



WASKAHEGAN TRAIL ASSOCIATION

Guided Hike Leader's Safety Plan

Purpose

In offering a program of hikes, the Waskahegan Trail Association (WTA) is concerned about the safety of its hikers. In general, the safety concerns are:

- newcomers who may be ill-prepared
- hikers falling behind and getting lost
- hikers' physical well-being and enjoyment
- natural dangers

As a result, every hike will be led by a responsible hike leader. This document details these responsibilities and presents guidelines for ensuring a safe and enjoyable hiking experience.

Hike Schedule

The hike schedule is compiled and published on the waskahegantrail.ca website. When you agree to lead a hike your first name and phone number are listed beside the hike you have chosen to lead. Your first name and phone number will also appear in other advertising such as bulletin boards and Meetup. This is so that you can be contacted by WTA members and the general public for more information.

The website and Meetup page contain details on what to expect on a hike and what to wear and bring. Newcomers may still contact you to ask you about proper clothing and footwear. You may give advice on wearing good hiking boots, layers of warm but light, sweat-absorbing clothes, and a hat. Hikers need to bring a lunch and plenty of water.

Let the newcomer know about the duration of the hike and when they can expect to return. This is not a fast jog solely for exercise, but a holistic appreciation of the countryside, its animals, the greenery, and people hiking in the group. People experienced only in city walking should be told that the hike may be over uneven terrain, over stiles and fences, climbing hills and across meadows in all seasons and weather.

Scouting the hike

Days before the hike, scout the trail with an experienced member to make sure it is in good condition, well-marked, and readily traversed considering the weather forecast.

Make notes of the following:

- The access points—places where the trail meets or gets close to a road. These will be the best way out in the event of an emergency.
- A suitable lunch spot taking into account the weather forecast.
- If there is no outhouse at the trail head, the first wooded section for a separation break (men go ahead, ladies catch up).

- The nature of the trail and the terrain so that you can let the hikers know what to expect before you set off.
- Interesting features on the trail that you will want to point out. Check the trail guidebook for local history points as well.

Day of the hike

Bring with you a hike sign-up sheet and waiver forms, driving directions for carpool drivers, your trail map with notes, first aid kit, extra water, extra hat, and a charged-up phone.

Arrive early at the meeting/carpool point. Greet each hiker during sign-up. Assess whether the hiker is dressed adequately for the weather, including footwear (no sandals) and a hat, and confirm that they have water and a lunch. You have the right to turn down anyone who is not dressed appropriately.

Before setting off:

- Form a circle and have each hiker introduce themselves, starting with yourself.
- Assign an experienced member as a tail-ender.
- Note the number of hikers.
- Go over the hike details: distance, terrain, conditions, and driving route.
- Explain the hiking etiquette:
 - No one gets ahead of the hike leader or falls behind the tail-ender.
 - We keep a respectful distance from animals (wildlife, livestock, and landowners' pets) and we do not interact with them.

Lead the convoy of cars, making sure all the vehicles are following along the way. Stop at turns in the route, if necessary, to make sure all the drivers are following.

During the hike:

- Start with a separation break at the first wooded spot if there is no outhouse.
- Check your speed by asking the hikers if the pace is okay. It is very easy to inadvertently charge ahead when you are at the front.
- Remind everyone to periodically look behind and check that they can see the hikers behind them. When they cannot, they must call out to the front to slow down so that everyone can catch up.
- Take lots of breaks. Allow the hikers time to enjoy views, drink water, and adjust clothing. Take a count of the people to make sure everyone is accounted for before proceeding.
- At junctions, wait to make sure everyone has caught up before proceeding.
- At breaks, junctions, and when crossing over stiles, talk to hikers individually and check if anyone is struggling or having any concerns or health issues.
- In the mid to late summer season, wasps and bees sometimes build their nests under boardwalks. When you come to a boardwalk, ask the hikers to pace themselves with several feet between and to move quietly on the boardwalk.
- Allow time at lunch for all to relax and enjoy conversation.
- After lunch, make sure there is time for separation breaks.

After the hike, invite everyone to join in coffee and conversation usually at the nearest place to the meeting point.