



Bayfield Peninsula Silent Sports Trails: A Community and Economic Impact Study 2025 Executive Summary



Big Ravine – Pine Bluff Trail

Photo courtesy of TJoseph Media



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PART I: ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BAYFIELD PENINSULA TRAILS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To estimate the economic value generated by Bayfield Peninsula trails in Bayfield County, an Intercept Survey was launched in September 2024 and data collection concluded at the end of September 2025. Trail counter data from 11 trails was used to estimate an average annual visitorship of 17,679 unique trips by visitor groups (see map on page 8). Based on this estimated visitorship, a minimum sample size of 377 responses was needed to develop statistically valid estimates. A total of 721 responses were received, leading to a margin of error of 3.5%.

Throughout this executive summary, respondents are referred to as trail users, community members, or simply as respondents. Trail users include Bayfield Peninsula residents and visitors to the area. Community members are those who live in the Bayfield Peninsula.

Key findings of the study are as follows:

Attributes of Trail Users

- Half (50%) of all trail users visit in groups of two and almost one-third (30%) visit in groups of three or more.
- Over one-quarter (27%) of trail users are seniors (65+) and 14% are younger than 35 years.
- Over one-quarter (28%) of trail users have household incomes of under \$75,000.
- About three-quarters of trail users do not have a primary residence in the Bayfield Peninsula.
- Just under one-quarter (22%) of trail users reside in a zip code in the Bayfield Peninsula, followed by 17% who reside in the Greater Minneapolis-St. Paul region and 16% who reside in Northern & Central Wisconsin.

Impact of Trails on Visitorship of Bayfield Peninsula

- Over half (54%) of trail users visit the Bayfield Peninsula primarily due to the trails. Trails are responsible for attracting about 63% of trail users to the Bayfield Peninsula, including 54% of whom visit primarily due to trails and 9% who would not have visited if the trails did not exist.
- One-third (34%) of trail users lengthen their stay due to the trails and 43% of these trail users add 2 or more days to their trip.

Experience with Trails

- Almost three-quarters (73%) of trail users visit multiple trails in Bayfield Peninsula during their trip, including 55% who visit 3 or more trails.

- Well over half (61%) of trail users visit the Bayfield Peninsula trails at least twice a year. About 12% visit 8 or more times.
- Trail users are highly satisfied with the trails. Over three-quarters (77%) are very likely to return to the Bayfield Peninsula based on their experience with the trails. Only 3% are at all unlikely to return.

Overnight Accommodations

- A vast majority (84%) of trail users who do not reside in the Bayfield Peninsula stay overnight during their trip. About two-thirds (66%) of these trail users spend at least 3 nights in the Bayfield Peninsula.
- The three most popular accommodations include cabin/house rental (29%), hotel/motel/resort (26%), and camping/RV (22%).

Activities that Trail Users Participate In

- The most popular activities trail users participate in in the Bayfield Peninsula include hiking/trail running (93%), swimming/beach (33%), kayaking (21%), canoeing (21%), and paddleboarding (21%).

Economic Impact of Trails

- On average, out-of-area trail users spend about \$620 per trip and about \$219 per day in the Bayfield Peninsula. This spending can be directly attributed to the Bayfield Peninsula trails. Lodging, food, and groceries are the top three spending categories.
- On an annual basis, the trails generate a total of \$3.4 million in new spending in Bayfield County. The economic value of this spending is over \$3.5 million. In addition, the trails support 33 jobs per year in Bayfield County and are responsible for \$829,000 per year in wages, salaries, and other labor income.
- The top three industries in Bayfield County that receive the largest economic impact from the trails include hotels & motels (including casino hotels), full-service restaurants, and amusement & recreation.

PART II: PERSPECTIVES OF BAYFIELD PENINSULA TRAIL USERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Bayfield Peninsula Trail User Survey was to understand how trails are used and the facilities and amenities that trails users would like to see on the trails. The SRC invited 765 Bayfield Peninsula trail users to complete the Bayfield Peninsula Trail User Survey through direct email. A total of 207 trail users completed the survey.

Key findings of the study are as follows:

Overall Satisfaction

- More than nine-in-ten (94%) trail users said they were “satisfied” (38%) or “very satisfied” (56%) with the Bayfield Peninsula trails.
- Regarding level of agreement with the statement, “The Bayfield Peninsula trails contribute to the overall experience of the region,” almost all trail users (98%) “agreed” (16%) or “strongly agreed” (82%).

Trail Awareness and Activities

- The majority of trail users (74%) are aware of Bayfield Peninsula trails because they have a primary or secondary residence in the area, and 51% are aware of the trails through word of mouth from friends and family.
- The most popular activity trail users participate in at any location or on the Bayfield Peninsula trails is hiking or backpacking, with 90% of trail users participating in this activity at any location and 92% participating in it on Bayfield Peninsula trails. Walking/dog walking came in 2nd place (77% anywhere, 65% Bayfield Peninsula trails).

Trail Usage Patterns

- The majority of trail users (66%) visit the Bayfield Peninsula trails “weekly” (49%) or “monthly” (17%).
- About 72% of trail users said that the Bayfield Peninsula is the primary location where they go for trail-related activities.
- Distance/living too far away, as identified by 83% of respondents, is the most popular reason why the Bayfield Peninsula is not where trail users primarily go for trail-related activities.

- Connectivity between trails (55%), Less crowded trails (32%), and More convenient location (28%) are the top three factors likely to increase trail users' frequency of visiting Bayfield Peninsula trails each year.
- When asked which Bayfield Peninsula trail respondents visit most frequently, Big Ravine Network (20%) narrowly edged out Mt Ashwabay (19%) for the top spot.
- Hiking/backpacking and Walking/dog walking trails are the most desired trail types in the Bayfield Peninsula trail system, as 66% of trail users indicated they would like to see more Hiking or backpacking trails, and 43% indicated they would like to see more Walking/dog walking trails.

Trail Attributes, Characteristics, and Area Amenities

- Nearly half (49%) of trail users indicated that Bayfield Peninsula trails are better than other trails visited in Wisconsin, 40% stated they are better than other trails visited in the Midwest, and 33% indicated they are better than other trails visited in the rest of the U.S.
- Two-in-ten or more trail users indicated that Disruptions from logging in the area (29%) and Accessibility issues (20%) are “moderate problems” or “major problems” on the Bayfield Peninsula trails.
- The majority of trail users find the following trail characteristics to be “important” or “very important” to them: Quiet, natural surroundings (95%), No motorized vehicles (89%), Seeing wildlife and birds (86%), Points of interest (81%), Variety of trails (78%), and Lack of crowds (73%).
- Although the proportion that identified these amenities as “important” or “very important” is small, Cell service (28%), Hike-in/bike-in/ski-in camping/shelters (15%), and Hotels, motels, and B&Bs (13%) are the top three most important amenities to trail users when deciding which trails to visit.

Open-Ended Comments

- A total of 107 written responses were received and analyzed, and major themes include appreciation/thanks (40% of all comments), trail connectivity (12%), well-maintained and excellent trails (10%), additional trails (6%), improved signage (5%), extend existing trails (5%), infrastructure improvements (3%), and crowding concerns (3%).

PART III: PERSPECTIVES OF BAYFIELD PENINSULA COMMUNITY MEMBERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Bayfield Peninsula Community Survey was to understand how community members use the Bayfield Peninsula trails and the impact the trails have on the community. The SRC invited a random sample of 2,411 households in the community to complete the Bayfield Peninsula Community Survey through direct email. A total of 295 community members completed the survey.

Key findings of the study are as follows:

Overall Satisfaction

- Nearly eight-in-ten (78%) community members said they were “satisfied” (48%) or “very satisfied” (30%) with the Bayfield Peninsula trails.

Residential Status

- Most community members (95%) reside in the Bayfield Peninsula. In fact, 90% have a primary residence in the Bayfield Peninsula, 2% have a secondary residence, and 3% have both a primary and secondary residence.
- Nearly half of community members (48%) are long time-residents, reporting that they have resided in the Bayfield Peninsula for more than 20 years.
- The natural beauty of the area and Lake Superior were “moderately important” or “very important” in most community members’ (96%) decision to have their residence in the Bayfield Peninsula.

Trail Usage Patterns

- Of those who indicated they participate in trail-related activities, a large majority (92%) participate in them within the Bayfield Peninsula as opposed to outside of the Bayfield Peninsula (8%).
- A majority (59%) of community members said they visit the Bayfield Peninsula trails “weekly” (32%) or “monthly” (27%) in an average year.
- The top two most popular activities enjoyed by community members in an average year on the Bayfield Peninsula trails are Hiking/backpacking (73%) and Walking/dog walking (68%).

- When asked which Bayfield Peninsula trail community members' visit most frequently, Mt Ashwabay was the most popular (18%) followed by Washburn (14%), Houghton Falls (11%), and Big Ravine Network (11%).
- Hiking/backpacking and Walking/dog walking trails are the most desired trail types in the Bayfield Peninsula Trail system, as 64% of community members indicated they would like to see more Hiking or backpacking trails, and 42% indicated they would like to see more Walking/dog walking trails.

Trail Characteristics, Issues, Facilities, and Amenities

- The majority of community members agree that the trails and trail-related activities have a positive effect on them as individuals and on the community at large. Most agree that the trails Enhance their quality of life (82%), are Part of the community's culture (76%), and are Utilized regularly by themselves (74%) and others in the community (78%).
- According to community members, the top issues/amenities that need improvement at the Bayfield Peninsula trails are Information on the naturally significant features of the trails (35%), Connectivity between trails (34%), Restrooms (30%), and Maintenance and/or cleanup (30%).
- The most desired new facilities/amenities on the Bayfield Peninsula trails are Community gathering spaces (43%), Camping (34%), Restaurants/cafes (28%), and ADA accessibility (26%).

Open-Ended Comments

- A total of 128 written responses were received and analyzed, and major themes include appreciation/thanks (37% of all comments), additional trails (9%), trail connectivity (9%), preserve and protect nature (8%), trail maintenance (6%), ATVs/UTVs and snowmobiles (6%), infrastructure improvements (6%), and trail maps/signage (4%).



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