

Artful Ways Survey

Art has positive impacts on trails and greenways

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Art and Community Landscapes is a partnership of the National Park Service (NPS), the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA), and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to encourage site-based art as a catalyst for increased environmental awareness and stewardship. In 2004, the partnership expanded to include American Trails, the USDA Forest Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management. The first step in launching this larger partnership was a first-ever nationwide survey of art on trails, conducted by American Trails in cooperation with the National Park Service.

A total of 75 surveys were received from a variety of rural, urban, and suburban locations spanning 27 states and even Panama. Approximately 75% of the respondents have art on their trail. Although the remainder surveyed do not currently have art, they expressed interest in learning more.

Art on the Trail: A Broad Path

We learned that art on trails nationally is far more diverse than we expected. Approximately 65% have some kind of contemporary installation. Most common types are functional pieces (i.e. bench, bridge, signs) and sculpture. Other types include photography, restoration/ecological art and painting/murals. A few trails feature mosaics or mixed media as well.

About one-third of the respondents have incorporated performing arts into their trail experience. The responses encompassed a broad range of activities: music/sound art is a favorite (53%), while the use of poetry/spoken word and folk/traditional arts have also been significant (40%).

Although less common, some trails include theater, film/video, and dance as trail-related activities. Although we expect that it is probably out there somewhere, none of those surveyed indicated the artistic use of light. Nearly half of those surveyed have some type of historical element along their trail, such as a monument, memorial, or interpretive signage.

Art Funding: Many Trails, One Destination

When it comes to project funding, the goal is singular but the sources are many— the majority of respondents have used multiple funding sources, including public, private, and in-kind contributions. Individual donors received the highest response (64%), while businesses/corporations, civic organizations, foundations, and certain Federal, state, or local resources were also noted as significant. The least used was the state arts council (13%). About half of those surveyed cited in-kind contributions, notably for materials (82%) and fabrication/labor (79%). Although much less common, art space was also noted as a source of in-kind assistance.

Another big question for many is, “How did the project get started?” Most of the respondents (57%) said that the art was a result of collaboration between the artist, managers, and others. Projects in which the artist or resource manager initiated the process were less common (34%).

Art Benefits: A Catalyst for Trail Stewardship

We were especially interested in responses about the benefits of art on the trail. A strong majority confirmed that art enhanced public appreciation of the trail environment (86%) as well as attracted positive public attention and increased trail use (82%).

About half saw art serving as a catalyst for other trail-related projects and increasing cultural/environmental tourism. One person credited the art with “sparking interest in local history.”

Although this survey was the first of its kind, more will most likely follow. It is evident that those who have used art on their trails have reaped a multiplicity of benefits from their investment. As the word continues to spread about how these projects get started, develop, and become successful, trail managers and others will explore how art can have a positive impact on their trails.



Sculpture park in downtown Pittsburgh along the Great Allegheny Passage NRT.

See more photos and art at www.AmericanTrails.org. Pick “Art and Trails” from the pull-down “Select a topic” menu. If you have questions contact American Trails at (530) 547-2060 or ArtfulWays@AmericanTrails.org.