



Lackawanna Heritage Valley National and State Heritage Area
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Lackawanna River Heritage Trail 2009 Trail User Survey and Economic Impact Analysis

Report Issued October 2011

Report Prepared by

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Arora and Associates, P.C.

Campbell Thomas & Co.

Urban Partners

The survey was conducted in association with the Rail Trail Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania

Executive Summary

The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail (LRHT) and its companion, the Delaware and Hudson (D&H) Rail-Trail, combine to create the longest land trail system in Northeastern Pennsylvania. The trail travels more than 70 miles from the New York State border to the river's confluence with the Susquehanna River at Pittston, Pennsylvania. It runs through 30 municipalities, including the cities of Carbondale, Scranton, and Pittston. The majority of the trail system is located in the Lackawanna Heritage Valley National and State Heritage Area (LHV), with the northern portion extending into the Endless Mountains State Heritage Region.

Of the 70+ miles in the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail system, 56 miles are open to the public. Seventeen of these miles are rail-trails surfaced with paving or crushed stone, and 39 miles travel through municipalities, using sidewalks, streets, flood control levees, utility access roads, and municipal parks. The remaining 18 miles of the trail system are under development, and they currently are not open to the public.

The Lackawanna Heritage Valley National and State Heritage Area (LHV) develops and manages the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail in conjunction with the Rail-Trail Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania. Both organizations work closely with the municipalities along the trail for planning, design, construction, and maintenance of the trail system, as well as other projects and programs.

Trail User Survey

In 2009, the Lackawanna Heritage Valley National and State Heritage Area initiated a large-scale planning initiative, The Lackawanna Greenway Plan and the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail Feasibility Study. One component of this study was a survey of the people who use the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail to better understand the number of users and their characteristics. LHV administered two different surveys - a counter survey and an intercept survey - to capture this data.

The analysis of the data gathered from these surveys estimated 128,000 annual user visits to the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, resulting in a direct economic impact of approximately \$28,251,862. For the counter survey, staff members were deployed with counters during 12 sessions at six different locations on various improved portions of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail to take actual counts of trail users. The surveys were conducted on different days of the week at various times of the day from early August through early October 2009. The counting sessions calculated a total of 658 users.

LHV administered the intercept survey for the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail to understand trail users in terms of origin, age, activity preferences, and spending habits associated with their use of the trail. This data was used to determine the economic impact of the LRHT. LHV used an intercept survey developed by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, adding questions regarding the safety and cleanliness of specific LRHT sections.

LHV placed the survey in a self-mailer in all trailhead locations, at local businesses, and at nine libraries around Lackawanna County. The survey was mailed with a return envelope to a list of more than 500 LHV Ambassadors. It also was posted on the organization's website, www.LHVA.org, as an electronic survey through the email marketing service, Constant Contact. A total of 500 users responded to the survey.

Trail User Characteristics

The vast majority of survey respondents reside in Lackawanna County (82.2%). Another 11.2% originate from counties adjoining or near Lackawanna County (Luzerne, Susquehanna, Wyoming, Wayne, Monroe, and Pike counties), and 6.6% reside in other counties in Pennsylvania, as well as in New York, New Jersey, and Ohio.

More of the trail users were men (54.8%) than women (45.2%), which is typical of comparative trail user studies. The majority of respondents (55.9%) were 46 years of age or older, with more in the 46-55 year-old group. Children under 15 years of age accounted for less than 2% of trail users. Based on these numbers, users of the LRHT are slightly older than those in other trail studies.

Most of the respondents (82%) had heard of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley and, of those trail users, 63.7% were familiar with the LRHT. Many people had learned about the trail by word of mouth (41%), and the remainder learned about the trail either by driving past trailheads, or from the newspaper, the Lackawanna River Corridor Association, or a rails-to-trails organization.

Condition of Trail Sections

A significant number of the respondents (66.5%) reported that they had used some segment of the LRHT in the past 12 months. When asked which sections they used most often, 41.5% said that they used the Mid-Valley Ontario & Western (O&W) section from Archbald to Blakely, 17.8% used the Delaware and Hudson (D&H) trail from Union Dale to Simpson, 14.1% used the New York Ontario and Western (NY O&W) section in Mayfield, and 10.6% used the Central New Jersey (CNJ) trail in Scranton.

The Mid-Valley O&W Rail-Trail received slightly higher marks regarding maintenance. More than 38% of its users reported that the trail is in excellent condition. Other "excellent" responses ranged from a high of

33.5% for the NY O&W trail to a low of 13.8% for the CNJ trail. Most people (58.2%) felt that the LHRT's safety and security were rated as "good."

Trail Usage

While 22.5% (which is the highest percentage) of respondents indicated that they use the trail 3 to 5 times per week, another 22.2% also indicate that they only use the trail a few times a year. Just under 3% use the trail once a month, and 4% were using the trail for the first time when interviewed. The majority of respondents (63.4%) reported that they use it on both weekdays and weekends. Another 21.4% said that they generally use the trail on weekdays, and 15.1% use it on weekends exclusively.

The primary activity on the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail is walking or hiking (60.3%), followed by biking (40%), jogging (29.1%), and walking with a child or pet (20.3%). The average round trip distance on the trail traveled by recreational users is 6.43 miles for each visit.

The primary use of the trail is for health and exercise (65.5%), followed by recreation (51.3%), fitness training (21.4%), and socializing (8%). Only 2.6% use it for commuting, and the average distance traveled by commuters is 3.88 miles. Just over 21% of the respondents reported that children under age 15 use the trail. Of those children, most use it for recreation, health/exercise, or both. None said that they use the trail to get to school.

Annual Fee

More than half (54.8%) of the respondents indicated that they would be willing to pay an annual usage fee to help maintain the trail. The average suggested was \$23.19 annually.

Economic Impact

Slightly more than 27% of the respondents reported that they purchased soft goods (sundries or consumables) on their trip to the trail. The average amount spent on these items during trail users' most recent trip was \$8.87. A large number of trail users (69.5%) reported that they had bought an item related to trail usage. The average amount spent on these items was \$313.08 annually, yielding almost \$27.9 million economic impact from these purchases.

Some trail users (8%) stayed overnight in conjunction with their visit to the trail. More than half of those respondents (4.6%) stayed with a friend or relative, with the remaining trail users using a campground, state park, motel/hotel, or bed and breakfast. Overnighters stayed an average of 2.43 nights and spent an average of \$55.75 per night.

Taking the combined results of the purchases of soft goods and hard goods, as well as overnight accommodations, the total economic impact of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail in 2009 was approximately \$28,251,862.

The U.S. Department of Commerce uses a formula to measure the dollars needed to create one job from heritage preservation/tourism funding in each state. Based on this formula, the economic impact of the Lackawanna River Heritage Trail was the creation and/or retention of 1,259.45 full-time jobs with an average annual wage of \$22,432.