

Testimony Related to House Bill HB311

Committee to Study Rail Trail Best Management Practices

February 14, 2022



New Hampshire Rail Trails Coalition

An affiliate of the Bike-Walk Alliance of NH

2 Whitney Road, Suite 11

Concord, NH 03301-1844

www.nhrtc.org

Our mission is to promote the development, maintenance, and active recreational use of trails constructed on New Hampshire's railroad corridors

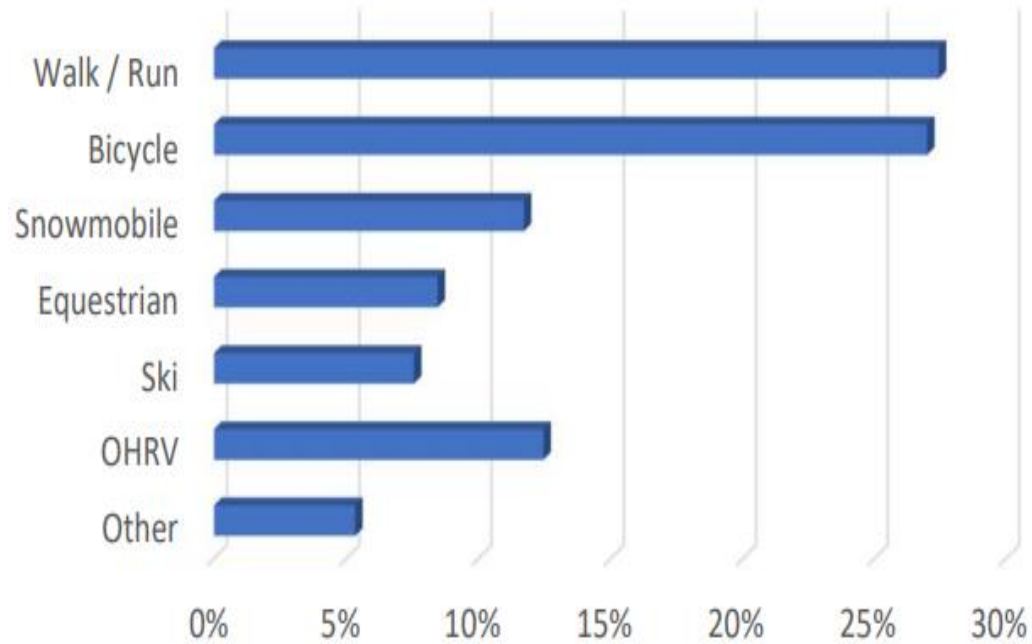
This presentation and our written testimony support the following conclusions:

- Design, construction, and maintenance practices exist across the country and can be adapted to New Hampshire's needs
- Most (75%) rail trail users prefer low-impact, non-motorized recreation
- Fugitive dust is harmful but can be prevented by limiting incompatible trail use
- Contamination along rail corridors is inconsequential for non-motorized recreation
- Economic benefits from diverse active recreation are substantial

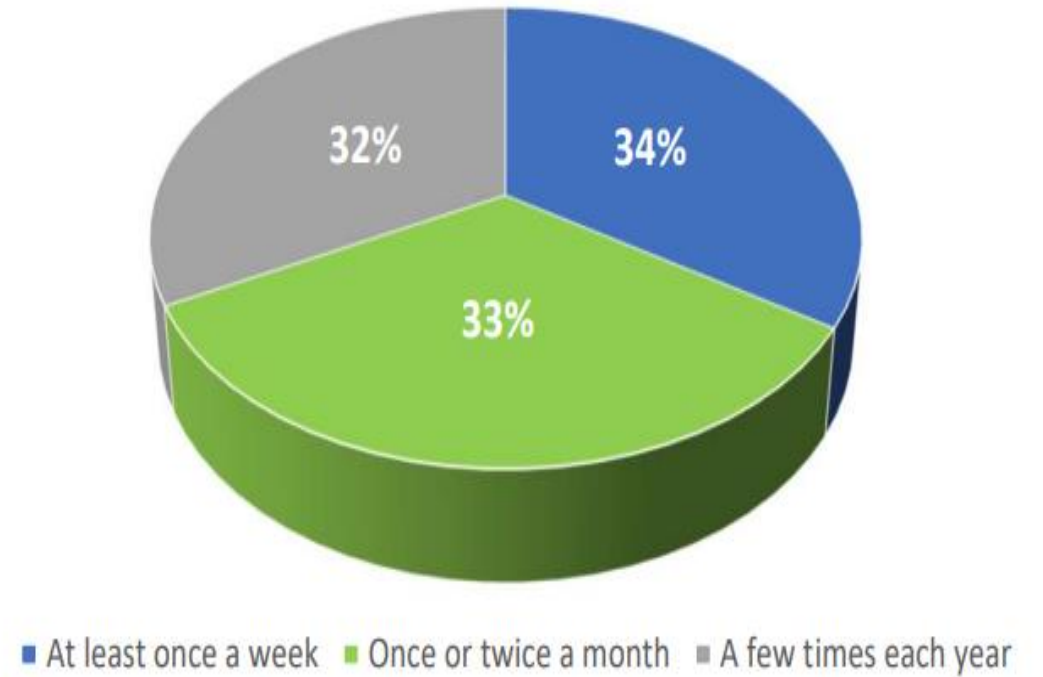


We advocate for thousands of NH residents and visitors that enjoy non-motorized use of New Hampshire's 300+ miles of rail trails to recreate and enjoy Nature

How do you typically use NH rail trails?



How frequently do you use New Hampshire's rail trails?



Rail Trails are Peaceful

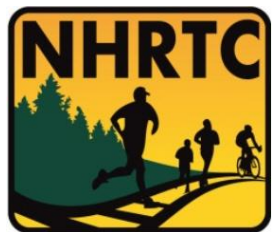


Goffstown Rail Trail



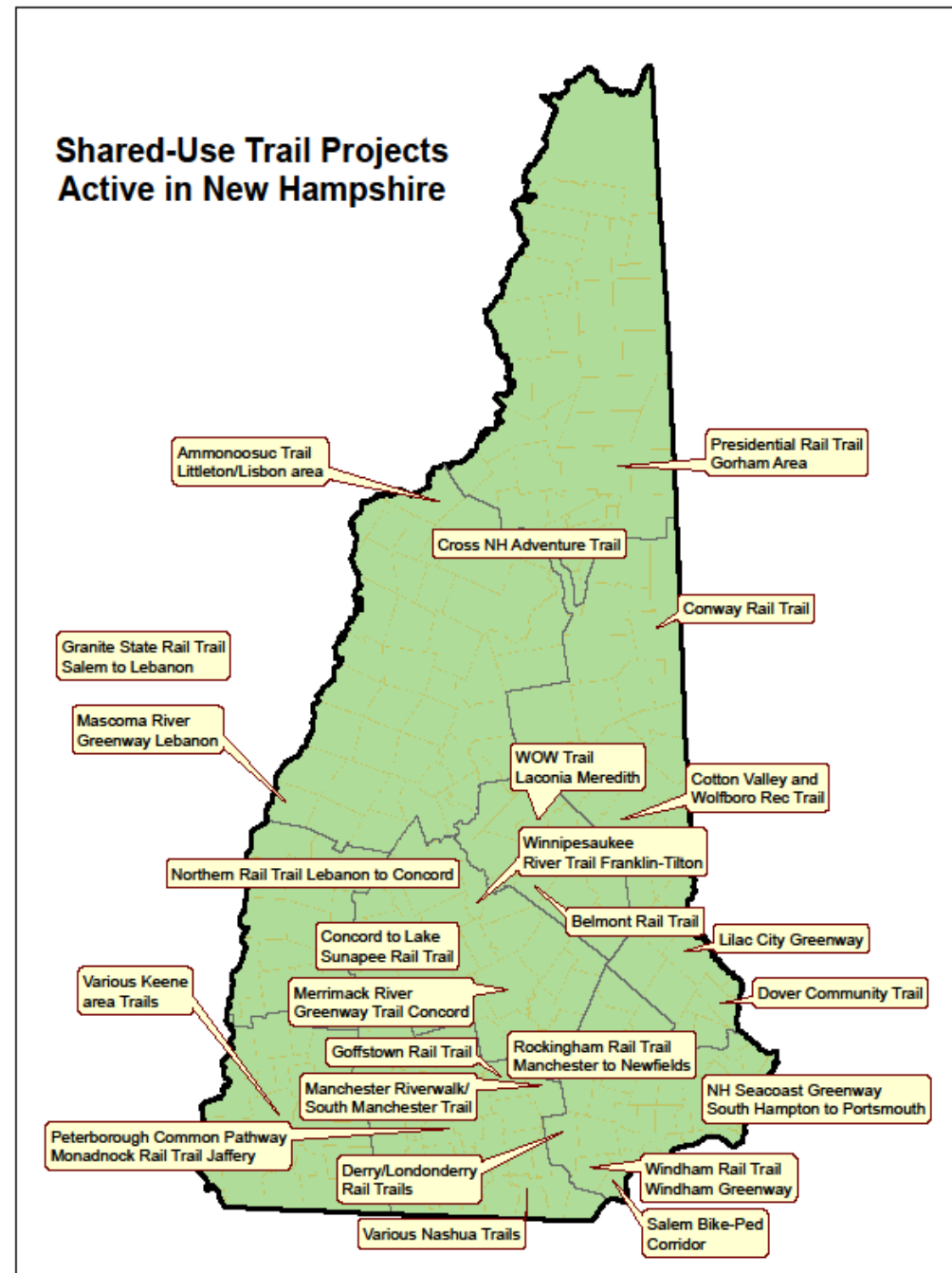
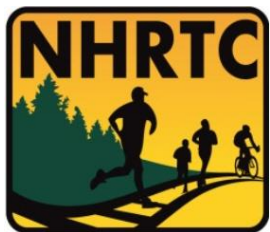
Ashuelot Rail Trail

Rail Trails are Safe



BMPs for Repurposing Former Rail Beds into Rail Trails

- Tens of thousands of miles of rail beds have been transformed into wildly popular and safe recreational corridors
- Millions of people annually enjoy active recreation (walking, biking, skiing)
- Practical and well-established BMPs can be easily adapted for the Granite State

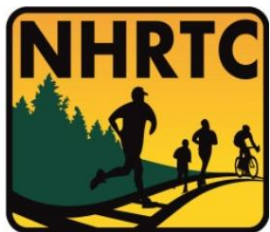


BMPs for Repurposing Former Rail Beds into Rail Trails

- Existing trail BMPs:
 - NHRTC [Stone Dust application BMPs](#)
 - NHDOT (design information from NH rail-trail projects)
 - NHDES (trails and wetlands)
 - Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (acquisition, design construction, maintenance)



Stonedust (Hardpack) surface



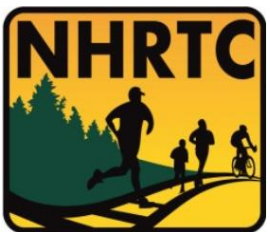
Established construction BMPs:

- Land clearing
- Excavation and filling
- Soil grading and compaction
- Drainage (ditching, culverts, and bridges)
- Fencing
- Stream and wetland crossing
- Parking
- Signage



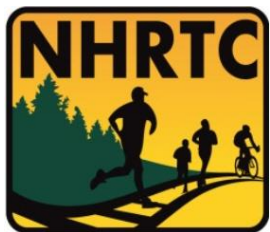


Repair and construction on Presidential Rail Trail



BMPs for Maintaining Rail Trails

- Prevent erosion, disturbance, or destruction of trail surface
- Limit incompatible use
- Prevent exposure to fugitive dust and underlying materials
- Invest in trail maintenance





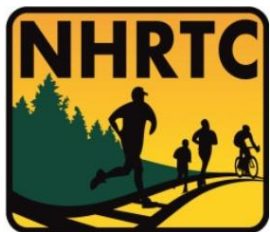
Abandoned rail beds are not regulated by NHDES or NHDOT. Ties, ballast and soil may be relocated within the right-of-way without concern



Advice and Testimony (HB311 Section 4 (III))

(a) residual contamination from railroad operations

- Rail corridor materials considered “background” and not regulated by NHDES Waste Management Division
- Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection similar to NHDES
- The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy lists 24,000 miles of rail-trails, decades of use, and millions of annual users with no impacts from residual contamination
- The NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT) owns over 300 miles of active recreational rail trails. No incidents of contamination have been reported

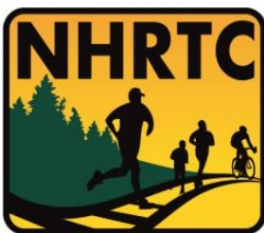


Residual Contamination is not a concern for non-motorized use

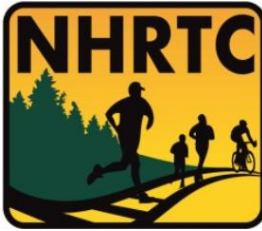
Advice and Testimony (Section 4 (III))

(f) Fugitive Dust and (g) Impact on Vegetation

- Fugitive dust causes transient and permanent health risks
- Visible dust can cause Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease and irritate eyes, nose, and throat
- Short-term exposure to fine dust can trigger asthma, worsen existing breathing difficulties, and trigger heart attacks
- Dust most dangerous for children, elderly and others with underlying conditions – and most attracted to gently-graded rail trails
- Visible dust damages plants by inhibiting photosynthesis



Trail use should not generate visible dust



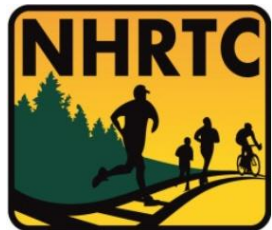
Health and Environmental Impact of Particulate Matter - Overview Fugitive Dust Workshop



Jeffrey Underhill, Ph.D.

NHDES

March 15, 2018



Health Impacts

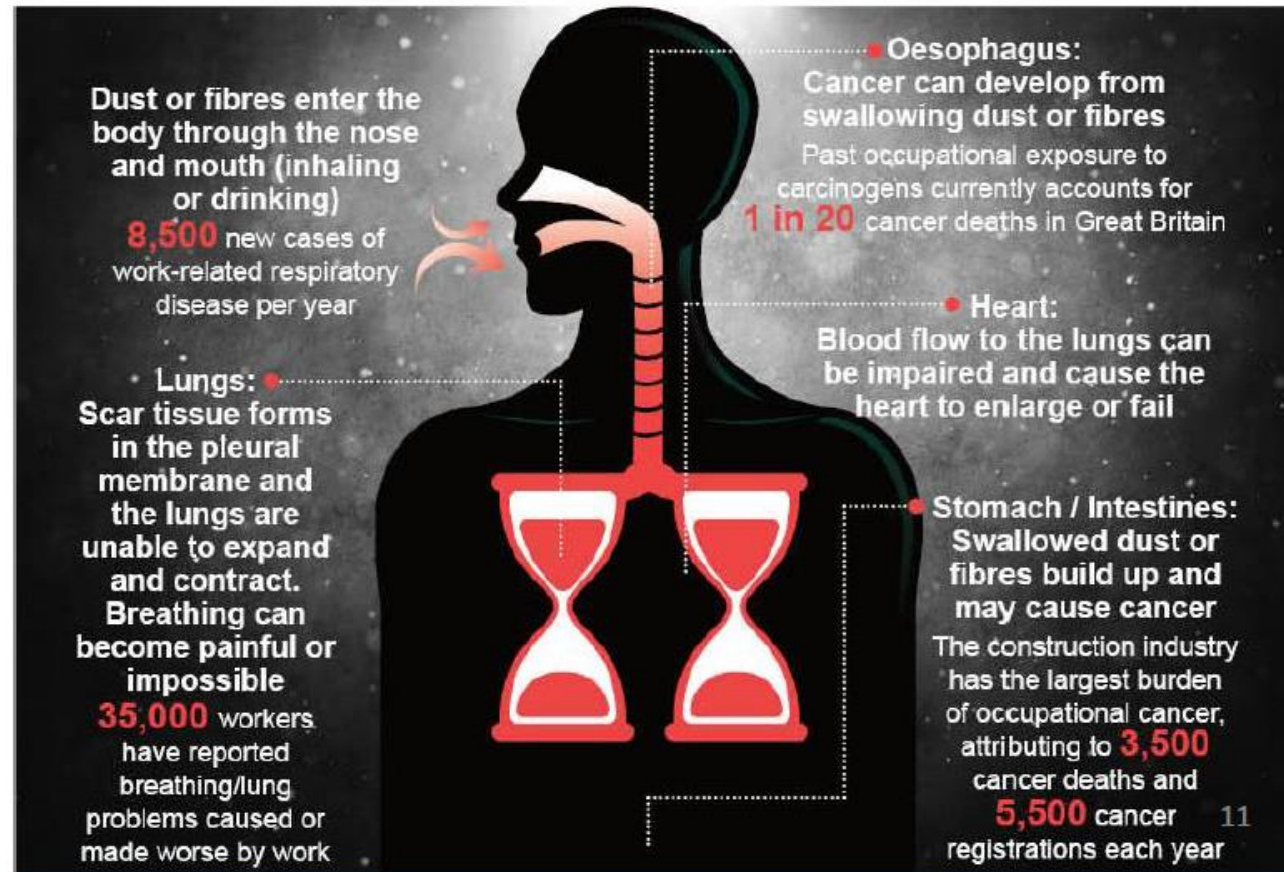
- Respiratory disease
- Scar tissue development limits free breathing
- Blood flow to heart compromised
- Swallowing dust can lead to cancer of esophagus, stomach or intestines.



Construction Dust: **THE SILENT KILLER**

***23 NEW CASES OF WORK RELATED
RESPIRATORY DISEASE DIAGNOSED EVERY DAY**

Protect yourself before it's too late



NHDES,
March 2018

Wearing a Mask Protects Me

- True, it protects you, but often only to a degree.
 - Useful life of filter may get exceeded.
 - Sometimes doesn't filter out the smallest particles.

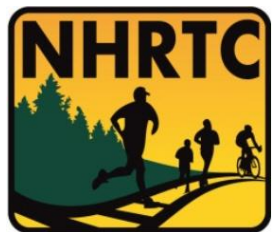


- But not everybody is wearing a mask.



Environmental Effects

- A layer of dust on the leaves of plants will block sunlight and reduce the plant's ability to photosynthesize.
- In order to protect the health of plants near dirt roads, construction sites and areas of loose dirt, plant leaves should be cleaned if coated.



Advice and Testimony (Section 4 (III))

(h) Impact on Abutters and (i) Motorized Vehicle Impact

- Incompatible trail use poses greatest threat
- Shared motorized and non-motorized use is incompatible:
 - Relative speeds increase chances of harm from collisions
 - Dust generated by motorized use is unhealthy, decreases visibility, reduces views
 - Noise from motorized uses detracts from the outdoor experience of non-motorized users



A lawsuit by Gorham, NH citizens details adverse impacts of motorized vehicles on abutters

Compatibility Ratings from the [“Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan” \(2005-2010\)](#)

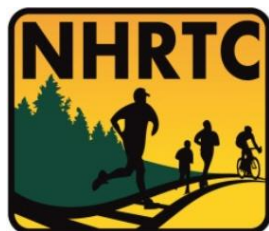
Table 4-2: Average Land-Based Recreation Activity Compatibility Ratings ^{a b}

PRIMARY USE:	INTERACTS:										Average Compatibility
	ATV Riding	Hunting	Snow-mobiling	Horseback Riding	Mountain Biking	Cross-Country Skiing	Linear Trail Biking	Hiking	Wildlife Watching	Camping	
ATV Riding	X	5.3	6.5	5.1	5.5	4.9	5.5	6.1	6.9	7.5	6.0
Hunting	3.3	X	3.7	4.7	4.3	5.3	5.7	5.4	6.0	6.3	5.0
Snowmobiling	4.3	4.0	X	4.0	4.8	4.3	5.8	5.3	6.3	7.2	5.1
Horseback Riding	2.2	3.5	3.0	X	3.8	4.9	4.5	6.3	7.3	7.7	4.8
Mountain Biking	3.1	3.6	4.7	4.8	X	5.7	8.1	6.1	7.4	8.0	5.7
Cross-Country Skiing	1.8	3.6	2.6	3.3	4.2	X	5.6	4.9	8.1	8.5	4.7
Linear Trail Biking	2.6	3.9	5.5	5.3	8.2	7.1	X	7.4	8.0	8.7	6.3
Hiking	2.4	3.5	3.5	5.7	4.7	6.1	6.5	X	8.9	9.2	5.6
Wildlife Watching	2.2	3.2	2.9	6.4	5.2	7.6	6.8	8.6	X	8.3	5.7
Camping	3.9	4.1	5.0	7.5	7.8	8.2	8.2	8.9	8.5	X	6.9
Average Compatibility	2.9	3.3	4.2	5.2	5.4	6	6.3	6.6	7.5	7.9	

a. Compatibility ratings are for how column activity interacts with the row activity. Ratings should therefore be read horizontally across rows.

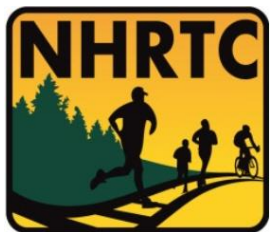
b. Ratings below 4.0 (highly competitive or antagonistic) are highlighted in red, ratings between 4.0 and below 7.0 are highlighted in yellow (moderately to mildly competitive), and ratings 7.0 (supplementary or complementary) and above are highlighted in green. Results are based on responses from 23 Wisconsin recreation professionals.

Ratings <4 = “highly competitive or antagonistic”



Key Points

- Rail trail design, construction, and maintenance practices are well established and can be adapted to NH (Utilize NHDOT's Rail Trail Strategic Plan and HB1188 commission)
- Non-motorized use of rail trails is three times greater than motorized use
- Exposure to dust is harmful, especially to children, elderly, and people with underlying health conditions
- Fugitive dust can be prevented by limiting motorized use
- Non-motorized, low-impact rail trail recreation is valued at \$10.6 billion to \$21.5 billion annually. Values increase from \$34 billion to \$139 billion when health, fuel savings, and CO2 reduction included ([RTC, 2019](#))
- NH can develop a world-class recreational trail network.



NHRTC would be pleased to help the Committee develop BMPs!

Thank You for this Opportunity

Questions?



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New Boston Rail Trail



Presidential Rail Trail



Northern Rail Trail



Mason Rail Trail

