2021 Connecticut Trails and Active Living Program
Accomplishments Report

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Volunteers
Thank you to the Trail Site Coordinators and many volunteers who contributed hundreds of hours to collect data and without whom this project would not be possible.

The Trail Census Advisory Committee provides invaluable support to our staff and programs:
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The UConn Extension Connecticut Trails and Active Living Program

In 2021, the University of Connecticut (UConn) Extension Trails and Active Living Program focused on the development and launch of the Connecticut Trail Finder website and continued multi-use path data collection and interpretation through the Connecticut Trail Census project.

Connecticut Trail Finder

The Connecticut Trail Finder is a statewide trails website that provides easy searching and access to information about the wide spectrum of active outdoor opportunities throughout Connecticut. UConn Extension has developed, launched, and continues to populate and manage the Connecticut Trail Finder. The audience includes Connecticut residents and visitors looking for opportunities to be active outdoors. With support from the Center for Community Geographic Information Systems (CCGIS), the Connecticut Councils of Governments (COGS) and other trail partner organizations, the UConn Extension Trails Team is happy to report the following accomplishments.

- **Established and finalized the CT Trail GIS (Geographic Information System) data standard.** The UConn Extension and UConn CLEAR team worked with the CT GIS Network Data Standards Committee to draft, review and adopt the CT Trail GIS Standard. The standard lays the necessary foundation for consistent GIS data collection to benefit both the CT Trail Finder and the development of a statewide GIS Trails layer.

- **Developed the Connecticut Trail Finder website**
  - Defined project parameters (geographic scope, trail types, points of interest types, fields required for trail postings, visual branding).
  - Developed website branding including logo, colors, and graphics.
  - Designed website mock-ups to match branding and reflect needs of all trail types.
  - Developed and reviewed the privacy policy and terms of use with UConn legal support.
  - Beta tested the site and reviewed all functionalities prior to launch.
  - Continual support of ongoing website development and expansion. For example, added an Electric Vehicle Charging Station point of interest.

- **Initial Trail Postings**
  - inventoried and prioritized trails to be included in the first (and subsequent) phases.
  - Identified associated trail management partners including CT DEEP Parks & Forests, CT Forest and Parks Association (CFPA), multiple Land Trusts, and more.
  - Engaged trail managers and began to gather spatial data (trail lines, points of interest), narrative text, and photographs for priority trails.
  - Developed initial trail postings including narrative, photos and map covering a diversity of geographic locations, trail uses, trail system sizes and types of organizations.
  - Published draft postings for trail manager approval.
  - Made adjustments and published to the CT Trail Finder website.

- **Social Media.** Created and launched Connecticut Trail Finder Facebook and Instagram social accounts in collaboration with Fitzgerald and Halliday, funded through Capitol Region COG’s administration of Centers for Disease Control Funding

- **Launched Connecticut Trail Finder website** on June 5, 2021 with 47 initial trail systems including trails on CT DEEP, municipal, and land conservation trust properties.
● **Documented workflow and developed documentation and training materials** to assist with core data input and management tasks. All training documentation is available on the UConn Extension CT Trail Program website [https://cttrails.uconn.edu/trailfinder_add/](https://cttrails.uconn.edu/trailfinder_add/).

● **Transferred GIS tasks from CCGIS to the UConn Trails Team**
  o CCGIS trained UConn Trails team on the data preparation process.
  o Transferred custom tools from CCGIS to UConn Trails team.
  o UConn Trails team continues to streamline data processing methods and data storage.

● **Presentations and Outreach.** Conducted many training workshops and targeted outreach presentations to provide both an overview and training to support trail data development and collection (See Trail Finder Presentations below).

● **Developed a structured approach for trail manager engagement** including establishing a shared email address ([trails@uconn.edu](mailto:trails@uconn.edu)), a training presentation template, and a data process including a development status tracking sheet.

● **Developed and published over 100 trail systems** to the Connecticut Trail Finder website, far exceeding the goal of 80-100 trail postings by December 31, 2021. Each Trail Posting requires the following steps:
  1. Initial outreach to trail manager
  2. Development of narrative information by manager or the UConn Trails Team
  3. Collection, review and processing in GIS of trail lines and points for the interactive map
  4. Sharing each draft post with the trail manager
  5. Receive final approval from the manager and publish the post for public view

● **Convened over 75 partner agencies, municipalities, and organizations** (see Partnering Organization list below) regarding coordination and continued population of the Connecticut Trail Finder website. Additional requests are frequent.

● **Social Media.** Manage social media accounts with high levels of engagement.
  o Facebook: Over 1,035 likes, over 1,102 followers; reach of over 24,290 since May 2021.
  o Instagram: Over 492 followers; reach over 1744 users since May 2021.

● **Student Interns.** Recruited, hired and supervised two student interns.

● **Administrative Oversight.** Project administration includes overseeing staff payroll, subcontracts, timelines, and tasks.

● **Project Coordination.** Convened UConn Trails Team in weekly coordination meetings to ensure progress towards program and project objectives.

The CT Trail Finder website has had over 37,461 page views in the six months between July 1 and December 20, 2021 (information from Google Analytics). There are currently 192 public user-created accounts on the CT Trail Finder website.

In addition to the direct benefits of Connecticut Trail Finder for trail users, the process of development of the website has resulted in strengthening the partnership and unification of the interconnected, and wide-reaching Connecticut’s trails community.

As the project continues, UConn Extension is concentrating on outreach to accelerate website use and adoption; recruiting additional trail partners and postings; incorporating trailside services and an events calendar; and seeking additional sponsors and funding diversification.
Connecticut Trail Census Project

The Connecticut Trail Census is a data collection program focusing on multi-use trails across the state. It includes trail count hardware and a volunteer-based trail user survey. The Connecticut Trail Census began as a pilot in 2016 through support of a CT DEEP Recreational Trails grant. The CT Trail Census has become a key source of trail use data metrics for the state of Connecticut, quantitatively documenting outdoor resource use. The metrics clearly showed the increase of outdoor resource use and change in user behaviors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program objectives are:

» To understand who is using Connecticut’s multi-use trails including when, why and by what means.
» To educate trail user groups, administrators, state and local government agencies, and the general public about trails and their impacts.
» To obtain multi-year information about trail use, user demographics, economic impacts, and trail amenities for identification of patterns and trends.
» To promote active citizen participation in monitoring and understanding the value of trails.
» To encourage sound trail building and maintenance programs based on collected data.

Additional objectives as outlined in the current proposals include:

» Develop and increase educational programs for stakeholders and community leaders.
» Expand the program to meet demand.
» Increase the number and scope of program partners.

Over 2021, the UConn Extension Trails Team, with the support of Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) and trail partner organizations has accomplished the following:

- **2020 Survey.** Commingled and analyzed QR code-based survey data collected in 2020.
- **Summary Reports.** Developed 2020 summary reports for annual count data and QR-code based survey data. [https://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu/reports-2/](https://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu/reports-2/)
- **Counters.** Maintained 23 infrared counters at locations across the state of Connecticut.
- **Downloaded data** from counters on a quarterly basis.
- **Reviewed, processed and adjusted data and posted to an interactive data portal.** [http://clear.uconn.edu/projects/ct_trail_census/visualizations.htm#ctc](http://clear.uconn.edu/projects/ct_trail_census/visualizations.htm#ctc)
- **2021 Survey.** Reviewed 2020 survey questions, revised based upon advisory committee input and launched 2021 QR based survey (685 responses as of December 2021).
- **Published monthly newsletters.** [https://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu/newsletters/](https://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu/newsletters/)
- **Manual Counts.** Coordinated with community volunteers on conducting manual counts for counter data calibration, and supported logging in-kind hours on Track It Forward web based tracking portal.
- **Data Analysis.** Hired Graduate Assistant economist Eniola Fasola who developed data gap estimation, demand modeling analysis and unified 5 year qualitative survey data spreadsheet.
- **Interns.** Hired a summer and fall intern to support social media outreach and project tasks while simultaneously supporting skill development focused on trails and active living.
• **Steering Committee.** Held quarterly Connecticut Trail Census steering committee meetings including the implementation teams, regional planners, academic and research faculty, and representatives of local, state and national organizations.

• **Meetings.** Coordinated monthly and/or quarterly meetings with the following partners:
  o CT Greenways Council
  o CT Outdoor Recreation Alliance (CORA),
  o Connecticut Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Committee for CTDOT
  o Metropolitan Council of Government Conservation Technology Committee
  o Naugatuck Valley Greenway
  o Northeastern Health District HealthQuest
  o UConn PATHS and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education program

• **Volunteers and Partners Contributions.** Volunteers contributed over 200 hours of in kind support, combined with cost share from UConn Extension staff, over $24,000 of match has been provided to the programs.

• **Fee for Service.** Developed and launched Fee for Service plan for CT Trail Census Services.

### Additional Funding
The Trails Team collaborated with UConn faculty on the following grant proposals with the goal of diversifying funding and partnerships.

  o FUNDED - Hatch Multi-State Research Grant: Study the connection between exposure to trails and family/community resilience ($90K/3 years)
  o FUNDED - Airline Trail Master Plan Project
  o FUNDED – Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (NERCRD) Regional Bike Ped Data Collection grant
  o PENDING - Northeast Regional Bicycle, Pedestrian, & Trail Data Collaborative ($2.6 million, submitted to the US Economic Development Administration (EDA))

### Partnering Organizations
The Connecticut Trails Program includes participation of a vast array of local, regional and state partners. The following is a list of local regional and state partners currently involved:

- Ansonia Nature Center
- Appalachian Mountain Club-CT Chapter
- Audubon Connecticut
- Avalonia Land Conservancy
- Bolton Land Trust
- Capitol Region COG
- City of Ansonia
- City of Hartford
- City of West Hartford
- Colchester Land Trust
- Connecticut Audubon Society
- Connecticut College
- Connecticut Department of Health
- Connecticut Forest & Park Association
- Connecticut Greenways Council
- Connecticut Land Conservation Council
- Metropolitan Council of Governments
- Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance
- Connecticut Recreation and Park Association
- Connecticut River Conservancy
- CT Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection
- Dension Pequotsepos Nature Center
- CT Dept. of Transportation
- East Coast Greenway
- East Haddam Land Trust
- Farmington Valley Trail Council
Recent Presentations & Publications

Presentations


Brown, Laura (moderator), Neva Taylor, Raul Irizarry, Bethany Yeo. Multi-Use trails: connecting communities with walking and cycling trails. 2021 Multimodal and Transit Summit, Virtual, November 22, 2021.


Publications

Podcast Series

Awards
Silver Award - On the Road and Walk with me Podcasts - Electronic Media Audio 2 – Podcasts, Neva Taylor, Association of Communication Excellence

Trail Finder Presentations for Partner Organizations
Presentations included an overview and data collection training.
- MetroCOGs Conservation Technical Advisory Committee
- Litchfield Greenprint Collaborative
- CRCOG’s Four Town Project (Mansfield, Bolton, Tolland and Coventry)
- Naugatuck River Greenway Committee
- CT Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Council
- HealthQuest Northeast Connecticut group
- Natural Resource Conservation Academy Students
- Joshua’s Trust
- Willimantic River Alliance
- Housatonic Valley Association
- Connecticut Outdoor and Environmental Education Association, Diversity Equity & Inclusion Committee
- Eightmile Wild and Scenic Watershed Coordination Committee
- Salmon River Watershed Committee
- Air Line State Park Trail Master Plan Advocacy Committee
- UConn Natural Resource Academy