

Memorandum

To: Programs, Projects and Operations Subcommittee

Subject: Papio Trails Project – User Survey

Date: March 19, 2007

By: Gerry Bowen

The District received the attached proposal from Dr. Donald Greer, UNO, to conduct a survey of trail usage in the metro area. As you may be aware, Dr. Greer conducted two similar studies in 2000 (Omaha Recreational Trails: Their Effect on Property Values and Public Safety) and 2001 (Nebraska Rural Trails: Three Studies of Trail Impact). These two studies concerned the impacts of trails on surrounding neighborhoods and economies. The current proposal would attempt to quantify the various trail users by type, reason for using the trails, travel patterns to and from the trails, and other demographic information.

It is proposed that the District enter into an interlocal agreement with the National Park Service (NPS), the City of Omaha, and the Nebraska Trails Foundation to conduct this study/survey. It is proposed that the NPS be the lead agency and to contract with UNO for the survey. The remaining partners would contribute cash to fund the \$5,000 survey/study. The proposed funding scheme is as follows:

Nebraska Trails Foundation	\$2,000
Papio-Missouri River NRD	\$1,500
City of Omaha	\$1,000
National Park Service	<u>\$ 500</u>
	\$5,000

It is recommended that the Subcommittee recommend to the Board that the General Manager be authorized to execute an interlocal agreement with the National Park Service, the City of Omaha, and the Nebraska Trails Foundation to conduct a trail user survey/study in the Omaha Metropolitan area, subject to changes deemed necessary by the General Manager and accepted as to form by the District Legal Counsel.

Omaha Recreational Trails: Their Effect on Property Values and Public Safety

**Donald L. Greer, Ph.D., Project Director
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Recreation and Leisure Studies Program
School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation**

**Partial Funding Provided by:
Challenge Cost Share Grant Program
Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance
National Park Service
(402) 221-3350**

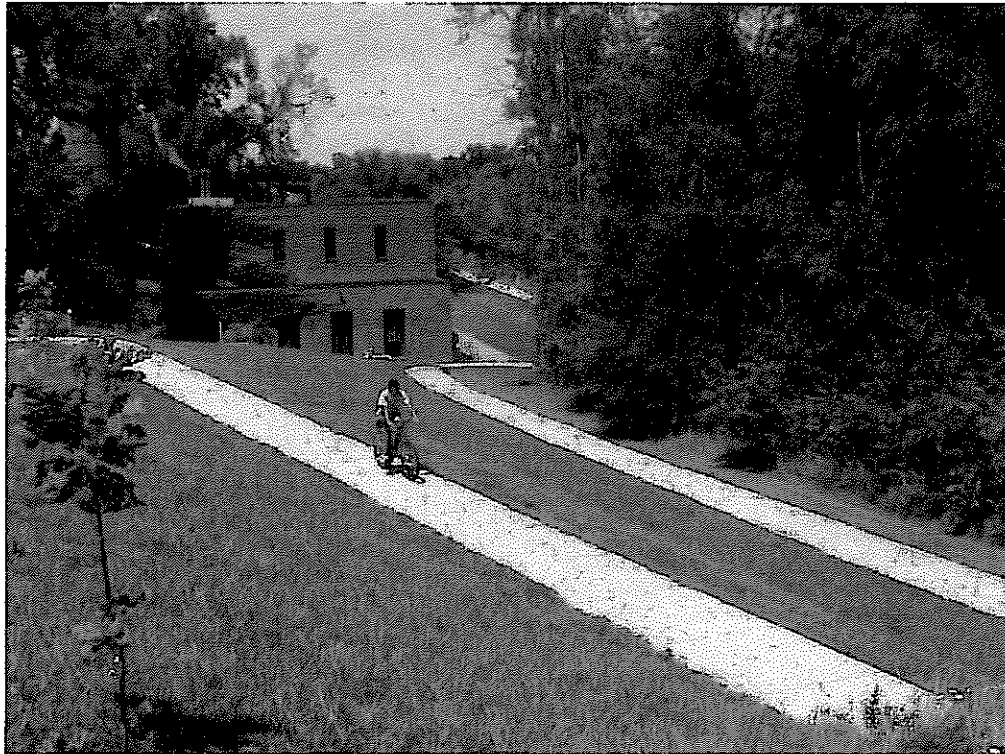


June 2000

This report may be used by anyone, but it is requested that acknowledgements are given to Dr. Greer receive as the author and that the National Park Service provided assistance.

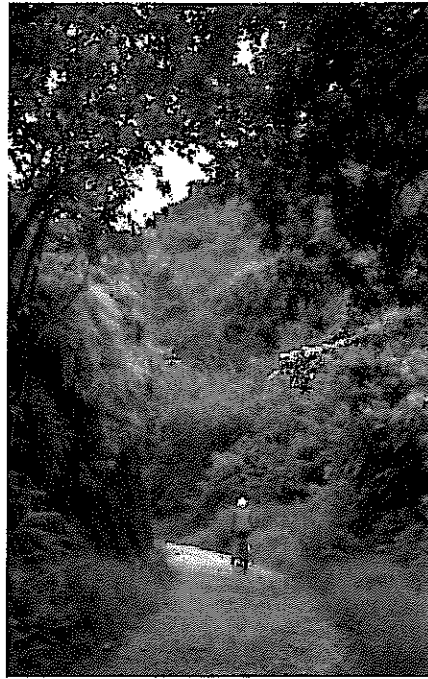
Conclusions

- ◆ The Omaha recreational Trails are used often by nearby residents. Over half (58.4%) of the responding used the trails daily or weekly.
- ◆ Omaha trails are generally perceived by nearby residents as an economic benefit. Almost two-thirds of those surveyed felt the trails would increase the selling price of their home.
- ◆ Property owners do not appear to have a widespread concern for their safety. Trespassing, theft and vandalism by trail users were relatively infrequent events.
- ◆ Very few residents in the sample had increased home security, considered moving or wanted the trail closed.
- ◆ Residents living along the trails appear to perceive there to be a positive relationship between the trails and neighborhood quality of life (75%).
- ◆ There are noticeable differences between trails (or neighborhoods) in residents' reaction to Omaha trails. All neighborhoods reacted positively to the trails, but the responses were higher among residents living near the West Papio Trail.



Photograph 2. Field Club Trail

Nebraska Rural Trails: Three Studies of Trail Impact



A Research Project by:
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National Park Service

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Executive Summary

As pointed out in *A Network of Discovery: A Comprehensive Trails Plan for the State of Nebraska* (1994), trails have played a central role in Nebraska's history. The Oregon, California, Mormon, and Pony Express Trails were central to the development of early cross-country communications networks and the opening and settlement of the American West. Though long ago replaced by the Union Pacific sector of the transcontinental railroad, and later by the Lincoln Highway (US 30) and Interstate 80, the authors of *A Network of Discovery* rightly pointed out in their report that the historic trail corridors of Nebraska still remain relevant to our lives today, albeit in somewhat different roles:

“Trails are now assuming other roles by emerging as important recreational and transportation arteries for people. Protected trail corridors help people rejuvenate themselves through fitness activities and contact with their environment, offer safe alternative routes for people to commute between home, school, workplace, and shopping, reduce traffic congestion and energy consumption, and preserve wildlife habitats.” (*A Network of Discovery*, p. 1)

And the authors of this vision for Nebraska's future trail system went on to suggest a more nuanced approach to viewing the benefits of a statewide trail system.

“There is also a dimension to the development of trails in Nebraska that transcends recreation and transportation... Trails, then, offer opportunities for both recreation and discovery of ourselves and our state.” (*A Network of Discovery*, p. 2)

Since the creation of Nebraska's comprehensive trail plan, *A Network of Discovery* in 1994, trail development has continued to move forward, particularly in the major cities of Omaha and Lincoln. From a complete absence of recreational trails and greenways in early 1989, Omaha has developed a system that today contains approximately 67 miles of paved recreational trails, and another 35 miles of trails are scheduled for completion within the next eight years. Trail development has been even more rapid in Nebraska's capitol city of Lincoln. Yet evidence concerning the impact of

recreational trails remains largely anecdotal, both in Nebraska and nationwide, even as pockets of opposition continue to challenge trail managers and developers to justify trail resource expenditures.

The authors of Nebraska's trail plan suggested in 1994 that the State should develop a *trail system* that would have *multiple benefits*, including recreation and fitness, economic development, improved community image and quality, environmental education and preservation, and community development and transportation:

“The creation of recreational opportunities is central to trails development; however, the system should have benefits beyond recreation. These benefits and roles... include transportation, education, family experience, health and safety, and economic development.” (*A Network of Discovery*, p. 9)

Seven years later, as that system continues to evolve, it seems worthwhile to assess our progress in realizing these benefits. To this end, this research examined the perceived impact of the existing trail system among small town residents, rural property owners, and rural and small town business owners along four targeted trail segments on the Cowboy, Oak Creek, MoPac East, and Wabash Trace trails. Using mail survey methodology, we asked these citizens about their level of support and use of the trails, as well as the trails' impact on a wide variety of issues, including public safety, local transportation, property values, economic activity and general community identity and pride. Responses were obtained from a total of 255 small town residents, 128 rural property owners, and 83 businesses along the four trails. For organizational purposes, our results are presented in three separate sections: Small Town Residents, Rural Property Owners, and Business Owners.

We found that small town residents and business owners generally expressed stronger support for trails, and used the trails more often, than rural property owners. They also reported higher levels of trail benefits at the personal, family and community levels, and expressed greater optimism about the trails' economic impact, influence on

community pride, and a variety of other issues. A much higher percentage of these respondents felt that the trails were better neighbors than the railroads that preceded them. In general, our respondents did not report widespread concerns about trail-related crime and vandalism, and saw most trail maintenance as acceptable or better, with rural property owners excepted. Although most of the business owners did not report a direct positive impact on their businesses due to the trails, they expected the trails to contribute to general business activity in their communities, especially in the long run.

With respect to the trails' impact on recreational and physical activity, our results suggest that the trails are contributing at least modestly to an increase in outdoor activity and physical activity levels among Nebraska citizens. Our respondents most frequently rated exposure to nature and the outdoor environment as the most important reasons for using the trails, followed closely by improved health and fitness through exercise.

Finally, our results include numerous comparisons of the four trails on each of the issues of interest. Due to the variety of issues and comparisons involved, generalizations are difficult to summarize succinctly, but at the very least it may be said that respondents near the MoPac East and Wabash Trace trails had a tendency to be more supportive of trails than those near the Cowboy and Oak Creek Trails. These differences may be attributable to a number of factors, including respondent demographics and trail "maturity".