



WASHINGTON STATE

Recreation and  
Conservation Office

## **2013–2018 WASHINGTON STATE TRAILS PLAN**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Washington State law (RCW 79A.35.040) requires the Recreation and Conservation Office director to prepare a state trails plan as part of the statewide outdoor recreation planning process. The plan is to help provide for the ever-increasing outdoor recreation needs of expanding resident and tourist populations and to enable and encourage the public to engage in outdoor recreation activities.

The 2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan meets the requirements of state law and is designed to provide a timely and much-needed update to the previous plan adopted in 1991. This plan offers strategic direction for establishing a system of state recreation trails in Washington State for the next 5 years. This plan is a separate but complementary plan designed to support the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) adopted in 2013 by providing specific guidance on trails route planning, designation, and coordination.

To this end, this planning process aims to achieve the following goals:

1. Measure the extent to which problems pointed out in the previous (1991) plan have been addressed.
2. Identify key issues and opportunities for meeting public demand for trails over the next 5 years.
3. Identify public needs and priorities for trail use.
4. Develop a compendium of current research on trails use, trends and public input.
5. Provide a framework for synchronizing the trails plan with the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
6. Provide a coordinated inventory of regional trails and planned trail routes.

Aligned with the overall goals of SCORP planning, the *2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan* acknowledges stakeholder priorities and makes recommendations that will, among other things, help guide state funding decisions for trails in Washington over the next 5 years.

### METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The methodology used to develop this *Trails Plan* was designed to ensure public participation in the planning process, to evaluate supply and demand, to identify key issues, and to assess public priorities and needs regarding trails in Washington.

A 40-member, broadly representative Trails Advisory Committee provided qualitative input by responding to three rounds of questions through an Internet discussion forum and participated in two web-based surveys.

More than 160 people provided over 297 comments on a public blog Web site known as the “Trails Town Hall.” They discussed issues related to trails and to the Nonhighway Road and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program.

Research for this plan also included a detailed analysis of data obtained for the SCORP: two web-based surveys of outdoor recreation providers, a large-scale scientific survey of Washington residents, and a literature review.

## **IMPORTANCE OF TRAILS**

The opportunity to use trails is an integral part of life in Washington State. Washington’s trails are an important asset that enables people access to the natural world for recreation, inspiration, and education. Trails provide many important benefits, including outdoor recreation, health and fitness, preservation of resources and open spaces, environmental value, educational value, economic value, and corridors for people and wildlife. Trails have a significant impact on quality-of-life in Washington.

As one of Washington’s valuable resources, it is important that trails are managed to support the demands and priorities of residents as well as natural, cultural, historical, and recreational values.

## **SUPPLY OF AND DEMAND FOR TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES**

Trail opportunities in Washington are in great demand. In fact, 72% of Washington State residents participate in outdoor activities that take place on or involve trails. Data in the SCORP was analyzed to determine participation in trails activities specifically, and showed 36 activities, grouped into 11 activity categories. This data shows that:

- 51% of Washington residents participate in hiking involving trails
- 40% participate in walking involving trails
- 24% participate in bicycle riding involving trails
- 17% participate in jogging or running involving trails
- 10% participate in off-roading involving trails
- 8% participate in camping or backpacking in a primitive location involving trails
- 7% participate in cross-country skiing or snowshoeing involving trails
- 4% participate in horseback riding involving trails
- 3% participate in snowmobiling or ATVing in the snow involving trails
- 2% participate in skating or skateboarding involving trails

Additionally, 12% of Washington residents participate in canoeing, kayaking, rowing, or other manual craft boating activities involving *water trails*.

To determine if supply is meeting demand, outdoor recreation providers were asked to estimate the percent of demand being met by outdoor recreation opportunities in the state. Providers ranked trail opportunities or activities low in terms of the percent of demand being met. Nearly all the trail opportunities or activities ranked lower than the other activities in the

SCORP, with all trail opportunities landing in the bottom 10%. Among the lowest ranked opportunities meeting demand overall (and specifically pertaining to trails) are designated snow and ice trails, designated motorized trails, and designated bridle trails.

## TRAIL ISSUES

The Trails Advisory Committee was asked to prioritize 87 problem statements related to 15 trails issue categories. This survey yielded a list of the top 20 problems related to trails (Table 1).

**Table 1. Top 20 Trail Problems for All Issue Categories Combined.**

Rank	Issue Category	Trail Problems (All scores were ranked by percent with 100% being the highest priority)	Mean <sup>1</sup>	Score <sup>2</sup>
1	Capacity	Existing trails are not being maintained, and many are being destroyed from overuse or improper use.	81.14	2,029
2	Multiple-Use Trails	Users often lack education on what is expected and what is permitted on multiple-use trails.	81.00	2,025
3	Maintenance	There is a general lack of funding for maintenance materials and staffing.	80.00	2,000
4	Water Trails	There is not a one-stop source for maps, amenities, campsites, topography, and other information on water trails and access sites.	77.33	1,933
5	Maintenance	Federal and state managers have extensive backlogs of trail maintenance needs.	76.00	1,900
6	Long Distance Trails and Trail Networks	Long distance trails are needed to link existing trails in the state's trails network.	75.00	1,875
7	Access	Trail closures and lack of maintenance have limited access to trails.	72.00	1,800
7	Multiple Use Land Management	Needs of natural resources, such as wildlife and wetlands, are sometimes perceived as excluding trails.	72.00	1,800
7	Private Lands and Private Concerns	Liability issues and concerns have caused private landowners, including timber companies and other large landowners, to close their lands to	72.00	1,800

<sup>1</sup> The mean shows where each problem would rank on average.

<sup>2</sup> The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. For the comparison of all problems, the score is the sum of the points given to each problem. The points were weighted to ensure uniformity among all the issue categories. For example, some issue categories only had 3 problems, whereas others had 11. The issue categories were weighted to match the category with the most problems in it to provide a comparison among all the problems presented in the survey

Rank	Issue Category	Trail Problems (All scores were ranked by percent with 100% being the highest priority)	Mean <sup>1</sup>	Score <sup>2</sup>
		the public.		
7	Water Trails	Self-guided routes lack facilities, including havens.	72.00	1,800
7	Urban Trails	Transportation issues are not sufficiently considered in trails development in urban areas, resulting in gaps between trails and mass transportation that could link safe routes to school, work, recreation areas, etc.	72.00	1,800
12	Volunteers	Managers sometimes lack skills, expertise, or resources to take advantage of volunteer resources.	70.00	1,750
13	Urban Trails	Urban trails sometimes lack linkages with the urban core, cultural and historical landmarks, and public transportation conveniences.	69.33	1,733
14	Trail Safety	There are concerns about the safety of some urban trails, including such concerns as security, safe parking, and minimizing criminal activity.	68.80	1,720
15	Volunteers	Volunteers lack awareness and information on volunteer opportunities, including whom to contact and how to get involved.	68.67	1,717
16	Use Compatibility	There are conflicts between different modes of recreation (e.g., equestrians and mountain bikers, hikers, and motorcyclists).	68.57	1,714
17	Communication	Real-time, easily accessible trails data, including maps, information on trails conditions, and trail closures, are limited.	68.00	1,700
17	Economics and Funding	There are many other needs (e.g., education, criminal justice) competing for government funding, making it difficult to prioritize trails funding.	68.00	1,700
17	Trail Safety	There are increasing concerns regarding parking lot safety and security.	68.00	1,700
20	Capacity	Growing populations and user demands are increasing pressure on all trail systems.	66.86	1,671

## FINDINGS AND RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 outlines key recommendations supported by the findings of the research. The sources of these recommendations come from the compilation of research conducted for the SCORP, online discussions with the Trails Advisory Committee and NOVA Advisory Group, the

two web-based surveys of the Trails Advisory Committee, the Trails Town Hall, and discussions with the RCO.

The six recommendations that follow are considered statewide priorities for the next 5 years and are necessary for supporting the other recommendations developed in this plan. Some recommendations apply to a range of trails service providers including state and federal agencies, local jurisdictions, and non-profit organizations.

See Chapter 5 for a complete listing of specific recommendations for each of the 15 trails issue categories.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #1: Develop a Web site that includes a regional trails inventory and provides links to other information about trails.**

The public is seeking a comprehensive and coordinated resource for information about trails. One approach is to develop a Web site that provides information regarding trails, trail locations, trail conditions, trail use, trail amenities, wildlife expectations, and many other information elements. Such a Web site would require coordination among state, federal, local jurisdictions, and non-profit trail providers.

The public noted that such a resource would not be a replacement for on-the-ground signage and trailhead information, nor would it be a replacement for real-time weather or trail conditions. Real-time trail users find these signs and information invaluable. While respondents clearly see a need for a central online source for trails information, both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors emphasized the importance of informative signage on trails and at trailheads.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #2: Improve data gathering among land managers to better understand trail use, users, and modes.**

Town Hall contributors indicated that land managers lack data to make informed decisions about trail capacity, funding, and resources. These contributors supported making trails development decisions based on real data. Currently, comprehensive measures of trail use do not exist, nor is data collected in consistent ways.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #3: Support efforts to find increased and/or sustainable revenue sources.**

Among both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors, funding was a top issue of concern. Many comments called for dedicated funding for trails, rather than reliance on grant funding, especially in light of the many priorities competing for limited funds.

Many felt that user groups, nonprofits, and others need to unite and present data-driven justification for a dedicated funding source for trails development, maintenance, and operations.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #4: Support the development of a trails leadership council or other coordinating forum for trails.**

Both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors emphasized the need to bring user groups together toward common goals. To this end, they suggested the development of a leadership council for trails. Many thought that by uniting toward common aims of improving, maintaining, and increasing trails throughout the state, user groups could foster more cooperation and collaboration.

Such a leadership council could unite trail users around common objectives, and assist with planning, policy recommendations, and funding priorities. A leadership group could provide two immediate benefits: 1) foster better relationships among user groups, and 2) develop a united constituency for trail issues.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #5: Focus on the maintenance of existing trails as a priority.**

Trail maintenance clearly emerged as a key issue among the public. In general, both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors agree that the use of existing trails should be maximized before focusing on the development of new trails. While stakeholders recognized that new trails may have to be developed to meet capacity demands, they were primarily concerned with ensuring that existing trails not fall into disrepair and become unusable.

These contributors agreed that trail planning should consider maintenance and be proactive rather than reactive. Any new trails development should anticipate trail usage and subsequent maintenance requirements, building into its goals and objectives a method or plan for handling maintenance issues.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #6: Encourage and support programs and initiatives focused on user conflict management.**

In the recently conducted SCORP survey, residents and user groups expressed concerns that opportunity for trail activities is unequally distributed among user groups, creating a sense of competition for access and resources. Still, while acknowledging these tensions, commenters called for cooperation and collaboration among user groups. The findings show that the public recognizes more can be gained by trails users working together.

Land managers recognize managing user conflicts is a priority due to the increased diversity of trail recreation activities combined with a limited supply of trails. They want to address user conflicts in order to improve user safety, protect natural resources, minimize crowding, and address threats to quality trails experiences.

Respondents from user groups recognize their own accountability and obligations to help manage user conflicts. They would like help facilitating and supporting user group efforts to manage or minimize user conflicts.

## **RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE ACTIONS**

As a major statewide funding partner for trails, the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) will strive to implement the following action items in response to the statewide trails plan recommendations. Note that statewide recommendations #3 and #6 are outside RCO's scope as a state funding agency and therefore do not apply directly to its core work.

### **RCO ACTION #1: Develop a Web page that is a clearinghouse for trails information.**

In response to statewide recommendation #1, RCO will develop a Web page dedicated to sharing information about trails throughout the state.

Ideas for the Web page include:

- A clearinghouse for trails-related information such as this plan, other state trails plans, and other planning information at the federal, state, or local level as provided by other parties.
- An inventory of regional trails, along with gaps or missing links in those regional trail systems. The inventory would include linked information on each regional trail with information and maps.
- Links to other sources of information about trails from federal, state agencies and local agencies and nonprofit organizations. These links would be a collection of resources where trail users find tools developed by others to plan their trail experiences.

### **RCO ACTION #2: Provide incentives, within existing resources, for grant applicants to submit trail data in consistent ways.**

While RCO grant programs require applicants to address trails use and need as part of the evaluation process, there is no standardized format of how trails data is collected. Some applicants have specific data on trails use and need while others have a general sense of need.

In response to statewide recommendation #2, RCO will revise its program policies to incentivize a consistent method for reporting trails use and need. The incentives will not be financial and must be within the existing funding resources. The use of this information would be to help prioritize funding investments.

### **RCO ACTION #3: Encourage and assist, within existing resources, with the coordination of statewide trails coordinating organization.**

In response to statewide recommendation #4, RCO will, within existing staff and funding resources, provide staff support to assist with and coordinate a statewide trails organization. While RCO staff resources are limited and the agency cannot take an advocacy role, it may provide limited support to an organization that is working towards implementing this plan's recommendations on a statewide level.

**RCO ACTION #4: Support funding for maintenance of trails.**

Two of RCO's grant programs allow for maintenance of trails as a grant project (Nonhighway Off-road Vehicle Activities program and Recreational Trails Program). In response to statewide recommendation #5, RCO will review funding patterns to determine whether the agency is adequately supporting maintenance of trails.

As part of this review, RCO is recommending incorporating the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's sustainability policy recommendations into its trails program priorities and adjust the evaluation criteria to incentivize sustainable design and maintenance goals.

**RCO ACTION #5: Prioritize funding for trail uses identified as being "in demand" in this trail plan and evaluate whether to develop and designate a system of state recreation trails as referenced in RCW 79A.35.**

In response to the public survey on supply and demand for trails, RCO will review grant award results to determine whether the agency is adequately supporting the types of trails identified as in demand. These are:

- Hiking, walking, biking
- Urban and suburban locations
- Access for traditionally underserved groups, including people with disabilities; people representing a variety of age groups, and minority populations.

In addition, RCO will evaluate whether to develop and designate a system of state recreation trails as referenced in RCW 79A.35 and whether trails so designated should receive preference in grant funding. As part of this evaluation, the RCO will consider the feasibility of developing:

- A method for establishing a state system of recreation trails,
- A process to propose trails into the system,
- An inventory of existing trails and potential trail routes for designation as state recreation trails, and
- Adjustments to program funding priorities to increase access to the statewide system of trails.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ask people who recreate in Washington about their experiences, and more often than not, their experiences will involve trails. In fact, 72% of Washington State residents participate in outdoor activities taking place on or involving trails, and this does not include the many visitors from other states who also use Washington's trails.

The state offers more than 12,000 miles of trails (RCO, 2001), providing ideal places for participating in diverse outdoor recreation opportunities. From participation in traditional activities such as hiking, walking, and horseback riding on trails to the pursuit of mountain biking and off-roading experiences, Washington's trails offer something for everyone.

Public interest in trail issues and legislation affecting these issues has increased during the past decade. However, the most recent statewide trails plan was developed by the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) in 1991. This plan was comprehensive, and it set forth recommendations for meeting residents' needs for state recreation trails, including more than 25 action items.

The Recreation and Conservation Funding Board, recognizing the need for an updated trails plan to guide state decision-making into the future, committed the resources to develop this *2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan*.

## HISTORY OF TRAILS PLANS AND PLANNING

### Local and Regional

City and county planning often includes trail and bike plans. In 2005, Washington's legislature affirmed the importance of local trails and pedestrian networks with the passage of Chapter 360 of Session Laws 2005. This law affected trails and trails planning by requiring communities to consider promoting physical activity and nonmotorized transportation in their comprehensive plans. The law also encourages collaboration between government and the private sector to provide free, accessible opportunities to exercise.

### State

The Washington State Recreation Trails System Act (RCW 79A.35, enacted in 1971 and amended over the years, provides for the planning of a statewide trail system that coordinates existing and proposed trails plans of federal, state, and local agencies within the state. A provision of this law authorized the participation of volunteer organizations in the construction and maintenance of public trails.

Using the authority granted in 79A.35, the Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC, now RCO) designated the state's first and only State Recreation Trail, the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route in 1978.

In 1991, the first and only Washington State trails plan was mandated by the legislature as an element of that year's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).<sup>3</sup> The IAC (now RCO) produced the *1991 State Trails Plan*. It provides a vision, goals, and objectives for a statewide trails system. The 1991 plan includes statistical data regarding trails and trail use; a policy and action document with the findings, issues, goals, and actions; and a technical assistance manual. It also identifies a proposed framework for greenway trails, long distance hiking trails, and water trails along with strategies to address issues encountered by stakeholders and managing entities.

Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) transportation plans include planning for pedestrian and bicycle paths. WSDOT's provides funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects that support its [Washington State Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan \(2008-2027\)](#). The agency also funds projects, including the state and federally funded Safe Routes to School grant program.

Since 1972, the Washington Department of Ecology has administered the Shoreline Master Program, a statewide framework for managing, accessing, and protecting the 28,204 miles of shorelines in Washington. This program provides guidelines on trails management and access in shoreline areas in Washington's 15 coastal counties.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission adopted *Centennial 2013* in 2003. It is a strategic plan and vision for the future of State Parks. All three of the plan's priorities acknowledge the importance of trails. The Commission pledged to maintain the state parks' current quality, including facilities; to upgrade existing parks, trails and services, and to add new trails and parks in the future. Included in the plan is a call to action that invites "communities and organizations to donate time, labor, and funds to help complete 100 improvement projects."

## Federal

The U.S. Department of the Interior's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program is the community assistance arm of the National Park Service. The program supports community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation projects by providing experienced facilitators with relevant expertise. In 2012, RTCA played an integral role in the development of Spokane's regional trails plan, among other projects. In 2013, RTCA is assisting with 14 projects across Washington, including the development of open space in the Central Puget Sound region, specific trail development in Cowlitz County and the Columbia Gorge, and regional mapping for potential greenway development in Seattle.

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<sup>3</sup> The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is a state and federally mandated requirement for the development of a 5-year outdoor recreation management, conservation, and development plan. To be eligible for Land and Water Conservation Fund grants, each state is required to prepare a SCORP. The SCORP provides a plan for meeting public demand and determining priorities for the acquisition, renovation, and development of recreational resources.

*America's Great Outdoors Initiative: A Promise to Future Americans*, launched in 2011, affirmed public lands and waters as invaluable assets. Trails acquisition, improvement, and management are among its objectives. Two projects in Washington were selected as showcase investments, to help fulfill the initiative's goals "to reconnect Americans to the natural world through parks, trails, and rivers and to conserve and restore working lands and wildlife habitat" and "to create jobs through travel, tourism, and outdoor recreation activities."

The two projects are:

- The Pacific Northwest Trail – Olympic Discovery Trail Convergence, which ties together 1,200 miles of national, state, and local trails, including the 120-mile Olympic Discovery Trail, connecting the cities of Sequim and Port Angeles to the Sequim Bay Area. An additional 120 miles of trail are planned.
- The Lower Columbia River Water Trail, managed by the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership, which travels through inland Washington along 146 miles of the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean. The goal of the project is a Water Trail along the Columbia River's entire length through Washington and designation as a National Water Trail.

Other federal programs that support trails in Washington State include the:

- Recreational Trail Program (Federal Highways Administration funding administered by RCO);
- Land and Water Conservation Fund (National Park Service funding administered by RCO);
- National, Scenic and Historic Trails program (National Park Service).

## **PURPOSE OF THE 2013-2018 WASHINGTON STATE TRAILS PLAN**

The 2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan meets the requirement of RCW 79A.35.040 and is designed to provide a timely and much-needed update to the previous plan adopted in 1991. This plan offers strategic direction for establishing a system of state recreation trails in Washington State for the next 5 years. This plan is a separate but complementary plan designed to support the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) adopted in 2013 by providing specific guidance on trails route planning, designation and coordination.

To this end, this planning process aims to achieve the following goals:

1. Measure the extent to which problems pointed out in the previous (1991) plan have been addressed.
2. Identify key issues and opportunities for meeting public demand for trails over the next 5 years.
3. Identify public needs and priorities for trail use.

4. Develop a compendium of current research on trails use, trends and public input.
5. Provide a framework for synchronizing the trails plan with the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP).
6. Provide a coordinated inventory of regional trails and planned trail routes.

Aligned with the overall goals of SCORP planning, the *2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan* acknowledges stakeholder priorities and makes recommendations that will, among other things, help guide state funding decisions for trails in Washington over the next 5 years.

## OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

The methodology used to develop this *Trails Plan* was designed to ensure public participation in the planning process, to evaluate trail supply and demand, to identify key trail issues, and to assess public priorities and needs regarding trails in Washington.

After a competitive bid process, RCO contracted with Responsive Management, which performed the research for this plan.

### Public Participation

Public and stakeholder participation was conducted in three ways in developing this plan: 1) ad-hoc Trails Advisory Committee, 2) Trails Town Hall discussion on the Web, and 3) telephone survey data.

To ensure adequate stakeholder participation in the trails planning process, Responsive Management convened a 40-member Trails Advisory Committee. This group consisted of representatives from existing RCO standing committees and key stakeholders from throughout the state with expertise in different topic areas. Committee members provided qualitative input through an Internet discussion board, which posed three rounds of questions for feedback and response.

The Trails Advisory Committee also participated in two Web-based surveys about trail issues. The purpose of the first survey was to evaluate the effectiveness and level of achievement of the 1991 plan. This survey explored the recommendations from that plan and assessed progress toward meeting its goals. The researchers conducted this survey in May 2013 and 100% of the committee members responded.

In the second survey, the Trails Advisory Committee identified new and emerging trail issues as well as public priorities for updating the trails plan. The second survey was conducted in July and August 2013, and 63% of the committee members responded.

More than 160 people provided over 297 comments on a public blog Web site known as the "Trails Town Hall" (hereafter referred to as the Town Hall). They discussed issues related to trails and the Nonhighway Road and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program.

The researchers' analyzed data collected from a telephone survey of Washington residents, conducted for the 2013 SCORP, to provide specific results regarding trails in Washington. A full report on the findings of the Trails Advisory Committee, the NOVA Advisory Group, and the Town Hall are included in Appendix A.

### **Evaluating Supply of and Demand for Trails**

The researchers analyzed data collected from two web-based surveys of outdoor recreation providers performed for the SCORP to assess trails supply and demand. One survey was of local recreation providers, and the other survey was of federal and state government agencies, tribal governments, and nonprofit organizations. The contractors contacted respondents a minimum of five times (three e-mails and two rounds of telephone follow-up calls) from July to October 2012. Providers statewide completed 213 questionnaires. The contractors used the findings from these surveys to evaluate supply.

Similarly, for the 2013 SCORP, the researchers conducted a large-scale scientific survey of Washington residents to assess their participation in recreation, their future needs for recreation, their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities, their issues of concern, and any constraints they had in participating in outdoor recreation in Washington. The researchers obtained 3,114 completed surveys of residents statewide age 18 years and older between August to October 2012. The researchers analyzed these findings for quantitative data related specifically to trails supply and demand.

### **Identifying Key Issues Regarding Trails**

The first survey of the Trails Advisory Committee assessed opinions on the 15 trails issue categories identified in the 1991 plan as well as 3 additional topics for a total of 18 key issues. For the second survey, issue categories were combined or removed, resulting in a total of 15 issue categories and 87 trail problems addressed in the current plan.

Key issues addressed in this Trails Plan are shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Key Issues Addressed in the 2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan.**

Access	Private lands and private concerns
Capacity	Rail-trails and utility corridors
Communication	Use compatibility
Economics and funding	Volunteers
Long distance trails and trails networks	Water trails
Maintenance	Urban trails
Multiple-use land management	Trail safety
Multiple-use trails	

## DEFINING TRAILS

Any discussion about trails should begin with a definition. Trails encompass much more than the backcountry and wilderness trails that traditionally come to mind. Increasing urbanization has seen a rise in urban and suburban trails designed not only to provide scenic and recreational value, but also to offer a safe means of transportation. As noted by members of the Trails Advisory Committee, trails are becoming a hybrid of conditions rather than linear, dedicated corridors for recreation.

To assess the accuracy of the definitions proposed in the *1991 Washington State Trails Plan*, the researchers asked the Trails Advisory Committee their opinions about the 1991 definition.

The *1991 Washington State Trails Plan* provides the following definitions for trails:

**A trail is...**

. . . a path, route, way, right-of-way, or corridor posted, signed, or designated as open for travel or passage by the general public but not normally designated as open for the transportation of commercial goods or services by motorized vehicles. [First part]

. . . an opportunity to experience solitude or companionship, recreation or challenge; an opportunity for the appreciation of nature; a means of achieving renewal of body, mind, and spirit. [Second part]

When asked about the first part of the definition of trails, the majority of members of the Trails Advisory Committee appear satisfied: 17% rated this definition excellent, 52% rated it good, 29% rated it fair, and 2% rated it poor (Figure 1.1).

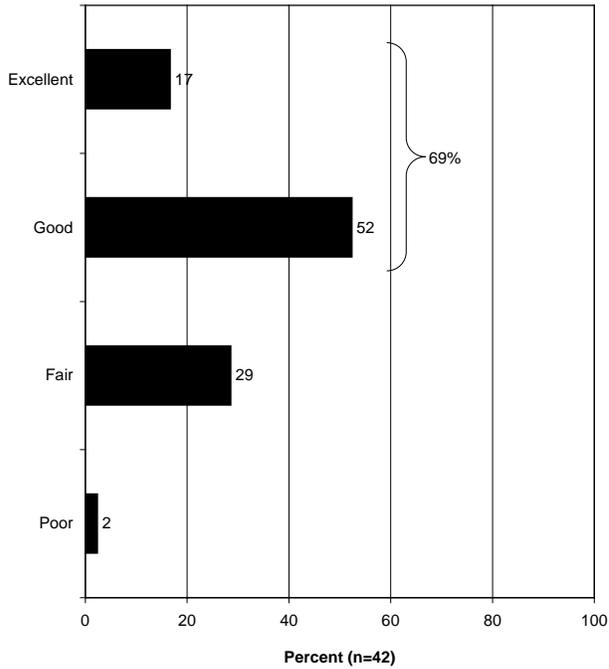
Among those who did not rate the first part of the definition as excellent, the top reasons for not doing so were because it is too complicated (25%), too confusing (22%), not inclusive enough (19%), or for other reasons (25%) (Figure 1.2).

Other reasons given included concerns about there being no reference to the importance of trails as a corridor for habitat, as providing open space, and as a resource for recreation. Others had concerns with the definition citing trails as being “signed,” since many trails do not have signs or are used on private properties and easements (Table 1.2). These results suggest that minor revisions may be considered to improve this definition of trails.

**Figure 1.1. Ratings of the First Part of the Definition of Trails.**

Ratings of the 1991 Trails Plan's first definition of trails:

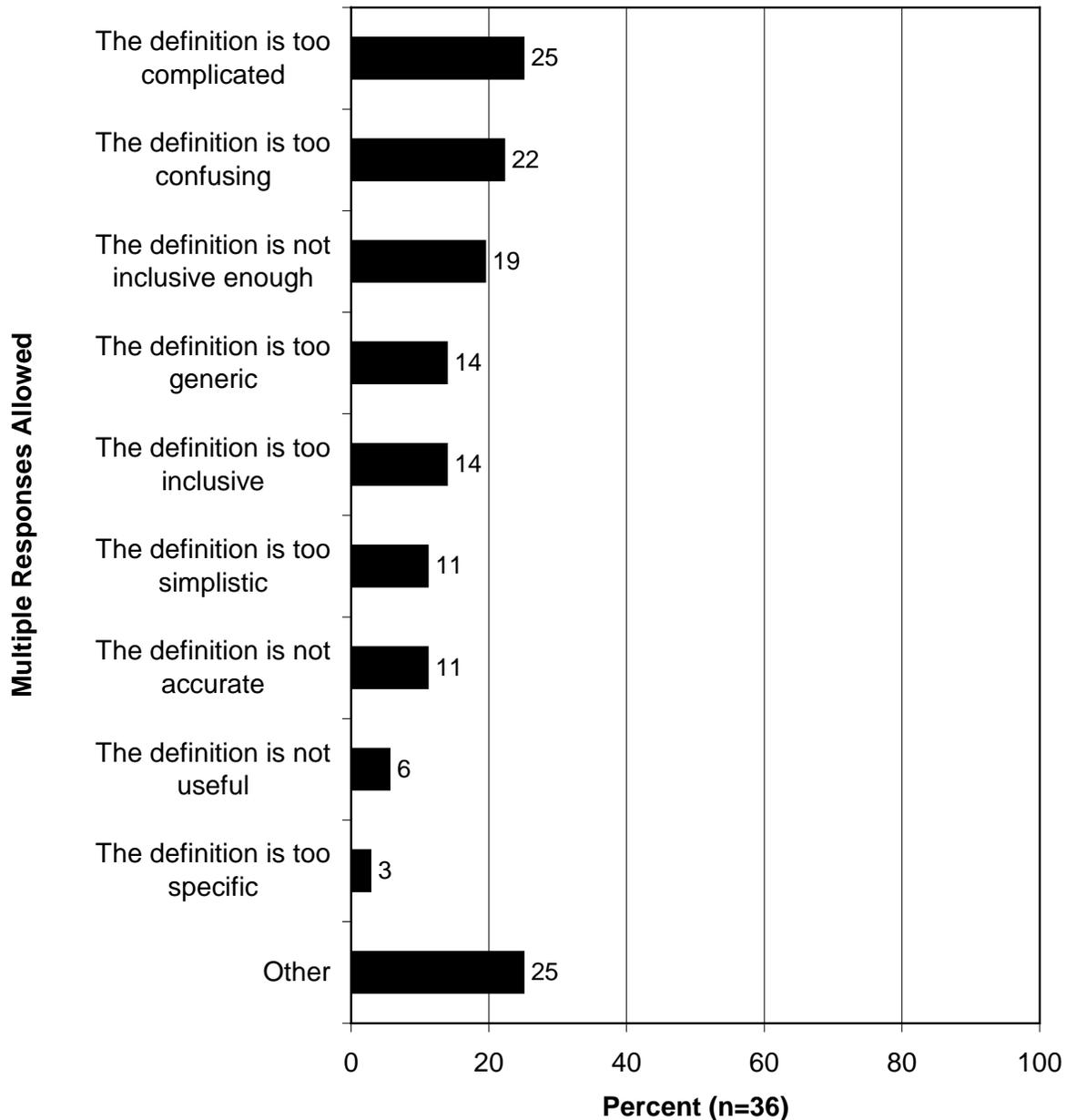
**“... a path, route, way, right-of-way, or corridor posted, signed, or designated as open for travel or passage by the general public but not normally designated as open for the transportation of commercial goods or services by motorized vehicles.”**



**Figure 1.2. Reasons for Not Rating the First Part of the Definition of Trails as Excellent.**

**1991 State Trails Plan's first definition of trails: "... a path, route, way, right-of-way, or corridor posted, signed, or designated as open for travel or passage by the general public but not normally designated as open for the transportation of commercial goods or services by motorized vehicles."**

**Why didn't you rate this definition higher?  
(Asked of those who rated the first definition good, fair, or poor)**



**Table 1.2. Other Reasons for Not Rating the First Part of the Definition of Trails as Excellent.**

<b>Other Reasons (open-ended response)</b>
The definition should include how the public uses the trail.
Trails are used on private property also; easements are included.
Many trails are not signed, but they're still trails.
It's fine. I don't know how you would make it better.
Good enough.
Does not include the word "recreation".
Add corridor for habitat - open space.
The definition should exclude all motorized vehicles for any purpose other than trail maintenance and emergencies.

When asked about the second part of the definition, the Trails Advisory Committee's opinions were mixed: 29% rated this definition excellent, 26% rated it good, 26% rated it fair, and 19% rated it poor (Figure 1.3).

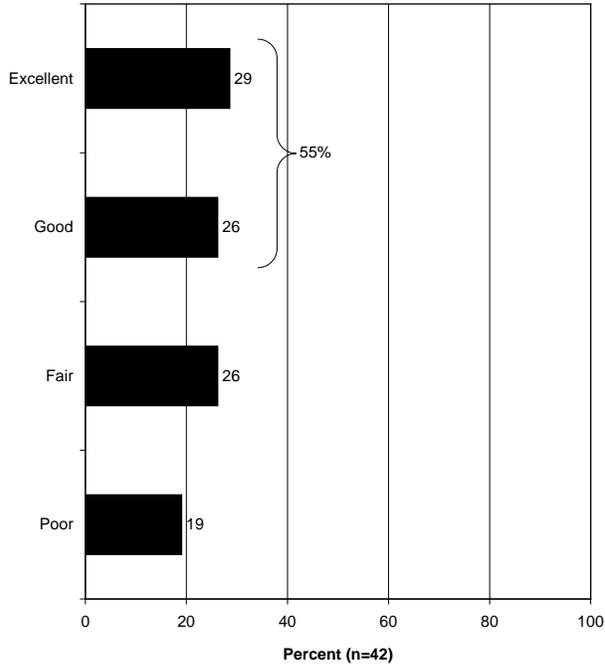
When asked why they did not rate the second part of the definition as excellent, committee members most often cited that the definition is not inclusive enough (29%), not useful (29%), too generic (23%), or too complicated (19%).

However, more than a third of respondents (35%) gave other reasons for not rating the second part of the definition higher (Figure 1.4). In general, committee members felt that the second part of the definition does not consider the importance of trails as transportation; more than half of the respondents who listed other reasons mentioned the importance of transportation, commuting, safe routes to schools, and other utilitarian values of trails (Table 1.3).

**Figure 1.3. Ratings of the Second Part of the Definition of Trails.**

Ratings of the 1991 Trails Plan's second definition of trails:

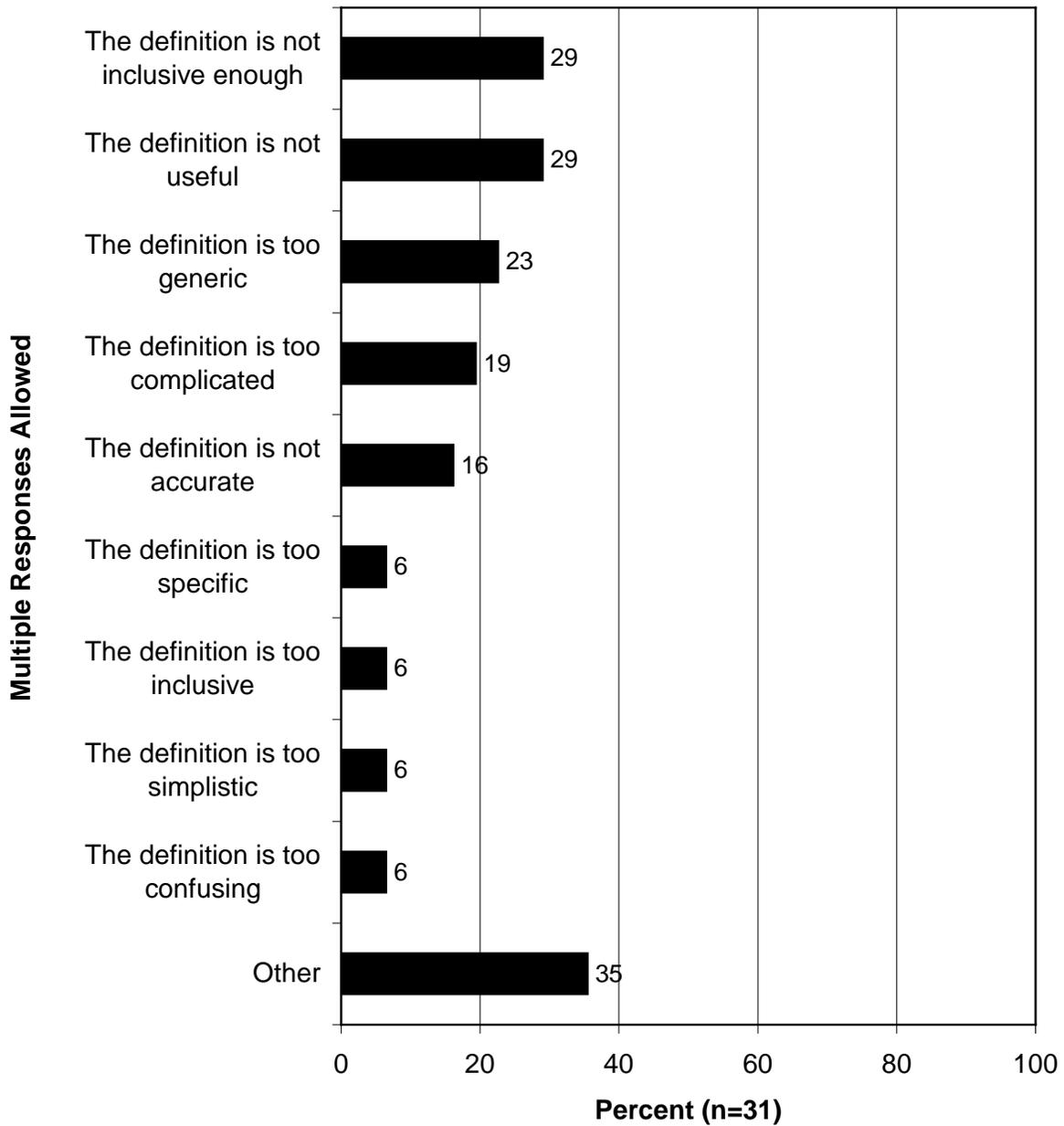
**"...an opportunity to experience solitude or companionship, recreation or challenge; an opportunity for the appreciation of nature; a means of achieving renewal of body, mind, and spirit."**



**Figure 1.4. Reasons for Not Rating the Second Part of the Definition of Trails as Excellent.**

**1991 State Trails Plan's second definition of trails: "...an opportunity to experience solitude or companionship, recreation or challenge; an opportunity for the appreciation of nature; a means of achieving renewal of body, mind, and spirit."**

**Why didn't you rate this definition higher?  
(Asked of those who rated the second definition good, fair, or poor)**



**Table 1.3. Other Reasons for Not Rating the Second Part of the Definition of Trails as Excellent.**

<b>Other Reasons (open-ended response)</b>
Transportation and links to mass transportation, safe routes to schools.
Everything in the definition can be had without a trail.
This is referring to nature/wilderness trails only.
Leaves out transportation.
Inspiring but needs to include practicalities of nonmotorized transportation; these aren't just recreational trails.
There are utilitarian uses for trails as well such as commuting; accessibility and mobility are important.
Can also be for transportation.
Could be slightly simplified.
Describes the experience not what defines a trail.
Philosophical.
Needs to mention that trails can also serve a transportation function, an alternative to traveling along or next to busy roadways.

To further understand opinions regarding the state's definition of trails, the researchers solicited comments through the Trails Advisory Committee and NOVA Advisory Group Internet forums. These comments helped provide a better understanding of the concerns that the committee members have with the current definition of trails.

Again, the comments from the forums showed that many of the members agree that the first part of the definition provides a concrete, objective definition of trails, while the second part of the definition presents challenges. Several committee members found that the second part of the definition was inappropriate because, rather than providing an objective definition, it attempts to assign a value judgment to the type of experience that a person must have on trails. Committee members noted that experience is subjective and depends on an individual's personal values and belief systems.

The consensus is that the second part of the definition appears to focus primarily on recreational, wilderness trails without considering the utility of trails as a means of transportation. These results suggest that a revision to the second part of the definition of trails may need to be considered and should highlight both the recreational and utilitarian value of trails in Washington.

While the current plan does not attempt to redefine trails, this may be a useful consideration in the future as trails use continues to expand and include increasingly diverse functions and activities.

## **IMPORTANCE OF TRAILS IN WASHINGTON**

Washington residents benefit tremendously from trail opportunities in the state. Washington's trails are an important asset and the following section highlights some of the major benefits of trails.

### **Diverse Outdoor Recreation Opportunities**

Trails vary in their setting, from remote wilderness areas to easily accessible urban trails with convenient facilities such as restrooms and picnic tables. Washington offers more than 12,000 miles of trails providing diverse opportunities to Washington residents and tourists.

The range of possible experiences include cross-country skiing on the Methow Community Trail in Okanogan County, biking along the scenic Burke-Gilman Trail through Seattle, snowmobiling on groomed state park trails near Fish Lake, kayaking in the Columbia River Gorge, or biking single-track at Devil's Gulch in western Washington.

### **Health and Fitness**

Trails play an important role in keeping Washington residents active. Trails often support active recreation, such as running, biking, hiking, and walking, that help improve overall health and fitness. The significant benefits of physical activity include helping to control weight and blood pressure and reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes, heart attack, and colon cancer. Participation in physical activity also helps improve mental health, reducing the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Many traditional active recreation opportunities on trails provide easy and convenient ways of staying active.

### **Preservation of Resources and Open Spaces**

Trails help land managers control access to sensitive habitats for native vegetation and wildlife. Trails prevent degradation by delineating a common route and they provide corridors where people and wildlife can move.

Trails often provide open space for educational, conservation, or recreational purposes. By definition, open spaces are lands left primarily in a natural state to protect their natural, aesthetic, historic, or cultural features. As such, open spaces are permanently protected from development and offer access to natural resources, while simultaneously helping to preserve environmental and ecological systems. These spaces serve the important purpose of helping to maintain natural resources, landscape, wildlife, and wildlife habitat.

Communities throughout the United States are recognizing the importance of trails and open space. Trails are now often built into housing developments to help create urban open space and provide city residents a reprieve from urban congestion. Trails can offer access to recreation activities that urban residents might not otherwise experience due to the distance, inconvenience, and expense of traveling to rural and backcountry recreation.

## **Environmental Value**

Trails offer numerous environmental benefits, the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat perhaps the most important. Trails provide buffers in sensitive habitats such as wetlands, forests, and riparian zones. By directing human access on to pathways, bridges, and boardwalks, trails afford users an opportunity to explore and appreciate scenic areas and wildlife habitat while also protecting environmentally sensitive areas. Use of urban trails also has direct environmental impacts since biking or walking can help reduce carbon emissions, fossil fuel use, and air pollution.

## **Educational Value**

Trails help support environmental education by allowing experiential learning about Washington's natural, cultural, historical, and recreational heritage. Trails can be used to teach both adults and children about wildlife, wildlife habitat, ecosystems, biodiversity, and other environmental concepts through direct exposure, exploration, observation, and investigation. Interpretive trails—those designed to include signage and additional natural, cultural, historical, and recreational information—educate users with information on plants and animals, history, land use, environmental issues, geology, conservation and management, and other topics.

## **Economic Value**

Trails have a significant impact on local and national economies.

Several studies showed that nearby parks, trails, or open spaces helped increase residential property value. The level of the economic impact was influenced by the home's distance from the open space, the size of the park or space, and the characteristics of the neighborhood.

The study found that homes in Portland, Oregon, within 1,500 feet of a park or open space had an increased sale price of between \$845 and \$2,262. Similarly, "Homes located within 1,500 feet of natural forest areas enjoyed statistically significant property premiums, an average of \$10,648, compared to \$1,214 for urban parks, \$5,657 for specialty parks and \$8,849 for golf courses (in 1990 dollars)."

The research also shows that trails and open spaces in urban areas tend to have increase economic benefit to surrounding property owners. These homes are often assessed higher, resulting in higher property tax revenues for municipal governments. Additionally, walkable development helps lower infrastructure costs in several ways, including savings on roads, schools, utilities, and the benefits of retaining agricultural lands.

Indirect economic benefits related to trails include tourism, community improvement, and healthcare cost savings. Tourists using trails spend money in areas nearby. Community improvement occurs when safe trail routes to school and work foster communities where people want to live and encourage economic activity. Healthcare costs can decline because

active recreation opportunities on trails can reduce obesity and the diseases often attributed to a sedentary lifestyle.

### **Corridors for People and Wildlife**

Trails can provide convenient corridors and methods of transportation for both people and wildlife. By providing opportunities to walk or bike to school, work, and community centers these routes offer safe and convenient travel and minimize exposure to roadway congestion.

As the Washington landscape becomes increasingly urbanized and developed, wildlife has a more difficult time traveling freely through fragmented habitat. This can isolate animals and poses a danger to healthy populations of many wildlife species. Trails allow wildlife to move freely and safely from one area to another, especially through urban areas, where they provide important corridors for avoiding roads and congested areas, and population centers.

### **Summary of Trail Benefits**

These benefits show that trails have a significant impact on quality-of-life in Washington State. They provide abundant opportunities for residents to enjoy the scenery, wildlife, and natural beauty of the state's various ecosystems. Furthermore, these opportunities suit any lifestyle, fulfilling some transportation needs and providing natural wilderness areas for leisure, recreation, and education. With changing demographics, such as increasing populations, aging populations, and growing diversity, the research suggests that trail use will only increase because trails are perhaps the most versatile of recreation resources, providing something for everyone.

## **CHAPTER 2: ASSESSMENT OF TRAIL SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN WASHINGTON**

### **SUPPLY OF TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES**

Washington has about 12,000 miles of trails, according to the *1999 Public and Tribal Lands Inventory* (RCO, 2001). Agencies maintain information about their own trail systems, and regional and metropolitan trails plans also provide localized information about trails systems. The National Recreation Trails database provides information on 48 trails in Washington that have been designated as exemplary trails of local and regional significance.

Many different types of trails are available to residents and visitors in Washington. These include greenways, water trails, bicycle routes, and multiple-use trails, as well as those developed for specific uses, such as for off-road vehicles, mountain bikes, or horses. Many of Washington's high country trails are inaccessible in the winter, or modified for seasonal uses, such as for snowmobiling or cross country skiing.

Long-distance trails traverse Washington. The John Wayne Pioneer Trail, the fourth-longest rail trail in the country, links the Columbia River and the Cascade Mountains. The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, which runs between the borders of Mexico and Canada, passes through two National Parks and four National Forests in Washington. The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail reaches its westward end in Astoria, linking nearly 3,700 miles of historic sites and recreational opportunities.

### **Trails and Land Management**

More than 8,000 miles of trails occur on the estimated 10 million acres of U.S. Forest Service lands in Washington. Colville, Gifford Pinchot, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, Okanogan and Wenatchee, and Olympic National Forests are located entirely in Washington, while portions of the Umatilla and Kaniksu National Forests are shared with Oregon and Idaho, respectively (USDA Land Area Reports).

The National Park Service manages about 1,500 miles of trail in the North Cascades, Mount Rainier, and Olympic National Parks. State lands host about 1,600 miles of trail, primarily on Washington Department of Natural Resources and Washington State Parks properties. The Washington Department of Transportation also provides paths and routes, with a small percentage of construction programs devoted by state law (RCW Chapter 47.30) to paths and trails. Washington Department of Transportation trails are usually in the form of widened highway shoulders that are used primarily by bicyclists. Small percentages of trails are also maintained the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Ecology, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A variety of private and non-governmental organizations also manage trails. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) lists 74 trails covering 1,016 miles in Washington (2013). In addition, the

Columbia River Gorge Commission manages the 80-mile Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area along the border of Washington and Oregon.

The balance of the estimated inventory is managed by local agencies. Counties, cities, and towns provide fewer trail miles than other agencies, but these trails, like the Burke-Gilman Trail in Seattle and the Spokane River Centennial Trail, are highly used because of their proximity to population centers. These trails also link separate trails systems managed by other agencies.

Water trails, also known as blueways, are marked routes on navigable waterways, such as rivers, lakes, canals, and coastlines, for paddlers in nonmotorized boats. Washington has seven designated water trails (Washington Water Trails Association, 2013):

- *Cascadia Marine Trail*: This marine trail has been designated one of only 16 National Millennium Trails by the federal government. This saltwater trail stretches over 140 miles, from the Canadian border on the north to southernmost Puget Sound near Olympia. The trail offers 58 campsites for overnight visits.
- *Kitsap Peninsula Water Trail*: This water trail offers 350 miles of saltwater shoreline on western Puget Sound and Hood Canal.
- *Lakes-to-Locks Water Trail*: This day-use water trail winds through the interior waterways of metropolitan Seattle and includes the Sammamish, Washington, and Union lakes as well as the Hiram M. Chittenden Locks where fresh water meets salt water. The Lakes-to-Locks Water Trail offers more than 100 miles of shoreline and 120 access sites.
- *Willapa Bay Water Trail*: This trail stretches along the southwest coast from Tokeland Marina to Cape Disappointment State Park, providing spectacular views of sandy beaches, dune grasslands, coastal pine forests, and wildlife at play.
- *Lower Columbia*: The Lower Columbia River Water Trail is a 146-mile, bi-state trail spanning the tidally influenced river waters from the Bonneville Dam to the Pacific Ocean.
- *Northwest Discovery*: The Northwest Discovery Water Trail links the Clearwater River in Idaho, the Snake River in Idaho and Washington, and the Columbia River in both Washington and Oregon. The majority of the 367-mile water trail is in eastern Washington State. Bonneville Dam links the Northwest Discovery and Lower Columbia River Water Trails, together offering more than 500 miles of navigable water.
- *Pend Oreille River Water Trail*: Located in the northeastern part of the state, this water trail runs from Idaho to just one mile shy of British Columbia, Canada.

## **DEMAND FOR TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES**

With 72% of Washington State residents participating in outdoor activities taking place on or involving trails, there is great demand for trail opportunities in Washington.

For this assessment, the researchers' analyzed data collected for the SCORP to determine participation in trail activities specifically. As a whole, trail activities in the resident survey conducted encompassed 36 activities, grouped into 11 activity categories.

The results show that:

- 51% of Washington residents participate in hiking involving trails
- 40% participate in walking involving trails
- 24% participate in bicycle riding involving trails
- 17% participate in jogging or running involving trails
- 10% participate in off-roading involving trails
- 8% participate in camping or backpacking in a primitive location involving trails
- 7% participate in cross-country skiing or snowshoeing involving trails
- 4% participate in horseback riding involving trails
- 3% participate in snowmobiling or ATViing in the snow involving trails
- 2% participate in skating or skateboarding involving trails

Additionally, 12% of Washington residents participate in canoeing, kayaking, rowing, or other manual craft boating activities involving *water trails*. However, because water trails differ considerably from land trails, this user group is not included in the overall 72% of Washington residents who participate in trail-related outdoor recreational activities. With water activities, it is difficult to determine if the activity actually occurred on a water trail.

As shown in Table 2.1, the top-ranked trail activities include hiking, walking, and bicycle riding. Residents spend a mean number of 17.1 days hiking, 97.8 days walking, and 35.5 days bicycle riding on trails.

The full listing of trail-related activity participation rates, including participation by specific types of trails, is shown in Table 2.2.a. and Table 2.2.b.

**Table 2.1. Washington Residents' Participation in the Trail Activity Categories (Ranked Highest to Lowest).**

Rank in Importance (based on participation)	Activity Category	Percent of Residents Participating	Mean Days of Participation
1	Hiking—Trails	51	17.1
2	Walking on Trails	40	97.8
3	Bicycle Riding—Trails	24	35.5
4	Jogging or Running—Trails	17	66
5	Boating—Canoeing, Kayaking, Rowing, Manual Craft	12	NA*
6	Any Off-Road Activity Involving Trails (includes Motorcycle, ATV/Dune Buggy, and 4-Wheel Drive Vehicle subcategories)	10	25.7
7	Camping—Backpacking/Primitive Location	8	10.6
8	Cross-Country Skiing or Snowshoeing—Established Public/Private Trails	7	7.54
9	Horseback Riding—Trails	4	31.9
10	Snowmobiling or ATVing in the Snow—Established Public/Private Trails	3	11.3
11	Skating or Skateboarding Activities Involving Trails	2	24.3

\*Mean days for boating activities could not be calculated based on the SCORP results because days of participation were not obtained for each specific boating activity.

**Table 2.2. Participation Rates in Trail Activities in Washington.**

Activity	Percent of Residents in Washington State Participating in the Activity
<b>Any Recreational Activity Involving Trails*</b>	<b>72.4</b>
<b>Hiking—Trails</b>	<b>51.0</b>
Hiking—Urban Trails	17.5
Hiking—Rural Trails	18.5
Hiking—Mountain or Forest Trails	36.4
<b>Walking on Trails</b>	<b>39.8</b>
Walking With a Pet—Park or Trail Setting	15.5
Walking Without a Pet—Park or Trail Setting	35.3
<b>Bicycle Riding—Trails</b>	<b>24.4</b>
Bicycle Riding—Urban Trails	17.3
Bicycle Riding—Rural Trails	10.8
Bicycle Riding—Mountain or Forest Trails	8.0
<b>Jogging or Running—Trails</b>	<b>17.2</b>
Jogging or Running—Urban Trails	11.4
Jogging or Running—Rural Trails	7.8
Jogging or Running—Mountain or Forest Trails	4.9
<b>Boating—Canoeing, Kayaking, Rowing, Manual Craft*</b>	<b>12.1</b>
Boating—Canoeing, Kayaking, Rowing, Manual Craft—Saltwater*	3.7
Boating—Canoeing, Kayaking, Rowing, Manual Craft—Freshwater*	9.0
Camping—With a Kayak/Canoe*	2.4
Camping—With a Kayak/Canoe—Site Specifically Designated*	1.2
<b>Any Off-Roading Activity Involving Trails (includes Motorcycle, ATV/Dune Buggy, and 4-Wheel Drive Vehicle subcategories below)</b>	<b>9.8</b>
Off-Roading—Motorcycle—Trails	2.7
Off-Roading—Motorcycle—Urban Trails	0.9
Off-Roading—Motorcycle—Rural Trails	1.4
Off-Roading—Motorcycle—Mountain or Forest Trails	1.8
Off-Roading—ATV/Dune Buggy—Trails	5.2
Off-Roading—ATV/Dune Buggy—Urban Trails	1.4
Off-Roading—ATV/Dune Buggy—Rural Trails	2.3
Off-Roading—ATV/Dune Buggy—Mountain or Forest Trails	4.0
Off-Roading—4-Wheel Drive Vehicle—Trails	6.6
Off-Roading—4-Wheel Drive Vehicle—Urban Trails	1.4
Off-Roading—4-Wheel Drive Vehicle—Rural Trails	3.0
Off-Roading—4-Wheel Drive Vehicle—Mountain or Forest Trails	4.0
<b>Camping—Backpacking/Primitive Location</b>	<b>8.3</b>
Camping—Backpacking/Primitive Location—Self-Carry Packs	7.7
Camping—Backpacking/Primitive Location—Pack Animals	0.3
<b>Cross-Country Skiing or Snowshoeing—Established Public/Private Trails</b>	<b>7.0</b>
<b>Horseback Riding—Trails</b>	<b>3.9</b>
Horseback Riding—Urban Trails	0.5
Horseback Riding—Rural Trails	2.3
Horseback Riding—Mountain or Forest Trails	2.7
<b>Snowmobiling or ATVing in the Snow—Established Public/Private Trails</b>	<b>2.7</b>

Activity	Percent of Residents in Washington State Participating in the Activity
<b>Skating or Skateboarding Activities Involving Trails</b>	<b>2.2</b>
Roller or Inline Skating—Trail at Outdoor Facility	1.8
Skateboarding—Trail	0.6

\* Activity not included in calculation of overall participation in trail-related recreation.

## UNDERSTANDING THE REGIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS THAT IMPACT DEMAND

Washington's population has grown dramatically during the past three decades. With a gain of 2,592,384 residents between 1980 and 2010, the state experienced a 63% population increase, almost double the population rate compared to the United States as a whole (36%) (United States Census, 2010).

Several other important demographic changes also are taking place in the state. These include increasing urbanization, an aging population, and an increasing minority population. In order to serve the needs of residents in the state, recreation providers need to understand both the regional and demographic characteristics that affect demand for trails use. For more information on the demographic changes taking place in the state, please see Chapter 1 of the SCORP report.

This section of the *2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan* focuses on the current regional and demographic characteristics of trail users overall in the state. For specific regional and demographic characteristics of trail users in each of the 11 activity categories, please see Appendix B. This information provides invaluable data for better understanding constituents and can be used to better align outreach and communications to target underserved populations.

### Regional Breakdown of Trail Users Overall

Table 2.3 shows the regional participation rates for trail users overall. At the top of the ranking is the King/Seattle region, where 78% of residents participate in outdoor recreational activities involving trails; meanwhile, the Coast region has the lowest percentage of residents participating in outdoor recreational activities involving trails yet still represents a majority of residents (61%).

**Table 2.3. Regional Participation Rates of Trail Users Overall.**

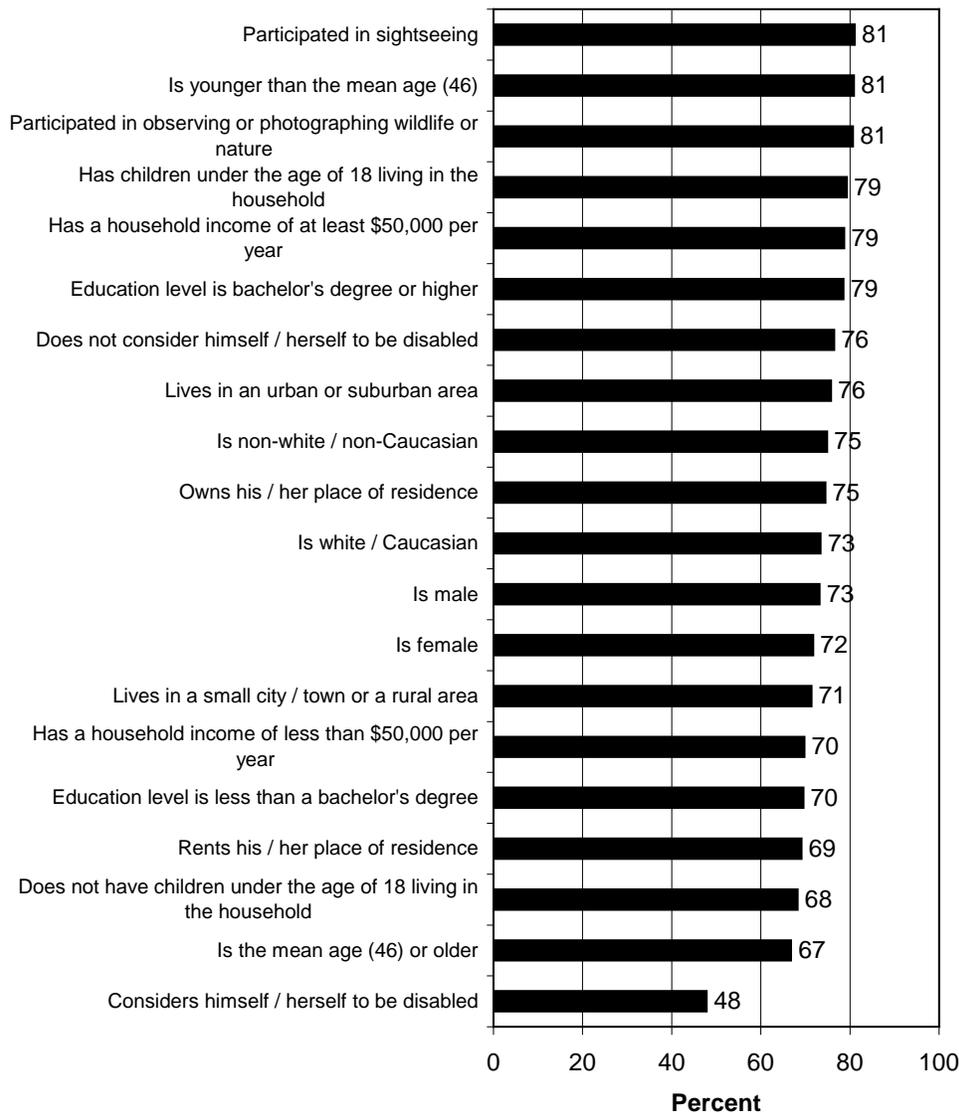
<b>Regional Participation Rates of Trail Users Overall</b>	
King/Seattle	78
Northeast	74
North Cascades	73
The Palouse	73
The Islands	71
Southwest	70
South Central	68
Peninsulas	68
Columbia Plateau	62
The Coast	61

### **Demographic Breakdown of Trail Users Overall**

Figure 2.1 shows the breakdown of major demographic and participatory subgroups within the overall survey sample that participate in any type of outdoor recreational activity involving trails. In this ranking, the top groups among all Washington State residents that participate in trail-related outdoor recreational activities include those who participate in sightseeing (81% of this group participates in trail-related outdoor recreation), those younger than the mean age of 46 years old (81%), and those who participate in observing or photographing wildlife or nature (81%). Other groups with at least 75% of individuals participating in trail-related outdoor recreation include those with children under the age of 18 living in the household (79%), those with a household income of at least \$50,000 per year (79%), those with an education level of a bachelor's degree or higher (78%), those who do not consider themselves to be disabled (76%), those who live in an urban or suburban area (76%), non-white / non-Caucasian individuals (75%), and those who own their place of residence (75%).

**Figure 2.1. Demographic Breakdown of Trail Users Overall.**

**Percent of each of the following groups that participate in any type of activity involving trails:**



The series of graphs beginning on the next page breaks down all trail users by seven key demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education level, household income level, residence type, rent/ownership of residence, and disability status (i.e., whether the respondent considers himself or herself to be disabled). Two types of graphs are included for each demographic characteristic. The first graph shows the percentage of each group within the demographic category participating in trail-related recreation (for instance, 73% of males and 72% of females participate in trail-related outdoor recreation). The second graph is a pie chart

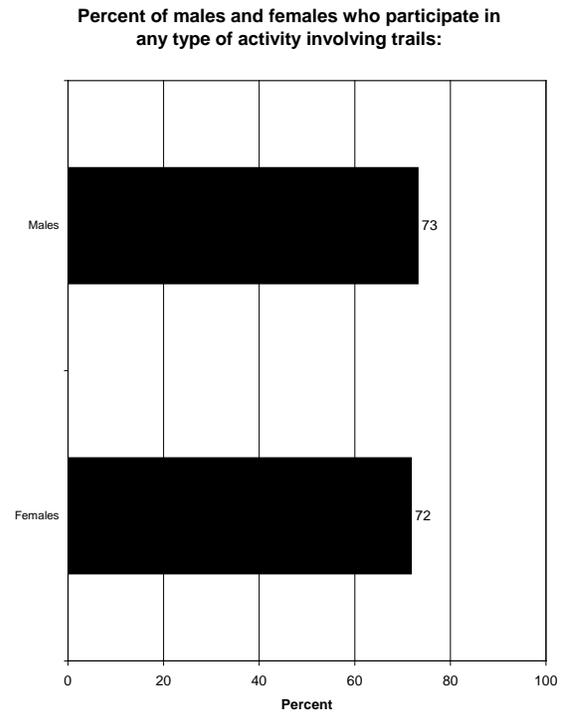
showing a proportional breakdown of all trail users by the demographic category in question (for instance, 50% of all trail users are male and 50% are female).

### Trail Use by Gender

As shown in Figure 2.2, 73% of all male Washington residents and 72% of all female Washington residents participate in some type of outdoor recreation involving trails. A majority of male and female Washington residents recreate on trails.

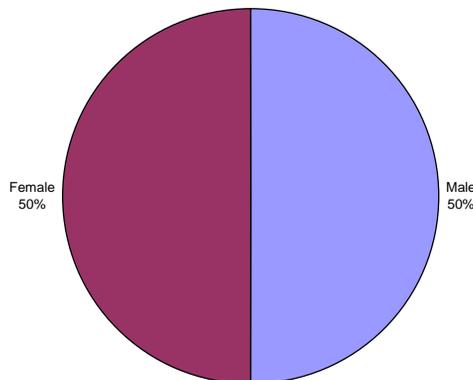
Figure 2.3 shows that of the Washington residents that are trail users, gender is evenly split. Trail users are equally male and female.

**Figure 2.2. Percent of Males and Females Who Are Trail Users.**



**Figure 2.3. Percent of Trail Users by Gender.**

Percent of All Trail Users by Gender:

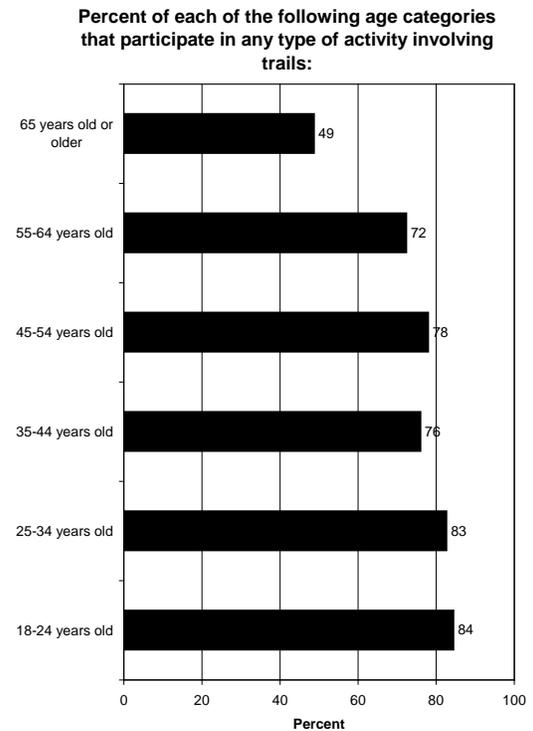


### Trail Use by Age

Figure 2.4 shows that every age category of Washington residents has at least 75% of individuals participating in outdoor recreation involving trails, except for those 65 years old and older which has about half of individuals participating in outdoor recreation involving trails. Regardless of age, a majority of residents participate in trails-related recreation.

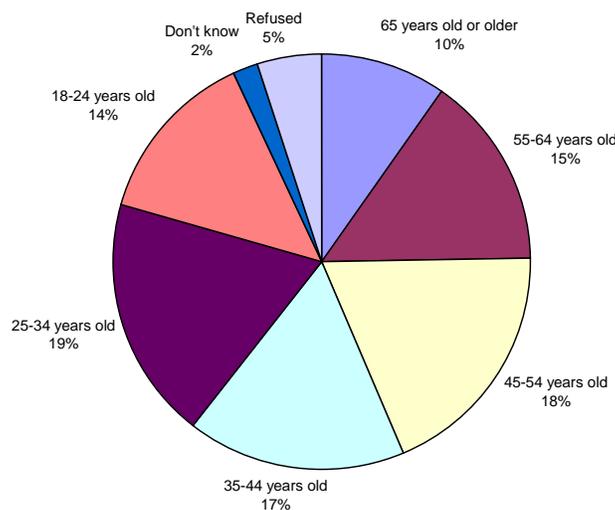
Figure 2.5 shows that of the Washington residents that are trail users, the most sizable categories for participation by age are 25 and 54 years old.

**Figure 2.4. Percent in the Following Age Categories Who Are Trail Users.**



**Figure 2.5. Percent of Trail Users by Age.**

**Percent of All Trail Users by Age:**

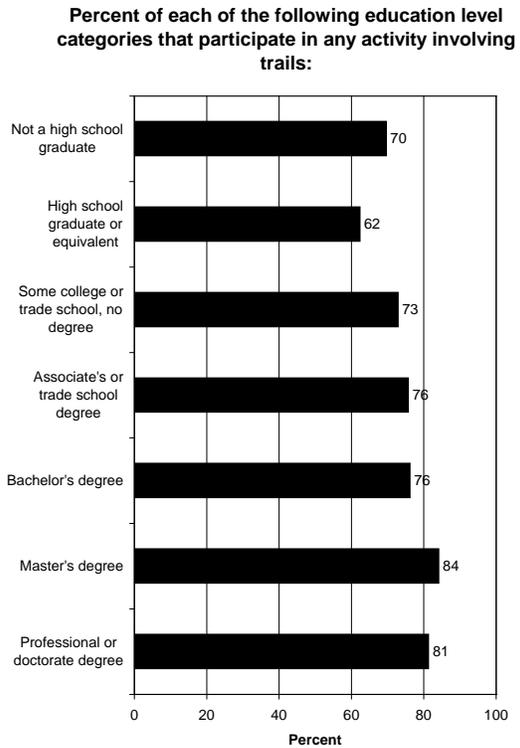


### Trail Use by Education Level

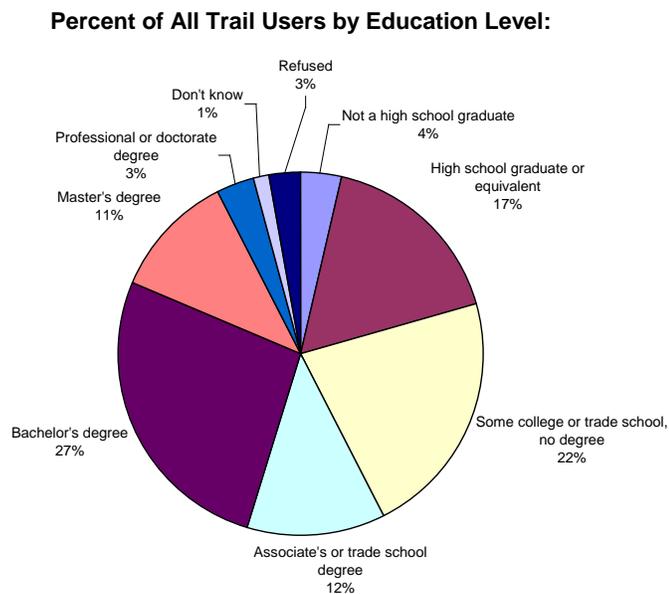
As shown in Figure 2.6, a majority of Washington residents' participate in outdoor recreation involving trails regardless of their education level. In addition, participation tends to increase along with education level.

Figure 2.7 indicates that of trail users, a majority of them have some level of post-high school education. Those with an associate's degree or higher make up about half of all trail users.

**Figure 2.6. Percent in the Following Education Categories Who Are Trail Users.**



**Figure 2.7. Percent of Trail Users by Education Level.**



### Trail Use by Household Income Level

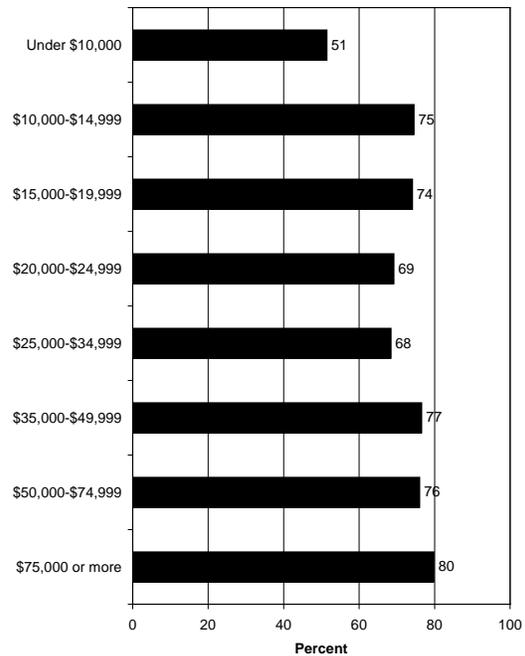
Figure 2.8 indicates that most income categories have at least 68% of all Washington residents participating in trail-related recreation; the exception is in the under \$10,000 category, where just over half of individuals participate.

Figure 2.9 shows that most trail users have a household income of at least \$35,000, while 34% have a household income of \$75,000 or more.

(Note that 19% of all trail users refused the income question or said that they were unsure.)

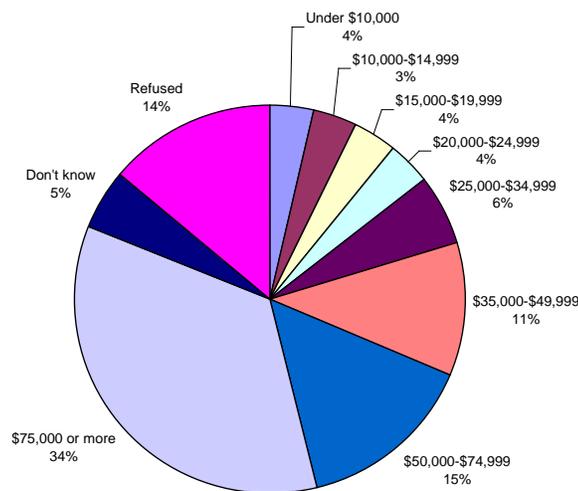
**Figure 2.8. Percent in the Following Income Level Categories Who Are Trail Users.**

Percent of each of the following income level categories that participate in any type of activity involving trails:



**Figure 2.9. Percent of Trail Users by Household Income Level.**

Percent of All Trail Users by Income Category:

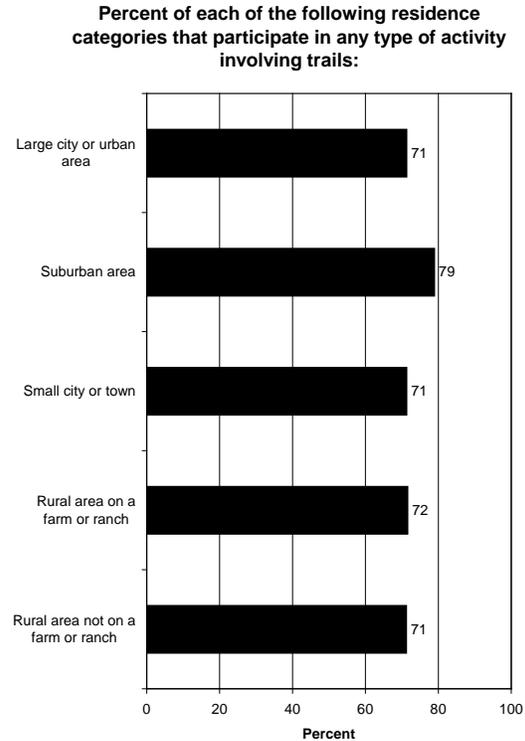


### Trail Use by Residence Type

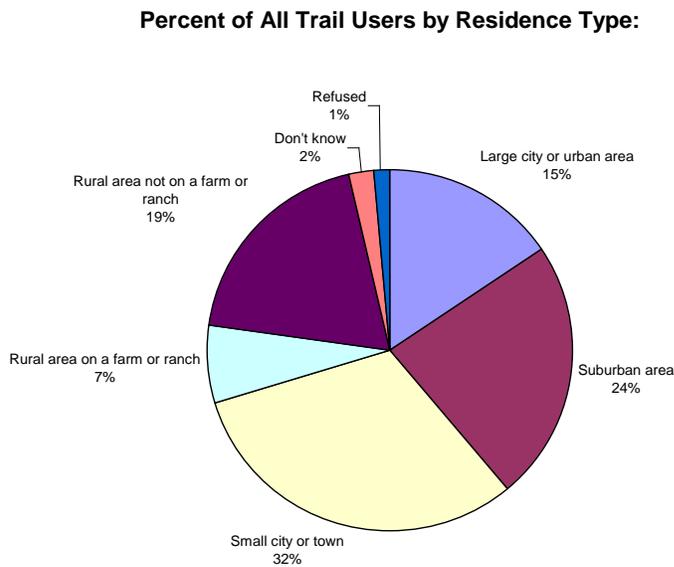
As shown in Figure 2.10, Washington residents' participation in trail-related outdoor recreation is consistent across the major residence categories, with the highest rate (79%) of participation among those living in a suburban area.

Figure 2.11 indicates that 39% of trail users live in a large city, urban area, or suburban area, 32% live in a small city or town, and 26% live in a rural area.

**Figure 2.10. Percent in the Following Residence Categories Who Are Trail Users.**



**Figure 2.11. Percent of Trail Users by Residence Type.**



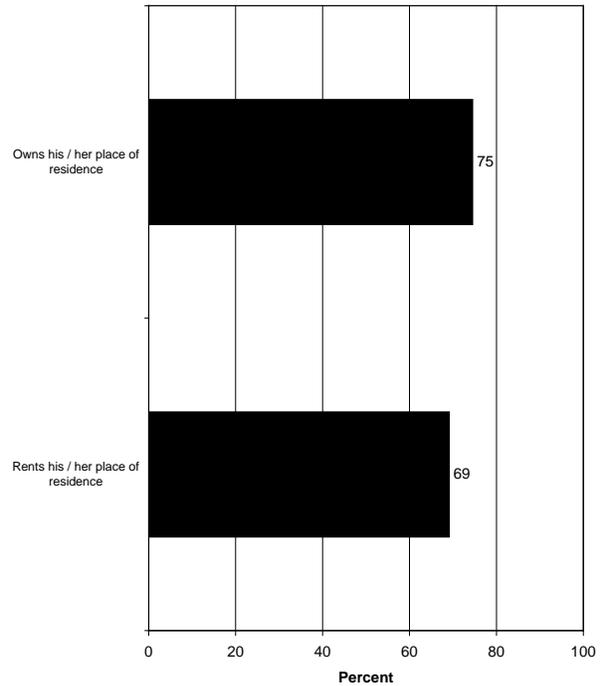
### Trail Use by Rent/Ownership of Residence

Figure 2.12 shows that large majorities of Washington residents who rent or who own their residence participate in trail-related outdoor recreation.

Figure 2.13 shows that nearly three quarters of all trail users are individuals who own their place of residence.

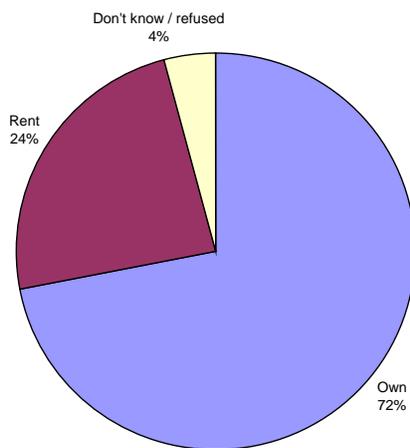
**Figure 2.12. Percent of Renters and Owners Who Are Trail Users.**

Percent of residence renters and owners that participate in any type of activity involving trails:



**Figure 2.13. Percent of Trail Users by Rent/Ownership of Residence.**

Percent of All Trail Users by Rent / Own Residence:



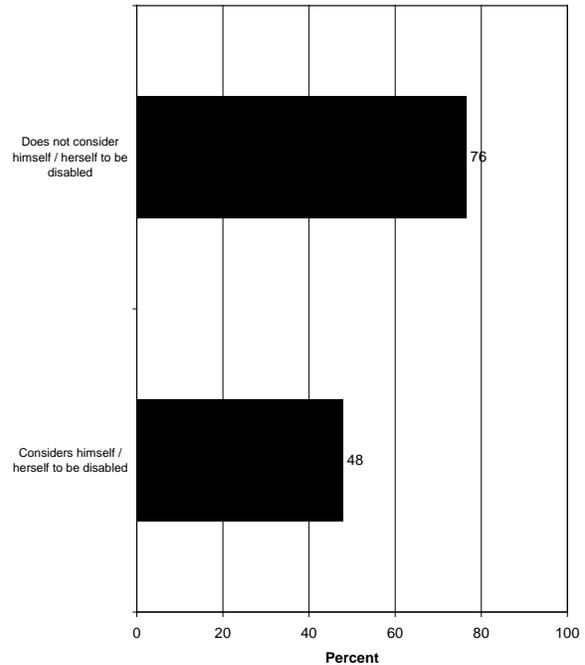
### Trail Use by Disability Status

As shown in Figure 2.14, at least three quarters of non-disabled Washington residents and nearly half of residents with disabilities participate in trail-related outdoor recreation.

Figure 2.15 shows that 7% of trail users overall are people with disabilities.

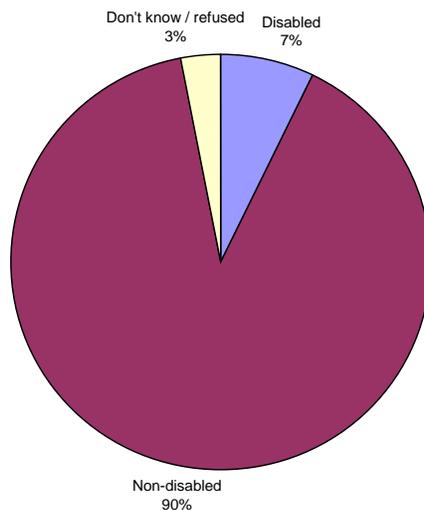
**Figure 2.14. Percent of Non-Disabled and Residents With Disabilities Who Are Trail Users.**

Percent of non-disabled and disabled people who participate in any type of activity involving trails:



**Figure 2.15. Percent of Trail Users by Disability Status.**

Percent of All Trail Users by Disability:



## Summary of Demographics of Trail Users

Washington residents of both genders use trails at a similar rate —73% of male residents and 72% of female residents. People with children under the age of 18 living are more likely to be trail users than those without children.

The vast majority of residents between the ages of 18 and 64 are trail users, but slightly less than half of people 65 years old or older use trails. In general, residents younger than the mean age of 46 are more likely to be trail users than residents in other age categories.

More than three quarters of residents in each of the education levels with a college degree (associate's degree or higher) are trail users. The correlation of income level with trails use varies, with those in the higher income brackets more likely to be trail users.

More than three quarters of suburban residents (79%) are trail users, while 71–72% of people living in large cities, small cities or towns, and rural areas, use trails. Three quarters of homeowners (75%) and 69% of renters in Washington are trail users.

Slightly less than half of all residents with disabilities (48%) are trail users, while 76% of non-disabled residents are trail users.

As the SCORP report shows, the population in Washington is growing. With that growth, the state is becoming more urban, older, and more diverse. These changes increase the demand for trail activities that meet the needs of these growing demographic groups.

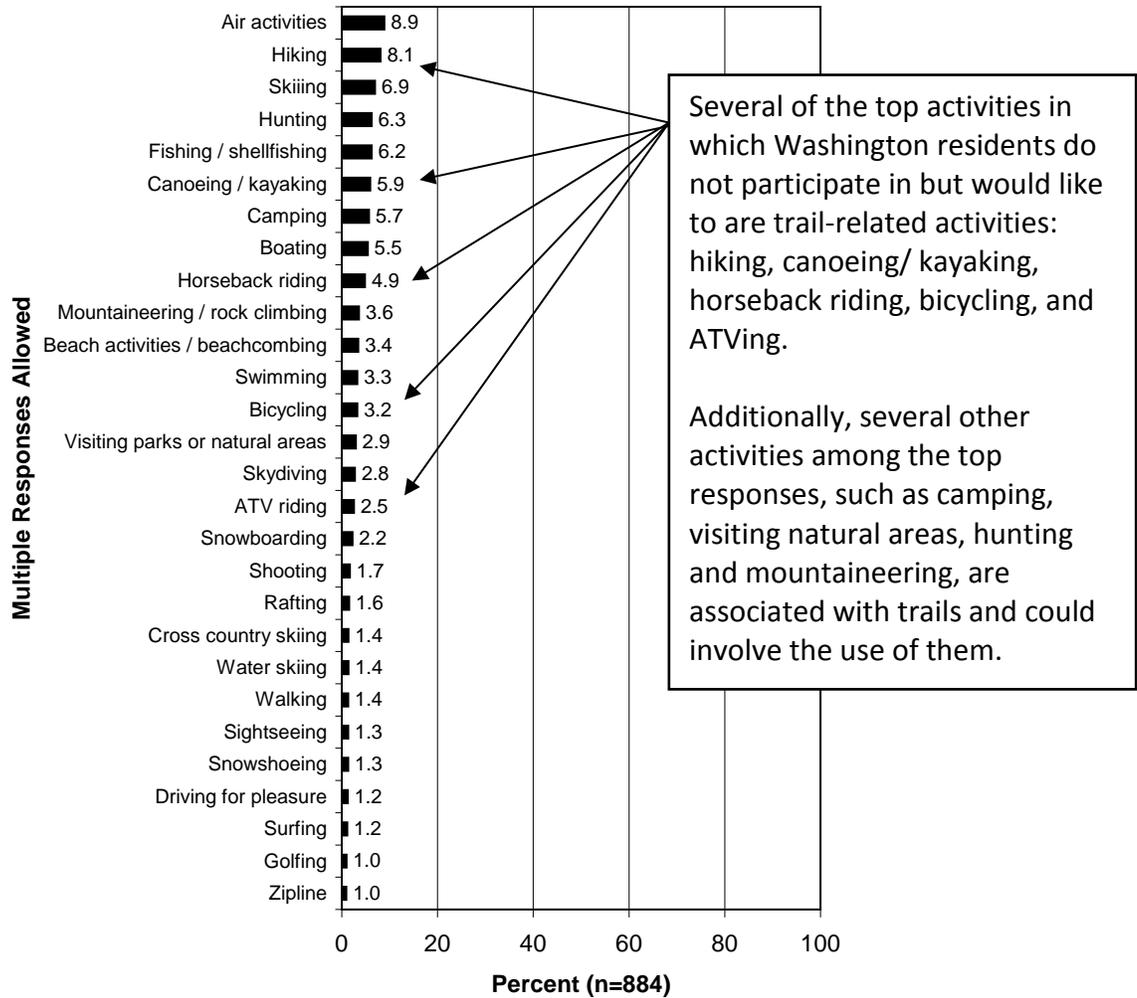
As mentioned, currently 79% of suburban residents and 71% of large city and urban residents use trails. As urbanization and development increases, it can be expected that the demand among these groups will also increase. And, while only 49% of residents aged 65 years old and older are currently trail users, as the population ages, land managers and recreation providers can expect the number of older residents participating in trails activities to grow as well. As these trends continue, it remains important for land managers and recreation providers to consider these changes in trails planning and development. Demographic characteristics for each specific trails activity are included in Appendix B.

## LATENT DEMAND FOR ACTIVITIES INVOLVING TRAILS

The SCORP survey had two measures of latent demand for activities: Residents were asked about activities they did not do but wanted to do, and activities in which they *did* participate but wanted to do more. The graphs that follow reflect the results from the two questions out of all respondents who said there were activities they did not do but wanted to do or wanted to do more. More than a quarter (29%) of Washington State residents said that there are outdoor activities that they currently do *not* do but that they would like to do. Figure 2.16 shows these activities.

**Figure 2.16. Activities in Which Residents Currently Do Not Participate but in Which They Would Like to Participate.**

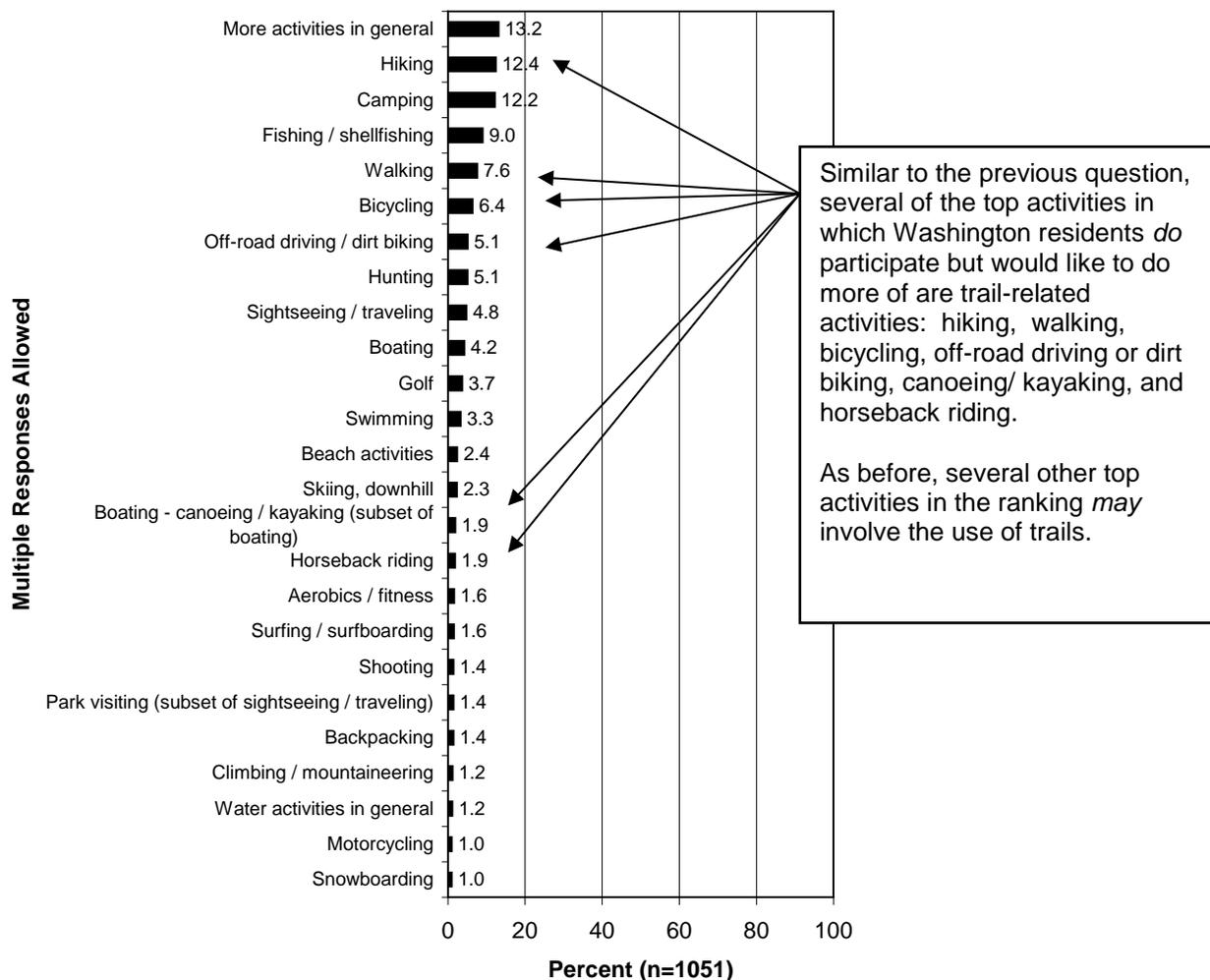
**Q341. Which outdoor activities do you think you'd like to do? (Asked of those who indicate that there is an activity(ies) that they do not currently do but would like to do in Washington.) (Shows only those named by at least 1.0% of respondents.)**



The second measure of latent demand asked residents to name activities in which they currently participate but in which they would like to participate more. A third of residents (33%) have activities in which they participate at a level lower than they would like to participate. Figure 2.17 shows the listing of activities named in the follow-up question.

**Figure 2.17. Activities in Which Residents Participate but in Which They Would Like to Participate More.**

**Q344. Which outdoor activities do you think you'd like to do more of in Washington? (Asked of those who indicate that there is an activity(ies) that they currently do but would like to do more of in Washington.) (Shows only those named by at least 1.0% of respondents.)**



## TRENDS IN DEMAND FOR TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES

Table 2.4 shows a comparison of the rankings of 17 major trail-related outdoor recreational activities from two previous SCORP surveys (2002, 2006) with the ranking from the 2012 SCORP survey. It is an abbreviated version of the complete activity comparison list in the SCORP. Because of methodological differences between the three surveys, a direct comparison of participation rates was not possible; however, a comparison of the relative rankings is made in Table 2.4.

In examining the trends, it is important to remember that Table 2.4 reflects overall participation in each activity category, not strictly trail-related activity participation. For instance, the first activity in the table, “walking without a pet,” includes the entire 71% of Washington residents who walked without a pet on sidewalks, streets, indoor facilities, etc., not just the 35% who walked without a pet in a park or trail setting. For this reason, the rankings below should be interpreted as approximate, but not exact, participation trends for trail-related activities.

**Table 2.4. Comparison of Rankings in Trail Activities from SCORP in 2002, 2006, and 2012.**

Activity	2002 SCORP Rank	2006 SCORP Rank*	2012 SCORP Rank	Percent (2012 Survey)
Walking Without a Pet	1	2	2	71.3
Hiking	8	16	6	53.9
Walking With a Pet	5	7	7	51.6
Bicycle Riding	6	9	10	36.9
Jogging or Running	15	12	12	36.2
Boating—Canoeing, Kayaking, Rowing, Manual Craft	38	28	30	11.1
Off-Road—4-Wheel Drive Vehicle	23	26	35	9.5
Camping—Backpacking/Primitive Location	51	50	36	8.3
Horseback Riding	34	55	38	7.7
Off-Road—ATV/Dune Buggy	37	39	41	7.3
Snowshoeing	61	63	44	6.7
Roller or Inline Skating	30	38	50	4.7
Off-Road—Motorcycle	35	46	52	4.2
Skateboarding	41	56	58	2.9
Snowmobiling	44**	61	60	2.7
ATV Riding on Snow or Ice	44**	42	62	2.4
Camping—With a Kayak/Canoe	62	62	62	2.4

\*Based on peak month data; therefore, ranking based on the lower bound estimate of participants in 2006.

\*\*Snowmobiling and ATV riding were combined into one category in 2002.

## THE ABILITY OF SUPPLY TO MEET PUBLIC DEMAND

As part of their efforts to assess outdoor recreation supply for the SCORP study, the researchers conducted two separate web-based surveys of providers of outdoor recreation in Washington State. One surveyed local recreation providers and the other surveyed federal and state agencies, tribes, and nonprofit organizations. Recreation providers gave detailed information on supply, capacity, and the demand met, as well as information about needs and challenges in providing outdoor recreation.

For the local providers survey, respondents were asked to rate the importance of 45 recreation opportunities. Table 2.5 shows only the seven trail opportunities in the survey; they are ranked by level of importance among all 45 activities that the local provider survey asked about in the SCORP.

**Table 2.5. Rank in Importance of Activity from SCORP in 2012.**

	Rank in importance (among 7 trail opportunities)	Rank in importance (among all 45 opportunities)	Total number of providers rating importance as high or medium
Surfaced trails	1	3	42
Unsurfaced trails	1	3	42
Surfaced trails appropriate for bicycles	3	18	26
Unsurfaced trails appropriate for bicycles	4	21	20
Designated bridle trails	5	29	10
Designated snow and ice trails	6	37	2
Designated motorized trails	7	45	0

Not all outdoor recreation providers responded to the survey. However, the findings suggest that providers consider surfaced and unsurfaced trails most important. These trails were also ranked in the top 3 among all 45 opportunities in the SCORP survey. Designated motorized trails ranked last among all 45 recreation opportunities, with none of the responding providers rating designated motorized trails as of high or medium importance.

The SCORP findings suggest that trails are a priority area for improvement when compared to other types of outdoor recreation. When providers estimated the percent of demand being met, trail opportunities or activities ranked lowest among all 45 opportunities. Nearly all the trail opportunities or activities ranked much lower than other activities in the SCORP; all landed in the bottom 10% of activities meeting the demand of the public in the state.

As table 2.6 shows, although surfaced and unsurfaced trails ranked in the top 3 for importance, only a little more than half of estimated demand is being met (mean percent of demand met).

**Table 2.6. Mean Percentage of Estimated Demand Met.**

	<b>Rank in demand met (among 7 trail opportunities)</b>	<b>Rank in demand met (among all 45 opportunities)</b>	<b>Mean percent of demand met</b>
Unsurfaced trails	1	35	56.59
Surfaced trails	2	37	53.59
Surfaced trails appropriate for bicycles	3	38	52.23
Unsurfaced trails appropriate for bicycles	4	39	51.15
Designated bridle trails	5	42	48.25
Designated motorized trails	6	44	46.67
Designated snow and ice trails	7	45	40

Among the lowest ranked opportunities for meeting demand overall (and specifically pertaining to trails) are designated snow and ice trails, designated motorized trails, and designated bridle trails. Providers estimated that less than half of demand for these activities is being met in Washington.

The SCORP findings show that from 2006 to 2012, the importance of snowshoeing (supported by snow and ice trails) and horseback riding (supported by designated bridle trails) both increased in ranking based on participation rates. On the other hand, off-roading activities (including ATV, 4-wheel, and motorcycle riding) experienced a decline in participation rankings between 2006 and 2012.

Because of the increased use of snow and ice trails and designated bridle trails and with the low demand being met, it is reasonable to conclude that additional opportunities in these activities would be welcomed by Washington State residents.

Many off-roading activities had a substantial drop in participation from 2002 and 2006 to 2012. Off-road 4-wheel driving fell 10.5 in ranking, while off-road motorcycling fell 12.5 in the ranking. However, it is also important to note that designated motorized trails rank last in meeting demand among 45 activities in the state. The SCORP data indicate that off-road driving and dirt biking activities are among the top 10 activities that residents would like to do more.

Again, not all outdoor recreation providers responded to the survey and some provided incomplete responses, so the results cannot be generalized to all providers in Washington. While further investigation is likely needed, the findings do suggest that the supply of trail related recreation opportunities is not completely meeting public demand.

## CHAPTER 3: PROGRESS SINCE 1991

The 1991 Washington State Trails Plan defined 15 trails issue categories and one to three specific problems to address in each issue. The result was a list of 31 problems with specific solutions and actions. To assess progress since 1991, the Trails Advisory Committee completed multiple surveys to explore the state's success at meeting the issues and solutions outlined in the *1991 Washington State Trails Plan*.

Chapter 4 discusses the major issues and problems that are recommended for consideration based on the research collected in this study.

### ASSESSING CURRENT TRAIL ISSUES

The Trails Advisory Committee rated the importance of the 15 trail issues outlined in the 1991 plan plus three additional issues for a total of 18 issues.

The 18 issues were:

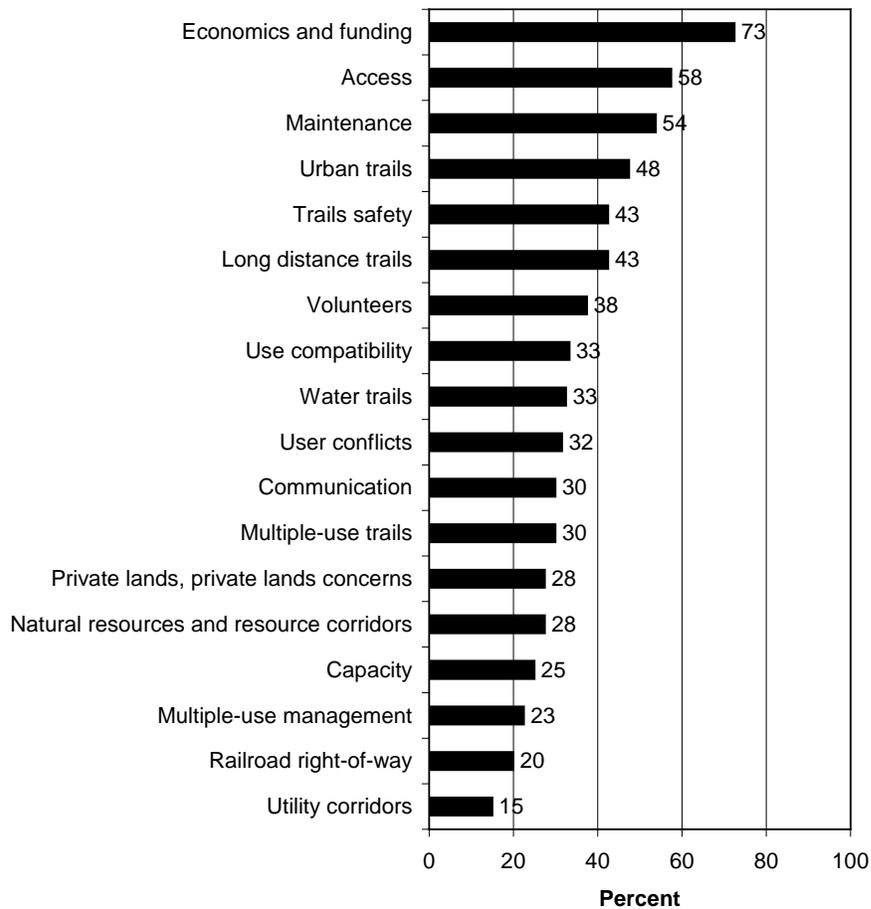
- Access
- Capacity
- Communication
- Economic and funding
- Long distance trails and a state trail network
- Maintenance
- Multiple-use management
- Multiple-use trails
- Natural resources and resource corridors
- Private lands, private concerns
- Railroad right-of-way (Rails to Trails)
- Trail safety (new in 2012)
- Urban trails (new in 2012)
- Use compatibility
- User conflicts (new in 2012)
- Utility corridor
- Volunteers
- Water trails

As shown in Figure 3.1, the Trails Advisory Committee indicated that economics and funding are by far the top issue (73% of respondents rated this as a 9 or 10 in importance). Access and maintenance also rank two and three, respectively (with a majority rating each a 9 or 10 in importance).

At the other end of the spectrum, less than a quarter of the Trails Advisory Committee rated multiple-use management, railroad right-of-way, and utility corridors with a 9 or 10 in importance.

**Figure 3.1. Current Trail Issues (Percent Rating the Importance as 9 or 10).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important," the percent rating the importance of each of the following issues for Washington trails in 2013 as a 9 or 10.**



## ASSESSING CURRENT TRAIL PROBLEMS

As reported in the previous section, the 1991 Washington State Trails Plan defined 15 trail issues. Each issue was then defined by one to three specific problem statements. The result was a list of 31 specific problems to be addressed by the trails plan.

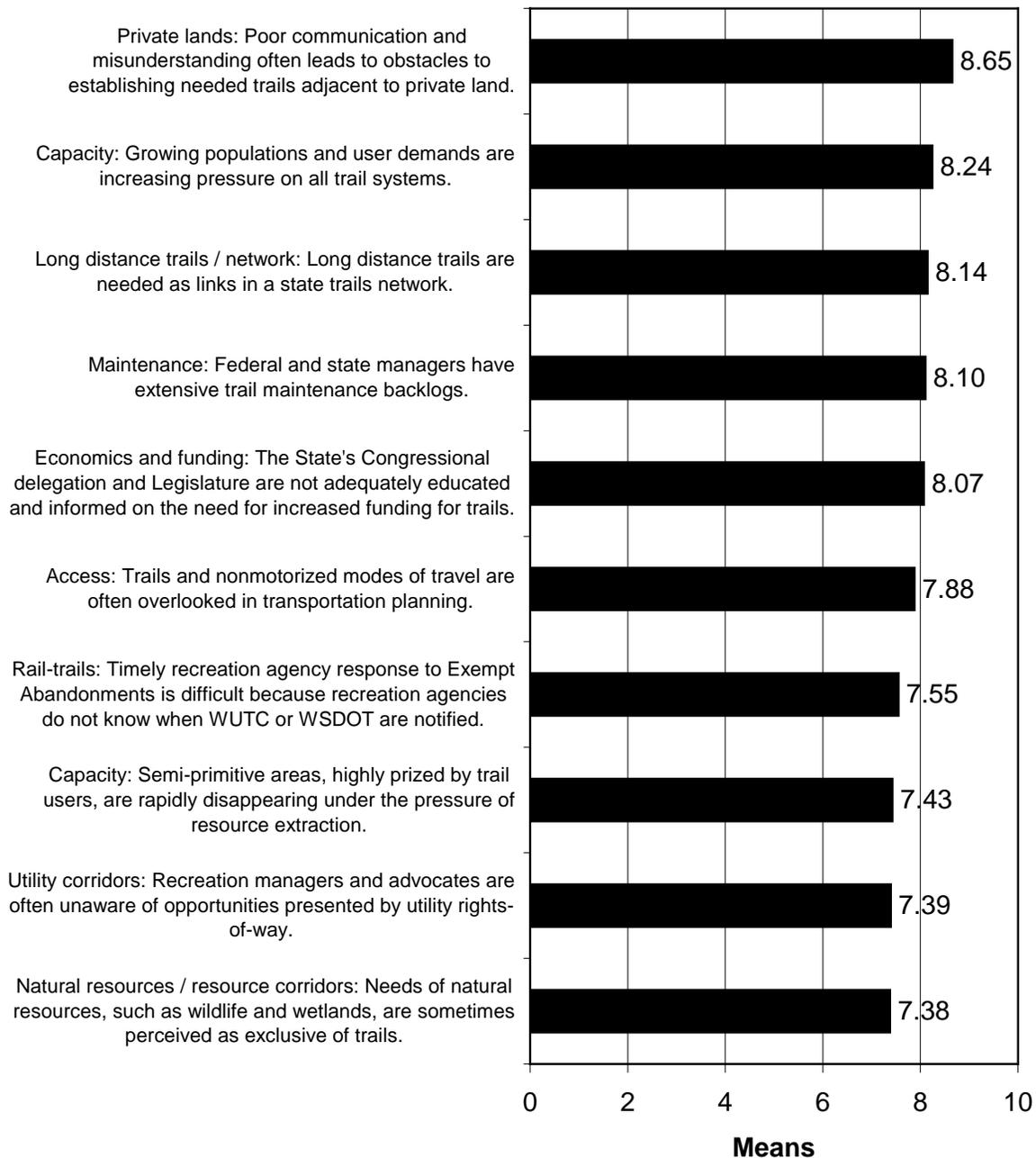
The Trails Advisory Committee rated the importance of the 31 trail problems on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is “not at all important” and 10 is “extremely important.” In general, the Trails Advisory Committee agreed that all 31 trail problems from the 1991 plan were still important; all problems had a mean rating above the midpoint of 5.00 ( Figures 3.2–3.4). Five top problems emerged, with at least half of the Trails Advisory Committee rating the importance of these problems as a 9 or 10 (Figures 3.5–3.7).

The top five trail problem statements are:

1. Private lands: Poor communication and misunderstanding often leads to obstacles to establishing trails adjacent to private land (8.65 mean rating; 57% rated this problem a 9 or 10 in importance) Economics and funding: The State’s Congressional delegation and Legislature are not adequately educated and informed on the need for increased funding for trails (8.07 mean rating; 55% rated this a 9 or 10)
2. Long distance trails/network: Long distance trails are needed as links in a state trails network (8.14 mean rating; 55% rated this a 9 or 10)
3. Capacity: Growing populations and user demands are increasing pressure on all trail systems (8.24 mean rating; 52% rated this a 9 or 10) Maintenance: Federal and state managers have extensive trail maintenance backlogs (8.10 mean rating; 50% rated this a 9 or 10)

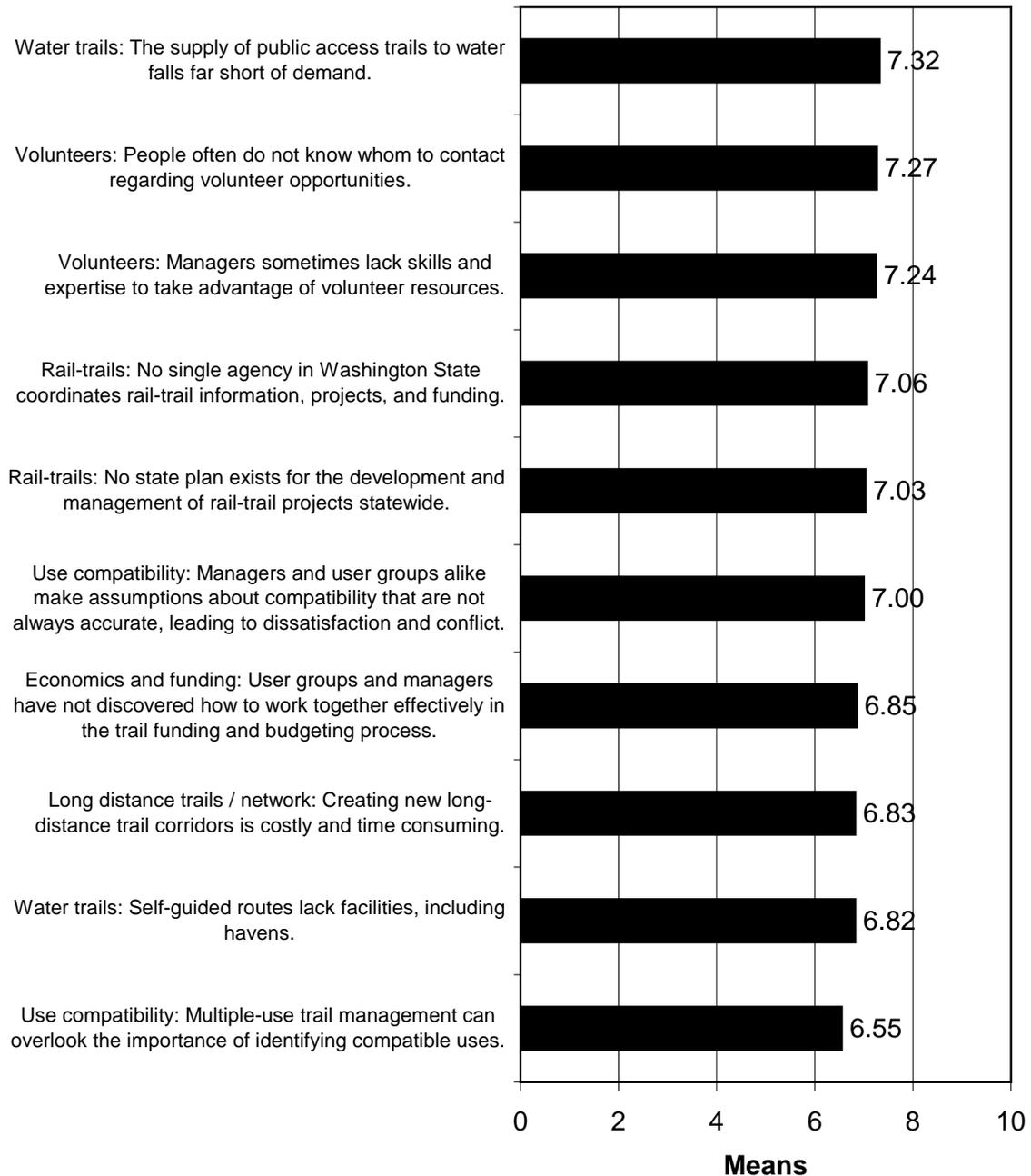
**Figure 3.2. Mean Ratings of Importance of Trail Problems (Part 1).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important," the mean rating of importance of the following as problems for trails management in 2013. (Part 1)**



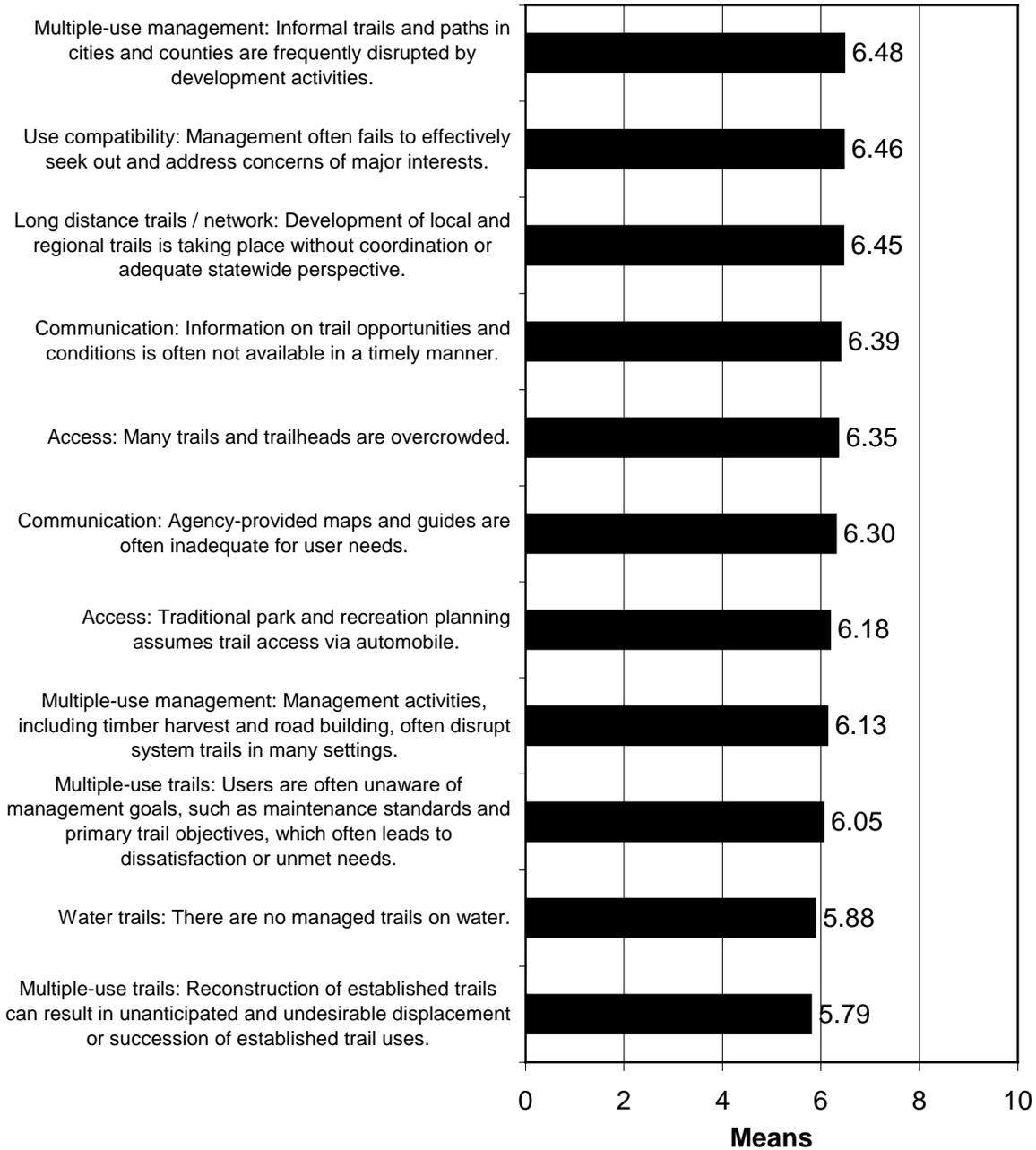
**Figure 3.3. Mean Ratings of Importance of Trail Problems (Part 2).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important," the mean rating of importance of the following as problems for trails management in 2013. (Part 2)**



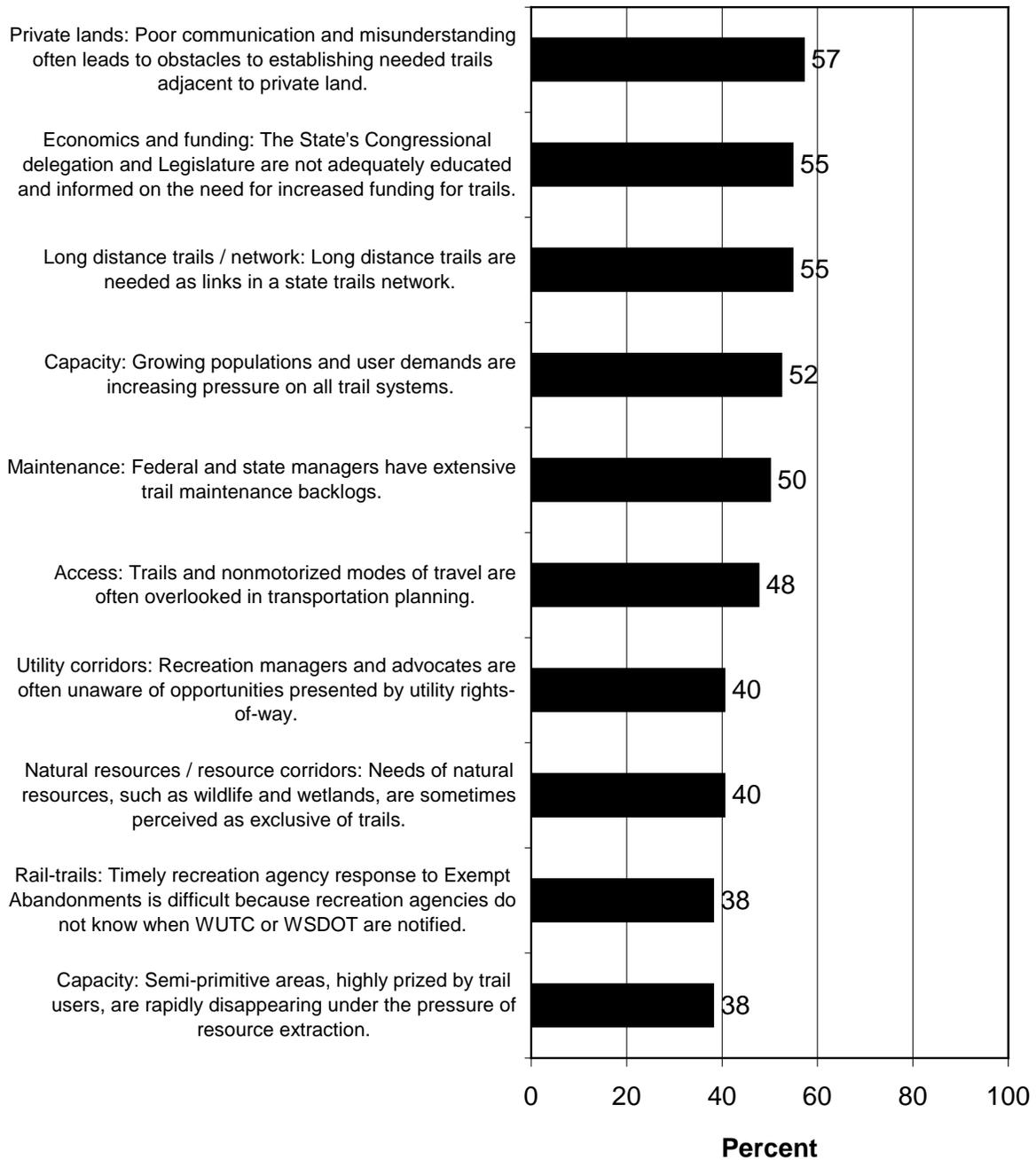
**Figure 3.4. Mean Ratings of Importance of Trail Problems (Part 3).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important," the mean rating of importance of the following as problems for trails management in 2013. (Part 3)**



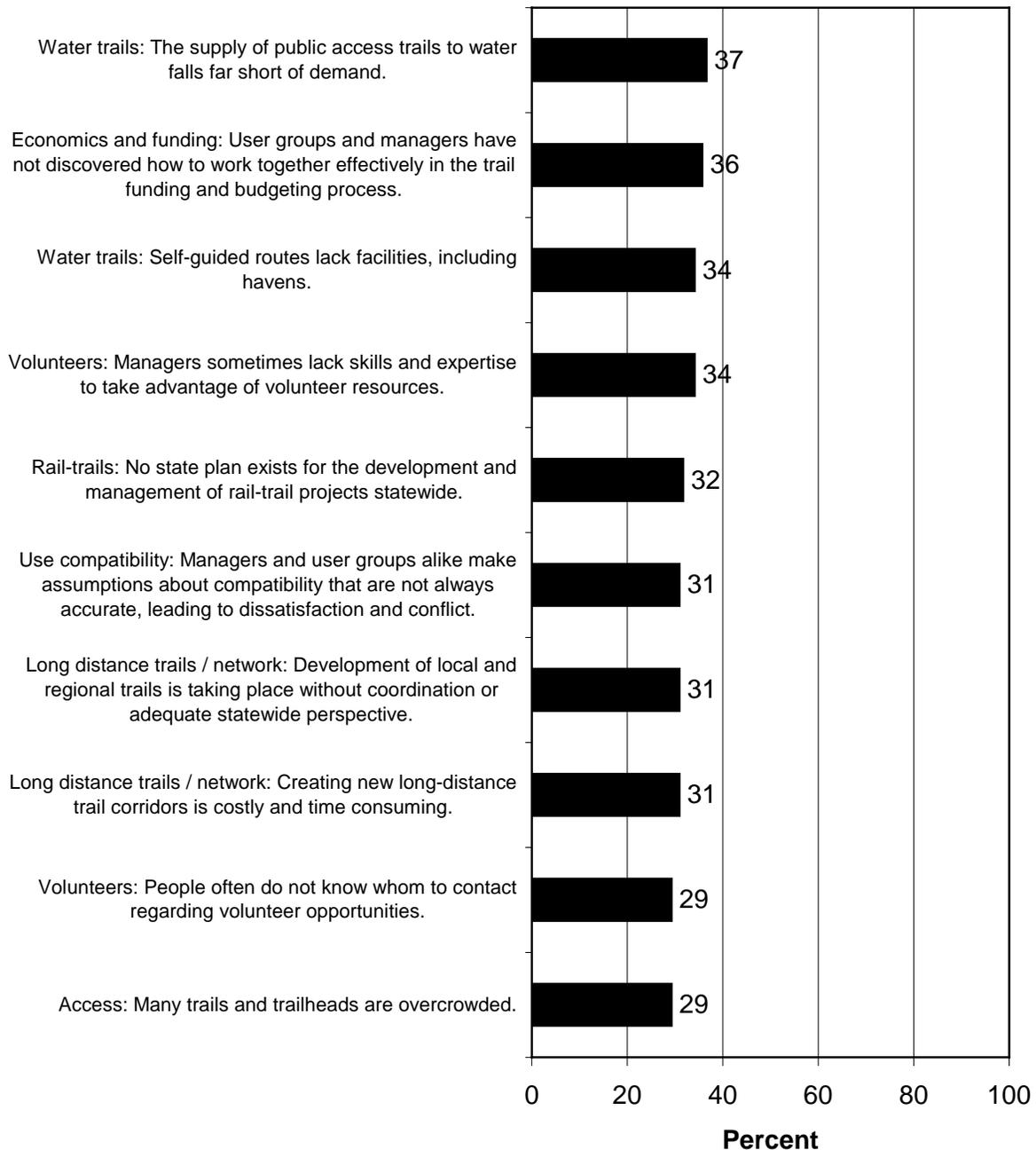
**Figure 3.5. Percent Rating Importance of Trail Problems as a 9 or 10 (Part 1).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important," percent who rated the importance of the following problems as a 9 or 10 for trails management in 2013. (Part 1)**



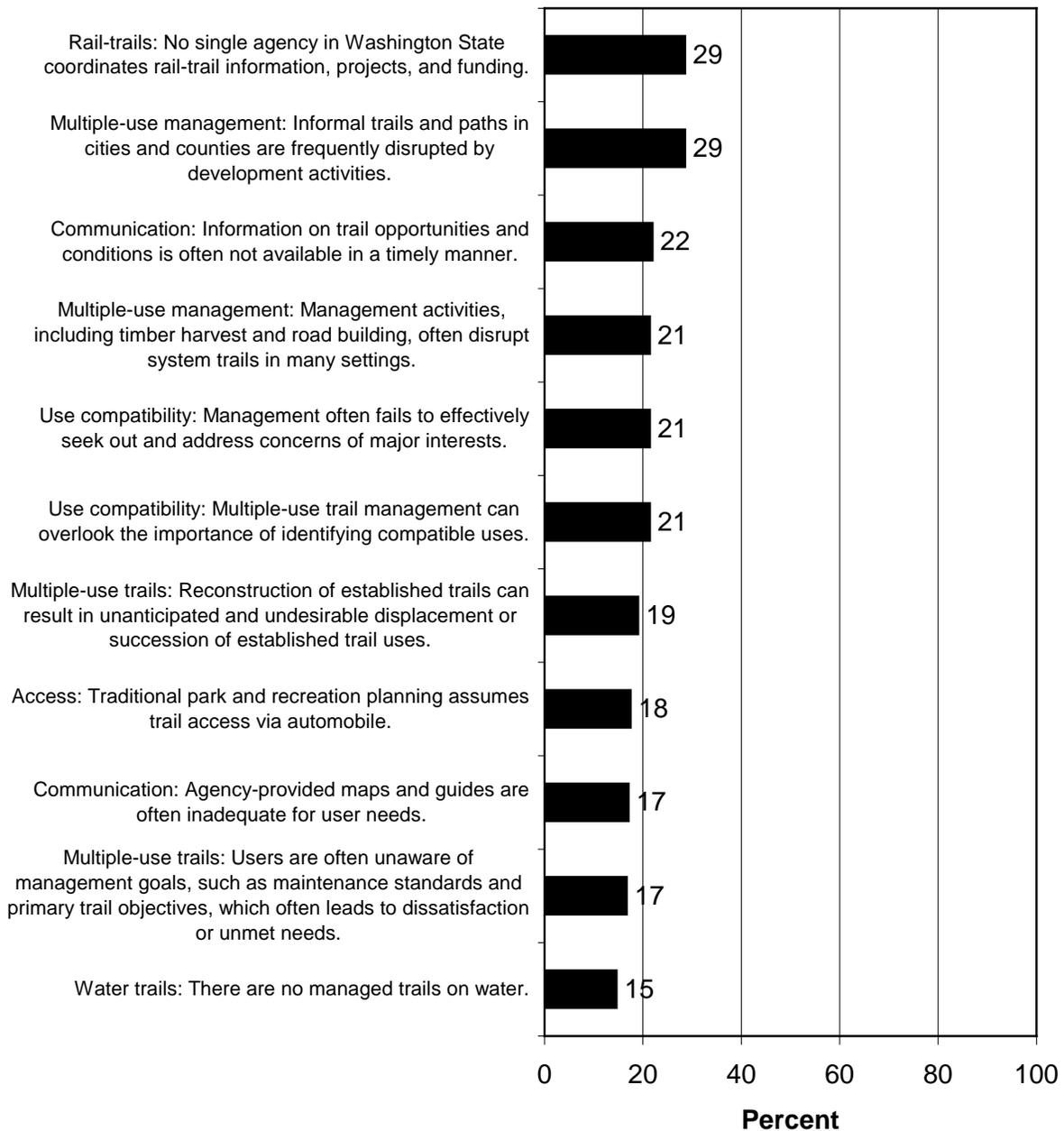
**Figure 3.6. Percent Rating Importance of Trail Problems as a 9 or 10 (Part 2).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important," percent who rated the importance of the following problems as a 9 or 10 for trails management in 2013. (Part 2)**



**Figure 3.7. Percent Rating Importance of Trail Problems as a 9 or 10 (Part 3).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important," percent who rated the importance of the following problems as a 9 or 10 for trails management in 2013. (Part 3)**



## ASSESSING PROGRESS TOWARD SOLUTIONS

The 1991 Washington State Trails Plan also outlined 29 solutions, each addressing specific trail problem statements. The Trails Advisory Committee rated progress toward implementing these solutions. In general, the Trails Advisory Committee rated the progress made toward all 29 solutions relatively high; again, the mean rating for each solution was above the midpoint (5.00) (Figures 3.8–3.10). However, none of the solutions received a mean rating of 8.00 or higher (representing excellent progress on the rating spectrum). Figures 3.11–3.13 show the percentage rating each solution as a 9 or 10. Less than half of the Trails Advisory Committee rated progress at a 9 or 10 for each solution.

The solutions toward which the most progress has been made since 1991 were:

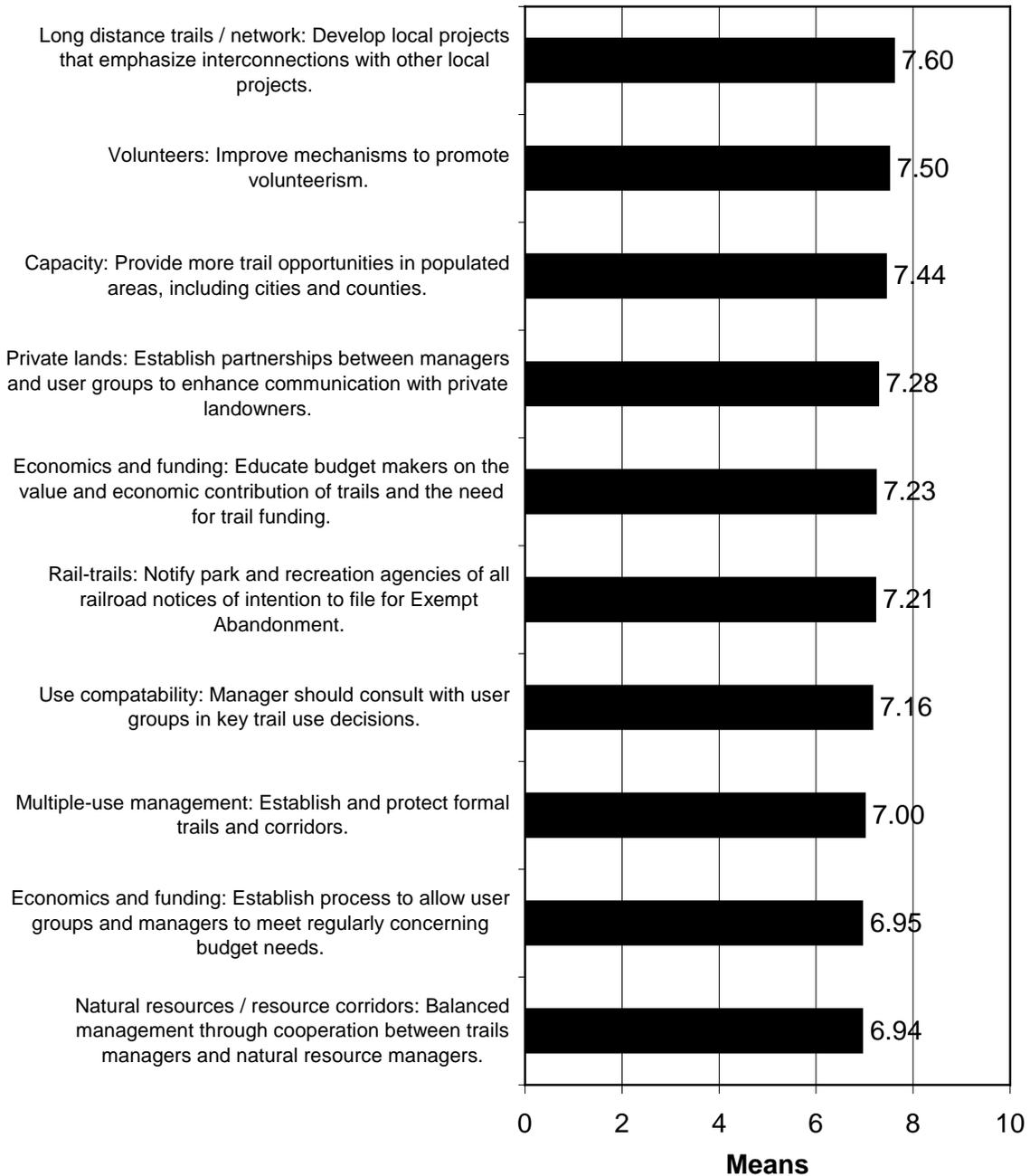
- Long distance trails and a state trail network: Develop local projects that emphasize interconnections with other local projects (7.60 mean rating; 38% rated progress a 9 or 10)
- Volunteers: Improve mechanisms to promote volunteerism (7.50 mean rating; 29% rated progress a 9 or 10)

The solutions toward which the least progress has been made since 1991 were:

- Multiple-use trails: Provide new or substitute trails (5.84 mean rating)
- Use compatibility: Provide on-the-ground management presence during peak use times such as weekends (5.58 mean rating)
- Access: Publicize existing opportunities on less crowded trails (5.46 mean rating)

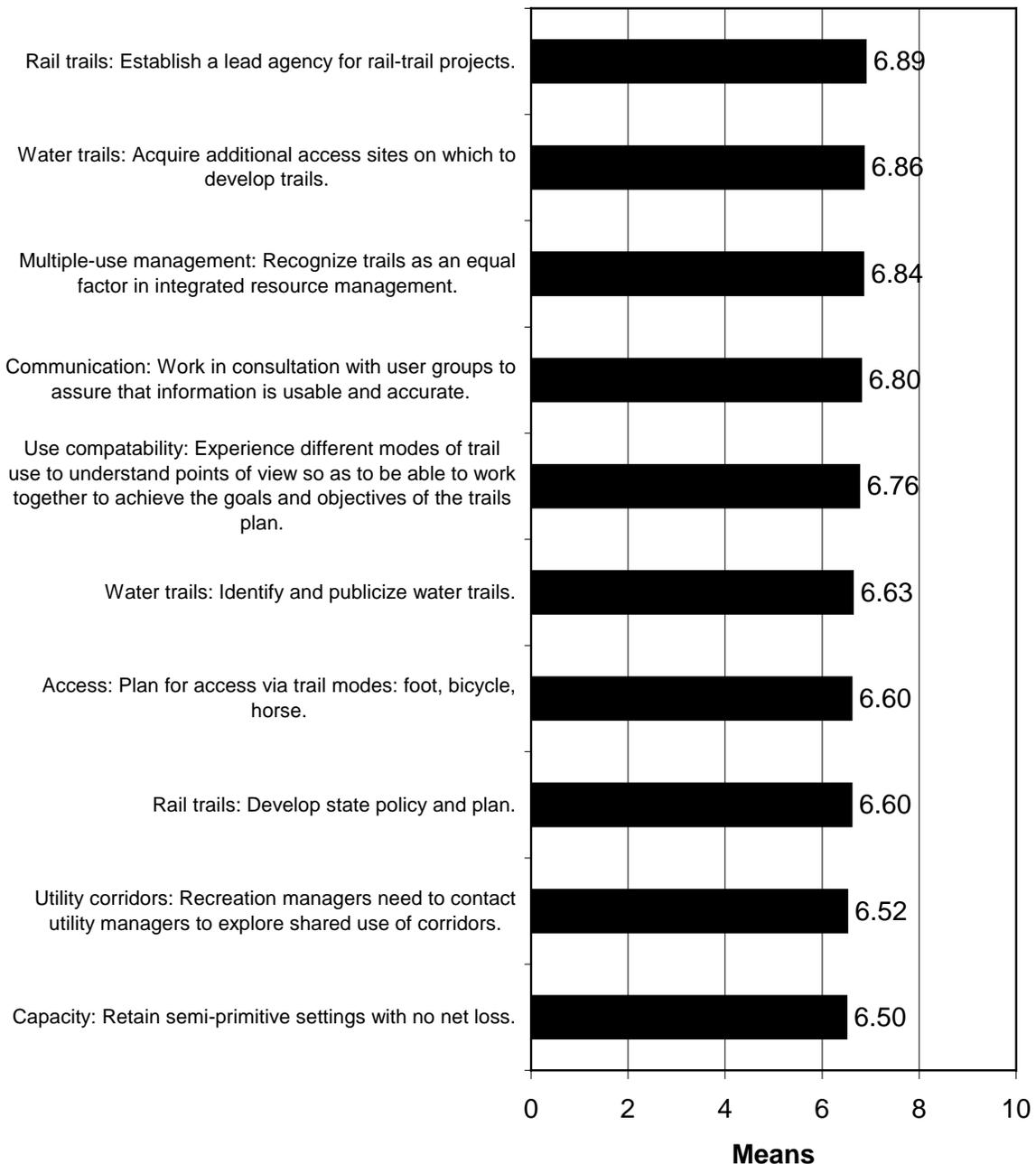
**Figure 3.8. Mean Ratings of the Progress Made Toward Solutions in the Past 10 Years (Part 1).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent," the mean rating of the progress made towards each of the following solutions in the past 20 years. (Part 1)**



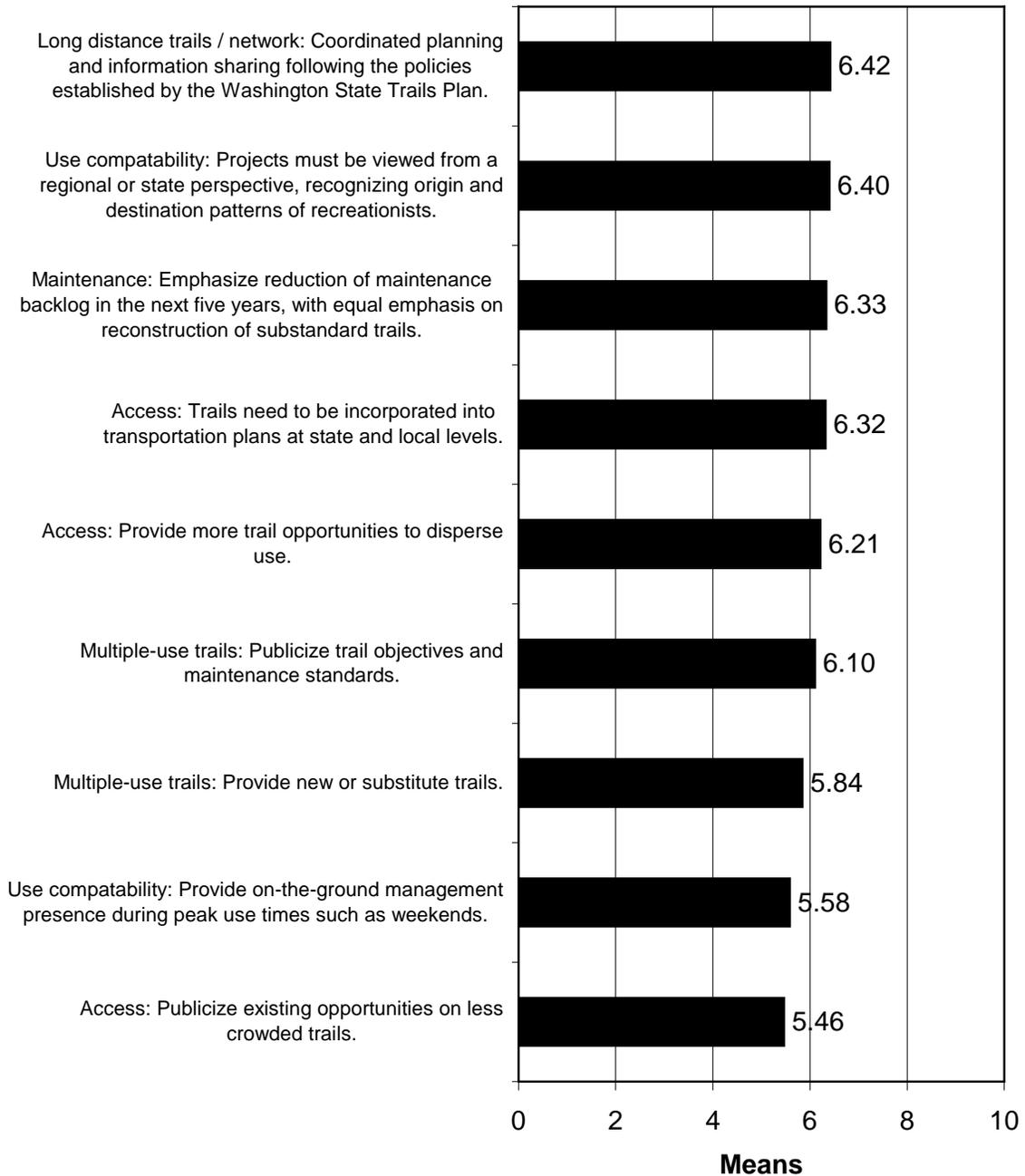
**Figure 3.9. Mean Ratings of the Progress Made Toward Solutions in the Past 10 Years (Part 2).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent," the mean rating of the progress made towards each of the following solutions in the past 20 years. (Part 2)**



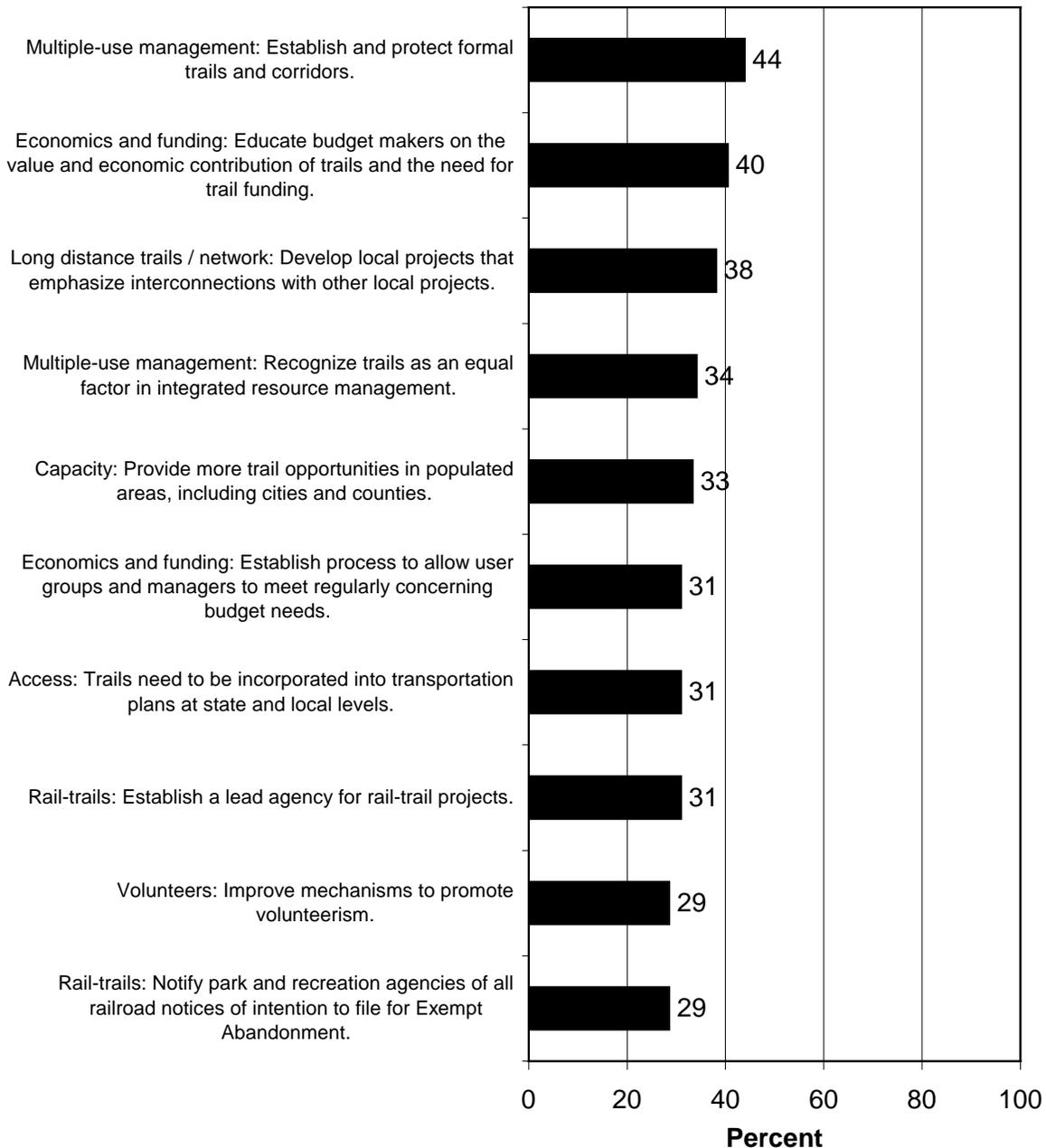
**Figure 3.10. Mean Ratings of the Progress Made Toward Solutions in the Past 10 Years (Part 3).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent," the mean rating of the progress made towards each of the following solutions in the past 20 years. (Part 3)**



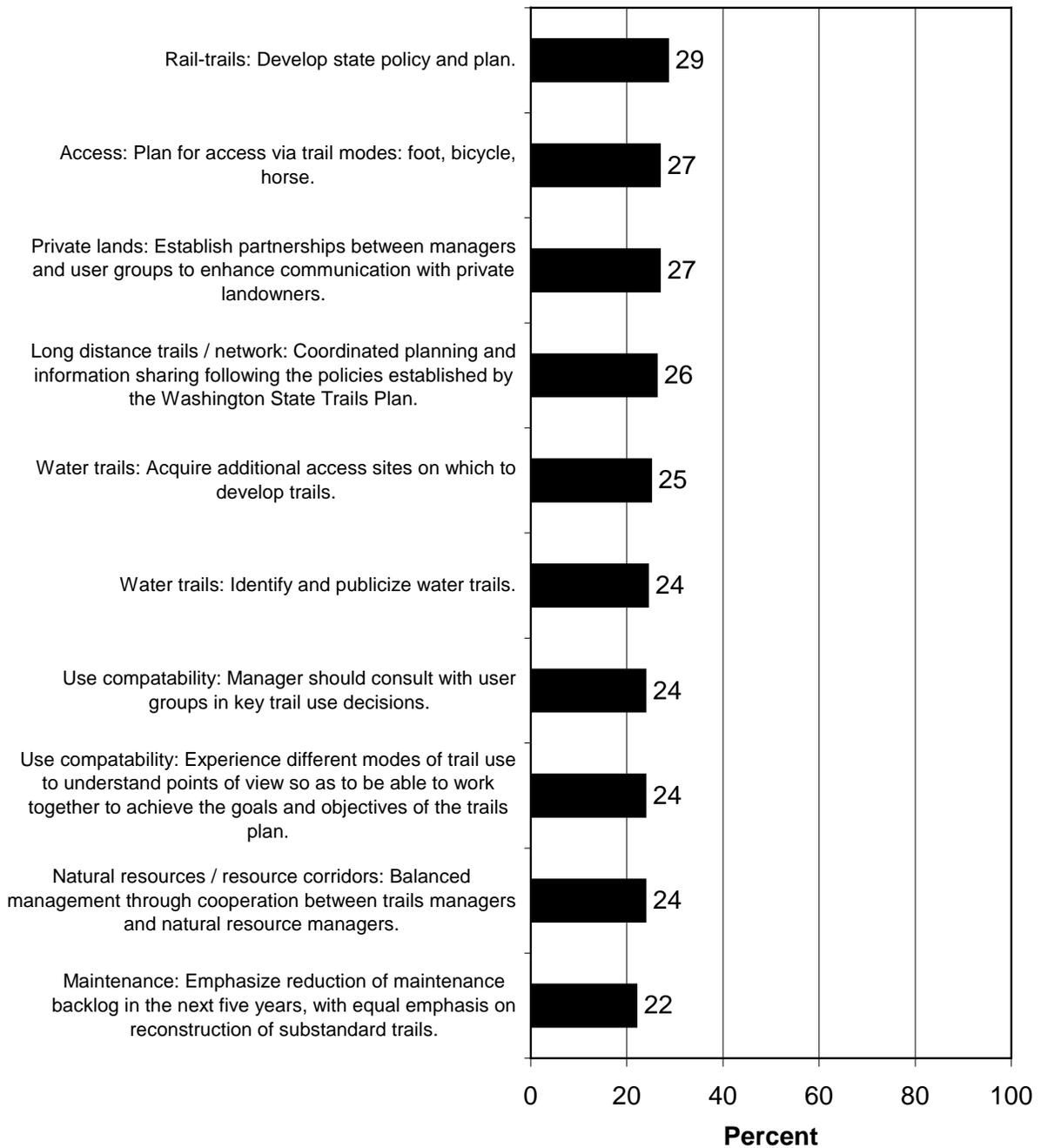
**Figure 3.11. Percent Rating Progress toward Solutions as a 9 or 10 (Part 1).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent," percent rating the progress made towards each of the following in the past 20 years as a 9 or 10. (Part 1)**



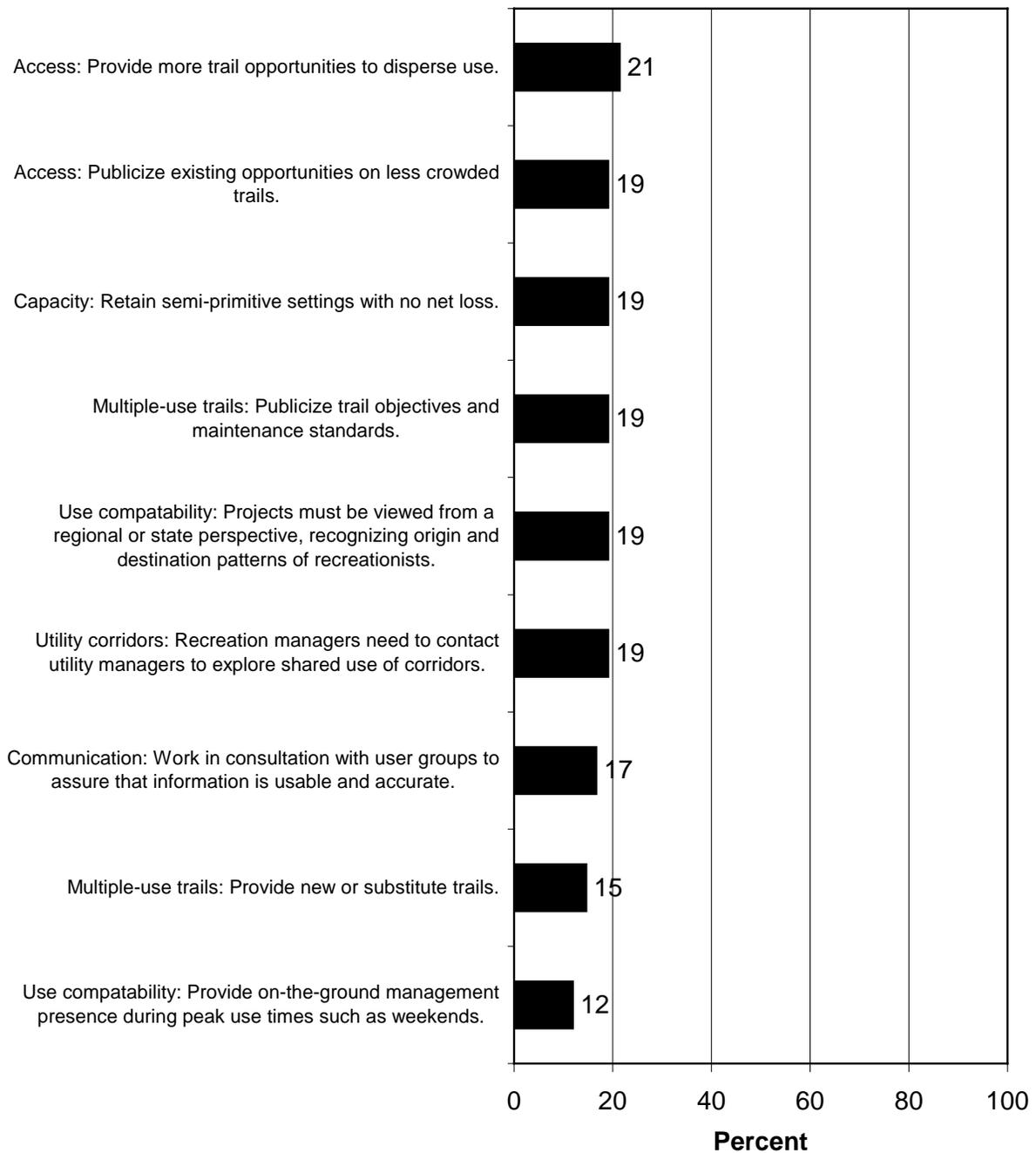
**Figure 3.12. Percent Rating Progress toward Solutions as a 9 or 10 (Part 2).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent," percent rating the progress made towards each of the following in the past 20 years as a 9 or 10. (Part 2)**



**Figure 3.13. Percent Rating Progress toward Solutions as a 9 or 10 (Part 3).**

**On a scale of 0 - 10 where 0 is "poor" and 10 is "excellent," percent rating the progress made towards each of the following in the past 20 years as a 9 or 10. (Part 3)**



## **COMPARING THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAIL ISSUES WITH PROGRESS ON SOLUTIONS**

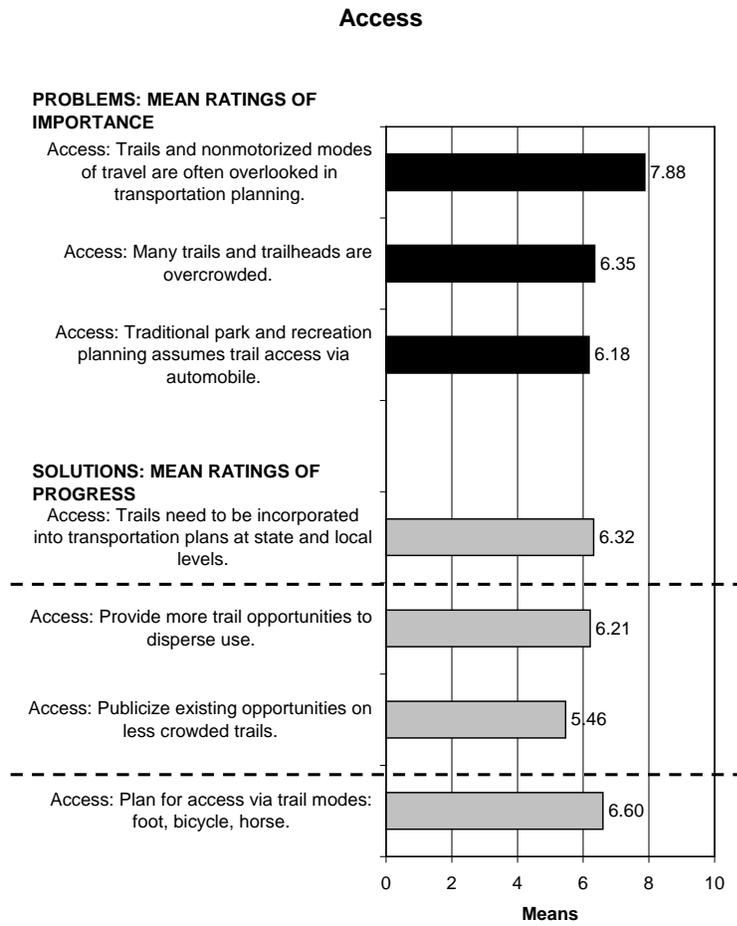
The following section compares the mean rating of importance of each trails issue and problem statement with the mean ratings of progress made toward solutions.

### **Issue: Access**

In the 1991 trails plan, access issues focused primarily on how users get to a trail. The plan recommended that it should be possible to access a trail by foot, bicycle, or horse without needing to drive to the trailhead or cross a busy internal park road or parking lot. The discussion of access also focused on barrier-free trails that provide unlimited opportunities for many users, including people with disabilities, the elderly, children, and people with limited mobility.

As shown in Figure 3.14, the 1991 plan indicated that the greatest access issue was that trails and non-motorized modes of travel are often overlooked in transportation planning. Currently, the difference between the importance rating and the progress rating indicates that additional attention is needed in this area.

**Figure 3.14. Access: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



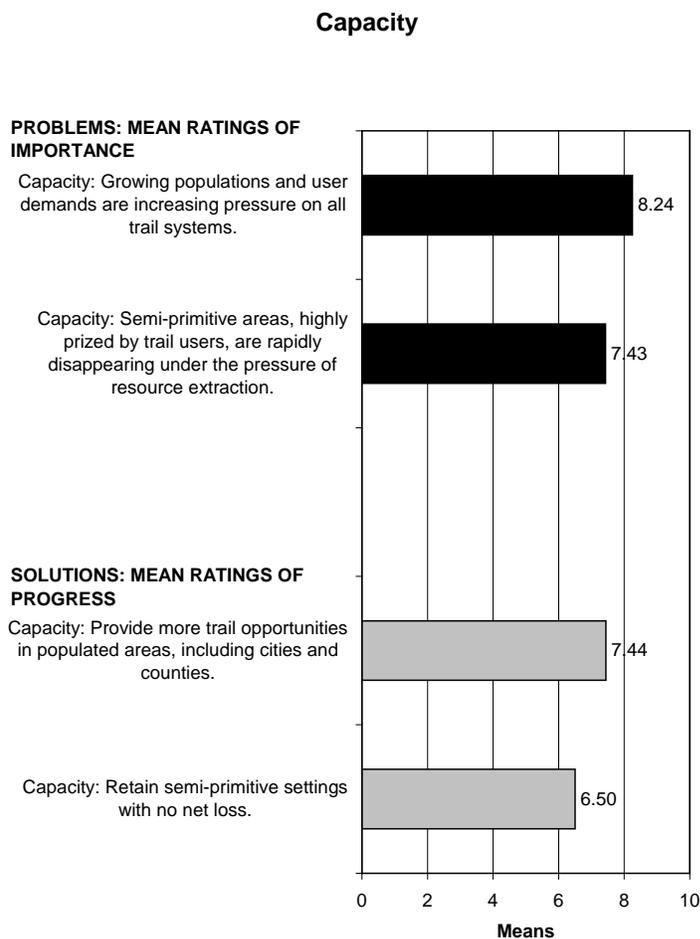
### Issue: Capacity

In the 1991 trails plan, capacity issues focused on the need for existing trails to meet user demand, the capacity of land to carry more trails miles per acre and withstand the impacts of additional visitation, and the maintenance and funding of trails.

While the Trails Advisory Committee identified growing population and user demand as one of the top three problems, their rating of progress made shows that the state is successfully making efforts toward providing more trail opportunities, particularly in populated areas. Still, with continued anticipated growth in the state, this capacity issue likely will remain a problem.

As shown in Figure 3.15, a notable difference exists between the problem of semi-primitive areas disappearing under the pressure of resource extraction (7.43 mean rating) and the progress made toward retaining semi-primitive areas with no net loss (6.50 mean rating). This suggests that a focus on preserving semi-primitive areas is another area of need.

**Figure 3.15. Capacity: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**

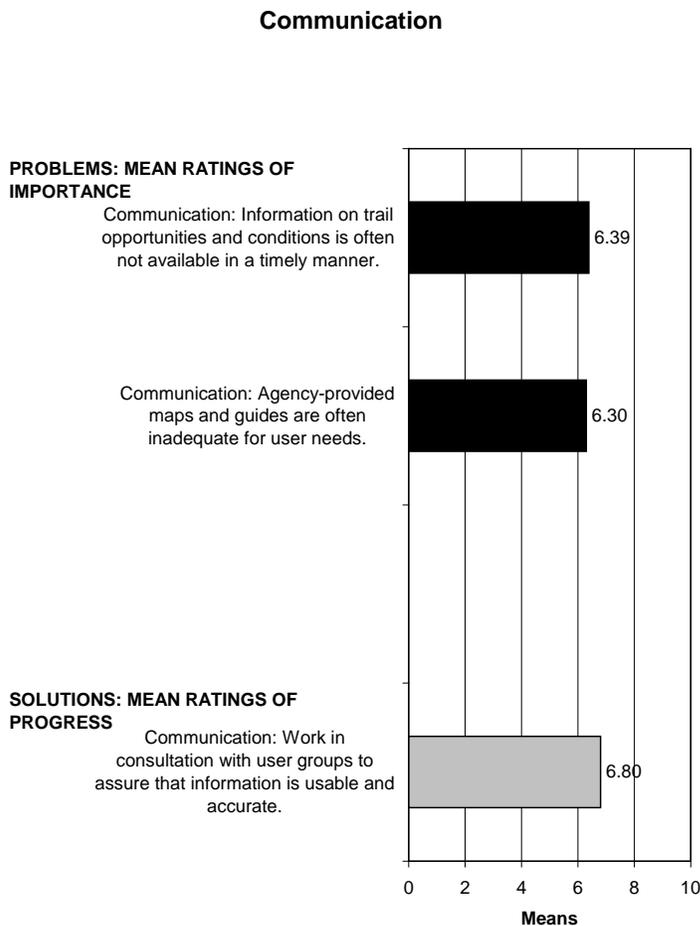


## Issue: Communication

The 1991 trails plan focused on increasing availability of information on trails. Despite an abundance of information about trails, the plan noted that up-to-date, trails-specific information was still hard for some users to obtain.

The state appears to be making progress in its communication efforts (Figure 3.16). As shown, communication appears to be of lower priority for the Trails Advisory Committee compared with other problems. The findings show a positive difference between the importance rating and the progress ratings.

**Figure 3.16. Communication: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**

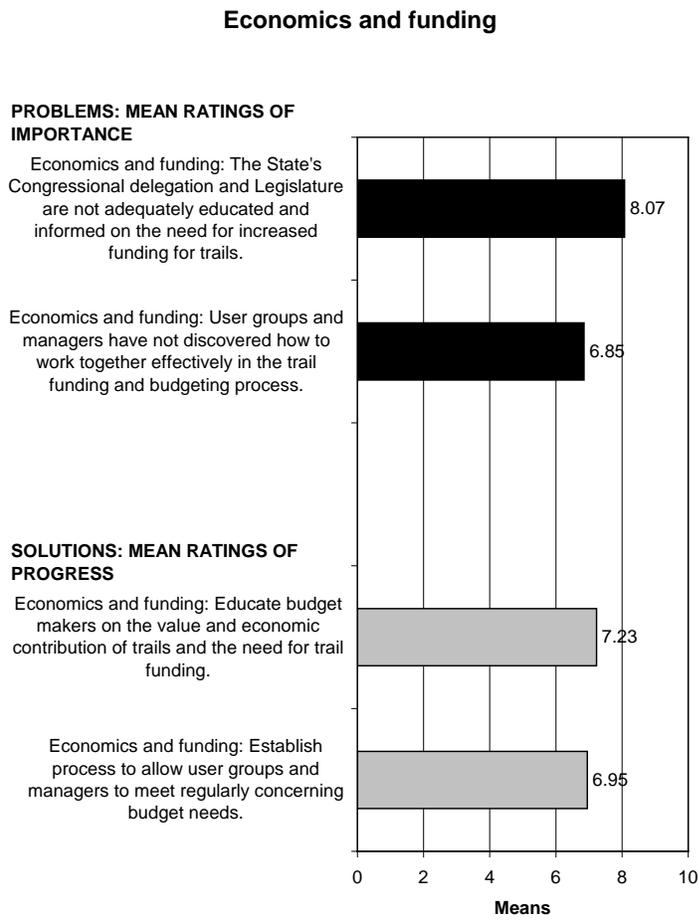


**Issue: Economics and Funding**

In its discussion of economics and funding, the 1991 trails plan considered the economic impact of trails use in Washington. At that time, trail users contributed an investment in outdoor equipment of over \$3.4 billion dollars. However, the plan contended that recreation funding did not compete well with other priorities in the budgeting process, and the plan upheld the importance of regular appropriations for trails recreation. This section of the 1991 trails plan discussed funding sources for federal, state, and local land managers as well as new sources of revenue, such as permits or licenses, taxes on trails equipment, fees on horse or ORV trailers, and additional gasoline taxes.

As shown in Figure 3.17, the most important problem regarding economics and funding rated by the stakeholders is their sense that the state's Congressional delegation and Legislature are not adequately educated and informed on the need for increased funding for trails. Although the survey of the Trails Advisory Committee indicates that much progress has been made on this issue, a gap still exists between progress on this issue and its importance. This indicates that educating policymakers about the value and economic contribution of trails and the need for trails funding continues to be a priority among stakeholders.

**Figure 3.17. Economics and Funding: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



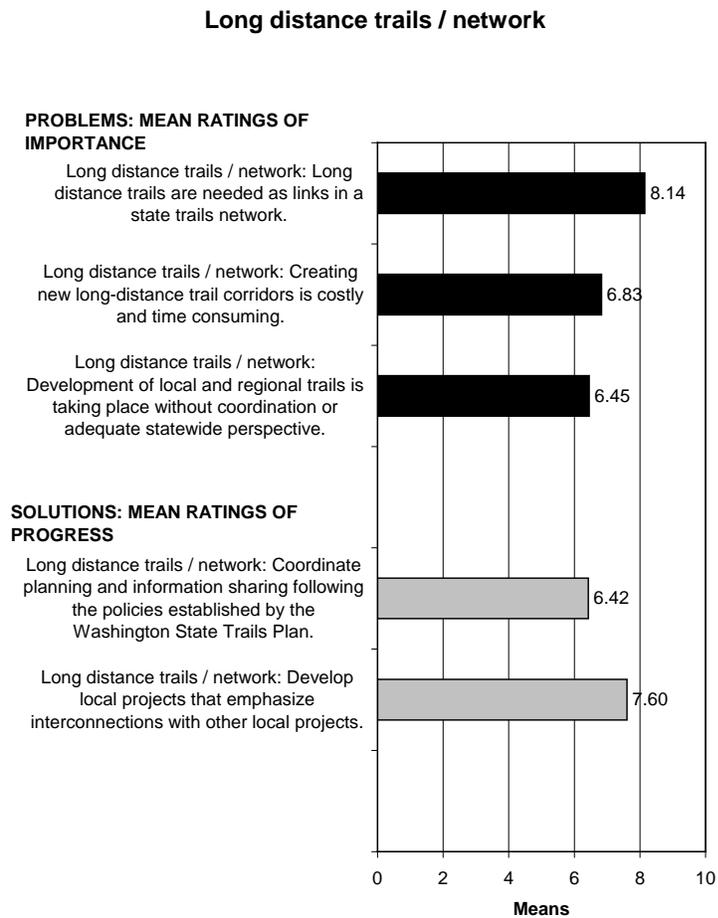
## **Issue: Long Distance Trails and a State Trail Network**

The 1991 trails plan defines long distance trails as a single trail or a series of connected trails requiring three or more days to travel by foot, or a day and half to travel by a motorized vehicle or bicycle. The plan discussed cross-state trails, local-to-local trail connections, and rail-to-trail conversions. The hope was that the coordination of efforts on the trails systems would result in a true state trails network, with the existing regional systems linked by county and regional corridors.

Long distance trails and the state trail network continue to be a top priority for stakeholders. As shown in Figure 3.18, the Trails Advisory committee ranked the need for long distance trails as links in a state trails network among the top trail issues in importance, with a mean rating of 8.14.

One of the solutions to this received a significantly lower progress rating: Coordinating planning and information sharing following the policies established by the Washington State Trails Plan (6.42 mean rating). The significant difference between the importance rating and the progress rating suggests this as a continued area of concern for stakeholders. Still, the findings show significant progress made toward developing local projects that emphasize interconnections with other local projects (7.60 mean rating and the highest rating for progress among all 29 solutions).

**Figure 3.18. Long Distance Trails / State Trail Network: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**

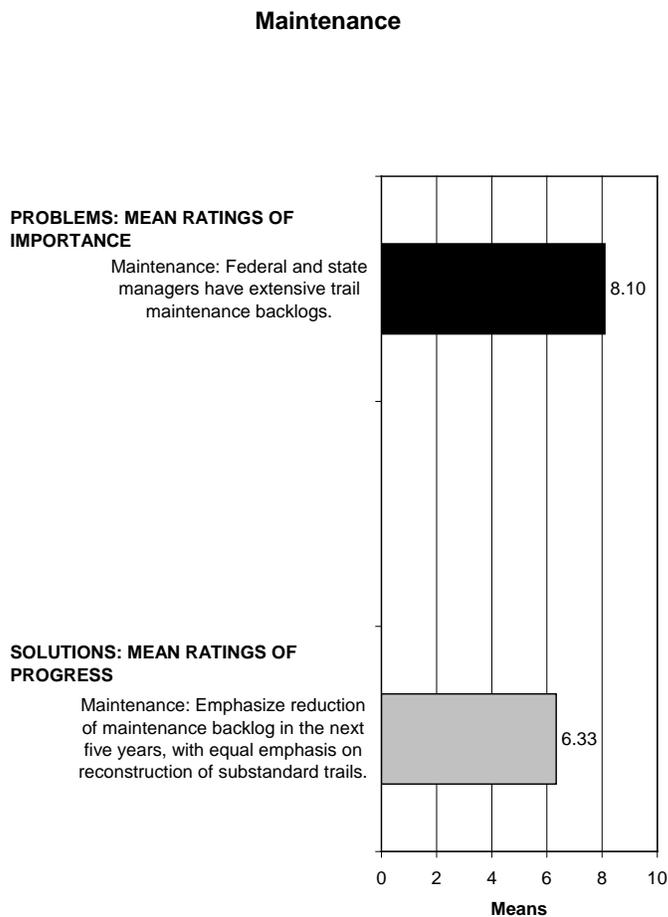


### Issue: Maintenance

In the 1991 trails plan, maintenance focused on proactive trails development, with the most important consideration being whether a trail has been built correctly from the start. The 1991 trails plan noted that appropriate trail design and construction, including route location, would do more for the life of a trail than any amount of maintenance. This section of the plan emphasized the need to redesign and reconstruct “substandard” trails to prevent resource damage and to enhance user safety and enjoyment.

As Figure 3.19 illustrates, the Trails Advisory Committee considers maintenance a priority for state trails planning. The importance of the problem of extensive trails maintenance backlogs had a mean rating of 8.10, while the progress toward reducing the maintenance backlog had a mean rating of 6.3.

**Figure 3.19. Maintenance: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



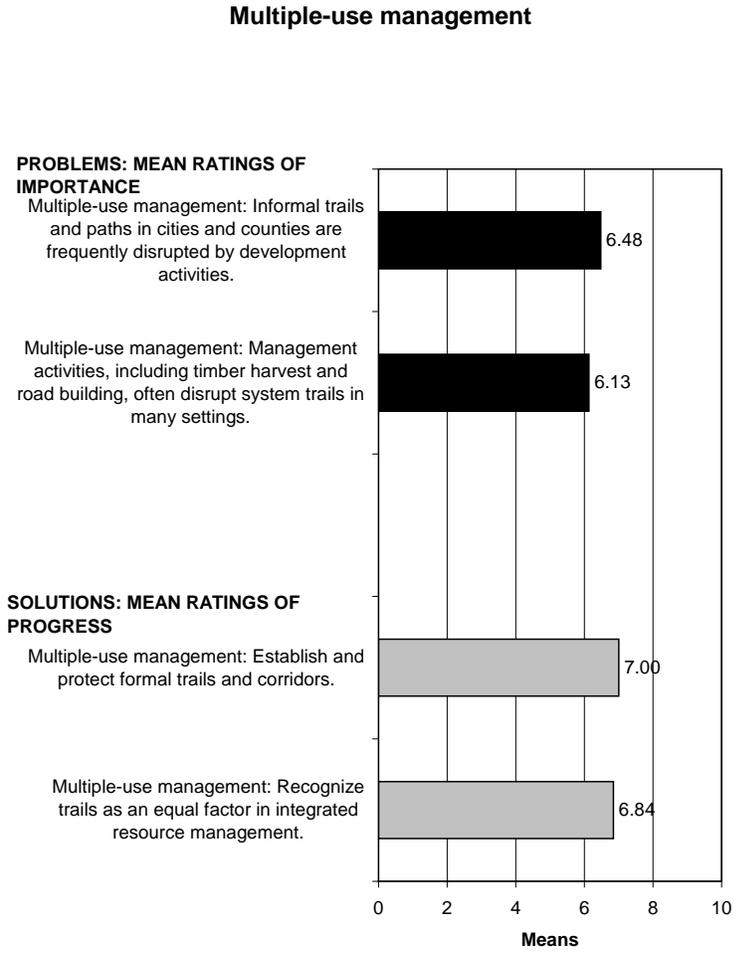
**Issue: Multiple-use Management**

Multiple-use management was defined in the 1991 trails plan as managing the same land base for two or more objectives. The discussion focused on how, in the past, trails suffered under the multiple-use concept, with trails being only a minor consideration in management decisions, secondary to other uses such as forest roads and timber harvest. Only trails protected by certain designations could reasonably be expected to escape disruption, abandonment, or destruction.

However, the 1991 plan highlights a then-new focus on trails created through the Forest Service's Recreation Strategy. This strategy acknowledged the overwhelming response to then-proposed Forest Plans, which made it clear that the public sees recreation as an important use of forest lands nationally. One of the most important features of the Forest Service's Recreation Strategy is its strengthening of the position of recreation in integrated resource management decisions.

Figure 3.20 indicates the Trails Advisory Committee sees much progress made to address problems related to multiple-use management. These problems received lower ratings on the importance scale, while obtaining higher ratings for progress being made.

**Figure 3.20. Multiple-Use Management: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**

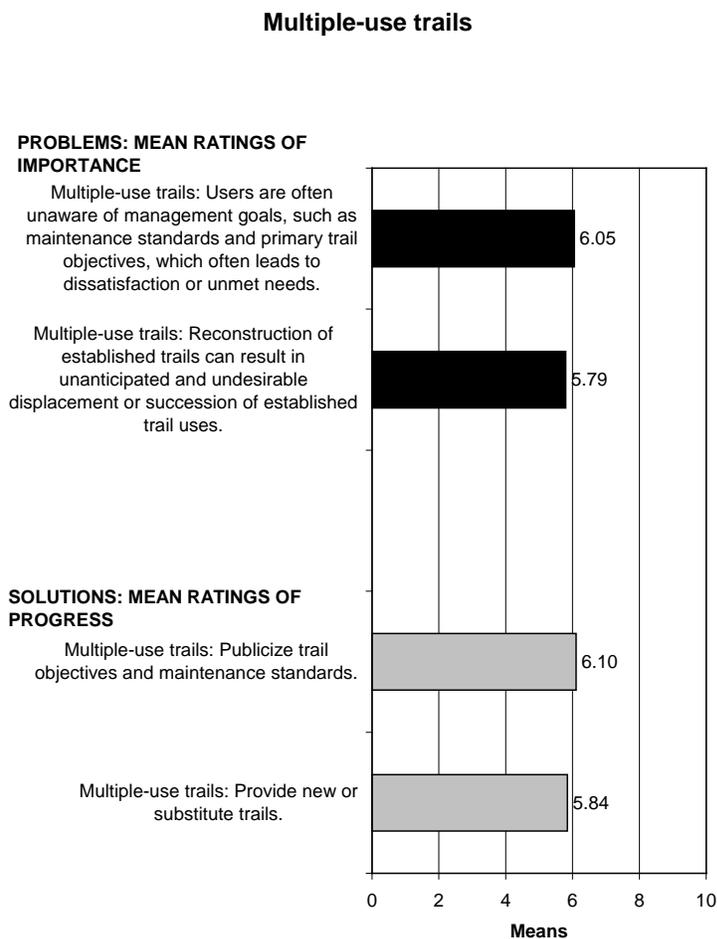


## Issue: Multiple-use Trails

The 1991 trails plan defined multiple-use trails as trails that provide for more than one type of activity. It noted that multiple-use does not have to mean simultaneous use. It could mean seasonal, apportioned, or sometimes limited uses. Multiple-use trails help to accommodate otherwise incompatible uses and minimize user conflicts. Solutions regarding multiple-use trails encouraged trails management based on a primary objective, including primary use, for both trails systems and individual trails. Once the primary use objective is set, other compatible uses can be determined.

The Trails Advisory Committee indicated that multiple-use trails appear to be less of a priority. Multiple-use trail problems rated among the lowest in terms of importance, while also ranking among the lowest in progress made toward solutions. The mean ratings toward progress are still higher than the mean ratings of importance in general, suggesting that the necessary progress is being made.

**Figure 3.21. Multiple-Use Trails: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



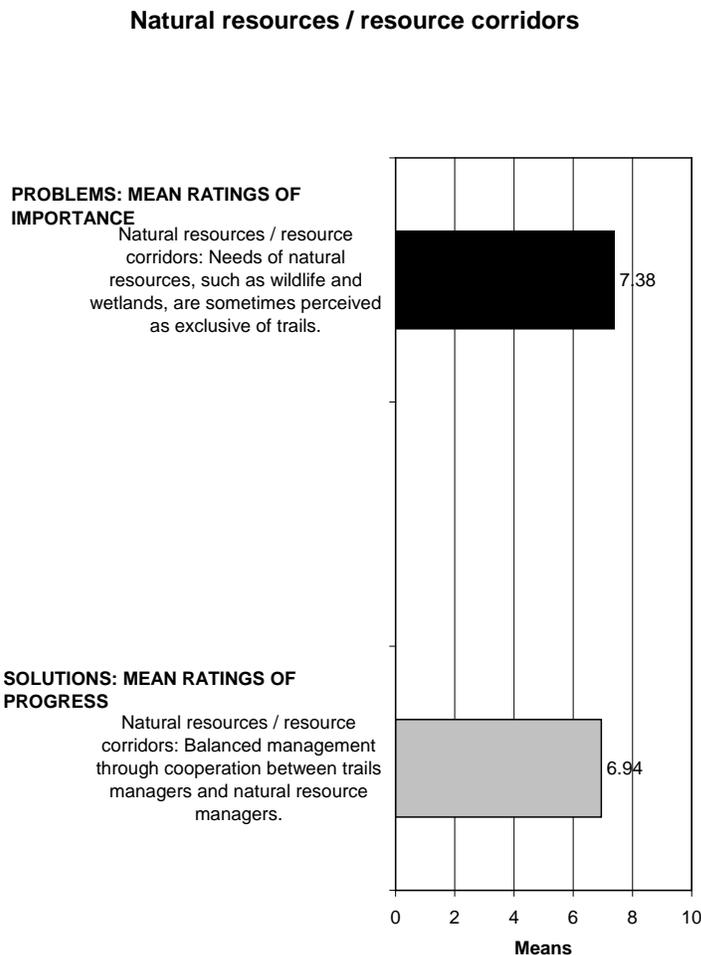
### Issue: Natural Resources and Resource Corridors

Natural resources and resource corridors are often the main reason why a trail exists—allowing access to a lake, to a fishing stream, or to an enjoyable forest walk or ride. The 1991 trails plan emphasized that trails management must take into account the needs of natural resources of all kinds and that certain types of trails uses may compete with natural resources. For example, the same forest that is popular with trail users might be earmarked for timber harvest.

The 1991 trails plan upholds the preservation of natural resource corridors to provide new trail opportunities. A natural resource corridor was defined as a greenbelt or linear open space, which could include an abandoned railroad right-of-way, a wildlife migration corridor, or a watercourse.

The Trails Advisory Committee rated the problem statement of trails being excluded from natural resources and resource corridors among the top ten most important trail problems (Figure 3.22).

**Figure 3.22. Natural Resources and Resource Corridors: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



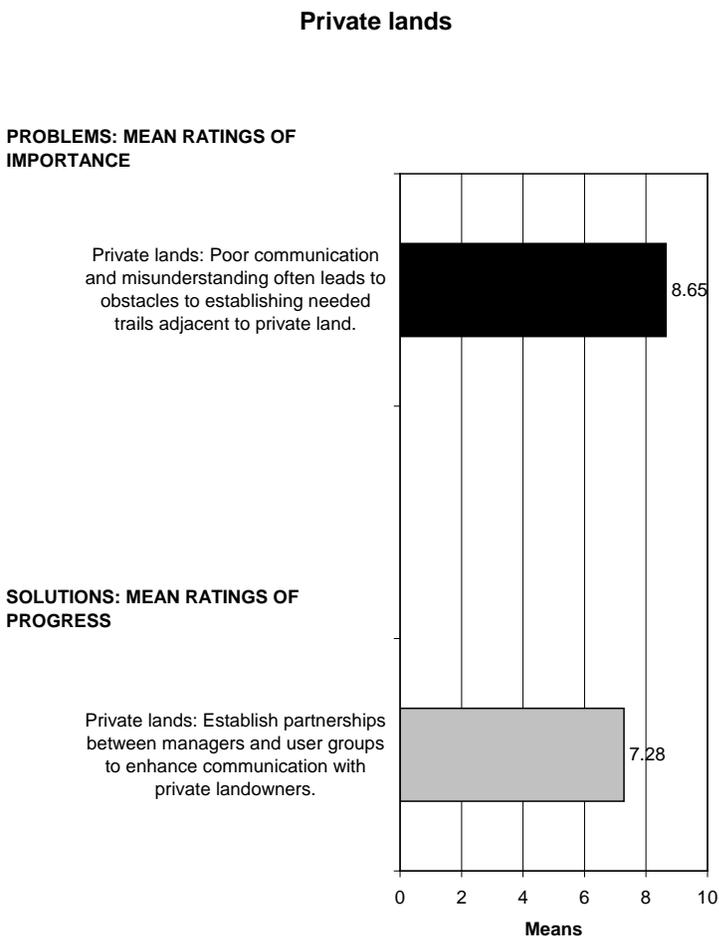
## Issue: Private Lands, Private Concerns

In the 1991 trails plan, private land was considered an issue of concern because, in some cases, private lands border public trails. In these instances, some landowners expressed concerns about litter, vandalism, fences, theft, fire, the spread of weeds, and other problems related to trails projects. Additionally, landowners had questions about adequate compensation for purchase or use of their property.

This issue received the highest mean rating for importance from the Trails Advisory Committee. While the committee indicated that progress has been made toward the proposed solution—establishing partnerships between land managers and user groups to enhance communication with private landowners—the fact that this is identified as the most important problem suggests that more could still be done.

As shown in Figure 3.23, a gap exists between the mean ratings of importance versus the mean rating of progress on this issue.

**Figure 3.23. Private Lands, Private Concerns: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



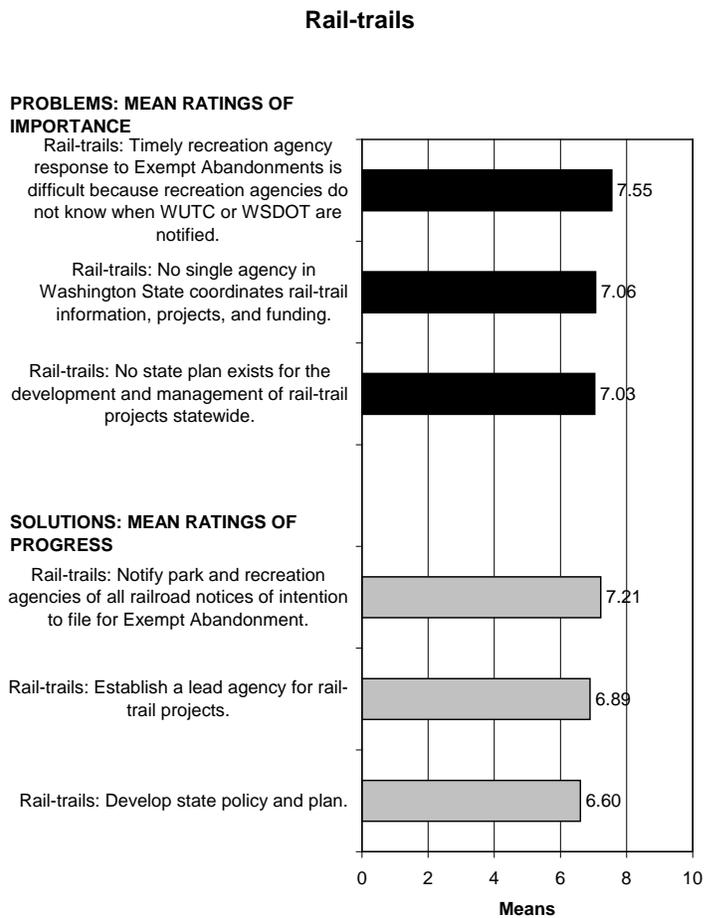
**Issue: Railroad Right-of-Way (Rails-to-Trails)**

The 1991 trails plan highlights Washington State as a national leader in the rails-to-trails movement, but focuses on the gap between abandonments and actual rails-to-trails conversions as a significant opportunity to expand trail miles. The plan suggests that a variety of uses, both mechanized and non-mechanized, can be accommodated by rails-to-trails and advises that appropriate uses should be decided on a case-by-case basis.

As shown in Figure 3.24, of the three problem statements associated with the rails-to-trails issue, the greatest problem is timely response from recreation agencies to Exempt Abandonments notices is difficult because recreation agencies do not know when the state agencies are notified.

The difference between the importance rating and the progress rating suggests that additional work is needed in this area. However, other trail problems and their solutions are rated as more important, suggesting there are greater priorities on which to focus trails planning efforts.

**Figure 3.24. Rails-to-Trails: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



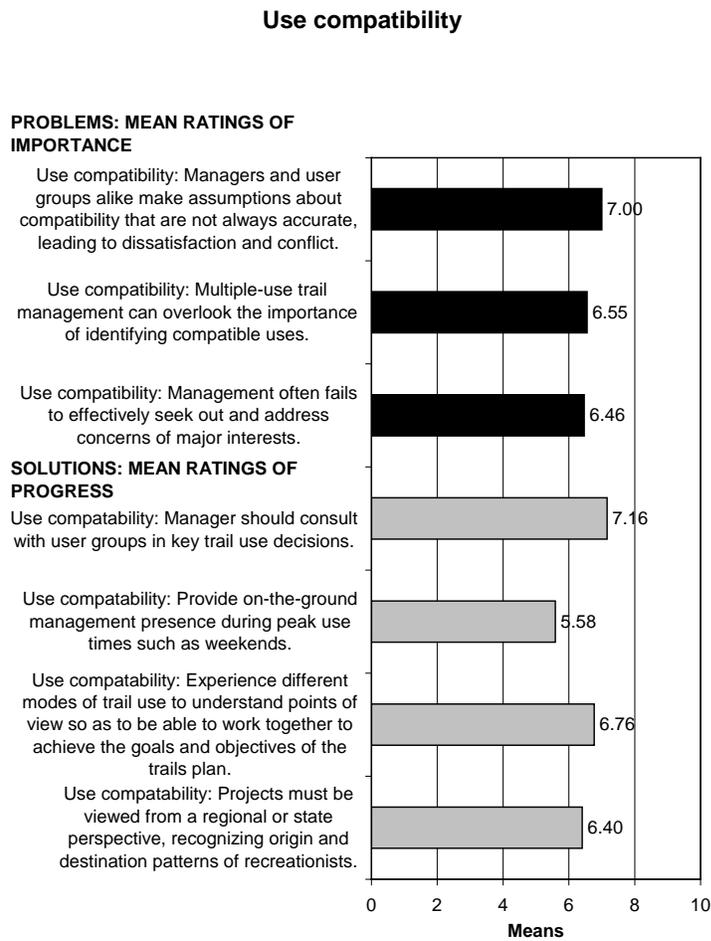
**Issue: Use Compatibility**

Use compatibility was identified as a critical issue in the 1991 trails plan. In its most general form, use incompatibility (or conflict) degrades the quality of a trail experience for a different type of use. Incompatibility means the constant threat of losing a recreational opportunity for one or more user groups. The 1991 trails plan contends that the key to maximizing compatibility is management by land managers in cooperation and consultation with user groups.

Figure 3.25 shows the Trails Advisory Committee indicated that the greatest problem regarding use compatibility is that land managers and user groups both make assumptions about compatibility that are not always accurate, leading to dissatisfaction and conflict (7.00 mean rating).

When exploring solutions to address this problem, the findings suggest that the state has made substantial progress in having land managers consult with user groups to make key trails use decisions. On the other hand, the findings indicate that progress toward having managers provide an on-the-ground management presence during peak-use times such as weekends has one of the lowest ratings.

**Figure 3.25. Use Compatibility: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**

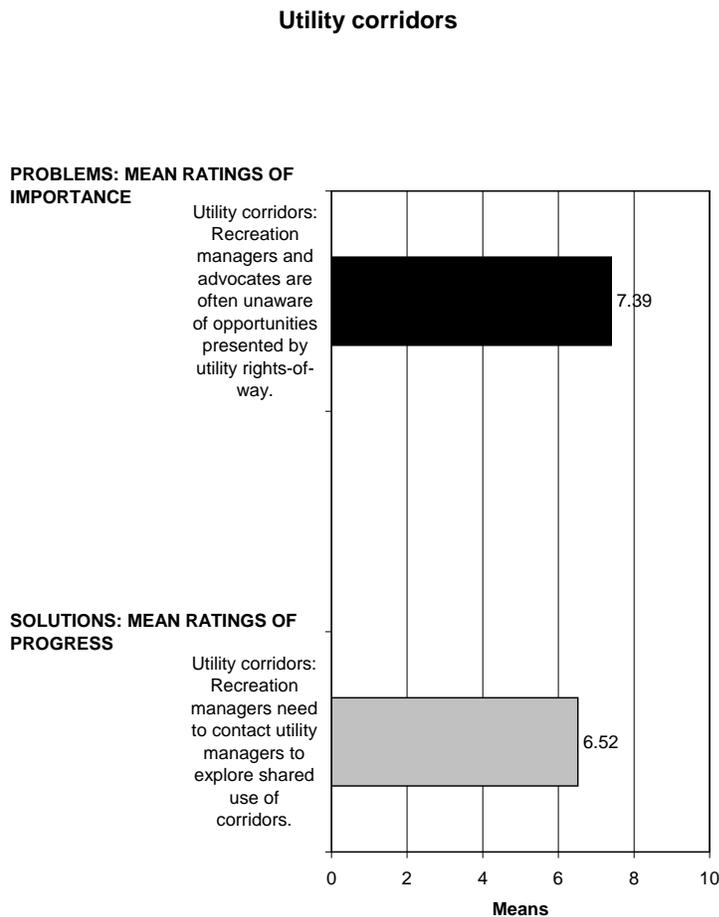


### Issue: Utility Corridors

Utility corridors, such as rails-to-trails routes, fiber optic cable placements, sewage lines, canals, dikes, and power line routes, sometimes offer recreational trails routes opportunities. Utility corridors are especially attractive in areas that are heavily developed, where locating a trail right-of-way might otherwise be impossible. The 1991 trails plan considers the benefits of using utility corridors for recreation trails routes, but it also discusses the challenges of doing so, including right-of-way issues, easements, and levels of management.

This issue was rated among the top ten most important trail problems (7.39 mean rating) by the Trails Advisory Committee. This rating, coupled with the substantially lower rating of 6.52 for progress, suggests that utility corridors remain an important issue.

**Figure 3.26. Utility Corridors: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**

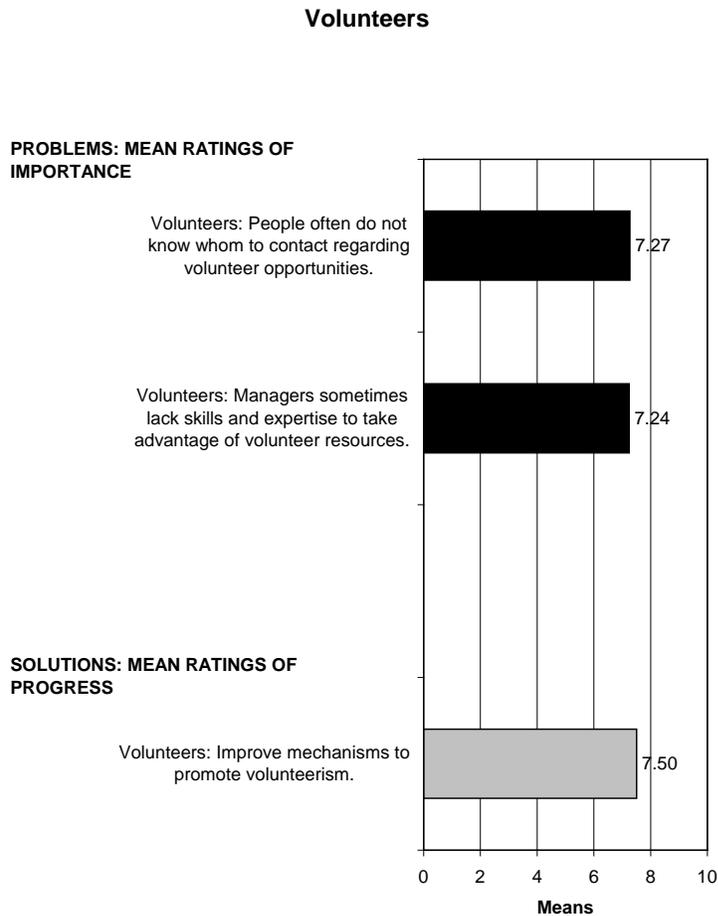


## Issue: Volunteers

The 1991 trails plan outlines the importance of and limitations associated with volunteers working on trails. Volunteers play an essential role in trails planning, development, and maintenance, and they can significantly augment the resources of trails managing agencies. On the other hand, liability is a major concern for land managers, as is reliability, with some volunteers losing interest quickly. Another limitation noted is training for volunteers and that people lack knowledge about how to volunteer.

The Trails Advisory Committee's ratings of volunteer problems and solutions show the greatest progress. While volunteer problems were rated high among all 31 trail problems, the solution received one of the top ratings in terms of progress being made (7.50 mean rating). The progress made toward this rated much higher than the importance of the volunteer problems, suggesting that progress has been made toward addressing volunteer issues since 1991.

**Figure 3.27. Volunteers: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**

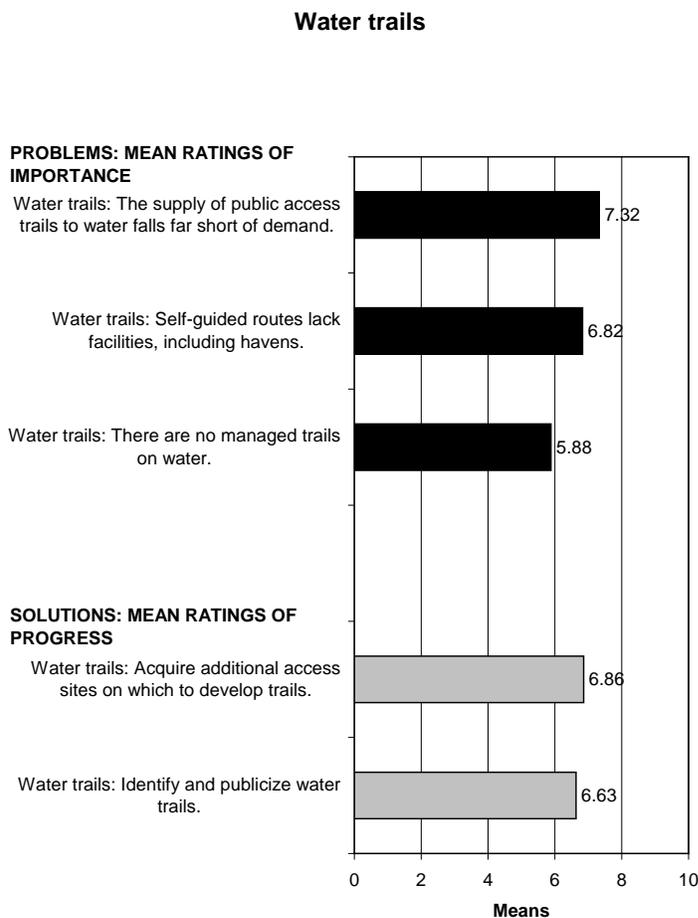


### Issue: Water Trails

The 1991 trails plan defines a water trail as a trail that provides a route or path to, on, or along a body of water. Water trails were emphasized as being in great demand at the time of the 1991 trails plan. Although water trails had been designated, at that time no managed trail on fresh or saltwater existed.

Figure 3.28 indicates that the Trails Advisory Committee sees water trails remaining an important issue for trails planning, particularly with respect to supply and demand. Still, some progress has been made on acquiring additional access sites and in identifying and publicizing water trails. This could explain why the third problem statement about water trails—that there are no managed trails on water—was rated of low importance. In short, the findings indicate that success in increasing and publicizing water trail opportunities since 1991.

**Figure 3.28. Water Trails: A Comparison of Mean Ratings of Importance and Progress.**



## **UNDERSTANDING PROGRESS MADE SINCE 1991**

The research and findings show that, while some progress has been made on several major issues identified in the 1991 trails plan, most of them remain important considerations. None received a mean score lower than the midpoint of 5.00.

The top three trail issues and associated problem statements are:

- **PRIVATE LAND, PRIVATE CONCERNS:** Poor communication and misunderstanding often leads to obstacles to establishing trails adjacent to private land.
- **CAPACITY:** Growing populations and user demands are increasing pressure on all trails systems.
- **LONG DISTANCE TRAILS AND A STATE TRAIL NETWORK:** Long distance trails are needed as links in a state trails network

Similarly, the Trails Advisory Committee rated the progress made toward all 29 solutions relatively high; again, the mean rating for each solution was above the midpoint (5.00). The solutions toward which the most progress has been made since 1991 include:

- **LONG DISTANCE TRAILS AND A STATE TRAIL NETWORK:** Develop local projects that emphasize interconnections with other local projects.
- **VOLUNTEERS:** Improve mechanisms to promote volunteerism.

A review of each issue shows there is a gap between the importance of an issue and the progress made in many of the problems related to trails. Still, progress has been made in several areas. Comparing the importance of an issue with the progress made, the most success has been made in:

- Addressing communication issues (both the unavailability of information on trail opportunities and trail conditions and the lack of trail maps and guides) by agencies consulting with user groups to assure information is useable and accurate.
- Developing local projects that emphasize interconnections with other local projects as a method to connect long distance trails into a state trail network.
- Establishing and protecting formal trail corridors and recognizing trails as an equal factor in multiple-use management.
- Reducing the overall issue of multiple-use trails.
- Improving access to volunteer opportunities and supporting their efforts by promoting volunteerism.
- Increasing and publicizing water trail opportunities to address the lack of managed trails on water related support facilities.

## CHAPTER 4: CURRENT ISSUES IN PROVIDING TRAIL OPPORTUNITIES

This chapter explores the most important issues, challenges, and problems related to providing trail opportunities and facilities. The survey research, discussions with the Trails Advisory Committee, and public comments posted on the Town Hall were used to identify the major trail problems that currently exist in the state.

This chapter highlights qualitative research from discussions on the Trails Town Hall and among the Trails Advisory Committee. Consequently, it is not appropriate to ascribe quantitative meanings to these issues. These discussions provide a context for better understanding key trail issues in Washington.

Based on the qualitative findings, the researchers identified 15 issue categories and 87 trail problems of relevance to the *2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan*. The Trails Advisory Committee prioritized these problems to guide trails planning in the next 5 years. Table 1 in the Executive Summary identifies the top 20 problems.

### Issue: Access

Access is an important issue to ensure trail opportunities exist for all Washington residents. Studies have shown that access issues can have a significant impact on outdoor recreation participation. In fact, in the SCORP, residents lack of facilities or closed facilities and access or travel distance as among the top problems.

Similarly, among both Town Hall contributors and the Trails Advisory Committee, access issues were a considerable concern. The survey of the Trails Advisory Committee identified access as the second most important issues (Figure 3.1).

Access issues encompass a variety of factors, including availability, accessibility, accommodation, awareness, and assumptions. Town Hall contributors voiced concerns about availability overall, referencing a lack of trail opportunities within a reasonable commute from major population centers. These contributors cited difficulty in accessing trails to participate in specific recreational activities, such as motorized recreation, mountain biking, and horseback riding.

Contributors also discussed the accessibility of trails and trailheads, expressing frustration with trail closures on both private and public lands and concerns about lack of public transit to trailheads.

Respondents indicated that another deterrent to access is the complexity and costs of fees and permits to use trails. Similar to concerns expressed in the SCORP, some trail users were unhappy with the Discover Pass and user fees. While some residents appear willing to pay user fees to ensure and increase access to trails, the financial burden and complexity of obtaining

passes and knowing which one to use was a deterrent for others. These obstacles were likely to deter beginner trail users and families with children.

Some users were frustrated about the multiple fee structure that exists, noting that they were not able to predict which kind of fee or permit was needed for various recreation sites.

Finally, both Town Hall contributors and the Trails Advisory Committee cited concerns about adequate access for residents with disabilities and limited mobility (e.g., elderly residents, children), urban residents, and underserved communities.

Parking also emerged as an important concern. Town Hall contributors discussed both the quantity and quality of parking for trails, indicating that parking was often insufficient and could not accommodate the number of trail users. In addition, they cited problems with inadequate infrastructure that does not meet the needs of the diverse transportation modes used to access trails, such as cars, bicycles, and trailers.

Further, several Town Hall contributors discussed the need for trail maintenance to improve trail access such as a horseback rider needing vertical clearance and a wheelchair user needing horizontal clearance.

One theme that emerged among both the Town Hall contributors and the Trails Advisory Committee was the importance of considering trails as part of the overall transportation infrastructure in Washington. Many users believe that trails are not considered during the transportation planning process often enough, yet trails are becoming increasingly important as transportation links for those commuting to work, schools, cultural attractions, and population centers.

The Trails Advisory Committee ranked access problems priorities for the next 5 years. As shown in Table 4.1, the top three ranked problems related to access are:

- Trail closures and lack of maintenance have limited the access to existing trails.
- Trails and non-motorized modes of travel are often overlooked in transportation planning.
- Insufficient access for underserved communities, including residents with disabilities or limited mobility, children, youth, and urban residents.

**Table 4.1. Ranking of Problems Related to Access.**

Problems Related to Access	Score*	Rank
Trail closures and lack of maintenance have limited access to trails.	198	1
Trails and non-motorized modes of travel are often overlooked in transportation planning. (Problem identified in 1991 trails plan.)	181	2
There is insufficient access for underserved communities, including residents with disabilities or limited mobility, children, youth, and urban residents.	170	3

Problems Related to Access	Score*	Rank
There are not enough trails facilities and opportunities near major population centers.	168	4
Parking at trailheads is insufficient (i.e., not enough capacity).	161	5
There is insufficient access to trailheads by bicycle or public transit. (Problem identified in 1991 trails plan.)	148	6
Trail use requires different permits (i.e., it's too confusing and time-consuming).	146	7
Parking at trailheads does not have adequate infrastructure for all users (cars, trailers, bicycles, etc.)	136	8
Private or public lands closures often prevent access to backcountry trails.	131	9
There is not enough access to water trails.	111	10
Trail use requires too many fees (i.e., it's too expensive).	100	11

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 11 problems, which were assigned points 1-11 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (11 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 11) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## Issue: Capacity

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the results in the SCORP suggest that the supply of trail opportunities is not meeting public demand. Furthermore, capacity issues become an increasing concern when demographic trends are taken into consideration.

As shown in the SCORP, the population in Washington State has increased dramatically during the past three decades. With a gain of 2.6 million residents between 1980 and 2010, the state has experienced a 63% increase in its population, almost double the population increase in the United States as a whole (36%) (United States Census, 2010). Further, Washington State's population is expected to increase from 6,725,000 in 2010 to 8,154,000 in 2030, an increase of 21%.

The state's population is growing, becoming more urban, becoming older, and becoming more diverse. All of these trends suggest that trails capacity will become increasingly challenging.

These capacity issues have led to other problems, including crowding, improper trails use, environmental damage from overuse, and rogue trails development, when user groups make their own informal recreational trails. Because they are not sanctioned by the land manager, rogue trails often have significant problems, including liability issues, safety problems, and detrimental environmental impacts.

Generally, the discussion of capacity issues focused primarily on making maintenance of existing trails a priority so that the safety and good trail conditions were ensured. Town Hall contributors indicated they thought maintaining existing trails should be a higher priority than developing new trails. However, some Town Hall contributors recognized the necessity of developing new trails, but recognized there should be a balance between maintenance and development of trails.

Several Town Hall contributors recognized the importance of creating a maintenance plan before developing a new trail. Many believed the emphasis for funding should be on maintenance which would also address capacity issues by opening closed or unused trails that have fallen into disrepair.

Related to this issue, Town Hall contributors also cited a lack of on-the-ground data for land managers to make informed capacity, funding, and resource decisions. These contributors supported making trails development decisions based on trails use data, user group data, and frequency of use. However, this type of comprehensive measurement does not currently exist, making it difficult to know exactly what the trail is being used for and how often it is accessed. These discussions suggest a need for conducting on-the-ground field surveys and monitoring trails to determine priorities for improving capacity.

The Trails Advisory Committee also made several observations regarding capacity. Again, the Committee emphasized the pressure that increased demand on trail opportunities. The Trails Advisory Committee also noted there were an insufficient number of trail facilities and opportunities in urban areas and proposed more land easements be pursued to accommodate growing demand.

The discussion among Town Hall contributors and comments made by the Trails Advisory Committee were summarized to identify the major capacity problems that exist in Washington State today. The Trails Advisory Committee was then asked to prioritize these problems to guide trails planning recommendations. As shown in Table 4.2, the top three ranked problems related to capacity are:

- Existing trails are not being maintained and many are being destroyed from overuse or improper use.
- Growing populations and user demands are increasing pressure on all trails systems.
- Land managers do not have enough on-the-ground data (e.g., trails use data, use by category of user, frequency of use) to make informed capacity, funding, and resource decisions.

**Table 4.2. Ranking of Problems Related to Capacity.**

Problems Related to Capacity	Score*	Rank
Existing trails are not being maintained, and many are being destroyed from overuse or improper use.	142	1
Growing populations and user demands are increasing pressure on all trail systems.	117	2
Land managers do not have enough on-the-ground data (e.g., trail use data, use by category of user, frequency of use) to make informed capacity, funding, and resource decisions.	115	3
There are an insufficient number of trails facilities and opportunities in urban areas.	94	4
Not enough land easements for acquisition and development of trails are being pursued to help accommodate the growing demand for trails facilities and opportunities.	91	5
Semi-primitive areas, highly prized by trail users, are rapidly disappearing under the pressure of resource extraction and urbanizing development. (Problem identified in 1991 trails plan.)	88	6
There are not enough water trails in the state.	53	7

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 7 problems, which were assigned points 1-7 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (7 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 7) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

### **Issue: Communication**

Several facets of communication were discussed by both the Town Hall contributors and the Trails Advisory Committee. The groups focused primarily on how to increase information and awareness by targeting user groups, but they also discussed the importance of communication and cooperation among user groups. Communication was seen as the key to getting users onto trails and to encourage cooperation and foster relationships.

Awareness was one of the most important issues related to communication (and also trails access) discussed by Town Hall contributors and the Trails Advisory Committee. The Trails Advisory Committee indicated they believed there was a shortage of trail signage including the need for better identification of trailheads, trail conditions, and wildlife expectations.

These problems were echoed by the Town Hall contributors who contended that lack of awareness was a deterrent for enjoying trails recreation. Town Hall contributors cited the importance of knowing where to go and what activities were allowed on trails. Some Town Hall contributors also indicated trail maintenance was a big problem and voiced frustrations over not knowing the conditions of trails before heading out.

Several Trails Advisory Committee members focused on technology as a means to provide information to trails users and promote awareness trails conditions. The Trails Advisory Committee members suggested improving the availability of real-time trails data by including online maps, information on trails conditions and trails closures, and other trails-related information using Web sites or social media. Map information should be combined with specific trails characteristics and conditions. The need to provide updated, concise online information to trails users was clearly an important priority among the Trails Advisory Committee members. In general, the Trails Advisory Committee would like to see a one-stop resource.

The Trails Advisory Committee identified the need to provide education programs and online forums to trails user groups specifically designed to foster communication and cooperation. They stated there is no online resource available for improving coordination, cooperation, or communication among user groups (e.g., leadership councils, meetings, online blogs, online forums, or online spaces). These resources could improve education and foster a sense of collaboration among user groups and includes discussion topics focused on mutual respect, trail ethics, and best practices.

The need for an online forum was also expressed among the Town Hall contributors. They indicated the forum would be important to facilitate opportunities for trails user groups to work together, rather than simply focusing on tension and differences between them.

Stakeholders also noted the lack of an organization or forum to coordinate discussions regarding trail issues. Trail users expressed the need for a trails organization or forum that would facilitate communication and encourage cooperation. Trail users also are seeking more authority in planning and decision-making on trails. Stakeholders felt an umbrella trails organization could provide an opportunity to further involve user groups and encourage their investment in trail issues.

The Trails Advisory Committee prioritized these problems related to communication. As shown in Table 4.3, the top three ranked communication problems were:

- Real-time, easily accessible trails data, including maps, information on trails conditions, trails closures, etc., are limited.
- Many trails lack signage, including better identification of trailheads, information on trails conditions, interpretive and educational information, and wildlife expectations.
- There is a shortage of education programs among user groups designed to promote mutual respect, trails ethics, and best practices.

**Table 4.3. Ranking of Problems Related to Communication.**

Problems Related to Communication	Score*	Rank
Real-time, easily accessible trails data, including maps, information on trails conditions, trail closures, etc., are limited.	85	1
Many trails lack signage, including better identification of trailheads, information on trails conditions, interpretive and educational information, and wildlife expectations.	83	2
There is a shortage of education programs among user groups designed to promote mutual respect, trail ethics, and best practices.	78	3
Agency-provided maps and guides are often inadequate for user needs.	66	4
There are limited activities for improving coordination, cooperation, or communication among user groups (e.g., leadership council, meetings, online blogs, online forums, or online spaces).	63	5

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 5 problems, which were assigned points 1-5 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (5 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 5) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## Issue: Economics and Funding

The 2012 *Outdoor Recreation Economy* report shows that outdoor recreation contributed more than \$22.5 billion in consumer spending to Washington's economy, as well as \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenue. Further, outdoor recreation directly supported 227,000 jobs across the state, along with \$7.1 billion in wages and salaries. The SCORP discusses the importance of outdoor recreation as a major economic engine that produces jobs and tax revenues, especially in local economies and in many instances in rural areas where these jobs and tax revenues are needed.

The following grant programs are available to fund trails in Washington State (RCO, 2010):

- **Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA).** This account provides funding to buy, protect, and restore aquatic lands and to provide public access to the waterfront. Projects funded under the ALEA must be associated with navigable waters of the state. The funding source for ALEA grants is from lease revenue on state-owned aquatic lands.
- **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).** The LWCF provides funding to buy or develop public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Grants support both acquisition and development of active and passive recreation areas and conservation lands. The funding source for LWCF grants is from lease revenue from oil and gas extraction on federal lands.
- **Nonhighway Road and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program.** NOVA provides funding to buy, develop, or maintain backcountry recreational areas or off-road vehicle parks. These grants also may be used to fund education and enforcement officer patrols. Projects must be for motorized and nonmotorized trails recreation that is

accessed by a nonhighway road<sup>4</sup>. The funding source for the NOVA program is one percent of the state's gasoline excise tax and off-road vehicle registration fees.

- **Recreational Trails Program (RTP).** The RTP provides funding to rehabilitate and maintain recreational trails and facilities that support a backcountry experience. There is a focus on performing annual, routine maintenance on backcountry trails. The RTP is funded in the federal transportation budget.
- **Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP).** The WWRP provides funding for any type of outdoor recreation. Funding is allocated between eleven different categories. Funding for trails is eligible in most of the categories. The WWRP is funded in the state capital budget.

There was a perception among the public that funding was insufficient for meeting the demands of trail development and maintenance in the state. Economics and funding issues were by far the most important issue among the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors. The public understood there are other priorities (e.g., education, criminal justice) competing for government funds. They recognized the difficulty the state has in securing funding for trails given limited budgets and other resources.

While the RCO provides grant funding for trails, respondents expressed that funding has been limited and the grant process competitive. Often, land managers found it difficult to secure funding for important trail development and maintenance projects, resulting in dissatisfaction or frustration among the end users.

The Trails Advisory Committee focused on a need to educate the public and elected officials about the benefits of trails and the cost of building and maintaining trails in an effort to curb underfunding. They viewed trails as a business investment and economic development opportunity, stating that trails provide important transportation linkages that are an important benefit to businesses and local enterprise. Trails were also seen as an important tourism attraction, bringing out-of-state residents to Washington and encouraging them to invest in outdoor recreation opportunities.

The public expressed a lack of information and awareness regarding recreation funding and how funds are spent. In general, the public commented that tracking down the amount of funding received for trails was difficult since funding comes from several government sources as well as nonprofits and grants. As a result, users groups found it challenging to identify problems and solutions regarding funding because they lack awareness of funding sources and money spent on trails. Comments suggested the need for more transparent and informative

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<sup>4</sup> A nonhighway road is any road owned or managed by a public agency or private road for which the owner has granted an easement for public use for which motor vehicle funds were not used for construction or reconstruction in the past 25 years or maintenance in the past 4 years

outreach regarding the amount of funding available for trail opportunities, projects and programs being funded, and the amount spent on trails development and maintenance.

There was a divergence and debate among participants on how trails should be funded. Many thought they are taxed too much already. Some also thought their taxes were better spent on more important priorities such as infrastructure, education, criminal justice, transportation, and commerce. Others were frustrated by passes, permits, and user fees, which they felt were not being properly allocated to preserve recreation opportunities. Others indicated the administration of the Discover Pass has been challenging. Yet, there were many participants who thought taxes and fees were an appropriate funding source for trails.

Town Hall contributors expressed a need for a balanced approach to recreational spending. The idea most often expressed by participants was that use reflected demand. User fees should be based upon the differences in demand for different recreation activities. Some indicated those paying more in fees should have a greater say in decision-making, and others contended that “pay to play” plans should be fair and equitable among all recreationists. Most Town Hall contributors agreed that part of the responsibility in keeping trail opportunities open and available rests with the user groups themselves.

Many believed that funding allocations should be commensurate with use and/or tax contributions. Perhaps nowhere is this apparent inequity more controversial than with the issues surrounding the distribution of NOVA funding and motorized vehicle recreation. This contention is due in part to a lack of awareness and information about NOVA funding. While some users appear to understand the intent behind NOVA programs, others question why NOVA funding supports nonmotorized recreation activities.

More transparency and increased public awareness is needed to demonstrate sources of funding and how they are allocated, particularly in the NOVA program.

At the same time, Town Hall contributors recognized the importance of uniting to preserve funding for all user groups in the NOVA program. Further, they were aware that NOVA funding has declined over the years making it important to protect funding. The Town Hall contributors felt very strongly about restoring NOVA funding and ensuring its sustainability.

Still others called for new, more stable and secure funding sources. Respondents contended that trails maintenance and development are valuable investments that offer an appropriate return to the people. As such, respondents felt trails need to be promoted to elected officials and the public to ensure the perpetuity of funding into the future.

Several Town Hall contributors indicated that creativity will be needed to find funding solutions. Finally, the Town Hall contributors requested more authority in the decision-making process for funding allocations. The Trails Advisory Committee also called for more authority in planning, decision-making, and funding allocations among user groups. These perspectives emphasized

the need for improving awareness and transparency regarding funding decisions as well as the importance of including user groups in trails planning.

Members of the Trails Advisory Committee strongly advocated for the development of a dedicated funding source for trails, rather than depending on grant funding. Committee members felt more effort should be made to educate the Legislature that trail issues are a quality-of-life issue that is just as important to the state and local communities as other priorities.

Taking these problems and issues into consideration, the Trails Advisory Committee ranked the importance of specific economic and funding problems. As shown in Table 4.4, the top three ranked problems related to economics and funding are:

- There are many other needs (e.g., education, criminal justice) competing for government funding, making it difficult to prioritize trails funding.
- The state's congressional delegation and legislature need to be more educated and informed on the need for increased funding for trails.
- Funding is not properly allocated between maintenance of existing trails and development of new trails.

**Table 4.4. Ranking of Problems Related to Economics and Funding.**

Problems Related to Economics and Funding	Score*	Rank
There are many other needs (e.g., education, criminal justice) competing for government funding, making it difficult to prioritize trails funding.	170	1
The state's congressional delegation and legislature need to be more educated and informed on the need for increased funding for trails.	163	2
Funding is not properly allocated between maintenance of existing trails and development of new trails.	161	3
Alternatives to government grants have not been adequately considered, explored, or pursued to help provide sustainable funding for trails.	149	4
Recreation sectors perceive that funding allocations are not commensurate with tax contributions from these sectors.	141	5
The legislature can re-direct the funding for the Nonhighway Road and Off-Road Vehicle Activities (NOVA) Program.	127	6
Funding allocations are not matching the contemporary user-demand profile (i.e., popular but more recent recreation modes are not funded commensurate with their popularity).	122	7
Recreation providers find the grant submission process challenging and bureaucratic, making it difficult to obtain trails funding.	121	8
User groups and managers have not discovered how to work together effectively in the trails funding and budgeting process.	118	9
Funding and resource allocations are unfairly distributed between remote, wilderness trails and urban trails.	103	10

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 10 problems, which were assigned points 1-10 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (10 points)

and the lowest priority (ranked 10) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

### **Issue: Long Distance Trails and Trails Networks**

A long distance trail is a single trail or a series of connected trails requiring three or more days to travel by foot, or a day and a half to travel by a motorized vehicle or bicycle<sup>5</sup>. Long distance trails are important to the trail community.

The Trails Advisory Committee recognized critical links are missing for trails connectivity, but there was some ambivalence over the importance of developing a long distance trails network. On the one hand, many Trails Advisory Committee members recognized the importance of trails linkages for building community and more wisely managing limited resources. While long distance trails were not a major topic on the minds of Town Hall contributors, some recognized the need for long distance trails.

While most of the Trails Advisory Committee agreed the state needs to prioritize sections of long distance connections and should focus on filling gaps, some members of the group questioned the necessity or importance of a state trails network. These members viewed local trails as a higher priority and some even resisted the trails network altogether, citing the distinct traits, amenities, and characteristics offered by local trails. Overall, when asked to weigh funding for long distance trails versus local trails, most Trails Advisory Committee members agreed that “shorter trails should be the priority.” Discussion on trails connectivity focused on how to connect local trails to long distance trails. The lack of guidance and standards for trail development made this a challenging task among land managers.

The Trails Advisory Committee also expressed concerns over planning, communication, and coordination for long distance trails. Several members noted that there was a lack of communication and cooperation in planning long distance trails among local entities on multi-jurisdictional trails. Members indicated there is a lack of coordination statewide or the lack of an overall plan to guide the development of long distance trails. The Advisory Committee cited great benefits in increasing multi-jurisdictional communication and cooperation.

Funding long distance trails development and maintenance was also a major issue brought forth by the Trails Advisory Committee. See the section on economics and funding issues raised on trails funding.

Finally, another issue raised by participants related to long distance trails was working with landowners. Landowners have concerns about safety, liability, and unethical recreationists which sometimes result in hesitation among landowners to open some of their land for long distance trails development.

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<sup>5</sup> 1991 Washington State Trails Plan

When presented the major problems related to long distance trails, the Trails Advisory Committee ranked these problems in terms of priority. As shown in Table 4.5, the top three ranked problems related to long distance trails and trails networks are:

- Long distance trails are needed to link existing trails in the state's trails network.
- Liability issues and problems with user groups prevent landowners from providing linkages or corridors for the trails network.
- Development of local and regional trails is taking place without coordination or adequate statewide perspective.

**Table 4.5. Ranking of Problems Related to Long Distance Trails and Trails Networks.**

Problems Related to Long Distance Trails and Trails Networks	Score*	Rank
Long distance trails are needed to link existing trails in the state's trails network.	75	1
Liability issues and problems with user groups prevent landowners from providing linkages or corridors for the trails network.	66	2
Development of local and regional trails is taking place without coordination or adequate statewide perspective.	64	3
There are concerns about how a state trails network will impact the trails, amenities, and character offered by local trails.	45	4

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 4 problems, which were assigned points 1-4 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (4 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 4) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

### **Issue: Maintenance**

Maintenance was one of the most important issues among both Town Hall contributors and the Trails Advisory Committee similar to findings in the SCORP. In general, both groups tended to agree the state should maximize the use of existing trails before development of new trails. While participants recognized that new trails have to be developed to meet capacity demands, they were primarily concerned with ensuring existing trails do not fall into disrepair and becoming unusable.

Town Hall contributors were asked specifically about maintenance versus development of trails. The following question was posed to the group: "Trail providers need money to maintain existing trails and to develop new trails, but they do not have enough money to do both completely. What is the right way to balance these priorities?" The response was overwhelmingly in favor of funding maintenance as the top priority. Again and again, Town Hall contributors agreed that the maintenance of existing trails was paramount.

More importantly, some of these contributors recognized that the demand for maintenance funding might be the result of poor planning during the development phase. Some comments pointed out the challenges faced by funding agencies. Well-planned trails development should anticipate trail usage and subsequent maintenance requirements, building into its goals and objectives a method for handling maintenance issues. In some cases, it was perceived that recreation providers seek funding for maintenance that should have been anticipated during development. This places maintenance on already burdened funding sources.

Another concern raised by the Advisory Committee was the adequacy of trail construction standards. Some members of the committee felt the standards are appropriate (e.g., ensuring environmental sustainability, ADA access), while others believed the construction quality standards are so high that maintenance is actually impeded because the cost and permitting burdens are so stringent.

Others discussed how the state should determine maintenance priorities. In general, Town Hall contributors indicated that maintenance funding should be focused on trails with the greatest demand as well as those with safety issues or those in which closures are threatened.

As a solution to maintenance issues, both Town Hall contributors and the Trails Advisory Committee focused on the importance of engaging volunteer stewardship groups to help build and maintain trails. This was, by far, mentioned as one of the state's greatest assets, and both groups focused on maximizing volunteer contributions to curb funding shortfalls and budget limitations.

While the majority of Town Hall contributors focused on maintenance as a priority, these comments were tempered by those who sought a balance in funding. Some participants recognized the importance of developing new trails in the context of supporting user groups lacking opportunities or to meet capacity. These respondents supported new trail development based upon a thorough plan for the construction and maintenance of the new trail. Again, it was important to these contributors that trails planning consider maintenance, being proactive rather than reactive.

The Trails Advisory Committee determined the highest priorities for maintenance problems. Table 4.6 shows the top three ranked problems related to maintenance:

- There is a general lack of funding for maintenance materials and staffing.
- Federal and state managers have extensive backlogs of trail maintenance needs.
- Construction quality standards are often so high that maintenance is impeded because of the cost and permitting burdens required to meet these standards.

**Table 4.6. Ranking of Problems Related to Maintenance.**

Problems Related to Maintenance	Score*	Rank
There is a general lack of funding for maintenance materials and staffing.	100	1
Federal and state managers have extensive backlogs of trail maintenance needs.	95	2
Construction quality standards are often so high that maintenance is impeded because of the cost and permitting burdens required to meet these standards.	71	3
There is rogue trail building.	55	4
There are no uniform performance standards or measures by which to assess the need for trail maintenance.	54	5

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 5 problems, which were assigned points 1-5 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (5 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 5) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

### **Issue: Multiple-Use Land Management**

Multiple-use management is management of the same land base for two or more purposes<sup>6</sup>. To distinguish between multiple-use land management and other overlapping categories of trail issues, this issue category considers land designation and/or the use of land for recreation development, timber harvest or other commercial uses, as well as natural resource and wildlife corridors. The Ecological Society of America (2000) identifies six land uses:

- resource-extractive activities (e.g., forestry, agriculture, grazing, and mining);
- infrastructure for human settlement (housing, transportation, and industrial centers);
- recreational activities;
- services provided by ecological systems (e.g., flood control and water supply and filtration);
- support of aesthetic, cultural, and religious values; and
- sustainability of the compositional and structural complexity of ecological systems.

In other words, multiple-use land management refers to the broad uses of the actual land and resources rather than multiple recreational uses and user groups. This is discussed under the category of the multi-use trails issue.

It was clear that some members of the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall perceived recreation uses as secondary to resource extraction activities. Several Town Hall contributors lamented that some roads were closed for timber harvest or trails were lost to commercial or

<sup>6</sup> 1991 Washington State Trails Plan

forest roads. However, it was recognized that a lot has changed since the 1991 trails plan was developed and land managers of resource lands are acutely aware of the economic, social, and environmental benefits of preserving lands for recreation. For example, Forest Service land management has a renewed focus on sustaining ecosystem health and biodiversity as the primary goals for effective land management reducing forest closures.

In general, however, multiple-use land management appears to be much less an issue among the Trails Advisory Committee and the public. A few participants expressed concern for the loss of trails and challenges with trail planning as a result of development and urbanization (i.e., human settlement land use type). For example, there was a perception that community trails were being lost to development.

When presented the major problems related to multiple-use land management, the Trails Advisory Committee ranked these problems in terms of priority. As shown in Table 4.7, the top three ranked problems related to multiple-use land management are:

- Needs of natural resources, such as wildlife and wetlands, are sometimes perceived as excluding trails.
- There is insufficient integrated planning, and managers often do not work together on trails and road building.
- Informal trails and paths in cities and counties are frequently disrupted by development activities.

**Table 4.7. Ranking of Problems Related to Multiple-Use Land Management.**

Problems Related to Multiple-Use Land Management	Score*	Rank
Needs of natural resources, such as wildlife and wetlands, are sometimes perceived as excluding trails.	108	1
There is insufficient integrated planning, and managers often do not work together on trails and road building.	100	2
Informal trails and paths in cities and counties are frequently disrupted by development activities.	86	3
Many trails do not offer educational and interpretive trail opportunities that can be helpful in supporting and encouraging resource protection.	83	4
There is insufficient enforcement of regulations that guide appropriate trail use.	79	5
Management activities, including timber harvest and road building, often disrupt system trails in many settings.	69	6

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 6 problems, which were assigned points 1-6 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (6 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 6) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## **Issue: Multiple-Use Trails**

Multiple-use trails provide opportunities for more than one type of use<sup>77</sup>. Multiple-use trails accommodate a variety of outdoor recreation activities, including hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and motorized trail use. Multiple-use does not mean the trail accommodates all uses at all times on all trails. Rather, trail use could be seasonal or limited.

Multiple-use trails can provide equality and fairness to trail users. However, the designation of multiple-use for trails should be carefully considered to address compatibility, safety, and user expectations. Multiple-use trails that are not planned with these considerations in mind can contribute to user conflict and dissatisfaction. As per the recommendations in the 1991 plan, multiple-use trails should be managed for a primary objective or primary use. Once the primary use objective is set for a trail, other compatible uses can be determined.

While multiple-use trails provide additional opportunities, especially for underserved user groups, it is important for users to understand the management goals and maintenance standards for the trail in order to avoid user conflicts. In fact, although multiple-use trails appear to give an element of fairness and equality among user groups, if the primary use objective is not communicated, multiple-use trails can actually cause contention among user groups.

Most Trail Advisory Committee members and Town Hall contributors supported the idea of trails available to everyone. Many agreed there should be more multiple-use trail opportunities. Still, many participants believed limited-use or segregated trails are better for addressing user conflicts. Several key problems were discussed related to multiple-use trails: (1) education and outreach, (2) use compatibility, (3) limited-use, and (4) ADA compliance.

Among both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall, participants identified a need to improve education and outreach among user groups to reduce conflict. Several concerns emerged regarding education and outreach, including users' lack of awareness of management goals as well as lack of education regarding trail etiquette. The Trails Advisory Committee mentioned the importance of providing and communicating clear goals, objectives, and maintenance standards for each trail. Participants felt many users are often unaware of the management or use goals for trails they are using which may result in unethical use and/or dissatisfaction among users

Although some agencies have established primary management objectives for trails use, the Town Hall discussion demonstrated there were many participants who did not have a clear understanding of the primary objective for a specific trail. In general, the Town Hall contributors suggested that communications need to improve to convey primary management objectives. (See the Communications section above.) Additionally, users need to be educated that a primary objective does not necessarily exclude other forms of recreation; rather, it sets

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<sup>77</sup> 1991 Washington State Trails Plan

the standard expectation for trail use. Town Hall contributors suggested increasing and improving signage at trailheads, posting objectives on land management Web sites, standardizing or “branding” trails protocols, and other descriptive annotations added to trails maps.

It was also mentioned the necessity of keeping users informed of trail closures and providing alternative routes: “Prior to trail closures, work with local governments and partners to establish safe alternative routes during reconstruction and long term maintenance disruptions. Communicate such alternative routes to trail users before trail closure.”

Use compatibility is a determination on which trail uses are compatible on the same trail. While this issue is discussed in more detail in a separate section, use compatibility is tangentially related to multiple-use trails. Use compatibility was a source of discussion, and even some contention, among Town Hall contributors, with the discussion centrally focused on nonmotorized versus motorized trail use. Opinions were mixed. Although many participants felt all trails could be shared among all trail users, there were also many who believed restricting trails use to certain user groups was the most effective method for reducing user conflicts and providing the best outdoor recreation opportunities. However, many participants believed that, by working together, multiple-use trails provide the greatest opportunity to the most residents.

While there were many participants who supported multiple-use trails, there are also many who did not agree. Participants felt some uses are not compatible, are disruptive, and have a negative, unsafe, or damaging impact on other users or the environment. For example, trails which allow horses or other animals can leave an unpleasant experience for other uses. Another example is damage from wheeled vehicles cause to tire tracking and ruts which can be a safety issues for other users. Another concern expressed was the inherent dynamics of one mode of recreation conflicting with the dynamics of another mode (e.g., mountain bikers and horse riders).

Participants made the case for limited-use or segregated trails, with a central focus of nonmotorized activities versus motorized activities to help reduce user conflicts

Finally, another major topic of discussion regarding multiple-use trails was the need to provide opportunities for people with disabilities. There were several members of both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall who mentioned the importance of American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance on trails. Participants felt access was important for many types of trails including motorized and nonmotorized and as links to transportation routes, places of interest, and parks.

The Trails Advisory Committee ranked four problems related to multiple-use trails. As shown in Table 4.8, the top three ranked problems related to multiple-use trails are:

- Users often lack education on what is expected and what is permitted on multiple-use trails.

- Users are often unaware of management goals, such as maintenance standards and primary trail objectives, which often lead to dissatisfaction or unmet needs.
- Some trails are not built to meet use requirements, such as serving a potential transportation function or meeting ADA compliance specifications.

**Table 4.8. Ranking of Problems Related to Multiple-Use Trails.**

Problems Related to Multiple-Use Trails.	Score*	Rank
Users often lack education on what is expected and what is permitted on multiple-use trails.	81	1
Users are often unaware of management goals, such as maintenance standards and primary trail objectives, which often leads to dissatisfaction or unmet needs.	66	2
Some trails are not built to meet use requirements, such as serving a potential transportation function or meeting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance specifications.	56	3
Reconstruction of established trails can result in unanticipated and undesirable displacement or succession of established trail uses.	47	4

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 4 problems, which were assigned points 1-4 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (4 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 4) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

### **Issue: Private Lands and Private Concerns**

Most trail use in Washington takes place on public lands. Further, while this trails plan does not include trail miles on private land, there are some public trail opportunities and issues that have a direct impact on private landowners. For example, the expansion of trails networks may impact private landowners who own land adjacent to or near pathways.

In fact, many landowners own land that borders public trails. Additionally, landowners often provide access to public trails through land exchanges, purchase of easements, and gifts or donations of land. Several concerns impact a private landowner's decisions regarding the use of their property. Liability issues are an important consideration among landowners. Landowners may also be concerned about unethical behavior and/or crimes committed on or near their property. For example, theft, vandalism, dumping, litter, and concerns regarding the impact of some uses are considerations that influence a landowner's decision to allow access to his/her property.

The Trails Advisory Committee recommended more proactive communication and education efforts that target landowners and include landowners in trails planning efforts. This inclusion could foster cooperation and collaboration among land managers and landowners and increase landowner buy-in and investment in trail opportunities. The Trails Advisory Committee also cited the importance of providing landowners adequate compensation for their land.

The Trails Advisory Committee ranked these problems to guide trails planning recommendations. As shown in Table 4.9, problems related to private lands and private concerns are:

- Liability issues and concerns have caused private landowners, including timber companies and other large landowners, to close their lands to the public.
- Poor communication and misunderstanding often leads to obstacles to establishing needed trails adjacent to private land.
- Landowners are not often included in trails planning efforts.

**Table 4.9. Ranking of Problems Related to Private Lands and Private Concerns.**

Problems Related to Private Lands and Private Concerns	Score*	Rank
Liability issues and concerns have caused private landowners, including timber companies and other large landowners, to close their lands to the public.	54	1
Poor communication and misunderstanding often leads to obstacles to establishing needed trails adjacent to private land.	48	2
Landowners are not often included in trails planning efforts.	48	2

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 3 problems, which were assigned points 1-3 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (3 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 3) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

### **Issue: Rails-To-Trails and Utility Corridors**

Rails-to-trails involve the conversion of unused railway corridors into trails or pathways. Utility corridors also offer an opportunity for trails such as along irrigation canals, or electric power lines.

Railroad rights-of-way offer ideal trail opportunities due to their long, linear pathways. They can be an opportunity for greenways in urban areas and often serve as important transportation and recreation links between population centers. In fact, 1,016 miles of railroad rights-of-way have been converted for trail use in Washington State, and another 132 miles are being converted under current projects (RTC, 2013).

Railroad companies that decide to discontinue commercial services over a particular line must request railroad abandonment from the U.S. Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) and notify the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) of its intent to request abandonment. Some of the issues associated with the process of acquiring abandoned railroad rights-of-way include the sometimes lengthy and burdensome abandonment process,

aggrieved landowners, reactivation of rail service, and disputes over ownership of the railroad right-of-way.

Similarly, the development of utility corridors into trail opportunities also comes with benefits and challenges. There are many benefits to the use of utility corridors for trails, including maximizing the use of utility corridor spaces and aesthetic benefits. The use of utility corridors as trails also fosters partnerships between utility companies and land managers. Still, the use of utility corridors for public trails raises concerns as well, and these issues should be considered in the planning and development of utility corridors into trails. James G. Carlson outlines several topics of concern when planning trails using utility corridors (2007):

- Exposure to tort liability
- Interference with regular utility operation and maintenance activities
- Increased crime (e.g., vandalism of structures, dumping of garbage)
- Protection of structures and facilities
- Conflicts between utility crews and trail users
- Encroachment on adjacent landowners
- Public safety
- Lack of a defined management entity
- Property easements

Thus, while rails-to-trails conversion and utility corridors represent ideal opportunities for trails development, these concerns and issues should be considered in planning for new trails.

One of the major issues discussed by the Trails Advisory Committee regarding rails-to-trails and utility corridors was the lack of oversight. Participants noted a lack of coordination on rails-to-trail information, projects, and funding. Furthermore, participants stated there was no statewide plan for the development and management of rails-to-trails projects which was expressed as a challenge to entities, often non-profit organizations, seeking railroad abandonments to convert into trails. Often, these organizations have limited funding for the oversight, management, and maintenance of rails-to-trails. These participants expressed a difficulty in managing rails-to-trails and learning about regular or exempt railroad abandonments. The Trails Advisory Committee also indicated there was insufficient communication and collaboration between government sectors which leads to rails-to-trails and utility corridor opportunities not being maximized.

Based on discussions, the Trails Advisory Committee ranked 8 problems associated with rails-to-trails and utility corridors. As shown in Table 4.10, the top three ranked problems related to rails-to-trails and utility corridors are:

- Timely recreation agency response to rail corridor abandonments is not well coordinated with transportation entities.
- No statewide plan exists for the development and management of rail-trail projects.
- Permitting requirements often complicate the use of utility corridors for trails.

**Table 4.10. Ranking of Problems Related to Rail-Trails and Utility Corridors.**

Problems Related to Rail-Trails and Utility Corridors	Score*	Rank
Timely recreation agency response to rail corridor abandonments is not well coordinated with transportation entities.	130	1
No statewide plan exists for the development and management of rail-trail projects.	125	2
Permitting requirements often complicate the use of utility corridors for trails.	121	3
There is insufficient communication and collaboration between government sectors to fully capture the benefits of rail conversion opportunities.	114	4
Recreation managers and advocates are often unaware of opportunities presented by utility rights-of-way.	111	5
No single agency in Washington State coordinates rail-trail information, projects, and funding.	108	6
Liability issues and concerns have caused utilities to close their lands to the public.	101	7
There are concerns among users regarding safety when traveling along a utility corridor.	90	8

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 7 problems, which were assigned points 1-7 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (7 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 7) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

### **Issue: Use Compatibility**

Use compatibility is a determination on which trail uses are compatible on the same trail. As discussed in the previous section on multiple-use trails, use compatibility was an important issue among both the Trails Advisory Committee and Town Hall contributors. Use compatibility such as incompatible use and user conflicts were important issues of concern.

Among both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors, the discussion regarding use compatibility primarily centered on the use compatibility between nonmotorized and motorized trails uses. There were significant differences in opinion. Many believed motorized trail use has a damaging impact on other trail users' experiences and the environment. Numerous participants stated shared use of motorized vehicle activities provides cost effective opportunities for all users.

It is noteworthy that many participants expressed a desire to increase multiple-use trails for motorized users from motorized and nonmotorized participants to meet demand.

These comments echo similar concerns voiced in the SCORP report, prompting suggestions that designated motorized and off-roading trails and areas be considered as priorities for new trail development.

For some Town Hall contributors, there were inherent differences in recreation modes that make it appear difficult or impossible to fit into a multiple-use framework. In contrast to reasons for public support for multiple-use trails, safety, environmental impacts, and negative impacts on the outdoor recreation experience were all cited as reasons for developing limited-use trails. For these participants, separating users was seen as an appropriate policy response.

These differences in opinion illustrate the challenges that land managers must overcome to effectively manage trails to meet the expectations of all users. In some cases, multiple-use trails appear to help minimize the perception of inequality that exists among users; however, limited-use trails also help address user conflicts by segregating incompatible uses. Land managers should continue to listen to their constituency and obtain on-the-ground, objective data regarding trail usage. Managers and user groups appear to make assumptions about compatibility that are may not always be accurate. Improving on-the-ground information is the best way to make informed management decisions regarding use compatibility. These considerations will help land managers determine the primary objectives of specific trail uses as well as whether or not a trail should be multiple-use or limited-use based on the demands and expectations of constituents.

### **User Conflicts**

An increase in the diversity of recreation activities requiring trail use, combined with a limited supply of trails for compatible use, have made user conflicts a priority area of concern among land managers. In the recently conducted SCORP survey, there were growing concerns among residents and user groups that there was an unequal distribution of opportunity among user groups. In particular, horseback riders, mountain bikers, and motorized users all expressed concerns regarding lack of opportunity for their preferred outdoor recreation activity. Addressing user conflicts can improve user safety, protect natural resources, minimize crowding, and address threats to quality trails experiences.

As discussed in the SCORP, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (2005) provided a spectrum of four types of interactions: (1) complementary, (2) supplementary, (3) competitive, and (4) antagonistic interactions. Accordingly, the goal of recreation providers is to manage resources to keep user interactions complementary or supplementary. By doing so, managers can help minimize user conflicts and foster partnerships among user groups. User conflicts should be addressed because they have serious consequences, including safety issues, user displacement, and even participation desertion.

There was tension among user groups in the Town Hall forum. In fact, comments ranged from frustration and dissatisfaction to antagonism regarding certain outdoor recreation activities and user groups. In general, the impetus behind these viewpoints was a call for more respect for

other users and the environment on the trails. That said, while acknowledging this sense of competition between user groups, there was a call for cooperation and even collaboration among user groups. In general, the participants realized that resolution of user conflicts is primarily the responsibility of the user groups themselves.

The research and findings show the public recognizes there is more to be gained by working together rather than working against one another.

Furthermore, there was optimism among user groups that improved relations are possible. When considering solutions to user conflicts, both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors focused on the need for facilitating communication and collaboration among user groups. Both groups proposed several methods for bringing diverse user groups together to minimize these conflicts. Suggestions included online resources such as Blogs or forums, a leadership council for trails, and an information clearinghouse for trails management.

There was strong support for a leadership council or forum of diverse user groups by several Trails Advisory Committee members and Town Hall contributors. A positive example described was Washington Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) efforts in Mason and Kitsap counties.

Moving beyond merely improving communications among the user groups, there were others who supported a concerted effort at cooperation and collaboration in trails projects. Many thought that by uniting toward a common goal of improving, maintaining, and increasing trails throughout the state, user groups could foster a relationship of cooperation and collaboration. This type of partnership could provide two immediate benefits: (1) it could help to maximize recreation funding and resources by taking some of the onus off the government to fund and maintain trails and (2) it could foster better relationships between user groups. One of the other benefits cited for participating in these cooperative and collaborative efforts is that it lends credibility to the various user groups; rather than being divided by special interests, user groups can unite with common interests.

A better understanding of other user groups can help to rectify existing conflicts. To this end, Town Hall contributors shared the benefits of simply attending each other's meetings to share needs and experiences and to explore shared values. User groups may have more commonalities than differences and are clearly seeking ways to improve relationships.

While the user groups recognized their own accountability and obligations in helping to minimize user conflicts, they also discussed ways that federal, state, and local governments can facilitate cooperation and minimize conflict. Many contributors expressed a need for better planning for both multiple-use and limited-use trails. Participants felt land and recreation managers have an obligation to plan proactively to inform constituents and minimize user conflicts.

A better understanding and awareness of user expectations and demands was seen as important for the planning, development, and maintenance of trails. The success of trails

projects should begin the planning process where multiple-use management best practices and user conflicts can be addressed. However, it was clear from the focused feedback on multiple-use management, use compatibility, and user conflict that trails use and use compatibility are very important issues to the public and should be taken into serious consideration during the planning of any trails project.

The stakeholders suggested government agencies can also improve its messaging and outreach to users. The Town Hall contributors cited the importance of messages and images that represented the diversity among trail users. There were many from the Trails Advisory Committee and Town Halls who indicated that improved communication is needed to better inform recreationists of the uses permitted on the trails, trail etiquette, and trail conditions. Additionally, some participants expressed a need for the government or some other organization to act as a clearinghouse for user groups.

Finally, some Town Hall contributors focused on the importance of umbrella organizations increasing awareness and education among their respective user groups. These contributors indicated that umbrella organizations representing different user groups (e.g., Backcountry Horsemen, Washington Trails Association, Washington ATV Association) can encourage and promote cooperation among the diverse user groups. By focusing on education and outreach regarding trails etiquette and collaboration among user groups, these organizations can help unite efforts to improve trails and trail access for all recreationists.

Based on the discussions, the Trails Advisory Committee ranked use compatibility problems. Table 4.11 shows the top three ranked problems related to use compatibility:

- There are conflicts between different modes of recreation (e.g., equestrians and mountain bikers, hikers, and motorcyclists).
- There is a lack of awareness and understanding of the distribution and volume of trail opportunities and trail uses by the different user groups.
- Multiple-use trail management can overlook the importance of identifying compatible uses.

**Table 4.11. Ranking of Problems Related to Use Compatibility.**

Problems Related to Use Compatibility	Score*	Rank
There are conflicts between different modes of recreation (e.g., equestrians and mountain bikers, hikers, and motorcyclists).	120	1
There is a lack of awareness and understanding of the distribution and volume of trail opportunities and trail uses by the different user groups.	111	2
Multiple-use trail management can overlook the importance of identifying compatible uses.	107	3
There is tension among user groups regarding multiple-use versus limited-use trails.	106	4

Problems Related to Use Compatibility	Score*	Rank
There is a perception of inequality among user groups.	95	5
Managers and user groups alike make assumptions about compatibility that are not always accurate, leading to dissatisfaction and conflict.	94	6
Management often fails to effectively seek out and address concerns of major interests.	67	7

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 7 problems, which were assigned points 1-7 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (7 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 7) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## Issue: Volunteers

Volunteers play an essential role in trail planning, development, and maintenance. From those serving on advisory committees making decisions regarding trail management to work parties performing on-the-ground trail maintenance, volunteers are an invaluable resource helping to take some of the burden off the government and land managers.

The importance of volunteers is also evidenced in the SCORP, in which there is a recommendation to increase the ability of jurisdictions to use volunteers. This recommendation focuses on methods for maximizing the use of volunteers, thereby mitigating some of the funding and resource limitations that recreation providers have experienced. As noted in the discussion on user conflicts in the previous section, volunteerism also provides the secondary benefit of bringing diverse user groups together toward a common goal, thereby helping to minimize user conflicts.

Both the Trails Advisory Committee and Town Hall contributors emphasized the importance of volunteers to trails. Many expressed that volunteers help minimize the funding required for trails development and maintenance, and they also provide on-the-ground work that governments may not have the time or resources to support. Many believed volunteers are the key to increasing trail opportunities in the state.

Although volunteers' importance to trails management and maintenance were widely supported, there were also concerns and challenges with using volunteer labor on trails. Some Town Hall contributors cautioned that volunteers needed to be educated and trained on trails construction, maintenance, uses, and expectations.

Another concern voiced regarding the use of volunteers was their tendency to focus on their preferred recreation activity rather than providing services that benefit all user groups.

Another issue raised by Town Hall contributors related to liability issues and regulations and laws that make it difficult to enlist the assistance of volunteers. Several Town Hall contributors expressed their frustration with these impediments to volunteerism.

Overall, Town Hall contributors frequently supported increasing volunteer contributions for both trail maintenance and new development. Many solutions were offered to help increase volunteerism, including the following:

- Increase communications and outreach regarding opportunities.
- Provide incentives to volunteers.
- Improve education and training of volunteers.
- Provide liability relief.
- Provide relief from onerous standards.

The Trails Advisory Committee ranked volunteer problems to guide trail planning recommendations. As shown in Table 4.12, the top three ranked problems related to volunteers are:

- Managers sometimes lack skills, expertise, or resources to take advantage of volunteer resources.
- Volunteers lack awareness and information on volunteer opportunities, including whom to contact and how to get involved.
- Volunteers lack training and education in trails management.

**Table 4.12. Ranking of Problems Related to Volunteers.**

Problems Related to Volunteers	Score*	Rank
Managers sometimes lack skills, expertise, or resources to take advantage of volunteer resources.	105	1
Volunteers lack awareness and information on volunteer opportunities, including whom to contact and how to get involved.	103	2
Volunteers lack training and education in trails management.	88	3
There are insufficient incentives offered to fully encourage volunteerism.	86	4
Liability issues often prevent the use of volunteers.	72	5
Construction standards might be impeding volunteer contributions.	71	6

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 6 problems, which were assigned points 1-6 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (6 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 6) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## Issue: Water Trails

Washington boasts seven major water trails in the state, offering a variety of boating, camping, and hiking opportunities to recreationists. The Trails Advisory Committee comments suggest that much progress has been made toward improving water trail opportunities in Washington. However, water trails still rates as an important issue for consideration in trails planning. Much of the discussion on water trails had to do with improving information and resources.

In particular, participants expressed a need for a one-stop resource providing maps and information on site amenities, campsites, topography, and other information on water trails and access sites. The Washington Water Trails Association provides some of this information. However, a more robust GIS-based system was desired to better inform users on what to expect and assist in planning.

Other comments focused on improving communications and signs at the site to encourage participation in water trails activities.

The Trails Advisory Committee ranked the major problems associated with water trails. As shown in Table 4.13, the problems related to water trails are:

- There is not a one-stop source for maps, amenities, campsites, topography, and other information on water trails and access sites.
- Self-guided routes lack facilities, including havens.
- There are insufficient trails on water.

**Table 4.13. Ranking of Problems Related to Water Trails.**

Problems Related to Water Trails	Score*	Rank
There is not a one-stop source for maps, amenities, campsites, topography, and other information on water trails and access sites.	58	1
Self-guided routes lack facilities, including havens.	54	2
There are insufficient trails on water.	38	3

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 3 problems, which were assigned points 1-3 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (3 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 3) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## Other Issues

In addition to the issues identified in the 1991 trails plan, the Trails Advisory Committee was also asked to consider two additional issues, urban trails and trail safety, that may be considered new or emergent issues related to trails.

## Urban Trails

Urban trails were not specifically addressed in the 1991 trails plan. However, population increases, urbanization, and changing demographics have made urban trails an issue for managers during recent years. Urban trails are shared use pathways, usually providing recreation opportunities for walking and bicycling. These trails facilitate alternative transportation choices and link major parks and open spaces in urban neighborhoods. Urban trails have become increasingly important in local transportation planning and infrastructure. With the emergence of safe routes to school and the increase in using trails as transportation to work and recreation in urban areas, this topic was clearly an emerging and important issue among the Trails Advisory Committee.

Two major issues surfaced regarding urban trails: safety and connectivity. Safety considerations are discussed more in-depth in the following section. Regarding connectivity, there were concerns among the Trails Advisory Committee that transportation and connectivity issues were not adequately considered in trails development in urban areas. Because urban trails tend to serve as mass transportation links, participants noted that urban trails need to connect to sidewalks, bike lanes, and other traffic routes. Additionally, contributors felt urban trails are valued for their links with the urban core, including cultural and historical landmarks in addition to linkages to public transportation.

While urban trails are a new topic of discussion for the *2013-2018 Washington State Trails Plan*, there was great interest in providing and improving the urban trail opportunities.

The Trails Advisory Committee ranked urban trail problems. Table 4.14 shows the problems related to urban trails:

- Transportation issues are not sufficiently considered in trail development in urban areas, resulting in gaps between trails and mass transportation that could link safe routes to school, work, recreation areas, etc.
- Urban trails sometimes lack linkages with the urban core, cultural and historical landmarks, and public transportation conveniences.
- Trails compete with other transportation corridors and roads in urban areas creating unique safety and conflict issues (e.g., intersection safety, traffic congestion).

**Table 4.14. Ranking of Problems Related to Urban Trails.**

Problems Related to Urban Trails	Score*	Rank
Transportation issues are not sufficiently considered in trail development in urban areas, resulting in gaps between trails and mass transportation that could link safe routes to school, work, recreation areas, etc.	54	1
Urban trails sometimes lack linkages with the urban core, cultural and historical landmarks, and public transportation conveniences.	52	2
Trails compete with other transportation corridors and roads in urban areas creating unique safety and conflict issues (e.g., intersection safety, traffic congestion).	44	3

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 3 problems, which were assigned points 1-3 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (3 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 3) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## Trail Safety

Trail safety emerged as an increasing concern for trail planning and maintenance. While trails were built to provide places for recreation and play, sometimes these areas serve as prime locations for vandalism, unsafe behaviors, and even criminal activities. With the growing trend in providing safe routes to schools and close-to-home trails, trail safety has become a growing concern among trails managers. Trail safety does not only include minimizing criminal activity, but it also includes important considerations such as intersection safety, walkable communities, the safety and security of facilities, and 9-1-1 trail address location solutions.

Several Town Hall contributors had concerns regarding multiple-use management and trail safety. Similarly, some trail uses were viewed as incompatible due to safety issues. Safety issues were also identified related to trail speeds. Some recreation modes value speed and these can easily come into conflict with other modes, like horseback riding, where the rapid appearance of a mountain bike, motorcycle, or quad can startle the horse and thereby create a safety risk.

There were also concerns about safe parking, trailheads, and camping areas, primarily focused on the unethical or criminal behavior of others. A number of Town Hall contributors mentioned trailhead parking lots as not secure thereby creating a risk for vehicle break-ins and theft. These safety concerns were cited as problems that occurred in both remote, rural areas as well as in urban areas.

The Trails Advisory Committee ranked trail safety priorities for the *2013-2018 Trails Plan*. Table 4.15 shows the top three ranked problems related to trail safety:

- There are concerns about the safety of some urban trails, including such concerns as security, safe parking, and minimizing criminal activity.
- There are increasing concerns regarding parking lot safety and security.
- Some trails lack safe and visible road crossings, resulting in unsafe intersections of trails near or adjacent to busy roads.

**Table 4.15. Ranking of Problems Related to Trail Safety.**

Problems Related to Trail Safety	Score*	Rank
There are concerns about the safety of some urban trails, including such concerns as security, safe parking, and minimizing criminal activity.	86	1
There are increasing concerns regarding parking lot safety and security.	85	2
Some trails lack safe and visible road crossings, resulting in unsafe intersections of trails near or adjacent to busy roads.	78	3
Increased safety risks occur on multiple-use trails (e.g., horses and mountain bikes, hikers, and motorcycles).	73	4
The inherent risks in some modes of recreation (e.g., motorcycle scrambles, rock or ice climbing, human and dangerous wildlife encounters) are increasing the management burden of agencies.	53	5

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. In this case, there were 5 problems, which were assigned points 1-5 in reverse order, with the top priority (ranked 1) receiving the highest score (5 points) and the lowest priority (ranked 5) receiving the lowest score (1 point). The score is the sum of the points given to each problem.

## TOP 20 MOST IMPORTANT TRAIL PROBLEMS

As part of the analysis of the second survey submitted by the Trails Advisory Committee, the researchers compared the rankings of all the problems listed under every issue category to develop a list of the top 20 problems related to trails (Table 4.16). It is important to note that this identifies the top 20 problems most important to the Trails Advisory Committee. These problems were identified based on discussions and comments from both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors; however, only members of the Trails Advisory Committee were given the opportunity to rank priority problems. The recommendations in chapter 5 consider these priority problems as well as the priorities discussed in the Town Hall.

**Table 4.16. Top 20 Trail Problems for All Issue Categories Combined.**

Rank	Issue Category	Trail Problems (All scores were ranked by percent with 100% being the highest priority)	Mean	Score
1	Capacity	Existing trails are not being maintained, and many are being destroyed from overuse or improper use.	81.14	2,029
2	Multiple-Use Trails	Users often lack education on what is expected and what is permitted on multiple-use trails.	81.00	2,025
3	Maintenance	There is a general lack of funding for maintenance materials and staffing.	80.00	2,000
4	Water Trails	There is not a one-stop source for maps, amenities, campsites, topography, and other information on water trails and access sites.	77.33	1,933
5	Maintenance	Federal and state managers have extensive backlogs of trail maintenance needs.	76.00	1,900
6	Long Distance Trails and a State Trails Network	Long distance trails are needed to link existing trails in the state's trails network.	75.00	1,875
7	Access	Trail closures and lack of maintenance have limited access to trails.	72.00	1,800
7	Multiple-Use Land Management	Needs of natural resources, such as wildlife and wetlands, are sometimes perceived as excluding trails.	72.00	1,800
7	Private Lands and Private Concerns	Liability issues and concerns have caused private landowners, including timber companies and other large landowners, to close their lands to the public.	72.00	1,800
7	Water Trails	Self-guided routes lack facilities, including havens.	72.00	1,800
7	Urban Trails	Transportation issues are not sufficiently considered in trails development in urban areas, resulting in gaps between trails and mass transportation that could link safe routes to school, work, recreation areas, etc.	72.00	1,800
12	Volunteers	Managers sometimes lack skills, expertise, or resources to take advantage of volunteer resources.	70.00	1,750
13	Urban Trails	Urban trails sometimes lack linkages with the urban core, cultural and historical landmarks, and public transportation conveniences.	69.33	1,733

Rank	Issue Category	Trail Problems (All scores were ranked by percent with 100% being the highest priority)	Mean	Score
14	Trail Safety	There are concerns about the safety of some urban trails, including such concerns as security, safe parking, and minimizing criminal activity.	68.80	1,720
15	Volunteers	Volunteers lack awareness and information on volunteer opportunities, including whom to contact and how to get involved.	68.67	1,717
16	Use Compatibility	There are conflicts between different modes of recreation (e.g., equestrians and mountain bikers, hikers, and motorcyclists).	68.57	1,714
17	Communication	Real-time, easily accessible trails data, including maps, information on trails conditions, and trail closures are limited.	68.00	1,700
17	Economics and Funding	There are many other needs (e.g., education, criminal justice) competing for government funding, making it difficult to prioritize trails funding.	68.00	1,700
17	Trail Safety	There are increasing concerns regarding parking lot safety and security.	68.00	1,700
20	Capacity	Growing populations and user demands are increasing pressure on all trail systems.	66.86	1,671

\*The score was calculated by assigning points based on the ranking given by each respondent. Points were assigned based on the number of problems ranked for each issue. For the comparison of all problems, the score is the sum of the points given to each problem. The points were weighted to ensure uniformity among all the issue categories. For example, some issue categories only had 3 problems, whereas others had 11. The issue categories were weighted to match the category with the most problems in it to provide a comparison among all the problems presented in the survey.

\*\*The mean shows where each problem would rank on average.

## CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter outlines key recommendations supported by the findings of the research. The recommendations come from the compilation of research conducted for the SCORP, online discussions with the Trails Advisory Committee and NOVA Advisory Group, the two web-based surveys of the Trails Advisory Committee, the Trails Town Hall, and discussions with the RCO.

The six recommendations that follow are considered statewide priorities for the next 5 years and are necessary for supporting the other recommendations developed in this plan. Some recommendations apply to a range of trails service providers including state and federal agencies, local jurisdictions, and non-profit organizations.

It is important to note that trail issues cannot be considered independently because many issues overlap or include the same problems. For this reason, many of the recommendations for specific issues may apply to other issues, as well. The end of this chapter includes specific recommendations for each issue category presented discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

### PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The six recommendations that follow are considered priorities for the state during the next 5 years and are necessary for supporting the other recommendations developed in this plan.

#### **STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #1: Develop a Web site that includes a regional trails inventory and provides links to other information about trails.**

The public is seeking a comprehensive and coordinated resource for information about trails. One approach is to develop a Web site that provides information regarding trails, trail locations, trail conditions, trail use, trail amenities, wildlife expectations, and many other information elements. Such a Web site would require coordination among state, federal, local jurisdictions, and non-profit trail providers.

In planning for the development of this Web site, it is important to understand that the public is seeking comprehensive information about their local trails. .

Some important elements that should be considered in the development of this Web site include:

- Primary use objectives for the trail and allowed uses
- Trail characteristics and conditions
- ADA accessibility
- Facilities and amenities available
- Modes of access
- Trail usage (users, frequency, modes, etc.)
- Wildlife expectations on the trail

More importantly, the public is seeking real-time trails data which could be through an interactive approach in which on-the-ground trail users or land managers can provide timely

updates regarding problems with the trails, trail closures, etc. Additionally, this resource should be used to identify gaps in meeting public needs. In other words, the information provided can help determine where additional funding is needed, where there is a lack of access, where capacity thresholds are being stretched, and many other factors that should be considered in decision-making and funding allocations.

This online resource should be a statewide data tool that trail users can access to plan their trail experiences, but it should also provide a method and the tools for replicating the resource at the local level. In other words, the development of this resource should consider ways it can be adapted at the local level.

The public noted that such a resource would not be a replacement for on-the-ground signage and trailhead information, nor would it be a replacement for real-time weather or trail conditions. Real-time trail users find these signs and information invaluable. While respondents clearly see a need for a central online source for trails information, both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors emphasized the importance of informative signage on trails and at trailheads.

### **STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #2: Improve data gathering among land managers to better understand trail use, users, and modes.**

Town Hall contributors indicated that land managers lack data to make informed decisions about trail capacity, funding, and resources. These contributors supported making trails development decisions based on real data. Currently, comprehensive measures of trail use do not exist, nor is data collected in consistent ways.

There is a need for conducting on-the-ground field surveys and monitoring trails to determine priorities for improving capacity.

The Trails Advisory Committee suggested using the Forest Service's National Visitor Use Monitoring Program as a template for the development of a data gathering model and assessment. This program is designed to track estimates of visitors to National Forests and Grasslands. It obtains information related to activity participation, demographic characteristics, visit duration, measures of satisfaction, and expenditures related to the visit (USDA Forest Service, 2012). It was suggested that this type of data collection be conducted annually or twice each year.

Two challenges should be taken into account in these efforts. First, there is the issue of agency capacity and resources to conduct the data collection needed to develop maps and trails communications. An entity would need to with coordinate and manage these efforts. Second, there is the issue of getting this information out to the public. Funding will be needed to develop and communicate these findings. A working group charged with developing a plan for effectively pursuing detailed, on-the-ground data collection as an initial step in this effort. The plan should clearly identify the funding needed to initiate and maintain data collection efforts,

as well as potential funding sources. This recommendation helps support Statewide Recommendation #1 and many other recommendations highlighted in this plan.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #3: Support efforts to find increased and/or sustainable revenue sources.**

Among both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors, funding was a top issue of concern (see Figure 3.28). Many comments called for dedicated funding for trails, rather than reliance on grant funding, especially in light of the many priorities competing for limited funds.

Many felt that user groups, nonprofits, and others need to unite and present data-driven justification for a dedicated funding source for trails development, maintenance, and operations.

In addition to this recommendation for dedicated funding, participants offered many suggestions for increasing revenue for trails. Some participants suggested raising new revenue for trails through new or re-directed taxes or by encouraging donations with vehicle registrations. Others suggested enlisting private companies to provide trail funding or increasing the use of volunteers. Still others suggested the use of inmate labor to build and maintain trails. And finally, some suggested lifting the current cap on the fuel tax that funds the NOVA account.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #4: Support the development of a trails leadership council or other coordinating forum for trails.**

Both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors emphasized the need to bring user groups together toward common goals. To this end, they suggested the development of a leadership council for trails. Many thought that by uniting toward common aims of improving, maintaining, and increasing trails throughout the state, user groups could foster more cooperation and collaboration.

Such a leadership council could unite trail users around common objectives, and assist with planning, policy recommendations, and funding priorities. A leadership group could provide two immediate benefits: 1) foster better relationships among user groups, and 2) develop a united constituency for trail issues.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #5: Focus on the maintenance of existing trails as a priority.**

Trail maintenance clearly emerged as a key issue among the public. In general, both the Trails Advisory Committee and the Town Hall contributors agree the use of existing trails should be maximized before focusing on the development of new trails. While stakeholders recognized that new trails may have to be developed to meet capacity demands, they were primarily concerned with ensuring that existing trails not fall into disrepair and become unusable.

These contributors agreed that trail planning should consider maintenance and be proactive rather than reactive. Any new trails development should anticipate trail usage and subsequent maintenance requirements, building into its goals and objectives a method or plan for handling maintenance issues.

The importance of this issue among stakeholders identifies a gap between the grant program funding priorities or requirements and a public that clearly views maintenance as a top priority for increasing trails access and capacity in the state. Well-planned trails development should anticipate trail usage and subsequent maintenance requirements, building into its goals and objectives a method or plan for handling maintenance issues. In some cases, however, recreation providers are seeking funding for maintenance that should have been planned for during development, thereby placing the onus of maintenance on already burdened funding sources.

To address stakeholder concerns regarding maintenance, the funding programs for trails projects should be reviewed to determine whether any changes need to be made. Additionally, funding programs and land managers should consider requirement more planning for maintenance requirements when developing new trails.

**STATEWIDE RECOMMENDATION #6: Encourage and support programs and initiatives focused on user conflict management.**

In the recently conducted SCORP survey, residents and user groups expressed concerns that opportunity for trail activities is unequally distributed among user groups, creating a sense of competition for access and resources. Still, while acknowledging these tensions, commenters called for cooperation and collaboration among user groups. The findings show that the public recognizes more can be gained by trails users working together.

Land managers recognize managing user conflicts is a priority due to the increased diversity of trail recreation activities combined with a limited supply of trails. They want to address user conflicts in order to improve user safety, protect natural resources, minimize crowding, and address threats to quality trails experiences.

Respondents from user groups recognize their own accountability and obligations to help manage user conflicts. They would like help facilitating and supporting user group efforts to manage or minimize user conflicts.

Programs and initiatives should be developed to support conflict management on trails issues. User groups should be supported in their efforts to minimize user conflicts.

Initial ideas offered by stakeholders include:

- Assistance in communicating these efforts through a clearinghouse or one-stop resource focused on user group initiatives and programs;

- Support for stakeholder organizations that wish to meet with one another to discuss common ground issues (e.g., offer neutral meeting management services, create meeting events such as local problem-solving groups, etc.);
- Work with stakeholders to improve the quality of and, perhaps most importantly, the dissemination of ‘best use practices’ for multiple-use trails;
- Improve signage at trailheads; and
- Assist in the creation of work parties that include multiple user groups.

## RECOMMENDATIONS BY ISSUE CATEGORY

The rest of this chapter includes specific recommendations for each issue category discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. See those previous chapters for details on the issues and problems raised. This section focuses on highlight specific recommendations for the next 5 years.

### ISSUE: ACCESS

The top three ranked problems related to access are:

- Trail closures and lack of maintenance have limited access to trails.
- Trails and nonmotorized modes of travel are often overlooked in transportation planning.
- There is insufficient access for underserved communities, including residents with disabilities or limited mobility, children, youth, and urban residents.

#### Recommendations

- Focus on trails maintenance to minimize closures.
- Incorporate trails into transportation and open space plans at state and local levels.
- Prioritize funding for trails planning and development that considers underserved communities.
- Increase and improve parking at trails.

### ISSUE: CAPACITY

The top two ranked problems related to capacity are:

- Existing trails are not being maintained, and many are being destroyed from overuse or improper use.
- Growing populations and user demands are increasing pressure on all trail systems.

#### Recommendations

- Develop new trail opportunities and improve maintenance to existing trails to increase capacity.
- Minimize the difficulty in obtaining land easements for acquisition and development to accommodate the growing demand for trails in the state.
- Increase and improve data gathering on trails use, users, and modes to inform land management decisions.

## **ISSUE: COMMUNICATION**

The top three ranked problems related to communication are:

- Real-time, easily accessible trails data, including maps, information on trails conditions, trail closures, etc., are limited.
- Many trails lack signage, including better identification of trailheads, information on trails conditions, interpretive and educational information, and wildlife expectations.
- There is a shortage of education programs among user groups designed to promote mutual respect, trail ethics, and best practices.

### **Recommendations**

- Provide updated, concise online information to trail users. Increase and improve road signs and signage at trailheads.
- Increase the number of interpretive/educational signs at trailheads and along trails.
- Create education programs and online forums that are specifically designed to foster communication and cooperation between user groups.
- Explore methods for including user groups in planning, funding, and decision-making processes.

## **ISSUE: ECONOMICS AND FUNDING**

The top three ranked problems related to economics and funding are:

- There are many other needs (e.g., education, criminal justice) competing for government funding, making it difficult to prioritize trails funding.
- The state's congressional delegation and legislature need to be more informed on the need for increased funding for trails.
- Funding is not properly allocated between maintenance of existing trails and development of new trails.

### **Recommendations**

- Consider conducting a study on the economic impact of trails.
- Educate the public and elected officials about the benefits of trails as well as the costs of building and maintaining trails.
- Focus on trails as a business investment and economic development opportunity, highlighting how trails provide important transportation linkages for businesses and local enterprise and as tourist attractions. Increase awareness and transparency regarding trails funding and trails expenditures.

## **ISSUE: LONG DISTANCE TRAILS AND A STATE TRAILS NETWORK**

The top three ranked problems related to long distance trails and a state trails network are:

- Long distance trails are needed to link existing trails in the state's trails network.
- Liability issues and problems with user groups prevent landowners from providing linkages or corridors for the trails network.
- Development of local and regional trails is taking place without coordination or adequate statewide perspective.

**Recommendation**

- Develop a collaborative and cooperative strategic plan for long distance trails and trails networks that includes a cost/benefit analysis of current long distance trails and current long distance trail use.
- Address liability issues and landowners' concerns regarding the impact of a state trails network on private land issues.

**ISSUE: MAINTENANCE**

The top three ranked problems related to maintenance are:

- There is a general lack of funding for maintenance materials and staffing.
- Federal and state managers have extensive backlogs of trail maintenance needs.
- Construction quality standards are often so high that maintenance is impeded because of the cost and permitting burdens required to meet these standards.

**Recommendations**

- Explore dedicated funding alternatives for trails maintenance.
- Continue to use volunteers to address the backlog of trail maintenance needs.

**ISSUE: MULTIPLE-USE LAND MANAGEMENT**

The top three ranked problems related to multiple-use land management are:

- Needs of natural resources, such as wildlife and wetlands, are sometimes perceived as excluding trails.
- There is insufficient integrated planning, and managers often do not work together on trails and road building.
- Informal trails and paths in cities and counties are frequently disrupted by development activities.

**Recommendations**

- Focus land management on sustaining ecosystem health and biodiversity as the primary goals.
- Encourage coordination and collaboration among land managers in trails and road building.
- Focus on integrating trails in community planning and housing development.

**ISSUE: MULTIPLE-USE TRAILS**

The top three ranked problems related to multiple-use trails are:

- Users often lack education on what is expected and what is permitted on multiple-use trails.
- Users are often unaware of management goals, such as maintenance standards and primary trail objectives, which often leads to dissatisfaction or unmet needs.

- Some trails are not built to meet use requirements, such as serving a potential transportation function or meeting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance specifications.

### **Recommendations**

- Improve education and outreach among user groups regarding trail goals, objectives, and uses.
- Develop new trails to meet ADA compliance specifications.

## **ISSUE: PRIVATE LANDS AND PRIVATE CONCERNS**

The problems related to private lands and private concerns are:

- Liability issues and concerns have caused private landowners, including timber companies and other large landowners, to close their lands to the public.
- Poor communication and misunderstanding often leads to obstacles to establishing needed trails adjacent to private land.
- Landowners are not often included in trails planning efforts.

### **Recommendations**

- Increase proactive communication and education efforts that target landowners.
- Provide landowners adequate compensation for their land.

## **ISSUE: RAIL-TRAILS AND UTILITY CORRIDORS**

The top three ranked problems related to rail-trails and utility corridors are:

- Timely recreation agency response to rail corridor abandonments is not well coordinated with transportation entities.
- No statewide plan exists for the development and management of rail-trail projects.
- Permitting requirements often complicate the use of utility corridors for trails.

### **Recommendations**

- Work with the WUTC and WSDOT to obtain timely notification of all rail corridor abandonments.
- Work with transportation entities to set policies and procedures for railroad abandonment notifications.
- Improve communication and collaboration between government sectors regarding rail-trails and utility corridors.

## **ISSUE: USE COMPATIBILITY**

The top three ranked problems related to use compatibility are:

- There are conflicts between different modes of recreation (e.g., equestrians and mountain bikers, hikers and motorcyclists).
- There is a lack of awareness and understanding of the distribution and volume of trail opportunities and trail uses by the different user groups.

- Multiple-use trail management can overlook the importance of identifying compatible uses.

### **Recommendations**

- Facilitate communication and collaboration among user groups.
- Improve on-the-ground, objective data.
- Recognize that providing motorized vehicle opportunities is worthy of further research and consideration.
- Increase user group diversity in agency outreach, images, and messages.

### **ISSUE: VOLUNTEERS**

The top three ranked problems related to volunteers are:

- Managers sometimes lack skills, expertise, or resources to take advantage of volunteer resources.
- Volunteers lack awareness and information on volunteer opportunities, including whom to contact and how to get involved.
- Volunteers lack training and education in trails management.

### **Recommendations**

- Increase education and training regarding the use of volunteers in the state.
- Increase communications and outreach regarding volunteer opportunities.

### **ISSUE: WATER TRAILS**

The problems related to water trails are:

- There is not a one-stop source for maps, amenities, campsites, topography, and other information on water trails and access sites.
- Self-guided routes lack facilities, including havens.
- There are insufficient trails on water.

### **Recommendations**

- Develop a one-stop resource for water trails.
- Prioritize water trails facilities and opportunities.

### **ISSUE: URBAN TRAILS**

The problems related to urban trails are:

- Transportation issues are not sufficiently considered in trails development in urban areas, resulting in gaps between trails and mass transportation that could link safe routes to school, work, recreation areas, etc.
- Urban trails sometimes lack linkages with the urban core, cultural and historical landmarks, and public transportation conveniences.

- Trails compete with other transportation corridors and roads in urban areas creating unique safety and conflict issues (e.g., intersection safety, traffic congestion).

### **Recommendation**

- Include urban trails in local transportation and infrastructure planning.

### **ISSUE: TRAIL SAFETY**

The top three ranked problems related to trail safety are:

- There are concerns about the safety of some urban trails, including such concerns as security, safe parking, and minimizing criminal activity.
- There are increasing concerns regarding parking lot safety and security.
- Some trails lack safe and visible road crossings, resulting in unsafe intersections of trails near or adjacent to busy roads.

### **Recommendations**

- Increase law enforcement presence in parking areas and on trails.
- Consider intersection safety and traffic coordination for trails planning.

## **RECREATION AND CONSERVATION OFFICE ACTIONS**

As a major statewide funding partner for trails, the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) will strive to implement the following action items in response to the statewide trails plan recommendations.

Note that statewide recommendations #3 and #6 are outside RCO's scope as a state funding agency and therefore do not apply directly to its core work.

### **RCO ACTION #1: Develop a Web page that is a clearinghouse for trails information.**

In response to statewide recommendation #1, RCO will develop a Web page dedicated to sharing information about trails throughout the state.

Ideas for the Web site include:

- A clearinghouse for trails-related information such as this plan, other state trails plans, and other planning information at the federal, state, or local level as provided by other parties.
- An inventory of regional trails, along with gaps or missing links in those regional trail systems. The inventory would include linked information on each regional trail with information and maps.
- Links to other sources of information about trails from federal, state agencies and local agencies and nonprofit organizations. These links would be a collection of resources where trail users find tools developed by others to plan their trail experiences.

**RCO ACTION #2: Provide incentives, within existing resources, for grant applicants to submit trail data in consistent ways.**

While RCO grant programs require applicants to address trails use and need as part of the evaluation process, there is no standardized format of how trails data is collected. Some applicants have specific data on trails use and need while others have a general sense of need.

In response to statewide recommendation #2, RCO will revise its program policies to incentivize a consistent method for reporting trails use and need. The incentives will not be financial and must be within the existing funding resources. The use of this information would be to help prioritize funding investments.

**RCO ACTION #3: Encourage and assist, within existing resources, with the coordination of statewide trails coordinating organization.**

In response to statewide recommendation #4, RCO will, within existing staff and funding resources, provide staff support to assist with and coordinate a statewide trails organization. While RCO staff resources are limited and the agency cannot take an advocacy role, it may provide support to an organization that is working towards implementing this plan's recommendations on a statewide level.

**RCO ACTION #4: Support funding for maintenance of trails.**

Two of RCO's grant programs allow for maintenance of trails as a grant project (Nonhighway Off-road Vehicle Activities program and Recreational Trails Program). In response to statewide recommendation #5, RCO will review funding patterns to determine whether the agency is adequately supporting maintenance of trails.

As part of this review, RCO is recommending incorporating the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board's sustainability policy recommendations into its trails program priorities and adjust the evaluation criteria to incentivize sustainable design and maintenance goals.

**RCO ACTION #5: Prioritize funding for trail uses identified as being "in demand" in this trails plan and evaluate whether to develop and designate a system of state recreation trails as referenced in RCW 79A.35.**

In response to the public survey on supply and demand for trails, RCO will review grant award results to determine whether the agency is adequately supporting the types of trails identified as in demand. These are:

- Hiking, walking, biking
- Urban and suburban locations
- Access for traditionally underserved groups, including people with disabilities, people representing a variety of age groups, and minority populations.

In addition, RCO will evaluate whether to develop and designate a system of state recreation trails as referenced in RCW 79A.35 and whether trails so designated should receive preference in grant funding. As part of this evaluation, the RCO will consider the feasibility of developing:

- A method for establishing a state system of recreation trails,
- A process to propose trails into the system,
- An inventory of existing trails and potential trail routes for designation as state recreation trails, and
- Adjustments to program funding priorities to increase access to the statewide system of trails.

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