Oh the Pain in Conducting a Trail User Count

An Overview of How and Why to Count

Objectives

• To recognize the value of trail user counts
• To describe the basic research practices to follow when conducting trail user counts
• To discuss and evaluate the uses and limitations of count data

Introduction

• Why Count?
• Limitations of Count Data
• Planning Your Counting Project
• Presenting Trail Count Data
• Taking it Home
• Q & A
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Why Count?
- Justification for allocation of scarce dollars
- Aid in future planning
- Assist with capital development
- Grant application justification
- Marketing
- Visitor satisfaction
- Document health benefits
- Determine environmental impacts
- Use ratio

Why Count?
NEED
- Accurate
- Consistent
- Demand and usage estimates
- Measure and document the positive benefits of trail investments
- To understand what influences different modes of trail use
Why Count?

San José trail count shows increases

Constraints

- "Another job on the list"
- Year Long Project
- Requires organizing and training volunteers
- No funding
- Too expensive
- Not enough staff
- Lack volunteers
- Too time consuming
- Don’t know how
- Its not important

Limitations

*** Does not provide Outcomes for Trail Users ***

- Trail Use numbers
  - not
  - Number of Citizens who use trails.
- Do not know what community they are from
  - (especially in Metroplex and regional parks)
Planning Your Counting Project

- Have a clear GOAL
- Ensure everyone is on the same page
- Understand what you need to count
- Spend a considerable amount of time planning and PILOT TESTING

Planning Your Counting Project

- Project Manager
- Counting Instrument
- Stratified Sample
  - Peak hours
  - Days of the week
  - Seasonal
  - Yearly
  - Consistency
- Data Entry/ Data Analysis Plan
- Reporting Plan
- Volunteers
  - M.O.U.
  - Safety Plan
  - Communication Plan
  - Substitutes
  - Supplies (water, chair)
- Training/Practice Sessions
- Other
  - Signs
  - Shirts/ vests
  - Police support
  - Phones/ walkie talkies

Follow the Golden Rule...

Every user needs to have an equal chance of being represented
Pilot Test, Pilot Test, Pilot Test...

Counting Locations
Seasons, Times, Days
User Counts
Data Entry
Data Findings

Our Most Common Approach

- Determine seasons, weeks, days, and times of day that people use the trail
- Make sure you count at least twice for each of these “time frames” at each “location” and plan backups for rain, etc.
- Add additional counting or data collection depending on limitations of where to count and what you are trying to count.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Times</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:30am - 10am</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00am - 1:30pm</td>
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<td>1:30pm - 5:00pm</td>
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<td>5:00pm - 8:30pm</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Days</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday/Wednesday/Friday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday/Thursday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
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Know what you want to count and how to count it.
Uses of Data – Writing it up

• Tells a part of the Trail User Story
• COUNT data is just COUNT data
• Usually counts “user uses” not number of people in the community who use the trail
• Understand how to use it and write it
  – Count data on its own does not provide correlation or causation data
  – Graphics and Charts tell a good story
  – Understand what factors might impact counts (marathon trainings, weather, closed trails)
  – Be forthcoming about limitations

Taking it Home

• Designing a Counting Project Plan Group Activity

In a Nutshell

You do not have to count everyday, all year

It can be done with trained volunteers and a trained volunteer coordinator

Can provide information your City Council or Leaders are requesting

Conducting Systematic Counts is VITAL but not always difficult
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Questions
For more information or for a copy of this presentation please contact
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Questions?