

Summary of Multi-Use Trail Surveys  
 Conducted by Michigan State University  
 Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies  
 2001 - 2004

Since 2000 researchers from Michigan State University's Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource Studies have studied several Michigan rail-trails to ascertain a variety of usage characteristics. For the most part, communities wanted to know who is using their trails, for what purpose, how often, how would they like to see them improved, and how much revenue is associated with trail use. The following trails were included in the studies:

- Pere Marquette Trail of Mid-Michigan (Midland County): urban/rural – 22 miles
- Leelanau Trail (Leelanau County): rural – 15 miles
- T.A.R.T. Trail (Grand Traverse County): urban – 10 miles
- Lansing River Trail (Ingham County): urban – 8 miles
- Paint Creek Trail (Oakland County): suburban – 11 miles

While the studies were customized towards what each community wanted to know about the usage of their trail, many of the questions in each of them were identical. The following is a comparison of the findings of the five trail studies where queries were identical.

**Total Number of Uses**

The total number of uses varied with the type of landscape the trail traverses, with the most uses recorded in an urban setting and the least amount of uses recorded in a rural setting.

| <u>Trail</u>        | <u>Total # of Uses</u> | <u>Survey Period</u>    |
|---------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Pere Marquette      | 178,000                | April – September, 2001 |
| T.A.R.T.            | 154,803                | May – September, 2002   |
| Leelanau            | 29,318                 | May – September, 2002   |
| Lansing River Trail | 72,040                 | May – September, 2004   |
| Paint Creek         | 66,420                 | May – September, 2004   |

**Age Profile**

At least two-thirds of all trail uses were by adults. The studies did not show whether the uses by children were in accompaniment with an adult or by themselves.

| <u>Trail</u>        | <u>Adults 18+</u> | <u>Child 0-17</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Pere Marquette      | 76%               | 24%               |
| T.A.R.T.            | 79%               | 21%               |
| Leelanau            | 76%               | 24%               |
| Lansing River Trail | 86%               | 14%               |

Paint Creek                                      86%                                      14%

**Gender Profile (all ages)**

Trail use was split almost evenly between male and female use, with the male usage slightly higher.

| <u>Trail</u>        | <u>Male</u> | <u>Female</u> |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Pere Marquette*     |             |               |
| T.A.R.T.            | 59%         | 41%           |
| Leelanau            | 55%         | 45%           |
| Lansing River Trail | 57%         | 43%           |
| Paint Creek         | 53%         | 47%           |

\*The Pere Marquette Trail study accounted separately for gender usage at each survey station. Overall, the same gender percentage trend held true for all survey stations, except for the segment including the Tridge, where surveys registered 38.9% male use and 61.1% female use. It should be noted that the Tridge section of the trail is adjacent to the trailhead in the municipal parking lot, which suggests perhaps an increased sense of security.

**Types of Trail Use by Adults**

The majority of use was split between bicycle use and walking/running. Where the surface does not permit smooth in-line skating, there was a more pronounced use of bicycles. Use of the trail by the disabled was consistently between 3-5%.

| <u>Trail</u>        | <u>Bicycle</u> | <u>In-Line Skating</u> | <u>Run/Walk</u> | <u>Disabled</u> |
|---------------------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pere Marquette      | 54%            | 22%                    | 23%             | 4%              |
| T.A.R.T.            | 49%            | 11%                    | 38%             | 3%              |
| Leelanau            | 43%            | 13%                    | 42%             | 3%              |
| Lansing River Trail | 49%            | 5%                     | 46%             | 5%              |
| Paint Creek         | 56%            | gravel                 | 44%             | 3%              |

**Where do Trail Users Live**

The majority of trail use was by residents of the area in which the trail was located. The exception was the Lansing River Trail which receives a lot of use in off-work hours by downtown workers. It should also be noted that in the Traverse City area, seasonal residents were counted in with the full-time residents, thus discounting some of the "tourism" use of the T.A.R.T. and Leelanau trails. Overall, the findings suggest that trails are used most often by those who find it easier to get there.

| <u>Trail</u>        | <u>Resident</u>                | <u>Live in Nearby Town</u> | <u>Live Elsewhere</u> |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Pere Marquette      | 77% (Midland County residents) |                            |                       |
| T.A.R.T.            | 79%                            |                            |                       |
| Leelanau            | 84%                            |                            |                       |
| Lansing River Trail | 56%                            | 15%                        | 29%                   |
| Paint Creek         | 90% (Oakland County residents) |                            |                       |

### **How Did Trail Users Get to the Trail**

At least half of all trail users accessed the trail by means other than driving to it, which reinforces the above hypothesis that trails are used most often by those who find it easier to get there.

| <u>Trail</u>        | <u>Did Not Drive to Trail</u> | <u>Live How Far Away</u>    |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pere Marquette*     |                               |                             |
| T.A.R.T.            | 60%                           | >50% traveled $\leq$ 1 mile |
| Leelanau            | 45%                           | 45% traveled $\leq$ 1 mile  |
| Lansing River Trail | 54%                           | 60% traveled $\leq$ 3 miles |
| Paint Creek Trail   | 55%                           | 48% traveled $\leq$ 2 miles |

\*The Pere Marquette Trail study did not include this question.

### **Primary Reason for Using the Trail**

The majority of uses on the trails were focused on exercise, with the exception of the Lansing River Trail where more usage was targeted at general recreation. The T.A.R.T. Trail, which links up many residential areas with businesses along Bus. 131 and the downtown core, experienced more use for transportation.

| <u>Trail</u>        | <u>Recreation</u> | <u>Exercise</u> | <u>Race Training</u> | <u>Transportation</u> |
|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Pere Marquette      | 35%               | 61%             | *                    | 3%                    |
| T.A.R.T.            | 38%               | 44%             | *                    | 18%                   |
| Leelanau            | 39%               | 56%             | *                    | 5%                    |
| Lansing River Trail | 59%               | 35%             | 3%                   | 3%                    |
| Paint Creek         | 37%               | 48%             | 11%                  | 4%                    |

\*The training category was not included in surveys for these trails.

### **Trail is Primary Reason for Visiting the Area**

A new question was added in the two latest trail studies, the Lansing River Trail and the Paint Creek Trail, about whether the trail was the primary reason for visiting the area. The Lansing River Trail was the primary reason for the visit in 7% of those surveyed and for 6% of those surveyed for the Paint Creek Trail. For the Pere Marquette Trail, the majority of those who

had placed inquiries about the trail with the Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau, were visiting the Midland area due to the trail.

### Frequency of Use

While it was found each trail has a group of regular users, such as the Pere Marquette, whose most frequent use it more than 100 days per year, the average use ranged between 10-15 times per year on all the trails.

| Trail               | Number of Uses per Year |              |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Pere Marquette      | Average 15/year         |              |
| T.A.R.T.            | 94% ≤ 10/year           | 6% ≥ 10/year |
| Leelanau            | 93% ≤ 10/year           | 7% ≥ 10/year |
| Lansing River Trail | Average 10/year         |              |
| Paint Creek         | Average 11/year         |              |

### Tourism Expenditures

For all of the trail studies except the Pere Marquette study, those who described themselves as being from outside the area were given a postcard questionnaire to complete and mail back in. The Pere Marquette study used postcard questionnaires from *intercepted tourists* using the trail and *travel inquirers*, those who asked for information from the Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau. The following purchases were evidenced by those returning the postcards:

| Trail          | Lodging | Restaurant/ Bar | Groceries      | Vehicular Expense | Other          |
|----------------|---------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Pere Marquette | 66%     | * <sub>1</sub>  | * <sub>1</sub> | * <sub>1</sub>    | * <sub>1</sub> |
| T.A.R.T.       | 93%     | * <sub>2</sub>  | * <sub>2</sub> | * <sub>2</sub>    | * <sub>2</sub> |
| Leelanau       | 93%     | * <sub>3</sub>  | * <sub>3</sub> | * <sub>3</sub>    | * <sub>3</sub> |
| Lansing River  | 21%     | 77%             | 31%            | 46%               | 39%            |
| Paint Creek    | 9%      | 54%             | 18%            | 18%               | 9%             |

\*<sub>1</sub> Respondents to the Pere Marquette Trail Study's special tourist study showed that 8 out of 10 "travel inquirers" and 2/3 of "intercepted tourists" visited businesses along its length. Those most visited were restaurants and convenience stores.

\*<sub>2</sub> The T.A.R.T. trail study asked for actual dollar amounts spent, not percentages. Tourists spent an average \$437 per party per trip on lodging, \$165 on restaurant/bar meals and drinks/trip, \$72.00 on grocery and convenience store goods, \$151 on motor vehicle expenses, \$74.00 on recreation and entertainment, and \$50 per trip on other goods, such as souvenirs and clothes.

\*<sub>3</sub> The Leelanau trail study asked for actual dollar amounts spent, not percentages. Tourists spent an average \$671 per party per trip on lodging, \$234 on restaurant/bar meals and drinks/trip, \$145 on grocery and convenience store goods, \$98 on motor vehicle expenses, \$70 on recreation and entertainment, and \$51 on other goods, such as souvenirs and clothes.

**The more trails that are studied in Michigan, the more that is learned about their importance to the quality of life in communities, both economic and the health and enjoyment of its citizens. Through studies such as this we can learn a lot about how to develop them and what extensions may be needed to fully realize the potential of a trail network.**