Northeast Multi Modal Summit
Exploring the Implications of Changes in Trail Use due to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Monday November 23, 2020, 1:00-3:00 pm
Laura Brown, Community & Economic Development Educator
University of Connecticut Extension
Outdoor activity is changing

Survey of existing outdoor enthusiasts April-May 2020 through Leave No Trace:

➔ Frequency of activity is down
➔ Distance traveled ↓ 3.5 to 1.94 miles
➔ Group size ↓ from 5.61 to 1.85 people¹

But trail use is surging - up 200% - since the start of the pandemic¹,²,³

Eco-counter is documenting these trends

In US, bike counts up 33% over October last year

Bike count trends by North American region for October 2020 (compared to October 2019)

Northeast (US)

Full week - % YOY change: **18.8%**

- West (US)
- West (Canada)
- Northeast (US)
- Southwest (US)
- West Coast (US)
- Southeast (US)
- Midwest (US)
- East (Canada)

Full week percent change in bike counts
October 2020 vs. October 2019

Weekday and weekend percent change in bike counts
October 2020 vs. October 2019
25 TRAFx Counters
Estimate uses and use patterns
24/7 permanent counters
Jan 1-Dec 31 data analysis
Calibrated with manual counts

www.cttrailcensus.uconn.edu

Infrared Counters
This is a survey about trail use, conducted by the Connecticut Trail Census. It will take about 5 minutes.

All data and information collected will be aggregated, kept confidential, and your responses will not be individually identifiable. At the end of the survey you will have the opportunity to provide your email, if you so choose, to receive additional information about the study and information about participating in ongoing research. Your contact information will not be sold or disseminated to any other parties for any other purpose. The aggregated data set and data report will be made publicly available for researchers and the general public at http://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu.

You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you agree to complete this survey, but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. This project has been approved under UConn IRB Exempt Study Number X16-181. Click to view the participant Information sheet.

For more information contact the Principal Investigator: Laura Brown, University of Connecticut Department of Extension, 203-407-3107, laurabrown@uconn.edu

☐ Yes, I would like to participate in the survey.
Trail use is up in Connecticut

Aggregated trail uses: 2020 compared to previous two years

Note: Trail uses are based on hourly trail data collected from 16 automated TrafX counters on trail sites for which complete data was available located in East Hampton, New Britain, Cheshire, Hamden, New Haven, Bolton, Vernon, Oxford, Middlebury, Derby, Wilton, Hartford, Madison, Brookfield, and Torrington.
Trail use is up in Connecticut

Percentage change in aggregated trail use: 2019 - 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>% Change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>82.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>-13.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
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</tbody>
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Many are new users

According to a survey of 1,247 multi-use trail users in Connecticut

- 21% say they use the trail more since the pandemic
- 16% said they did not use the trail before the pandemic

Outdoor amenities open during the pandemic

Percent of Outdoor Recreational Resources
Open/Closed - May 2020

Observed changes among trail managers

Preliminary data from trail manager survey (n=74)

➔ Increase # of users
➔ Increase interest in the trail
➔ Use of trail for health & wellness
➔ Overcrowding
➔ Change in demographic of users

Implications for equity and access

➔ Increased use does not imply increased or equitable access - loss of access to green space has greater impacts on urban communities

➔ Loss of access inhibits mental and physical health benefits of greenspaces

  Rung et al. 2011; Samuelsson et al. 2020. as cited in Rice et al, 2020

➔ Who has access to safe outdoor recreation?

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[Screenshot of The New York Times article titled "Restricting Beach Access to Residents Only"]

Fearing the spread of Covid-19, some cities in Connecticut and Long Island are trying to keep nonresidents off the sand, butting up against legal mandates that require them to maintain public access.

By Lisa Prevost
Aug. 6, 2020
Community implications

Short Term

➔ Public health and safety - signage, closures for overcrowding
➔ Addressing environmental/ecological implications of increased use
➔ Education about lesser used trails and for new users

"PLEASE remember to stay 6' feet apart to keep us all safe"

Community implications

Long Term

➔ Shines a spotlight on the need for more/better integration of public health into planning and design, including focus on “complete streets”
➔ Strategies to maintain engagement in outdoor activities post-pandemic
➔ Documenting & communicating economic value of open spaces trails
➔ Turning interest into long term stewardship
➔ Repurposing outdoor spaces and trails as educational spaces
➔ Social media / virtual engaged programming
➔ Increased potential for development of related amenities/businesses
References


Thank you:

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Visit us on the web: cttrailcensus.uconn.edu
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