May 20th, 12:30 PM

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Timothy Paradis  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst, tparadis@umass.edu*

Elena Carbone  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst, ecarbone@nutrition.umass.edu*

Jeffrey McCollough  
*Pioneer Valley Planning Commission*

*See next page for additional authors*

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Presenter Information
Timothy Paradis, Elena Carbone, Jeffrey McCollough, and Elaine M. Puleo

Comments
Abstract of poster presented at the 2014 UMass Center for Clinical and Translational Science Research Retreat, held on May 20, 2014 at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, Mass.

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

Timothy Paradis¹, Elena Carbone¹, Jeffrey McCollough², Elaine Puleo³

¹ University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Nutrition
² Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
³ University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Public Health

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.

Timothy Paradis
tparadis@umass.edu
(413) 250-4300