

# Bonner County Trails Final Survey Results

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Prepared for:

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The LOR Foundation, whose goal is to enhance livability in the Intermountain West, provided funding for this survey. The Foundation hopes that this information on pathways and trails contributes to a productive discussion about how best to meet the needs of Bonner County residents today and in the future.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Headwaters Economics and RRC Associates conducted this survey in partnership with the cities of Sandpoint and Ponderay, Bonner County, and the Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of this study is to collect public feedback on the Bonner County trail system. The research is intended to help stakeholders prioritize improvements for the trails network based on resident usage, satisfaction, reasons for living in the area, and suggestions for improvement.

This report contains reliable information regarding the opinions of a representative sample of county residents, including those who use and do not use trails, a variety of user types, long-time residents and newcomers, locations around the county, and incomes and ages.

Data from this survey show that trails are an essential part of daily life in Bonner County:

- Three out of four residents used trails in the last year.
- Residents use trails nearly every day in the summer and every other day in the winter.
- Trail use is high in towns and rural areas, regardless of duration of residence in the county, income, or age. Residents age 45-54 are most likely to use the trails, with 88 percent reporting use in the past year.
- More than three-quarters of residents support the development of an expanded and better connected trail system in the county.
- Nearly nine in ten residents believe that protecting the rural character of areas outside cities is extremely important for Bonner County.
- More than half of residents identified proximity to trails and safe places to walk as important factors influencing their decision on where to live.

Survey respondents identified several opportunities to increase trail use and satisfaction:

- There is strong interest in more trails in and around residential areas, with one in five residents saying they would use trails more if they lived closer to them.
- There is strong interest in easier and wheelchair accessible trails to encourage new trail users and increase use among existing trail users, the disabled, and seniors.
- There is strong interest in more broadly shared information about trails. One in five residents do not use trails because they are unsure where they are.

Bonner County's trail system is a core amenity that defines or provides access to the area's quality of life. This includes access to lakes and rivers, public lands, downtowns, and schools.

While current residents as a whole value area trails, survey results show that younger residents, newer residents, and business owners value them the most. This finding may be significant for Bonner County communities as they consider how to attract a younger population and entrepreneurs who will contribute to the long-term vitality of the region.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to collect public feedback on Bonner County's trail system. The research and subsequent analysis are intended to help local stakeholders prioritize future improvements for the trails network based on resident usage, satisfaction, reasons for living in the area, and suggestions for improvement. This report contains reliable information that communicates the opinions of a representative sample of county residents, including those who use and do not use trails, a variety of user types, long-time residents and newcomers, and a range of incomes and ages. This information can be used to help plan the future of trails in Bonner County.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted using three primary methods: 1) a mail-back survey, 2) an online, invitation-only web survey to further encourage response from those residents already within the defined invitation sample, and 3) an open-link online survey for members of the public who were not part of the invitation sample. The analysis herein primarily focuses on responses from the invitation sample. However, open link responses are additionally analyzed and discussed in a separate section of the report, highlighting differences and similarities from the invitation sample.

The primary list source used for the mailing was a third-party list purchased from Gravis Marketing, a marketing agency that specializes in political polling. Gravis provides consumer lists for U.S. addresses as well as automated robocalls. Use of the Gravis list includes renters in addition to homeowners, and residents who are not registered to vote in addition to registered voters. Follow-up robocalls were utilized for this study to further encourage survey response.

A total of 3,600 surveys were mailed to a random sample of Bonner County residents in August 2015. The final sample size for the statistically valid survey was 388, resulting in a margin of error of approximately +/- 5.0 percentage points for questions at 50% response.<sup>1</sup> The open link survey received an additional 97 responses.

The underlying data were weighted by age to ensure appropriate representation of Bonner County residents across different demographic cohorts in the sample. Using the U.S. Census 2013 American Community Survey five-year estimates, the age distribution within the invitation respondent sample was matched to the 2013 demographic profile of Bonner County. A comparison between the Census profile and the weighted data is depicted in Figure 1.

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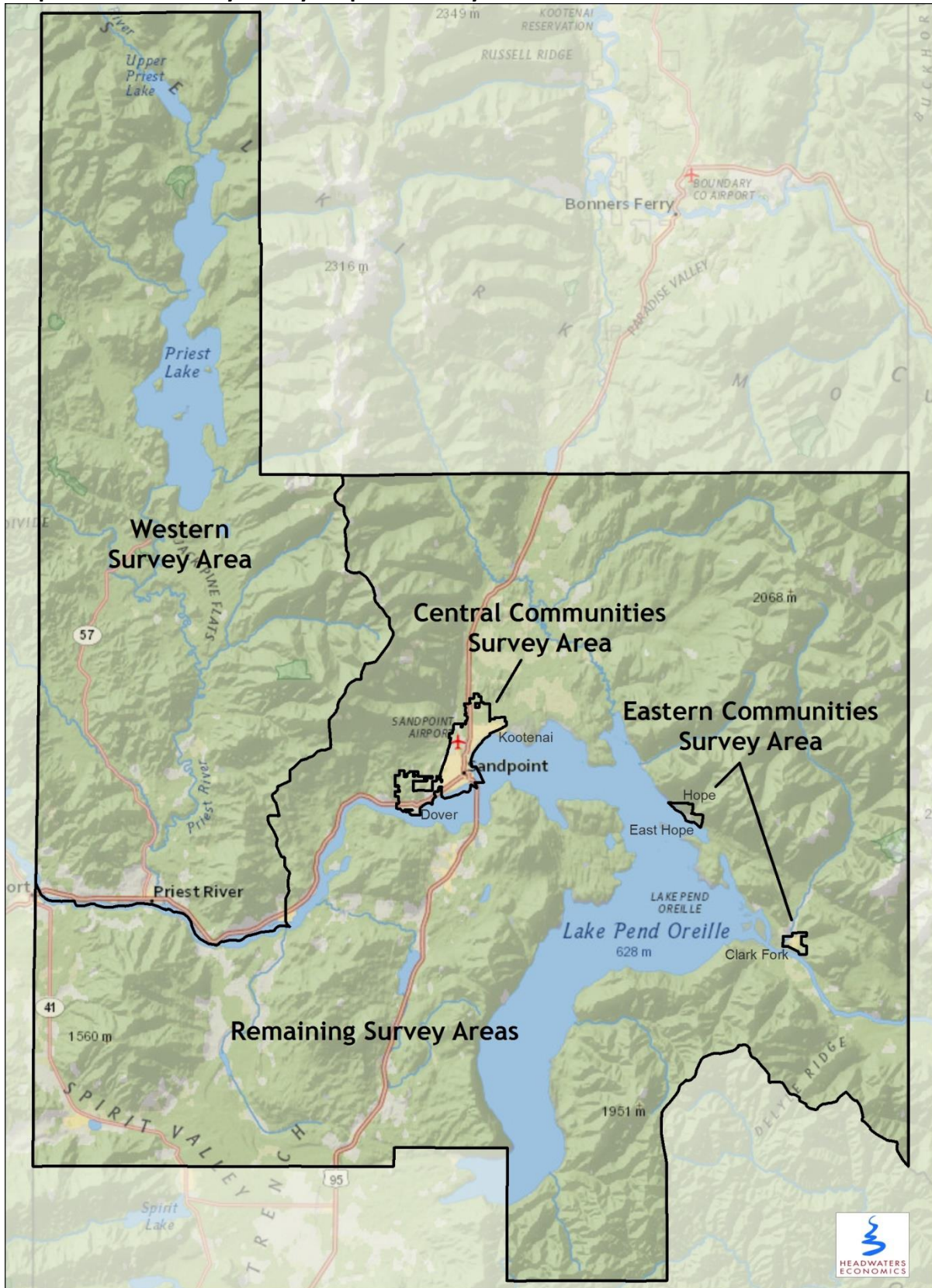
<sup>1</sup> For the total invitation sample size of 388, margin of error is +/- 5.0 percent calculated for questions at 50% response (if the response for a particular question is "50%"—the standard way to generalize margin of error is to state the larger margin, which occurs for responses at 50%). Note that the margin of error is different for every single question response on the survey depending on the resultant sample sizes, proportion of responses, and number of answer categories for each question. Comparison of differences in the data between various segments, therefore, should take into consideration these factors. As a general comment, it is sometimes more appropriate to focus attention on the general trends and patterns in the data rather than on the individual percentages.

Due to variable response rates by some segments of the population, the underlying results, while weighted to best match the overall demographics of residents, may not be completely representative of some sub-groups of the population.

Segmentation analysis was conducted on some of the questions in order to illustrate key differences among demographic cohorts. Segments explored include respondent age, location of residence in Bonner County, and length of time lived in Bonner County. Location of residence is divided into four sub-areas – Eastern Communities (including Hope, East Hope, and Clark Fork), Central Communities (including Sandpoint, Dover, Ponderay, and Kootenai), Western Survey Area (including the Priest Lake area, Priest River, and Oldtown), and other areas of Bonner County. Each of these subgroups is depicted geographically on the map of Bonner County in Map 1 on the following page. Results should be interpreted with caution as some segment sample sizes are relatively small.

The survey also asked several open-ended questions to elicit more in-depth comments from respondents on their opinions and experiences. A full listing of comments are available. However, for various open-ended questions throughout the report, a brief summary of open-ended responses from the invitation survey is provided with word clouds and random samplings of comments. The final open-ended question in the survey is analyzed in more depth, with an examination of recurring themes supported by relevant groupings of comments.

Map 1: Bonner County survey scope and analysis areas.



## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This section details the demographic and residential characteristics of the invitation sample respondents. The American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Bonner County as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau are illustrated beside the weighted demographic profile of respondents to provide context. All analysis in the remainder of the report focuses on results from the invitation sample, with the exception of the section describing open link results.

- Gender. The invitation sample had a higher proportion of females (60 percent) than males (40 percent).
- Age. Over a quarter (29 percent) of invitation sample respondents are under age 45, with roughly half (46 percent) between the ages of 45 and 64. Twenty-five percent are age 65 or older. The average age was 53.9 years old, consistent with the somewhat older age profile of the area.
- Annual Household Income. Annual earnings of less than \$50,000 a year were reported by approximately a third (34 percent) of respondent households. An additional 52 percent indicated that they earn between \$50,000 and \$99,999 each year, and 14 percent reported annual household incomes of \$100,000 or more.
- Length of Residence in Bonner County per Year. Almost all invitation respondents (95 percent) said they live in Bonner County all year long. Two percent indicated that they reside in the county between seven and eleven months each year, and an additional two percent live there for three to six months.
- Number of Years Lived in Bonner County. Half of the invitation sample respondents have been in Bonner County for more than 20 years. An additional 39 percent have been in the area between five and 20 years, and 12 percent have lived in Bonner County less than five years.
- Primary Residency. Consistent with the high proportion of year-round residents, 99 percent of invitation respondents consider Bonner County their primary residence.
- Location of Residence. Roughly a third of respondents (32 percent) indicated that they live in the City of Sandpoint. Other common areas include the cities of Priest River or Oldtown (9 percent); the cities of Hope, East Hope, or Clark Fork (7 percent); the Priest Lake area (4 percent); the City of Ponderay (2 percent); the City of Dover (2 percent); and the City of Kootenai (1 percent). Forty-two percent live in some other area of Bonner County, likely unincorporated areas.
- Total Number of Household Members. The largest share of invitation respondents reported that there are two people living in their home (55 percent), while 12 percent indicated that



they live alone. Thirty-four percent said there are three or more people in their home. On average, 2.6 individuals live in invitation respondent households.

- **Number of Household Members Age 18 or Under.** Two-thirds of the invitation sample (67 percent) do not have household members under the age of 18. Those who do have children more frequently report having one or two children (26 percent) as opposed to three or more (7 percent).
- **Household Need for ADA-Accessible Facilities.** Seven percent of invitation sample respondents indicated that their household has a need for ADA-accessible facilities.
- **Business Ownership.** Approximately a quarter (24 percent) of invitation respondents identified themselves as business owners in Bonner County.

Figure 1: Respondent Demographic Profile

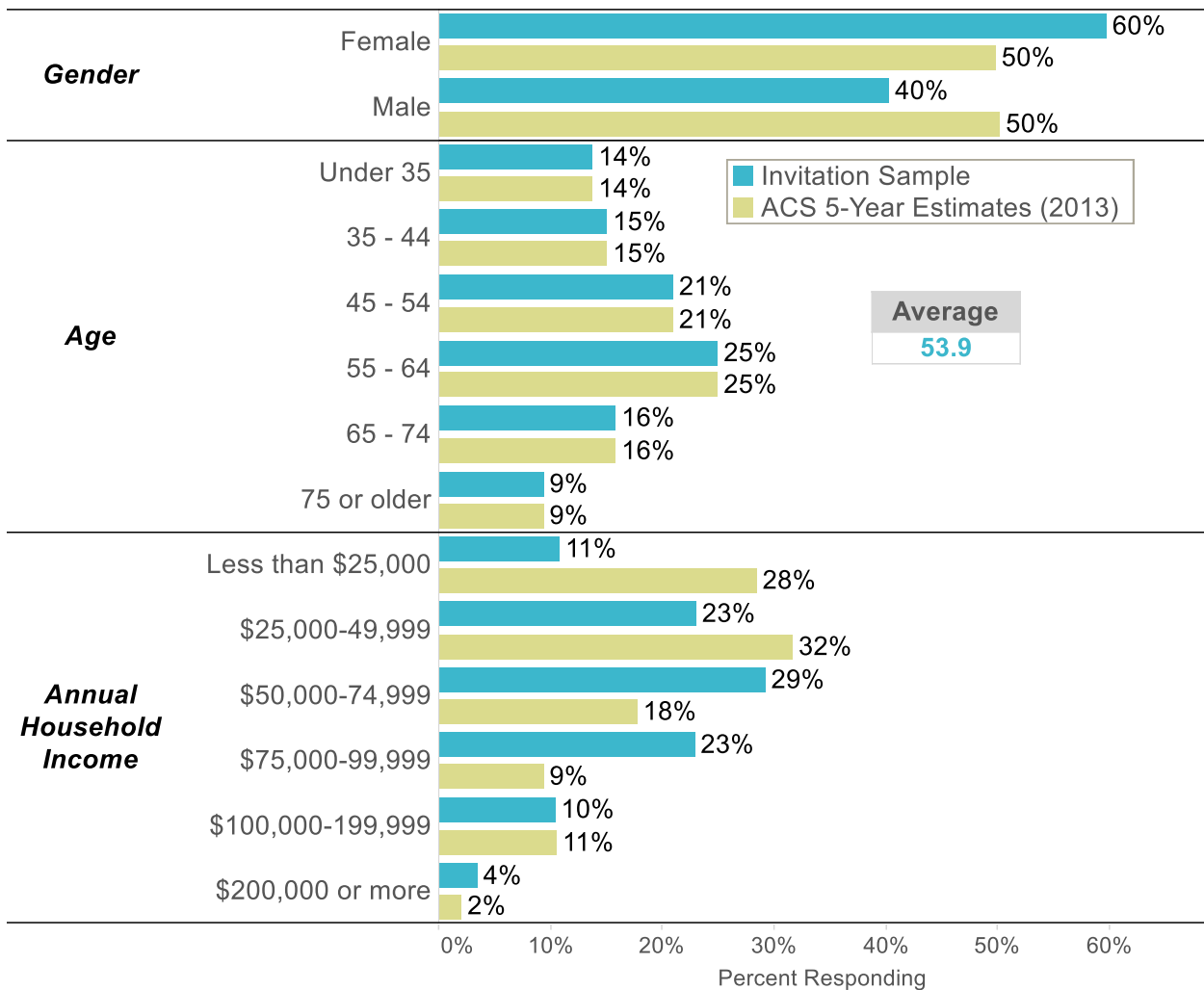
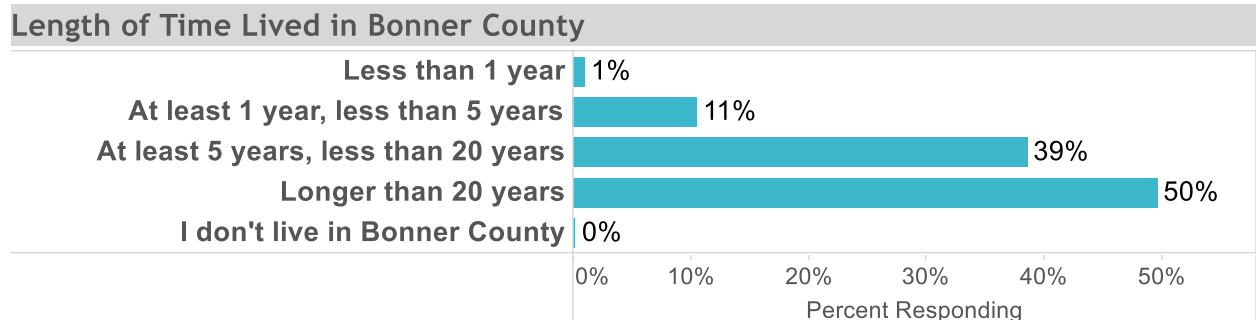
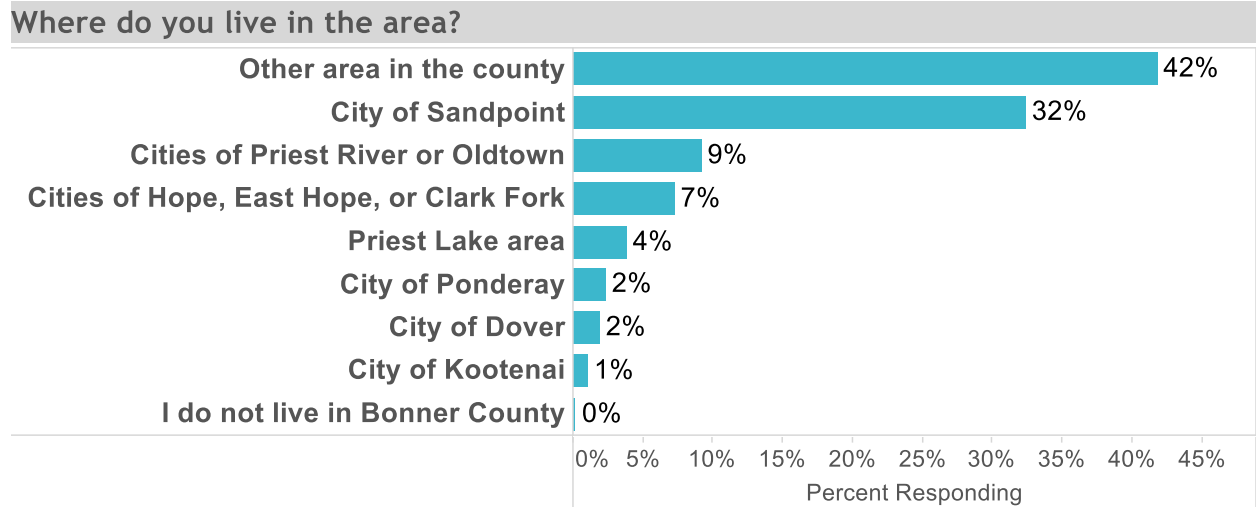
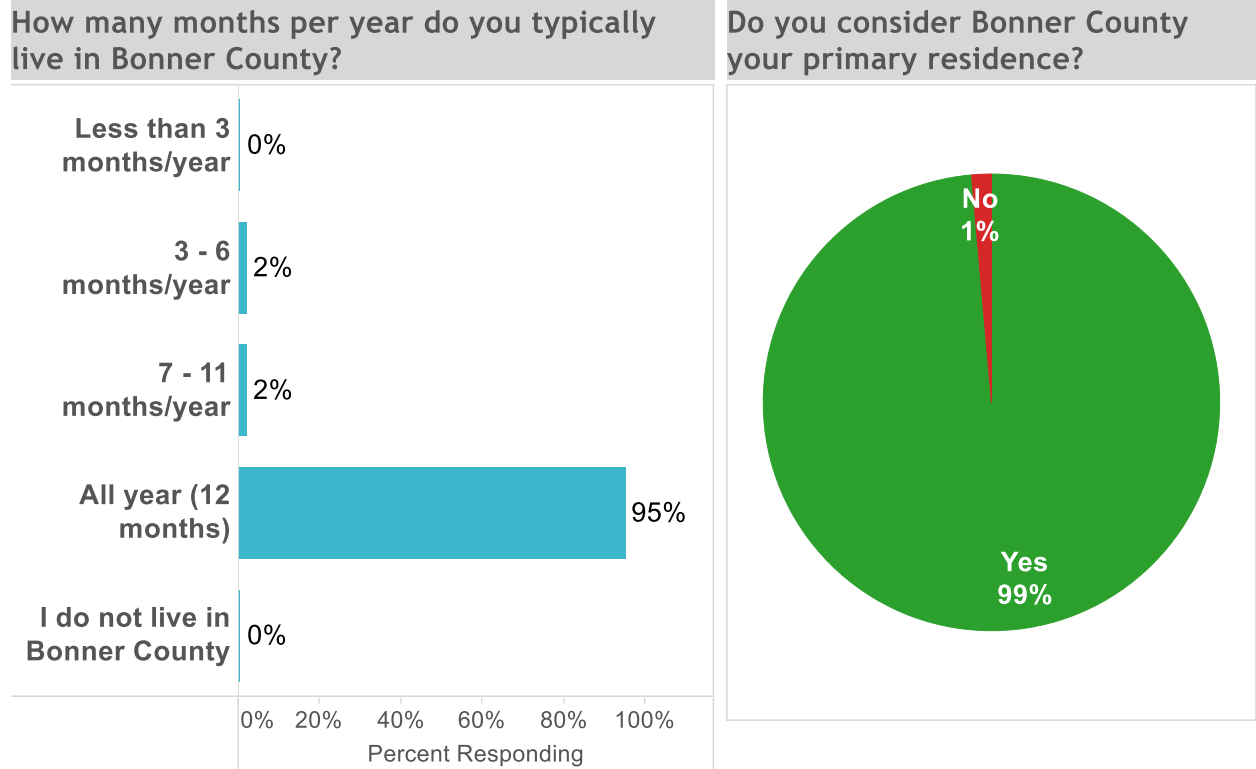


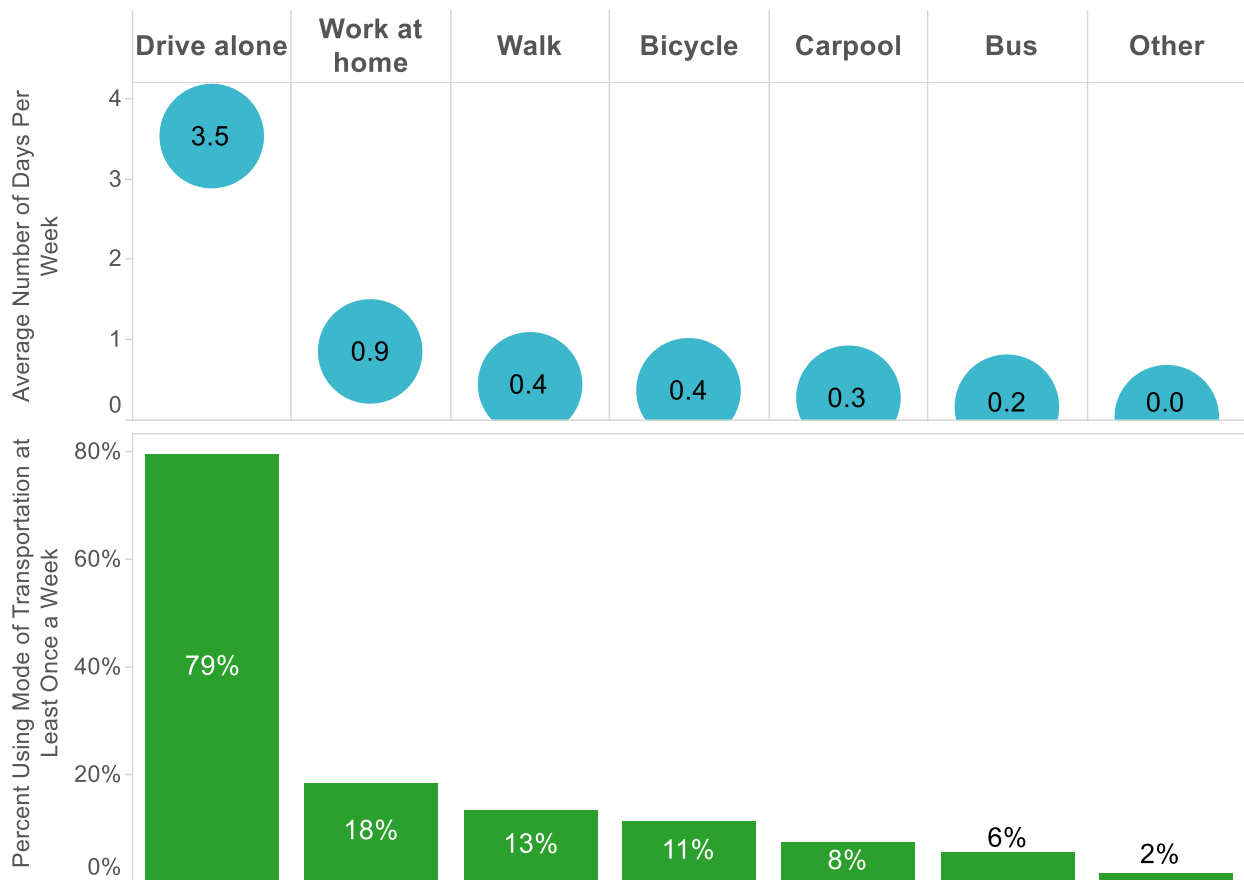
Figure 2: Residential Profile



## DAILY TRAVEL/COMMUTING

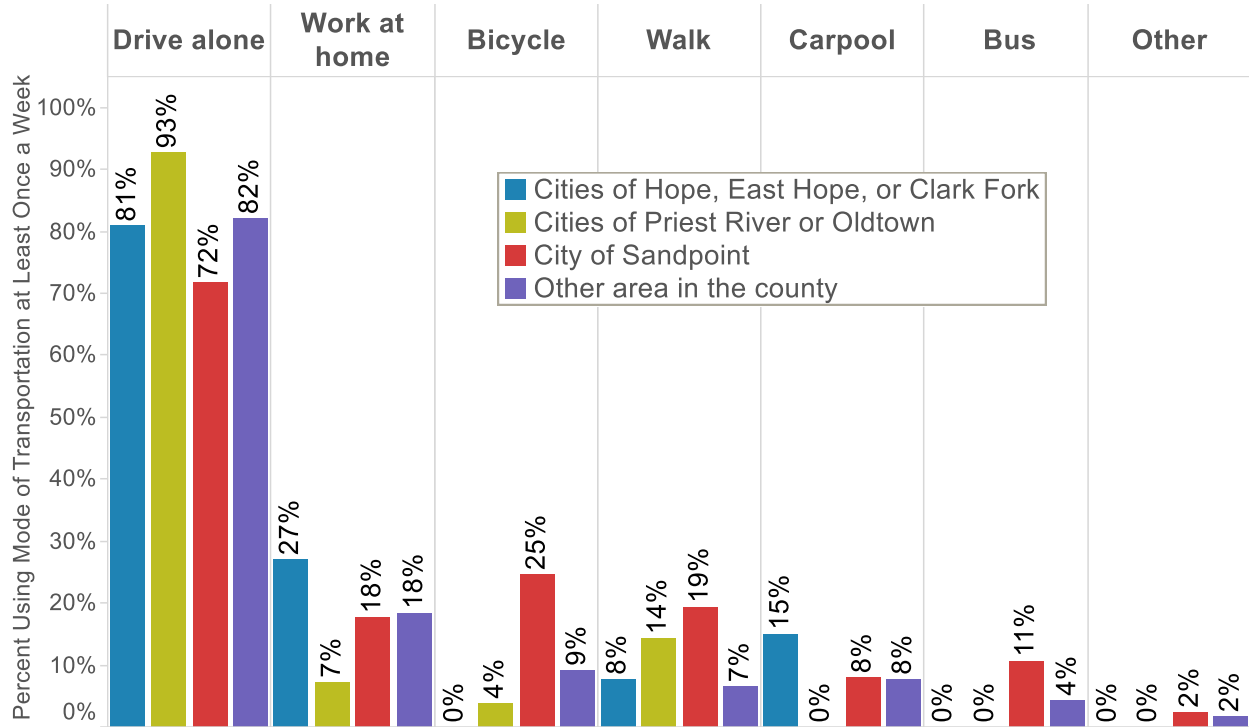
Respondents were asked to indicate the average number of days per week they typically use various transportation modes to get to work during summer months. As illustrated in Figure 3 below, driving alone is the most common method of commuting among invitation respondents, with 79 percent using this transportation mode at least once per week and an average usage of 3.5 days per week. Working at home is somewhat common, with 18 percent staying home at least one time a week and an average of 0.9 days worked from home each week. Thirteen percent walk to work at least once a week (0.4 days on average), 11 percent bike at least once (0.4 days), and eight percent carpool at least once (0.3 days). Walking/biking and taking the bus (3 percent), riding the bus (2 percent), and driving to Park & Ride and taking the bus (1 percent) were selected by few respondents as frequently used commuting methods.

**Figure 3: Typical Number of Days Using Transportation Modes to Commute to Work During Summer**



This question was also analyzed for residents of different cities in Bonner County (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Percent of Residents Using Mode of Transportation at Least Once a Week By City of Residence**



As shown, a majority of respondents from all of the cities in the segmentation analysis indicated that they drive alone at least once a week. Sandpoint residents are least likely to do so, with slightly under three-quarters (72 percent) reporting that they typically drive alone one or more times in a week during the summer. Meanwhile, Priest River/Oldtown respondents have the highest likelihood of driving alone one or more times each week (93 percent). Sandpoint residents are most likely to indicate that they use alternative transportation modes such as biking (25 percent), walking (19 percent), and using the bus (11 percent) once or more per week. Respondents living in Hope, East Hope, or Clark Fork more commonly work at home or carpool during the summer.

## TRAIL USE

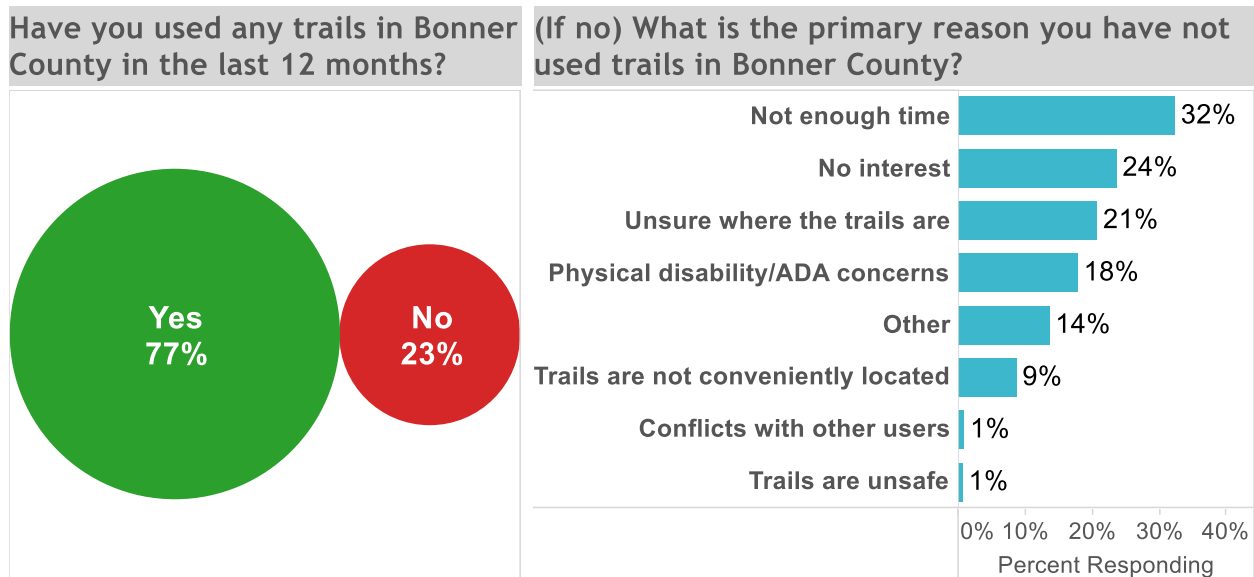
Respondents were asked a variety of questions about how they use the Bonner County trail system. Those who indicated that they have used trails in the past year were asked a series of additional questions including usage by activity, locations used, satisfaction with trails, methods of learning about trails, and factors that would encourage increased trail usage. Those who have not used trails in the past year were asked to identify reasons for not using the trails and factors that would encourage trail usage. The findings from each of these questions among invitation respondents are discussed in the section below.

### Recent Use of Trails

Figure 5 shows that more than three in four invitation respondents (77 percent) indicated that they have used trails in Bonner County during the last 12 months.

Among those who said they have not used Bonner County trails, the primary reason cited for not using trails is not having enough time (32 percent). Other top reasons include a lack of interest (24 percent), uncertainty about the location of the trails (21 percent), a physical disability or ADA concerns (18 percent), some other reason (14 percent), or the lack of convenience of trail location (9 percent). Few respondents identified conflicts with other users or a perception that the trails are unsafe (each 1 percent) as major deterrents.

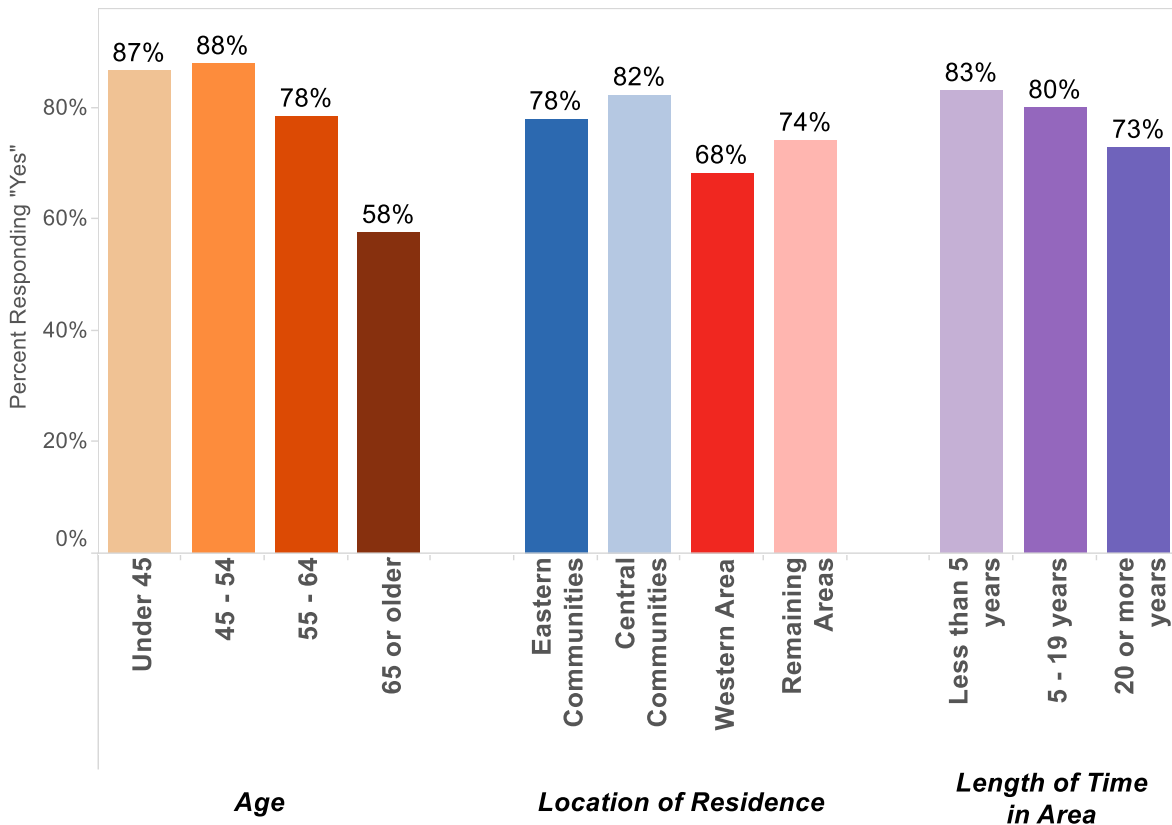
**Figure 5: Bonner County Trail Usage in Last 12 Months**



Invitation responses to trail usage are analyzed by respondent age, location of residence, and length of time lived in Bonner County (Figure 6):

- **Respondent Age.** Trail usage is highest with younger respondents, with 87 percent of respondents under the age of 45 indicating that they have used the trail system in the last year and only 58 percent of those over 65 having used trails. When asked to identify the primary reasons they do not use the trails, older respondents were more likely to indicate that they have no interest or that they have physical disability/ ADA concerns. Those who selected “other” wrote comments indicating that trails on their own property and safety concerns are additional factors that limit their trail usage.
- **Location of Residence.** Usage of the Bonner County trails is highest among respondents living in central Bonner County communities (82 percent) and eastern Bonner County communities (78 percent), and lower among respondents living in the western Bonner County area (68 percent) and remaining areas of the county (74 percent).
- **Length of Time Lived in Bonner County.** Trail usage is highest among newer residents, with 83 percent usage among respondents who have lived in Bonner County less than 5 years, 80 percent among those who have lived in the county between five and nineteen years, and 73 percent among those who have lived in Bonner County for 20 or more years.

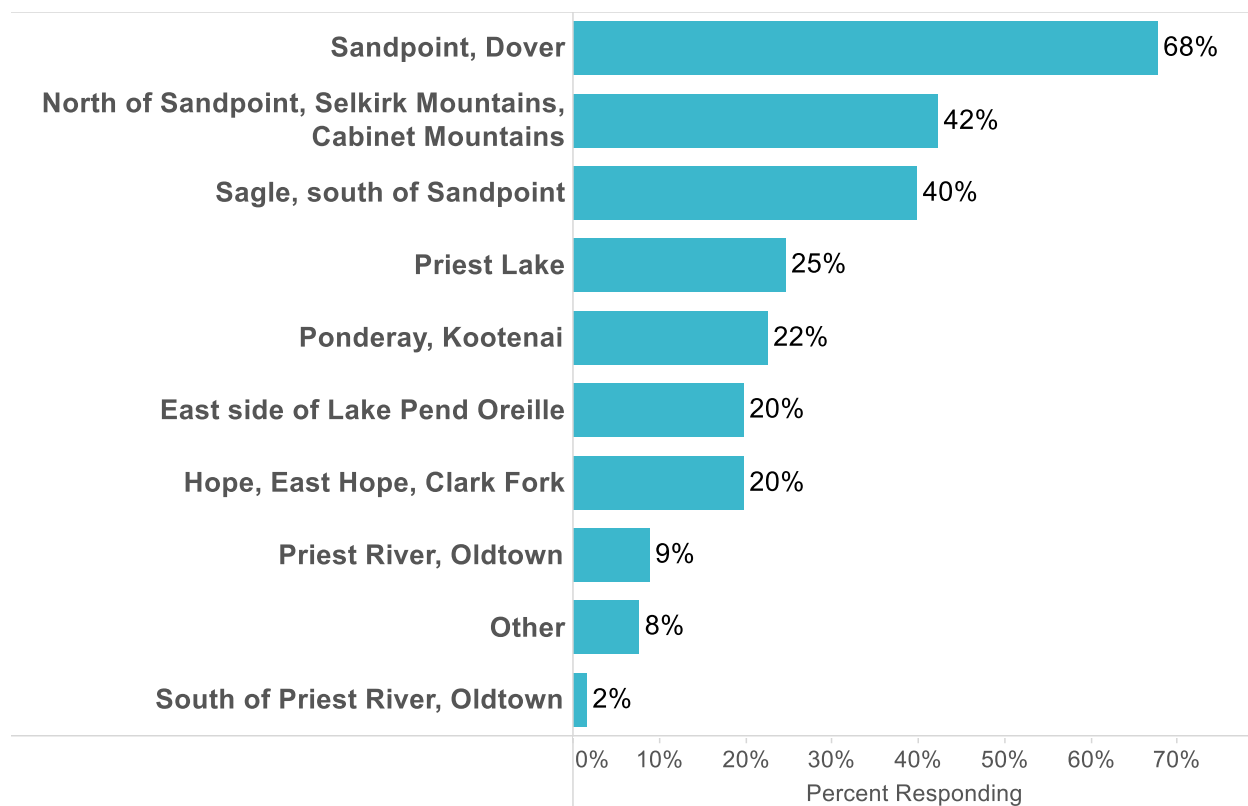
**Figure 6: Percent Using Bonner County Trails in Last 12 Months  
By Respondent Age, Location of Residence, and Length of Time Lived in Area**



### Locations Used Most Often

Respondents who indicated that they have used trails in the past year were asked to identify the locations of Bonner County trails that they use most frequently. The most popular trail locations by far are Sandpoint and Dover, with 68 percent of invitation respondents utilizing the trails in these areas. The area north of Sandpoint/the Selkirk Mountains/the Cabinet Mountains (42 percent) and Sagle/south of Sandpoint (40 percent) are also commonly used. These areas are dominated by public lands.

Figure 7: Locations of Bonner County Trails Used Most Often

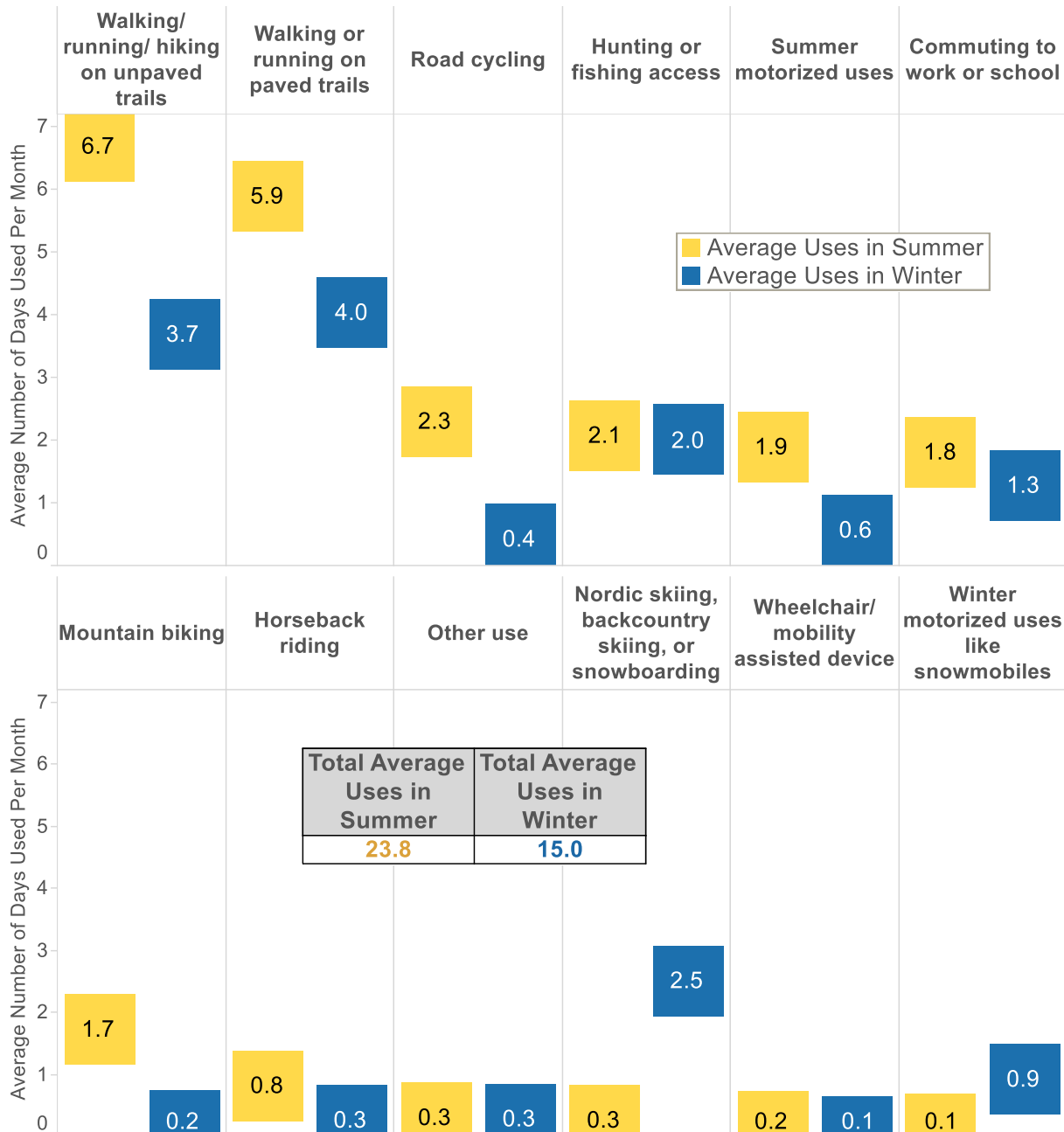


### Trail Usage by Activity

Respondents estimated the number of days per month, on average, that they use the Bonner County trail system, both during the summer (May through October) and the winter (November through April). Figure 8 on the following page depicts the average number of days used per month among invitation respondents. Average usage is considerably higher during summer (23.8 days on average) than winter (15.0 days on average). These averages indicate that respondents use trails almost every day during summer months and approximately every other day during winter months.

Walking, running or hiking on unpaved trails, and walking or running on paved trails are the most popular summer activities, with 6.7 days and 5.9 days of participation per month on average. These are also the most popular winter activities, though with lower participation levels (3.7 days and 4.0 days, respectively). Respondents also reported a higher level of summer participation in road cycling, summer motorized use, commuting, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Not surprisingly, higher participation was noted for Nordic skiing/backcountry skiing or snowboarding and winter motorized use during winter months.

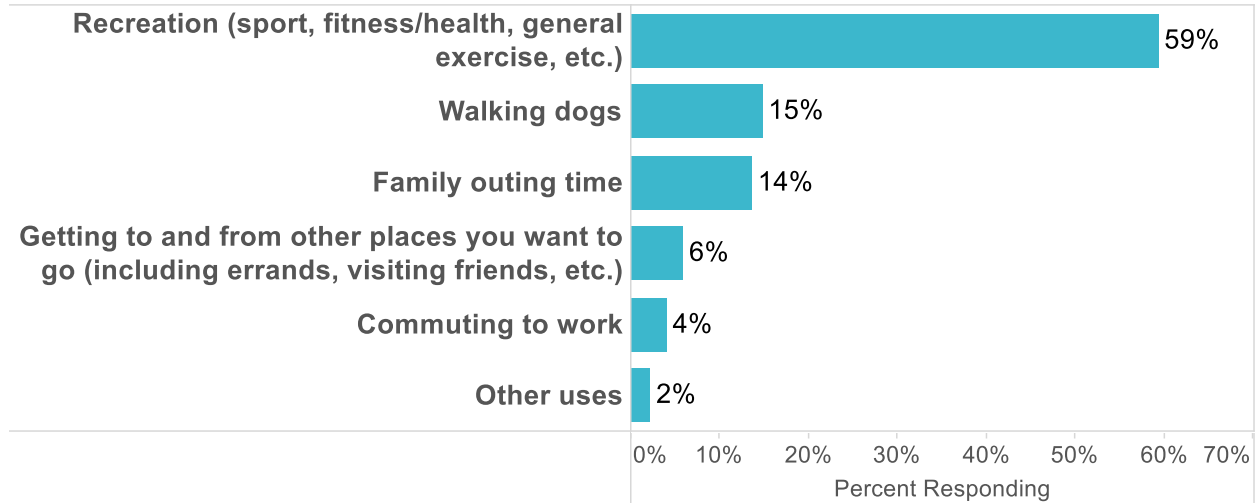
Figure 8: Monthly Trail Usage by Activity





When asked to indicate the percentage of total trail usage attributable to various purposes, invitation respondents identified recreation as their top purpose (59 percent on average), followed by walking dogs (15 percent) and family outing time (14 percent). Smaller amounts of usage are attributable to getting to and from places you want to go (6 percent), commuting (4 percent), or other uses (2 percent).

**Figure 9: Percentage of Overall Trail Usage for Various Activities**



### Satisfaction with Trail System

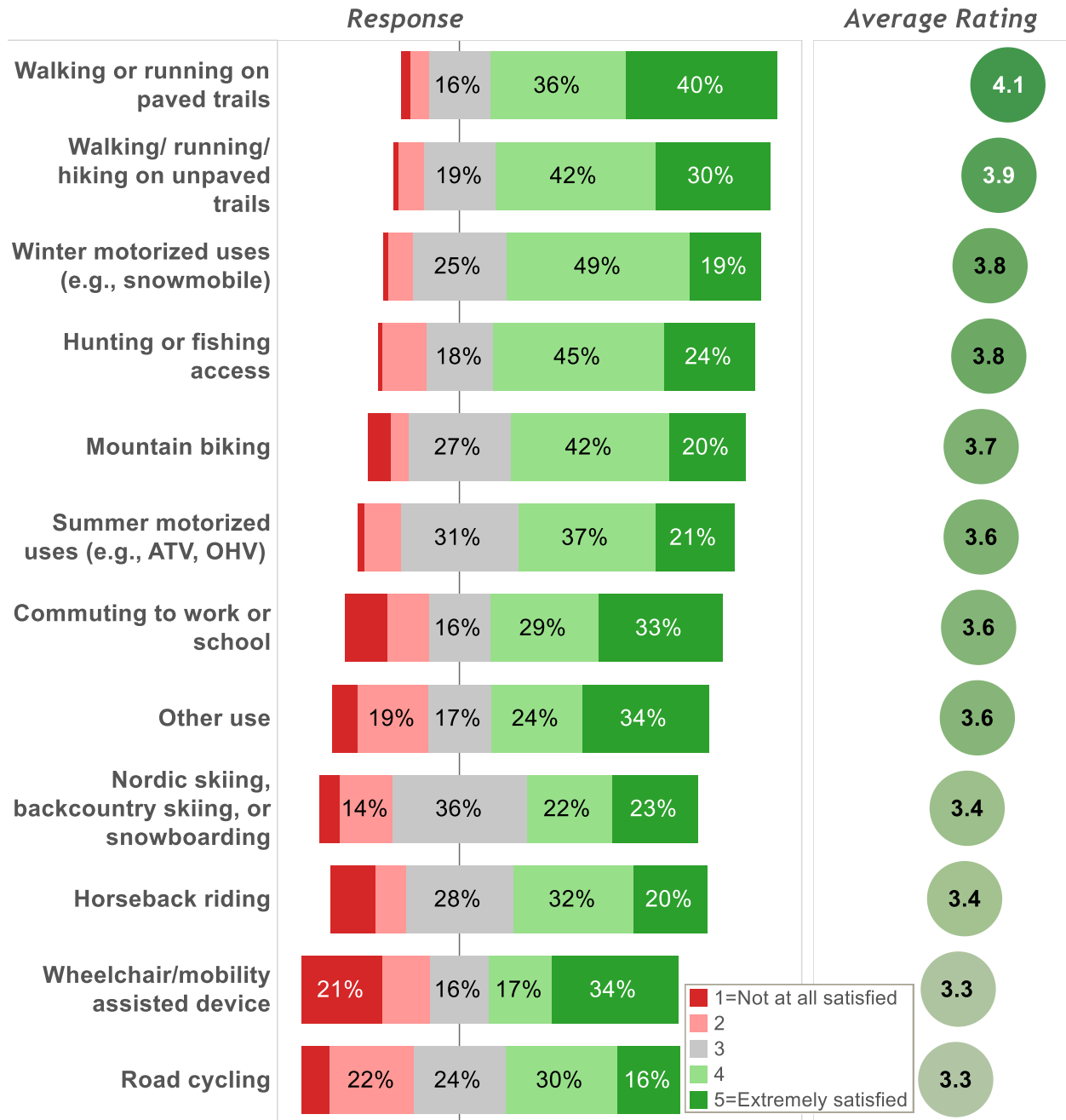
Respondents who use trails rated their satisfaction with various trail activities on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “not at all satisfied” and 5 means “extremely satisfied.” Figure 10 on the following page illustrates the share of invitation respondents selecting each rating for each activity, with “1” and “2” responses depicted in dark and light red (indicating the respondent is dissatisfied) and “4” and “5” responses depicted in light and dark green (indicating the respondent is satisfied). Each activity is sorted in relation to the others based on their midpoint rating. Average satisfaction ratings among invitation respondents are shown on the right side of the graph.

The activities receiving the largest share of “4” and “5” responses and highest average satisfaction ratings include:

- Walking or running on paved trails (average rating 4.1; 76 percent rated it a 4 or 5)
- Walking/running/hiking on unpaved trails (3.9 average; 73 percent)
- Winter motorized uses (3.8 average; 67 percent)
- Hunting or fishing access (3.8 average; 69 percent)
- Mountain biking (3.7 average; 63 percent)
- Summer motorized uses (3.6 average; 58 percent)
- Commuting to work or school (3.6 average; 62 percent)

Activities receiving relatively lower satisfaction ratings include Nordic skiing/backcountry skiing or snowboarding (average 3.4), horseback riding (3.4), wheelchair/mobility assisted device (3.3), and road cycling (3.3). Future improvements on trails to better accommodate these specific activities may boost the overall degree of satisfaction felt by respondents.

Figure 10: Satisfaction with Trail System



Respondents answered an open-ended question following the satisfaction ratings asking, “What makes you satisfied or dissatisfied with the current trail system?” A random sampling of twenty comments is presented below to provide a general idea of specific responses. Ten comments indicating satisfaction with trails were selected, and ten comments indicating dissatisfaction with trails were selected. Overall, respondents who are satisfied with the trail system mentioned adequate maintenance, connectivity, abundant trail options, and beautiful scenery as positive qualities of the trails network. On the other hand, those who feel dissatisfied overall identified accessibility, bike lanes on roads, disobedience of traffic laws by cyclists, closed trails, poor signage, excessive motorized use, lack of information on trails, litter and overrun weeds/downed trees, and uneven pavement as areas that could use some attention to improve satisfaction.

### ***Sampling of Comments Indicating Satisfaction***

- *“Access is easy for the most part.”*
- *“Ease of access from where we live to where we want to go. Includes some scenic routes”*
- *“Gorgeous areas”*
- *“I only mountain bike and all trails are in excellent shape and are well maintained by local volunteers.”*
- *“Peace & quiet away from motorized traffic”*
- *“Smooth pavement!”*
- *“The variety and amount of trails is incredible to me”*
- *“They are nice, clean and easy to get to”*
- *“Upkeep overall is good in all areas!”*
- *“Well maintained”*

### ***Sampling of Comments Indicating Dissatisfaction***

- *“Access from Long Bridge-Sagle to city beach/Sandcreek/Bay trail is very poor”*
- *“Dissatisfied by lack of lighting at Memorial field boat ramp.”*
- *“Hard to use”*
- *“Lack of snow removal on long bridge walking side. Can't commute to work in winter. Long bridge bar allowed to plow snow onto bike path in winter making it impassable.”*
- *“Mountain biking trails are too difficult and too dangerous for beginners. They are not marked well enough to inform riders of trail difficulty. There should be more, safer trails suited for beginners.”*

**Sampling of Comments Indicating Dissatisfaction (Continued)**

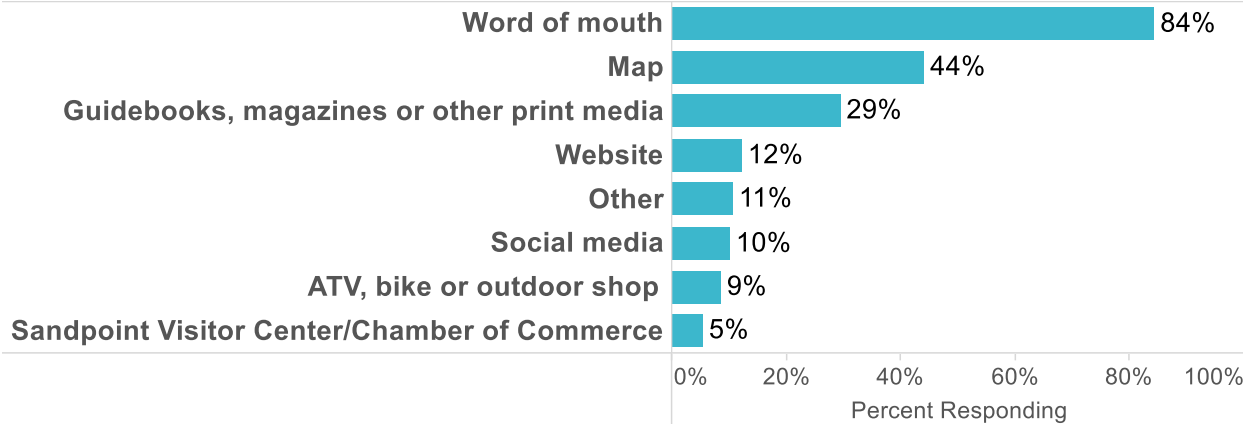
- *“No parking at trailheads, nobody clears felled trees, no maintenance, access roads not maintained”*
- *“Not enough, especially paved trails for biking”*
- *“Short trails. Lack of looping/connecting trails”*
- *“There is not enough hunting and fishing access, especially fishing on the lakes and rivers”*
- *“Would love more accessible maintained Nordic trails and better bike trails (more distance away from cars)”*

Open-ended comments from respondents with a household need for ADA-accessible facilities and those who provided low satisfaction ratings for using a wheelchair/mobility assisted device on the trail system indicate that some improvements could be made to boost satisfaction among these respondents. These respondents mentioned trail and sidewalk accessibility as the primary dissatisfactory aspect of their trail usage, identifying a need for easier sidewalk accessibility, additional paved trails, more handicapped parking at trailheads, and upkeep on debris clearing on the trails.

**Learning About Trail Type & Location**

Trail users were also asked to identify the forms of communication through which they learn about the location and type of trails within Bonner County. The top method of learning by far is word of mouth (84 percent). A map (44 percent), guidebooks/magazines/print media (29 percent), and the web (12 percent) were also mentioned fairly frequently.

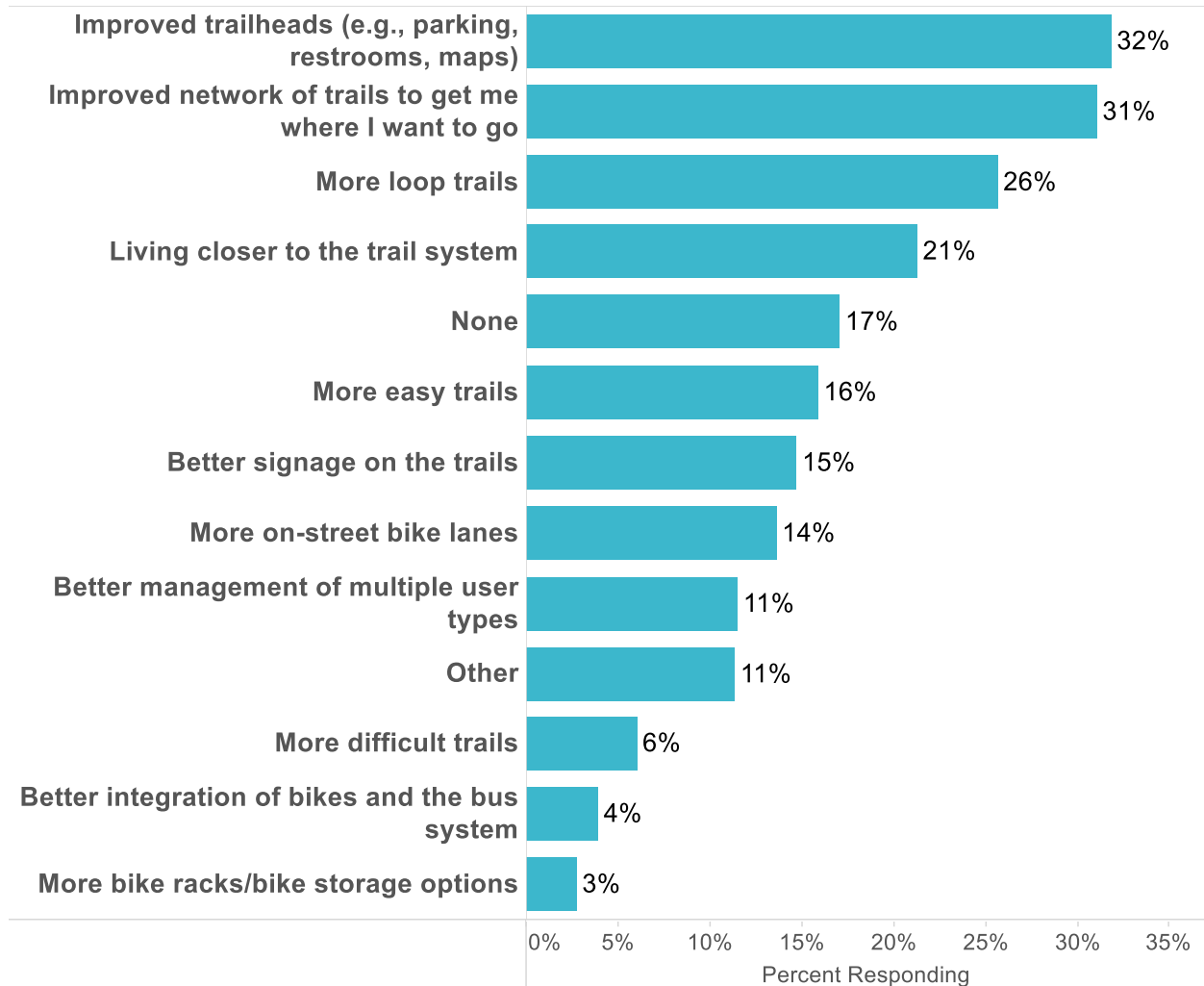
**Figure 11: Learning About Trail Type & Trail Location**



### Factors that Would Encourage Increased Usage

All invitation respondents, both users and non-users of trails, were asked to identify improvements and changes that would encourage them to use the Bonner County trail system more in the future. About a third of respondents cited improved trailheads (32 percent) and an improved network of trails (31 percent) as top areas that, if improved, would encourage future usage. Respondents also frequently selected more loop trails (26 percent), living closer to the trail system (21 percent), more easy trails (16 percent), and better signage on the trails (15 percent). Therefore, it appears that basic improvements and additions to the trail network are the amenities most commonly desired to encourage future usage among invitation respondents.

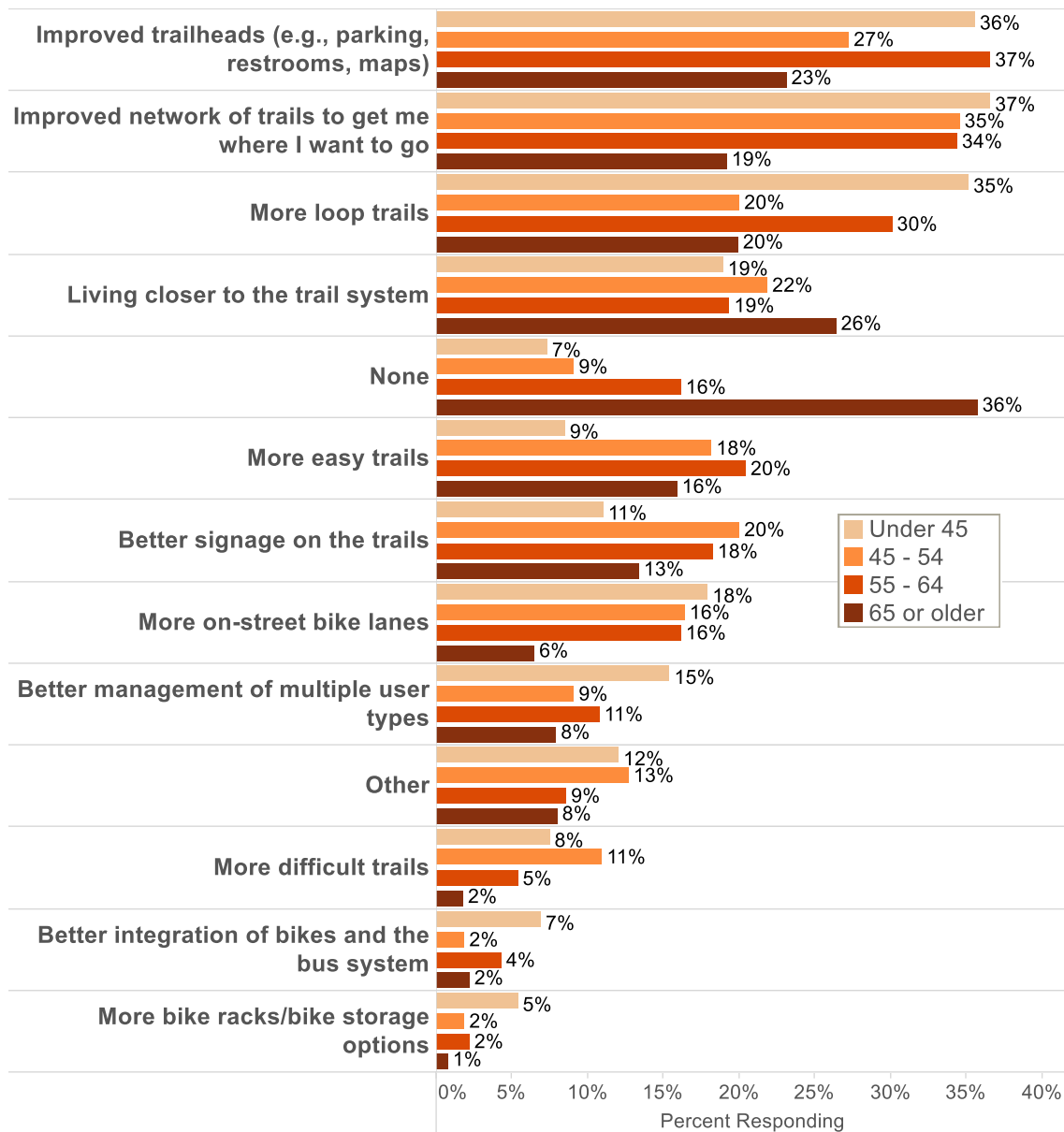
Figure 12: Factors that Would Encourage Increased Trail Usage



Invitation responses to this question were also analyzed by respondent age (Figure 13) and location of residence (Figure 14) and those who did and did not use trails (Figure 15):

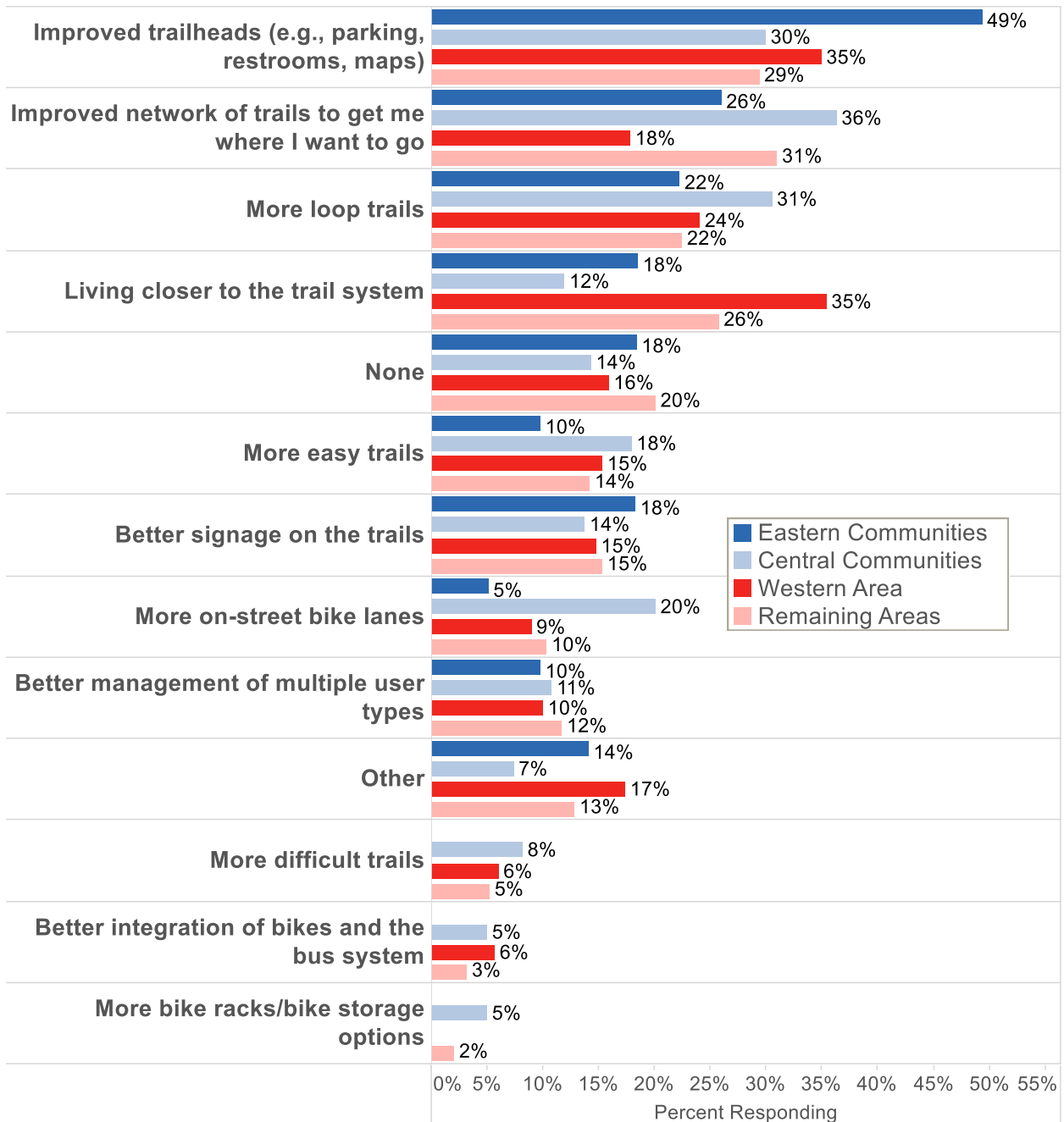
- **Respondent Age.** Younger respondents were more likely than their older counterparts to feel that an improved network of trails, more on-street bike lanes, better management of multiple users, more difficult trails, and more bike racks/bike storage options would encourage them to use trails more. In contrast, older respondents more commonly felt that no improvements or changes would play a role in increasing their future usage.

**Figure 13: Factors that Would Increase Trail System Usage By Respondent Age**



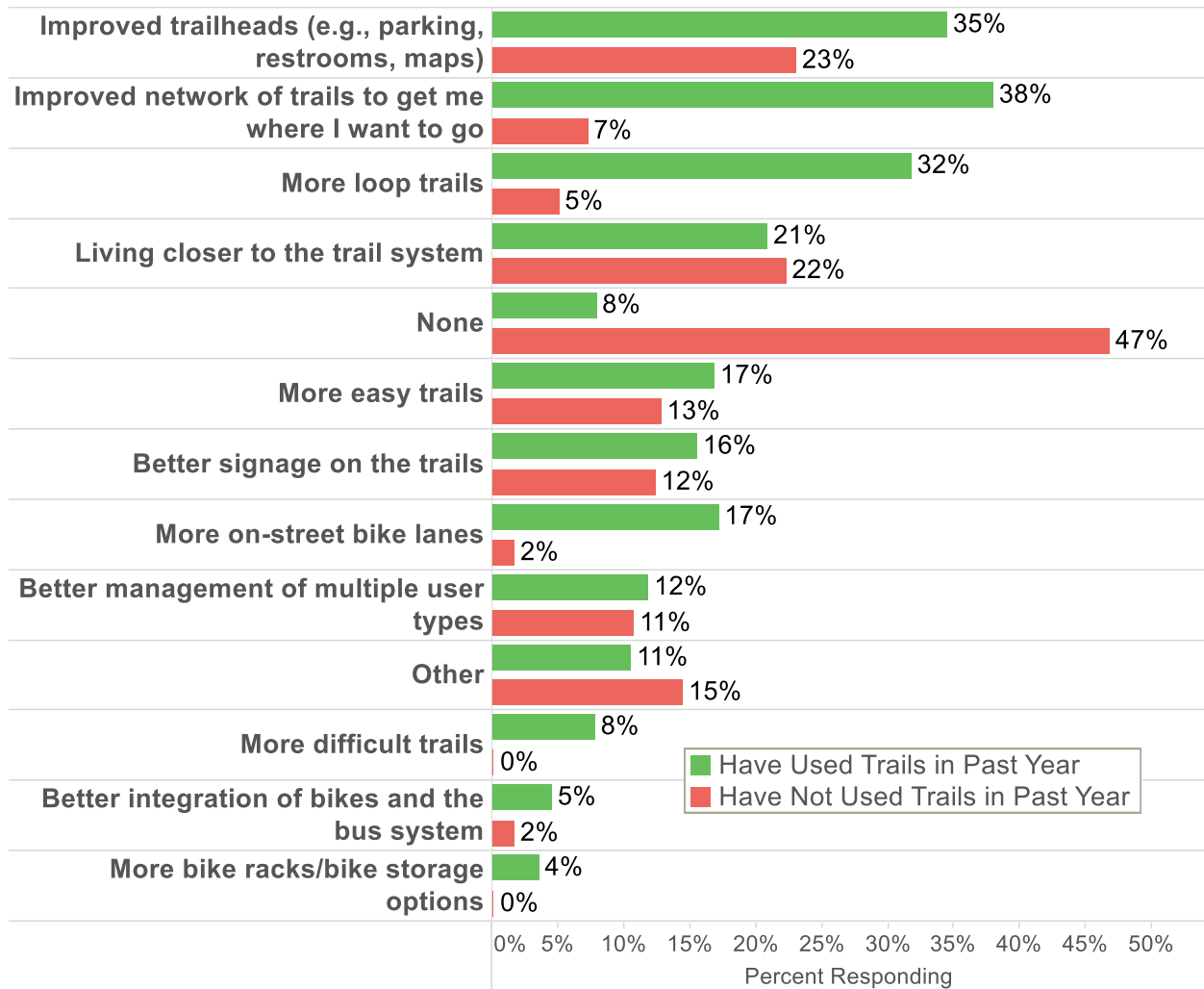
- By Location of Residence. Respondents living in eastern Bonner County communities most frequently indicated that future usage would be encouraged by improved trailheads, while those in central Bonner County communities had the greatest likelihood of selecting an improved network of trails, more loop trails, and more on-street bike lanes. Western Bonner County residents most commonly felt that living closer to the trail system would encourage future usage.

**Figure 14: Factors that Would Increase Trail System Usage By Location of Residence**



- **By Trail Usage in Past Year.** Current trail users had a greater likelihood of selecting improved trailheads, an improved network of trails, more loop trails, more on-street bike lanes, and more difficult trails as factors that would further boost their usage of the trails. Respondents who did not use the trail system in the past year, frequently chose “none.” However, they also identified a need for improved trailheads (23%) and living closer to the trail system (22%), which were also popular among current trail users.

**Figure 15: Factors that Would Increase Trail System Usage By Trail Usage in Past Year**





## LIVING IN BONNER COUNTY

A section of the survey had respondents indicate how long they have lived in Bonner County and identify some of the influential factors in their decision to move to or stay in the county as well as live in their current residence. Key findings from these questions are summarized below.

### Influential Factors in Decision to Move to/Stay in Bonner County

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of fourteen amenities and characteristics of Bonner County in their decision to move to or stay in the county on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “not at all important” and 5 meaning “extremely important.” Invitation sample responses are illustrated in Figure 16, with the dark and light red segments representing “1” and “2” responses (indicating the item was not important) and light and dark blue segments representing “4” and “5” responses (indicating the item was important). Items are sorted in descending order by their midpoint rating, and average importance ratings are depicted in the right column.

The following items received very high average ratings and strong shares of “4” and “5” ratings, indicating that they are highly important to respondents’ decisions to live in Bonner County:

- Access to lakes and rivers (4.6 average rating; 92 percent provided a 4 or 5 rating)
- Outdoor recreation (4.6 average; 91 percent)
- A safe and secure community (4.5 average; 89 percent)
- The overall character of the community (4.4 average; 88 percent)
- Access to public lands (4.4 average; 83 percent)

A second tier of importance ratings, somewhat lower in comparison but still quite high on an objective basis, included the following items: friends in the community (average 4.0), scenic views from town (3.9), amount of open space like working farms (3.8), cost of housing to buy/rent (3.7), high quality public schools (3.6), and the trail system (3.5).

Although the trail system ranks relatively low (11<sup>th</sup> out of 14 attributes), trails are integral to residents’ access to lakes and rivers, outdoor recreation, and public lands, which are three of the five most important attributes.

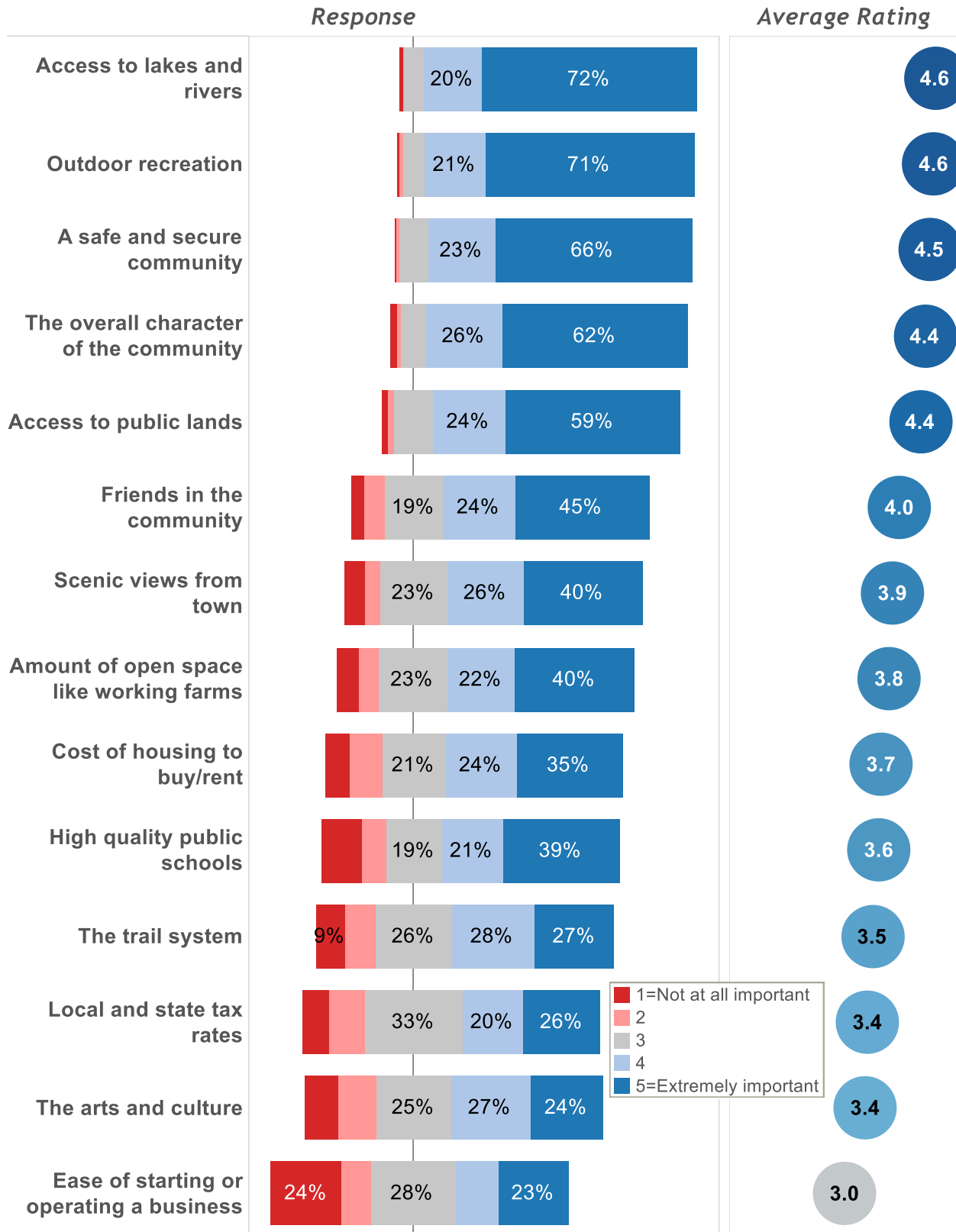
Finally, the lowest-rated categories include local and state tax rates (3.4), arts and culture (3.4), and ease of starting or operating a business (3.0). These factors were rated as less influential in the decision to move to or stay in Bonner County. Generally, respondents seem to be focused most on local recreational opportunities and safety and character of the local community in their decision to live in the county.

Invitation responses for this question were segmented by business ownership to identify differences in influential factors between business owners and non-business owners in Bonner

County. Many ratings are similar in nature between the two segments. However, as might be expected, business owners are considerably more likely to identify the ease of starting or operating a business as important (average rating 3.7) compared to non-business owners (2.7). Business owners also provide slightly higher importance ratings, on average, for the amount of open space, the overall character of the community, the arts and culture, friends in the community, and scenic views from town. Meanwhile, non-business owners rated high quality public schools somewhat higher, on average.

Responses from the invitation sample were also segmented by length of residency. Relative newcomers, who have lived in the area for fewer than five years, identified the trail system and scenic view from town as more important than long-time residents. In contrast, respondents who have lived in the area for a considerably period of time provided higher importance ratings, on average, to arts and culture, friends in the community, high quality public schools, and a safe and secure community.

Figure 16: Importance of Factors in Decision to Move To or Stay In Bonner County





## Influential Factors in Decision about Location of Residence

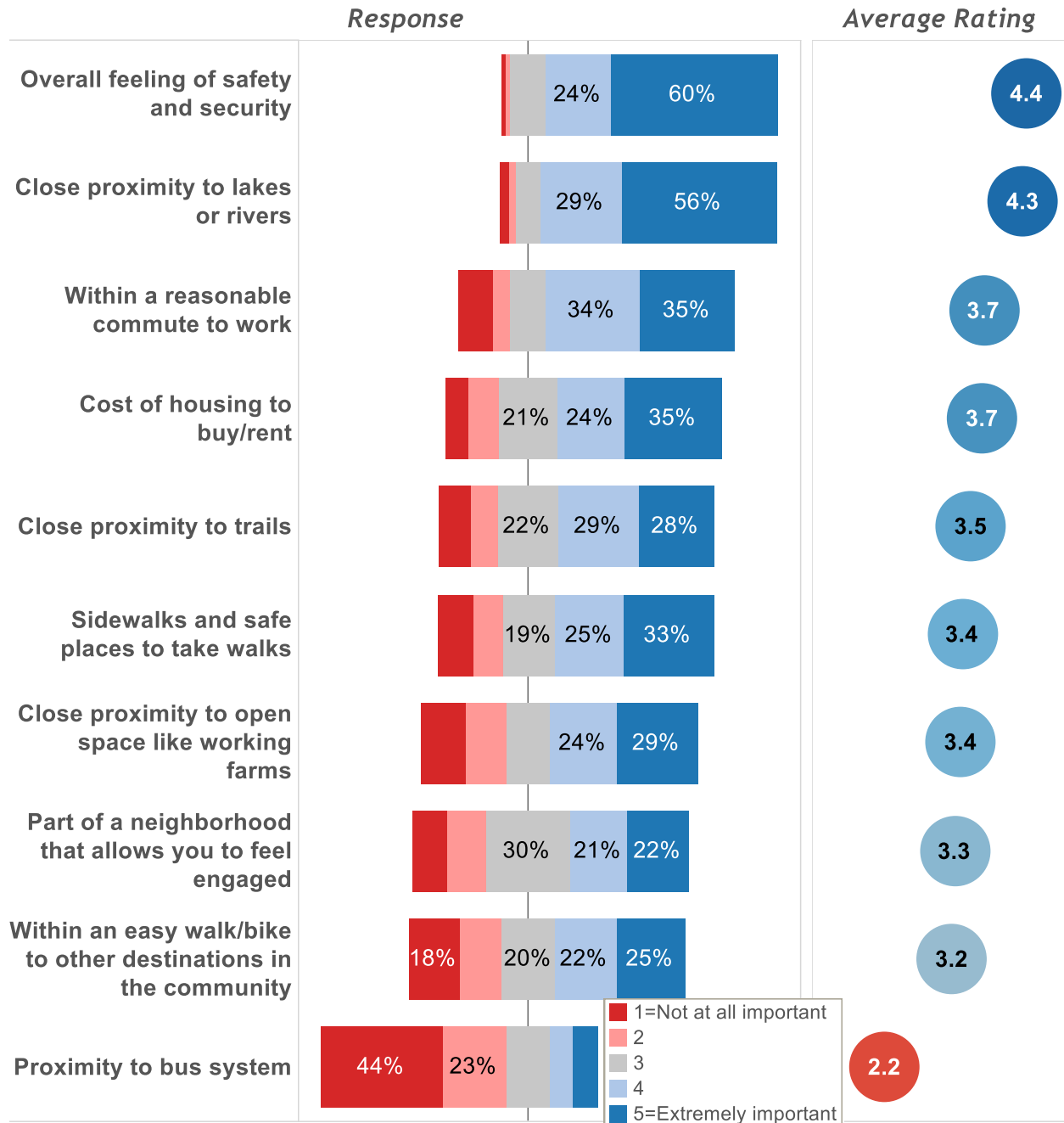
In a similar question, respondents rated ten amenities and characteristics of their community in their decision about the location of their current residence on the same scale, where 1 is “not at all important” and 5 is “extremely important.” Results are shown in Figure 18. The items that received the highest average ratings and largest shares of “4” and “5” responses from invitation respondents include:

- Overall feeling of safety and security (4.4 average; 84 percent rated 4 or 5)
- Close proximity to lakes and rivers (4.3 average; 85 percent)

Items that were rated somewhat lower but were still fairly important to respondents in their residence location decision include a reasonable commute to work (average 3.7), cost of housing to buy/rent (3.7), close proximity to trails (3.5), sidewalks/safe places to walk (3.4), close proximity to open space (3.4), an engaged neighborhood (3.3), and an easy walk/bike ride to other destinations in the community (3.2). Proximity to the bus system received a low average importance rating (2.2), and the share of respondents indicating that this item was unimportant (67 percent) far outnumbered the share indicating it was important (17 percent).

Similar to their decision to locate in Bonner County, respondents noted that community safety and proximity to bodies of water were highly important to where they chose to live. Again, trails were rated as somewhat less important when compared to the other items, though in some cases they provide access to higher ranked factors.

Figure 18: Importance of Factors in Decision About the Location of Your Current Residence





## PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE ENHANCEMENTS TO TRAILS

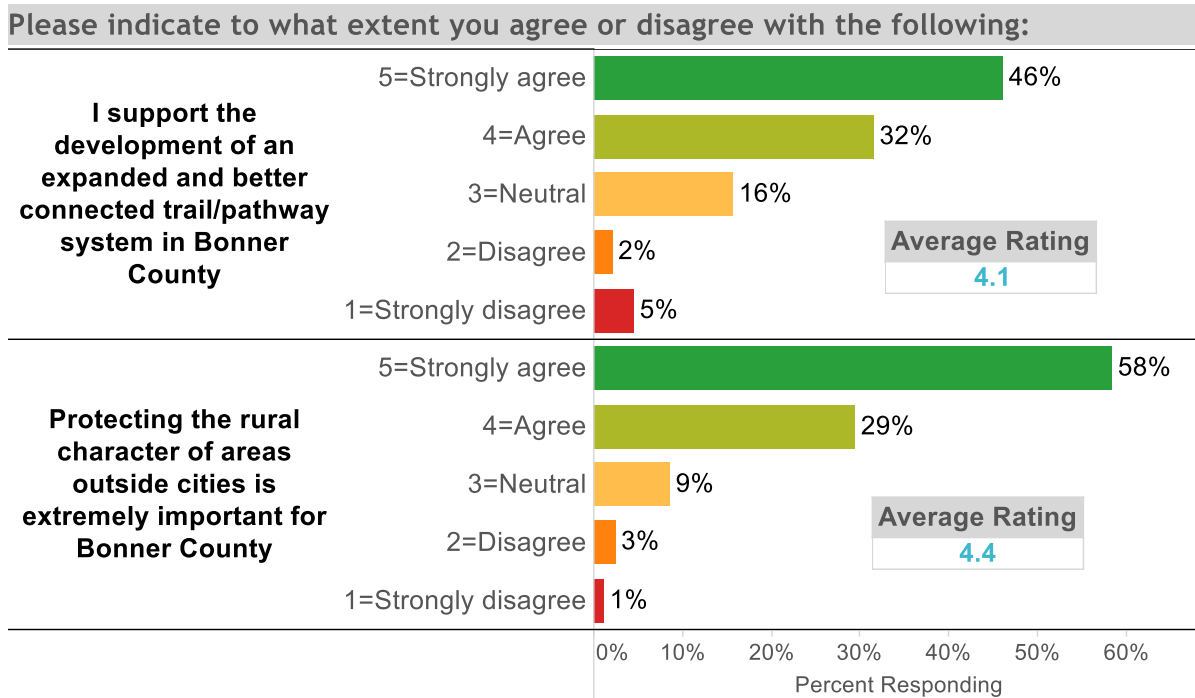
In a final section of the survey, respondents answered several questions regarding the future of trails in Bonner County, including opinions of future trail development, an allocation of potential future funding towards various components of trails, and support for different funding mechanisms. The results from each question are discussed below.

### Opinions of Future Trail Development

Respondents rated their level of agreement with two statements about future trail development in Bonner County on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 5 is “strongly agree.” The first, “I support the development of an expanded and better connected trail/pathway system in Bonner County,” received strong agreement, with over three-quarters of invitation respondents (78 percent) providing a “4” or “5” rating and an average rating of 4.1. Seven percent of respondents disagreed with this statement (provided a “1” or “2” rating).

Slightly higher levels of agreement were noted for “Protecting the rural character of areas outside cities is extremely important for Bonner County.” Almost all (88 percent) respondents rated this statement as a “4” or “5” and the average agreement rating was 4.4. Only 4 percent disagreed.

Figure 20: Level of Agreement with Statements about the Bonner County Trail Development





### Allocation of Future Funding

Respondents were asked, “If you had \$100 to spend on trails and open space, how would you allocate that \$100 across the following categories?” and provided a list of ten options. As illustrated in Figure 21 below, respondents allocated the largest sum on average towards maintaining existing backcountry trails on public lands (\$19.89), followed by maintaining existing town/rural trails (\$13.18) and developing new trails to a specific destination (\$11.50). Improving trailheads (\$10.86), improving signs (\$8.07), connecting town trails to the waterfront (\$8.06), and preserving working agricultural lands (\$8.06) also received moderate allocations. Results indicate that respondents are most likely to prioritize maintenance of existing trails.

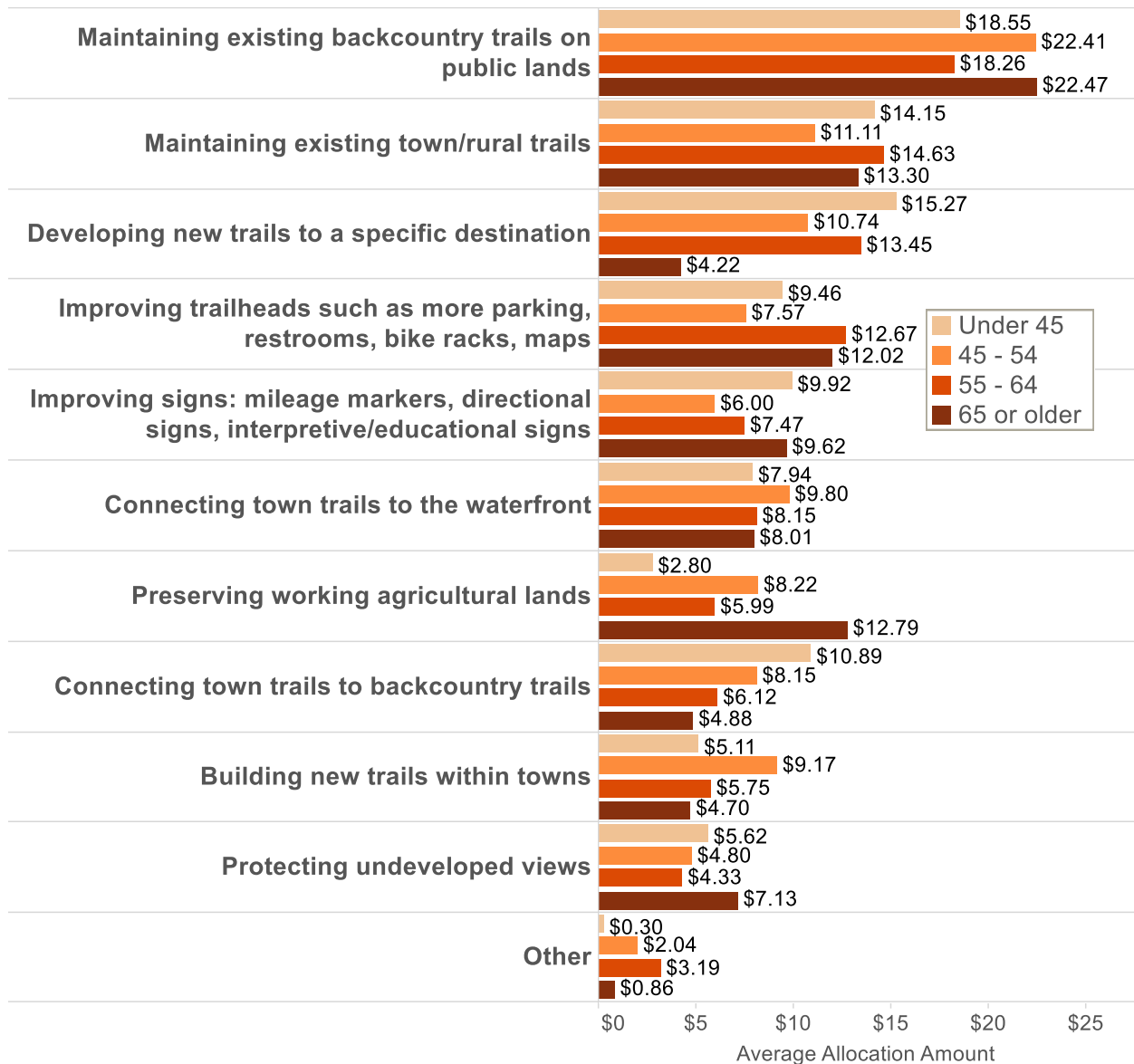
**Figure 21: If you had \$100 to spend on trails and open space, how would you allocate that \$100 across the following categories?**



Invitation responses to this question were also analyzed by respondent age (Figure 22) and length of time lived in the area (Figure 23):

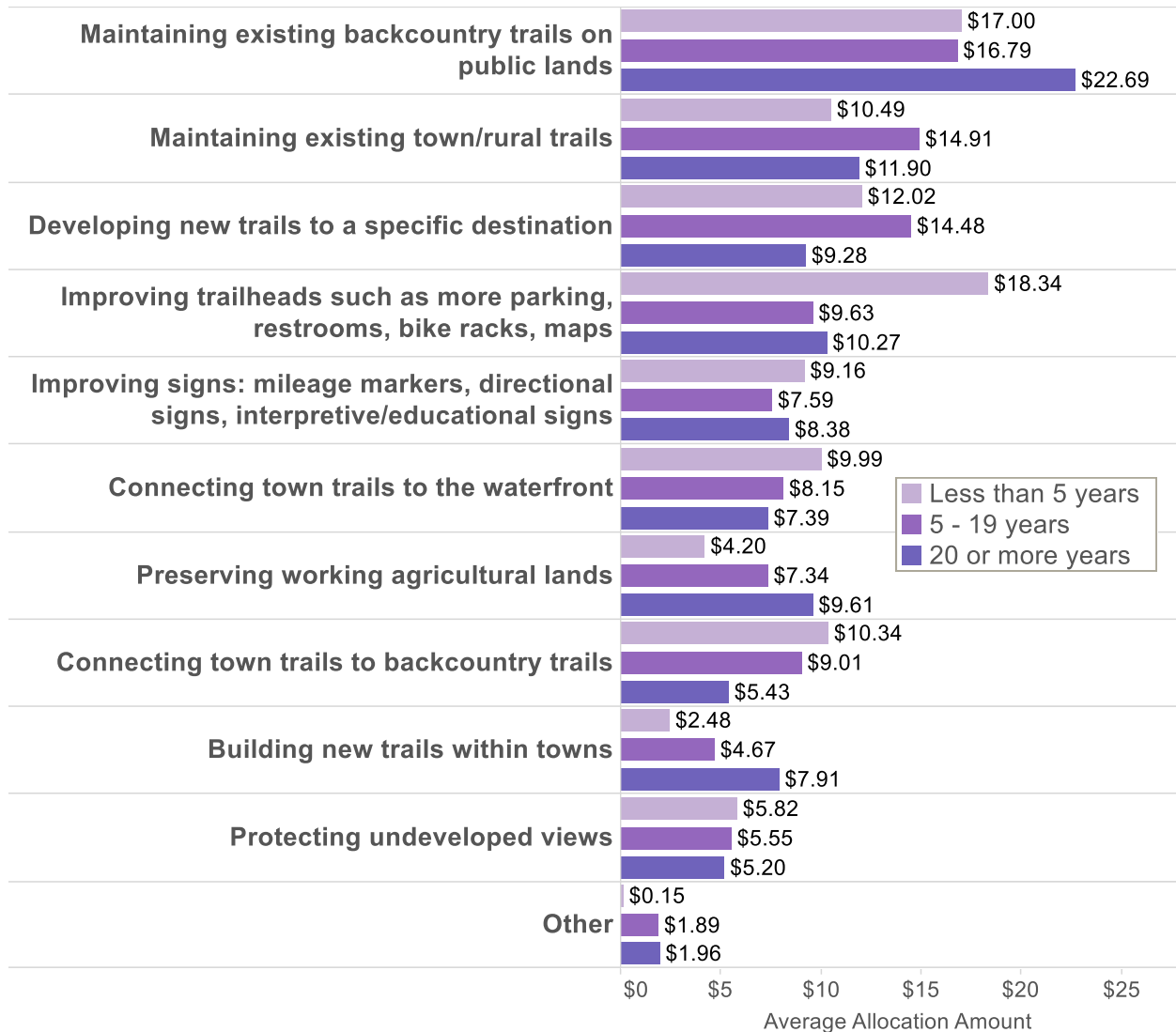
- Respondent Age. Older respondents typically allocated more money towards improving trailheads, preserving working agricultural lands, and protecting undeveloped views compared to younger age cohorts. Meanwhile, younger respondents were more likely to prioritize developing new trails to a specific destination, connecting town trails to backcountry trails, and building new trails within towns.

**Figure 22: If you had \$100 to spend on trails and open space, how would you allocate that \$100 across the following categories?  
By Respondent Age**



- Length of Time Lived in Bonner County.** Long-time residents of Bonner County allocated more on average than relative newcomers towards maintaining existing backcountry trails on public lands, preserving working agricultural lands, and building new trails within towns. Respondents who are newer to the area, on the other hand, preferred to put money towards improving trailheads, connecting town trails to the waterfront, and connecting town trails to backcountry trails.

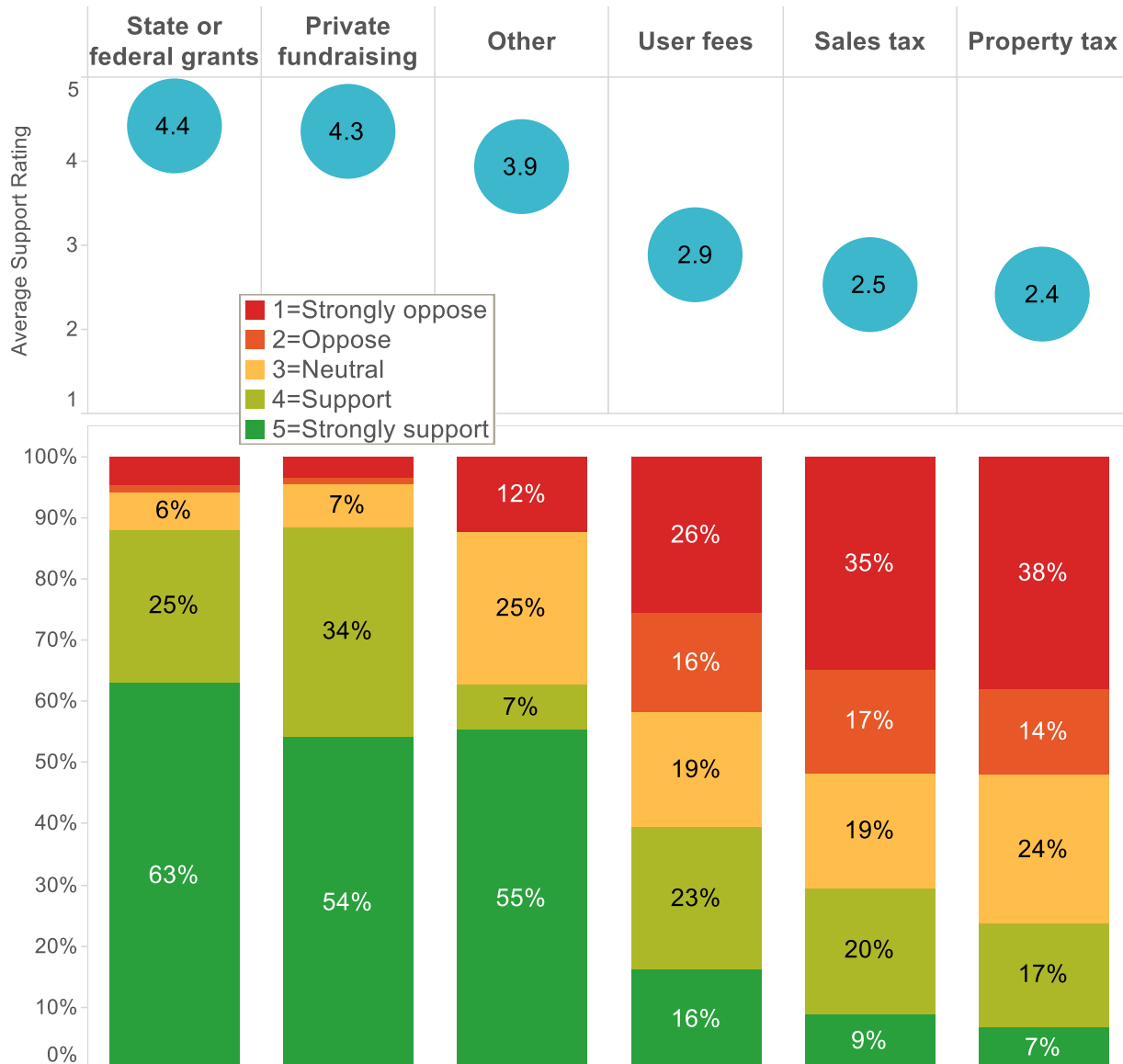
**Figure 23: If you had \$100 to spend on trails and open space, how would you allocate that \$100 across the following categories?  
By Length of Time Lived in Area**



### Support for Funding Mechanisms

After a reminder that expanding or improving trails would require funding, respondents were asked to what degree they would support the following funding mechanisms on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “strongly oppose” and 5 means “strongly support.” Respondents provided the highest ratings for state or federal grants and private fundraising, with averages of 4.4 and 4.3 respectively and 88 percent of respondents providing “4” or “5” responses for each method. Respondents provided considerably lower support ratings for user fees (average 2.9), sales tax (2.5), and property tax (2.4), indicating that they are not interested in placing the cost burden on residents for trail improvements and expansions.

Figure 24: Support for Trail Funding Mechanisms



## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON TRAILS

At the end of the survey, respondents were provided with an opportunity to write in any additional comments about trails in the Bonner County area. A multitude of comments were received, and these should be read in their entirety in order to gain a full understanding of the ideas expressed. However, some common themes did emerge and have been summarized below along with a sampling of relevant verbatim comments. A full listing of verbatim comments is available.

### ***Maintain, improve, and upgrade existing trails instead of developing new ones.***

- *“I feel very strongly about the maintenance of what we already have. There are already funds for this maintenance. We do not need what we cannot afford.”*
- *“I will forgo expanding trails in favor of maintaining existing trails and also improving the connection of existing trails to sidewalks, currently existing and in the future”*
- *“Maintain the current roads and trails!”*
- *“Our trails are fine the way they are right now”*
- *“REPAIR existing trails before you make new ones! Trail from Bottle Bar Rd to Sagle is very bad. Trail from Long Bridge to Dog Beach needs repair. Items have bounced out of my basket when going over rough spots.”*
- *“Require agencies that own the land to maintain it. Already pay taxes for that.”*
- *“Sandpoint Ranger District does a poor job maintaining trails and creating access. They receive tax \$ and do nothing. Boundary County does a MUCH better job.”*
- *“We have some excellent trails already”*
- *“We have some great trails. It would be nice to have more, but let's take care of what we have and make sure we maintain them and have good access to them.”*

### ***Expand parking availability and space at trailheads; maintain parking lot areas.***

- *“I would use the Sagle/Sandpoint trail a whole lot more if there was a place to park in Sagle. The old post office land would make a great park and ride.”*
- *“More trailhead parking needed for PDY Bay Trail and Sagle Trail”*
- *“Parking needed at Ponderay end of paved trails”*
- *“I usually end up using old logging roads or current ones and they are next to impossible to get to in winter; they never plow out the parking spots.”*

**Improve safety for walking and biking by connecting more paths and developing trails alongside roads to avoid dangerous situations.**

- *“A safe bike/hike trail from Sandpoint to Clark Fork would be nice. It would be safer for cyclist to be off Hwy 200 and less stress for drivers who have to pass them.”*
- *“Better shoulders on highway toward Clark Fork. Connector trail improvement from Sandcreek Trail which goes under highway to access road to Ponderay.”*
- *“I think trails in and around towns in the area need to be developed more to make walking and bicycling safe and practical alternatives to car travel”*
- *“I would like to see a bicycle trail from Sandpoint to Hope. Riding along hwy 200 is not safe.”*
- *“I would like to see bike and walking trails beside the major highways for safety”*
- *“With the new biking trail going through Mickinnick to Baldy to Schweitzer, there needs to be a safer biking route to the trail head. Many bikers already on Great Northern. It's VERY unsafe!”*

**Avoid increasing taxes for residents.**

- *“Don't spend tax monies or indebt the public for any trail works for the small minority that use such things”*
- *“Land agencies need to manage their lands with the tax revenues they ALREADY receive.”*
- *“No more land should be set aside for trails. Government owns too much land as it is. Do NOT raise taxes for this!”*
- *“Property taxes are becoming oppressive. I spend more on city and county taxes than on food! Pretty important for fixed income (or any other).”*

**Develop new trails or connections between existing trails to expand the network.**

- *“Extend bike path to Westmond”*
- *“I would like to see a Gold Hill loop trail completed”*
- *“It would be awesome if the Dover Trail went all the way to city beach with less need to ride on streets/sidewalks. Also more paved biking trails on the North and West side of town would be great.”*
- *“More trails will make this area more of a destination. It is a wise investment.”*
- *“Primarily would just like to have more options for trail running and mountain biking close to town.”*

***Keep up the good work.***

- *“I think the paved and dirt trails here are great and I use them a lot.”*
- *“Impressed with amount of development in last 5 years. Appears to be a successful collaboration of civic and private groups to improve systems.”*
- *“Keep up the good work!”*
- *“Love to see you being proactive! Thanks!”*
- *“Thank you for taking the time to gather information and continue to improve Sandpoint and the surrounding areas”*
- *“The trails are great and I love being on them and seeing so many others using them.”*
- *“They are awesome. Keep up the good work!”*
- *“You've done some great things. Looking forward to the bay trail connection.”*

## COMPARISON TO OPEN LINK RESULTS

Due to the small size of the open link sample, open link responses have been kept separate from invitation responses. Notable similarities and differences between these two samples are highlighted in the following summary.

- Open link sample slightly different in demographic and residential profile. Compared to the invitation sample, the open link sample was more heavily represented by males, somewhat younger, and more affluent. It was also made up of a somewhat larger proportion of second homeowners and was predominantly comprised of Sandpoint residents.
- Commuting to work by bike much more common. Open link respondents had a greater likelihood of indicating that they commute to work via bicycle at least once a week compared to invitation respondents. The average number of days per week commuting by bicycle was also higher among open link respondents.
- Trail usage reported by almost all open link respondents. While roughly three-quarters of invitation respondents indicated that they have used trails in the last year, almost all of open link respondents have done so. This may be a result of the advertising for the open link sample as well as the voluntary nature of the survey, thus generally drawing in respondents who already use the trail system on a regular basis and are invested in the future of trails in Bonner County.
- More frequent use of trails for recreational activities. On average, open link respondents reported higher trail usage per month for traditional outdoor recreation activities during both the winter and summer, including walking/hiking/running on unpaved trails, road cycling, mountain biking, and Nordic skiing/backcountry skiing or snowboarding. The total average number of uses per month for summer and winter overall was also higher among open link respondents than invitation respondents.
- Satisfaction ratings by activity generally similar or slightly lower. For almost all of the activities rated, open link respondents provided similar or slightly lower ratings on average than invitation respondents. This indicates that open link respondents are slightly less satisfied with trail offerings for a variety of activities, perhaps a result of their greater investment in and usage of the trails.
- More likely to learn about trails via maps, social media, websites, and outdoor shops. Compared to invitation respondents, open link respondents reported somewhat greater use of maps, social media, various websites, and ATV/bike/outdoor shops as ways to learn more about the location and type of trails in Bonner County.



- Improved and new trails most likely to encourage increased usage. Open link respondents more often desired maintenance and new developments to the trail network when asked about what factors would encourage future use of the trail system. These factors include an improved network of trails, more loop trails, more on-street bike lanes, and more difficult trails.
- Ratings of importance for decision to live in Bonner County and residence very similar. With the exception of the trail system, which was rated considerably higher by open link respondents due to the strong presence of trails enthusiasts in the sample, many ratings of importance of the amenities and characteristics in the area that influenced respondents' decision to live there were similar among invitation and open link respondents.
- Average allocation amounts differ. Open link respondents allocated more funding on average towards building new trails within towns and connecting town trails to backcountry trails than invitation respondents did. In contrast, they allocated less towards preserving working agricultural lands, maintaining existing town/rural trails, improving trailheads, and improving signage.
- Open link respondents more supportive of taxes and fees to fund trails. The average support rating was considerably higher among open link respondents for utilizing sales tax, property tax, and user fees as methods to fund expansions or improvements of trails as compared to invitation respondents.

## CONCLUSIONS

Trails are essential to daily life for many Bonner County residents. Three out of four residents used trails in the last year. Residents use trails nearly every day in the summer and every other day in the winter. Use is high across towns and rural areas and regardless of length of residence in the county, income, or age. Trails are particularly popular among newcomers to the area, younger residents, and business owners.

The survey responses point to several findings that merit discussion.

*Broad support for amenities:* More than three-quarters of residents support the development of an expanded and better connected trail system in the county. Nearly nine in ten residents believe that protecting the rural character of areas outside cities is extremely important for Bonner County.

*Trails lack their own identity:* Although the county's trails are popular, they do not have a strong identity separate from their role in providing access to other amenities. When residents identify what brought them to, or keeps them in, Bonner County they highlight access to the lakes and rivers, outdoor recreation, and public land. Relatively few respondents identified the trail system specifically, even though trails are essential for access to these resources.

*Trails closer to homes:* Residents want trails closer to where they live, suggesting demand for more trails in and around residential areas. More than half of respondents identified proximity to trails and safe places to take walks as important factors in their decision about where they live. One-fifth of respondents stated they would use the trails more if they lived closer to the trail system. Improving the trail network and increasing the number of bike lanes were also identified as factors that would increase use.

*Easier trails:* There is a need for easier trails to encourage new trail users and increase use among existing trail users, including the elderly and those with disabilities. Eighteen percent of non-users cited a physical disability as the primary reason they did not use the trails more. When asked what factors could increase their trail use, 13 percent asked for easier trails. Easier trails would also increase use among 17 percent of current trail users. This is particularly true among residents age 45 and older. More than one-fifth of trail users stated they are "not at all satisfied" with how well trails accommodate wheelchairs or mobility assistance devices. As current residents age and the area continues to be a retirement destination, trails that are easier to access and use will become increasingly important.

*Better information:* There is a desire for more broadly shared information about trails. Among non-users, 21 percent did not use trails because they are unsure where they are. One-third of all respondents cited improved trailheads with parking, restrooms, and maps as the factor most likely to increase how much they use the trails. Eighty-four percent of trail users get their information about trails in the community from word of mouth. Informal communication may

be effective between existing users, but it leaves out non-users and visitors who may want to learn more about trails.

*Potential for trails as transportation:* Almost all current trail use is for recreation, not transportation. This is unsurprising given the largely rural population of the county. However, within towns there is a small group of users who walk, bike, bus, and carpool to work. For residents of towns across the county, 20 percent report using at least one of these forms of transportation each week, on average. This small group of users, along with demand from many residents for more trails and bike lanes near where they live, suggests there is an opportunity to increase the use of trails for transportation.

*Funding challenge:* While residents want trail improvements, they generally do not want to pay for the improvements themselves. Nearly nine out of ten respondents support or strongly support funding improvements to trails via state or federal grants or private fundraising. Nearly half support or strongly support user fees, and roughly one in four support the use of sales or property tax. In short, those wishing to improve the trail system face substantial reluctance for local financial support. Success raising new funds may be more likely using a diverse mix of funding sources, and where local dollars can be significantly leveraged.

*The Future:* While current residents as a whole value area trails, survey results show that younger residents, newer residents, and business owners value them the most. This finding may be significant for Bonner County communities as they consider how to attract a younger population and entrepreneurs who will contribute to the long-term vitality of the region.