

# Kimberley Forest

Up-Date

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Important milestones have been reached in the establishment of the Kimberley Forest, including the development of a stewardship strategy, trail rehabilitation, incorporation and liability insurance.

Stretching nearly 2.5 kilometres along the west side of the Beaver Valley, the Kimberley Forest extends from the Beaver Valley ski club nearly to Talisman. A large tract of public land, it extends all the way up the escarpment from the Beaver River to the 7th Line on the west.

The forest encompasses almost 364 hectares (900 acres) of provincial Crown land, property owned by the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority and the Bruce Trail Conservancy. The entire area is located within Grey Highlands.

In the past this area was loosely referred to as the Wodehouse Karst but for convenience it is now being called the Kimberley Forest.

Stew Hilts, chair of the Friends of Kimberley Forest, recently acknowledged the involvement of Grey Highlands council along with

the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and Grey Sauble Conservation Authority in helping the group incorporate as a organization, an important step in moving forward.

Cathy Little, a founding member of the Friends of Kimberley Forest and Grey Highlands councillor said the three-year Memorandum of Understanding with Grey Highlands and the \$3,000 a year that accompany the MOU was key to helping the group get legally established and acquire liability insurance.

Now the group will be able to apply for other grants to help pay for a map of the trails, and some interpretive signage.

A stewardship strategy, which has been approved by the MNRF, is focusing for now on trail rehabilitation and management, a top priority for the area which has suffered severe damage to trails through erosion and ATV traffic.

"We anticipate continuing support from MNRF through Craig Todd, partnership specialist, as we move to implementation of the recommendations," Hilts said during a presentation to Grey Highlands

council on May 1.

Trail rehabilitation and new trail development have taken the form of three major projects.

Hilts described an experimental trail rehabilitation project undertaken with the assistance of the three MNRF students working for three days with remarkable success.

A 200-metre stretch of horizontal trail where large ruts and mud puddles had developed was successfully rehabilitated.

A stretch of uphill trail where a deep rut on one side had made the trail unsafe was also repaired.

Both locations had been damaged by excessive ATV use at inappropriate times of the year.

"The rehabilitation work was simple hard physical labour, making use of rocks and logs as needed to protect the trail from further erosion," said Hilts.

The Friends of Kimberley Forest have been working closely with the Bruce Trail Conservancy through the local Bruce Trail Club as well as Grey Sauble Conservation Authority in the development of a new trail that will allow visitors to hike from the Wodehouse Karst

sinkholes to the Karst springs.

The new trail runs east from the 7th Line past the sinkholes to the springs below. The parking lot on the 7th Line was also improved.

Hilts said for the first time hikers will be able to see both the sinkholes and the springs where they merge below the slope, on a single walk.

The new trail will be managed as a Bruce Trail side trail and will be maintained by the local Bruce Trail club volunteers.

Little said focusing on a creating the Bruce Trail side trail was part of the group's ability to achieve something tangible.

"Up until then we had done a lot of talking and mapping and working on management plans but we didn't seem to be able to make much progress because we were relying on some upper levels of government," she said.

Last year field work was undertaken to finalize a detailed map of existing and former trails in the Kimberley Forest including details of trail junctions. Once complete, the map will enable decisions to be made on the trail management and the preparation of a simplified trail map for public use.

The organization has successfully reached out to local casual ATV users, especially those who belong to the Beaver Valley Ski Club who have indicated their willingness to assist with coaching users who may be abusing the sensitive trails, especially during the wet seasons.

"We hope that this connection will produce more volunteers who will help with summer maintenance and rebuilding," said Hilts.

The group is also receiving support from the Dufferin-Grey ATV club.

Hilts said club members recognize the sensitive nature of parts of the forest and have agreed not to use the trails in the forest for now.

Plans for the coming year include developing interpretive signage that will highlight the significant geological site for visitors, more trail rehabilitation, design and publication of a trail map. The group is also working toward the production of a smartphone app for a trails map.

On May 13 the new Wodehouse Karst side trail will be officially opened. It runs from the 7th Line just south of the hamlet of Wodehouse two concessions north of Hutchison's Corners.

Owen  
Sound  
Sun Times

Fri  
5/5/17

Thanks

Peop