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## We Asked for Your Opinions, and You Gave Them

### *Report on our member & community survey*

*(An abbreviated version of this report appears in the July/August 2011 issue of Trail Walker.)*

By Michael Brickman

In an effort to better serve our members we recently completed a survey. Thank you to everyone who participated. The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference thrives because of our active membership and your responses to the survey will help us improve our services to you.

Here are the highlights of the survey.

***We received more than 1300 responses to the survey of which more than 1000 were members.***

### **Member Involvement**

We surveyed members about their involvement in the Trail Conference. Among the key findings:

- More than 80% of member respondents use our website to lookup hikes and information! If you are not using the site, there are some amazing features such as the hike finder, a calendar of hikes and events, and of course the official Trail Conference online store. Check us out now at [nynjtc.org](http://nynjtc.org)

Other top ways members participate are:

- Nearly 25% participate in maintaining a trail.
- About one-third of members said they love the shopping discounts at our retail partners.
- Less than 10% participate in member events, which indicates an opportunity for us to grow member involvement.
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### **Member Communications**

We are pleased to report that 90% of members rated our communications excellent. We were thrilled with this finding and will continue working hard to improve our dialogue with members.

With regard to specific member publications, we found:

- The *Trail Walker* print newsletter is our most popular form of member communication with more than 60% of members reading it often.
- The eWalker email newsletter is also a popular form of member communication, with more than 50% of survey respondents indicating that they read it often.
- The Website is also popular, with nearly 70% of members surveyed indicating they use it somewhat or often.

With all the hype of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, we were interested to find that fewer than 10% of members say they rely on social media channels for information from the Trail Conference.

Trail leaders were an important source of communication as well, with nearly one in five members relying on communication from trail leaders and fellow members. This may be an area where we can build more effective communication in the future.

### **Trail Conference Maps and Books**

We were thrilled to find out that 97% of members surveyed indicated they owned a Trail Conference map or book! This tells us we are doing a good job of providing the information our

members want. And we continue to offer new and improved map sets, such as the new Jersey Highlands set just released last month.

### **Member Satisfaction**

98.5% of members surveyed would recommend the NY-NJ Trail Conference to a friend. This is a great response from our members and is a strong indicator of satisfaction. We only exist if we have members, so take action and tell a trail-loving friend about the Trail Conference today.

### **Trail Conference Events**

Building a great community of hikers is one of our missions, so we asked members, What would attract you to a Trail Conference event?

Not surprisingly, more than half responded Hikes (53%). We also learned that many members are interested in information on trail issues (43%), workshops and discussions on trail-related issues (46%), and guest speakers (38%)

### **Trail Conference Strengths and Areas for Improvement**

Our survey asked members what they thought were strengths and what were areas for improvement.

#### **Trail Conference Strengths**

- Advocacy for Trails
- Member Communications
- Trail Building and Maintenance
- Maps
- Volunteers
- Local Knowledge
- Commitment to the Mission of Connecting People to Nature

#### **The Voice of Our Members - What Are Strengths of the Trail Conference**

- "The 'value' of joining; the 'bang for the buck' of membership; excellent oversight of trails and advocacy on trail issues; the *Trail Walker*; TC books and maps (especially the latter)"
- "Comprehensive trail maintenance and trail building in our area. Providing the best hiking maps I have ever seen anywhere!"
- "Trail maintenance is top notch. Keeping people informed."
- "Greatest strengths are its mission, the dedication and talents of its staff and volunteers, and its coordination of large numbers of like groups and individuals. Keep up the terrific work."
- "Its effectiveness in getting people together to protect and maintain trails, fighting the 'good fight' for open space; hiking information in form of maps and books (and updates); organized hikes; discounts are very nice too."
- "Advocacy, thoughtful stewardship, map and guide publication. Most significant, however, is as community for hikers."

#### **What Are Areas for Improvement?**

When we asked members what they thought were areas for improvement we received some great feedback.

- Many members suggested we do more outreach to volunteers and improve the communication to those who are building and maintaining trails.
- Members also suggested we improve communication and outreach to involve more members.

- Members also are looking for maps in different digital formats

#### **Members Voice - How Can We Improve the Trail Conference?**

- "Awareness. I don't think very many people are aware of the Trail conference outside of the hiking community."
- "Would like to be able to buy maps in digital form to load on a GPS."
- "Catching up with technology. In particular, I wish there were more products that would allow better pre-hike planning utilizing GPS and computer."
- "An aging population needs moderate hikes that loop. There are several I take that require a bit of bush-whacking. More connecting trails needed between longer trails so more loops."
- "Greatly appreciate the efforts of trail maintainers, but don't like the attitude on the part of some that the trails must be made 'easy' to be accessible 'to all'--we're not all the same, yes we need gentle nice trails, but we need to keep a lot of rugged ones too, the forests and mountains must challenge us, not just be a 'walk in a town-like park.' "
- "Approachability, opportunity for casual volunteers who get to feel like they contributed, had fun, might get hooked to do more?"
- "Creating involvement, recruitment of new members"
- "Find ways to make more people aware of the Conference and its purposes."

There were hundreds of comments just like this and it's great to hear the voices of our members. We will be integrating this feedback into our strategic planning process. Thank You!

#### **What Are Your Favorite Hikes?**

We asked members to share some of their favorite hikes. Some of the most popular destinations are listed below in alphabetical order. Check out the Trail Conference website for more information about hikes in these parks. Member tested and approved!

Bear Mountain  
Bearfort Ridge  
Breakneck Ridge  
Delaware Water Gap  
Devils' Path (Catskills)  
Gertrude's Nose (Minnewaska)  
Gunks (Shawangunks)  
Harriman  
High Point (NJ)  
Hudson Highlands  
Long Path  
Minnewaska  
Mohonk Preserve  
Schunemunk  
Storm King Mountain  
Torne Trail

Thanks to everyone who took the time to complete the survey.

*Michael Brickman is a Trail Conference member and professional marketing consultant who is volunteering his professional services to support the Trail Conference.*