

Trail User Surveys and Economic Impact: A Comparison of Trail User Expenditures

Researched and prepared by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy with assistance from the PA DCNR, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, Community and Conservation Partnerships Program, 2009

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Purpose: The main focus of this report was to compare economic and demographic data from trail user surveys completed on seven rail-trails in Pennsylvania and seven rail-trails in the northeast United States that were comparable to those in PA.

Location: The research for this report focused on rail-trails in Pennsylvania, Maryland, New York, Virginia, and Rhode Island.

Study Design: Data from surveys was collected and compiled to compare the impacts of trails on the surrounding communities.

Key Findings:

- Trail Types (9):
 - Urban Trails—exist in metropolitan areas, have many road crossings, and may or may not have retail potential. Many assume that an urban trail would have the most economic impact on its surrounding area; however, the majority of urban trails are often isolated from the areas they are passing through.
 - Suburban Trails—mainly run parallel to roads and highways through residential housing, primarily single family dwellings, and potentially have many road crossings. Unless the trail is specifically designed to enter a retail center, it is easy for users to by-pass these centers.
 - Rural Trails—feature expansive views, woods and/or farmland, and are sometimes designed to start and end in small towns. Those that pass through small towns may have the largest economic impact of all trail types.
- Demographics (10)
 - Age – the majority of users were 45 and up
 - Gender Mix – normally within 10% of a 50-50 ratio
 - 45% female, 55% male was very common
 - the higher percentage was typically for male users
- Local versus Non-Local (10)
 - Non-Local – expenditures made by non-local trail users are considered new money, creating economic growth
 - Local – local users are often repeat purchasers and keep business revenues at a steady rate instead of an increasing rate.
- Some Overall Statistics (12-13)
 - The number one reason for using rail-trails is for health.
 - On average, about 80% of trail users were considered local.
 - On average, the annual soft goods total revenue was \$4,146,312.
 - On average, the annual number of total user visits was 532,740 visits.