

New York Statewide Trails Plan: Appendix G

Appendix G – Results from the 2006 Trail Organization Survey

Results from the  
2006  
Trail Organization Survey



Carol Ash, Commissioner  
Eliot Spitzer, Governor



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## Introduction

Trail-based activities are an important component of the total recreational activity that takes place within New York State. The 2003 New York State Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) reports that over 3 million New Yorkers hiked at least once during the year and 1.3 million New Yorkers went horseback riding. Winter trail-based activities are also very popular: cross country skiing and snowmobiling each have approximately three-quarters of a million participants. Each of these activities are expected to have an increase between 4.2% and 5.4% in the number of participants over the course of the SCORP projection period (1998-2020).

As a part of its planning process, the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), in cooperation with Parks & Trails New York, surveyed trail organizations to obtain information on the concerns and issues facing trail users today. As part of the same project, trail organizations were asked to provide information on the trails that they are active in supporting. This information, along with trail data collected via other methodologies, will form the basis for a trail inventory of trails located within New York State.

## Methodology

From the onset, this survey was a joint effort with Parks & Trails New York (PTNY). PTNY is a non-governmental, not-for profit, statewide membership organization whose mission is to work to expand, protect and promote a network of parks, trails and open spaces throughout the state for the use and enjoyment of all.

Following a series of meetings to determine the goals and objectives of this study, two survey instruments were developed (see Appendix A). The first of these, the *Trail Organization Survey* focused on the issues facing trail organizations within New York State and the work done by these organizations. The second form, the *Trail Inventory Form*, collected information on the location, use and other aspects of the trails themselves. The data collected from the Trail Organization Survey is the subject of this report.

In May of 2006, a mailing list was obtained from PTNY. This list contained contact information for approximately 700 statewide organizations and their local chapters. An initial mailing, including the survey form, was sent to these organizations in June 2006. A follow-up mailing was sent to approximately 130 non-respondents in October 2006 with a telephone follow-up with a few of the others. After the surveys were received, the data were keypunched and analyzed.

## Results

Two hundred and thirty-six usable survey forms were returned to the OPRHP. The majority of the surveys were sent to groups whose organization names suggested they were primarily concerned with either snowmobiling or hiking. The responses to survey questions were more or less consistent with this observation, the four trail activities with the greatest frequency of occurrence were hiking, cross country skiing, nature interpretation and snowmobiling. Further analysis of the survey returns is the basis for the following report. Additionally, results between organizations which are winter-based (mainly snowmobiling and some cross country skiing) and other organizations are made where these results have proved interesting.

## Executive Summary

- This survey was conducted by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation with the assistance of Parks & Trails - New York during the spring and summer of 2006.
- Completed survey forms were received from 226 trail based organizations of which 64 appeared to be mainly winter-based organizations.
- As described in the 2003 New York State Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), not-for-profit and trail organizations maintain trails on lands they own, on privately held lands via an agreement with the owners, and on various public lands. These organizations, together with the private sector, provide other services such as lodging, food and other amenities. The purpose of this survey is to determine the nature and the extent of issues facing these organizations.
- Hiking and nature interpretation were the most common spring/summer/fall activities taking place along the trails maintained by the responding organizations. Cross country skiing and snowmobiling were the most common winter activities.
- Obtaining liability insurance is an issue for many trail-based organizations, particularly those who operate during the winter.
- Dues and donations are the major source of funding for trail organizations but state funding and grants are also an important component.
- Illegal use of trails is a major concern for both summer and winter-based trail organizations.
- Trail organizations also submitted information on the location, use and other aspects of the trails they maintain. This information will form the basis for a statewide trails inventory, which will be an ongoing project within the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Planning Bureau.
- Future directions for following up this study will include ongoing contact with trail organizations for updated trail inventory data and further analysis of trail-based activities for inclusion in the upcoming New York State SCORP.

Q1. Frequency of activities on the organization’s trail(s).

After determining the name of the trail(s) that the organization serves, the first question inquired about the frequency of various types of activities that take place on these trails. The respondent was asked to reply on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (very frequent) for each activity. There were many non-responses to the activities listed in this question. These non-responses could be interpreted to mean that the activity in question either never takes place on the trail or occurs so infrequently as to not merit being mentioned by the trail organization. The non-responses do not appear on the following graphs (but would be the difference between 226 and the “Number of Responses” amount. For the purposes of calculating the mean value of the responses indicating frequency of use, the non-responses were ignored but the “nevers” were included .

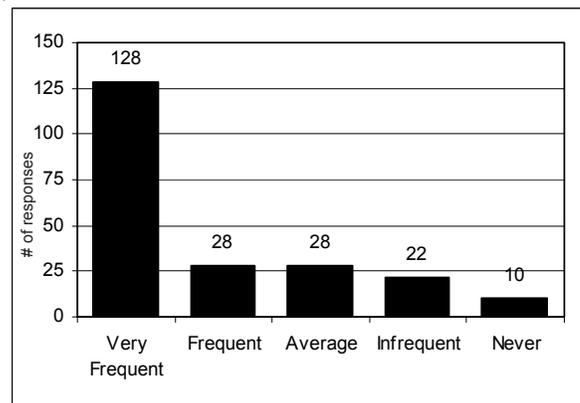
**Activities**

Activity: **Hiking**

Number of Responses: 216

Mean: 4.12 (5=very frequent; 1=never)

More organizations responded to this activity than any other. The frequency of use is also higher than any other of the non-winter activities. Based on an informal look at the organizations surveyed, more were involved with hiking than the other activities.

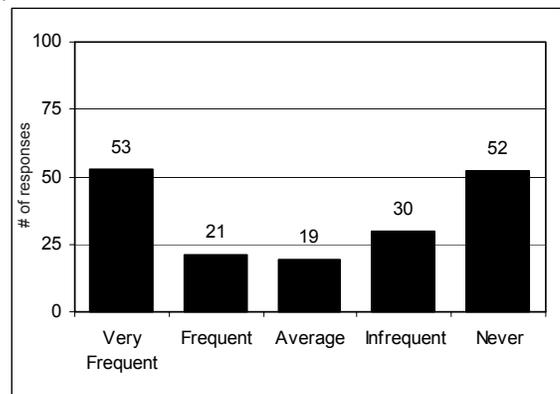


Activity: **Recreational Biking**

Number of Responses: 175

Mean: 2.96

Based on data available in the New York State SCORP, recreational biking is a very popular activity, however much biking takes place on public roads and the number of organizations that indicated recreational biking taking place on their trail was only about 1/2 that for hiking.

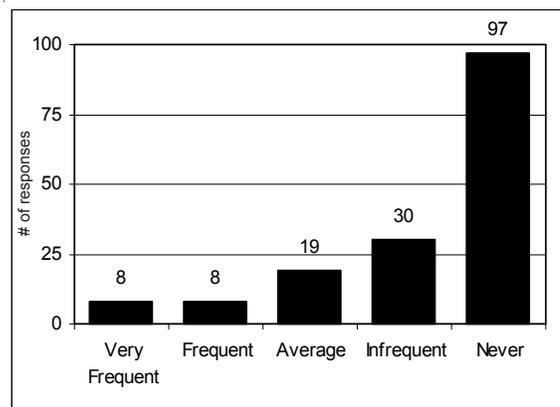


Activity: **Commuter Biking**

Number of Responses: 162

Mean: 1.77

Most organizations indicated that commuter biking never takes place on their trail. As with recreational biking, most of this activity would likely take place on public roads.

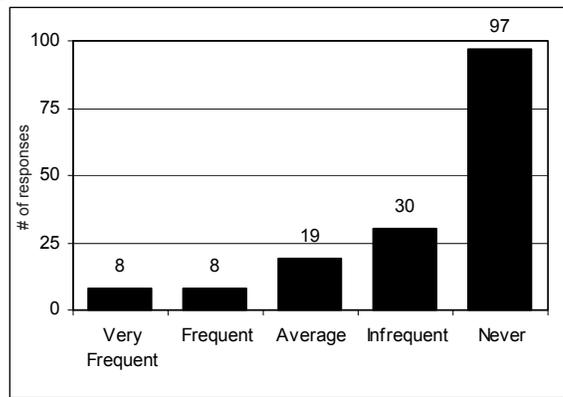


Activity: **Mountain Biking**

Number of Responses: 174

Mean: 2.41

Mountain biking is gaining in popularity but is restricted in some areas because of conflicts with other types of trail users.

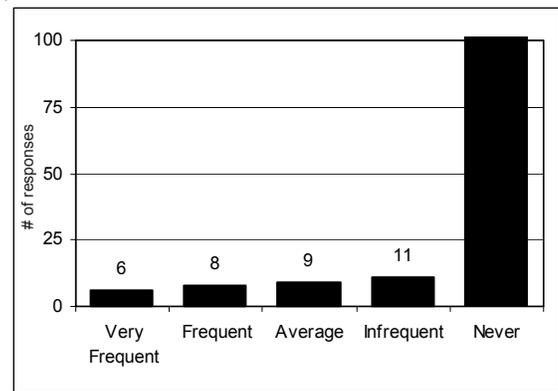


Activity: **Roller Blading (In-line skating)**

Number of Responses: 152

Mean: 1.51

This activity requires either grass or a paved surface, making it unsuitable for many trails.

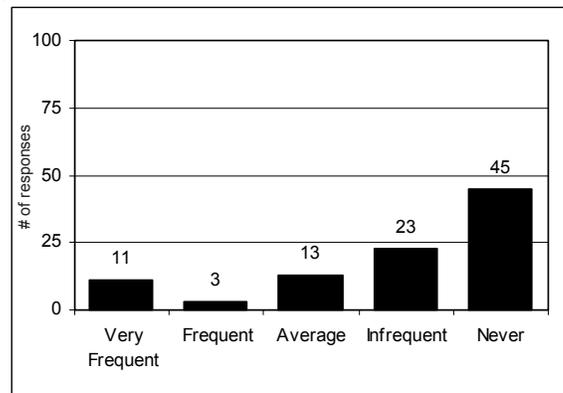


Activity: **ATV**

Number of Responses: 95

Mean: 2.07

Areas where this activity is permitted are very limited with almost all existing trails on private land. Despite that, there are a number of organizations that support this activity.

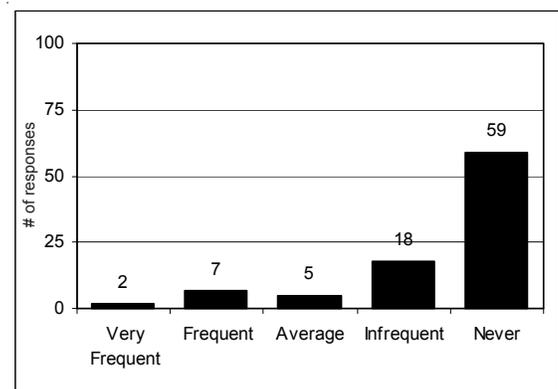


Activity: **Off Road Vehicles**

Number of Responses: 91

Mean: 1.63

The remarks above under ATV use apply here as well.

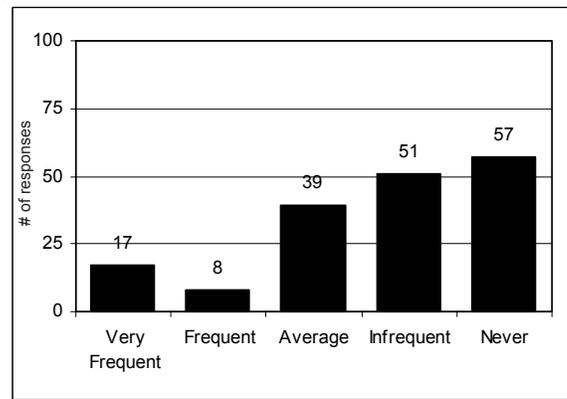


Activity: **Equestrian**

Number of Responses: 162

Mean: 2.30

According to the 2003 SCORP, trails for horseback riding are located in every county in New York State. The need for ancillary services (hitching rails, trailer parking areas, etc.) may be a limiting factor in the number of trails where horseback riding actually takes place.

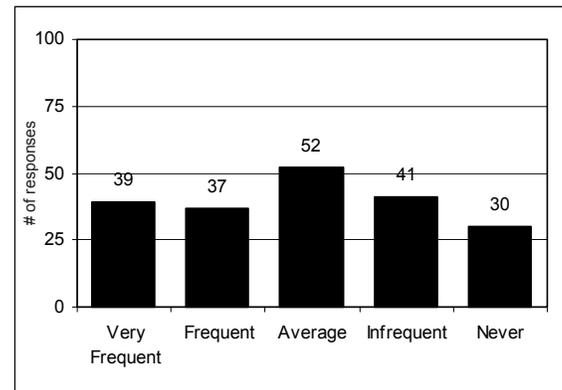


Activity: **Nature Interpretation**

Number of Responses: 199

Mean: 3.07

This activity is second only to hiking in frequency along the trails being serviced by the organizations surveyed.

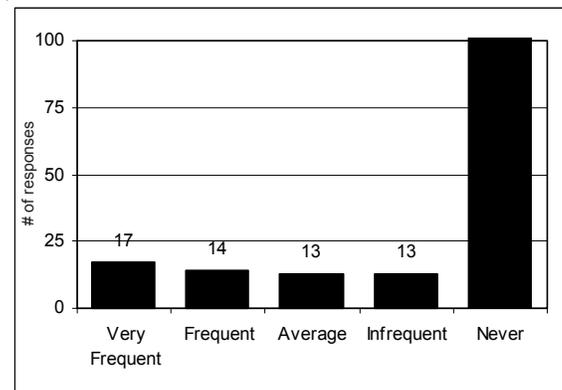


Activity: **Canoeing/Kayaking**

Number of Responses: 171

Mean: 1.87

As a large number of the organizations surveyed serve land based trails, the number of “never” responses to this question for this activity is not surprising.

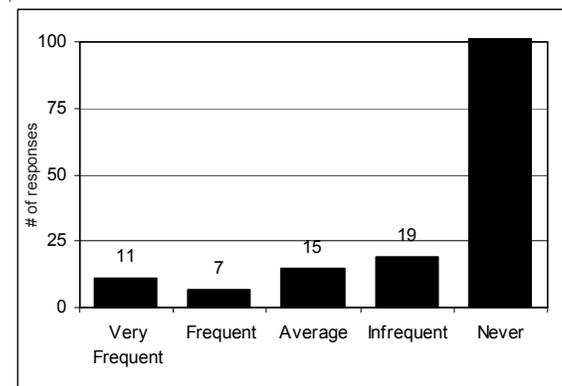


Activity: **Other Water Uses**

Number of Responses: 162

Mean: 1.70

See remarks under “Canoeing/Kayaking”.



## Winter Activities

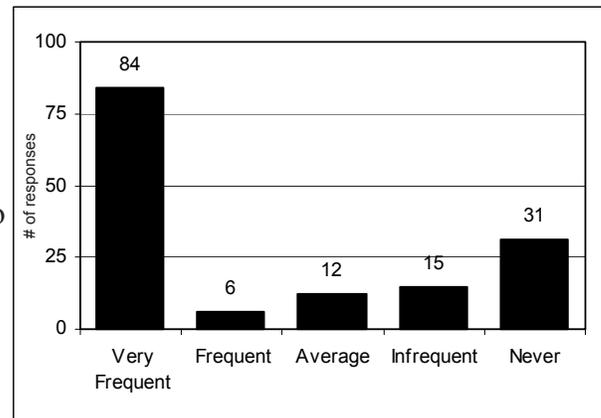
There are trail activities that can only be enjoyed during the winter months and even then, these activities require an adequate snow covering on the ground. The snow covering needed for these activities may only last four months in even the coldest areas of the state. In Southern New York, there may be years without such a snow covering at all. As noted in the 2003 New York State SCORP, these activities generally have less participants and less participant-days than the previous activities. Nonetheless, these participants can be very dedicated and devote a great deal of time and money to their activities and their organizations.

### Activity: **Snowmobiling**

Number of Responses: 148

Mean: 3.66

Many of the snowmobilers in New York State belong to clubs. These clubs are frequently involved in trail maintenance.

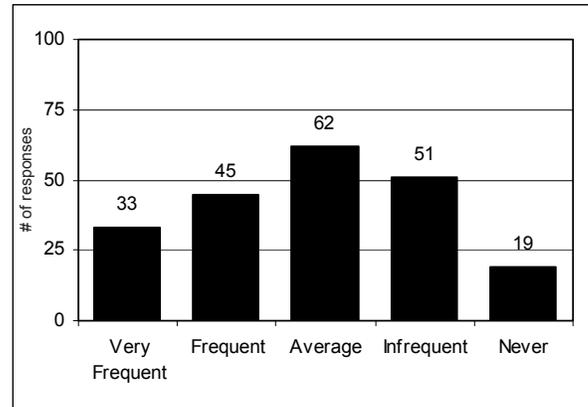


### Activity: **Cross Country Skiing**

Number of Responses: 210

Mean: 3.10

Cross-country skiing has about as many participants as snowmobiling, but its participants are not as likely to belong to organizations.

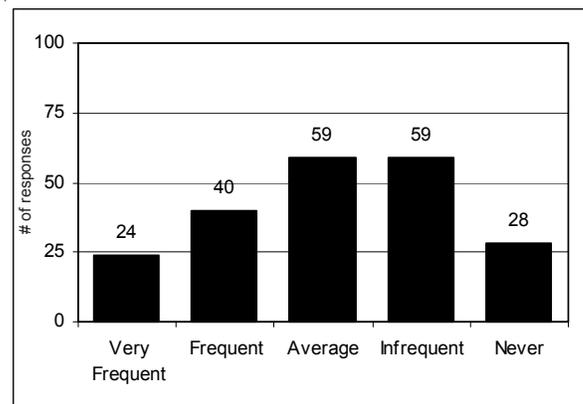


### Activity: **Snowshoeing**

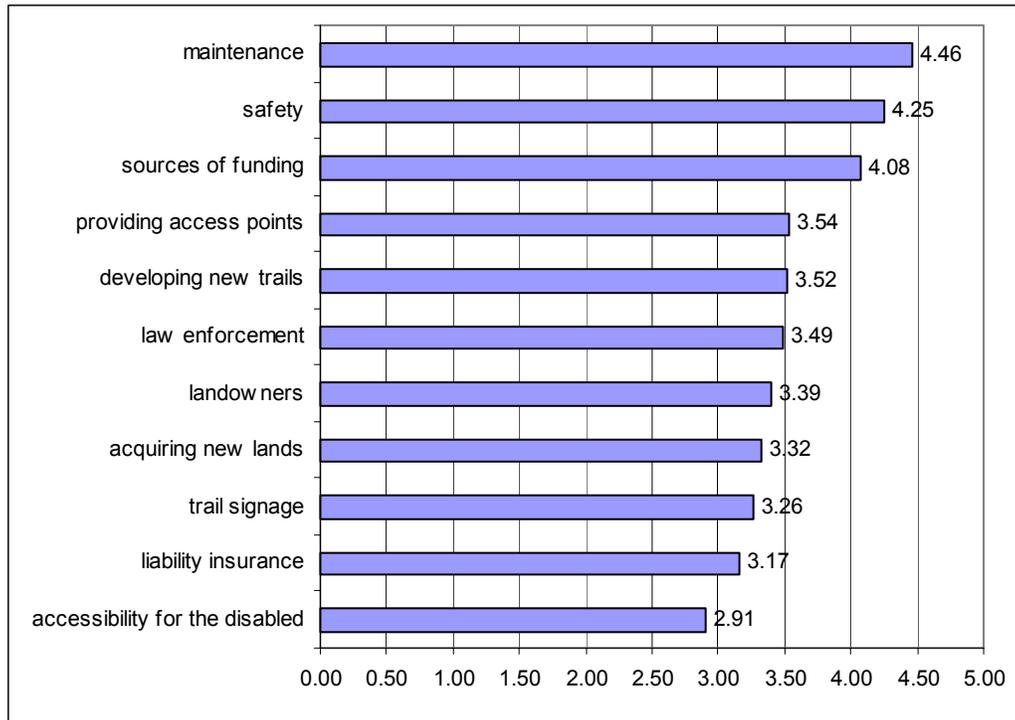
Number of Responses: 210

Mean: 2.87

See the comments on Cross country skiing above.



Q2. Trail organizations were asked to rate the importance of 11 selected trail issues and one “other” category on a scale of 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). The results of this question are shown below:



In fiscally difficult times, maintenance is often deferred, and as can be seen from the chart above, it is the leading concern of trail organizations. Also related to fiscal problems is the concern expressed for “sources of funding”, which has the third highest rating. Of equal concern, in second place, is user safety.

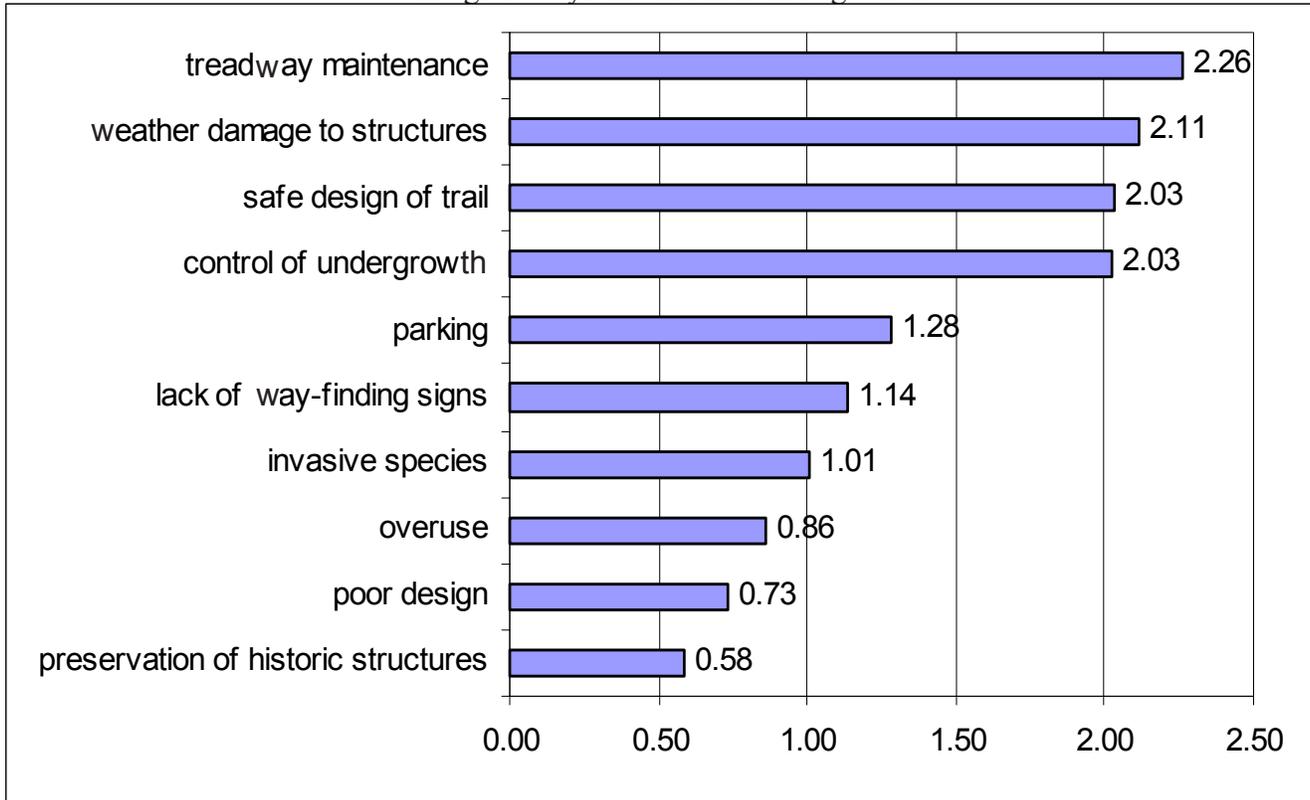
The second half of this question asked the respondent to go back and mark the three issues which were the priorities for his/her organization. Not surprisingly, the results more or less mirrored the first half of the question with maintenance, safety and sources of funding heading the list. At the bottom of the list were law enforcement, signage and accessibility for the disabled.

In comparing the response to this question by summer-based organizations and winter-based organizations, there were some similarities and some differences. Both groups considered maintenance, safety and sources of funding as very important. Winter groups were more concerned with acquiring new land for trails and landowner issues while summer groups expressed concern for signage and law enforcement. Neither groups rated accessibility for persons with disabilities as a very high concern.

As part of this question, the respondent was given the opportunity to specify an “other” trail issue and indicate the nature of the issue. Of the 236 responses, only 34 did so and of these, while almost all could be classified under one of the explicitly stated issues, there were a few unique issues. Among these were logging, rerouting the trail and multiple-use issues.

Q3. Trail organizations were asked to rank physical issues affecting their trails from 1 (most serious) to 5 (least serious). However, before mean value and other calculations were made, the responses were recoded to 5 (most serious) to 1 (least serious) so that higher values reflected more serious issues and non-responses could be included in the calculations as zero.

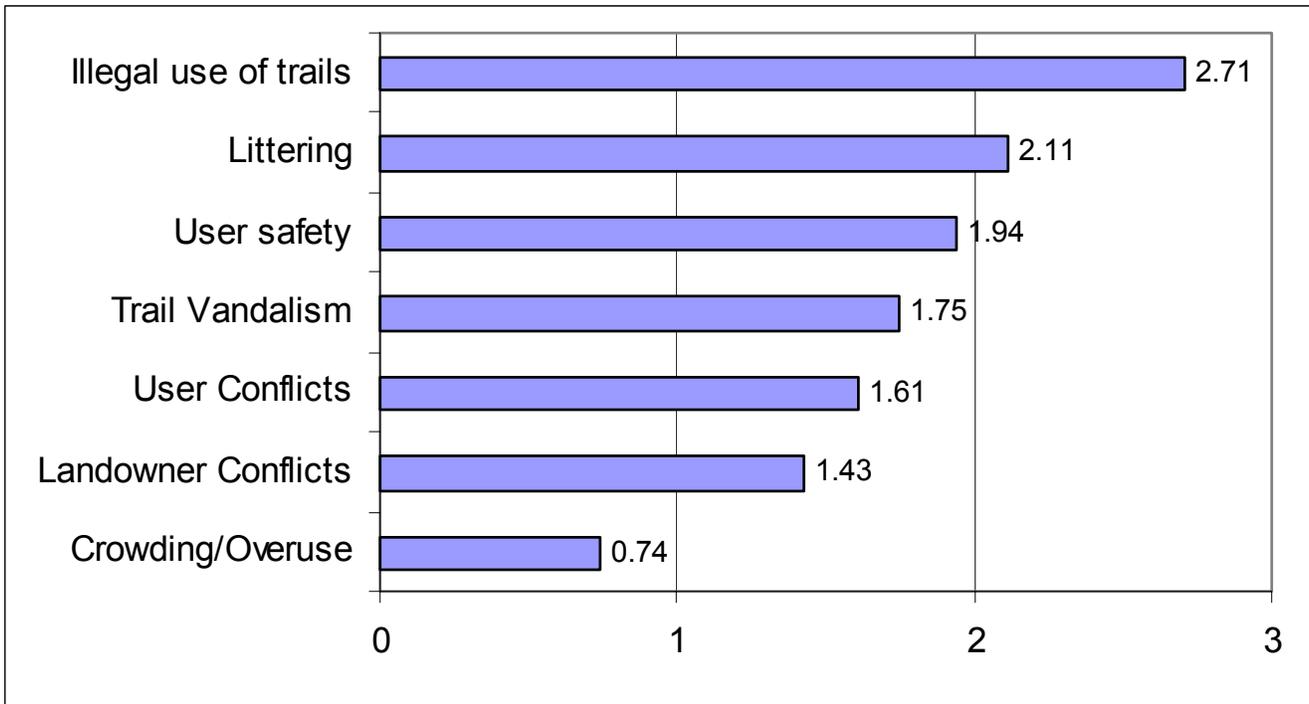
Ratings of Physical Issues affecting Trails



Again, as in the previous question, maintenance is the most important issue to the trail organizations. This would include not only the first item “treadway maintenance” but the second and fourth issues as well: weather damage to structures and control of undergrowth.

The differences between summer and winter based organizations were not particularly noticeable for this question. The most noted difference was that summer organizations were more concerned about invasive species and the preservation of historic structures.

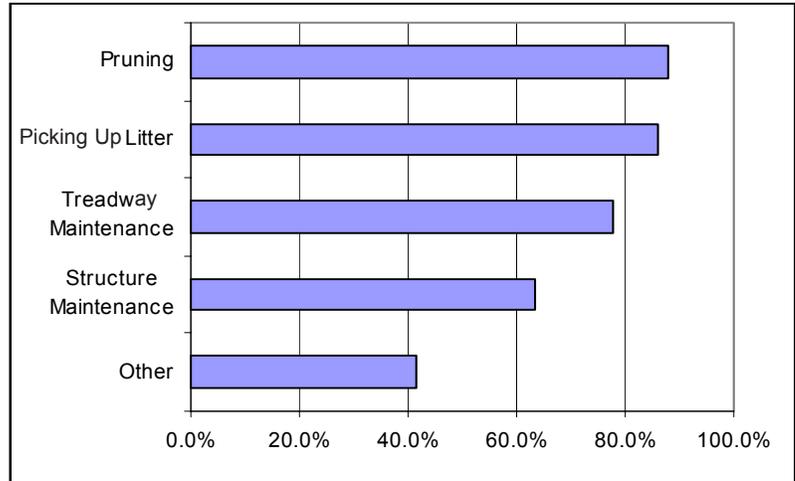
Q4. While offering less choices than the previous question, this question was similar in format. It focused on social rather than physical issues. As seen below, the issue of greatest concern for the trail organizations is illegal use of their trails. A similar finding was expressed by New York State park managers when asked about trails under their jurisdiction (during a survey conducted in 2005).



For both winter and summer organizations, illegal use of trails was the number one issue. The most common illegal use of trails takes the form of trespassing on private lands and prohibited groups of users (frequently motorized users) entering trail lands. Issues on which these two groups digressed were littering and landowner conflicts. Summer groups were more concerned with littering. Winter groups considered landowner conflicts second most important - just behind illegal use of trails.

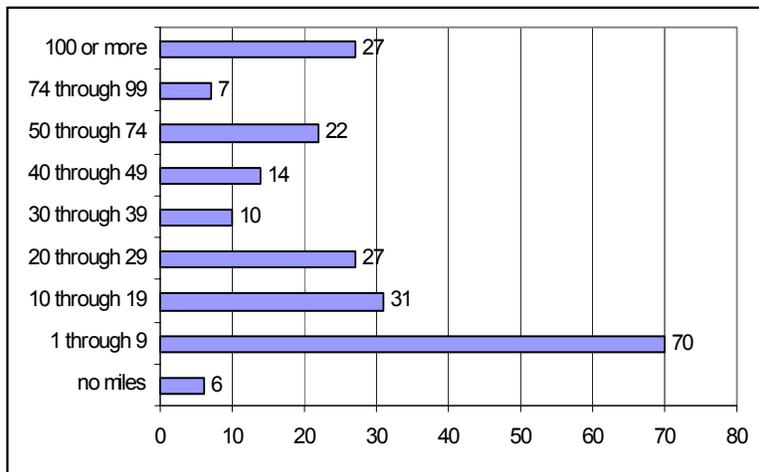
Q5a through Q10 Trail activities and organization: This series of questions dealt with a number of differing aspects of the trail organization, e.g. their activities; miles of trails maintained; sources of funding, etc.

Trail organizations are very often involved in the maintenance of trails. The most common type of maintenance mentioned was pruning, followed by cleaning litter and treadway maintenance. The organizations were also given the opportunity to mention other types of maintenance they were engaged in.



Trail organizations mentioned many different types of activities for the “other” category from signage to repairing structures to clearing blowdown. The most frequently mentioned “other” category was grooming which included slightly more than 10% of the organizations.

There is some variation in the number of miles of designated trails that these organizations maintain. Of the 236 organizations surveyed, 22 left the answer to this question blank, leaving 214 valid responses. Of the 214 responses 6 organizations said they were responsible for no miles at all. Altogether a total of 10,121 miles of designated trail are maintained, an average of 47.3 miles per organization. The average, though, is misleading in that there is a large number of organizations that maintain a large number of miles as well as an even greater number of organizations that maintain a very small number of miles. This is reflected in the values for the median and modal values below:

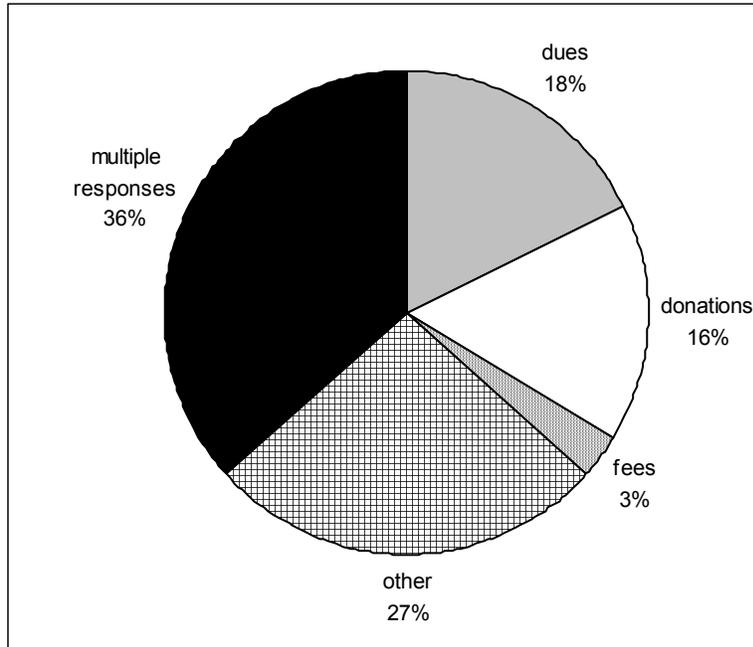


Miles of designated trails maintained by the organization.

mean value = 47.3 miles  
 mode = 2.0 miles  
 median = 19.5 miles  
 n = 214 organizations

## Sources of Funding for Organizations

Trail organizations were asked which of the following is the major source of their funding: membership dues; donations; user fees; and “other”. Slightly more than one-third (36%) indicated that more than one of these categories were their major source of income as indicated in the pie chart below.



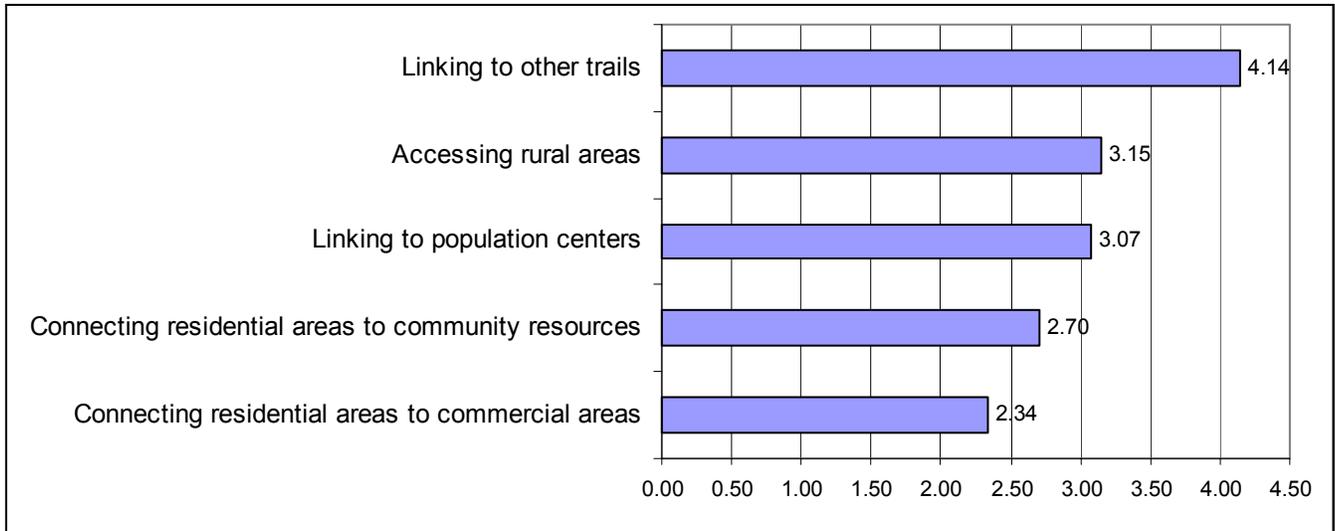
The above pie chart leaves some doubt as to what sources of income were included in the multiple response section of the chart. An inspection of the data reveals that there were 76 organizations who checked more than one major source of income. Of this group of 76 organizations, 66 (87%) included dues among their responses; 50 (66%) included donations; 11 (14%) included user fees and 51 included “other”.

Including the component parts of the multiple responses within the four principal categories of dues, donations, user fees and other, it appears that dues and donations constitute the most important source of funds for these organizations.

State funding, fund-raisers and grants were the most frequently mentioned “other” category source of funding. Lesser mentioned sources of funding included sales of t-shirts, county and local government funding, map sales, etc.

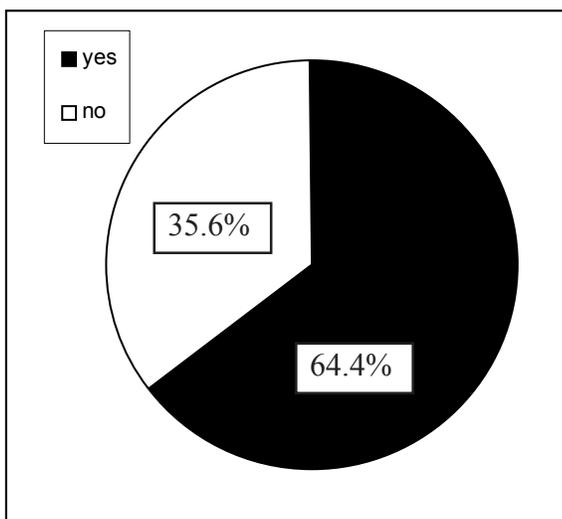
### Future directions for trails

Trail organizations were asked what they considered important for their trails in the future. Of the five choices they were asked to rank, “Linking to other trails” received the highest rating.

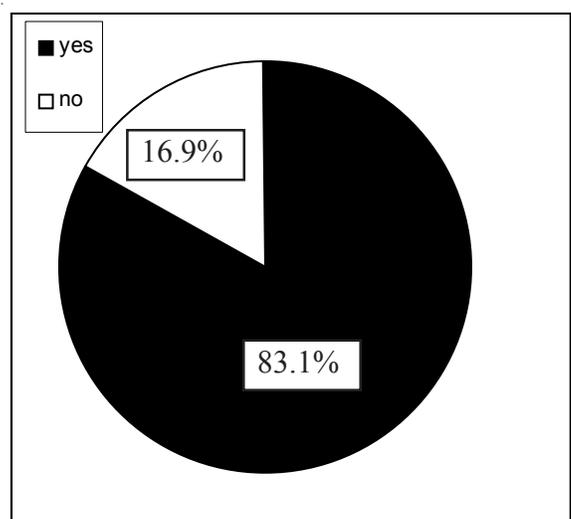


### Coordination with other organizations

The trail organizations were asked if they coordinated with other organizations or with any level of government for maintenance purposes. Almost two-thirds (64.4%) of the organizations surveyed indicated that they coordinated with other clubs and organizations. Coordination with government of any level was even higher (83.1%).



Does your group coordinate with other groups?



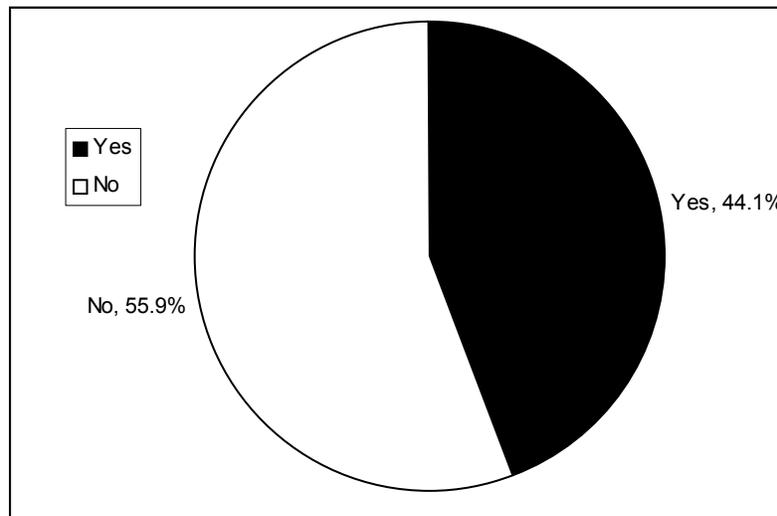
Does your group coordinate with either the federal, state or local government?

Q10. Is obtaining liability insurance a concern?

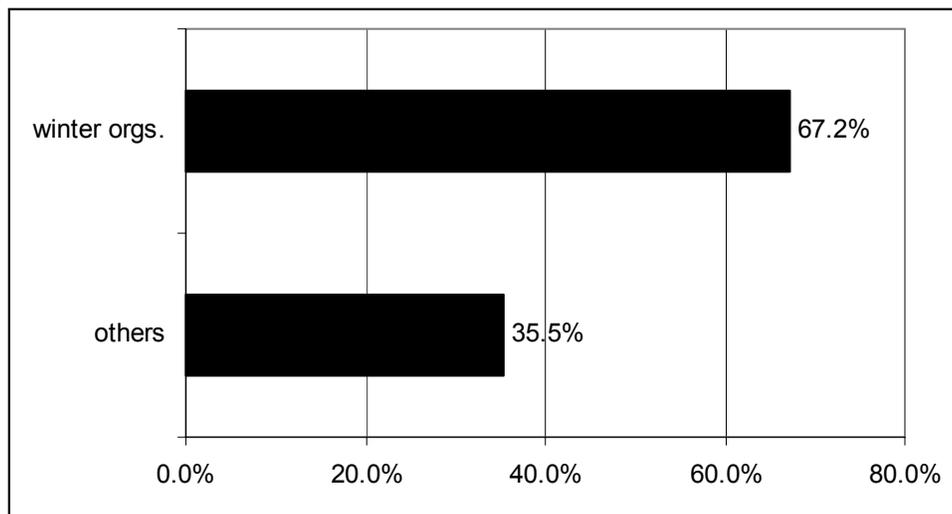
Liability is a concern for both landowners and trail organizations. In New York State, the Recreational Use Statute (part of the General Obligations Law) limits the liability of landowners who voluntarily allow access to their land for certain recreational activities. Nonetheless, having liability insurance is important for both landowners and trail organizations especially in recent years as the number of companies writing policies has been decreasing and premiums increasing.

Forty-four percent of the organizations surveyed indicated that obtaining liability insurance is a concern:

Is obtaining liability insurance for your trails a concern?



However, the results of this survey indicated that obtaining liability insurance is an issue for winter-based groups (mainly snowmobile clubs) almost twice as often as for the others:



## Q11. Comments

Many of the people completing the trail organization surveys offered comments in the section at the end reserved for that purpose. Below is a sample of these comments:

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All our trail miles are located on private property. Keeping landowners happy & cooperative is the most serious challenge followed by unauthorized use of trails in off season by ATVs.

Cost of liability insurance is a major issue for our board of directors and users.

Canal Corp needs more resources to help volunteers maintain trail and waterway.

[It's] great to have the mowing done by the state. Litter is minor so only done infrequently. Lots of use by responsible users.

In our Organization's experience, we have noticed that maintenance has become an increasingly significant issue.

Liability insurance & direct or liability insurance was so costly that our organization transferred the arboretum to the municipality.

Liability insurance for our not-for-profit organization is a major problem.

Need ATV trails.

NYS government must be part of the solution to inadequate recreational problems.

One of our recent biggest problems is obtaining liability insurance.

Our biggest problem is getting trained people to do the specialized work of building rock steps, water bar, rerouting eroded areas etc. So far we have been unsuccessful.

Our trails are all on private land with permission.

Railbed has been abandoned for over 20 years. Issue is reclaiming for trail use (keeping out ATVs, cars, hunters, dumpers, etc.)

The waterfront trail has become a hot topic in Ithaca, due to trail development conflicts with municipal golf course and other private landowners.

## Conclusion

Trail-based recreational activity is an important component of the total recreation taking place within New York.

- Trail organizations are an important component of the overall task of providing recreational opportunities for New Yorkers. Among the tasks performed by these groups are
  - Pruning
  - Picking up litter
  - Treadway maintenance
  - Structure maintenance
- Hiking and Nature Interpretation are the most frequent use of trails mentioned in this survey.
- Liability insurance is an issue for many trail organizations, especially snowmobile organizations.
- Maintenance is a concern for trail organizations.
- Dues and donations are the major sources of funding for trail organizations.
- Many organizations mentioned ‘Illegal use of trails’ as a major concern. This category included trespassing on private lands and use of trails by prohibited groups (frequently motorized vehicle users).
- Important directions for the future, as indicated by trail groups are:
  - Linking to other trails
  - Accessing rural areas

As stated in the most recent 2003 New York State SCORP, “The vision for trails in New York State is to have a statewide network of interconnecting shared and single use trails that connect parks, open spaces, historic sites, communities, business districts and residential areas.”

Because of the important role that trail organizations have in helping to achieve these goals, they should be supported by the various levels of government: federal, state and local. Further study into the issues facing these groups will also assist in the governmental decision making process to help them.

## Appendix A (Trail Organization Survey Form)



George E. Pataki, Governor  
Bernadette Castro, Commissioner

# TRAIL ORGANIZATION SURVEY

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and Parks & Trails New York needs your help in gathering information on the trail facilities that your organization services. We are also interested in your opinion of trail issues. Thank you for your help. If you have any questions, please call Wesley Bartlett at (518) 474-8410.



Name(s) of the trail(s) or trail system that your organization serves: \_\_\_\_\_

T1) Please indicate the various types of activities that take place on your trails on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being very frequent and 1 being never at all:

Not permitted	Very frequent					Never	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Walking / Jogging / Hiking
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Recreational Bicycling
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Commuting via Bicycle
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Mountain Biking
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		In-line Skating/Roller Blading
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		ATV Use
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Off Road Vehicle Use
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Equestrian User
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Nature Interpretation
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Canoeing/kayaking
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Other Water Uses
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Snowmobiling
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Cross Country Skiing
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Snowshoe-ing
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	4	3	2	1		Other _____

T2) Please rate the importance of the following trail issues on your trail(s):

Most important					Least Important					
5	4	3	2	1						
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Providing points of access to trails			
							(parking areas, entry locations, etc.)			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Obtaining liability insurance			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Accessibility for persons with disabilities			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Safety			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Law enforcement			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Acquiring new land for trails			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Developing new trails			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Maintenance			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Poor or no trail signage at trail head or along trail			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Concerns of landowners			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Sources of funding			
5	4	3	2	1	<input type="checkbox"/>		Other _____			

T2a) Please return to question T2 and check the box next to the three issues with the highest priorities.

T3) For your trails, please number five of the following physical issues in order from most serious(1) to least serious(5), using each number 1,2,3,4 and 5 only once:

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| ___ Invasive Species                 | ___ Weather damage to trail structures  |
| ___ Control of undergrowth and weeds | ___ Treadway maintenance                |
| ___ Poor design                      | ___ Overuse                             |
| ___ Safe design of trail             | ___ Preservation of historic structures |
| ___ Lack of way-finding signs        | ___ Parking                             |
| ___ Other _____                      |   |

T4) For your trail(s), please number five of the following social issues in order from most serious(1) to least serious(5), using each number 1,2,3,4, and 5 only once:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts between different types of users | <input type="checkbox"/> Trail vandalism    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts between users and landowners     | <input type="checkbox"/> Crowding / Overuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illegal use of trails                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Littering, dumping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal/user safety                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____        |

T5a) Approximately how many miles of federal, state and locally designated trails does your organization maintain? \_\_\_\_\_ miles

T5b) Maintenance by your organization consists of the following activities (Check all that apply):

- Cleaning Litter;     Treadway Maintenance;     Structure Maintenance;     Pruning;
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

T6) What is the major source of financing for your organization?

- Membership Dues     Donations     User Fees     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

T7) Approximately what percentage of maintenance on your trail(s) is done by volunteer groups? \_\_\_\_\_ % Volunteer work consists of \_\_\_\_\_ hours and \$\_\_\_\_\_ in materials per year.

T8) Do you consider any of the following an important direction for the future of your trail(s):

Most important		Least Important			
5	4	3	2	1	Linking to population centers
5	4	3	2	1	Linking to other trails
5	4	3	2	1	Accessing rural areas
5	4	3	2	1	Connecting residential areas to schools, parks and other community resources
5	4	3	2	1	Connecting residential areas to commercial areas

T9) For maintenance purposes, does your organization coordinate with other clubs/organizations?

- Yes     No  
If yes, which club(s)/organization(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Does your organization coordinate with any of the following levels of government?

- Federal     State     Local     No governmental coordination

T10) Is obtaining liability insurance for your trails a concern?  Yes     No

T11) We welcome any comments you have on trails usage / issues / problems in your area:

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Thank you for your interest in this important project. Please mail your completed form to:

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
Agency Building #1 – 17<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, New York 12238

Name of your organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ NY    Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_    Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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