

TRAIL USE TRENDS

Connecticut River Valley Region Information:

- Connecticut River Valley Region Participation: Hiking- 41.9%, Road biking- 13.7%, Mountain biking- 18.9%, Camping- 9.3%, Canoeing/kayaking- 18.8%, Cross Country skiing- 3.8%, Fishing- 39.7%, Hunting- 2.9%
- In contrast to demand (or present use patterns), respondents in this region place the highest priority for new facilities on road biking (14.5%), walking (13.9%), swimming (13.8%), playground (11.3%), hiking (10.0%), and mountain biking (10.3%). A middle tier of priorities includes golfing (8.2%), tennis, picnicking and fishing (5.5%), and camping (5.3%).

Central Region Information:

- The suburban growth explosion has occurred without a corresponding set-aside of recreation and conservation lands for the new “communities” that have emerged. Consequently, these communities feel both the fiscal effects of their recent growth and the inability to meet recreation needs at the same time. This suburban and highway-driven commuter pattern of dispersed settlement is presently working these same forces upon the towns ringing the City of Worcester, and the Blackstone Valley.
- There is a clear dominance of land protected for watershed purposes in this region, even more so than in the Connecticut Valley Region. The implication of this fact for recreation interests is, perhaps, obvious. Watershed lands are most often managed exclusively for water supply protection interest, which often precludes recreation use. Because public health and safety are of interest, this cautious approach to land management is understandable. However, this region, more than any other, must come to grips with this dilemma, either in the form of increased protection for other types of resources more compatible with recreation, or in carefully revised watershed management strategies.
- Central Region Participation: Hiking- 43%, Road biking- 12.9%, Mountain biking- 6.1%, Camping- 10.7%, Canoeing/kayaking- 21.7%, Cross Country skiing- 5.4%, Fishing- 33.7%, Hunting- 4.6%, Horseback Riding- 1.7% (Baseball- 4.1%, Soccer- 1.0%, Playgrounds- 31.8%)
- The attraction of lakes and ponds is stronger than in most other regions, by far, in the Central Region at almost 59%, versus a statewide average of 46%.
- The least-used resources by Central residents are bikeways (relatively few exist nearby) and agricultural lands. In the case of bikeways, the low usage may reflect both the small number of dedicated bike facilities, and perhaps to a lesser degree, the very hilly terrain. Since satisfaction levels reported below are high, crowding or poor maintenance are clearly not factors.
- Historic and cultural sites receive the highest satisfaction levels for the Central Region and the highest statewide. Bikeways were also high in satisfaction. Lower levels of satisfaction are



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TRAIL USE TRENDS

reported with wetlands, rivers and streams, lakes and ponds, coastal beaches, agricultural lands and golf courses, neighborhood parks, playgrounds and tot lots. The ***strongest dissatisfaction ratings are given for trails and greenways*** (emphasis added), agricultural lands, and wildlife conservation areas.

- When asked what new facilities would most benefit them, residents of the Central Region showed the highest interest in facilities for walking (16.4%), swimming (17.0%), hiking (14.4%, the strongest interest in the state), road biking (12.1%), and playground activity (10.2%). A second tier of facilities interest is noted among relatively moderate percentage of Central Region respondents for mountain biking (8.5%), golfing (8.3%), picnicking (5.3%), camping (4.8%) and basketball (4.0%).

CONNECTICUT RECREATION TRENDS AND DESIRES

The State of Connecticut, with a potential tourism component in Sturbridge equal to that of Massachusetts, is also undergoing an update of its SCORP. Data presented in the state's 2005 plan includes:

Outdoor Recreation Participation:

Visiting Historic Sites- 57%, Road/Neighborhood Biking- 38%, Bird Watching/Wildlife Viewing- 37%, Camping- 31%, Canoeing/kayaking/tubing- 27%, Golf- 22%, Baseball- 19%, Mountain Biking- 18%, Cross Country Skiing/snowshoeing- 16%, Hunting/Trapping- 10%, Horseback Riding- 10%

Avid Users' Activity As First Choice:

Horseback Riding- 21.7%, Bicycling- 17%, Hiking- 12.6%, Bird Watching- 8.2%, Hunting- 4.7%, Fishing- 3.9%, Kayaking- 2.9%

The three largest unmet needs in the State are for paved multi-use trails, unpaved multi-use trails and unpaved single-use trails (emphasis added).

Paved multi-use trails were respondents' top choice of a facility to develop both locally and throughout the state. This was the first choice of the greatest number of individuals and households. In state parks, it is the third rated cumulative choice, behind picnic areas, shelters and playgrounds and unpaved multi-use trails. Picnic areas and unpaved trails are the second and third choices for local parks.

Among those households that visit state parks, about half (53.3%) visit those parks between once and five times per year. Nearly one quarter of households go to state parks between 6 and 10 times a year or approaching once a month.

TRAIL USE TRENDS

LOCAL ATTITUDES/DESIRES FOR TRAILS

A web-based survey was prepared and hosted on the Town website for approximately three months. 407 total respondents completed the survey. A summary of the responses is included later (pg. 77).

- In general, respondents strongly agreed that trails, nature, and healthy lifestyles are very important, while trails as a means of transportation is not as strong an area of agreement. Participation in walking/hiking on trails from respondents is very high (>75%). Participation in trail running, mountain biking, road biking, fishing, camping, wildlife/birdwatching, powerboating, canoeing/kayaking, alpine skiing/snowboarding, and snowshoeing are also popular, with percentages between 20% and 50%. Participation in horseback riding, backpacking, hunting, atv riding, off-road motorcycling, rock climbing, snowmobiling, nordic skiing is below 15%.
- 78% of respondents already use trails in Sturbridge, but 65% of those respondents use trails two times or fewer per month. Of the 22% that do NOT use trails in Sturbridge, 65% don't know where the Sturbridge trails are located. Narrow natural surface trail, water trails/access, and stone-surfaced woodland trails are the most desired trail types with 71%, 69%, and 68% of respondents providing a value of extremely or very desirable.
- Almost 60% of respondents do not find bikeways more than moderately desirable. However, safe bike lanes, wide shoulders, connected sidewalks, and controlled intersections are listed as very or somewhat positive needs for over 70% of respondents. Approximately 65% of respondents indicated that greenway infrastructure is extremely or very desirable.
- Related to water access, 90% of respondents desire (very or somewhat positive response) more access to the Great Ponds, with 85% desiring boating access to the Quinebaug, and 83% desiring riverside parks/gathering areas.
- Approximately 75% of respondents felt that trails could have a positive tourism impact (strongly or moderately agree), 85% felt that improved bike/ped infrastructure in the Quinebaug/Rte. 20/ Fiskdale corridor would make Sturbridge a more livable community. Less than 50% of respondents felt that bike/ped infrastructure to the Sturbridge schools would lead to an increase of students biking or walking to school.
- 81% of respondents are willing to pay in some manner for improved trail facilities, with 66.5% responding positively to the idea of using Betterment and/or Community Preservation funds for that purpose. 83% of respondents would prefer a 5-10 year plan for trail development. 75% of respondents are willing to volunteer to improve trail facilities at some level.

TRAIL SYSTEM VISION & GOALS

The Trails Committee has incorporated trail-related information from previous Sturbridge planning efforts (i.e. Sturbridge Master Plan, Commercial Tourist District Revitalization Study, etc.), analyzed public desires related to trails at the regional and local levels, and assessed the potential for meeting these needs in a responsible and efficient manner within Sturbridge town limits. Through this process the Trails Committee has developed a Vision to guide the trail development process, set a number of Goals to achieve over the next ten years, and proposed measurable Objectives and Strategies, with conceptual responsibilities and timelines, to outline the trail development and management process moving forward.

Vision For Sturbridge Trails

The Sturbridge Recreation Trails Master Plan seeks to highlight the community's small town character, vast open spaces, scenic character, and abundant natural resources through the development of a diverse, interconnected system of recreation trails and signed touring routes. These facilities will provide improved access to protected lands, the Quinebaug River, community gathering places, and cultural/historical sites. The trail system will bolster Sturbridge's brand as a conservation leader and the ample recreation opportunities will incentivize visitors to spend additional time in Town exploring our natural environment.

Recreation Trails Master Plan Goals

1. Develop a diverse system of forest-based, environmentally sustainable trails that highlight the ecology, topography, vistas, rural character, and historical/cultural significance of protected lands within Sturbridge.
2. Provide an uninterrupted riverside greenway from Brimfield to Westville Reservoirs with direct connectivity to the Commercial Tourist District.
3. Create a safer and more efficient bicycling/pedestrian infrastructure, including connections to historical, business, and commercial areas and scenic, rural touring routes.
4. Establish effective and readily available education, outreach, and marketing materials that direct residents and visitors to trails, provide information on volunteer opportunities, and highlight events related to the Sturbridge trails and protected lands.
5. Improve and highlight public access to the Quinebaug River.
6. Implement the Plan in an efficient manner to provide maximum benefits to residents and visitors, identifying and employing a variety of funding sources, volunteer assistance, and Town resources to optimize the inputs of all stakeholding parties.



OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Develop a diverse system of forest-based, environmentally sustainable trails that highlight the ecology, topography, vistas, rural character, and historical/cultural significance of protected lands within Sturbridge.

Objective 1.1: Establish a model trail system on the Leadmine Mountain Open Space property that includes approximately six miles of wider, aggregate surfaced trail that connect to each of the property's trailheads and fifteen to twenty miles of narrow, natural surface singletrack.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
1.1.1	Allocate funding for the professional planning, design, and construction cost estimation of the Leadmine Mountain property	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Short-Term
1.1.2	Develop implementation plan for trail system development, including permitting, funding, coordination with forest improvement activities, and ongoing trail system management	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Short-Term
1.1.3	Implement trail system development	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Intermediate



OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objective 1.2: Develop a network of narrow, aggregate surfaced singletrack loops, approximately two to three total miles and connected to the Grand Trunk Trail, on the River Lands property.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
1.2.1	Allocate funding for the professional planning, design, and construction cost estimation of the River Lands property	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Short-Term
1.2.2	Develop implementation plan for trail system development, including permitting, funding, coordination with remediation activities, bridge development, and Commercial Tourism District parking/access improvements	Trail Committee (Co-Lead) Conservation Agent/ Planner/Town Administrator (Co-Lead) Community Preservation Committee (Support)	Short-Term
1.2.3	Implement trail system development	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support) Community Preservation Committee (Support)	Intermediate

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objective 1.3: Enhance the environmental sustainability and interpretive opportunities of the Opacum Woods trail system by creating better trail alignments away from sensitive habitat, surfacing trails where appropriate, and improving trail connectivity and access.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
1.3.1	Facilitate discussion with Opacum Land Trust regarding trail system sustainability, interpretation, connectivity, and access	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Intermediate
1.3.2	Develop implementation plan for trail system development, including permitting, funding, coordination with conservation easement/wildlife planning and surrounding neighborhoods	Trail Committee (Co-Lead) Opacum Land Trust (Co-Lead)	Intermediate
1.3.3	Implement trail system improvements	Trail Committee (Co-Lead) Opacum Land Trust (Co-Lead)	Intermediate

Objective 1.4: Retrofit the Wells State Park trail system for improved environmental sustainability and to better meet trail user desires, as defined by the Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (MA SCORP).

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
1.4.1	Facilitate discussion with Wells State Park regarding trail system sustainability, recreation quality, and access improvements	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Intermediate
1.4.2	Develop implementation plan for trail system development, including permitting, funding, coordination with park master plan, SCORP findings and surrounding neighborhoods	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator and Wells State Park Mgt. (Support)	Intermediate
1.4.3	Implement trail system improvements	Trail Committee (Lead) Wells State Park Mgr. (Co-Lead)	Intermediate

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objective 1.5: Provide improved fishing access and wildlife interpretation trails on Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game-managed (MADF&W) properties within Town boundaries.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
1.5.1	Facilitate discussion with MADF&W local/regional managers regarding trail system development, enhanced interpretation, and access improvements	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Intermediate
1.5.2	Develop implementation plan for trail system development, including permitting, funding, coordination with wildlife management area plan, SCORP findings and surrounding neighborhoods	Trail Committee (Lead) MADF&W Mgr. (Co-Lead)	Intermediate
1.5.3	Implement trail system improvements	Trail Committee (Lead) MADF&W (Co-Lead)	Long-Term

Objective 1.6: Optimize trail connectivity between parcels under diverse ownership (i.e. River Lands to Leadmine Mountain, Opacum Land Trust to Wells State Park, connections across Town boundaries through DFW properties, etc.)

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
1.6.1	Facilitate connectivity/access discussion with land managing entities	Trail Committee (Lead) Conservation Agent (Support)	Ongoing

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Goal 2: Provide an uninterrupted riverside greenway from Brimfield to Westville Reservoirs with direct connectivity to the Commercial Tourist District.

Objective 2.1: Complete the development of the Grand Trunk Trail.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
2.1.1	Complete currently funded portion of the trail	Trail Committee and Grand Trunk Trailblazers (Co-Lead) MADOT and ACOE (Support)	Ongoing
2.1.2	Develop implementation plan for River Lands section, including permitting, funding, coordination with remediation	Trail Committee and Grand Trunk Trailblazers (Co-Lead) Board of Selectmen, Planner (Support)	Short-Term
2.1.3	Finalize trail development	Trail Committee (Lead) Town Administrator (Support)	Intermediate
2.1.4	Provide outreach, support, and assistance to extend the trail through other Grand Trunk Trail communities	Grand Trunk Trailblazers (Lead) Regional Trail Committee (Support)	Ongoing

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objective 2.2: Create bridged access to the River Lands and Grand Trunk Trail from the east and west portions of the Commercial Tourist District.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
2.2.1	Finalize preferred bridge crossing locations	Planner (Lead) Trails Committee (Support)	Short-Term
2.2.2	Develop site and engineering plans, easements, permitting, and funding	Planner (Lead) Trail Committee (Support)	Intermediate
2.2.3	Construct bridges	Town Administrator (Lead) Dept of Public Works (Support)	Long-Term

Objective 2.3: Create a paved eight to ten foot wide greenway trail on the north bank of the Quinebaug River throughout the Commercial Tourist District.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
2.3.1	Develop CTD “River Trail” stakeholder group to facilitate discussion and planning	Planner (Lead) Tourist Association (Support) Trail Comm. (Support)	Short-Term
2.3.2	Develop site and engineering plans, easements, permitting, and funding	Planner (Lead) Tourist Association (Support) Trail Comm (Support)	Intermediate
2.3.3	Construct greenway	Town Administrator (Lead) Dept of Public Works (Support) Trail Comm (Support)	Long-Term



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OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Goal 3: Create a safer and more efficient bicycling/pedestrian infrastructure, including connections to historical, business, and commercial areas and scenic, rural touring routes.

Objective 3.1: Develop system of signed touring routes within Sturbridge connecting important Town features, public trailheads, and natural/historic highlights.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
3.1.1	Erect “bike route” safety and routing signs along routes	Trails Committee (Lead) Dept. Public Works(Support)	Short-Term
3.1.2	Develop branded map of routes and complementary roadside signage and mobile device application to add depth to touring experience	Trails Committee (Lead) Tourist Association (Support)	Intermediate
3.1.3	Conduct feasibility/cost study on the addition of paved, striped bike lanes along the touring routes	Trail Comm (Lead) Planner. (Support) Dept of Public Works (Support)	Long-Term
3.1.4	Add design elements to roadway improvement plans and implement on existing transportation improvement schedule or as funding is developed	Dept. Public Works (Lead) Trails Committee (Support)	Intermediate to Long-Term

Objective 3.2: Improve pedestrian/bicycle accessibility and safety throughout the Commercial Tourist District.

Strategy 3.2.1: Trails Committee to provide support to Planner in implementing bicycle/pedestrian facets of the Commercial Tourist District Revitalization Plan. Initial study funded for 2012.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Objective 3.3: Extend the signed, mapped touring concept throughout the region.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
3.3.1	Following initial implementation of signage and mapping, develop a comprehensive sign plan, maps and brochures for all open space lands, create a booklet that combines all maps and brochures for town wide delivery, and create a mobile device application.	Trails Committee, Open Space Committee (Co-Lead) Community Preservation Comm, Tourist Association (Support)	Ongoing
3.3.2	Create stakeholder group to facilitate discussion and provide support and best practices to regional communities and add routes to the Last Green Valley regional bike touring opportunities	Trails Committee and Town Planner (Co- Lead) Town Administrator, GTTB, TLGV, CMRPC (Support)	Short-Term

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Goal 4: Establish effective and readily available education, outreach, and marketing materials that direct residents and visitors to trails, provide information on volunteer opportunities, and highlight events related to the Sturbridge trails and protected lands.

Objective 4.1: Create standardized Sturbridge-wide trail map template based on cartographic best practices, including space to display partner/land owner information as well as discreet advertising space, that can be cost efficiently updated on an annual basis.

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
4.1.1	Develop accurate map of current signed, marked trails and trail area “cut-out” maps suitable for posting on Sturbridge Townships website	Trails Committee (Lead) Tourist Association (Support)	Ongoing
4.1.2	Create standardized trailhead kiosk plans that include a single area trail map, trail use preparation information, emergency management address, and a space for positively stated regulatory information	Trails Committee and Conservation Agent (Co-Lead) Tourist Association (Support)	Short-Term
4.1.3	Enhance web exposure by providing current trail information for use on Last Green Valley site	Trails Committee (Lead) Tourist Association (Support)	Short-Term

Objective 4.2: Develop program of regularly scheduled guided/interpreted hikes and rides on the Sturbridge area trails

Strategy	Description	Coordinating Entities	Timeline
4.2.1	Immediately employ Trek Sturbridge as the branded outreach vehicle for leading and marketing docent-led guided/interpreted hikes and rides with, docent training, and providing a presence at events and at trailheads during high visitation periods	Trails Committee (Lead) Conservation Comm, Town Administrator, Tourist Association (Support)	Short-Term