

THE EFFECTS OF THE ROCK ISLAND TRAIL
ON
RURAL ADJACENT LANDOWNERS

An Abstract of
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Abstract

Abandoned railroad right-of-ways are regarded by many as an ideal source for recreational trails. However, proposals for conversion of abandoned right-of-ways to trails are often met with strong local opposition. Resistance to construction of the Rock Island Trail was so strong that it is considered to have been one of the most difficult rail to trail conversions in the country.

Studies have been conducted nationwide to determine how adjacent landowner feelings towards a trail change over time. Many studies have also attempted to determine if a trail has caused an increase in crime, vandalism, or decreases in property values. Few studies have been undertaken which attempt to identify what adjacent landowners feelings are toward the day-to-day problems of the trail.

The purpose of this study was to determine the most common trail-related problems experienced by adjacent landowners since completion of the Rock Island Trail. Prior to implementation of the trail, landowner concerns fell into three broad categories: 1) The ability of the Illinois Department of Conservation to properly manage the trail, 2) Concerns related to trail users, and 3) Perceptions related to the physical trail itself.

A questionnaire was designed to provide a measure of identification as to which category of problem (management, trail, user) was of greatest concern to adjacent landowners.

There were few demographic differences among the respondents. The majority of respondents owned the land in question and had farmed it for a number of years. These individuals were also married, over 45 years of age, and had older children.

This study has shown that of the three identified categories of potential problems, trail management by the Illinois Department of Conservation was considered to be of greatest concern among adjacent landowners. Landowners expressed major dissatisfaction with the maintenance of overhanging trees along the right-of-way as well as with the upkeep of fencing.

Issues which relate to the physical presence of the trail itself were the second greatest cause of concern for adjacent landowners. Within this category, landowners expressed greatest dissatisfaction with drainage problems caused by the trail.

Adjacent rural landowners to the trail show little apprehension towards trail users, and rated this category as that of least concern. One exception was a feeling that those bicyclists who leave the right of way and use local roads are a source of traffic hazards.

Forty percent of individuals initially opposed to the trail have an improved opinion of the trail since its completion. Yet, there are still a number of individuals who feel the methods used in trail acquisition were wrong and these individuals still harbor strong negative feelings

towards the trail. This becomes apparent through examination of the large number of comments which were returned with the questionnaire.