

COVID-19 Trail Impact Report: June 2020



Image: Joe Gaylor Photography

Connecticut Trail Census

Statewide multi-use trail user study



July 28, 2020

Overview

This is a report on infrared (IR) counter data collected by the Connecticut Trail Census. It documents trail use during **June 2020** at 13 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 (190,218) uses were recorded across all 13 sites in June 2020, which reflects a combined (53%) increase over the same period in 2019 across these trails.

More than half of the trails in this study recorded an increase of greater than 65% in use, compared to June 2019. Trails with the largest relative increase in use were the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail/Cheshire (+177%); Air Line Trail/Thompson (+156%) and the Riverfront Recapture Riverwalk in Hartford (+99%).

This brief report is part of an ongoing trail research project conducted by the Connecticut Trail Census. Comprehensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 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.

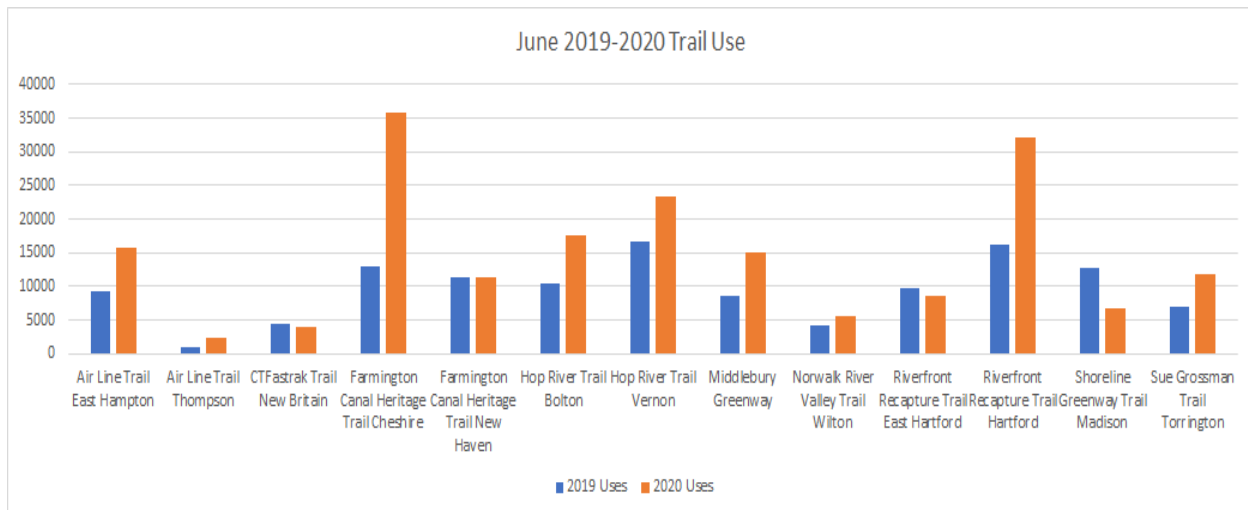
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Comparison of Trail Use in June 2019/June 2020

Key Takeaways

- Sustained Increase in Connecticut Trail Use Through June:** Trail use in June is continuing the trend of increased use since March. More than half of the trails recorded an increase of 68% or greater, compared to June 2019. The most heavily used trails during June 2020 were the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in Cheshire, the Riverfront Recapture Riverwalk in Hartford and the Hop River Trail in Vernon. In previous years, these three trails have been consistently among those receiving the highest annual use. Even on these trails, the increase in volume from the June 2019 was dramatic: Cheshire (+22987), Hartford (+16035) and Hop River (+6590).
- Users Choosing Trails Less Traveled:** As some popular trails reach a social distancing limit, users are opting for less busy trails. Other trails may be reaching limits constrained by visitor parking capacity and temporary closures, 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 daily updates for safe recreation on social media using #CTTrailsLessTraveled, #StaySafeOutdoors, #RecreateResponsibly.
- Commuter-Oriented Trail Use is Mixed:** Trails that typically include commuting as part of their overall use pattern present a more complex picture: the Riverfront Recapture Trail increased in Hartford (+95%) and decreased in East Hartford (-12%); the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in New Haven (+1%) was flat; the CT Fastrak in New Britain, was down (-12%) in June, but almost even in May (+1%), which may reflect changes in work patterns from the phased re-openings.

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



Percent Change in Infrared Trail Counts: June 2019/June 2020

Trail	2019	2020	% Change
Air Line Trail <i>East Hampton</i>	9201	15644	70%
Air Line Trail <i>Thompson</i>	961	2458	156%
CTFastrak Trail <i>New Britain</i>	4484	3895	-13%
Farmington Canal Heritage Trail <i>Cheshire</i>	12933	35830	177%
Farmington Canal Heritage Trail <i>New Haven</i>	11247	11358	1%
Hop River Trail <i>Bolton</i>	10450	17510	68%
Hop River Trail <i>Vernon</i>	16738	23328	39%
Middlebury Greenway	8593	15111	76%
Norwalk River Valley Trail <i>Wilton</i>	4201	5611	34%
Riverfront Recapture Trail <i>East Hartford</i>	9816	8652	-12%
Riverfront Recapture Trail <i>Hartford</i>	16195	32230	99%
Shoreline Greenway Trail <i>Madison</i>	12793	6693	-48%
Sue Grossman Trail <i>Torrington</i>	7084	11898	68%

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.