

# MEDIA RELEASE

*For Immediate Release*



## **CANADIANS' TRAIL USE UP SIGNIFICANTLY DURING COVID-19: NATIONAL SURVEY FINDS PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS, ACCESS TO NATURE BEHIND SURGE IN POPULARITY**

### **TREND SET TO CONTINUE DURING UPCOMING WINTER SEASON**

**Montreal, November 26, 2020** – Canadians are using trails across Canada in greater numbers since the onset of COVID-19 with usage up close to 50 per cent across all age groups according to a recent national Léger survey commissioned by Trans Canada Trail (TCT). The Montreal-based TCT is the steward of the 27,000 km Great Trail of Canada, the longest recreational trail in the world.

When asked to compare their trail use to summer/fall 2019, 76 per cent of Canadians said they are using trails as much or more than before with 44 per cent confirming that they have increased their usage.

Among Canadians 18-24 and 25-34, usage has increased by 55 and 52 per cent respectively. Among Canadians aged 55-64 and over 65, usage has increased by 39 and 35 per cent respectively, with a higher percentage of these Canadians indicating that their trail usage had remained constant at 38 and 42 per cent respectively.

“This confirmation of increased use mirrors what we have seen on our network, and what our trail partners and operators have told us: trail use is up across the country as Canadians seek refuge from social isolation and a haven that connects them to nature. The data also underscores the fact that Canadians, especially now, value their access to trails and see them as a way to enhance their physical and mental health,” said Eleanor McMahon, President & CEO of Trans Canada Trail.

In terms of how and why Canadians are using trails during this pandemic period, TCT asked Canadians about whether enhancing their mental health motivated their decision to use trails, and 95 per cent confirmed that this is the case. Amongst Canadians 18-24 this number jumps to 100 per cent, with 97 per cent of those over 65 indicating that their mental health and well-being is what prompts their use of trails.

When it comes to using trails for physical exercise and fitness, 95 per cent of Canadians cited this as motivating their trail use, with 88 per cent of Canadians aged 18-24 agreeing that this is the case, and 98 per cent of Canadians 65 and over citing this as their motivation. Access to nature also dominated as a reason why Canadians use trails with 99 per cent of Canadians agreeing that the opportunity to be outdoors led them to use trails.

“This data underscores the fact that trails make important contributions to our social well-being as well as to our physical and mental health. Together with the data on increased trail use, it is clear that trails have become a lifeline for Canadians during COVID-19, providing them with vital connections to nature, and to one another,” McMahon noted.

“The survey results also confirmed that Canadians’ trail use is poised to continue - despite the arrival of winter -- with 69 per cent intending to use trails this winter. While winter trail use is higher amongst younger Canadians, 64 per cent of those aged 65 and older indicated that they intend to keep using trails,” McMahon said.

“This is a very positive sign, given concerns about increased social isolation as winter approaches. It also makes the case for why trails should remain open, particularly with access to gyms, community and recreation centres limited across Canada. Indeed, it prompted the recent launch of our Winter Trails

program, with TCT providing funding to trails groups for initiatives that will ensure safe trail use during winter,” McMahon noted.

The survey also found that Canadians strongly agree that trails are an important source of community recreation (91 per cent), and contribute to the economic development of our communities (76 per cent) and to building our tourism economy (77 per cent). When it comes to investing in the development of trails and in maintaining them, 89 per cent of Canadians agree that the government has an important role to play.

Additional Léger survey data on trails in Canada:

- Winter trail use and COVID-19: All (69 per cent), 18-24yrs (84 per cent), 25-34yrs (82 per cent), 65 years and older (64 per cent)
- Winter vacation plans: 78 per cent of Canadians who have 2021 winter vacation plans are considering including the usage of trails in their winter vacation plans
- Trails are important in the maintenance of my physical health: 90 per cent confirmed that trails are somewhat important, or very important with 95 per cent of Canadians aged 18-24 and 91 per cent of Canadians 55 and over, responding affirmatively.
- When asked if trails are important in terms of the maintenance of their overall mental health, 88 per cent of Canadians affirmed their importance with 92 per cent of Canadians 25-34 and 88 per cent of Canadians 65 years old and above agreeing this is important.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadians have been looking for ways to stay active and connected to friends, family and neighbours while respecting the physical distancing requirements recommended by public health officials,” McMahon noted. “For many, local trails have become the answer to their search. The ability to access free recreation areas close to home has made a tangible difference in the way they have been able to cope with the massive lifestyle changes that have been required as we fight this global pandemic together.”

“While public health guidance has been that outdoor activities, such as being on a trail, have a lower risk profile (given ventilation and enhanced ability to physically distance) we would remind Canadians to follow all local public health guidelines and protocols,” McMahon added.

#### *SURVEY METHODOLOGY*

A Web survey was conducted with a representative sample of 1,500 Canadians. Respondents were randomly selected from Léger’s Web panel. French and English speaking Canadians, 18 years of age and older. No margin of error can be associated with a non-probability sample (Web panel in this case). However, for comparative purposes, a probability sample of 1,500 respondents would have a margin of error of  $\pm 2.5$  19 times out of 20.

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#### **About The Great Trail of Canada**

Stretching for more than 27,000 kilometres and profiling Canada’s diverse landscapes and cultures, The Great Trail of Canada is the world’s longest network of recreational multi-use trails. With the valued support of our partners, donors, volunteers and all levels of government, The Great Trail links over 15,000 rural, urban and Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast. [thegreattrail.ca](http://thegreattrail.ca)