Assessing Multi-Use Trails for Economic Impact
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Abstract

The economic impact of trails on communities can be significant. This research assessed the economic impact of a recreational trail network in Winneshiek County, Iowa. Winneshiek County is located in the northeastern corner of the state and is home to a 7.3 mile paved recreational trail located in the town of Decorah, Iowa. This trail is part of a comprehensive trail network of the Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities, and Winneshiek County Conservation Board and School of Urban and Regional Planning. It provides useful information in determining how trail user spending can aid the sustainable planning, implementation, funding and evaluation of Winneshiek County’s network of non-motorized trails through an economic impact assessment, qualitative analysis, and project evaluation tools used in twenty-first century planning. The objective of this research was to conduct a multi-use trail economic impact assessment to determine the extent that recreation trails contribute to the local economy. This assessment includes qualitative analysis and a guided improvement process.

Steps for Economic Impact Assessment

1. Survey
   - Assessing the economic impact of the Trout Run Trail in Decorah, Iowa.
   - Survey responses were collected online from 620 users who used the Trout Run Trail between July 2014 and June 2015. The survey asked respondents about trail use, trip purpose, and expenditures. The sample was obtained through a variety of recruitment methods including e-mail, social media, and word of mouth.
   - The survey was administered via a web-based survey and was completed by individuals who had used the Trout Run Trail.

2. Normalizing Spending Data
   - Normalizing reported expenditures by user type:
     - Direct spending: cash register sales
     - Indirect spending: additional economic activity generated by the direct spending
     - Induced spending: purchases of goods and services locally
   - The survey data was normalized to account for differences in trail use between the two years of trail use surveys conducted.

3. Input-Output Model
   - Multi-Use Trail Economic Impact Assessment Model
   - The total annual economic impact of the Trout Run Trail is between $1.6 and $2.4 million, with a 95% margin of error.
   - The economic impact analysis included a local and a regional economic impact assessment.

4. Reporting Conclusions
   - Reporting the results of the economic impact assessment is an important part of multi-use trail assessments.
   - No significant findings with regard to home sales price near the Trout Run Trail.
   - The economic impact of the Trout Run Trail is between $1.6 and $2.4 million in output, 22 to 33 jobs, and $.5 to $.7 million in labor incomes.

Acknowledgments

The University of Iowa: John Fuller, Professor, Associate Chair, and Director of Graduate Studies, School of Urban and Regional Planning; Professor, Program Chair, Robert McDonald, School of Urban and Regional Planning. Winneshiek County: Jim Alstad, Winneshiek County Assessor; Lilly Jensen, Education Director, Winneshiek County Conservation Board; Jon Lubke, Winneshiek County GIS/IT Director, Winneshiek County Conservation and Outreach Coordinator, Winneshiek County Conservation Board; John Kraus, Natural Resource Technician, Steven Spears, Assistant Professor, School of Urban and Regional Planning; David Swenson, Adjunct Lecturer, School of Urban and Regional Planning.

Keywords: Economic Impact, Recreation Trail, Winneshiek County, Iowa, Local Economy, Trail User Spending, Local Employment, Local Sales Tax, Upper Explorerland Regional Planning Commission, Iowa Initiative for Sustainable Communities, School of Urban and Regional Planning.