



Use and Users of the Leelanau Trail



Introduction

Stretching over 15 miles through the last of the Leelanau County railway corridor, the partly paved Leelanau Trail connects Traverse City and Suttons Bay. This multi-purpose, non-motorized trail route features hills, forests, orchards, meadows and medley of streams, lakes and ponds. To better understand trail use and users, a study was conducted by Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails in cooperation with researchers from the Dept. of Park, Recreation and Tourism Resources at Michigan State University. On-site trail observations coupled with a self-administered survey of randomly selected trail users was done from May 3rd until September 27, 2002.

Methods

Trail use was observed at two different points on the Leelanau Trail on systematically selected days and times during the study period. Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails volunteers were positioned adjacent to the Trail and counted all individuals going one direction, classifying them as adults or children and noting their mode of travel (bike, in-line skating, foot or other). Observations were then extrapolated to estimate use for the May – September period. At ten-minute intervals during four hour observation periods, a volunteer would select the next adult passing and interview them or ask him/her to respond to a self-administered one-page questionnaire. The minimum number of surveys distributed was one per observation period and the maximum number was 22. During the study period, 270 surveys were distributed on the Leelanau Trail, with 227 (84%) completed and returned.

Survey data provides two important measures. When considering respondents this information provides accurate information about uses, but it is not representative of distinct individual users, as those who visit more frequently are more likely to be sampled and to be asked to complete a survey. However, the data can be weighted to account for this frequent use bias, and the characteristics of distinct users/visitors can be assessed. This report is organized by first describing levels of use based on observations, then describing characteristics of uses based on unweighted survey data and finally, characteristics of segments of distinct users/visitors based on weighted data.

Observation Highlights

- The Leelanau Trail had 29,318 estimated uses with 20,916 weekday uses and 8,402 weekend uses from May 3rd through September 27th, 2002.
- Based on the 29,318 extrapolated observations, there were 12,734 (43%) bicycling uses, 12,519 (42%) walking/running uses, 3,695 (13%) inline skating uses, and 370 (2%) uses for various other activities. There were 22,253 (76%) adult uses and 7,065 (24%) child uses.

Use Highlights from Surveys

- The majority (84%) of Leelanau uses were by Traverse City area full-time or seasonal residents. They made up approximately two-thirds (66%) of distinct users.
- More than half (54%) of the Leelanau Trail uses were by visitors who participated in solo trail activities.
- More than three-quarters (78%) of the use was by people who were 18 years or older. Over one-third (35%) of the use was by people who were between 41 and 60 years old, of these 55% were males and 45% females.
- Nearly half (45%) of Leelanau use was by people who accessed the trail without driving a vehicle to it. Approximately half (45%) of the uses were by people that traveled one mile or less to reach the trail.
- The majority of uses (92%) were rated as satisfactory.

Distinct User Highlights from Surveys

- Over one-third (34%) of the distinct trail users had contributed support to Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails and half (52%) would like to become a Friend of Traverse Area Recreation and Transportation Trails or was already members of the organization.
- More than one-third (34%) of distinct users were tourists and they accounted for 16% of uses on the Leelanau Trail. All tourist uses resulted in an overnight stay in the area. Of those overnight stays nearly half (44%) were with friends or relatives.

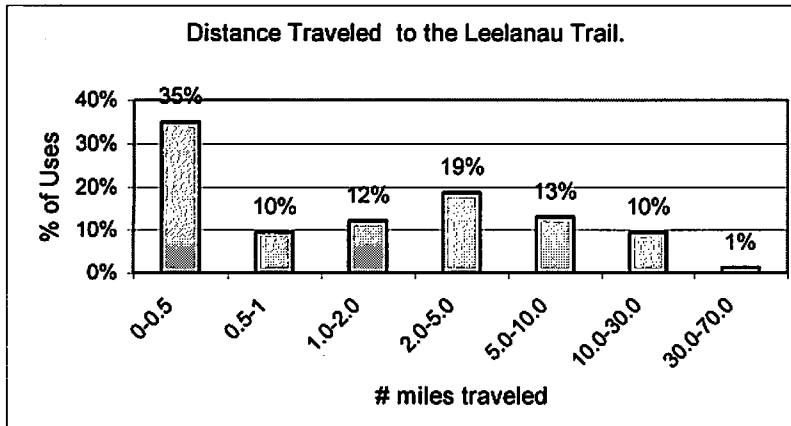
Trail Use Estimates and Characteristics

Use Estimates

The Leelanau Trail had 29,318 estimated uses with 20,916 weekday uses and 8,402 weekend uses from May 3rd through September 27th, 2002. Uses observed and extrapolated from observations included 12,734 (43%) bicycling uses, 12,519 (42%) walking/running uses, 3,695 (13%) inline skating uses, and 370 (2%) uses for various other activities. There were 22,253 (76%) adult uses and 7,065 (24%) child uses.

Leelanau Use Activities and Access

Survey data suggested Leelanau Trail uses were mostly for exercise (56%) or for the purpose of recreation (39%), and transportation to work, school, or other locations (5%). The majority (92%) of uses on the trail were rated satisfactory (on a scale of 1-9 with "9" being highly satisfied and "1" being highly dissatisfied), with 74% being rated "9" and 18% "8." The remaining 8% were rated ranging from a "3" to a "7."



Nearly half (45%) of Leelanau trails uses were by people who did not drive a vehicle to reach the trail. Most (35%) uses were by people who traveled less than ½ mile to reach the Leelanau Trail. Three-fourths (76%) traveled 5 miles or less to reach the trail. Almost half (45%) traveled one mile or less. Of those traveling less than ½ mile, more than four-fifths (83%) did not drive to the trail.

The most common entry points to the Leelanau Trail were Cherrybend Rd. (45%), followed by 4th St & downtown Suttons Bay (26%), and Carter Rd. (7%). The remaining (22%) started at other locations. Over half (57%) of trail use was by people spending one hour or less using the trail. The time that people spent on the trail ranged from a few minutes to 6 hours and the average was 1.4 hours. On the day surveyed three-quarters (76%) of the people exclusively used the Leelanau Trail, while the remaining 24% used Leelanau and one or more additional trails.

Demographics

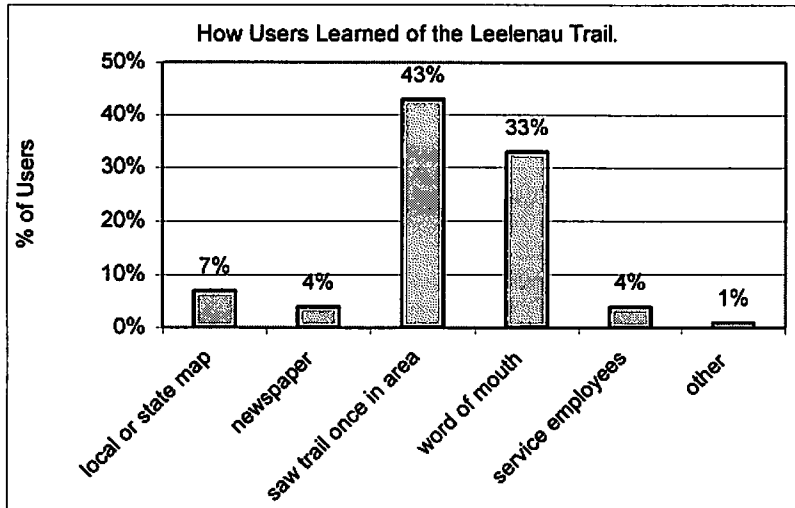
Over half (54%) of the use was by solo trail participants, while the average group size was two. More than three-quarters (78%) of the use was by people who were over 18 years old. One-third (35%) of the use was by people 41 to 60 years old; of these 55% were males and 45% females. This was followed by nearly one-third (30%) of use by people 19 to 40 years old, of these 35% were males and 65% females. Twenty-two percent of use was by youth under the age of 18, of which 50% were males and 50% females. The remaining 13% of use was by people who were 61 years of age and above, of which 63% were males and 37% females. Three percent of use was by people who had an impairment limiting work and recreation participation.

Tourist Data

One-third (34%) of distinct trail users were tourists and they accounted for 16% of uses on the Leelanau Trail. Concerning tourists uses, all (100%) uses resulted in an overnight stay. Of those overnight stays, nearly half (44%) were with friends and relatives, 19% at a campground, 13% in a hotel or motel, 13% in a rented cabin or cottage, 6% at a seasonal home, and 6% at other accommodations. More than one-tenth (13%) choose their lodging because of the proximity to the trail. Half of the tourist uses involving overnight stays in the Traverse City area were for five nights or more, while the other half stayed for less than five nights. For those who stayed in paid lodging accommodations, the average lodging spending was \$671.00 per party per trip. For all tourists uses surveyed on the Leelanau Trail respondent parties spent an average of \$234.00 on restaurant and bar meals and drinks per party per trip, \$145.00 on grocery and convenience store goods, \$98.00 on motor vehicle expenses, \$70.00 on recreation and entertainment, and \$51.00 on other goods, such as souvenirs and clothes. Tourist residences included eight states with most of the tourists residing in Michigan (47%).

Distinct Trail User Characteristics

Source of Discovery of the Leelanau Trail



A majority (43%) of distinct trail users first learned of the Leelanau Trail by seeing the trail once they were in the area. One-third (33%) of users learned of the trail by word of mouth from friends or relatives. The remainder of users surveyed learned of the trail from local or state maps (7%), newspapers (4%), service employees (4%) or by a variety of other means (1%) including club memberships, via the Michigan Trail Book and the Internet.

Leelanau Surveyed Users' Trail Activities Over the Past Twelve Months

Of the distinct Leelanau users surveyed, eighty-five percent had used the trail in the previous year while 15% were first time users. Of those who had previously used the trail, 93% were infrequent users (using the trail ten or less times per year) and 7% were frequent users (more than ten times per year). Over the past 12 months prior to the day they were sampled, distinct Leelanau users participated in a variety of activities on the Leelanau Trail including biking, walking, running, in-line skating, walking the dogs, and skiing. Over half (63%) bicycled, 30% walked, 13% in-line skated, 8% ran, 3% walked the dogs and 3% cross-country skied. For those participating in the activity bicyclists average 3 times per year, walkers 4 uses per year, in-line skaters 5 uses per year, runners 6 uses per year, dog-walkers 14 uses per year and cross-country skiers 6 uses per year.

Most (96%) of the Leelanau users only participated in one trail activity on the Leelanau over a 12 month prior to being surveyed: 56% only bicycled, 26% only walked, 8% only in-line skated, 2% only ran, 2% only walked dogs and 2% only skied. The remaining 4% of Leelanau users participated in multiple activities. In the 12 months prior to being surveyed, 48% of distinct Leelanau Trail users exclusively used the Leelanau Trail, while 28% used the Leelanau as well as the TART, 13% exclusively used the TART Trail, 2% used the Vasa Pathway exclusively, and 9% used all three trails (Leelanau, TART and Vasa). The primary activities for Leelanau users on the TART Trail were biking, in-line skating and walking. Leelanau users biked, walked and skied on the Vasa Pathway.

Trail Involvement

When asked about trail involvement, more than one-third of distinct users (34%) reported they had contributed support to the TART Trails and 52% would like to become a Friend of Traverse Area Recreation Transportation Trails or were already members of the organization.

User Suggestions

Users were asked in an open-ended format to suggest an improvement to the Leelanau or an extension they would like to see. Eighty percent of distinct users had a suggestion and 20% provided no suggestion. Of those who provided suggestions, they were analyzed by segmenting them three ways: 1) frequent vs. infrequent users, (frequent users – more than ten Leelanau uses in 12 months prior to being surveyed and infrequent users – less than or equal to ten uses), 2) residents vs. tourists, (residents – those with a primary or seasonal home in the Traverse City area and tourist – those without a primary or seasonal home in the Traverse City area); and 3) supporters vs. others (supporters – those who reported contributing support to the trail and others – those who did not report contributing support to the trail).

Frequent vs. Infrequent Users

Improvements: All (100%) of the frequent users suggesting improvements would like to see the Leelanau Trail paved. Over half (52%) of the infrequent users suggesting improvements wanted the Leelanau Trail paved, while 7% did not want the Leelanau Trail paved, 29% suggested more amenities such as restrooms, water fountains, phones and more parking, 7% wanted improved crossings and the remaining 4% suggested other improvements including maintenance and more shade.

Extensions: Frequent users did not suggest any extensions. Over half (57%) of the infrequent users suggesting extensions wanted the Leelanau connected to the TART Trail. Twenty-nine percent of infrequent users would like to see an extension east to Williamsburg and the remaining 14% would like to see more local connections.

Residents vs. Tourists

Improvements: Two-thirds (63%) of resident users suggesting improvements wanted the Leelanau Trail paved, while 5% did not want the Leelanau Trail paved. One-fifth (21%) of residents would like to see more amenities such as restrooms, water fountains, and more parking. Five percent of residents wanted improved crossings and the remaining 6% suggested other improvements such as more shade and maintenance. Almost half (43%) of tourists suggesting improvements wanted the Leelanau paved, while 8% did not want the Leelanau Trail paved. One-third (33%) of tourists would like to see more amenities, 8% wanted improved crossings and the remaining 8% suggested more maintenance.

Extensions: Over half (57%) of residents suggesting extensions wanted the Leelanau Trail to the TART Trail connected. One-fourth (29%) of residents would like to see an extension east to Williamsburg and the remaining 14% suggested local connections. All of the tourists suggesting extensions reported connecting the Leelanau to the TART Trail.

Supporters vs. Other Users

Improvements: Over half (56%) of supporters suggesting improvements would like to see Leelanau Trail paved. One-fourth (27%) of supporters suggested more amenities such as restrooms, more parking, phones and water fountains, 11% would like improve crossings and the remaining 6% suggested more trees. Little more than half (55%) of other users suggesting improvements would like to see the Leelanau paved while 10% did not want the Leelanau paved. Approximately one-third (30%) of other users wanted more amenities such as restrooms, water fountains and more parking, and the remaining 5% suggested more maintenance.

Extensions: One-third (33%) of the supporters suggesting extensions wanted the Leelanau connected to the TART Trail. One-third of supporters would like to see an extension east to Williamsburg and the remaining one-third would like to see more local connections. Three-fourths (75%) of other users suggesting extensions wanted the Leelanau connected to the TART Trail and the remaining 25% suggested extension east to Williamsburg.