Prairie Path Survey Results Highlight User Needs

Last November, survey questionnaires were sent to approximately 2,000 members of the Illinois Prairie Path as part of an increased effort by the IPP Board to obtain information about path users and their needs. A total of 540 surveys, or 27%, were returned. Some of the highlights from this extremely interesting effort include:

- Exactly 60% of the respondents belong to other trail or environmental organizations. The most frequently mentioned groups included: Rails-to-Trails (27%), Nature Conservancy (15%), Sierra Club (12%), National Wildlife and World Wildlife Federations (8%), Audubon Society (5%), Conservation Foundation of DuPage County (4%), and Chicago Bicycle Federation (3%).

- More than 51% of the respondents use the Prairie Path for bicycling. Walking, at 35%, was the second-most frequently mentioned use. Running/Jogging (4%), environmental education (4%), skiing and horseback riding (1% each) were also listed. Surprisingly, nearly 3% indicated that they used the Path for commuting.

- Almost 48% of the respondents use the Prairie Path weekly, 19% monthly, 16% daily, 13% quarterly, and 4% annually.

- On average, nearly 36% of the respondents spend more than $5 in the local community during each visit to the Prairie Path.

- Almost 75% of the respondents ranked the Illinois Prairie Path “above average” when compared to other trails they have used.

- Of those that live within two miles of the trail, 99% indicated it enhances the quality of life in their community.

When asked to rank the issues upon which the Illinois Prairie Path Board should focus its resources, users responded as follows:

1. Improvement of trail surface and right-of-way
2. Natural area restoration
3. Improvement of water fountains, benches, restrooms, and parking
4. Trail landscaping and beautification
5. Trail signage and mile markers
6. Trail safety and security
7. Local and regional advocacy efforts
8. Information kiosks and educational exhibits
9. Membership recruitment / involvement
10. Quarterly newsletter

- Steve Plumb
1997 Midwest Bicycle Show:
Cyclists Learn More About Prairie Path

The Illinois Prairie Path (IPP) sponsored an exhibitor’s booth at the 1997 Midwest Bicycle Show in February at the Rosemont Convention Center. For the third consecutive year, IPP Directors manned the display table and had an excellent opportunity to meet with area bicyclists to publicize the IPP, answer questions, provide free literature, and sell maps, memberships, tee shirts, etc.

Here’s a sample of some of the most frequently asked questions at the Bicycle Show and our responses:
- What is the status of refurbishing the IPP’s 4.2-mile Cook County section? $1 million of improvements by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources is planned to be completed in 1997.
- What trail amenities does the IPP provide? Display cases, mile markers, prairie restoration, trash barrels, free trail maps, comfort stations, etc.
- When will the Great Western Trail’s bridge over I-355 be completed? Spring 1997.
- What is the trail surface of the IPP? Limestone screening.
- Why isn’t there better signage along the trail, especially at trail intersections? This is also a real concern of the IPP Board which we plan to address.
- What is the status of the six-year old ComEd lawsuit? In October 1996, the Second District Illinois Appellate Court ruled in favor of the ICC and ComEd. In November 1996, a petition to take the Appellate Court case to the Illinois Supreme Court was filed by DuPage County, Warrenville, CUB and the Friends of the Path.
- When will the bridge over Kirk Road on the IPP’s Batavia Spur be finished? July 1997.

The annual Midwest Bicycle Show is sponsored by the Chicago Area Bicycle Dealers Association. The 1997 product lines from the major bicycle and accessory manufacturers were displayed. Other booths also featured numerous bicycle clubs, trail book authors, publishers, and more.

- David Tate

IPP Director Tom Yule from West Chicago and volunteer Benna Tate from Winfield answer questions at the 1997 Midwest Bicycle Show.
Bellwood Police on the Bike Beat

The heroic crimefighter cruises up and down the Illinois Prairie Path in his new helmet and uniform, protecting the public on... a bicycle? Well, Batman has his Batmobile but late last summer Chief Greg Moore of Bellwood established the Bellwood Bike Police, a unique way of community policing, which was originally started in Las Vegas, Nevada. The 15 or so energetic Bellwood police officers on the bike beat trained at a 40-hour school in Chicago, which already has an extensive bike patrol along the lakefront.

Sgt. P. Palermo, the Supervisor of the Bellwood Bike Police, thinks it is a friendlier way for the police to come into contact with the community. It is also a more silent and subtle way to sneak up on lawbreakers, who don’t expect the police to be on bicycles. Several arrests have been made by Bellwood police that probably wouldn’t have happened otherwise. And it’s great exercise for the officers, helping them stay in shape.

The police bike used is not your average bike. Bellwood has 5 of the fully-equipped bikes with 21 speeds, and the special shock absorbers alone cost over $300. These $1,300 bicycles have been donated by 30 generous business owners. Sgt. Palermo has also set up a special Police Bicycle Fund at the Bank of Bellwood for individual and business contributions.

When the Cook County section of the Illinois Prairie Path is finally enhanced in the summer of ’97 (a project that already has begun on paper), all the joggers, bicyclists, and all who use the Path can feel a lot safer knowing that the Bellwood Bike Police will already be out there, starting April 15, on day and evening shifts, providing security for the community and its visitors.

- Susan Wisniewski

The Trails Project of the Conservation Foundation

In addition to the Illinois Prairie Path, there are other organizations who are committed to the preservation and improvement of the Illinois Prairie Path and the creation of trails linking to it. The Trails Project of the Conservation Foundation of DuPage County is such an organization.

The Conservation Foundation is the oldest (25 years old) and largest (800 member) conservation organization in DuPage County. One of its goals is public policy advocacy. The Trails Project is very active as a liaison between local government and citizens interested in trails. It focuses its efforts on two fronts: 1) public education and discussion at various local events and projects and 2) working with local officials to advocate additions and improvements to the countywide trail system.

With respect to public events, the Project had informational booths at such events as the DuPage County Fair, Danada Earth Day, National Trails Day in Warrenville, DuPage County Bikeway Plan Workshops in Oak Brook and Wheaton, and the Wheaton Eco-Fair. With the Illinois Prairie Path and TROD, the Trails Project was a co-sponsor of the Grand Illinois Adventure Finale Party and Geneva Spur dedication in June 1996. The Project also organized and conducted the Great Western Trail Clean Up in October 1996.

With respect to working with government, the Trails Project worked with the DuPage County Planning Commission during the development of the DuPage County Bikeway Plan and is now helping to establish grassroots support to implement the plan. The Project makes specific proposals for new trails, lobbies local government for grant money, recommends safer routes and transmits public opinion survey results on trails to appropriate government agencies. An important role is to support national advocacy efforts in such areas as rail-trail railbanking and trail funding.

Several members of the Prairie Path Board are also members of the Trails Project: If you would like more information, call Ed Barsotti, Chair of the Trails Project, at (630) 820-8759.

- Tom Yule
Illinois Prairie Path Events

Saturday, March 29
PRAIRIE RESTORATION at West Chicago Prairie. Meet at 9 a.m. at Mac Queen Drive and the Path.
Dick Wilson (847) 299-7882 (8 a.m. - 6 p.m.)

April (All Month)
EARTH DAY CLEANUPS in all communities along the Path. Call for dates and locations.
Dick Wilson (847) 299-7882 (8 a.m. - 6 p.m.)

Saturday & Sunday, April 19-20
ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH CLEANUPS in observance of Earth Day. See page 3 of this Newsletter for more information and contacts.

Saturday, May 17
BIRD WALK in Pratts Wayne Woods to look for spring arrivals. Meet at 9 a.m. in the far back parking lot. Bring binoculars.
Directions to Wayne: From Rt. 59 go west on Army Trail Road to Powis Road (about 2 miles), then go north to Forest Preserve entrance.
We will have a picnic lunch after the walk.
Dick Wilson (847) 299-7882 (8 a.m. - 6 p.m.)
Paul Mooring (630) 469-4289

Saturday, May 17
BICYCLE RIDE to check signs along the Path. Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot on the southwest corner of Liberty St. and Carlton Drive.
Wheaton, across the street from Volunteer Park.
Paul Aescheiman (708) 848-6023 (evenings)
Dick Wilson (847) 299-7882 (8 a.m. - 6 p.m.)

Saturday, June 21
WORK DAY - For information, call Dick Wilson (847) 299-7882 (8 a.m. - 6 p.m.)