

## **Gallatin County Trails & Parks Interconnect Survey Results**

### **Executive Summary**

#### **Purpose:**

The purpose of undertaking the Interconnect Survey was to create a scoping plan and gather user feedback. The expectations from the results were two-fold. First was to determine the current use and adequacy of existing trails and parks within Gallatin County. The survey was designed in a manner that would provide Gallatin County officials a profile of the current trail and park users, as well as determine their use(s) on present facilities.

Secondly, this survey was intended to provide officials a guide for planning future trail and park development and requirements. Trail and park developments include types of trails and parks, site placement, and future funding needs for acquiring, constructing, and maintaining these future County infrastructure investments.

#### **Research Design:**

The statistical package used to complete this survey analysis was provided through analytics by Question Pro. An open-ended question was included at the end of the survey to give respondents an opportunity to give further information or suggestions, explain answers, and/or express attitude to the survey in general. Additional data was gathered by distribution of a printed copy of the online form to selected sites (see Sampling). The online survey took an average of 12-14 minutes to complete.

An informal, internal "pre-test" was completed by having County officials, employees, and County board and committee members complete the online version and submit concerns and suggestions to the survey administrator.

#### **Sampling:**

The sampling plan was randomized, with quotas set by zip code to ensure adequate participation by county residents who reported using parks and trails in Gallatin County in the last year. Non-users were not included.

Data collection efforts consisted of Public Service Announcements and newspaper notices directing county residents to the survey website. In addition, announcements were made available at community meetings, schools, clubs, and other service oriented organizations. Local recreation organizations were emailed an announcement to facilitate inclusion, as were the Chambers of Commerce and any local Senior Centers. In addition, four community outreach meetings were held in Bozeman, Belgrade, Manhattan and Big Sky to inform residents of the survey effort, take questions, and allow for time to fill out a paper copy of the survey. Paper copies were also distributed to every library in the County and the Big Sky Post Office.

A total of 1764 people viewed the survey online. Of those, 575 people began the survey, but did not complete it. A total of 1,189 people completed the survey. This creates a total survey response level of 67.4%. Question Pro has calculated the confidence level to be 95%.

## **Participant Demographics:**

Survey participant reported the following demographic data:

- 55% live within city limits and 45% live outside city limits
- Males made up 53.49% of survey participants
- Nearly half of participants (49.37%) reported an income level of \$32,550 and \$78,850
- Over half of respondents were between 31 and 50 years old
- A majority (38.29%) of survey participants reported a 2 person household. However, there is a significant number of 4 person household declared as well (22.25%)

## **Survey Limitations:**

As with an survey attempting to gather quantitative and/or qualitative data, this study has some limitations. This survey was designed and administered in a manner to control as many identified sources of bias as possible., nevertheless, a few are worth mentioning her.

One is the fact that no "true" pretest was conducted on the survey instrument. "Pretests are necessary to evaluate question wording and question sequence and to test techniques by which responses are recorded."<sup>1</sup>

Great care was taken by the survey designers to use clear and concise terminology and definitions were used in certain cases, but there is no guarantee that some of the terminology was not interpreted as designed. It is assumed that all responses are an accurate reflection of the respondent's opinion and that each respondent fully understood the essence of the question and answered accordingly.

A final limitation of this study may be its overall length and the time required to complete it. Roughly 33% of the people who began the survey failed to complete it. There is no way to determine the effects, if any, of respondent fatigue on the final results. However, with a completion rate of 67%, designers determined the length and time of the survey had little to no impact on the final results. It is assumed that for all responses and questions, participants responded with an equal level of accuracy and enthusiasm.

Missing data are the result of unanswered questions and cause the number in the sample to fluctuate from question to question. Such occurrences are treated as response errors and result in very minor data inconsistencies.

It is assumed that by using generally accepted techniques of formatting, sampling, question wording and sequencing, and survey administration that any unseen limitations were eliminated or mitigated to a degree that bears no statistical effect on the final results. Keep in mind that these results do not represent the total population of Gallatin County. The results are reported for park and/or trail users.

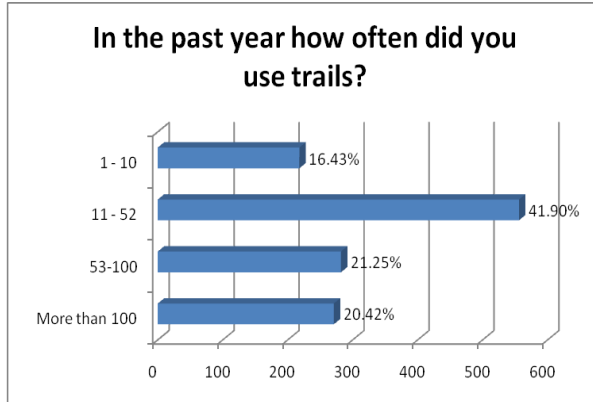
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<sup>1</sup> Frey, James H. (1989): "Survey Research By Telephone" Second Edition  
Sage Publications; Newbury park, California (p. 181)

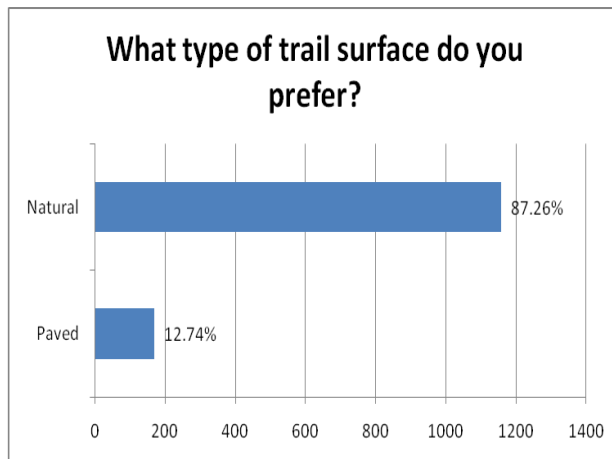
## **Trails:**

### **Respondents report;**

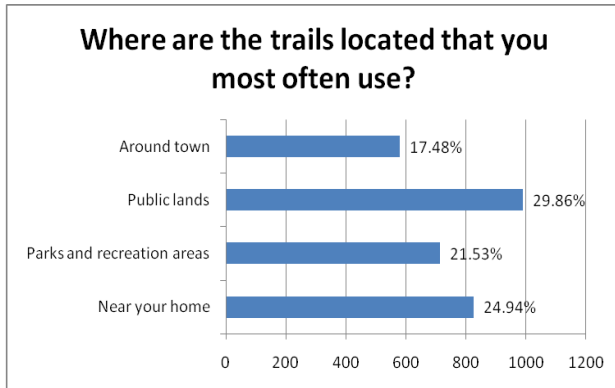
- Just over 83% of users report using trail at least once per week (Q2)



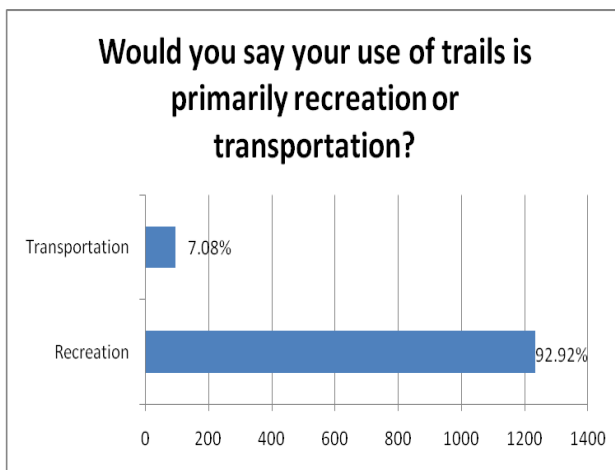
- An overwhelming amount of respondents prefer natural fine trails to surfaced trails (Q7)



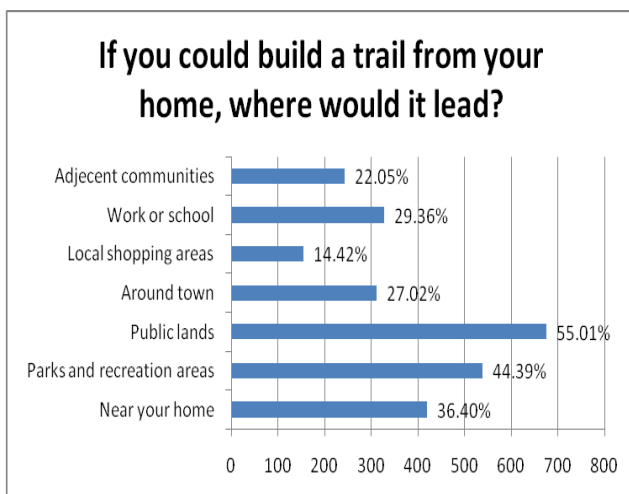
- Just over half of respondents (51.39%) presently utilize trails located on public lands and parks/recreation areas (Q4)



- A vast majority of respondents report that they use trails primarily for recreation, as opposed to transportation (Q6)



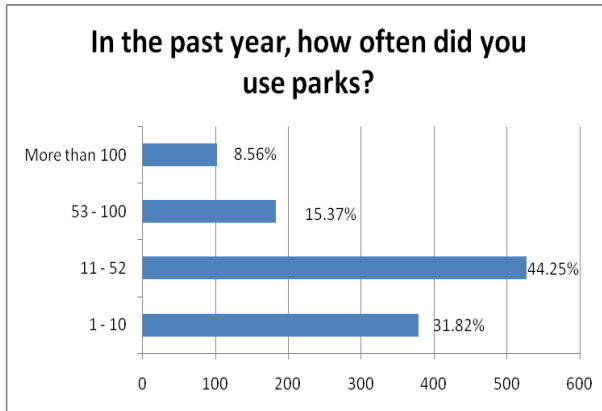
- Respondents' preferential ranking revealed they would like to see future trails link to trails they currently use on public lands and parks/recreation areas as determined in question 4 (Q5)



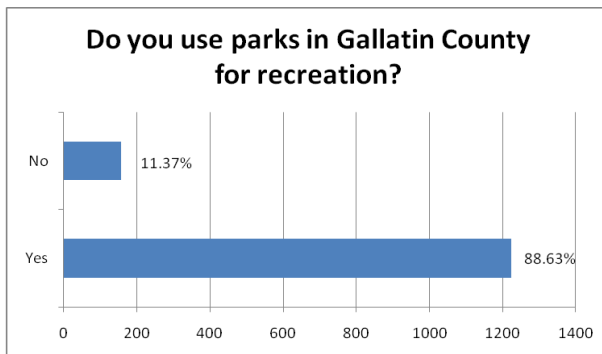
## **Parks:**

### **Respondents report;**

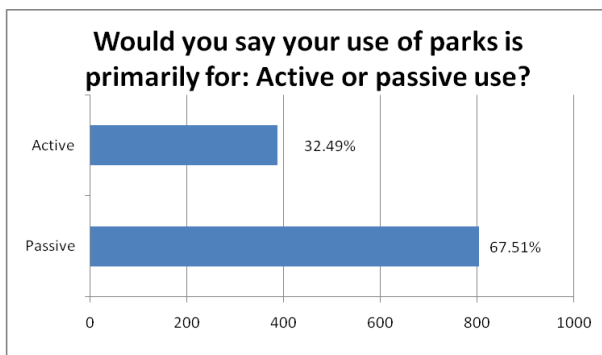
- 68.10% of survey participants reported that they used parks in Gallatin County at least one time per week in the past year (Q10)



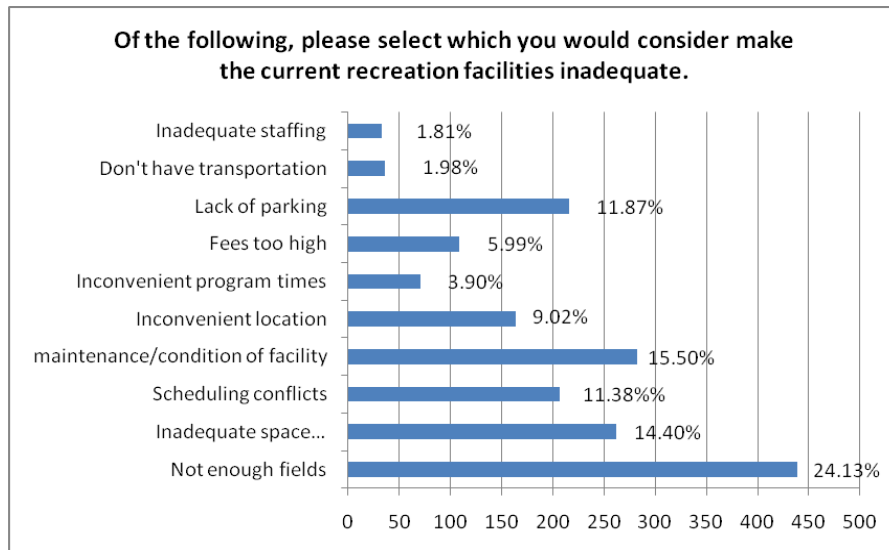
- 88.63% of respondents said they use parks in Gallatin County for recreation (Q9)



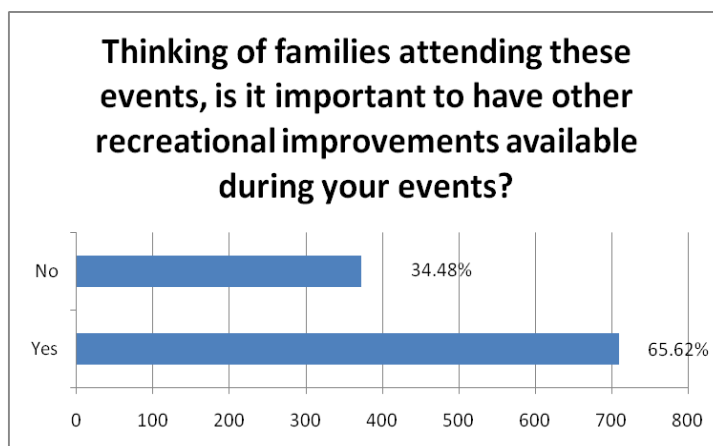
- Just over two-thirds (67.51%) of the respondents report their use of parks as passive versus active (Q12)



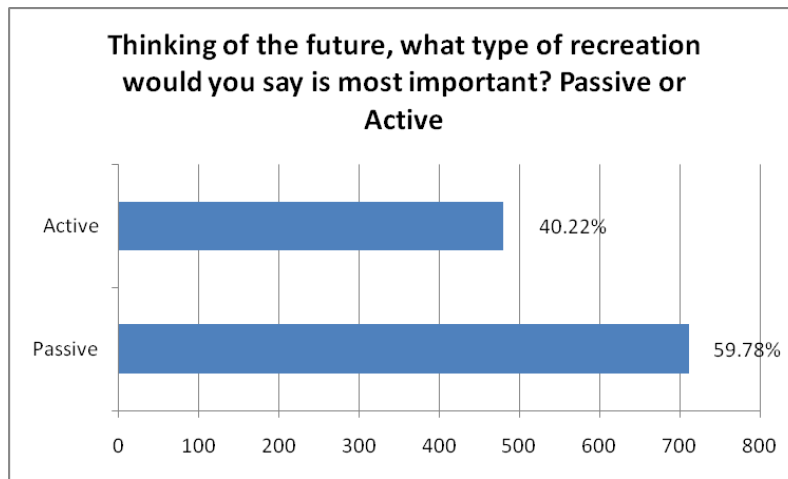
- When asked about what makes current park facilities inadequate, 49.91% say issues related to the lack of field space (not enough fields, inadequate space at current fields, and scheduling conflicts) is the biggest issue. (Q14)



- When asked about families attending events occurring on parks within the county, almost two-thirds responded that other recreational improvements be made available during the events. (i.e. playground for kids at or near ball field) (Q19)



- When prompted about their thoughts on future park uses, 59.78% reported that passive use is most important. This is a significant decline from what they (around 7%) report is their current type of use as reported in question 12 (Q17)



## **Findings:**

- Respondents would prefer to have links to existing trails in parks and recreation areas rather than links to shopping or other communities.
- Respondents overwhelmingly want natural fine trails as opposed to paved surfaces. This is consistent with how they report current trail system use, which favors recreational use versus transportation.
- Survey respondents reported that the location of recreation facilities is not as important as field availability. This indicates a willingness to travel to site locations.
- The favored time of recreation is spread evenly throughout the day and week, however, weekend afternoons are the most common times for recreation.
- While a majority of respondents were from a two person household, it is important to note that over 1/4 of the respondents reported a four person household. This could indicate two parents and two children, giving possible explanation to why the demand for more active recreation facilities is predicted to increase in the future. Parents are foreseeing a need for more ball fields and playing space as their children age and become more active in organized sports.
- Respondents substantially "agree" or "somewhat agree" (81.58%) that parks, trails, and recreation facilities are necessary infrastructure and should be funded by the government. In fact, over half feel these needs cannot be met by volunteers and private donations. (Q22)
- Top priorities to users in Gallatin County are (in order of importance) trails, fairgrounds, picnicking, playgrounds, fishing (lakes), soccer, outdoor swimming, camping, sledding, and cross-country skiing. These were determined by taking the responses of "very" or "somewhat important" that added up to a percentage greater than 75%.
- Respondent have identified that while their *current* type of park use is primarily passive, they feel the demand for active recreation will increase in the *future*. This finding indicates a need to increase levels of active use fields in the future(Q17). There is an anticipated increase (7.73%) in the demand for active recreational needs in the future.