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Cheese Country Trail Final Report Available

The final report of the year-long study of the Cheese Country Trail is complete. This collaborative effort of local groups and UW Extension was designed to assess how many people are using the trail, the user characteristics and the user perceptions of trail conditions. The final report is an overall evaluation of local economic impacts of this important recreational asset. It is available online at the Green County UW Extension website <http://green.uwex.edu/>.

During the 12 month study period, seventy four local volunteers spent more than 1,400 hours collecting the data summarized in the report. They conducted 683 randomly allocated two hour trail observations and a total of 730 face-to-face interviews. Results of their work highlight several important implications for outdoor recreation planning and local economic development.

Number of Users

During the 12 month study period, 98,000 people used the trail. Almost 75 percent of all visitor days occurred on weekends or holidays. The majority of Cheese Country Trail usage occurred between Memorial Day and Labor Day. A modest amount of snowmobile usage occurred during the winter of 2010-2011 but was hampered by lack of snow and trail closures. The Cheese Country Trail was the primary reason why most non-local visitors were in Green, Lafayette, and/or Iowa Counties.

Characteristics of Users

Two-thirds of all trail users were not from the local three county region. The average age of users was in the mid-40s with non-local trail users tending to be older than local trail users. Non-local trail users were more apt to be college educated and had significantly higher household incomes when compared to local Cheese Country Trail users. Non-locals often spent overnights in the area in local campgrounds or hotels and motels. Trail users also participated in related activities such as dining and shopping during their trips.

User Spending

Individual trip expenditure patterns were very different when comparing local trail users with non-local trail users. On average, individual non-local trail users spent between \$175 and \$220 per trip, depending on the time of year. Total spending of trail users exceeded \$15 million during the 12 month study period. Non-local trail user spending provided an economic stimulus that infused over \$13 million into the local economy during the 12 month study period. Non-local trail user spending supported almost 190 local jobs and contributed to almost \$3 million in employee compensation for local residents of Green, Lafayette, and Iowa Counties.

Future Implications

A host of public policy issues need to be addressed in order to maintain and enhance local development efforts relating to the Cheese Country Trail. The Tri-County Trails Commission plans to use the results of the study to improve trail experiences for future users. Short fact sheets will be developed to summarize the report. Presentations and fact sheets will be available for local communities, businesses and counties to help create economic development related to the trail and its users.

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