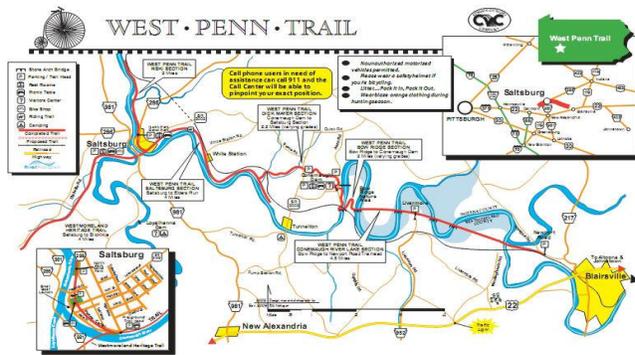


Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

The West Penn Trail is a 15-mile biking and hiking trail in Indiana and Westmoreland Counties in southwestern Pennsylvania, owned, built and operated by the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy and maintained by a volunteer Trail Council. The trail travels between the heritage-rich communities of Saltsburg and Blairsville, and features a middle section with some challenging hills on a wide, rail-type trail, sandwiched between several miles of even rail-trail on either end.

The Conemaugh River Lake section of the trail passes over 100+ year old stone arch Pennsylvania Rail Road bridges, the middle section passes through the Conemaugh Dam recreation area, and the Saltsburg section passes through Saltsburg's interpretive Canal Park and connects to the Westmoreland Heritage Trail.



The West Penn Trail Council annually raises a maintenance fund through sponsorships, commemorative benches, and tshirt sales. In 2011, our sponsors and donors included:

Jim Brett
Mary Shaw and Roy Weil
The Lumber Store and More
Pam Mayer (in honor of Dick Mayer)
Saltsburg Borough
TMR Roofing
Wyotech
MANY THANKS!

In 2011 the Trail Council decided to undertake a survey of trail users with the following goals:

- Measure the performance and perception of maintenance efforts;
- Establish a line of communication with users that could be expanded upon by social media;
- Recruit and diversify volunteers and trail maintenance fund donors;
- Gain insight about how West Penn Trail's unique topography, flooding issues, marketing and directional signage are perceived by our users.

Printed surveys were available at plastic boxes at the three trail heads: Newport Road, Westinghouse, and Saltsburg. Surveys were also available on line at the CVC's website and at SurveyMonkey. Many, many thanks goes out to those of you who completed and returned these surveys.

Below is a summary of the results, discussion and recommendations.

To report fallen trees, washouts, vandalism, and other maintenance issues on the West Penn Trail, call (724)639-3781.

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 110 surveys were returned: 44 printed surveys and 66 on-line. The on-line survey was modified slightly to fit SurveyMonkey parameters. The profile of our survey respondents is detailed below.

1. Respondents' Residence - 105 respondents indicate their home location by listing their zip code.

Following is a numeric summary of responses:

Blairsville – 10	Westmoreland County - 45
Saltsburg – 8	(Eastern Westmoreland Co – 12)
Pittsburgh area – 17	(Central Westmoreland Co – 28)
Kiski Valley – 8	(Western Westmoreland Co – 5)
Somerset - 2	Indiana – 4
Punxsutawney – 1	Philadelphia area - 4
Johnstown – 4	Out of State – 2 (Delaware, Maryland)

2. Age Range

15 and younger – 3% 16-25 – 5% 26-35 – 11% 36-55 – 43% 56-65 – 27% 66+ - 11%

3. Frequency of use

Daily – 6% Weekly – 27% Monthly – 29% A few times/year – 24% Once – 14%

4. Section use

Conemaugh River Lake – 31%	Saltsburg – 26%	Bow Ridge/Mayer – 9%
Kiski – 6%	Entire Trail – 27%	Don't know – 1%

5. Activities on trail - Participants were able to indicate several activities for this question. Responses are listed by number, not percentage.

Bike – 82	Birdwatch – 30	Purchase a snack/beverage - 15
Walk – 45	Watch wildlife – 50	Read a kiosk - 39
Run – 15	Study wildflowers - 26	Visit a historic site - 30
Horseback ride – 2	Take pictures - 55	Visit a community - 10
Boat – 3	Fish – 9	

6. Other trails used - This question was only available on the printed survey.

Most frequently cited: Great Allegheny Passage, Ghost Town Trail, Westmoreland Heritage Trail, Five Star Trail, and Roaring Run Trail.

Additional trails mentioned: Coal and Coke, Mon River, 6 to 10, Hoodlebug, Pine Creek, Freeport to Butler, Crooked Creek, Forbes Park, Erie Presque Isle, Wellsboro, Path of Flood, Cedar Creek to Boston, Montour, Laurel Highlands, Twin Lakes, St. Vincent, State and County Parks, several trails in Westmoreland County, trails in western Maryland.

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

MAINTENANCE, MARKETING, and COMMUNICATIONS

Several questions revealed what survey respondents knew and thought about the trail.

1. Did you know West Penn Trail is maintained by volunteers? This question was only available on the printed survey and was answered by 41 respondents:

40% yes 60% no

2. How did you hear about the trail?

Word of mouth – 37%

Roadside signage – 15%

Website/Facebook – 15%

Other: brochure, newspaper, used before it was a trail,

Tourism bureau – 5%

rails to trails book, live nearby, Indiana Co trail guide

Bike shop – 4%

3. How would you rate the safety and security on this trail?

Excellent – 40%

Good – 49%

Fair – 10%

Poor – 1%

4. How would you rate the maintenance and condition of the trail?

Excellent – 31%

Good – 46%

Fair – 17%

Poor – 6%

5. What do you like least about this trail?

The most common response to this question by a wide margin was flooding, trash, debris and glass.

Respondents that answered the question this way were those who primarily used the Conemaugh River Lake section.

Other responses included:

- only 5 miles for horses;
- upkeep of grass cutting;
- maintenance on Bow Ridge and Mayer sections is hit or miss;
- switchback; poor condition, rough gravel on Mayer section;
- short post in the middle of the trail entering westbound the Auer culvert is a hazard with no obvious benefit; (NOTE: post was removed 7/7/2011)
- large rock road right before the Dam and no signs at top of switchback except #1 and #2;
- for bicycling Bow Ridge, switchback and Mayer sections have to be hiked – bikers traveling long distances w/panniers should be warned in trail brochure that they will have to walk bikes;
- difficult riding between Tunnelview to east side of White Station;
- dirt bike and white ATV use Saltsburg section;
- large trucks left ruts in Kiski Section; (NOTE: equipment for installation of culvert on Kiski section and wet spring caused rutting, which has since been resurfaced and repaired)
- picnic tables at Newport Road and porta john vandalized several times – evidence of shady characters on trail;
- some sections had very loose surface.
- needs more benches;
- can't find accurate maps;

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

6. What do you like most about this trail?

The most common responses by a wide margin were natural scenery, beautiful stone arch bridges, peace and quiet.

Another theme in responses was:

- tame, civilized sections, and some more adventurous;
- hills and diverse trail on Mayer section;
- Dick Mayer section is our favorite section. Unfortunately maintenance on this section is fair. Water seems to wash out parts of the trail.
- I am not sure what it is called, but we took trail from Saltsburg out a few miles then went over the “mountain” – more mountainous than we expected but a beautiful ride!
- fast twisty lumpy fun sections, actually the most fun “rail trail” I’ve ever seen.

Additional responses included:

- close to home;
- convenient parking;
- historic rail road/canal aspects;
- clearly marked; history;
- historic markers and signs;
- well-marked, easy to follow;
- can’t wait to see West Penn connected to other trails.

7. Tell us how you’d like to participate in the maintenance and operation of the trail.

Respondents were able to check all that apply. Responses are listed by number, not percentage.

Send me the results of survey – 31

Regional trail connectivity - 15

Volunteer – 29

Fund development - 2

Trail council – 12

Public relations - 4



Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

DISCUSSION and OBSERVATIONS

It is important to note that the survey was not conducted in a statistically reliable fashion, so the responses only represent the opinions of those polled. Nevertheless, we were able to gain some insight about West Penn Trail users' experiences, and identify a few areas where improved communication may be warranted.

Profile of Respondents

There was nothing too surprising in the profile of respondents, although it is noteworthy that few respondents seem to be visiting the communities near the trail. This may be in part due to the fact that the trail is not physically connected to Blairsville as of this writing, but some users have indicated that they are not sure how to follow the trail through Saltsburg. Maps of the town with points of interest were added to trail head kiosk a few years ago, and signage was added to help clarify the route from the Saltsburg trail head (near the playground). Additionally, maps to trail heads and trail brochures were provided to several businesses in Saltsburg and are updated annually, to make sure other visitors know how to get from town to the trail. This may be an area for further study and input.

It was also surprising to see how many users are taking pictures on the trail. We are always looking for pictures, so hopefully we can find more ways to have users share their pictures through Facebook.

Maintenance, Marketing and Communications



A slight majority of respondents were not aware that the West Penn Trail is maintained entirely by volunteers. Volunteers logged more than 200 hours of service on our trail in 2011 (see appendices 1-3). We may want to consider mechanisms for raising awareness about the work of the volunteers, particularly in light of the challenging nature of maintenance on this trail. We may also need to explore new ways to engage volunteers in maintenance. Overwhelmingly, users indicate an interest in participating in trail clean ups. However, when volunteer maintenance days are scheduled and promoted, turn out is very low. Often, it is the same core of 4-5 volunteers showing up to do all of the work.

This past year, a core team of new volunteers was established by the trail monitor for the Conemaugh River Lake section. The team included volunteers who do not serve on the trail council. The team was designed to meet monthly for clearing that section, with a schedule they established. Perhaps this team option could be explored for other sections.

Since knotweed is a big challenge on the Saltsburg section of the trail, this might be another location to consider developing a core maintenance team. Team members could focus on knotweed cutting once or twice a month, particularly in the spring months, and establish their own schedule.

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

It was interesting to note that word of mouth was the primary way respondents learned about the trail. That's a bit of a head-scratcher, when part of what we are trying to figure out through surveys is how to better communicate the unique features of our trail to existing and potential users! How, then, does the Trail Council make informed marketing decisions if most people get their initial information through a mechanism we cannot influence? This may be an area that requires further research.

Security on the trail had an average rating, which could be related to ATV and motorcycle use. Users may also not be aware that the West Penn Trail is mapped into the Indiana County 911 emergency response system. Users' exact location can be identified through their cell phones if they dial 911. Reception is sketchy in a few places, but overall reception is not bad considering the remote nature of the trail. For more information on security, see our incident reports, appendix 4.

Condition of the trail also received an average rating, but this is not surprising considering the regular flooding that occurs on the Conemaugh River Lake section. It is also possible that some respondents completed surveys before the entire trail was resurfaced during June and July of 2011.

This brings us to the number one concern expressed through surveys: the flooding and related debris on Conemaugh River Lake section. It is important to note that the Trail Council does not know when the trail will be flooded or for how long. In fact, the Army Corps of Engineers does not have a pre-determined schedule for pooling water behind the Conemaugh Dam, which is the cause of the flooding on the trail and indeed, into Blairsville. Pooling and release is determined by a complex set of criteria controlled out of the Pittsburgh district office. They do not notify the council when the water will be raised, and even if they did we do not have an easy way to inform users – it is not realistic to update our website every time the water is raised, for example.

The debris left behind is another challenge. While the Conemaugh Hydro Electric Plant typically clears a path through the large debris for their own access reasons, which allows trail users to pass through once the water is down, this still leaves a lot of unsightly garbage behind. Broken glass is also left behind, and we've had a number of users report flat tires on this section. It has been the practice of the Trail Council to wait until after the last spring pooling event to do any major clean ups due to limited human resources – it doesn't make sense to clear the trail if it is going to be flooded the following week.

Discussions are being revisited with ACOE and the Hydro Electric Plant about the possibility of installing a boom somewhere that would help hold debris off of the bridges during flood events. The debris could then be burned when water is released and less damage would be done to the trail.

The other controversy of the West Penn Trail is the hills, ramp and switchback of Bow Ridge through the Conemaugh Dam area to the Saltsburg section of trail. The middle section of the trail is clearly not for everyone – some rail trail users prefer a continuous, flat, even trail. However, we had just as many respondents indicate that the middle section of the trail is their favorite section. Some users love this section for the diversity of the topography and its beauty and uniqueness. What is clear is we have to find better ways to inform users about the nature of this section so that they can plan accordingly and really enjoy it rather than being caught off guard.

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

To be clear - no, we cannot go through the tunnel to avoid going over Bow Ridge. Some respondents suggested this and it is commonly heard on the trail. The tunnel is plugged in the middle and needs to stay that way...otherwise the water would be diverted away from the Conemaugh Dam! Also, a Corps inspection revealed that a portion of the tunnel ceiling had collapsed, making an opening using hydraulic gates an unfeasible option.

In the fall of 2011, representatives of the West Penn Trail Council joined together with the operators of Roaring Run, Hoodlebug, Ghost Town, Westmoreland Heritage, Path of Flood, Lower and 6 to 10 trails. Among other things, the trail operators group is working on how to market themselves as a regional trail system, even though the trails are not all connected. One of the things that will be addressed is how to help potential users plan for the hills on West Penn and Roaring Run Trails, and even possibly the hills associated with on-road connections for those inclined to use that method. The focus will be on promoting these challenges as assets, as something unique that sets the system apart and provides a different kind of experience than long-distance rail trails. The group has dubbed the system the TransAllegheny Trails. We look forward to contributing to and benefiting from their work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage trail users to share pictures through Facebook.
- Initiate follow up questions with a select group of respondents re: what would encourage you to visit the communities close to trail heads?
- Continue to encourage the Conemaugh River Lake section maintenance team to meet monthly for trail clearing during trail season.
- Explore the possibility of establishing a knotweed trimming team for the Saltsburg section of the trail.
- Continue to work with the Conemaugh Hydro Electric Plant and ACOE about the possibility of installing a boom to prevent debris collection on bridges.
- Investigate options for notifying potential trail users when pooling is occurring at Conemaugh River Lake Section.
- Continue to work with the trail operators group to identify better ways to promote the hilly sections and raise awareness about this unique aspect of the trail.
- Initiate follow up with survey respondents who indicated an interest in public relations to see if they have suggestions for improving communications on the above items.
- Initiate follow up with survey respondents who expressed an interest in serving on the Trail Council.
- Continue to develop “likes” and use Facebook as a communication tool.



Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

Name	Date	Hours	Section	Description	Total
Mark F.	4.25	3	Salt/Kisk	check mile markers for repairs	3
Jack E.M.	3.1-7.20	12		RTC sojourn planning and coordination	24
		12		Trail council meetings	
Jack M.	5.28	5	CRL	debris removal, sign repair	112
	6.18	5	Bow Ridge	brush clearing, trimming	
	3.1-12.31	15	Entire	routine monitor	
	3.1-7.20	75		RTC sojourn planning and coordination	
	1.1-12.31	12		Trail council meetings	
Jerry S.	4.21	6.5	CRL	clearing brush	53.5
	5.28	4	CRL	debris removal+E11	
	6.14	5	CRL	repair fences and wire, clear debris	
	7.11	4	CRL	debris removal	
	7.13	4	CRL	swept glass from trail	
	10.8	4	Saltsburg	cutting trees of heaven E12	
	11.19	4	CRL	debris removal and removal of bags	
	3.1-7.20	10		RTC sojourn planning and coordination	
	1.1-12.31	12		Trail council meetings	
Jarrett S.	5.28	4	CRL	debris removal	16
	7.11	4	CRL	debris removal	
	7.13	4	CRL	debris removal	
	11.19	4	CRL	debris removal and removal of bags	
Nathaniel S.	11.19	4	CRL	debris removal and removal of bags	4
Chuck S.	3.23	5	CRL	repair wire, clear debris, cut trees	52
	4.21	6.5	CRL	brush clearing	
	5.25	5	CRL	brush and debris removal	
	5.28	5	CRL	debris removal, sign repair	
	6.7	3.5	CRL	debris removal	
	6.28	5	CRL	clearing debris	
	8.9	1	CRL	tree removal	
	8.11	2	CRL	brush clearing, weeding with new vol team	
	9.24	4	CRL	mowed and cleaned up at Westinghouse gate	
	12.25	3	CRL	picked up trash at Livermore gate	
	1.1-12.31	12		Trail council meetings	
Alan M.	8.11	2	CRL	brush clearing, weeding	2
Norm B.	8.11	2	CRL	brush clearing, weeding	4
	11.19	2	CRL	debris removal	
Pat N.	8.11	2	CRL	brush clearing, weeding	11
	11.19	5	CRL	debris removal, cut up wood	
	12.3	4	CRL	cutting and removing trees from bridges	
Eric S.	10.8	1	Saltsburg	cutting trees of heaven	13
	1.1-12.31	12		Trail council meetings	
Chris V.	3.25	3	Salt, CRL	update kiosks	51
	6.14	3	CRL	repair fences and signs	
	10.8	3	Saltsburg	cutting trees of heaven	
	3.1-7.20	30		RTC sojourn planning and coordination	
	1.1-12.31	12		Trail council meetings	
Barry T.	4.21	8	CRL	brush clearing and tractor transport	90
	6.14	5	CRL	repair fences and signs	
	7.11	5	CRL	haul tractor, debris removal	
	3.1-7.20	60		RTC sojourn planning and coordination	
	1.1-12.31	12		Trail council meetings	
Kitty T.	6.14	4	CRL	repair fences and signs	51
	10.8	5	Saltsburg	cutting and spraying trees of heaven	
	3.1-7.20	30		RTC sojourn planning and coordination	
	1.1-12.31	12		Trail council meetings	
Laura H.	3.25	4	Entire	update kiosks	11
	5.28	3	CRL	trash and debris removal	
	10.8	4	Saltsburg	cutting and spraying trees of heaven	
Leann C.	5.28	3	CRL	trash and debris removal	3
Mike R.	5.28	3	CRL	trash and debris removal	3
Vicki N.	5.28	3	CRL	trash and debris removal	3
Ralph S.	3.1-12.31	23	BR, Maher	routine monitor, debris removal, tree clearing	23
		529.5			529.5

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

CONEMAUGH VALLEY CONSERVANCY									
TRAIL ENGINEER'S TIME RECORD									
JOHN MAGUIRE				TIME PERIOD AUGUST 1 TO DEC.31,2011					
DATE	PROJECT TASK					HOURS			
9/7/2011	INSTALL BENCH ON KISKI SEC					4.0			
9/13/2011	LOCK REPAIR AT NEWPORT GATE					2.0			
10/5/2011	FUEL FOR MOWER					5.0			
10/7/2011	MOWING ON KISKI SEC.					5.0			
10/8/2011	CUTTING TREES OF HEAVEN					4.5			
10/11/2011	LOADING MOWER ON TRAILER					1.0			
10/17/2011	MOWING CONE RV LK SECTION					7.0			
11/14/2011	REPAIRING BALLARD AT Q SPAN					4.0			
11/16/2011	PORTA JOHN REPAIR					3.0			
11/16/2011	MET STATE POLICE AT NEWPORT GATE					1.5			
						TOTAL	37.0		
ALL HOURS SHOW ARE DONATED TO CVC									
VALUE: 37.0 X \$20.00/HR= \$720.00									

Conemaugh Valley Conservancy
West Penn Trail User Survey Summary and Report – December 2011

Date of Inc.	Section	MM	Location	Description	Police Report	Follow Up
7.09	CRL	12.5?	Newport Rd gate	chain, lock stolen	Kiski 7.15.09	replaced
7.09	CRL		Newport Rd gate	chain, lock stolen	Kiski 7.15.09	replaced
7.09	CRL		Newport Rd gate	lock damaged	Kiski 7.15.09	replaced w/circular lock
app 7.12.09	Salt	0-.5	Saltsburg kiosk	WPT map stolen	Kiski 7.15.09	
7.18.09	Bow R	7-7.5	Tnlton trail bridge	rocks thrown to river	911- Indiana	
8.21.09	WHT		Con trail bridge	rocks thrown to river	911-Saltsburg boro	
March ?	Kiski		Blacklegs bridge	padlock chain cut N side of bridge		replaced chain
5.25.10	CRL	9.5	Bridge 4	concrete bench stolen		
10.27.10	CRL	12.5	Pavillion at Newport	picnic table thrown into river	Indiana SP 10.27.10	
mid May	CRL	12.5	Newport Rd Gate	bolder removed	Indiana 5.19.11	Jack replaced bolder
mid May	Kiski	1	near Bligs bridge	ATV damage	Kiski 5.19.11	will be repaired with resurfacing
6.13.11	Kiski	1	gate at trailhead	Firemen cut lock to access for asthma issue		Jack will replace lock
6.13.11	Salt	1	trailhead	large metal "drag" beam stolen	Saltsburg 6.14.11	Jack is checking salvage yards
11.11.11	CRL		Newport Rd TH	ballards, picnic table, porta john damaged	Indiana 11.14.11	Jack, Jerry repaired damage