

Northeast Multi Modal Summit

Exploring the Implications of Changes in Trail Use due to the Covid-19 Pandemic



Photo: Visit CT



*Monday November 23, 2020, 1:00-3:00 pm
Laura Brown, Community & Economic Development Educator
University of Connecticut Extension*

Outdoor activity is changing

Survey of existing outdoor enthusiasts
April-May 2020 through Leave No Trace:

- Frequency of activity is down
- Distance traveled ↓ 3.5 to 1.94 miles
- Group size ↓ from 5.61 to 1.85 people¹

Rice, W. L., Mateer, T. J., Reigner, N., Newman, P., Lawhon, B., & Taff, B. D. (2020). Changes in recreational behaviors of outdoor enthusiasts during the COVID-19 pandemic: Analysis across urban and rural communities. *Journal of Urban Ecology*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jue/juaa020>

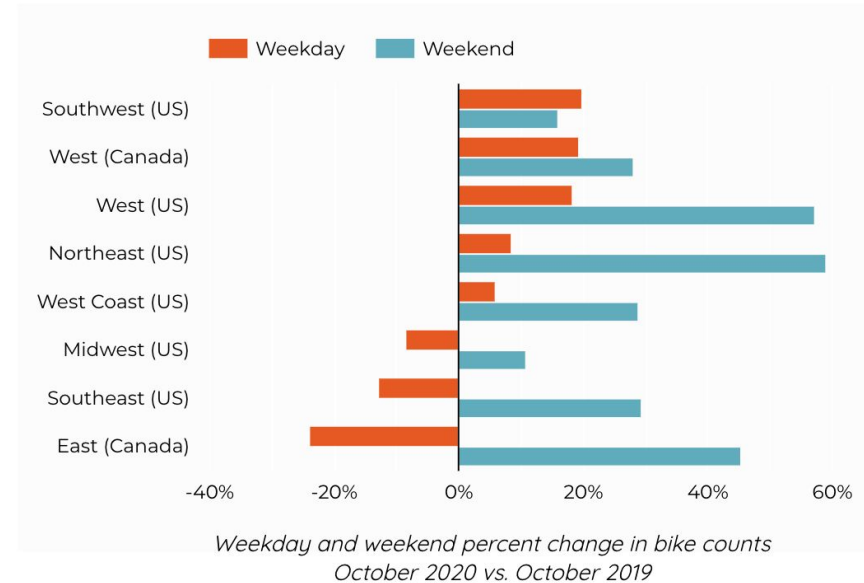
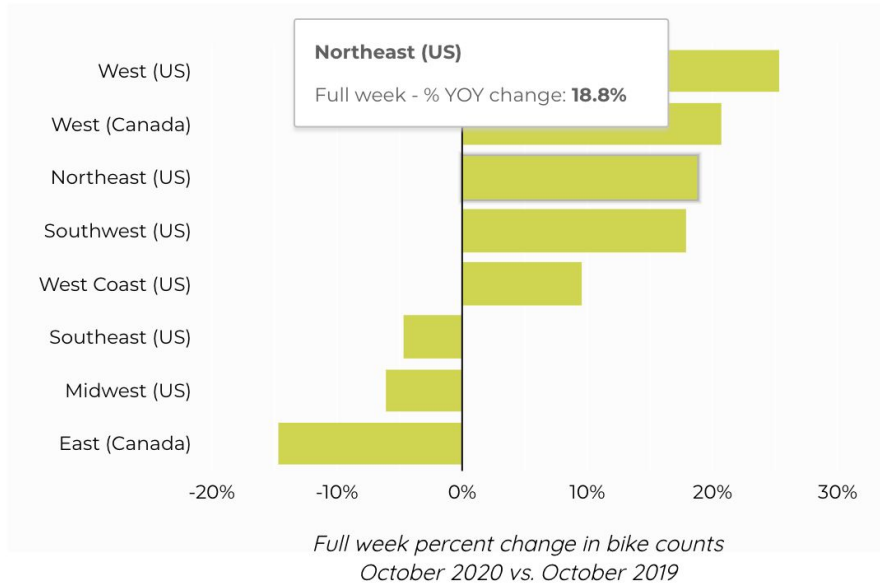
But trail use is surging - up 200% - since the start of the pandemic^(1,2,3)



Eco-counter is documenting these trends

In US, bike counts up 33% over October last year

Bike count trends by North American region for October 2020 (compared to October 2019)





www.cttrailcensus.uconn.edu

Infrared Counters

25 TRAFx Counters

Estimate uses and use patterns

24/7 permanent counters

Jan 1-Dec 31 data analysis

Calibrated with manual counts

Connecticut Trail Census

Statewide multi-use trail user study

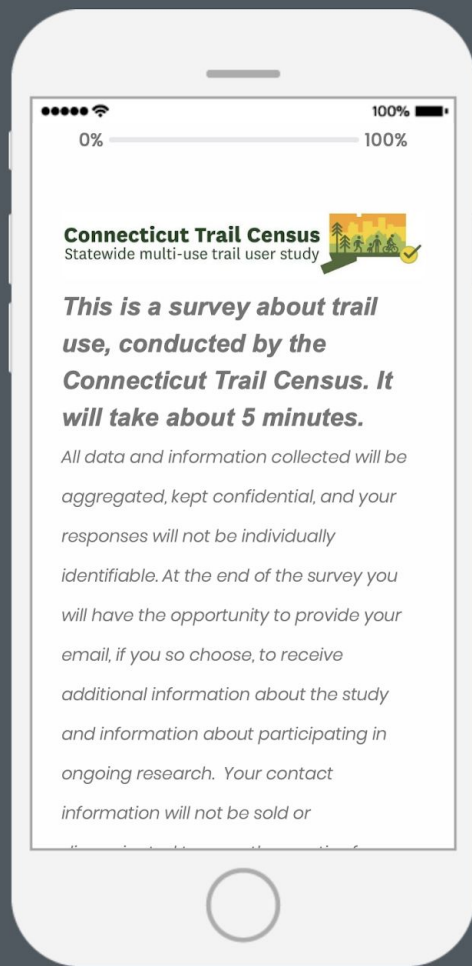


This is a survey about trail use, conducted by the Connecticut Trail Census. It will take about 5 minutes.

All data and information collected will be aggregated, kept confidential, and your responses will not be individually identifiable. At the end of the survey you will have the opportunity to provide your email, if you so choose, to receive additional information about the study and information about participating in ongoing research. Your contact information will not be sold or disseminated to any other parties for any other purpose. The aggregated data set and data report will be made publicly available for researchers and the general public at <http://cttrailcensus.uconn.edu>. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you agree to complete this survey, but later change your mind, you may stop at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide that you do not want to participate. This project has been approved under UConn IRB Exempt Study Number X16-181. [Click to view the participant information sheet.](#)

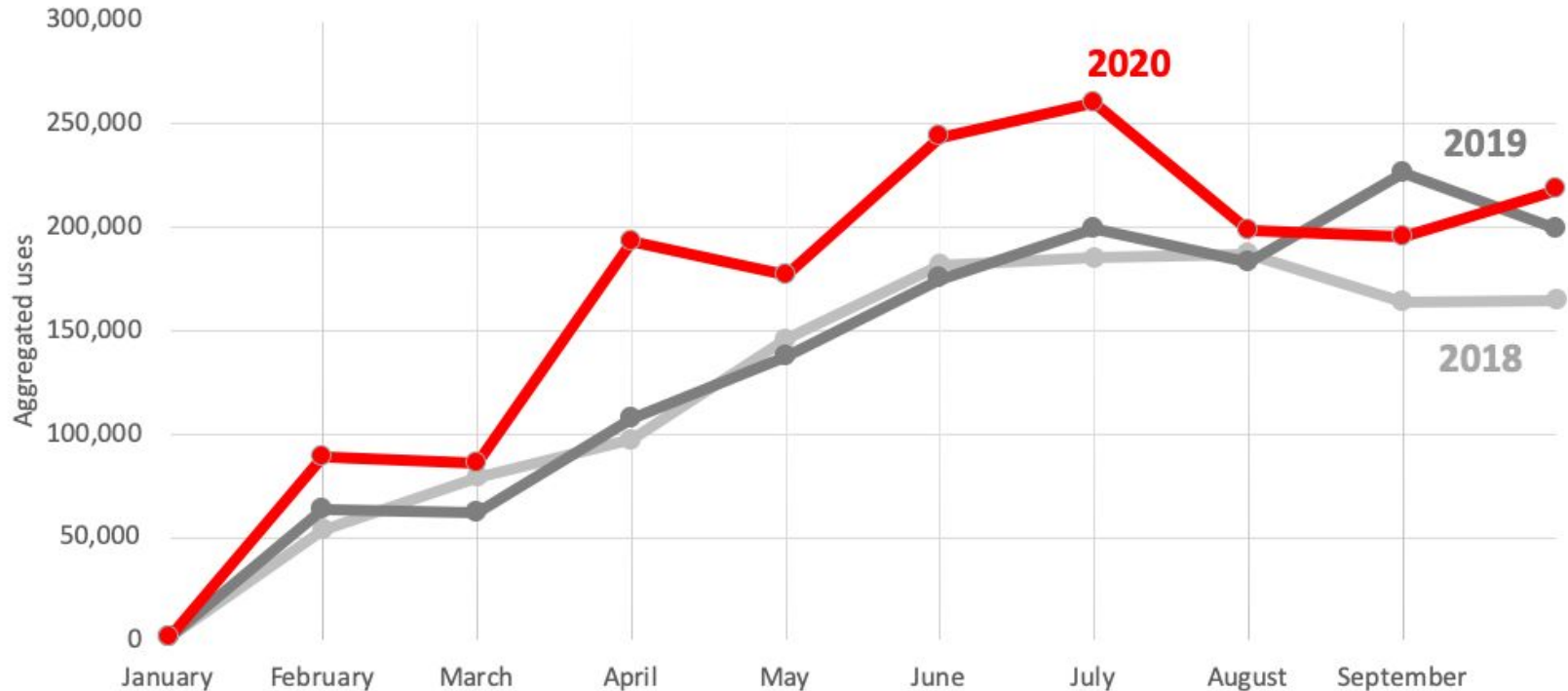
For more information contact the Principal Investigator: Laura Brown, University of Connecticut Department of Extension, 203-407-3157, laura.brown@uconn.edu

Yes, I would like to participate in the survey.



Trail use is up in Connecticut

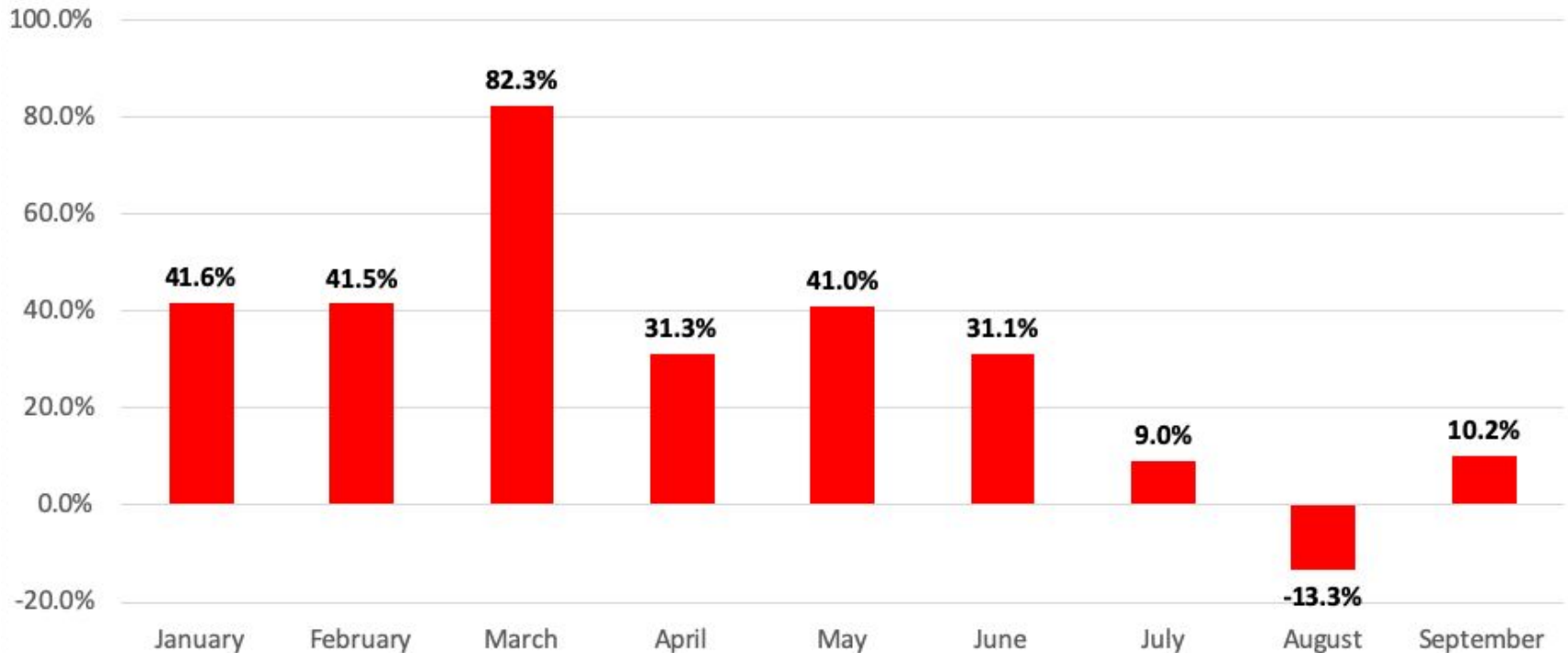
Aggregated trail uses: 2020 compared to previous two years



Note: Trail uses are based on hourly trail data collected from 16 automated TrafX counters on trail sites for which complete data was available located in East Hampton, New Britain, Cheshire, Hamden, New Haven, Bolton, Vernon, Oxford, Middlebury, Derby, Wilton, Hartford, Madison, Brookfield, and Torrington.

Trail use is up in Connecticut

Percentage change in aggregated trail use: 2019 - 2020



Note: Trail uses are based on hourly trail data collected from 16 automated TrafX counters on trail sites for which complete data was available located in East Hampton, New Britain, Cheshire, Hamden, New Haven, Bolton, Vernon, Oxford, Middlebury, Derby, Wilton, Hartford, Madison, Brookfield, and Torrington.

Many are new users

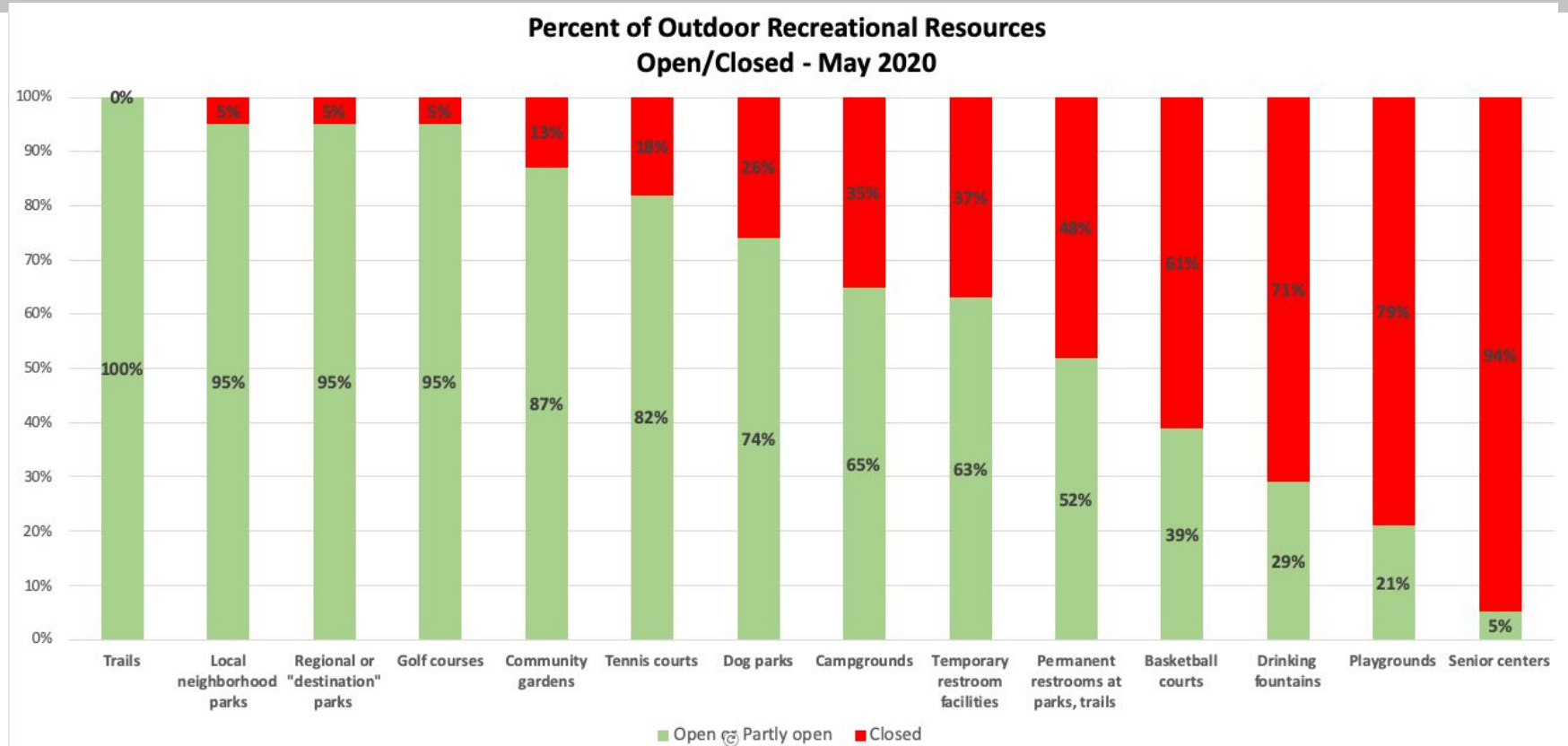
According to a survey of 1,247 multi-use trail users in Connecticut

- 21% say they use the trail more since the pandemic
- 16% said they did not use the trail before the pandemic

2020 Trail Census User Survey and Trail Census Count Data. [Unpublished data]. Retrieved November, 17, 2020. Connecticut Trail Census.



Outdoor amenities open during the pandemic

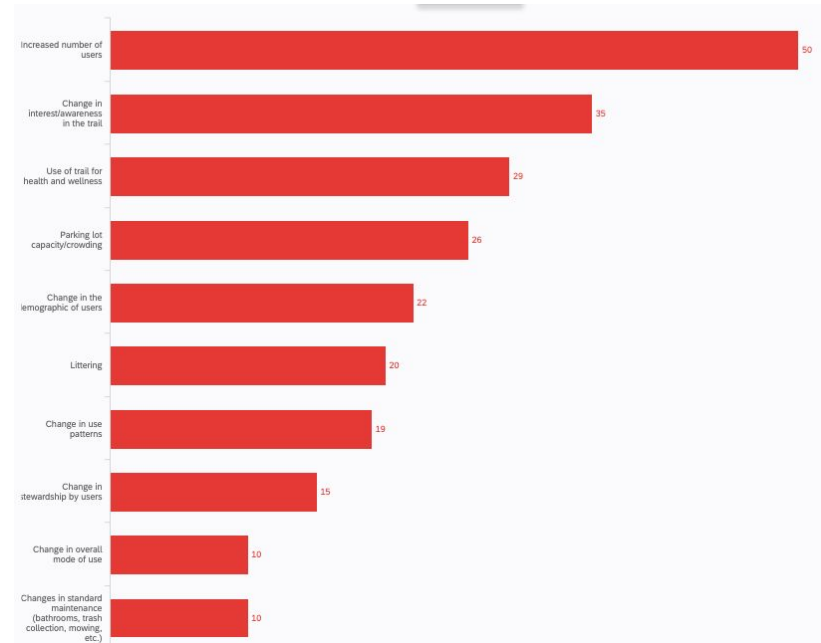


Data analyzed by Laura Brown, University of Connecticut Extension NRPA Parks Snapshot: Special Edition October Survey Results | Open Space | National Recreation and Park Association. (October, 16, 2020). Retrieved November 12, 2020, from <https://www.nrpa.org/blog/nrpa-parks-snapshot-special-edition-october-survey-results/> (4)

Observed changes among trail managers

Preliminary data from trail manager survey (n=74)

- Increase # of users
- Increase interest in the trail
- Use of trail for health & wellness
- Overcrowding
- Change in demographic of users



Implications for equity and access

- Increased use does not imply increased or equitable access - loss of access to green space has greater impacts on urban communities¹
- Loss of access inhibits mental and physical health benefits of greenspaces
Rung et al. 2011; Samuelsson et al. 2020. as cited in Rice et al, 2020
- Who has access to safe outdoor recreation?

The New York Times | <https://nyti.ms/3ieNg52>

SHELTERING

Restricting Beach Access to Residents Only

Fearing the spread of Covid-19, some cities in Connecticut and Long Island are trying to keep nonresidents off the sand, butting up against legal mandates that require them to maintain public access.

By Lisa Prevost

Aug. 6, 2020

Community implications

Short Term

- Public health and safety - signage, closures for overcrowding
- Addressing environmental/ecological implications of increased use
- Education about lesser used trails and for new users



Community implications

Long Term

- Shines a spotlight on the need for more/better integration of public health into planning and design, including focus on “complete streets”
- Strategies to maintain engagement in outdoor activities post-pandemic
- Documenting & communicating economic value of open spaces trails
- Turning interest into long term stewardship
- Repurposing outdoor spaces and trails as educational spaces
- Social media / virtual engaged programming
- Increased potential for development of related amenities/businesses

References

1. Rice, W. L., Mateer, T. J., Reigner, N., Newman, P., Lawhon, B., & Taff, B. D. (2020). Changes in recreational behaviors of outdoor enthusiasts during the COVID-19 pandemic: Analysis across urban and rural communities. *Journal of Urban Ecology*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/jue/juaa020>
2. Pennsylvania Environmental Council. (2020, June 8). Measuring COVID-19's Impact on PA Trail Use [Blog post]. Retrieved August 13 from <https://pecpa.org/pec-blog/measuring-covid-19s-impact-on-trail-use/>
3. Oftedal, A. (2020, April 27). Trail use has surged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota. [Blog post]. Retrieved August 13, 2020, from <https://www.parksandtrails.org/2020/04/27/trail-use-covid19/>
4. 2020 Trail Census User Survey and Trail Census Count Data. [Unpublished data]. Retrieved November, 17, 2020. Connecticut Trail Census.
5. NRPA Parks Snapshot: Special Edition October Survey Results | Open Space | National Recreation and Park Association. (October, 16, 2020). Retrieved November 12, 2020, from <https://www.nrpa.org/blog/nrpa-parks-snapshot-special-edition-october-survey-results/>

Thank you:

Laura Brown

Community & Economic Development Educator
University of Connecticut Extension
laura.brown@uconn.edu

Kim Bradley

Connecticut Trail Census
kimberly.bradley@uconn.edu



*Visit us on the web: cttrailcensus.uconn.edu
or cttrailcensus@gmail.com*



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