including latest news, hike information, and blog posts with the goal of keeping members and non-members up to date on NBTC happenings.

All Club websites are being consolidated onto the Bruce Trail Conservancy's server. Niagara's migration went very well in December of 2023. The NTBC website will be re-designed with branding guidance from the Bruce Trail Conservancy, expected sometime over the next year.

### **Secretary - Marion Hanover**

The Board of Directors of the Niagara Bruce Trail Club meets monthly with the exception of July and August. Minutes of all meetings are shared with the BTC. The Niagara Board stores club documents including meeting minutes on its own Google Drive. This allows for greater access for board members and succession planning.

Hikers achieving goals and being awarded with badges (as set out in Niagara Bruce Trail website) continues to be popular. In the last fiscal year 666 badges were issued in contrast to 630 in 2022/23 711 in 2021/22, 314 in 2020/21 and 238 in 2019/20.

Alicia announced the 2024/2025 board of directors.

***A motion to accept the directors was made by Marinus Koole and seconded by Mark Crisp. Carried.***

Janet presented awards to outgoing directors: Vince Zvonar, Corrie Kellestine, Diane Marlett, Alicia Aitcheson

Ellen presented the Volunteer Recognition Awards:

- 1) Lifetime volunteer award - Corrie Kellestine
- 2) Volunteer of the Year - Diane Marlett
- 3) Unsung Hero award - Bill Russell

***A motion to adjourn was made by Robin Garrett and seconded by Vince Zvonar. Carried.***

