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Dear Trail Survey Participant:

Several years ago, you participated in a multi-use trail-managing agency and trail user-group survey which I conducted for the Openlands Project based in Chicago, Illinois. At that time, I was a graduate student completing my M.A. degree and was doing the project for Openlands and also using the data for my thesis on multi-use trail management.

Unfortunately, the Project Director at Openlands left that organization shortly after I completed my report and thesis. I provided Openlands with a copy of my thesis which was based on the survey findings, additional research, and on other information which was provided by survey participants. I also provided a summary report in May 1996, and it was my understanding that Openlands Project was planning to send it to the survey participants. I have been advised that this was never done; therefore, I have decided to take it upon myself to send you the summary report.

Although the data are not current, I believe that the results of the survey and of my research may be of value to you. I want to emphasize that the recommendations in the enclosed "Multi-Use Trail-Managing Agency and Trail User-Group Survey: Summary Report - May 1996," are mine alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Openlands Project. If you are interested in receiving the complete report (190 pages or 95 pages two-sided) based on the entire survey data, I would be glad to send it to you for the cost of copying and postage. I anticipate that the approximate cost would be \$10.00. The report includes an extensive literature review, analysis of additional survey data, and a lengthy bibliography.

I also want to take this time to thank you for your participation in the multi-use trail-managing agency/trail user-group survey and for any additional information and materials with which you may have provided me. I regret that due to the above mentioned unforeseen circumstances the summary report was not sent to you sooner.

If you should have any questions regarding the report, or would like to comment on it, please feel free to contact me at (630) 665-5125, or you may write to me at the above address. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Pauline Gambill

Enclosure

**MULTI-USE TRAIL-MANAGING AGENCY AND TRAIL USER-GROUP SURVEY:  
SUMMARY REPORT - MAY 1996**  
by Pauline Gambill

**SURVEY DATA RESULTS**

In 1995, multi-use trail-managing agencies in northeastern Illinois and in 14 other states (5 Midwest, 3 East Coast, 3 West Coast, 2 Southwest, plus Alaska) were surveyed with respect to current policies and recommendations for: 1. Managing conflict among trail user-groups; and 2. Controlling adverse resource impacts associated with trail use and/or misuse. Survey data on 28 multi-use trails in northeastern Illinois and on 43 trails in other states were analyzed. Through the use of a different questionnaire, additional input was solicited from trail user-group, trail advocacy, and conservation organizations with respect to their policies concerning multi-use trail issues.

Data from the trail-managing agency questionnaire revealed that according to the majority of survey respondents, user-group conflict did not occur on a frequent basis; however, approximately 50% of northeastern Illinois (NEI) respondents and 35% of respondents in other states (OS) reported conflicts occurring on a moderate or more frequent basis. Sixty-one percent of NEI and 44% of OS respondents also evaluated conflicts as having increased at least slightly, or more, during the previous two to three years.

There was a high similarity of responses of NEI and OS respondents to most of the survey questions. Similar user-group conflicts (with the exception of cross-country skier/ snowmobiler conflicts) occurred in all geographic areas of the country represented by the survey. Overall, the most prevalent user-group conflicts were perceived to be: 1. pedestrian/bicyclist (both tour and mountain bicyclist); 2. equestrian/mountain bicyclist; and 3. cross-country skier/snowmobiler. The three most important social/behavioral causes of user-group conflict were perceived to be: 1. "reckless or unsafe behavior;" 2. "incompatibility of user-group values (e.g. attitudes toward nature, appropriateness of trail use activities);" and 3. "user-group causing environmental impacts" and/or "user-group going off-trail." For OS respondents, "reckless or unsafe behavior" was rated as the most important cause; for NEI respondents, "user-group causing environmental impacts" and "user-group going off-trail" were rated equally as being the most important cause of conflict. "Crowding" was rated by the majority of all respondents, as being the most important trail-related cause of conflict. In general, social/behavioral factors were rated as being more important causes of conflict than were trail-related factors.

Light-handed measures, i.e., education, communication, etc., were rated as the most important measures needed to reduce conflicts among trail user-groups. NEI and OS respondents assessed the following as the most important measures: 1. "more education of user-groups by user-group organizations and media re: proper trail use and trail etiquette" - rated as the most important by the majority of all respondents; 2. "more education to be provided by trail-managing agencies;" 3. "more brochures, maps and other trail-related information for dissemination to trail users;" and 4. "more communication between trail-managing agencies and user-groups." Both NEI and OS respondents rated "more patrolling or monitoring" as among the next most important measures needed to reduce conflict on their multi-use trails.

Approximately 50% of all respondents indicated that their agencies now provide some type of formal trail user education; however, most of this appeared to be in the form of brochures and signage. Twenty-eight percent of OS respondents advised that they provide other types of education which includes: presentations by park rangers, barricade programs, bicycle rodeos, group meetings with agency staff, forums, nature or awareness programs, and public relation campaigns. Additional recommendations made for management of user-group conflict included: 1. involvement of user-groups in the decision-making process; 2. use of volunteer patrols; and 3. involving user-groups in trail maintenance.

NEI and OS respondents also evaluated overall environmental impacts to the trail path and to the adjacent lands, due to trail use activities, in a similar fashion. The majority of all respondents assessed some

minor problems due to trail use activity on their sites. Forty (40) percent of the NEI respondents evaluated overall impacts as causing moderate or major problems. Most of the adverse impacts which occurred (i.e., soil erosion, soil compaction, vegetation damage, off-trail abuse, impacts from activity on wet trails) were attributed by NEI and OS respondents, to the same user-groups, i.e., equestrian, mountain bicyclist, and snowmobiler. Impacts were attributed to some other user-groups, although to a far lesser degree. Recommendations for controlling adverse impacts of trail use, included: 1. appropriate trail design and maintenance; 2. seasonal closures and closures during wet conditions; and 3. education of the trail user.

Survey respondents also provided some recommendations concerning trail design. A number of respondents emphasized the importance of adequate trail width. Those who recommended a specific width suggested that paved trails should be either 10 or 12 feet in width. Separate paths for certain trail uses, primarily equestrian, was also recommended by several respondents. Others emphasized the importance of appropriate signage and proper trail construction i.e., appropriate surface material for the specific type of trail use, and consideration of the requirements of different trail user-groups.

Due to the controversy surrounding mountain bicycle use in some areas of the country, one section of the questionnaire was addressed to this issue. Although survey data revealed that there are similar concerns regarding this activity (e.g., user-group conflicts and resource impact problems) in many of the areas of the country in which trails were surveyed, the majority of NEI and OS respondents described few specific management policies directed toward this use. However, a number of agencies related that they are in the process of developing such policies or are at least thinking about doing so. Only four agencies indicated that they have designated some single-track trails for mountain bicycle use; although all of these trails also permit hiking or pedestrian activities. Several agencies mentioned use of a permit system for mountain bicyclists.

Follow-up contacts were made with a number of trail-managing agencies; specifically with respect to off-site trail user educational programs and the use of volunteer trail patrols. One of these agencies, the City of Phoenix Parks, Recreation and Library (PRL) Department, conducted a "Don't Be A Trailblazer" campaign in conjunction with National Trails Day in 1994. This included both on-site as well as outreach programs, including presentations to trail clubs and to local business staffs. A multi-use recreation video, entitled "In Their Shoes," has also been produced by the Arizona State Committee on Trails with the support of the Phoenix PRL and other groups. This video promotes a "multi-use trail attitude."

Seven agencies surveyed reported the utilization of volunteer trail patrols, in addition to their formal trail patrols. Additional information was obtained on two of these volunteer patrols: the Volunteer Trail Courtesy Patrol of the Lake County Forest Preserve District of Lake County, in Illinois, and the volunteer patrols (bicyclist, equestrian, and hiker) of the East Bay Regional Park District in Oakland, California. Both of these volunteer patrol programs have reportedly been successful in helping to reduce conflicts among trail user-groups as well as to control adverse resource impacts.

The trail user-group and conservation organization survey questionnaire revealed a wide range of policies and positions concerning user-group conflict and resource impact issues. Of particular interest are the codes of ethics, or rules of the trail, which are advocated by the bicyclist, equestrian and snowmobiler organizations. It is apparent that many user-group organizations are interested in promoting responsible and courteous trail use among their membership. Through additional research and follow-up contacts, it was learned that some user-group organizations are actively involved in promoting appropriate trail use. A few examples include the following: the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) actively promotes its code of conduct for trail cyclists, and reported that approximately 95 companies are currently involved in promotion of IMBA's Rules of the Trail. The International In-line Skating Association has undertaken an effort, in some cities, to provide education to in-line skaters on responsible and safe skating techniques. The Backcountry Horsemen of California is also reportedly involved in an effort to educate backcountry stock users with respect to low-impact techniques.

Since not all multi-use trail users belong to user-group organizations, outdoor industry retailers and manufacturers can also play an important role in promoting responsible recreational trail use. Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) a consumer cooperative, reported that they are involved in efforts to educate REI members concerning trail use. REI was also a major impetus for bringing IMBA and the Sierra Club together in Colorado to resolve some differences concerning mountain bicycling trail access issues. Since some mountain bicycling advertising has contributed to negative images of mountain bicyclists, Specialized Bicycle Components reported it no longer plans to "use ads with mud" for its mountain bicycle advertisements.

## MULTI-USE TRAIL MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

These management recommendations are based upon the results of the trail-managing agency survey, follow-up contacts, and information gleaned from the recreational research literature review. While it is recognized that there are some differences with respect to multi-use trails due to their location, various environmental factors, types of usage, etc., this study revealed many similarities among agencies surveyed with respect to user-group conflict and resource impact management problems.

1. Recreation land resource management agencies should set objectives with respect to both ecological and social considerations which clearly reflect the agency's mission. Setting clear objectives allows managers to evaluate the effectiveness of their management programs, and to take appropriate action when objectives have not been met.

2. A proactive approach is recommended for managing potential user-group conflicts and adverse resource impacts associated with trail use and/or misuse. This would include the following:

- a) *Instilling a strong and committed land ethic among trail users.* This can be promoted by: encouraging participation in volunteer activities (i.e., trail patrols and maintenance activities); providing on-site events such as trail safety days and interpretive programs, as well as outreach programs focusing on the local ecology; and encouraging others in the community to promote a land ethic, i.e., the media, outdoor industry retailers, etc.
- b) *Monitoring, on a continuing basis, environmental impacts from recreation trail use.* Detecting environmental impacts before they become too severe will enable managers to implement appropriate measures and/or set objectives to mitigate these impacts. Several agencies reported that they are currently undertaking studies of environmental impacts to their trails and adjacent lands, or are preparing vegetation management plans.
- c) *Providing outreach and on-site education to trail users and to user-group organizations concerning potential trail conflict situations.* A slide presentation or video, such as "In Their Shoes," produced by the Arizona State Committee on Trails, is suggested.
- d) *Involving recreational user-group organizations and other concerned parties in decision-making processes.* This should be done early on, before serious conflicts arise and/or environmental impacts become serious concerns. The use of trail committees helps to keep the lines of communication open. One survey respondent mentioned having held "trail summits" to bring leaders of organizations and other trail users together for a day of communicating.
- e) *Implementing volunteer trail patrols.* In addition to educating trail users through peer group interaction, volunteer patrols disseminate trail etiquette reminders and other important information, and report on trail conditions and problems.
- f) *Utilizing appropriate and well-designed signage and brochures.* This will help to promote appropriate and responsible trail use.
- g) *Developing a "Trail User Ordinance" to govern appropriate use of the trail.* A listing of general "responsibilities" and rules for all trail users, and "responsibilities" for specific user-groups is suggested. A separate "Bicycle Ordinance" may also be warranted. Strict enforcement of trail use regulations is also important, particularly where abuses are occurring;
- h) *Publishing a trail newsletter.* This could be an effective means for disseminating information to trail

users, and of increasing trail users' awareness of resource impact problems and etiquette issues.

i) *Employing trail user surveys.* This may provide valuable insight into the causes for existing or potential user conflicts, in addition to providing other useful information.

j) *Sharing ideas and resource information with other regional land management agencies.* This is an excellent means for obtaining information on common resource impact problems, effectiveness of management policies, results of impact studies, etc.

3. Construct and maintain new multi-use trails in an environmentally sensitive manner. When designing a trail it is important to determine what effects the trail might have on the adjacent habitat, including the wildlife. The following are suggested: a) Conduct an "environmentally sensitive" trail design contest. b) Decisions concerning trail width, and possible implementation of separate paths for equestrian or bicycle use should, of course, take ecological considerations into account. Several survey respondents mentioned 10 to 12 feet as a recommended width for paved multi-use trails, which may preclude trail siting in certain sensitive natural areas. A soft surface shoulder which can be used as a jogging path is suggested, if there is sufficient resource base. An adequate buffer zone is essential. The decision concerning the implementation of separate equestrian or bicycle paths should be based upon ecological considerations since this causes additional fragmentation of the landscape and may result in ecological harm. c) Close trails due to flooding or muddy conditions, and consider the use of geosynthetics for trail construction in wet areas.

4. Consider zoning a trail (e.g., designating different segments of a trail for different uses), if feasible, as a possible solution for deeply ingrained user-group conflicts. According to survey respondents, trail user education is the preferred method for managing user-group conflicts; however, zoning a trail may be the only satisfactory solution for managing deeply ingrained conflicts.

5. Implement mountain bicycling management policies in areas where this activity is continuing to grow. The following are some of the factors to consider when implementing mountain bicycle management policies: a) Whether or not to designate separate single-track trails should be based upon ecological considerations, as well as on the management objectives which have been set by the agency. User groups and other constituencies should have some input in the decision making process. b) If single-track trails are compatible with ecological goals, standards should be set for their construction, repair, monitoring and maintenance. c) Provide rider education which includes low-impact riding techniques. d) Encourage participation by mountain bicyclists (as well as other user-groups) in volunteer patrol and maintenance activities. Peer group interaction is recognized as an effective means for resolution of some types of conflict and adverse impact problems. e) Consider the use of a permit system for bicyclists. A permit system provides monies for trail maintenance and repair, allows for dissemination of information, and may also help to instill a commitment to the land resource.

6. Encourage trail user-group organizations to develop and promote a trail user code of ethics, applicable to all outdoor recreationists, and to provide education to their membership and other trail users who participate in the same activity. The need to develop a "universal Code of Ethics" was suggested at the 1988 National Trails Symposium, but apparently has yet to be acted upon. This would be an excellent opportunity for user-group organizations to work together toward a common goal: the promotion of trail etiquette and of low-impact trail use. Development of this code of ethics could also be undertaken at a regional or local level.

In addition to this, user-group organizations should also be encouraged to provide education on safe and responsible trail use to their members, and where possible to other trail users who participate in the same activity. Some good examples of this are the "National Skate Patrol" which was implemented by the International In-Line Skating Association to provide education on responsible and safe skating techniques, and the educational program reportedly being undertaken by the Backcountry Horsemen of California to teach low-impact riding techniques. The latter program was undertaken in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and the Central and Southern Sierra Wilderness group. Such partnerships could go a long way toward helping to reduce or prevent both user-group conflict and adverse resource impacts.