

The  
**Economic Benefits**  
of the  
**Eastern Trail**  
in Southern Maine  
(Second Edition)

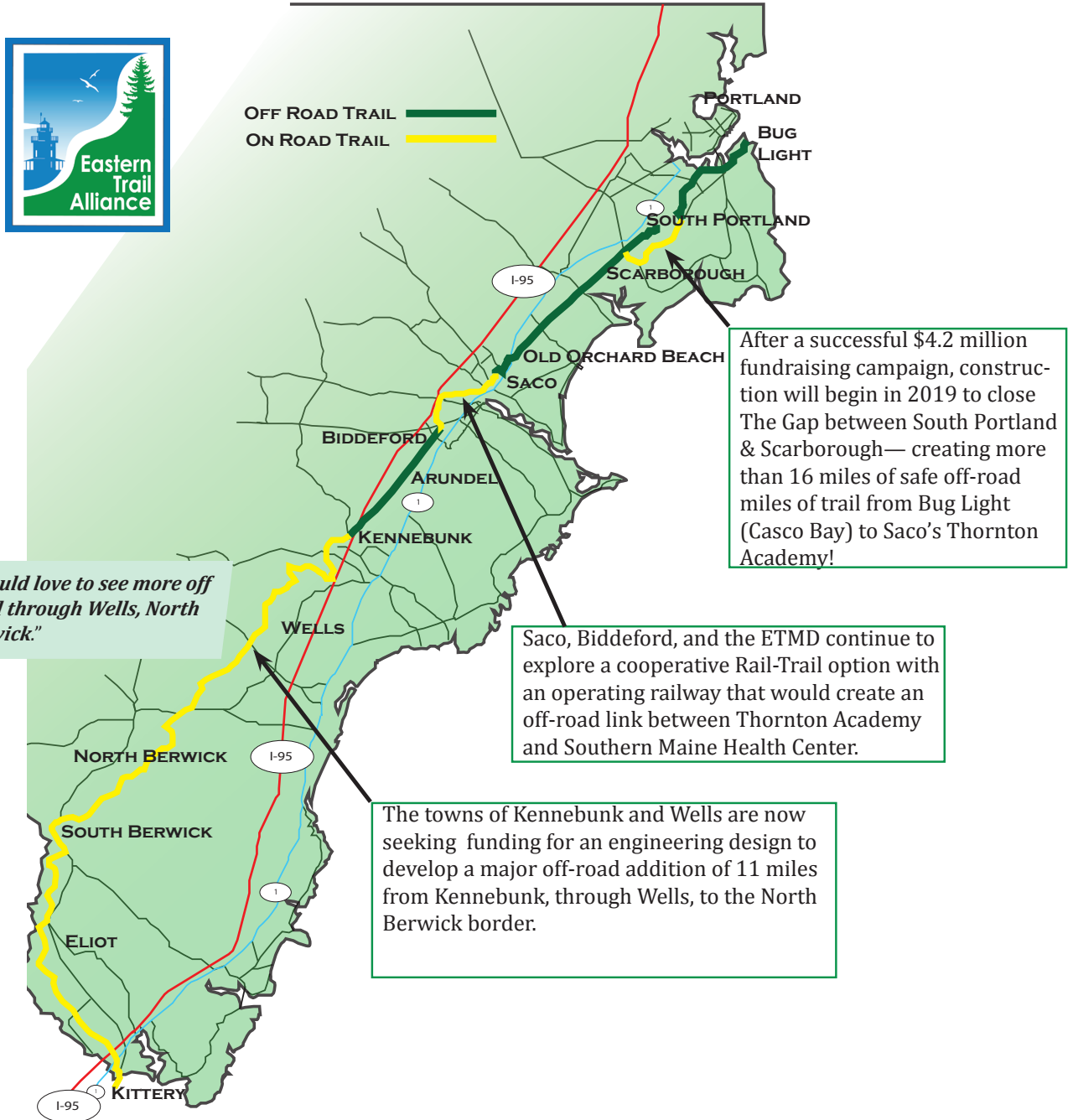


Based on a  
2017–18 Study



## The Eastern Trail in Southern Maine

The 2018 edition of the EIS bases its conclusions on data and surveys taken on the off-road sections of the Eastern Trail. Those are the GREEN sections in this map.









## The Bottom Line: A New Study

Since the Eastern Trail's inception about eighteen years ago, an abundance of persuasive evidence has presented a strong case for its *non-economic* benefits to both individuals and communities in southern Maine. However, while plentiful observation and anecdotal evidence seemed to make a sound argument for substantial economic benefits to towns and businesses bordering the Eastern Trail (ET), no one had conducted a statistically-based, methodical examination of those benefits— that is, not until 2014, when the Eastern Trail Alliance conducted a study and published its first Economic Impact Study, based on a survey methodology developed and tested by the Pennsylvania Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) specifically to monitor and measure the economic impact of rail-trails.

That first study, however, relied on a limited measurement of trail traffic taken over a four-month period and then extrapolated according to accepted statistical models to an estimated count of 88,000 annual users on off-road sections whose presence contributed nearly \$900,000 to the economies of local communities.

That seemed impressive testimony that the ET brought people and dollars to southern Maine, principally to towns served by its off-road sections, but that initial study begged for more longer, more determined measurement of ET traffic and more in-depth analysis of both primary— and less apparent secondary— economic impacts.

### Thus, the 2018 EIS, which accomplishes those two objectives:

- \* It takes a full year of traffic readings and adds the seventh off-road town's traffic counts (South Portland).
- \* It offers information about and analysis of the less obvious but very real and crucial benefits the ET offers to the financial health of Maine and local communities

#### Communities connected by the ET

*South Portland\** (new for 2017-18 counts)

*Scarborough\**

*Old Orchard Beach\**

*Saco\**

*Biddeford\**

*Arundel\**

*Kennebunk\**

*Wells*

*North Berwick*

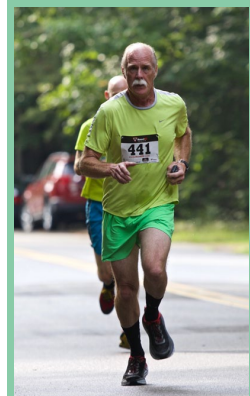
*South Berwick*

*Eliot*

*Kittery*

\*Municipalities that include off-road sections of ET  
Municipalities with user counters *in italics*

[See Eastern Trail map, page 2]





## History and Future of the Eastern Trail in Southern Maine

Although the ET is relatively young, recent users— as noted in both their written surveys and close encounters with ETA trustees and volunteers— have included many visitors from most of the United States and others from around the world. In other words, The Eastern Trail has been a potent tourist magnet since it began in the mid 1980's when South Portland, relying solely on municipal funding, paved a 2.0 mile trail. Since then, towns have used funding from Maine DOT, their own fundraising, and contributions from corporations, non-profits, and individuals to add 20 more safe, off-road miles. By 2020, after an intense fundraising effort brought in \$4.2 million, trail users will be able to travel off-road 16+ miles from Bug Light in South Portland to Thornton Academy in Saco. The Gap between South Portland and Scarborough will be no more.

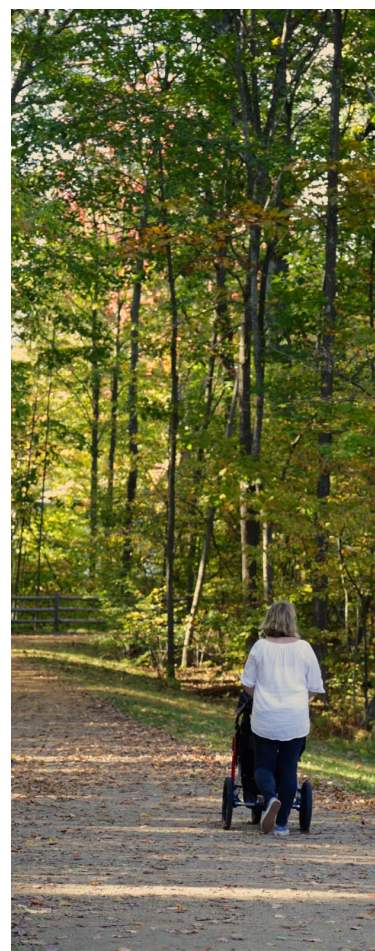
In addition, the towns of Kennebunk and Wells are undertaking engineering studies to prepare their joint application to MaineDOT for funds to extend the trail south for 11 miles through their town limits, all the way to the Berwicks. That would add, in one stroke, 50% more off-road trail. Theirs is an exemplar of municipal cooperation, based on a realistic understanding of short term costs and long term benefits. It is certainly no coincidence, then, that the successful Close the Gap campaign and the planning and surveying in Kennebunk and Wells has stirred interest and new activity in North and South Berwick.

It is a clear truth: the more miles of off-road trail we build, the more users come to our area of Maine, and the more they benefit ET communities.



### BEFORE

Part of the Gap, at the Nonesuch River, *before* the successful \$4.2million fund-raising campaign.



### AFTER

Artist's rendering of the Gap *after* major donations by MaineDOT and PACTS South Portland Scarborough Businesses Foundations, Individuals & The Eastern Trail Alliance.



Dr. Philip Thompson— *benefactor*

## Purpose of the Economic Impact Study

The simple purpose of the study and its publication is to speak to a crucial audience:

The decision makers in towns and regions served by the Eastern Trail,  
The business men and women who wish to increase their markets,  
Foundations and charitable organizations,  
The elected officials who wish their constituents to prosper.  
Local constituents who want to benefit from the recreational and health  
benefits— both physical and psychological— the trail offers.

To inform them of the measureable and considerable economic benefits of the Eastern Trail. And by informing them, to persuade them to support the growth of the trail ... for *their own* benefit.

**We do not seek charity;  
We intend to encourage investment!**

*"The presence of the trail has increased our incentive to vacation in the Wells region - expanded the season past summer to include Spring and Fall. "*

## The Methodology of the EIC Trail Statistics

As noted earlier, the Eastern Trail Alliance followed a tested and proven method developed and used by the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC) in Pennsylvania.

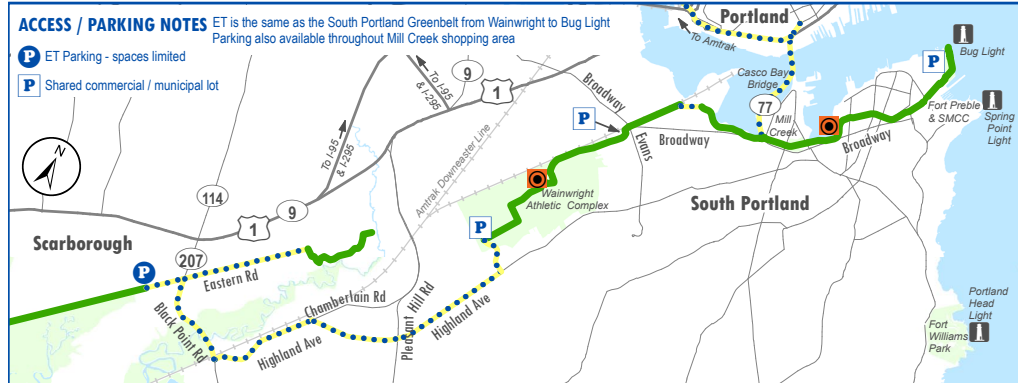
The study's central mover, ETA President Emeritus, John Andrews, placed infrared traffic counters in four strategic locations along off-road sections of the ET in March 2014. [See maps on facing page.] For this new study, with the enthusiastic support of the South Portland Recreation Dept, we added two more counters on the 5.7 mile Greenbelt. The original four units counted traffic from July 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018. The two Greenbelt counters measured traffic from mid-November 2017 through August 31, 2018, enough time to permit extrapolating the missing 2.5 months. The total reached, while impressive and compelling, is, according to all statistical guidelines we consulted, still a conservative number.

**2017-18  
Total Count of Trail Users:  
251,978**



## ET Off-Road Sections and Infrared Counter Locations

### South Portland Scarborough: Off-Road Eastern Trail

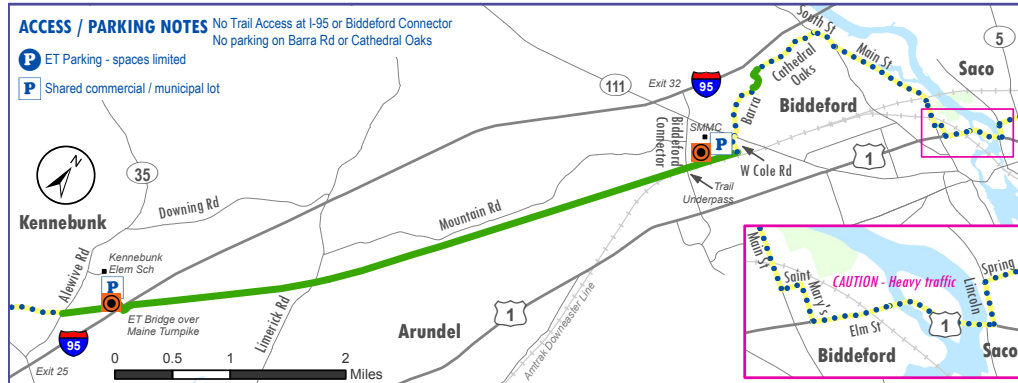


- Six Counter Locations
- South Portland- Mill Apartments
  - South Portland- Mile 4.5
  - Scarborough Marsh Bridge
  - John Andrews Bridge- Saco
  - SMHC- Biddeford
  - Turnpike Bridge- Kennebunk

### Scarborough-Old Orchard Beach-Saco: Off-Road Eastern Trail



### Biddeford-Arundel-Kennebunk: Off-Road Eastern Trail



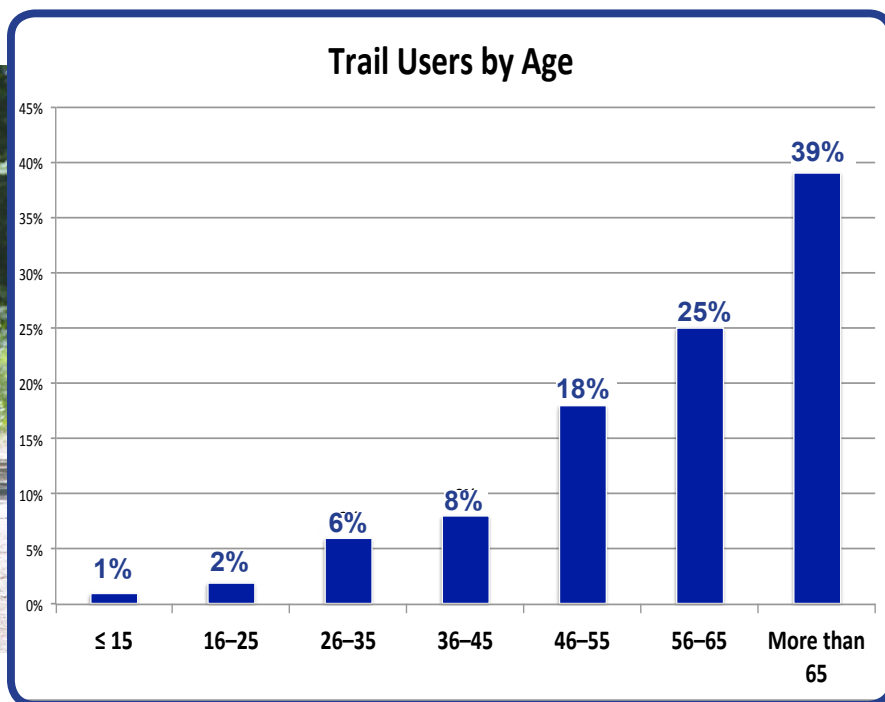


## Demographic Profiles of Users Derived from Surveys

The literal number of trail users, while impressive, does not in itself predict much about what kind of economic impact they will exert while they enjoy the ET. For that information, the ETA, like the RTC, distributed paper surveys at trail kiosks and then analyzed the returns, particularly the survey responses most relevant to economic impact: the age, education, income profiles of trail users, and their spending patterns. In those four areas, Eastern Trail user profiles describe a group inclined and affluent enough to make purchases well above state and national norms, all of which confirms long-standing national data regarding bicyclists, bird watchers, fitness enthusiasts, and family-oriented tourists.

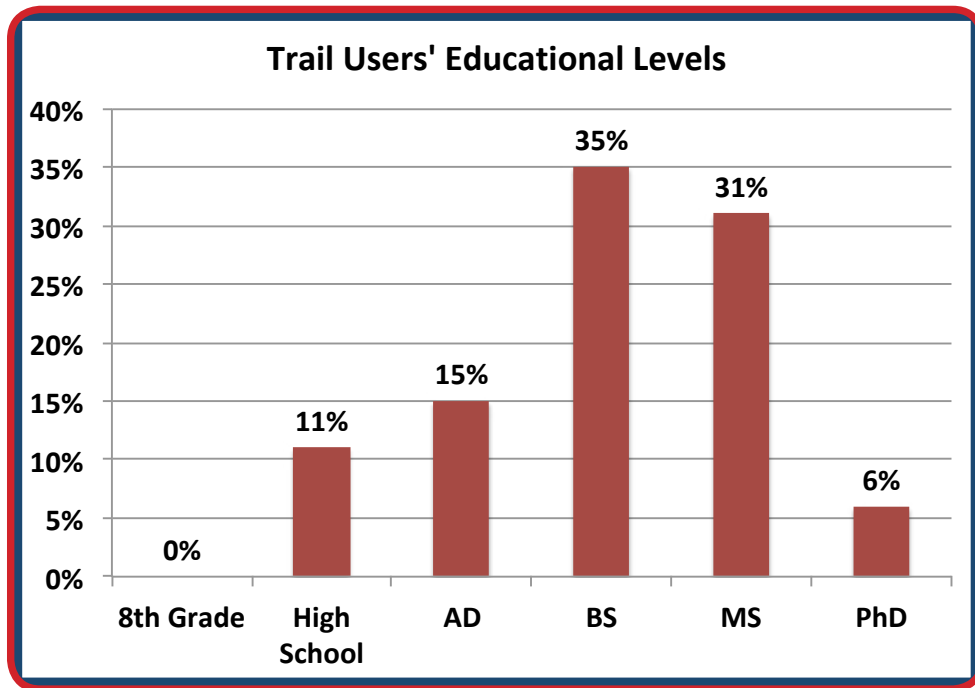
### I. Trail Users: Age

Survey responders lean heavily (82%) toward the above-45 population group— that is, those with the most earning and spending power:



## II. Trail Users: Educational Level

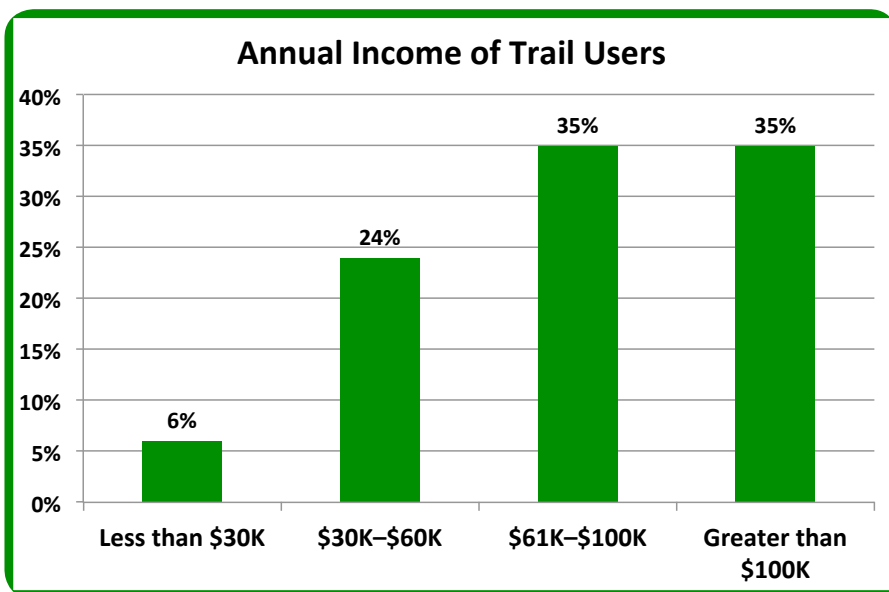
The correlation between the profiles for age and education levels is remarkably tight: 78% of respondents reported degrees above the high school level. And 40% held four-year college degrees. Even more remarkable, over one-third had Masters/PhD Degrees:



### III. Trail Users: Annual Income

According to U.S. Census survey for 2017, the median income for Maine households was just over \$56,227; for the entire U. S. population, the figure was just over \$61,400. Consider, then, the chart below; it puts the annual income of **70%** of trail users at over \$60,000— well above state and national averages— with an income of over **\$100,000** for over **a third** of users:

*"We can't wait to go again . . . This small trip made the expense of **purchasing bikes** for 4 people . . . [at a York County bike shop] well worth it."*



### Spending by Trail Users

Last, the returned surveys indicated that the Eastern Trail's affluent users bring with them a willingness to enhance their experience on the trail with a broad range of expenditures.

In the 152 surveys returned, 50% of the trail users reported spending on hard goods (bikes and bike accessories, running gear and clothing), soft goods (food and beverages, restaurant meals), and rentals of sports equipment). The total, \$31,842, translates into an average expenditure— per person— of \$194.

The surveys also recorded \$13,740 spending for accommodations for trail users.

If those numbers seem modest, recall that the ET survey returns account for only 162 trail users out of the **one-quarter million** counted over the last twelve months!





## Direct Financial Impact I Outdoor Tourism

Step back to look at the national picture of Americans who, in ever-increasing numbers, are taking to the outdoors, enabled in part by a burst of nation-wide bike and pedestrian trail development. Surveys report that annually—

66 million . . . view wildlife  
60 million . . . get on their bikes  
56 million . . . walk, run, or hike trails

While research into the precise amount of financial benefit to local economies in the U.S. by all that outdoor activity is scarce, tourism studies in Germany, Denmark and Ireland report that 9–10% of their entire tourism revenue is generated by bicyclists. The European Cyclists Federation determined that the total economic impact of bike touring in a recent year amounted to \$47 billion (in U.S. dollars). Given the elevated average income of bicyclist tourists, that level of spending is not so surprising. According to the 2017 Outdoor Recreation Economy Report, overall outdoor recreation in the United States “generates \$887 billion in consumer spending, \$51 billion in New England alone. [N.B. See next page for report on the Maine Lighthouse Ride.]

While U.S. bicycling cannot [yet] rival that of Europe, it *is* growing— significantly. Example: the Boston Globe wrote in 2014 that biking is the nation’s fastest growing commuting style. In the years between 2000 and 2015, bicycle commuters in the southeast U.S. grew by 124%.

Locally, our own most recent measurements of interest in biking and bike traffic on the off-road Eastern Trail confirm a rising tide moving in the same direction as Europe. That trend was also visible nationally when Amazon set off a frenzy of competition to bring its economic might to benefit a community that could meet its firm qualification, including a key requirement that any town wanting its new headquarters “must have bike lanes.”

**As another example, North Carolina claimed a ninefold (900%!) return on trail investment: \$6.7 million in trail infrastructure brought in \$60 million in economic benefit.**



### Small-Town Community Gets a Big Boost

Closer to home, Old Orchard Beach has joined other international towns and cities (e.g., Nice, France; Shanghai, China) as a site for an international sports competition Rev3 (now IronMan) to bring 2,500 competitors to its town for three days in late August. Why Old Orchard Beach? In part because the town was able to offer to the IronMan a place to hold its Run competition “over a portion of the storied Eastern Trail.”

Thus, each August, OOB’s and other area towns’ businesses supply accommodations, food, clothing, etc. for those 2,500 competitors and their families and spectators.



## Maine Lighthouse Ride: Bikers Bring \$\$\$ to Maine Businesses

A previous survey of MLR riders in 2014 showed that they mirrored the demographic profiles of riders on the ET: significantly above average in levels of income and education. According to national surveys, bicyclists are among the highest spending tourists all over the world. No surprise then: the 2014 MLR riders spent **\$354,000** locally during their stays. As the Eastern Trail Alliance planned for the 15th Maine Lighthouse Ride in 2018, it once again had to cap its rider registrations at 1200.



Yes, even a wedding party chooses the MLR!

## Riders from Away

Typically, at least 50% of the 1200 MLR riders are out-of-staters. And most of them seek accommodations at area hotels, B&Bs and AirBnBs. And they dine at local restaurants, rent cars, spend time souvenir and clothes shopping. In 2015's ride, the MLR drew 125 riders from Iowa's Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training charity ride along our Maine coast. On one evening, the group reserved over 150 places at a Portland restaurant for a pre-ride event.

Iowa charity riders at The Lobster Shack



## 2018 MLR confirms data about bicycle tourism

*The Team in Training group returned in 2018 with **134** riders, plus **50** family members and support staff. They reported paying for **106** total hotel room nights. Others in their group lingered in Maine for 5–8 days, and many rented cars.*

***Overall Rider Demographics:** 70% of the 1200 riders were drawn from **out-of state**; 44% stayed overnight in hotels, B&B's etc; 50% earned **Masters** or **PhD degrees**; 67% reported annual incomes **greater than \$100,000**. Bicycling tourism generates dollars!*

## Direct Financial Impact II

### Housing Values & Municipal Revenues

#### Eastern Trail's Impact on Housing Values and Municipal Revenues

Housing values nationwide are reported to increase from 5 to 10% for proximity to a trail. (Boulder, Colorado and the Hartford CT anecdotally report 25%.) One of Saco's more successful realtors told the author that he had noticed that those near-trail properties sold much more quickly. That must be why real estate advertisements and MLS listings now commonly mention when a property is "close to the Eastern Trail."

This writer can report first-hand testimony that buyers cite proximity and easy access to the Eastern Trail as items they placed prominently on their list of house-hunting criteria, and that is very much in line with national trends.

The above facts explain why developers have made an effort to build housing developments close to the Eastern Trail in Arundel and Old Orchard Beach. The latter project has been named, not incidentally, Eastern Trail Estates. In both cases, the developers have sought direct access to the ET where it borders their properties.

Scarborough's Project and Data Coordinator, GIS mapping expert Stephen Buckley, computed the total real estate property value for all real estate within one-half mile of the ET in Scarborough as \$260,423,000. If follows, then, that a conservative 5% increase in those property values by the Eastern Trail increases their value by \$13,021,150, which potentially yields increased tax income of \$192,322 annually to Scarborough. That local phenomenon also echoes national surveys.

**Apparently, local real estate companies agree that the Eastern Trail enhances property values:**



Old Orchard Beach's Town Planner asserted that Eastern Trail proximity "was a definite plus" in the planning of two recent housing developments.

"Proximity to the trail was important to me when buying my home. I love being near the trail!"

*Tremendous Asset to Community.*



## Secondary Financial Impact: Health & Healthcare

### The Bad News

#### The Current State of Americans' *Physical* Health is Bad for Individuals

- \* 1960–2017 the percentage of overweight Americans rose from 45% to **70%**
- \* 1980–2017 the percentage of obese Americans (>30 pounds overweight) grew from 15% to **38%**
- \* In the U.S. 2,600 persons die *every day* from heart disease

#### And It Is Bad for the *Economic* Health of All Americans

#### Costs to individuals, families, local communities, states and the nation

The Centers for Disease Control measured out the financial burdens of this epidemic of obesity

**Do  
The  
Math!**

Type II Diabetes	\$63.1 billion
Osteoporosis	\$17.2 billion
Heart disease	\$7.0 billion
Hypertension	\$3.2 billion
Colon cancer	\$2.7 billion
Breast cancer	\$2.3 billion
Endometrial cancer	\$790 million

**ADD UP THE NUMBERS !!!**

As just one example, South Carolina's Charleston County owns one of the highest Type II diabetes rates in the U.S.: **22%**. In a recent year, over 10,000 emergency room visits **cost the county \$166 million!**

For both large and small businesses, stress and hypertension cause the loss of over 250 million working days each year— at an **average cost of more than \$600 per day**. No wonder that many businesses offer incentives to their employees both to exercise regularly, and the places to do it.

Is there anyone left who will argue against the proven fact that even modest exercise makes people of both genders and all ages healthier?

**Time on the Trail = less time in emergency rooms and doctors' offices and less \$\$ spent on long-term care and medications.**

**Consider, then, the savings for American businesses and for all levels of government from a healthier workforce:**

- \*Reducd loss of productivity and**
- \*Lower costs for healthcare premiums.**

## The Good News

### Trails Get People Outdoors— Onto Their Feet and Their Bikes

Our own observations and surveys offer convincing testimony that the Eastern Trail does entice people to walk and run and bike and ski more often by offering them safe and attractive miles to exercise conveniently and easily.

Our survey revealed that the Eastern Trail has had a significant impact:

#### Do The Math!

**\*Two out of three trail users (66%) claim that the Eastern Trail has increased their outdoor activities.**

**\*80% percent said they use the trail for “health and exercise.”**

**\*42% report that they are on the trail at least twice a week; 17% are daily users**

A multitude of studies show that even modest exercise reduces the incidence of heart disease. In one study over a 15-year period, sedentary individuals **lost 40%** of their aerobic power; in sharp contrast, exercisers **lost only 13%, less than one-third as much**

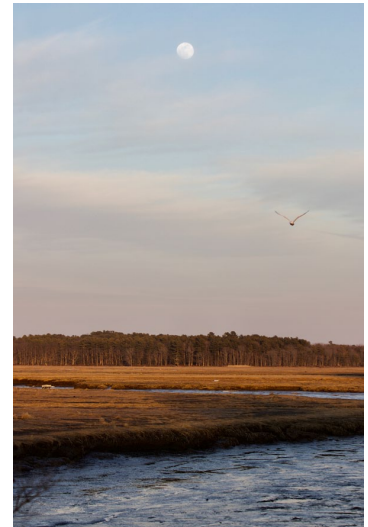
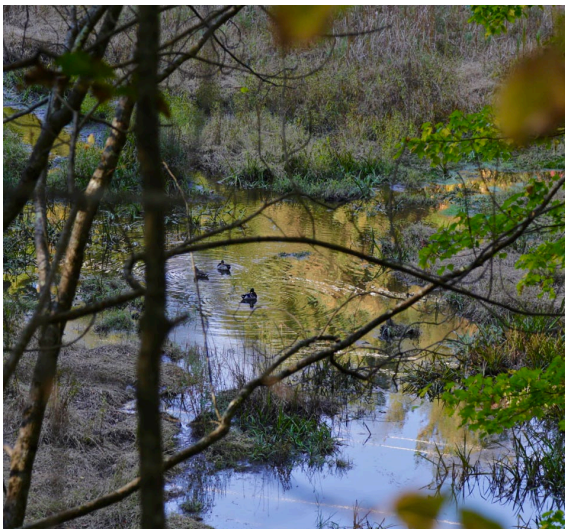
Regular moderate exercise (walking, biking) reduces blood pressure by 1mm/Hg.

### Mental Health?

A study published in 2018 in the Journal of the American Medical Association “found that the [higher] seniors scored on seven measures of cardiovascular health, the lower their risk of dementia . . . The difference was dramatic”: the rate of incidence of dementia was **cut by 47%**.

AND

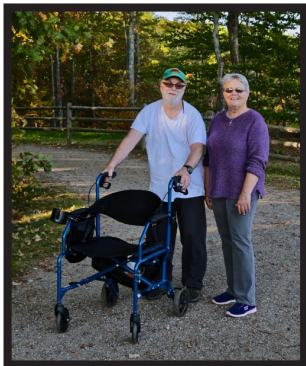
Walking and biking release endorphins that reduce stress and depression. That might also explain why ET users say they are drawn to the forested beauty of the trail: 83% (five out of six) users surveyed said when they jog, walk, or bike, they also enjoy pauses to observe the wildlife and natural beauty the trail offers. That’s a prescription for mental and spiritual health that H.D. Thoreau was trumpeting 130 years ago!



## Trail Users: Many Purposes & Benefits

"The trail is very important to the health and vigor of the people of the country."

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Sometimes three times/day!



Barry: in 11 months of trail use, lost 95 pounds, no longer needs blood-pressure meds.



"T" retired in Biddeford: first bike in 30 years— for "lower weight & better shape."

**"My friend used the trail to get back in shape after a stroke— using a walker!"**  
**"My dog lost three pounds, and I lost 8 pounds just walking."**

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## & WILDLIFE



*"We love having this great trail! It is peaceful and gives us the opportunity to connect with the natural beauty of Maine!"*



"Enjoy walking the trail to see the birds of Scarborough Marsh. I am glad we have repurposed the railroad lines for public use around Maine."



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## &amp; FAMILY



***"We can't wait to go again - Great location for our 4 and 6 year old to practice riding bikes without worrying about cars."***

***"I am retired and thankful for the trail – finally a safe walking area."***

***"I love having a place to walk/bike which is free of cars."***

***"I'm grateful for this trail. Roads are too dangerous to walk on near my home, and I am able to enjoy nature."***

***"We were visiting from MA and enjoyed being able to ride our bikes on off-road trails that were safe"***



Three Families= 13 safe & happy people (two biked on ahead).

***"The trail from Kennebunk to Biddeford is perfect for children new to biking . We enjoy making it a part of our Maine vacation."***



Local couple with friend & child from Soisson, France



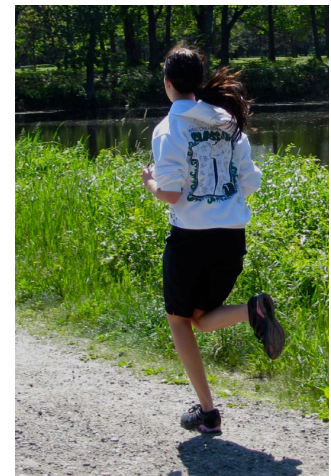
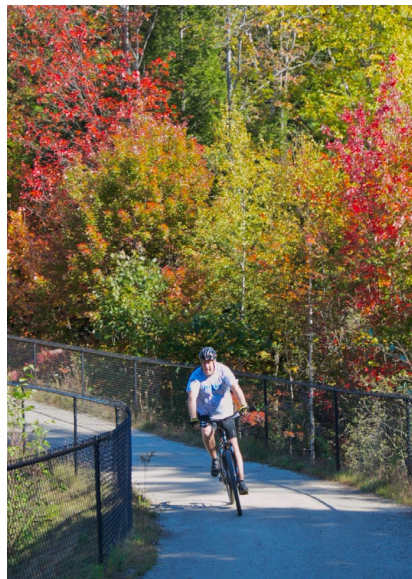


## for All Seasons

&



"On Sunday morning quite a lot of biking, running, and walking activity. This is a *jewel of a trail*."



Great to find and use this. Terrific condition and **length is a big plus** Thanks! ***We'll be back for more.***



"Great trail - **thoroughly enjoy the 12 mile bike ride from KES to SMHC and back.**"



## Many Reasons



Bill Green interviewing two trail users for his television series "Bill Green's Maine."



*"The trail is very important for the health and vigor of the people of the country. To have these trails nationwide should be the next public works project."*



"I like the Eastern Trail. It is flat, no cars, not crowded. I work nearby so I stop after work."

"This trail is well maintained and very well signed. *Some of the best marked trails on the East coast.* Fantastic Ride!"

*"We came up from Boston. Trail is big draw."*  
(International visitor from Germany.)

"I use the trail to commute to work—**safer than** Rte's 1 or 111."

"Terrific first experience with the trail.  
*It won't be my last.*"

"We have walked and biked from Eastern Rd. to Saco while geocaching. *We have brought other friends with us* so they may as well."





**Arundel Recreation Bikers on the Eastern Trail**

## **The Economic Benefits of the Eastern Trail**



**[WWW.EASTERNTAIL.ORG](http://WWW.EASTERNTAIL.ORG)**

**2018**

