

COVID-19 Trail Impact Report: April-May 2020



(Image: Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota)

Connecticut Trail Census

Statewide multi-use trail user study



June 15, 2020

Overview

This is a report on infrared (IR) counter data collected by the Connecticut Trail Census. It documents trail use during April-May 2020 at 12 sites along some of the most popular multi-use trails in Connecticut, and compares use with the same period in 2019, as one indication of the unprecedented changes in trail use occurring simultaneously with the outbreak of COVID-19. A total of 364,761 uses were recorded across all 12 sites during April-May 2020, which reflects a combined 51% increase over the same period in 2019.

Overall, three quarters of the trails participating in this study recorded an increase of greater than 50%, compared to April-May 2019. Trails with the largest relative increase in use were the Hop River Trail in Bolton (+170%), Norwalk River Valley Trail in Wilton (+130%), Air Line Trail in East Hampton (+110%) and the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Hamden (+110%).

This brief report is part of an ongoing trail research project conducted by the Connecticut Trail Census. The study team wanted to share these findings as soon as the data was available; comprehensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on trail use will be conducted at a later date.

The **Connecticut Trail Census** is a statewide volunteer data collection program, designed to get a better understanding of multi-use trail use trends, and to make this information widely available. In addition to this report, the Trail Census publishes annual reports on trail counts and user data, and provides data visualization tools, all available at cttrailcensus.uconn.edu



The Connecticut Trail Census is funded by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Recreational Trails Program; project partners include the Connecticut State Greenways Council and the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments.

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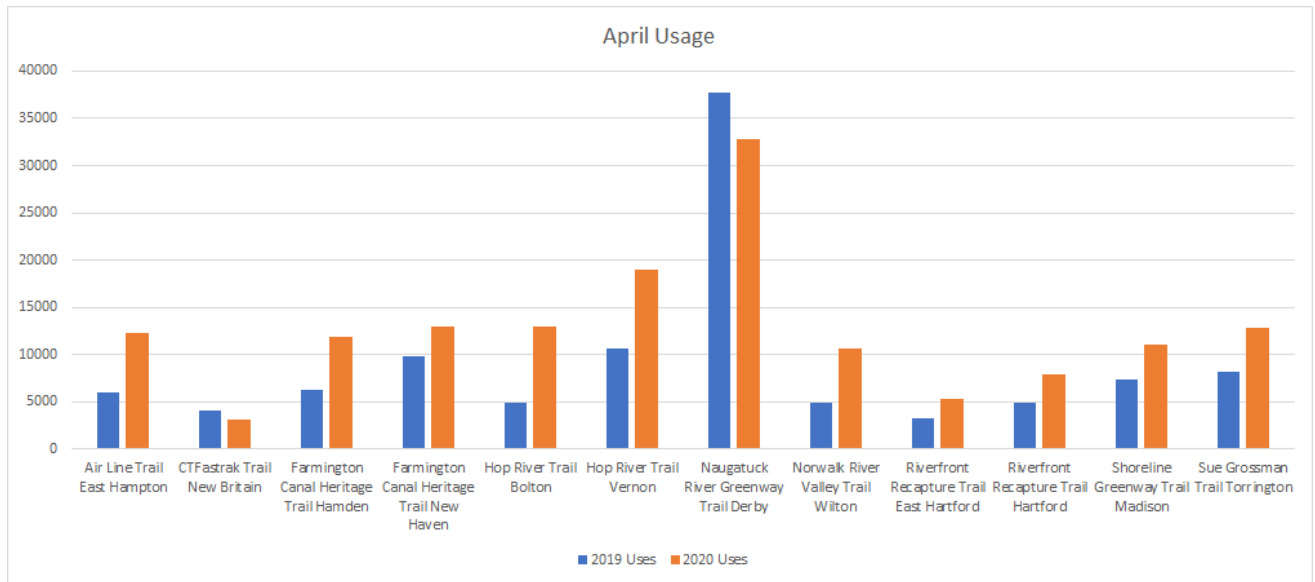
Comparison of Trail Use in April-May 2019/April-May 2020

Key Takeaways

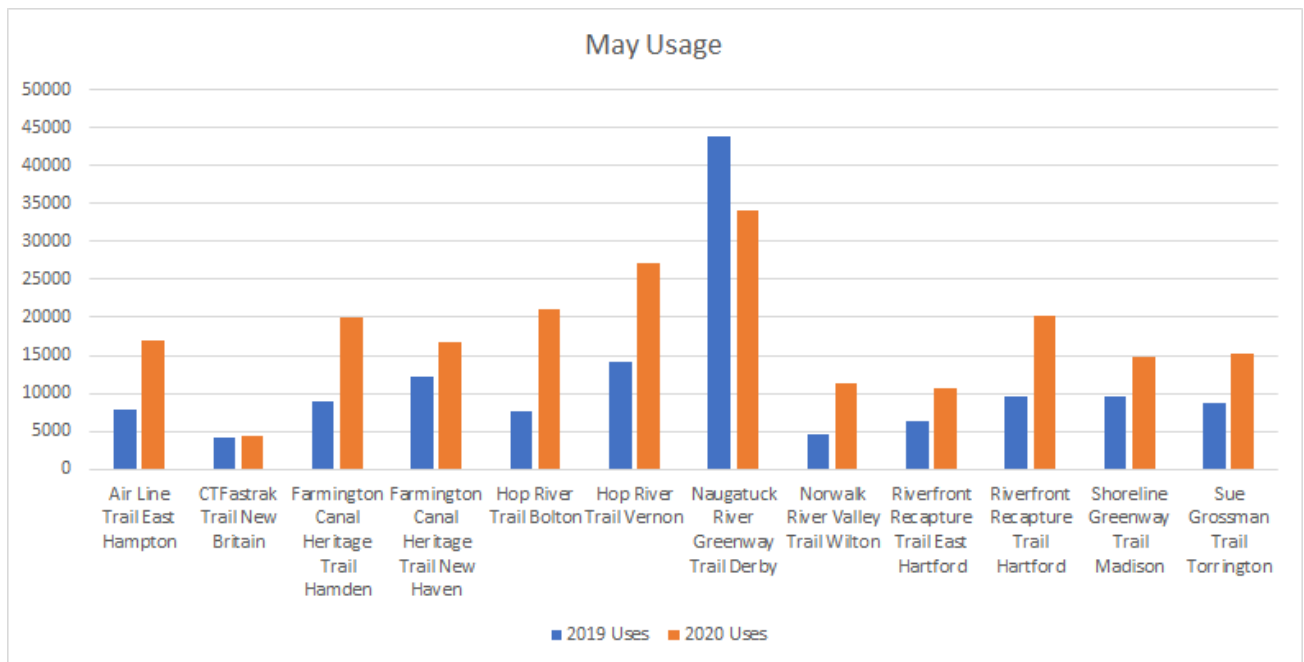
- **Connecticut Trail Use is Still Growing:** The trend of increased trail use occurring simultaneously with the March outbreak of COVID-19 is continuing. The most heavily used trails during April-May 2020 were the Hop River Trail in Vernon, the Norwalk River Valley Trail in Wilton and the Air Line Trail in East Hampton, and Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Hamden. These four trails all saw more than a doubling in usage compared to the same months in 2019. While not as dramatic as the increases observed in March, five other trails recorded increases greater than 50% from the previous year.
- **Users Choosing Trails Less Traveled:** As popular trails reach a social distancing limit, some users are opting for less busy trails. For example, the Naugatuck River Greenway in Derby, which recorded the highest usage (66,769) in April-May, actually saw a 13% decrease from last year, a change that may reflect social distancing on this busy trail. Other trails may be reaching limits constrained by visitor parking capacity, such as the Shoreline Greenway Trail in Madison. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environment, the Connecticut Forest and Park Association, and other organizations are promoting recommendations, tools and updates for safe recreation on social media using #CTTrailsLessTraveled, #StaySafeOutdoors and #RecreateResponsibly.
- **Commuter-Oriented Trail Use is Mixed:** Trails that typically include commuting as part of their overall use pattern present a more complex picture: increases for the two Riverfront Recapture Trails in Hartford (+95%) and East Hartford (+69%) were strong; and for the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in New Haven (+35%) was moderate. The most commuter-oriented trail of all participating trails, the CT Fastrak in New Britain, was down (-23%) in April, but almost even in May (+1%), which may reflect changes in work patterns from the phased re-openings.

**BE SMART
STAY 6 FEET
APART**

Comparison of April 2019/April 2020: Adjusted Infrared Trail Counts



Comparison of May 2019/May 2020: Adjusted Infrared Trail Counts



Percent Change in Infrared Trail Counts: April-May 2019/April-May 2020

Trail	2019	2020	Percent Change
Air Line Trail, <i>East Hampton</i>	13941	29223	110%
CTFastrak Trail, <i>New Britain</i>	8303	7424	-11%
Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, <i>Hamden</i>	15153	31883	110%
Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, <i>New Haven</i>	21904	29668	35%
Hop River Trail, <i>Bolton</i>	12577	34017	170%
Hop River Trail, <i>Vernon</i>	24732	46138	87%
Naugatuck River Greenway Trail, <i>Derby</i>	77099	66769	-13%
Norwalk River Valley Trail, <i>Wilton</i>	9489	21869	130%
Riverfront Recapture Trail, <i>East Hartford</i>	9487	16004	69%
Riverfront Recapture Trail <i>Hartford</i>	14433	28106	95%
Shoreline Greenway Trail, <i>Madison</i>	16945	25769	52%
Sue Grossman Trail, <i>Torrington</i>	16954	27891	65%
Total	241,017	364,761	51%

Study Limitations and Next Steps

This analysis does not consider possible changes in use due to factors such as variations in weather from 2019 to 2020, changes in length or amenities on trails, or any other factors that may have contributed to the overall increase in use during this period. Additional analysis would be necessary to determine if these changes can definitively be attributed to effects of COVID-19 and Stay Home, Stay Safe mandates. However, given the observations collected by trail coordinators and users, it is highly likely that use patterns have changed in this period.