

Project Description Narrative

The Connecticut Statewide Multiuse Trail User Study

In response to an identified need for information about users of Connecticut's multiuse trails, The Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) is pleased to submit this application for funding to conduct a **Statewide Multiuse Trail User Study**. This application is being submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Greenways Council (CGC), and in partnership with The UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Department of Extension (Extension) and the Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR).

The Connecticut National Recreational Trails Program Recreational Trails Plan, published in 2011 by the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) identified a need for information about trail users and usage in the state. In the report, DEEP states that *"little research has been done regarding the number and types of trail users around the state, potential conflicts and safety concerns"*. Without this important user information, it is difficult for the state, municipalities, regional planning agencies or trail administrators to plan for, maintain or improve multiuse trails to meet public needs or expectations. This lack of local data hampers efforts to obtain funding for trail design and construction since it is difficult to demonstrate a need for multi-use trail infrastructure without information about existing trail use. When applying for grants or requesting municipal funding for trail projects, trail administrators often resort to using anecdotal evidence or trail user and economic impact data collected elsewhere, weakening their argument for local multiuse trail investment.

The Recreational Trails Plan also offered a solution to this problem: *"Working with some of the academic institutions in the state, the DEEP should develop a protocol for surveying trail users so that the present and future needs of these constituents can be met."* This project is a direct response to that recommendation. With this grant funding from the Recreational Trails Program, the Connecticut Greenways Council will be able to work with project partners to develop a trail survey and count methodology, create a survey that addresses the needs of trail administrators and users, deploy surveys and trail counters, compile responses, analyze results, and provide count and survey information back to those who need it and to the general public. Information gathered during this project will greatly improve the ability of trail administrators to plan for future trail construction and improvements, will provide a basis for more in depth analyses of the economic impacts of trail users, and will help appropriately allocate trail infrastructure funding in the future.

This project involves conducting both numerical counts and intercept surveys of multiuse trail users. Long term trail use will be measured using infrared trail counters that record trail uses 24 hours per day for the duration of the study. These count data will show trail use patterns by time of day, day of week and season, and will serve to help better understand and compare trail use. These counts will also serve as a valuable baseline to gauge the effectiveness of future trail improvements. The project partners will work with local trail groups to determine appropriate counter locations, and will develop methods for deployment, data retrieval and analysis, with local trail groups and volunteers taking on responsibilities of counter maintenance and data downloads. With a maintenance and data management plan that will be developed as part of this study, the counters purchased with grant funding could continue monitoring trail uses into the future beyond the timeframe of this study.

In the development of a trail user survey, the Council will work with experts in economic analysis and community development at UConn Extension to design a survey and methodology that will accurately and

thoroughly assess multiuse trail usage across CT. The survey will be based on a pilot study conducted by NVCOG and UConn in the Fall of 2015, and includes questions about the demographics of trail users (age, gender, location of residence, etc.), characteristics of trail use (how, when and why people are using the trail), general spending by trail users locally, trail amenities that are being used or needed, and concerns that trail users may have about safety, conflicts, or other issues. Trained local volunteers will be relied on to conduct intercept surveys. With the importance of data consistency in mind, a major part of this study will be developing a training program to properly train survey volunteers. Training will likely include a mix of in-person and online formats, along with written guidance and “train the trainer” sessions. Intercept surveys will be administered by trained volunteers in a paper format which will then be converted into a digital format. The UConn partners will help train the volunteers and oversee data collection, compilation, analysis and reporting of the data with help from NVCOG planning staff.

The data collected will be made freely available online. CLEAR has agreed to host the collected data and develop a website that will enable the public to easily access and investigate the information about trail use and trail users. Project partners will investigate appropriate methods to best disseminate the data including through interactive maps, data download or interactive data visualization. The website and tools will be designed keeping in mind the goal of ongoing data collection into the future.

Although this project has been proposed as a stand-alone project, and as such will provide valuable information, it is ultimately envisioned as a pilot for ongoing, annual collection of trail use data. To ensure that the project can be sustained beyond the grant funding cycle, NVCOG and UConn Extension will work with the Greenways Council and others to solicit regular feedback on the development of the survey, document and improve procedures for data collection, guide the establishment of systems for data input and management, raise additional funding as needed, and ensure that appropriate educational tools are developed for sharing the data widely across the state. The sustainability of this project beyond this funding cycle will largely depend on the willingness of other partners and stakeholders to commit to supporting this project.

As state and federal agencies and local governments increasingly look to develop pedestrian and bicycle facilities as a means for alternative transportation, recreation, and to drive economic development, the need for information about how trails are being used, and their impacts on local communities has never been greater. This project, stemming from recommendations in *The Connecticut National Recreational Trails Program Recreational Trails Plan*, is an opportunity to fill the current gap in information about Connecticut’s multiuse trail users. By funding this project, the Recreational Trails Program will be providing tools to municipalities and trail administrators to design trails that will have the most benefit to trail users and communities, and to more successfully pursue funding for trail projects. It will provide tools to grant administrators to better guide funding to where it is most needed and can do the most good, and will provide a baseline to assess future trail improvements. By approving funding for this project, the Recreational Trails Program will provide for a more successful and equitable future for Connecticut’s multiuse trail system and its users.

Scope of Work

The Connecticut Statewide Multiuse Trail User Study

Purpose: Fill a gap in information about Connecticut's Multiuse Trail Users.

Timeline: Spring 2016 – Winter 2017 (18 Months)

Partners:

- Connecticut Greenways Council (CGC)
- Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG)
- UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Department of Extension (Extension)
- UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR)

Goals:

Determine the following about Connecticut's multiuse trail users, and disseminate information to trail user groups, administrators, state and local government agencies, and the general public:

- Characteristics of trail use- how, when, why are people using multiuse trails in CT?
- Demographics of trail users- who (age, gender, location of residence) is using multiuse trails?
- General spending by trail users- How much direct economic impact are trail users having on the local economy?
- Amenities being used or needed- What trail features are important to multiuse trail users in CT?

Task A: Trail User Counts – Collect data about how many people are using multiuse trails, and determine when and where multiuse trails are being used. Automatic infrared trail counters will be used to count trail users 24 hours per day for the duration of the project. Data will be processed and analyzed to determine user trends by hour of day, day of week, and season. Data collected will serve as a means to compare usage between trails and as a baseline to assess future trail improvements. After completion of the study, counters may remain in place and collect data about trail uses into the future.

Task A Subtasks:

1. Develop a user count methodology and determine count locations (CGC, NVCOG, Extension (Spring 2016))
2. Purchase, set up, and deploy trail counters in proper housings (NVCOG, Volunteers (Spring/Summer 2016))
3. Train volunteers in proper trail counter operation (NVCOG, Spring/Summer 2016)
4. Monitor counters and quarterly data downloads (NVCOG, Volunteers – Duration of Project)
5. Conduct manual counts for counter calibration (NVCOG, Volunteers – Duration of Project)
6. Process and analyze count data (Extension, NVCOG, CLEAR – Duration of Project)

Task B: Trail User Survey – A multiuse trail user survey will be designed to collect information about the demographics of trail users (age, gender, location of residence, etc.), characteristics of trail use (how, when and why people are using the trail), general spending by trail users locally, trail amenities that are being used or needed, and concerns that trail users may have about safety, conflicts, or other issues. The survey tool will be based on a survey developed during a pilot study by NVCOG and Extension in the fall of 2015. Intercept surveys will be administered by trained volunteers, with oversight by a "Trail Captain"

and project partners, and survey locations will be determined in consultation with local trail user groups. All materials will be provided to volunteers including paper surveys, clipboards, signage, etc. Based on an assessment conducted as part of this project, it may be determined that additional survey techniques will also be required such as a supplemental drop-box survey. Techniques and methods developed during this study will be designed with future program sustainability in mind.

Task B Subtasks:

1. Develop a survey methodology and instrument, determine locations to administer surveys (CGC, Extension, CCEA, NVCOG – Summer/Fall 2016)
2. Train volunteers to administer intercept survey (Extension, NVCOG, CGC – Winter/Spring 2017)
3. Administer surveys (Volunteers with oversight by project partners – Summer/Fall 2017)
4. Data input/ cleanup/ compilation (Extension, NVCOG– Duration of Project)
5. Overview analysis of survey data (Extension –Fall 2017)

Task C: Administration, Reporting and Dissemination – Inform trail administrators, municipalities, state agencies and the general public about the findings of the study and provide collected data to the public in an easy to access and understand manner. CLEAR has agreed to host the collected data and develop a webpage to disseminate project data freely and openly. The best data delivery method will be determined during the study process and may include interactive maps, a data download portal or interactive data visualization tools. Other outreach may include overview reports, presentations, whitepapers and press releases.

Task C Subtasks:

1. Program Design (All Partners – Duration of Project)
2. Administrative and fiduciary oversight (NVCOG – Duration of Project)
3. Outreach to stakeholders and the public (All Partners – Duration of Project)
4. Website development with data access (CLEAR – Summer 2016-Winter 2017)
5. Other outreach (All Partners – Duration of Project)