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May 20th, 12:30 PM

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Paradis T, Carbone E, McCollough J, Puleo EM. (2014). Live Well Springfield (LWS): Measuring Baseline Usage of the Springfield River Walk. UMass Center for Clinical and Translational Science Research Retreat. Retrieved from https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/cts_retreat/2014/posters/92

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Live Well Springfield (LWS): Measuring Baseline Usage of the Springfield River Walk

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BACKGROUND

This study is part of a larger evaluation of the public health initiative known as LiveWell Springfield (LWS). One goal of LWS is to increase usage of the River Walk (RW), a 3.7-mile paved walking and biking trail along the Connecticut River.

OBJECTIVE

To measure RW usage prior to implementation of a targeted LWS intervention.

METHODS

Users were automatically counted by TRAFx infrared trail counters, which were installed at three locations along the RW – Brightwood, Boathouse, and Depot. Data are expressed in counts, not in number of people, because the counters cannot determine user identity. Data represent counts from August through October 2013.

RESULTS

The median daily counts for the Brightwood, Boathouse, and Depot locations were 70, 96, 181, respectively; mean counts were 69, 97, 189, respectively; and the range in counts were 39-133, 18-209, and 52-374, respectively. Hourly distributions varied.

DISCUSSION

Brightwood had relatively high counts during the 6 PM hour (6:00 to 6:59), suggesting nearby residents using the trail after work. Boathouse counts showed no sharp hourly peaks, suggesting usage is less related to a typical work schedule. Depot counts peaked sharply during the 12 PM and 1 PM hours, suggesting employees from downtown using the trail on their lunch break. The range in counts at each location suggests that weather affected usage overall, while differences between locations suggest that characteristics of each location played a large role in determining counts.

CONCLUSION

Results of this study will inform LWS programming and lay the foundation for post-intervention comparisons.

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