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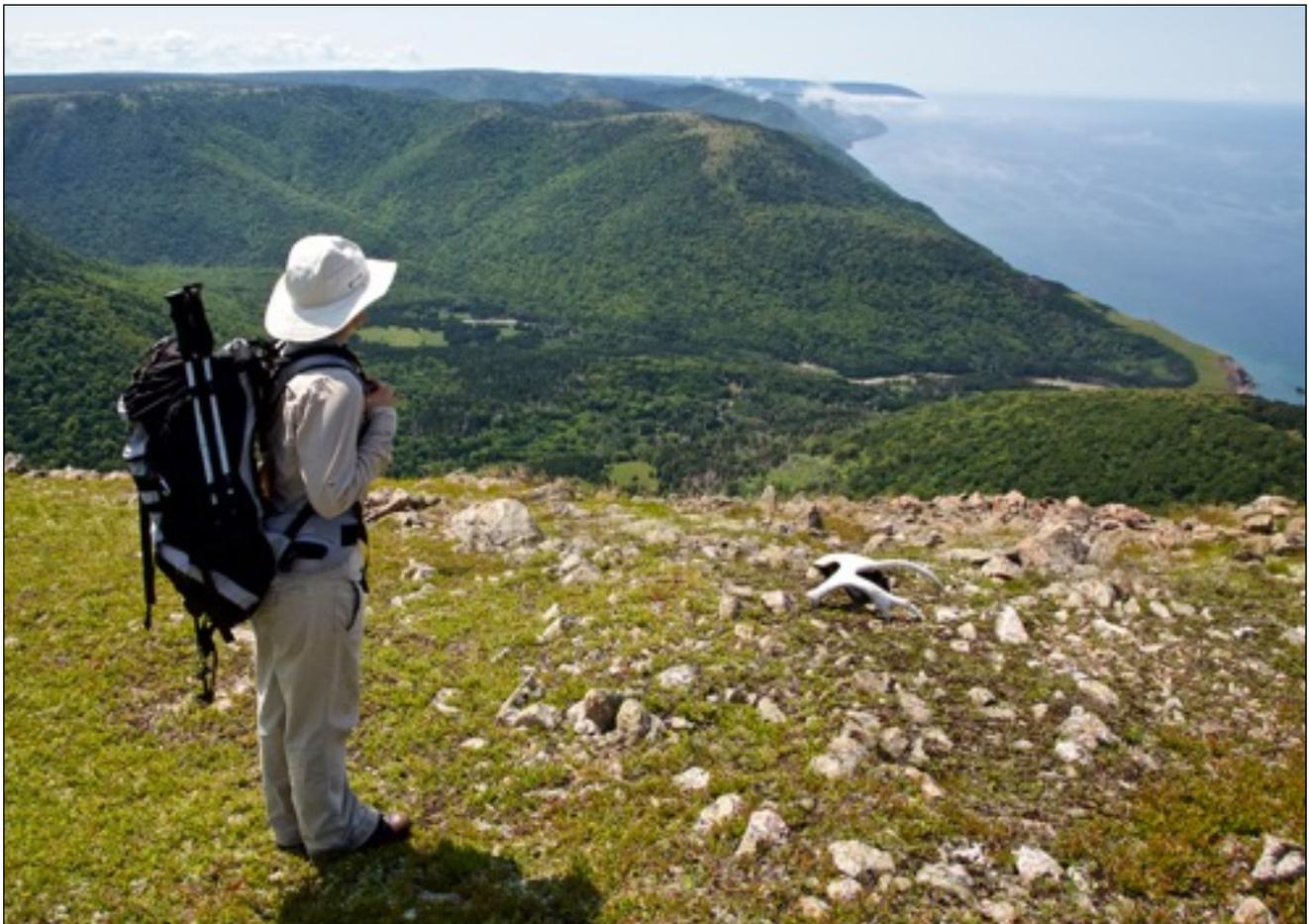
# The Seawall Trail

## Trail Development Proposal

The Seawall Trail Society - April 11, 2016

(Version 2.0)

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## Introduction

Cape Breton Island is a wonderful place to explore on foot. Expansive valleys, hidden waterfalls, majestic old growth forests and a rugged coastline are just a few of the natural features waiting for the curious and intrepid hiker. While it has plenty of wonderful day hikes, Cape Breton lacks a true long-distance wilderness hiking trail.

We are proposing the Seawall Trail: a three to five day trek along the coast and cliffs of Northern Cape Breton. The trail will be predominately contained within the boundaries of the Polletts Cove – Aspy Fault Wilderness Area (PCAFWA).

We believe that, when completed, the Seawall Trail will attract hiking enthusiasts from around the globe and will help establish Nova Scotia as a world-class hiking destination.

## Background

The PCAFWA has been used by various groups for millennia. The area has long been a hunting ground for First Nations people. More recently, the region was home to pioneer Cape Bretoners who lived in isolated, now abandoned, settlements along the coast. To this day First Nations and locals take advantage of the PCAFWA for hunting and recreation. Even without an official hiking trail, the terrain draws many intrepid tourist adventurers.

The PCAFWA borders the Cape Breton Highlands National Park. The National Park does a wonderful job promoting hiking in Cape Breton and attracts numerous walkers to the region. However, the Park currently focuses on shorter day hikes. Adventurous hikers are coming to the PCAFWA for longer back-country excursions. Visitors are looking for a product that is currently not offered in Cape Breton — a long distance, wilderness hiking experience.

The official numbers from Tourism Nova Scotia support our contention that we can offer what tourists want. According to Tourism Nova Scotia's 2010 Exit Survey, thirty-four percent (34%) of visitors to Cape Breton want to hike. Thirty-eight percent (38%) want coastal sightseeing. Among the Outdoor Enthusiasts segment (our target demographic) seventy-five

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percent (75%) seek hiking opportunities and seventy-one percent (71%) want coastal sight seeing. The Seawall Trail offers the very best of both.

Vehicle access to northern Cape Breton and the Seawall Trail is via the world-famous Cabot Trail - along which one can also find many wonderful day hikes. The trails for these shorter hikes have been developed, used and maintained by communities such as Meat Cove and Pleasant Bay, along with organizations such as Hike the Highlands and adventure outfitters such as Cabot Trail Adventures.

A focus on hiking by local communities, businesses, organizations and the Cabot Trail tourism industry shows a commitment towards developing a “hiking culture.” Promoting this culture establishes a sound environment for the popularity of the Seawall Trail.

The hiking culture along the Cabot Trail Trail is not limited to tourism. Many people make their home in the region because of their love of the outdoors.

Developing a long-distance hiking trail will accrue huge benefits to locals. It is no secret that there is a shortage of services on Cape Breton Island: a shortage of hockey rinks, basketball courts and activities for both adults and youth alike. The Seawall Trail will provide youth groups, community groups and recreation societies access and educational opportunities in a unique and special wilderness setting. The trail will also provide First Nations with improved access to a historically and culturally significant region. The trail will be a model for health and well being through active living.

Development of a world-class trail is possible because of the PCAFWA’s unique ecology. Within the area’s boundaries one will discover breath-taking barrens, wind-swept bluffs, pristine wetlands, old-growth forests, ancient faults, a rugged highland coastline, and secluded beaches. The land teems with moose, eagles rule the sky, and whales frolic offshore.

It is for these very reasons that we, the Seawall Trail Society, see the PCAFWA as the ideal location to develop Cape Breton’s first long-distance hiking trail.

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## Trail Description

The Seawall Trail will be a three to five day wilderness hiking trail. The main north-south trail will extend existing walking paths at Red River and Cape St. Lawrence and will complete a route along the coast and across the hills from Meat Cove to Pleasant Bay. This main section will be anywhere from 50 km to 75 km in length, depending on the terrain and exact routing chosen. There will also be an east-west spur trail that leaves the main trail somewhere along the Blair or Pollett's Cove River and terminates near Cape North. This spur section will be approximately 15 km to 30 km in length, dependent on terrain and routing. These access points connect communities in both Victoria and Inverness Counties to the trail.

At various appropriate locations we are planning for year-round, serviced sites with both huts and tent pads at each location. Hikers will book and pay for use of these amenities in advance. We want hikers to camp only in designated areas. Locating huts and tents together will minimize the environmental impact in the PCAFWA and make administering and servicing the trail more efficient and economical.

Hikers on the Seawall Trail will pay a trail access fee and an additional fee will be charged for use of the huts or tent sites. We are investigating possible models for access fees and accommodation charges. We also envision some type of online booking system. The Seawall Society will arrange with businesses in both Inverness and Victoria Counties to make access efficient for hikers and profitable for local communities.

Revenues from accommodations and trail access will be used to maintain and service the path, to hire trail staff (for huts, bookings and maintenance) and to fund trail promotion and administration. This model has worked successfully in other jurisdictions.

Hikers will be supplied and huts/campsites will be maintained by established, local guides and outfitters via horseback and by boat. Hikers requesting supplies or desiring the services of a guide will be charged for the services. The local guides will also assist and provide local knowledge to first responders in case of emergencies.

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The Seawall Trail will be promoted as an authentic wilderness experience. Trail design and construction must reflect this aesthetic. The trail will be constructed using generally accepted standards for narrow-width, back-country routes. Sensitive and easily eroded areas will be protected with the appropriate structures — bridges, boardwalks, barriers and berms. Safety of the hikers will be an important consideration in trail design. We plan to consult with local Search and Rescue as we plan the trail and facilities.

The Seawall Trail will be a challenging hike. It will have steep grades and uneven terrain. The trail will ascend and descend through many meters of elevation. Its difficulty will be part of its appeal.

We anticipate that the Seawall Trail will attract a diverse group of users.

We see the trail being used by many groups: foreign backpackers and visiting tourists who want to experience an authentic coastal wilderness adventure; hikers and explorers from Cape Breton and across Canada; educators and scientists for teaching and research; community groups for programming and skills development; First Nations as a way to get back to the land and to pass on traditional activities; and local residents as a way to further explore their “back yard.”

We believe the trail will attract a significant number of users and generate significant economic activity in Northern Cape Breton.

## Administration

The Seawall Trail Society is the lead organization responsible for the planning, development and management of the Seawall Trail. The Society is a registered non-profit society in Nova Scotia.

The Society’s board of directors bring a wide range of experience and enthusiasm to the table. Members are fishermen, teachers, community leaders, entrepreneurs, engineers, hunters, hikers and explorers.

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The board has limited experience with trail development — particularly with a trail of this magnitude. However, the Society plans to leverage the help of its partners and experienced trail consultants throughout the planning and construction stages.

The Society has also formed an advisory work group - all members of this group are outdoor enthusiasts whose knowledge and input will help in the decision making process. This group reports to the board on a regular basis (and includes several board members). The advisory work group is also actively involved in fundraising and supporting all areas of trail development.

The Seawall Trail Society plans to partner with all three levels of government — municipal, provincial and federal — to ensure that its plans dovetail with government efforts to promote rural development and tourism in Nova Scotia and to guarantee that the trail meets all environmental standards and regulations. The trail will be built by well trained trail builders with guidance from professional consultants. The Seawall Trail Society has contacted and is seeking the advice and participation of Nova Scotia’s First Nations community in trail planning.

We plan to partner with private organizations that offer trail-building grants or funding and we will seek private-sector support from individuals and companies that share our vision for sustainable rural development and our respect for environmental stewardship.

Most importantly, as we move forward with the Seawall Trail, we will work closely with the people of Northern Cape Breton to ensure that they have a voice at the table and that their input and concerns are heard and handled in an appropriate and respectful manner. We will proceed to build the Seawall Trail only at a pace that is acceptable to members of the local communities.

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## Regional Significance And Community Benefits

We believe the Seawall Trail will have a significant and positive impact on Cape Breton, particularly in Northern Cape Breton.

Communities and businesses will provide the following services: access and fee administration; parking and car shuttles; equipment rentals; provisioning and supplies; boat transfers; pre and post hike dining and food services; visitor information and souvenirs; accommodations in motels and campgrounds; and general support for visitors before and after their hikes. In time, these local businesses, some of which will spring up as a direct result of the Seawall Trail development, will assist the Seawall Trail Society with the support and management of the trail.

The Seawall Trail's impact is not limited to improving access to an area which is important to the heritage of many Nova Scotians. The development and maintenance of the Seawall Trail will create dozens of jobs and generate significant economic activity. The Society envisions hiring operational staff, including hut caretakers, trail maintenance crews, booking agents, marketing staff and IT personnel. The Society plans to hire locally where possible.

The spin-off jobs and economic impact of the trail are far reaching. Let us use a low estimate of one thousand people coming to the Seawall Trail in a year. (For comparison, the Long Range Traverse in Gros Morne — a route with no trail and intentionally limited access — sees over 500 hikers a year). Assume that only half of the Seawall Trail hikers fly to Sydney and only half of them pay for accommodations in the area.

A modest estimate of the impact of the Seawall Trail would be a minimum of five hundred new airline tickets, two hundred fifty car rentals, seven hundred fifty fuel-tank fill-ups, five hundred rented rooms, two thousand meals, one thousand grocery stops, and thousands of dollars spent on incidentals. If our hikers fly in and out of Halifax then spending on accommodations, car rentals and fuel increases.

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Using figures from the Tourism Nova Scotia 2010 Visitor Exit Survey, our estimate of one thousand hikers would inject millions of dollars a year into the Cape Breton economy. Most of the impact would be felt in Northern Cape Breton.

There are many hiking initiatives in Cape Breton at the moment and the Seawall Trail Society believes that the island has the potential to become a world-class hiking hub. We see the Seawall Trail as the crown jewel in that system, the premier route that showcases the best that Cape Breton has to offer. It will be the trail that puts Cape Breton “on the map” as an epic hiking destination.

## Options And Priorities

As with any large project, the development of the Seawall Trail has many critical tasks and requires co-operation among many stakeholders. The society has identified several key priorities that must be addressed to ensure successful completion of the trail.

### **Sustainability**

The Seawall Trail must be a sustainable, asset-based community development. If built correctly and with care, the trail can provide healthy enjoyment and generate economic activity indefinitely. One of the Seawall Trail Society’s major goals is to ensure the construction of a resilient and durable trail with minimal environmental impact.

### **The Moose Hunt**

The PCAFWA is a prized moose hunting area utilized by First Nations communities as well as hunters from Nova Scotia and beyond. Many people in Northern Cape Breton derive some of their income from the annual hunt and it has significant economic impact, particularly during the fall — a season that sees significantly less tourist activity. The Seawall Trail Society is very aware of the needs of moose hunters and outfitters and we have been working with these groups since the beginning.

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Our trail, as it is currently routed, minimally impacts the areas used by hunters. We are communicating and working with moose hunters continuously to ensure that our plans are known and accepted.

We are proposing the construction of several potential supporting structures and sites. These sites will be located some distance away from the actual trail and can be used for housing equipment and supplies; guides and crews; and pack animals. These particular camps could be available to hunters and guides during the moose season.

Our trail is currently routed as a linear track. With time and validation of the trail then the option exists to work with moose hunters and other stakeholders to expand upon the existing route by adding additional side paths or potentially a loop. This is a very long term outlook and no decisions will be made without agreement from hunters.

We believe that with proper education, awareness, trail routing and coordination, hunters and hikers can safely co-exist in the PCAFWA.

## **Public Input**

Public input and approval is critical to the success of the trail. The Seawall Trail Society believes in transparency and values both approval and criticism from concerned citizens.

The Society has disseminated planning information as early and as broadly as possible through the use of the internet and social media outlets. The Society has a simple web page, a Facebook page and a Twitter feed. Society meetings are open to the public and local residents have been encouraged to join our board. To date, response from area residents has been generally positive and our online community is growing steadily. Links to our social media sites can be found at the end of this document.

The Seawall Trail Society will conduct two rounds of public consultations, as outlined in the guide *Developing a Hiking Trail in a Wilderness Area (2006)*. For our first round (Winter 2016) we offered public presentations in Sydney and Halifax and also a series of four key community meetings in Northern Cape Breton (Meat Cove, Pleasant Bay, Cape North and

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Bay St. Lawrence). Meetings were generally positive and a report will be compiled and submitted to government.

### **Trail Routing And The Trail Experience**

The PCAFWA is an amazing place. The Society respects the area's natural beauty, its heritage and its fragility. Any trail that passes through it must also respect these elements.

The flagging and routing of the trail will not be rushed. The route must optimize the user experience — both visually and physically. The route must be designed to withstand erosion and weather events. The route must respect other activities that occur within the area. Use of experienced trail consultants will be combined with local knowledge for optimal results.

### **Local Benefits**

The Society believes that the trail should bring with it associated benefits to local communities. Trail construction and other infrastructure work should require local labour. Trail staff (hut caretakers, booking clerks, etc.) should be hired from local communities. The society will carefully consider local benefits at each stage of the project.

### **First Nations Benefits**

The PCAFWA is part of Unama'ki and has been used by Mi'kmaw for generations. We see the development of the Trail as a way to increase access to a valued area for First Nations. Increased access allows opportunities to pursue traditional activities, deliver educational programming to young people and conduct valuable research.

We have reached out to and will work with First Nations during trail development.

### **Partnerships**

While we see the Seawall Trail as a stand alone product, there are many opportunities to partner with other organizations and individuals to ensure that the trail is successful. Some opportunities for partnerships are presented below.

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**Parks Canada:** Cape Breton Highlands National Park has plans to develop several longer distance trails within their boundaries and there may be an opportunity to link the Seawall Trail into their network. Additionally there are opportunities for shared marketing and increased exposure for the Seawall Trail through The Park’s advertising channels.

**Local Land Owners:** While most of the trail will pass through public, protected lands there are opportunities to work with local land owners. These private owners may be willing to let the trail pass across their properties and they may also be interested in establishing services such as campgrounds or trailhead food services. We will work with private land owners to explore additional options for the trail.

**Guides and Hunters:** There may be opportunities to partner with different guides and outfitters to offer custom, high value tours along the trail.

**International Appalachian Trail:** The IATA has expressed interest in adding the Seawall Trail to its walking system - this designation would dramatically increase the exposure of the Seawall Trail and provide much needed IATA infrastructure in the province.

## Development Options

The Seawall Trail can be developed and constructed one of three ways:

1. by using only experienced trail consultants and builders
2. by using only volunteers
3. by using a combination of consultants, local workers and volunteers

The Society believes that Option 3 — a combination of trail consultants, local work crews and volunteers — is the best approach at this time. Consultants will bring valuable experience in the areas of trail flagging, routing and construction, while residents will provide local knowledge of key routing highlights, trail obstacles, and hunting areas. Using locals and

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volunteers to plan and build the trail will also help grow community support for the Seawall Trail.

The training and experience gained by local work crews can be put to good use building other trails in Cape Breton and also maintaining the Seawall Trail.

Using consultants and volunteers will strike an attractive balance of both costs and timing.

The Society and its members all work as volunteers.

## Development Stages and Estimated Costs

The Society sees the trail development taking place in three stages:

### **Stage One – Planning and Development**

Stage One includes all activities before any actual construction begins. This includes: public consultations, the *Seawall Trail Planning Agreement*, fundraising activities, the *Proposed Seawall Trail Development Plan*, trail flagging and alignment, the *Seawall Trail Management Agreement*, and any other planning activities.

We hope to complete all aspects of Stage One in 2017. It is estimated that Stage One will cost between \$75,000 and \$125,000, depending on the use of consultants versus volunteers.

The Society hopes to raise the necessary funds through private fundraising campaigns, corporate donations and grants from each level of government.

### **Stage Two – Construction**

Stage Two involves the construction of the trail and any associated infrastructure such as parking facilities, interpretive signage, huts and tent sites, bathroom facilities, etc.

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The actual duration of construction is undetermined at this point and the Society is actively trying to generate estimates for this activity.

Trail costs can vary considerably, but a conservative estimate is between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per kilometre. At these rates, the trail itself will cost between \$1 million and \$1.5 million dollars. The cost of associated infrastructure will vary considerably depending on the type of structures, the quality of construction and the materials used. When serviced huts are considered, associated infrastructure costs could also push into the millions of dollars. The Society is investigating these costs in greater detail.

### **Stage Three – Trail Maintenance and Administration**

Ongoing maintenance is critically important. The Society believes that the trail will be self-sustaining: revenues generated from trail fees and merchandising will cover the costs of staffing, maintenance, administration and promotion. This is a model employed in other jurisdictions.

The Society is currently investigating the cost of trail maintenance and administration.

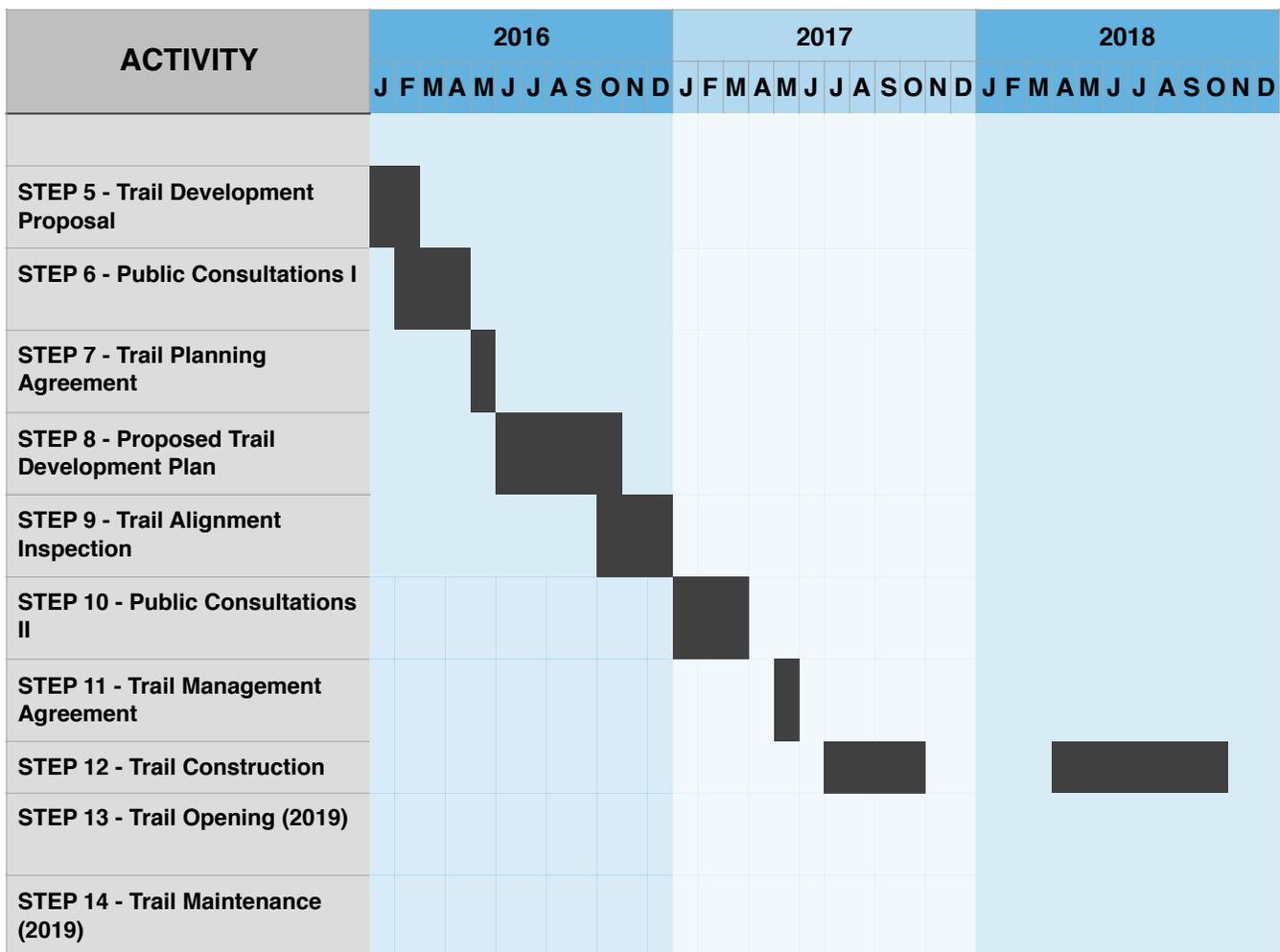
## **Anticipated Actions & Timing**

Timely construction of the Seawall Trail depends on many factors and on co-operation with multiple groups and agencies. Our anticipated actions and timings, described in *Schedule 1*, are aggressive and are best estimates given our current knowledge of the project. They are subject to change.

Of primary concern to the Seawall Trail Society is dissemination of accurate and timely information to the public, in particular to the residents of Northern Cape Breton. We are currently using the internet and community contacts to distribute information.

Public consultations and input are critical to a successful development. We plan to hold public meetings and information sessions at multiple locations in the province and at two occasions as indicated by the document *Developing a Hiking Trail in a Wilderness Area (2006)*.

## Schedule 1 - Seawall Trail Project Planning



While the Seawall Trail will primarily cross public lands within the boundaries of the PCAFWA, in some places it will impact private lands. Private land owners impacted by the trail will be consulted as necessary for trail development. Formal agreements will be entered into with private land owners if necessary.

- Private lands at the Meat Cove and Red River trail heads present no difficulty as these are historical trails and public right-of-ways (K-Class Roads). The spur trail terminus near Cape North is contained within the PCAFWA.
- There are private lands at Lowland Cove and Otter Brook. The historical path that exists through these properties is believed to be a right-of-way. If necessary, however, we will consult with the land owners regarding these crossings.

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- The private lands at Pollett’s Cove will be circumnavigated at this point in our planning.
  - The trail crosses Federal Government lands at Cape St. Lawrence (the PCAFWA itself is a provincial wilderness area) and the government agencies with jurisdictions for these lands will be consulted. However, as with the private land in Lowland Cove and Otter Brook, a public right-of-way and trail has crossed this land for many years.

We will continue to work with the Department of Environment to ensure the trail meets the requirements set out in the Wilderness and Protected Areas Act. As the trail is located within the PCAFWA, the Department of the Environment is our major government partner. We will work with other departments and crown corporations such as Nova Scotia Tourism, The Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and appropriate Federal agencies.

## Conclusion

We believe that the time is ripe for a long distance hiking trail in Cape Breton. We have the place and the people to ensure that the Seawall Trail becomes one of the world’s top hiking experiences.

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## Map

Our current map is shown on the following page.



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## Contact Information

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