

Summary of the 2019 Minnesota State Trail Visitor Study

In Minnesota, paved state trails serve about 1.2 million visitors each summer. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) administered a trail intercept survey to 1,561 visitors throughout the summer of 2019 to better understand visitor satisfaction, how they used state trails, their opinions on investment and funding, and their demographics. Below are key takeaways from the survey.



Root River State Trail

Visitor satisfaction

Given that providing high-quality experiences is a cornerstone of the DNR's efforts to attract new and current visitors to state trails, how satisfied are people with Minnesota state trails?

Overall, **trail users were highly satisfied** with their experiences. The majority were also satisfied with specific aspects of the trails, such as how well they were maintained and the availability of amenities, such as toilet facilities. Of those trail visitors who were not completely satisfied, the most common suggestion was the need to improve trail surface conditions, such as fixing potholes and cracks.

More than 90% of visitors reported being completely **satisfied** or very satisfied with their **overall experience**.



The most commonly suggested **improvement** was that **trail surface conditions** needed improving (e.g., potholes, cracks).

More than 90% of visitors indicated that **different aspects of state trails**, including trail maintenance, trail surface, and amenities were at least **acceptable**.



More than 80% of visitors reported that the **availability of trail amenities** was at least **acceptable**; 36% reported that **drinking water** availability was **poor** or very poor.

"DNR trails are a great resource for Minnesotans. Doing a great job!" – Gateway visitor



Characteristics of state trail trips

Minnesota state trails offer visitors hundreds of miles of paths to exercise, recreate, view nature, and relax. What activities do visitors participate in when they visit Minnesota state trails?

By far, **bicycling tops the list as the most popular activity**, especially among tourists. (We're defining "tourists" as those visitors who travel more than 50 miles to access a state trail or anyone who stays overnight at a public or private accommodation.) How far did visitors travel to reach a state trail? Nearly three-quarters of tourists traveled more than 100 miles to access a state trail and they spent, on average, \$525 per trip. In this survey, locals who visited the state trails outnumbered tourists three to one.



Paul Bunyan State Trail

75% of groups were **bicycling**, with the next highest activity being walking at 25%.



70% of tourists **traveled more than 100 miles** to access a state trail.

Tourists **spent** an average of \$525 on their trips to state trails, including transportation, lodging, food & beverages, and other trip-related costs.



72% of visitors were **locals**, meaning they lived within 50 miles of the trail; 28% were **tourists**.

"MN trails are FAR superior to those we've been on in other nearby Midwestern states. We are so proud of our state for investing in our bike trails, taking good care of them, and building new ones. We hope the state continues to value this wonderful asset. We are a really healthy couple [ages 60+] and credit the ease of access we have to so many great and safe bike trails. Thank you!"

– Sakatah Singing Hills visitor

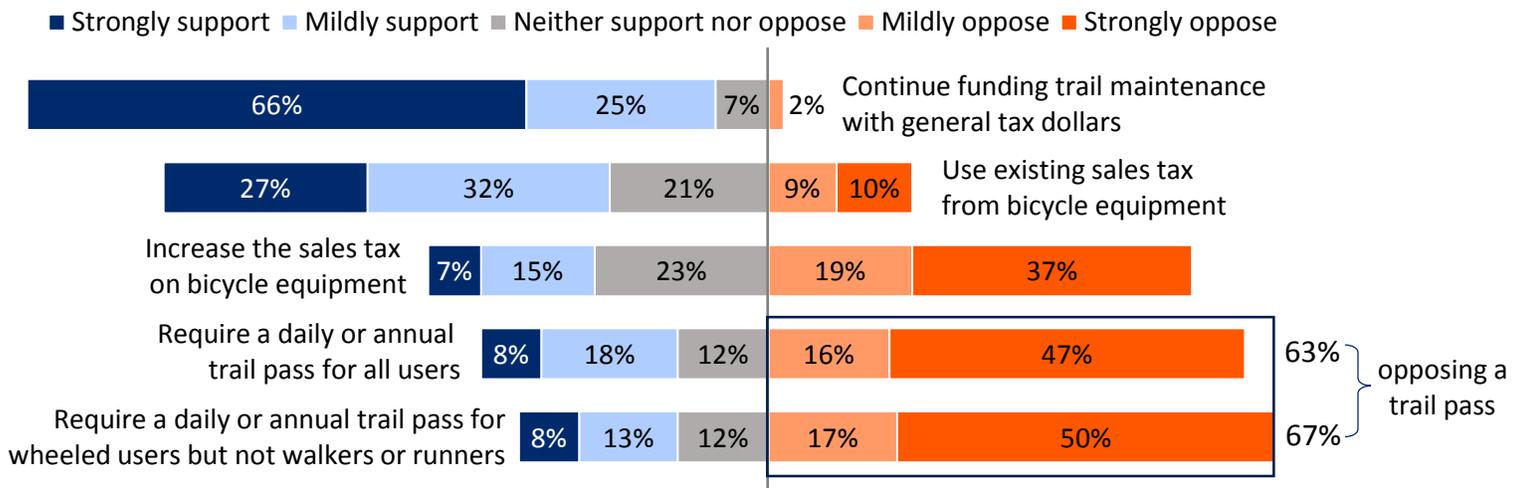
Investment and funding opinions

Currently, the DNR funds its state trail operations through the use of general tax dollars appropriated by the Minnesota legislature as well as revenue from lottery in-lieu-of-sales taxes. The funding helps the DNR maintain the physical condition of more than 1,300 miles of paved and natural trails and their associated amenities. Do visitors believe the DNR should invest in more trails? How should the DNR fund its trail operations?

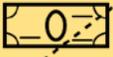
Overall, **the majority of visitors support the idea of building more trails and that the state should invest more in state trail maintenance.** When asked specifically where sources of funding should come from, the large majority of the visitors supported continuing funding state trail maintenance with general tax dollars. However, when asked about their opinions on other methods of funding, a majority of visitors opposed trail passes and an increase of sales taxes from bicycle equipment.

The idea of requiring an annual trail pass fee was viewed the most negatively, with 61% of respondents indicating that they would not use the trail or use the trail less often at a hypothetical cost of \$30 per year.

Funding



Note. Percentages may add up to more than 100% due to rounding.

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| <p>More than 90% of visitors mildly or strongly supported continuing funding state trail maintenance with general tax dollars.</p>  | <p>63% of visitors mildly or strongly oppose the requirement of a daily or annual pass.</p>  |
| <p>Overall, 84% of visitors mildly or strongly support the idea of building more trails, and 85% mildly or strongly support the idea that the state should invest more in state trail maintenance.</p>  | <p>59% of cyclists indicated that they would never use state trails or would use them less often with a \$30 annual fee.</p>  |

Characteristics of state trail visitors

As a public resource, Minnesota state trails serve as physical and mental health-promoting destinations for anyone who can reach them. Who uses Minnesota state trails?

The study results found that visitor demographics differ from the general Minnesota population. Compared to Minnesota's adult population, trail visitors were **older**, had **higher incomes**, **higher educational attainment**, and were much more likely to identify as **white**. Most visitors use the state trails alone or with one other person.

70% of adult trail visitors were **older than 45**, whereas 54% of Minnesotans are older than 45.



67% of adult trail visitors had a **bachelor's degree or higher**, compared to 35% of all Minnesotans.

95% of adult trail visitors identified their race as **white**, compared to 84% of all Minnesotans.



60% of visitors to state trails had household incomes **higher than \$75,000**, compared to 45% of all Minnesota households.

51% of trail visitors used the trail **alone**, and 37% were with **one other person**.



"Bicycle trails in MN are the reason I'm retiring in MN." – Paul Bunyan visitor



Left to Right: Douglas State Trail, Gitchi-Gami State Trail, Gateway State Trail

This summary presents highlights of the *2019 Minnesota State Trail Visitor Study*. The report and summary were prepared by Maria Robinson, Jacob Wascalus, and Edith Gozali-Lee of Wilder Research. For more information, contact the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources at 888-MINNDNR (646-6367) or info.dnr@state.mn.us.

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