



DATE: October 17, 2019
TO: Plan for Ashuelot Rail Trail Project Advisory Committee
FROM: SWRPC Staff
RE: Outreach – Key Stakeholder Group Survey

A number of trail user groups have an interest in the Ashuelot Rail Trail. User group priorities may overlap in some areas, and differ in others. In order to gather trail user group perspectives on a number of trail-related issues, SWRPC staff developed and distributed an online survey. This memo summarizes survey methodology and response.

I. Survey Methodology

SWRPC staff developed survey questions on a variety of trail-related issues, including:

- Respondent information
- Group information
- Participation to date in trail user survey
- Trail use
- Trail conditions and facilities
- Trail stewardship
- Coordination
- Balancing the needs of multiple trail user groups
- Trail connectivity
- Trail-related education

Prior to distributing the survey to respondents, SWRPC sent draft questions to NH Fish and Game, NH Trail Bureau, and NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) for comment and feedback. SWRPC received some suggestions for minor modifications from NHDOT.

A copy of finalized survey questions is attached to this memo.

Once survey questions were finalized, SWRPC staff migrated survey questions to the online platform Survey Monkey. Survey recipients were then contacted via e-mail or Facebook to participate in the survey. Email was used as the preferred method of contact, but, where an e-mail address was unavailable, Facebook was used. Survey recipients are listed below, in Table 1.

Table 1 – Trail User Group Survey Recipients and Contact Method

Recipient Group	Method of Contact
NH Horse Council	Email
Monadnock Happy Trails Association	Email
Monadnock Cycling Club	Email
Keene Sno-Riders	Email
Ashuelot Valley Blazers Snowmobile Club	Facebook
Winchester Trail Riders	Email
Pisgah Mt. Trail Riders	Email
Pathways for Keene	Email
Friends of Pisgah	Email
Winchester Learning Center	Email

Survey recipients were advised to complete the survey as a group exercise, with fellow group members. The goal was to receive a single survey response from each contacted trail user group. Survey recipients were given three weeks to submit responses.

II. Survey Response

Four contacted trail user groups submitted survey responses: the New Hampshire Horse Council (NHHC), the Monadnock Happy Trail Association (MHTA), the Winchester Trail Riders, and the Monadnock Cycling Club. The New Hampshire Arabian Horse Association, who was not included on the original distribution list, also submitted a response. Respondent answers to each questions are summarized below.

In what year was your organization founded?

Table 2 – Respondent Groups, Year of Founding

Group/organization	Year founded
Monadnock Cycling Club	2006
NHHC	1986
NH Arabian Horse Assoc.	No response
MHTA	2000
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	1994

On average, how frequently does you group/organization meet? (Please include both off-trail and on-trail gatherings.)

All respondents indicated that they meet once a month, with the exception of the NH Horse Council, which reported that the Trails Committee meets 3-4 times a year and also corresponds regularly through e-mail.

How many individuals are members of your group/organization?

Table 3 – Respondent Groups/Organizations, Number of Members

<u>Group/organization</u>	<u>Number of Members</u>
Monadnock Cycling Club	100
NHHC	No response
NH Arabian Horse Assoc.	20
MHTA	15
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	200

What do members of your group do on the Ashuelot Rail Trail? Please select all that apply

Three of the respondents represented equestrian groups, while one represented a cycling club, and another, a snowmobile club. Some respondents also indicated other activities that they personally pursue on the trail.

Which sections of the trail does your group use the most? If possible, use specific landmarks or cross streets to describe trail sections.

Trail segments used by respondents overlapped in some cases and were distinct in others. Taken together, trail sections used by respondents covered the entire extent of the Ashuelot Rail Trail.

Table 4 – Respondent Groups/Organizations, Used Trail Sections

Monadnock Cycling Club	<i>Mostly just in Keene, quality of the trail diminishes as you get further away.</i>
NH Horse Council	<i>Local riders will need to answer this</i>
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	<i>Matthews Rd in Swanzey to Rt. 10 in Winchester</i>
MHTA	<i>Matthews Rd. parking lot, Keene end to West Swanzey; NH 63 parking lot in Hinsdale to Ashuelot village</i>
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	<i>Recycle way, Ashuelot to Oak Hill Cemetery, Railroad Street, Swanzey</i>

There are many ways to improve the trail. Please rank the following in terms of priority

Respondents were asked to select whether potential trail improvements were a “high priority,” “medium priority,” a “low priority,” or “not a priority.” Table 5 compiles responses, with blank cells representing “not a priority.”

Improving the trail surface with packed gravel was the most commonly recognized high or medium priority improvement among respondents.

Table 5 - Group/Organization Trail Improvement Priorities

	Monadnock Cycling Club	NH Horse Council	NH Arabian Horse Assn.	MHTA	Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.
Wider path	Low	Low	Low		High
Benches	Low	Low			
Lighting	Low	Low			
Directional signs and maps	Medium	High		Low	
Trail etiquette signs	Medium	High		Medium	
New or improved trailheads/parking areas	Low	High		Medium	High
Better road crossings	High	Medium		Low	Medium
Access to shops, etc.	Medium	Low			
Improved trail surface w/packed gravel	High	High	Medium		High
Trail “branding” and promotion	Low	Low			
Trail patrols/enforcement		Low	Low	Low	Medium
Restrooms	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium
Drinking fountains	Low	Low	Medium		
Signs about places history, nature, etc.	Low	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium
Pet waste stations	Low	Low	Low		

Would members of your group/organization consider paying an annual fee to help fund the priorities indicated above?

Table 6 - Group/Organization Willingness to Fund Priorities

Group/Organization	Willingness to Fund Priorities
Monadnock Cycling Club	Maybe
NH Horse Council	Maybe
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Unknown. Would have to ask them.
MHTA	Maybe
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	Already pay a fee through snowmobile registration

Does your group/organization volunteer time to help with any of the following management tasks on the Ashuelot Rail Trail? If so, please describe location, frequency, and equipment used.

Most respondent groups and organizations indicated that they had at some point engaged in trail maintenance activities (Table 7). The Winchester Trail Riders reported that they perform a full range of trail maintenance tasks on the trail section that they manage (Recycle Way in Winchester to Railroad Street in Swanzey).

Table 7 – Respondent Organization/Group Maintenance Activities

	Monadnock Cycling Club	NH Horse Council	NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Monadnock happy trails assoc.	Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.
Mowing					Our trail section, tractor and mower
Cutting back trailside brush	Yes		Have done this in the past	Matthews Road section	Our trail section, tractor and mower
Removing downed trees	Yes				Our trail section, tractor and mower
Maintaining trail surface (grading, maintaining drainage features)	Yes				Our trail section, tractors, back hoes, dump trucks
Repairing bridges	Yes		Have done this in the past		Our trail section
Picking up trash	Yes		Have done this in the past	Matthews Road section	Our trail section
Snow grooming					Our trail section, Tucker Snocat and grooming drag
Other (please specify)	Already do most of the above as a user	Would likely help if advertise a trail care day			Wood chipper

If given the opportunity, would members of your group/organization volunteer time to help with any of the following activities on the Ashuelot Rail trail? (Choices: Yes, No, Maybe, Already Doing)

Most respondent groups and organizations indicated that their members would be willing to contribute volunteer time towards at least some trail maintenance tasks (Table 8). Most groups, for example, said that their members would or might be willing to help repair bridges.

Table 8 - Respondent Group/Organization Interest in Providing Additional Volunteer Help towards Trail Maintenance

	Monadnock Cycling Club	NH Horse Council	NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Monadnock happy trails assoc.	Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.
Mowing	Yes		No	No	Already doing
Cutting back trailside brush	Already doing		Maybe	Already doing	Already doing
Removing downed trees	Already doing		No	Yes	Already doing
Maintaining trail surface (grading, maintaining drainage features)	Yes		No	No	Already doing
Repairing bridges	Yes		Maybe	Yes	Already doing
Picking up trash	Already doing		Maybe	Already doing	Already doing
Snow grooming	No		No	No	Already doing
Other (please specify)		Locals will need to answer			

Has your group/organization coordinated with other groups/organizations on trail maintenance or development?

Respondent equestrian groups indicated that they had worked with other trail user groups on trail maintenance projects, although they did not specify whether these were projects on the Ashuelot Rail Trail or on other trails (Table 9). The respondent snowmobile club reported that other trail user groups did not want to coordinate on trail maintenance project, although the level of outreach to other trail user groups was not specified.

Table 9 – Respondent Coordination with Other Groups/Organizations

Group/Organization	Coordination with Other Groups
Monadnock Cycling Club	Not participated
NH Horse Council	Worked with both bike and snowmobile groups, doing basic maintenance and providing funds for bridges
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Yes. We did work with multiple groups on a bridge repair.
MHTA	Our equestrian group has helped with clean up and bridge repair with the snowmobile group
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	No other club wants to participate at this time to help us

Would your group/organization be interested in establishing a trail user group focused on improving the trail for all permitted users?

All respondent groups/organizations indicated interest in establishing an umbrella trail organization.

Table 10 – Respondent Interest in Coordinating with other Trail Groups/Organizations

Group/Organization	Interested in Coordinating?
Monadnock Cycling Club	Yes
NH Horse Council	Maybe
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Yes
MHTA	Yes
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	Yes

Would members of your group/organization be interested in organizing fundraisers with other trail user groups to support improving the trail?

Most respondent groups/organizations were unsure whether members would be interested in organizing fundraisers with other trail user groups (Table 11). Only the Monadnock Cycling club responded that it would be interested.

Table 11 – Respondent Interest in Organizing Fundraisers with other Groups/Organizations

Group/Organization	Interested in Coordinating?
Monadnock Cycling Club	Yes
NH Horse Council	Maybe
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Maybe
MHTA	Maybe
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	Maybe

Are there ways in which your group's use of the trail conflicts with how others use the trail? Where applicable, please describe specific instances and locations where these conflicts have impacted your group's experience on the trail.

Four out of the five respondents identified on-trail conflicts between user groups (Table 12)

Table 12 – Respondent-Identified On-Trail Conflicts

Group/Organization	Identified Conflicts with other Trail User Groups
Monadnock Cycling Club	Walkers and runners with headphones who never hear you approaching and are then surprised when you pass them.
NH Horse Council	Mostly it is a speed issue with other users, need to slow down and speak when approaching and passing horses
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Trail etiquette problems - bicyclists don't know to speak when approaching horses, especially from the rear. A simple "passing on your left" would do. Off leash dogs are a problem, can be aggressive with horses; may get kicked or stepped on.
MHTA	We have had instances where bike riders come up behind the horses, but don't announce that they are there and startle the horse... a simple "Hi can I pass" would alert us they are there. Loose dogs have also been an issue, a barking dog coming at a horse can cause a spook... dangerous to rider, dog and anyone standing near.
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	None at this time.

In your opinion, what on-trail changes might minimize or prevent the conflicts described above?

Table 13 – Respondent-Identified Measures to Mitigate On-Trail Conflicts

Group/Organization	Identified Mitigation Measures
Monadnock Cycling Club	No Headphones
NH Horse Council	Keep the trail surface natural, prefer no paving, if paving is done do only in congested developed areas and provide a third unpaved parallel path for horses
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Trail etiquette educational signs indicating multi-use trail, be courteous!
MHTA	Education of trail rules and best practices
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	None

Does your group use the Ashuelot Rail Trail to connect to other trails? If so, please provide the name and location of any trails that you access from the Ashuelot Rail Trail.

Respondents reported that they use the Ashuelot Rail Trail to connect with other trails in Keene and Pisgah State Park (Table 14).

Table 14 – Respondent-Identified Trail Connections

Group/Organization	Identified Trail Connections
Monadnock Cycling Club	Connections to other trails within Keene
NH Horse Council	Locals will need to answer this
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	Rarely but have parked in Winchester and used the rail trail to connect to Pisgah State Park trails.
MHTA	Not yet... we have not explored any of the trails off the rail bed yet
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	Corridor 5 Pisgah State Park, & Trail 15 Pisgah State Park

Would members of your organization be interested in participating in any of the following trainings, should they be offered? Please check all that apply.

Among survey respondents, workshops regarding trail maintenances technique was the most commonly indicated training type of interest (Table 15).

Table 15 – Respondent Interest in Trail-Related Training/Workshop Topics

	Monadnock Cycling Club	NH Horse Council	NH Arabian Horse Assn.	MHTA	Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.
How to coordinate with state agencies and local government on volunteer-led trail maintenance and development	✓	✓			✓
Developing a trail maintenance plan		✓	✓		✓
Trail maintenance techniques		✓	✓	✓	✓
Recruiting volunteers for rail trail maintenance			✓		✓
Leading on-trail volunteer events					✓
Fundraising for rail trail projects	✓		✓		

If you have additional thoughts or opinions related to the Ashuelot Rail Trail, please feel free to share them here.

Table 16 – Additional Respondent Comments

Group/Organization	Additional Comments
Monadnock Cycling Club	<i>No response</i>
NH Horse Council	Would love to see horse use on lists of users in the same manner and importance as snowmobiles, bikers, hikers and sled dogs. We may be a smaller users group but just as important.
NH Arabian Horse Assn.	<i>No response</i>
MHTA	We do not want to see the rail trail paved as it is in Keene, that is not desirable for horses.
Winchester Trail Riders, Inc.	Open to ATV's & UTV's

III. Findings

- All respondents indicated some interest in establishing an umbrella entity that includes representatives from different trail user groups, demonstrating interest in enhanced coordination among trail user groups/organizations.
- Although trail segments used by respondent groups/organizations overlapped in some cases, they were distinct in others. Together, trail segments used by respondents encompassed the entire Ashuelot Rail Trail. If the Ashuelot Rail Trail is to be developed and managed as a single, continuous asset (as opposed to a series of unrelated segments), leveraging the collective knowledge of the trail's varied user groups will be critical.
- Improving the trail surface with gravel was the only high priority improvement indicated by cyclist, equestrian, and snowmobile user groups.

IV. Recommendation

- During future outreach to trail user groups, consider using a variety of engagement methods, including phone interviews and in-person discussions. Relying solely on a written survey distributed via e-mail and Facebook yielded a low response rate skewed toward certain user groups. Given that snowmobile clubs currently play a central role in trail management and maintenance, enhancing outreach to those groups would be especially valuable.

Key Stakeholder Group Survey
Trail User Group Version

- **Respondent Information**
 - What is your name? If more than one person is contributing to this survey response, please indicate the name of each respondent.
 - For which group/organization are you responding?
 - What is/are your position(s) within the group/organization (e.g. volunteer, member, president)?
- **Group Information**
 - In what year was your organization founded?
 - How frequently does your group/organization meet? (Please include both off-trail and on-trail gatherings.)
 - How many individuals are members of your group/organization?
- **Trail User Survey**
 - To your knowledge, how many members of your group/organization have taken the Plan for [Ashuelot Rail Trail online Trail User Survey](#)?
 - If you haven't done so already, would you be willing to promote the online survey to your group/organization's membership?
- **Trail Use**
 - What do members of your group do on the Ashuelot Rail Trail? Please select all that apply.
 - Walk
 - Hike
 - Jog/Run
 - Bike
 - Cross-country ski
 - Snowshoe
 - Snowmobile
 - Dogsled
 - Other (please describe)
 - Which sections of the trail does your group use the most? If possible, use specific landmarks or cross streets to describe trail sections. If needed, please reference the online map [here](#).
 - Which trail access points do members of your group/organization generally use when visiting the trail? Please describe access points referencing landmarks and/or cross streets. If needed, please reference the online map [here](#).
- **Trail Conditions/Facilities**
 - There are many ways to improve the trail. Please rank the following trail improvement, with number one represent your top priority. If you *oppose* a listed improvement, select "Opposed" from the drop-down menu.
 - Wider path

Key Stakeholder Group Survey
Trail User Group Version

- Benches
 - Lighting
 - Directional signs and maps
 - Trail etiquette signs
 - New or improved trailheads/parking areas
 - Better road crossings
 - Access to shops, etc.
 - Improving trail surface condition with packed gravel
 - Trail “branding” and promotion
 - Trail patrols/enforcement
 - Restrooms
 - Drinking fountains
 - Signs about places history, nature, etc.
 - Pet waste stations
- If you would like to describe in more detail your priorities listed above, please do so here. Also feel free to describe trail priorities *not* listed above. If possible, please identify specific locations for potential improvement by referencing landmarks and cross streets. An online map of the trail is available [here](#).
- **Trail Stewardship**
 - Does your group/organization volunteer time to help with any of the following management tasks on the Ashuelot Rail Trail? If so, please describe location, frequency, and equipment used.
 - Mowing
 - Cutting back trailside brush
 - Removing downed trees
 - Maintaining trail surface (grading, maintaining drainage features)
 - Repairing bridges
 - Picking up trash
 - Snow grooming
 - Other (please specify)
 - If given the opportunity, would members of your group/organization volunteer time help with any of the following activities on the Ashuelot Rail trail? (Choices: Yes, No, Maybe, Already Doing)
 - Mowing
 - Cutting back trailside brush
 - Removing downed trees
 - Maintaining trail surface (grading, maintaining drainage features)
 - Repairing bridges

Key Stakeholder Group Survey Trail User Group Version

- Picking up trash
 - Grooming
 - Other (please specify)
- Would members of your group/organization consider paying an annual fee to help maintain the trail? (If members of your group already pay a fee, e.g. through snowmobile registrations, please describe whether group members would be willing to contribute additional dollars, if it meant funding additional trail improvements.)
- **Coordination**
 - Has your group/organization coordinated with other groups/organizations on trail maintenance or development? Hypothetical examples include a snowmobile club working with a town parks and recreation department to trim brush or an equestrian club working with a cycling club to raise money for trail improvements. Please describe any coordinated efforts in which your group/organization has participated.
 - Would your group/organization be interested in establishing a trail user group focused on improving the trail for all permitted users?
 - Would members of your group/organization be interested in organizing fundraisers with other trail user groups to support improving the trail?
- **Balancing the Needs of Multiple Groups**
 - Please describe how use of the Ashuelot Rail Trail by members of your group/organization are compatible or incompatible with the following groups (Choice: Compatible, Incompatible - Why?):
 - Walkers/hikers/joggers
 - Bicyclists
 - Cross-country skiers
 - Snowshoers
 - Snowmobilers
 - Equestrians
 - Mushers (dogsledders)
 - OHRV users: ATV riders and trail bike riders
 - Other (please specify)
 - What on-trail changes might improve compatibility between your group/organization and other trail users?
- **Connectivity**
 - Does your group use the Ashuelot Rail Trail to connect to other trails? If so, please provide the name and location of any trails that you access from the Ashuelot Rail Trail.
- **Education**
 - Would members of your organization be interested in participating in any of the following trainings, should they be offered?

Key Stakeholder Group Survey
Trail User Group Version

- How to coordinate with state agencies and local government on volunteer-led trail maintenance and development
 - Developing a trail maintenance plan
 - Trail maintenance techniques
 - Recruiting volunteers for rail trail maintenance
 - Leading on-trail volunteer events
 - Fundraising for rail trail projects
- **Anything else?**
 - If you have additional thoughts or opinions related to the Ashuelot Rail Trail, please feel free to share them here.
 - **Contact Information**
 - What is your email address? (If available, please provide an organizational e-mail address?)
 - If applicable, what is the web address of your organization's website?