

Demographic differences in reported reasons for non-use of a prominent community trail



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ABSTRACT

Trails are an important environmental feature for recreational and transport-related physical activity. This study examined whether reported reasons for trail non-use differed by demographic groups. The Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail is an 18.6-mile paved trail in Greenville, SC that is an integral part of the community infrastructure. A random-digit-dialing survey of residential phone numbers was conducted to identify barriers to and facilitators of trail use. Chi-square was used to examine differences in the primary reason for trail non-use by demographic groups. Almost 80% of the 899 survey respondents reported not using the trail in the past 6 months. Reasons for trail non-use differed significantly by gender ($\chi^2=10.67$, $p=.03$), age ($\chi^2=97.86$, $p<.001$), and income ($\chi^2=33.74$, $p<.001$), but not race ($\chi^2=3.96$, $p=.41$) or education ($\chi^2=8.28$, $p=.08$). This study provides valuable information about diverse residents' reasons for not using a prominent community trail that can guide future interventions.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

This study provided unique insights into reasons and demographic characteristics of community residents who do not use a prominent community trail. Direct implications for recreational managers and public health officials are:

- Over three-quarters of the randomly-selected residents reported not using the trail, indicating that promotional and other diverse strategies may be needed to facilitate trail use.
- The most commonly reported reasons for not using the trail included not aware, too busy, and physical limitations, which provides preliminary content for developing promotional messages and other approaches to encourage trail use.

Differences existed based on gender, age, and income, suggesting that barriers to trail use differ for specific groups; trail promotion efforts should be tailored to targeted user segments.

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1. Introduction

Environmental factors have increasingly been recognized as playing an integral role in facilitating or restricting physical activity opportunities within communities (Jackson, 2003; Kaczynski & Henderson, 2007; Sallis, Floyd, Rodriguez, & Saelens, 2012; Sallis & Glanz, 2006; Saelens, Sallis, & Frank, 2003). Trails are one unique feature of the built environment providing inexpensive

opportunities for both recreational and transport-related physical activity in a natural environment (Brownson, Baker, Housemann, Brennan, & Bacak, 2001; Dunton et al., 2009; Reed, Ainsworth, Wilson, Mixon, & Cook, 2004; Starnes, Troped, Klenosky, & Doehring, 2011). The presence of community trails has often been associated with increased physical activity participation among community members (Brownson et al., 2001; Humpel, Owen, & Leslie, 2002) and in communities where trails are present, trail users are more likely to meet physical activity recommendations compared to trail non-users (Librett, Yore, & Schmid, 2006), which can have substantial health benefits (Blair, 2009; Haskell et al., 2007; United States Department of Health and Human Services,

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2008). Consequently, the past decade has seen a substantial increase in the construction of community trails throughout the country as a way to improve community infrastructure and promote health by providing additional resources for transport and recreation related physical activity (Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, 2014). In addition, trails have demonstrated positive economic impacts in various communities as well as been shown as cost-effective interventions for physical activity (Bowker, Bergstrom, & Gill, 2007; Corning, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2012; Laine et al., 2014). Specifically along the Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail that is described and evaluated in this study, several new businesses have been developed to serve trail users and community residents while businesses that were already present reported an increase in their overall sales as a result of trail users (Reed, 2012).

Most research regarding trails has focused on identifying demographic and environmental correlates, barriers to, and facilitators of trail use, including those studies that evaluated the Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit trail users (Maslow, Reed, Price, & Hooker, 2012; Price & Reed, 2014; Price, Reed, & Muthukrishnan, 2012; Starnes et al., 2011). Studies have consistently demonstrated that males and adults as well as residents with higher education and income levels are more likely to use trails (Price et al., 2012; Reed et al., 2004; Starnes et al., 2011).

Additionally, residents who live closer to a trail and report trails as aesthetically pleasing are more likely to use such resources (Gobster, 1995; Gobster & Westphal, 2004; Gordon, Zizzi, & Pauline, 2004; Starnes et al., 2011). Despite identifying consistent associations between various demographic and environmental features and trail use (Gobster, 1995; Gobster & Westphal, 2004; Gordon et al., 2004; Price et al., 2012; Reed et al., 2004; Reed, Price, Grost, & Mantinan, 2012; Starnes et al., 2011), few studies have focused on trail non-users and their reported reasons for a lack of trail participation, or have considered how these explanations may differ by various socio-demographic characteristics. One study comparing trail users and non-users reported similar findings that males and individuals with higher socioeconomic status, and lower body mass index were more likely to use trails and this study also provided descriptive information regarding the reasons individuals reported for not using the trails (Dunton et al., 2009). In another study, Troped and colleagues found that trail users and non-users reported similar perceived environmental barriers and concerns about using a bikeway (Troped, Saunders, & Pate, 2005). However, more research is needed to specifically examine why trail non-users do not use trails and how such concerns may differ by socio-demographic characteristics; this information may be beneficial when developing targeted intervention strategies or promotional campaigns to maximize the health-promoting

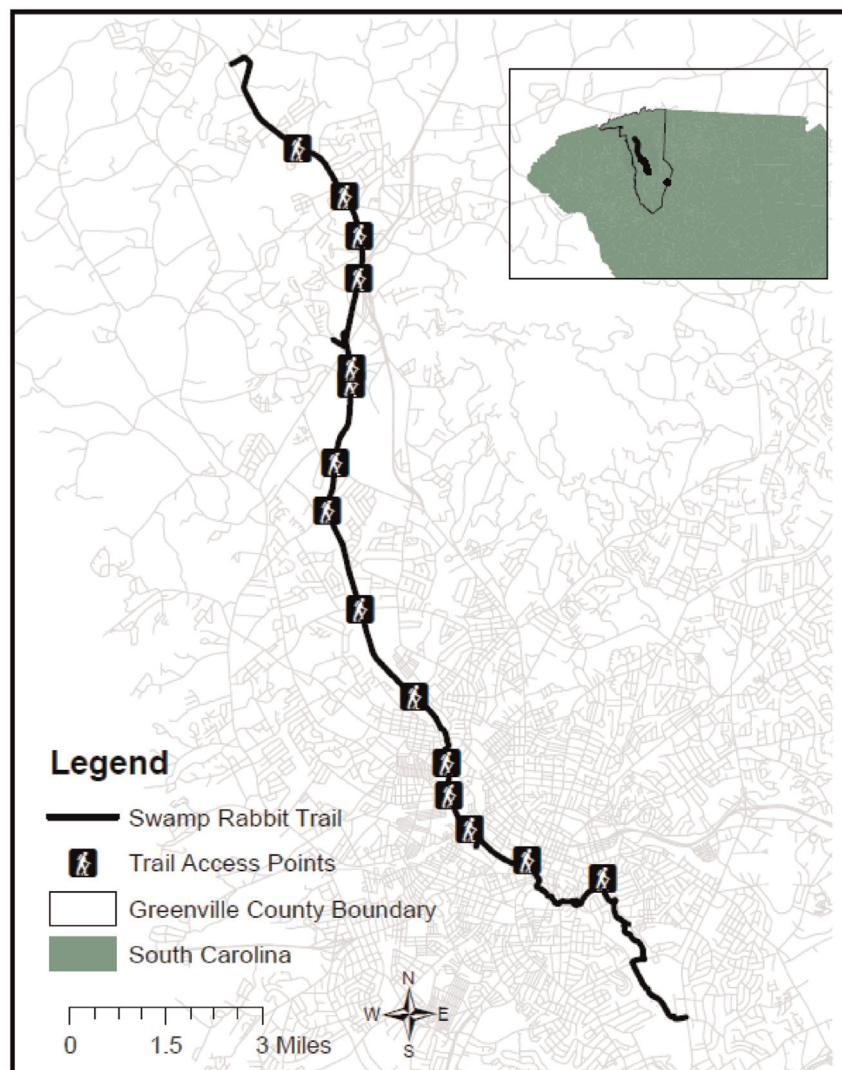


Fig. 1. Greenville Health System Swamp Rabbit Trail.

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