



● Regional policy for hiking trails

in the Estrie region

Les Sentiers de l'Estrie inc.



Plan pour une
économie
verte



Québec



**FONDS D'ACTION
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This financial support comes from the Quebec government as part of the Quebec Action Fund for Sustainable Development (Fonds d'action québécois pour le développement durable – FAQDD), which stems from the [Plan for a Green Economy 2030](#) and the Action Plan for Responsible and Sustainable Tourism 2020-2025.

● A collaborative approach

More than twenty partners have contributed to the process of drawing up a regional hiking trails policy for the Estrie region, which will help preserve our hiking trails, one of our region's greatest assets.

This policy represents a shared desire to work together to ensure the presence, sustainability and longevity of hiking trails in the Estrie region.

This collaborative effort will continue over the coming years, with the drafting of a master plan and the implementation of inspiring, concerted actions to give concrete form to the Policy's vision and directions.



WALKING TRAILS, THE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ACCESS TO NATURE IN THE ESTRIE REGION

Acknowledgements

The advisory committee would like to thank Les Sentiers de l'Estrie and the Conseil Sport Loisir de l'Estrie for their commitment in developing the Policy and coordinating the participatory process that made it possible.

We also acknowledge the Société de plein air des Pays-d'en-Haut (SOPAIR) for sharing its experience in developing the Pays-d'en-Haut RCM's Trail Protection and Access Policy.

Photo : Hugo Mimee

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● Introduction

In a context where hiking trails are likely to come under considerable pressure, this regional concerted effort is the cornerstone of sustainable land management. A shared vision is essential to ensure the preservation of natural environments, four-season access to nature and the promotion of ralentourism for visitors and residents alike.

Sustainable access to nature and walking are essential in the context of climate change and sustainable development, for a number of reasons:

- They promote good physical and mental health.
- They support the practice of low-GHG emission activities.
- They help to strengthen links with nature and raise awareness among users about the need to preserve and conserve ecosystems.

The Quebec government wants to involve the various regional players in implementing the orientations of the 2030 Nature Plan to « give Quebecers greater access to nature and achieve the conservation target of 30 per cent of the territory by 2030 ». [translation]¹

This context is highly conducive to the integration of hiking trails into land-use planning and the implementation of trail enhancement projects in

the Estrie region. Hiking trails that are developed, maintained and used in a responsible and sustainable manner contribute to the conservation of the region and the mobilisation of the public.

For these reasons, Les Sentiers de l'Estrie has received financial support to develop a hiking trail policy in collaboration with local partners.

This financial support comes from the Quebec government as part of the Quebec Action Fund for Sustainable Development (Fonds d'action québécois pour le développement durable – FAQDD), which stems from the *Plan for a Green Economy 2030* and the *Action Plan for Responsible and Sustainable Tourism 2020-2025*.

To achieve this, a participative approach has been initiated to facilitate consultation with all partners.

The Conseil Sport Loisir de l'Estrie and Les Sentiers de l'Estrie are coordinating this initiative.

¹Gouvernement of Québec. 2022. *Protection de la biodiversité - Québec annonce 650 M\$ en vue d'un ambitieux Plan Nature pour 2030*. <https://www.quebec.ca/nouvelles/actualites/details/protection-de-la-biodiversite-quebec-annonce-650-m-en-vue-dun-ambitieux-plan-nature-pour-2030-44554> (accessed on April 10, 2024)

● Why have a walking trail policy?

The aim of developing a policy is to establish common guidelines for the coming years in order to ensure the sustainability of the hiking trails.

In addition, a number of opportunities are to be seized in the short and medium term, which can be used as food for thought when drawing up the master plan.

Characterizing the Estrie region as a global health region

- Prioritize access to nature throughout the Estrie region.
- Adopting different approaches to encourage green environments and the presence of nearby landscaped natural areas.

Facilitating projects financing and implementation

- Raise awareness and obtain a commitment from local and regional authorities and stakeholders to organize and support access to nature for the Estrie region population.
- Access funding programs through a policy and, possibly, a regional walking master plan.
- Increase the availability of tools for integrating walking trails into land-use planning and development.

Connecting Estrie's hiking trails to the major trail networks

- International connection at the Vermont Long Trail.
- Connection to the Quebec section of the [International Appalachian Trail](#) (GR A1).
- Participate in [Sentier national du Québec](#) network.
- Connection to the [Collines Montérégiennes](#) network.
- Connection to the [Trans Canada Trail](#).



Photo : Ian Roberge

Policy objectives

The aim of the *Hiking trails policy* is to ensure the presence, sustainability and development of hiking trails in the Estrie region.

More specifically, it targets the infrastructure of hiking trails as a prerequisite for the practice of hiking.

This policy is not intended to replace other policies, action plans or other documents governing hiking trails in the Estrie region. It adds to and integrates with other documents in compliance with current regulations and may contribute to their development.

● Joint approach process

A participatory approach was launched in June 2023 to invite partners and the general public to help develop the Policy. In addition to the advisory committee, discussion workshops with partners and an online questionnaire for the general public were held.

Stages in the regional joint approach process





Advisory Committee

Set up in the fall of 2023, the advisory committee, coordinated by the Conseil Sport Loisir de l'Estrie, met five times between September 2023 and September 2024. The committee's mandate was to :

- Participate in discussions on land-use planning in the Estrie region that focus on conservation and access to nature.
- Discuss the expectations and concerns of organizations with regard to the protection and development of walking trails.
- Recommend content elements to be included in a regional walking trail policy that addresses active travel and access to nature.
- Encourage other stakeholders to get on board.

Members of the Advisory Committee

- Association du Marais-de-la-Rivière-aux-Cerises
- Conseil régional de l'environnement de l'Estrie
- Conseil Sport Loisir de l'Estrie
- Nature Conservancy of Canada
- Appalachian Corridor
- Les Sentiers de l'Estrie
- Haute-Yamaska RCM
- Coaticook RCM
- Brome-Missisquoi RCM
- Memphrémagog RCM
- Des Sources RCM
- Val-Saint-François RCM
- Granit RCM
- Haut-Saint-François RCM
- Rando Québec
- Sentiers Frontaliers
- Tourism Eastern Townships
- City of Sherbrooke

Consultation workshops



The purpose of the consultation workshops held with the various stakeholders in the area was to discuss the issues, opportunities and possible solutions surrounding the sustainability and management of the hiking trails.

Workshop with trail managers

(December 6-7, 2023)

Workshop with environmental and conservation organizations

(January 31, 2024)

Workshop with RCMs and municipalities

(February 7-8, 2024)

Online questionnaire

In November and December 2023, the Cocoriko consultation platform was used to conduct a questionnaire with all the stakeholders and the population of Estrie.

A total of 197 people took part in this online consultation, which focused on four themes on which people could vote on proposals, suggest other proposals and enter their comments.

The online consultation covered four themes

- **Are you a hiker?** to find out more about hikers, their interests and their needs.
- **Promote conservation and access to nature**, to find out whether it is possible for walking trails to coexist with natural environments without destroying them.
- **Continued existence of hiking trails**, in order to canvass the public on ways of ensuring the permanence of trails that depend on voluntary rights of way on private land.
- **On the map**, so that people can identify places of interest (such as projects, trail breaks, infrastructure and support needs, safety or conservation issues).

● Situation report

The region

The Estrie region is vast, with a population of around 506,200, spread over an area of 12,482 km². Regional governance is based on eight regional county municipalities (RCMs), the large City of Sherbrooke and 101 municipalities that care deeply about their natural environment (see map on page 12)². The Estrie region has a varied landscape of mountains and valleys. The hiking sites are naturally grouped into different geographical zones, each with its own distinct appeal.

To the west of the region are a number of Monteregian hills, including Mont Brome and Mont Shefford, where there are organized networks of short forest hikes, often accessible to a broad clientele, as well as longer intermediate networks in the Parc des Sommets de Bromont. There are also other local trail networks, as well as the Yamaska national park one.

In the centre, the Long sentier des Sentiers de l'Estrie (160 km) is the largest regional infrastructure of hiking trails in the Estrie region. Located for the most part in the Nature Conservancy of Canada's (NCC) Green Mountains Nature Reserve (GMNR), it features a series of wilderness summits, loop sections and a variety of routes. The trail spans three RCMs (Brome-Missisquoi, Memphrémagog and Val-Saint-François) and extends as far as Vermont's Long Trail, which connects to the Appalachian Trail. This is the main example of connectivity. The municipality of Potton, the Bolton sector, the Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS), the private inhabited park Au Diable vert, Mont Foster of the Appalachian Corridor and Parc national du Mont-Orford are all connected to the Long sentier.

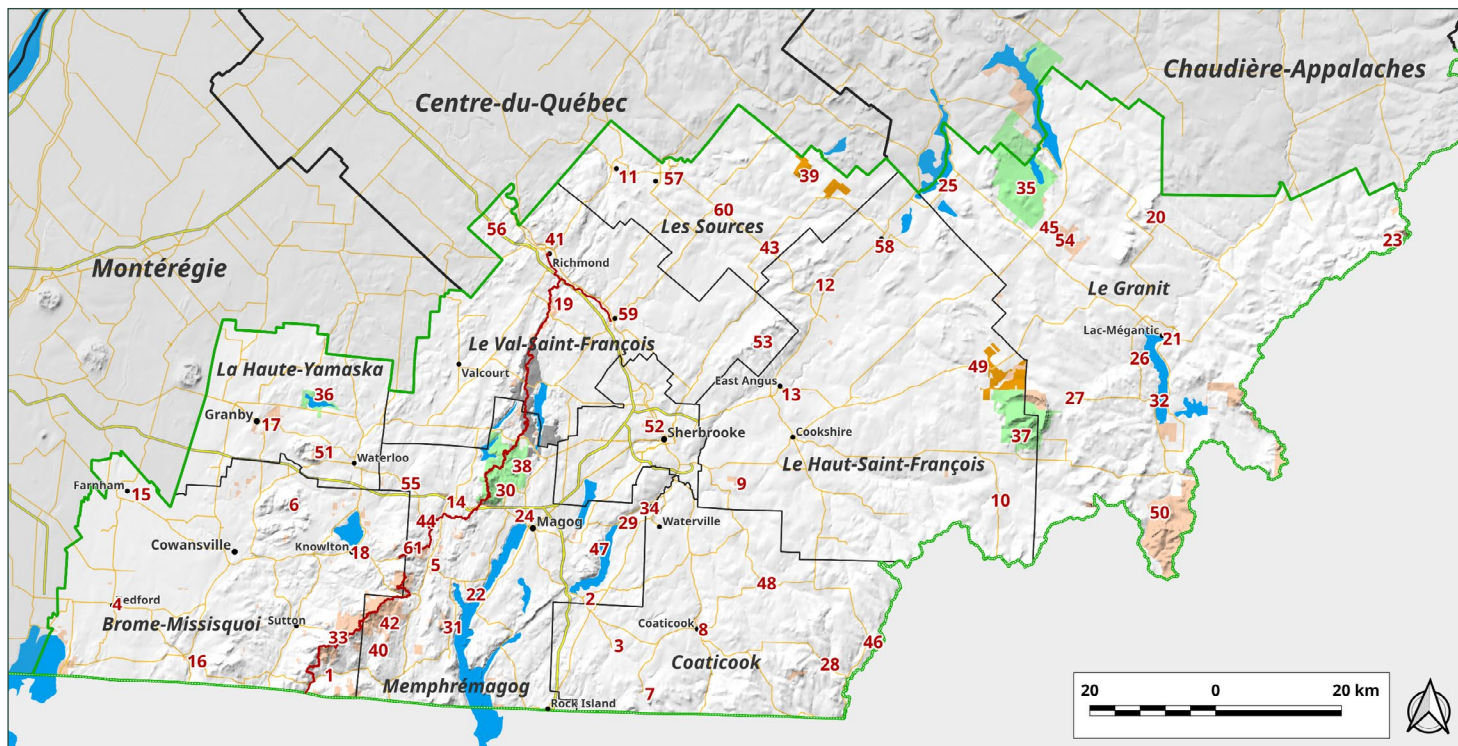
Heading north from Parc national du Mont-Orford along the Rivière au Saumon, you'll find another section of the Sentiers de l'Estrie, the Kingsbury zone, with a gentle gradient through an often mature forest. Local trail networks are also found here.

To the north, Mount Ham offers a bare summit. Nearby, the Monts Stoke massif, with its several peaks in woodland (Domtar forest), offers a network of trails accessible from five different access points. There are many different routes and viewpoints.

To the east of the region, close to the Canada/US border, the Sentiers Frontaliers network offers wild access to a number of peaks, including the highest in the region, Mount Gosford at 1,193 m. Connected to Mont-Mégantic National Park and to New-Hampshire's Cohos Trail, this sector offers opportunities for long hikes. Further afield is Mont Bélanger, accessible in summer only. Finally, the Coaticook River valley boasts a number of major hiking sites, including Hereford Mountain, Coaticook Gorge Park and Pinnacle Mountain, as well as a number of small local trails. Frontenac National Park also offers a network of trails for hiking.

²Government of Quebec, Municipal Affairs and Housing. 2023. Administrative Region 05: Estrie. https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/affaires-municipales/publications/organisation_municipale/cartotheque/Region_05.pdf (accessed May 3, 2024).

● Situation report



■ Parc national
 ■ Parc régional
 ■ Ajout au parc national du Mont-Orford
 ■ Aire protégée
 — Sentier de l'Estrie

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Au Diable Vert | 22. Le circuit de l'Abbaye | 46. Le sentier Poétique |
| 2. Sentier d'Ayer's Cliff
Sentier nature Tomifobia | 23. Les sentiers du Mont Bélanger | 47. Sentiers Massawippi
Île du Marais de Katevale |
| 3. Sentier Onès-Cloutier | 24. Marais de la Rivière-aux-Cerises
Parc de la Baie-de-Magog (pointe Merry) | 48. Sentier du Parc de Sainte-Edwidge-de-Clifton |
| 4. Sentier de la nature Keith-Sornberger | 25. Marais Maskinongé | 49. Parc Walter-MacKenzie
Parc régional du Marécage-des-Scots |
| 5. Sentier de la sablière
Sentier des ruisseaux | 26. Marais Un Lac au Sommet | 50. Sentiers Frontaliers |
| 6. Parc des Sommets | 27. Mini Compostelle - Parcours de marche au coeur
de Mégantic | 51. Parc des Montagnards
Parc écologique Jean-Paul-Forand
Parc Ménard |
| 7. Parc Harold F. Baldwin | 28. Forêt Hereford | 52. Base de plein air André-Nadeau
Bois Beckett
Boisé Fabi
Boisé Lucien-Bouchard
Marais Réal-D.-Carbonneau
Parc du Domaine Howard
Parc du mont Bellevue
Promenade de la Gorge de la rivière Magog |
| 8. Circuit Vélo-Piétonnier Rivière Aux Pins
Parc de la Gorge de Coaticook
La voie des Pèlerins de la Vallée | 29. Parc Scowen | 53. Les monts Stoke (Sentiers de l'Estrie) |
| 9. Parc écoforestier de Johnville | 30. Station touristique du Mont-Orford | 54. Parc récréotouristique de Stornoway |
| 10. Sentier pédestre de la mine d'or | 31. Owl's Head | 55. Sentier pédestre de Stukely-Sud |
| 11. Étang Burbank | 32. Le sentier du clocher de Piopolis
Les sentiers du Scotch Cap | 56. Moulin à laine d'Ulverton |
| 12. Forêt habitée de Dudswell | 33. Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS) | 57. Parcours les Sources
Sentier Quatre Saisons |
| 13. Parc des Deux Rivières | 34. Parc du Mont Hatley | 58. Parc du Vieux-Moulin
Parc Saint-Gérard |
| 14. Parc Missisquoi-Nord | 35. Parc national de Frontenac | 59. Parc historique de la poudrière de Windsor |
| 15. Centre de la nature de Farnham | 36. Parc national de la Yamaska | 60. Parc des Érables |
| 16. Sentiers du parc municipal de Frelighsburg | 37. Parc national du Mont-Mégantic | 61. Mont Foster (Corridor appalachien) |
| 17. Centre d'interprétation de la nature
du Lac Boivin
Le Flâneur curieux
Les Boisés Miner
Parc Terry-Fox | 38. Parc national du Mont-Orford | |
| 18. Sentier du marais de Kingsbury | 39. Parc régional du Mont-Ham | |
| 19. Circuit historique de Knowlton
Sentier Lac-Brome | 40. Fiducie foncière de la vallée Ruitier
Sentiers de Potton | |
| 20. Sentier du Morne | 41. Forêt urbaine du parc Gouin de Richmond | |
| 21. Parc de la rivière Chaudière
Station touristique Baie-des-Sables | 42. Réserve naturelle des Montagnes Vertes (les sentiers
des Monts Singer, Écho, Glen) | |
| | 43. Sentier familial de Saint-Camille | |
| | 44. Domaine du Lac Libby | |
| | 45. ZEC de Saint-Romain | |

HIKING TRAILS IN THE ESTRIE REGION MEAN...

- More than 1,000 km of trails
- 30 accessible summits
- Several observation towers and lookouts
- Four long-distance walking routes (Circuit de l'Abbaye, Marche au cœur de Mégantic, La voie des pèlerins de la Vallée, Parcours les Sources)
- Several trails for exploring wetlands (marshes, swamps and peat bogs), including the Marais de la Rivière-aux-Cerises in Magog



Five regional parks

- Parc régional du Mont-Ham
- Parc régional des Marécage-des-Scots
- Parc de la Gorge de Coaticook
- Parc des Sommets
- Parc du Lac-Aylmer

Four national parks managed by SÉPAQ

- Yamaska National Park
- Mont-Orford National Park
- Frontenac National Park
- Mont-Mégantic National Park

Some major trail networks managed by non-profit organizations, in particular

- Appalachian Corridor
- Les Sentiers de l'Estrie
- Sentiers frontaliers
- Trans Canada Trail
- Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton (PENS)

● Situation report



Photo : Gilles Turgeon

The national parks managed by the Société des établissements de plein air du Québec (SÉPAQ) help preserve and enhance natural environments, while offering safe hiking experiences. Thanks to dedicated funding and a team of dedicated experts, they guarantee access to a wide variety of trails suited to different levels of ability. These trails are sometimes very popular.

Some of the region's municipalities and RCMs also own and manage trails.

Companies that manage trails are often recreational tourism sites that also offer a range of activities and accommodation.

In addition to trail managers, many other players are also involved in hiking trails, including nature conservation organizations, organizations involved in sports, leisure and outdoor activities, and tourism organizations.

AND LET'S NOT FORGET THE WORK OF THE MANY VOLUNTEERS WHO ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS' TRAILS!

● Situation report

Current issues

The consultation process identified a dozen issues associated with hiking trails in the Estrie region, in terms of their management, use and development :

- Financing ongoing operations (maintenance, repairs, surveillance)
- Rights of way in private, public and agricultural areas
- Physical connectivity of trails in the Estrie region and neighbouring areas
- Hiker numbers versus trail capacity
- Coexistence and harmonisation of uses
- Safety for trail users
- Volunteer involvement in management and maintenance
- Communication and awareness-raising among users
- Low-impact development
- Consultation between local players
- Accessibility to trail networks by public transport and carpooling

Some examples of good practice in the management of walking trails

- To facilitate the management of walking trails in accordance with the **principle of subsidiarity**, a principle of sustainable development according to which powers and responsibilities should be delegated to the appropriate level of authority, with due regard to the appropriate distribution of decision-making locations so as to bring them as close as possible to the citizens and communities concerned. [translation]
- Contribute financially to trail maintenance in exchange for public access to the trails.
- Clearing snow from car parks to allow access to nature.
- Call for volunteers to maintain and patrol the trails.

Source: OQLF. 2024. Principle of subsidiarity.
<https://vitrinelinguistique.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/fiche-gdt/fiche/26502059/principe-de-subsidiarite>. Accessed April 10, 2024

● Vision

THROUGH THE ACTIVE AND COLLABORATIVE COMMITMENT OF ALL THOSE INVOLVED, THE HIKING TRAILS IN THE ESTRIE REGION FORM A UNIFIED NETWORK THAT PROMOTES ACCESS TO NATURE AND THE WELL-BEING OF THE COMMUNITY.



● Values

These four shared values are at the very heart of this policy and the actions that will be linked to it.

Health

Both physical and mental, promoted by access to nature and physical activity

Equity and social solidarity

In access to nature through hiking trails, for the entire population

Belonging

To the network of hiking trails, which contribute to the identity, heritage, pride and appeal of the Estrie region.

Resilience and adaptation

To climate change through the sustainable use and design of walking trails.



● Orientations

The orientations represent the priority elements on which the territory's partners agree to work over the next few years, and which will enable the vision for the future to become a reality.

These orientations will serve as a basis for drawing up a master plan as the next step, which will flesh out the *Regional hiking trails policy*.

1 Pathway connectivity

Ensuring the connectivity of the various sections of hiking trails with each other and with national, regional, and local parks, while linking the different environments, both on public and private land, in forested, agricultural, or urban areas.

2 Durability of trails

Ensuring the long-term future of hiking trail routes and infrastructure.

3 Access to nature

Encouraging the use of trails so that the whole population can have access to nature.

4 Conservation of natural environments

To *reconcile* the development and use of hiking trails with the conservation of natural environments and the protection of biodiversity.

Reconcile definition: To find a way in which two situations or beliefs that are opposed to each other can agree and exist together (source: Cambridge Dictionary)

5 Responsible facilities and practices

To promote sustainable, low-impact path development and maintenance based on best practice.

6 Collaboration between all stakeholders

Encourage collaboration and consultation with all stakeholders in order to give concrete form to the orientations of the *Policy* and, eventually, its master plan.

● Commitments

Trail managers, RCMs, municipalities and all other stakeholders are invited to commit to :

Recognize the importance of hiking trails in the Estrie region as infrastructure providing access to nature and the landscape, and promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Support the *Estrie hiking trail policy*, in particular by means of a resolution, to demonstrate their commitment to the guidelines set out in the *Policy*.

Participate in the process of developing the master plan to identify the actions that will be used to implement the *Policy* and its guidelines.

Contribute to the implementation of the objectives and actions identified in the master plan, in line with their responsibilities, their local situation and their resources.



● Implementation

To ensure that the *Policy's* guidelines are put into practice, the Conseil Sport Loisir de l'Estrie, in collaboration with Tourism Eastern Townships, will be coordinating the development of a *Regional Hiking Master Plan*, in which clear objectives will be set, accompanied by actions to be carried out through the collaboration of a variety of partners.