



**Continental Divide Trail Coalition
Strategic Planning Survey Results**

Executive Summary

As part of the CDTC strategic planning process, CDTC staff and board created two surveys to measure sentiment among the trail community regarding the future of both the Continental Divide Trail itself and the Continental Divide Trail Coalition, as well as how CDTC can be in the best position to support the trail and its community. One survey was designed for representatives of CDT partner organizations, land management agencies, and trailside communities, while the other survey was designed for the general public. This report summarizes the results of the general population survey, which was conducted using the online tool Zoho Forms.

Analysis of the survey results was performed using Microsoft Excel and MATLAB to perform multi-level analysis of respondents' answers. This enabled us to analyze responses based on individual characteristics of respondents, such as whether or not they are a member of CDTC. For several questions, answers were grouped by the ways in which respondents reported recreating on the CDT. While this provided some interesting insights, it also provided some challenges in interpreting data accurately, due to the wide variance in user group sizes and the ability for respondents to put themselves in more than one user group. For all types of use other than hiking and backpacking, group sizes were less than 70 (10% of total responses), with most use types reported by fewer than 40 individuals. These small group sizes may give individual respondents outsize effect on the results for their reported activity type. Additionally, those who reported more than one use essentially received "extra votes" when data was broken out by activity.

Just over two-thirds of the respondents were male, and the vast majority identify as white. Age distribution of respondents was somewhat more even, with the average respondent indicating that they are between 50-65. 70% of the respondents have visited the CDT, with many reporting that they have accessed the CDT by multiple modes of recreation (hiking, mountain biking, hunting, etc.). By far the most common activities reported were hiking and backpacking. It is important to acknowledge that some activities had very few reported users in the survey population and may not be representative of their user groups or of CDT users as a whole. This is a signal that the CDTC should perform more targeted outreach to these other users if the goal is to be representative of all users and allowed use types on the trail.

Overall, respondents indicated strongly that the CDTC should keep the current direction established in the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan and implemented through CDTC's programmatic priorities of volunteer stewardship, corridor protection, education and outreach, Gateway Communities, and trail information services. Given that the survey's pool of respondents were already interested in the CDT (evidenced by being CDTC members or social media followers), it is not surprising that there was also very strong support for "conservation of the natural, historic, and cultural resources along the CDT corridor:"

A proposal in the survey to have CDTC represented along the trail by installing CDTC regional offices received strong support. Some caution was expressed for measured expansion to avoid overreaching capacity or losing effectiveness in the process. A majority of respondents also supported a proposal to create a diversity, equity, and inclusion plan to guide the CDTC's work moving forward.

Several survey questions focused on trail use, including non-primary uses (uses other than hiking and equestrian) along the trail. The responses were generally mixed and appear to be dependent on how the questions were presented. For example, 84% responded positively when asked whether the trail should be primarily for hiking and equestrian use. However, when asked about the importance of allowing for non-primary trail use and (separately) the importance of CDTC representation of non-primary use communities, the responses were mixed with a large proportion of neutral responses.

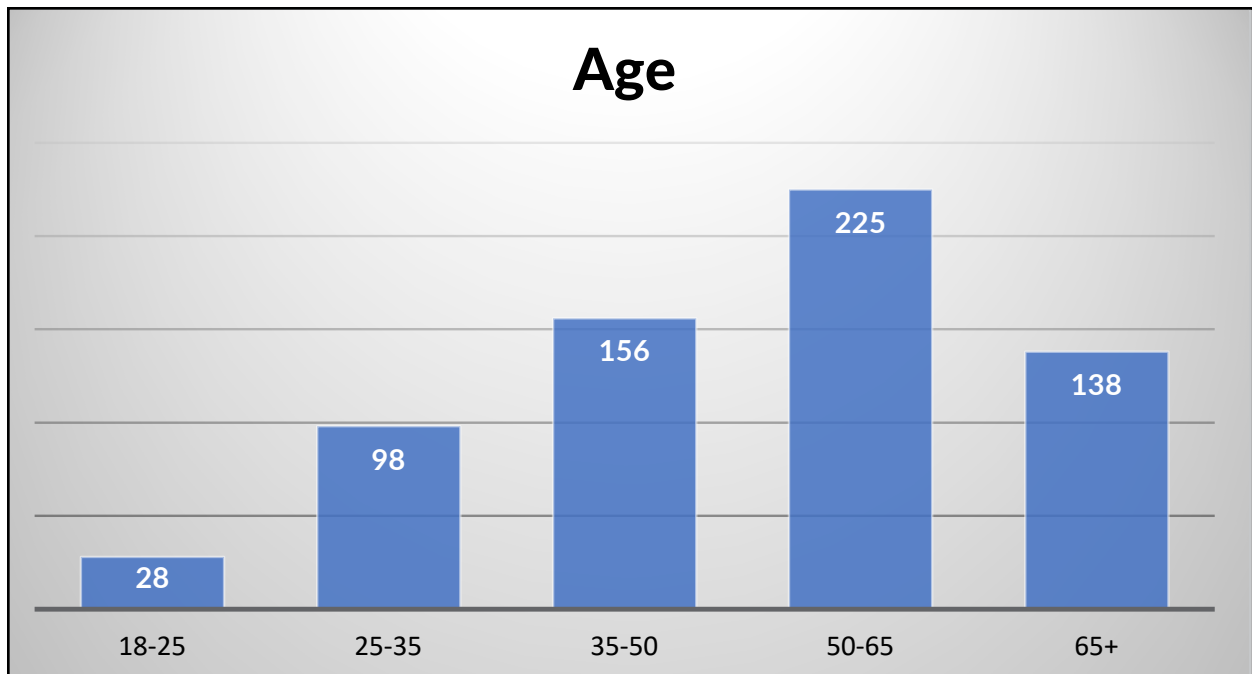
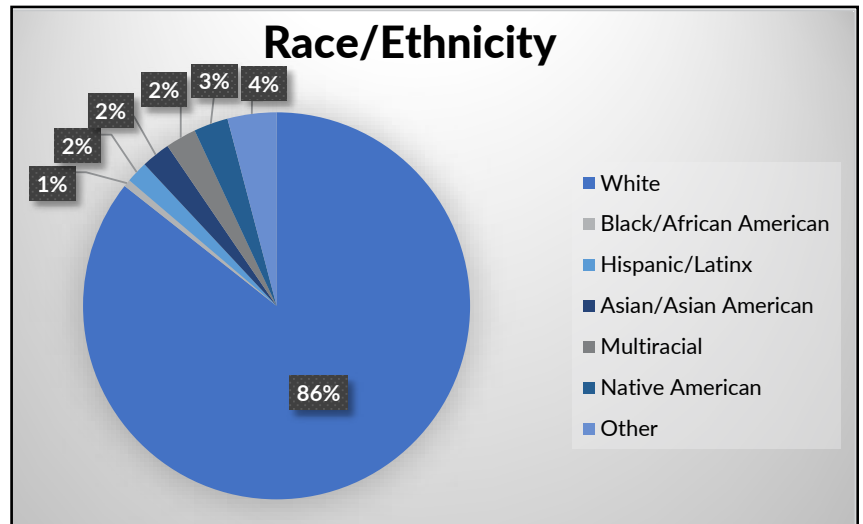
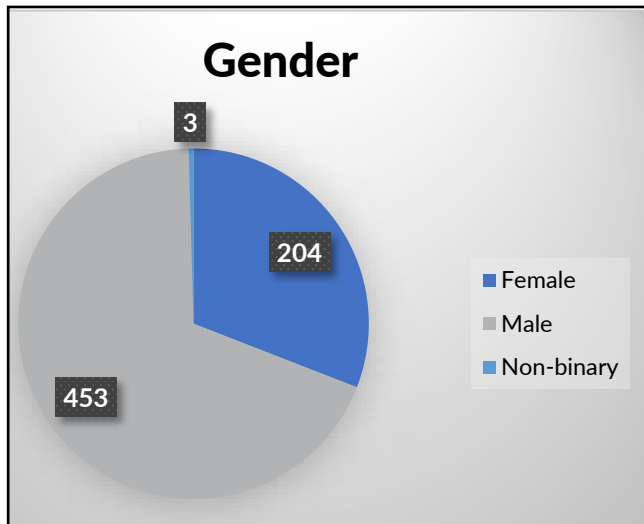
The reader is encouraged to delve into the details below, as there are additional interesting findings from the survey not summarized here.

Who Responded?

From June 14 to July 31, 2019, CDTC collected 711 responses to its strategic planning survey designed for stakeholders across the general public. The survey was primarily distributed via CDTC's email contact list (~9,000 subscribers) and CDTC's social media channels (17,000 Facebook followers and 15,000 Instagram followers). Individuals were encouraged to take the survey by being given the opportunity to enter a gear giveaway if choosing to provide their email address.

Of those who chose to self-identify, just over two-thirds of the respondents identified as male, and 86% of respondents identified as white.

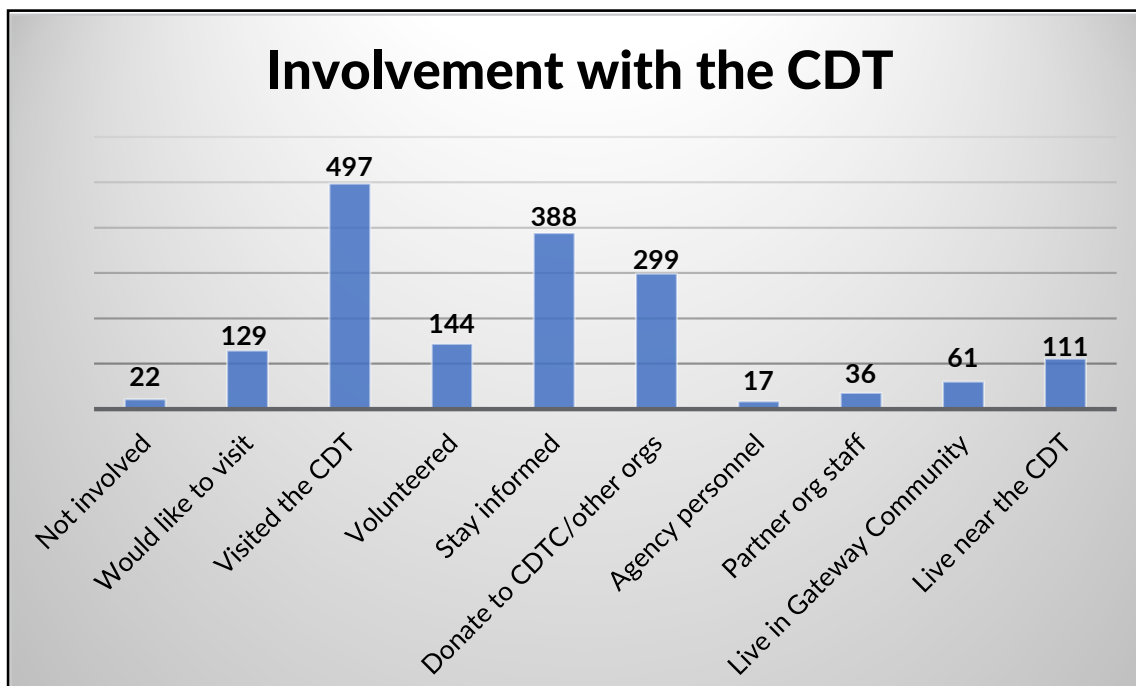
Age distribution across respondents was more balanced, with the majority (59%) of respondents between the ages of 35-65. The average respondent indicated that they are between 50-65 years old.



Who Responded?

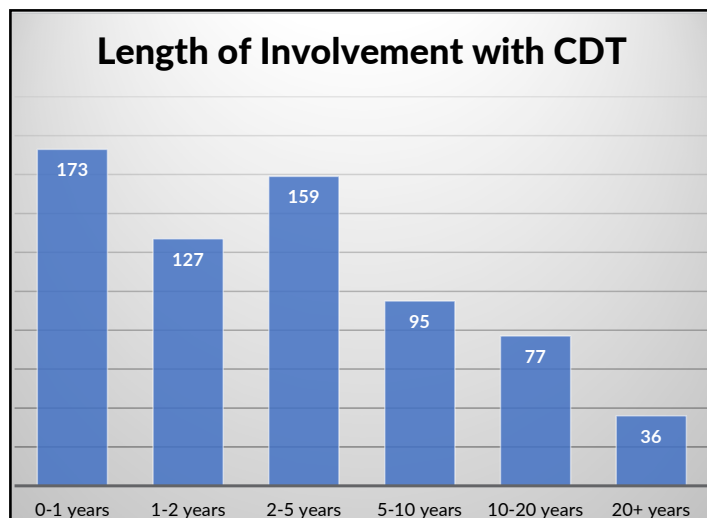
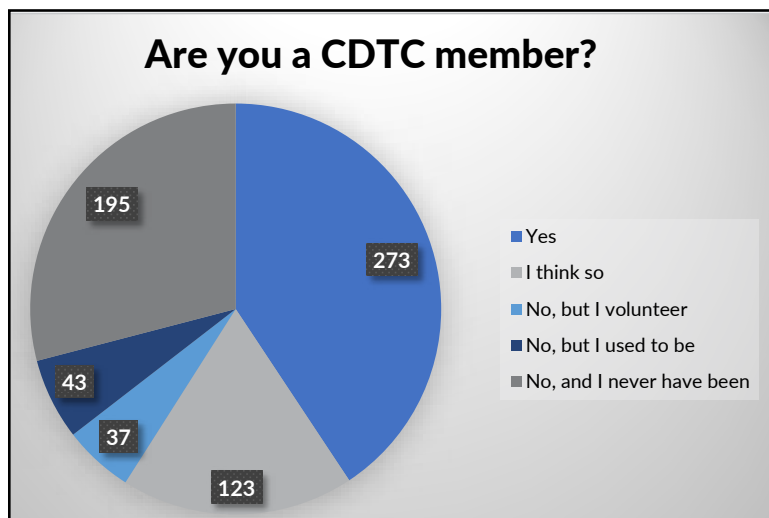
70% of respondents reported having visited the CDT, while another 18% said they would like to visit.* Almost half (42%) donate to CDTC or other organizations that protect the CDT, and 20% have volunteered on the trail.

One-quarter of respondents reported living near the trail. Of those who said they live near the CDT, just over one-third are residents of designated CDT Gateway Communities.



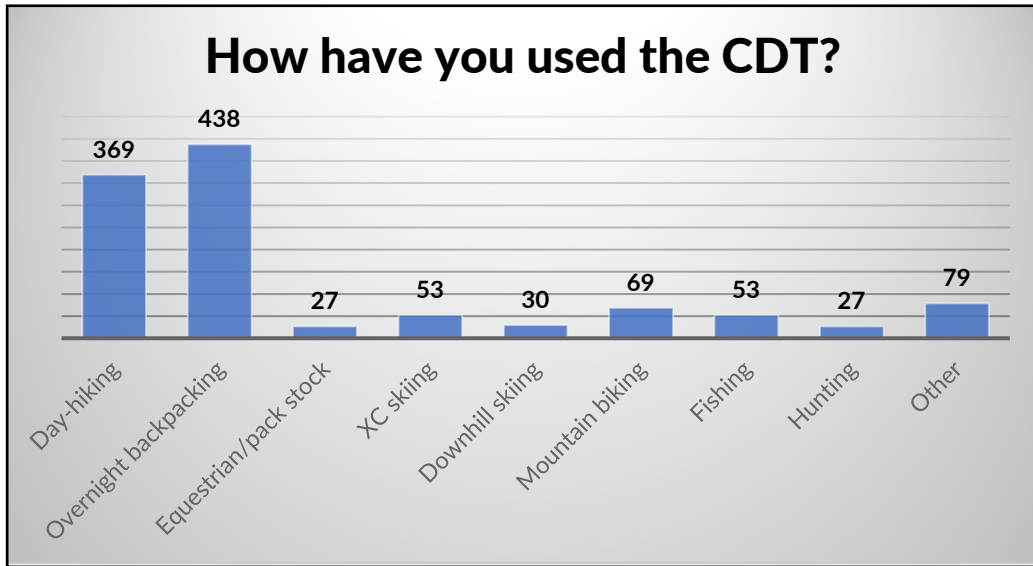
41% of respondents reported that they are currently members of CDTC, and another 18% think they are currently members but aren't certain. 29% have never been members.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents reported having been involved with the trail for less than five years; 24% of respondents have been involved with the trail for less than one year.

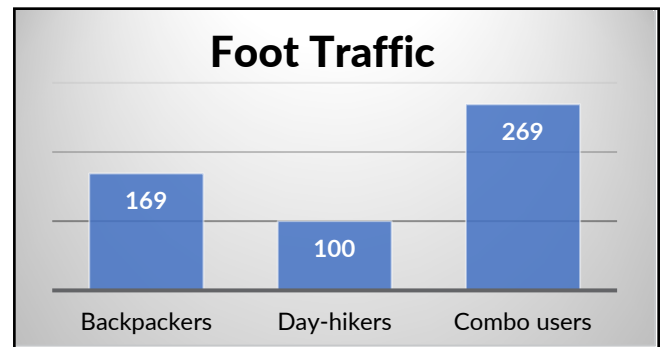


*NOTE: 497 respondents reported having visited the CDT when asked "How are you involved with the CDT?" Later in the survey, when asked "If you have visited the CDT, please check all the ways you have recreated on the trail," 576 respondents reported having recreated in at least one way on the CDT.

576 people reported recreating on the CDT, with the most common uses being overnight backpacking (438) and day-hiking (369), and mountain biking a distant third (69). 240 respondents have accessed the trail by one method, while three people reported that they have used seven different methods of recreation on the CDT!

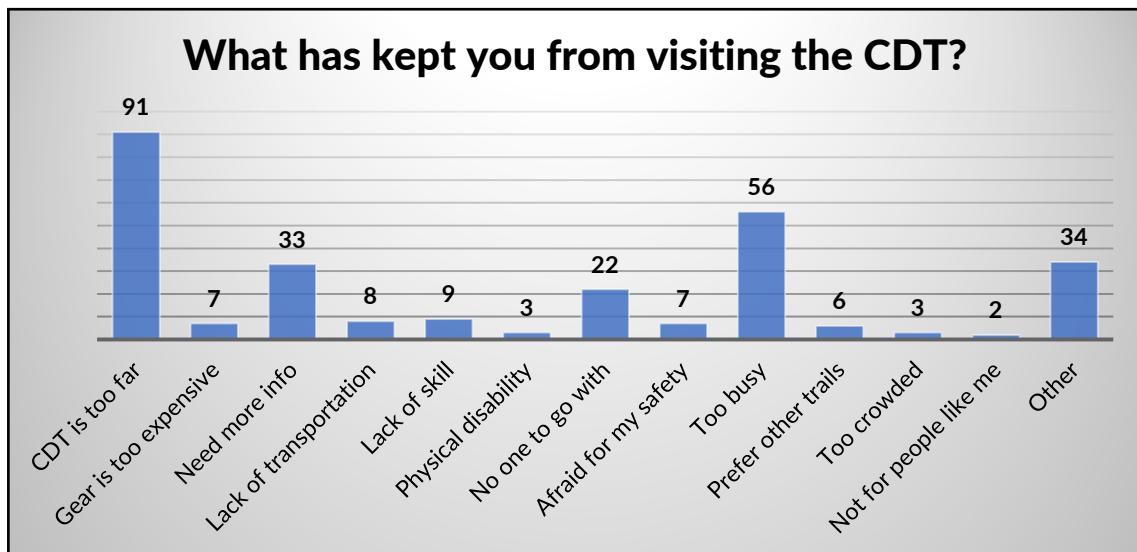


There was considerable overlap between the individuals who reported day-hiking and overnight backpacking. Exactly half (269) of “on foot” users have accessed the CDT by both day-hiking and backpacking, while another 269 have only used one of those methods to recreate on the CDT.



Overall, 93% (538) of respondents who reported recreating on the CDT have done so by day-hiking and/or backpacking.

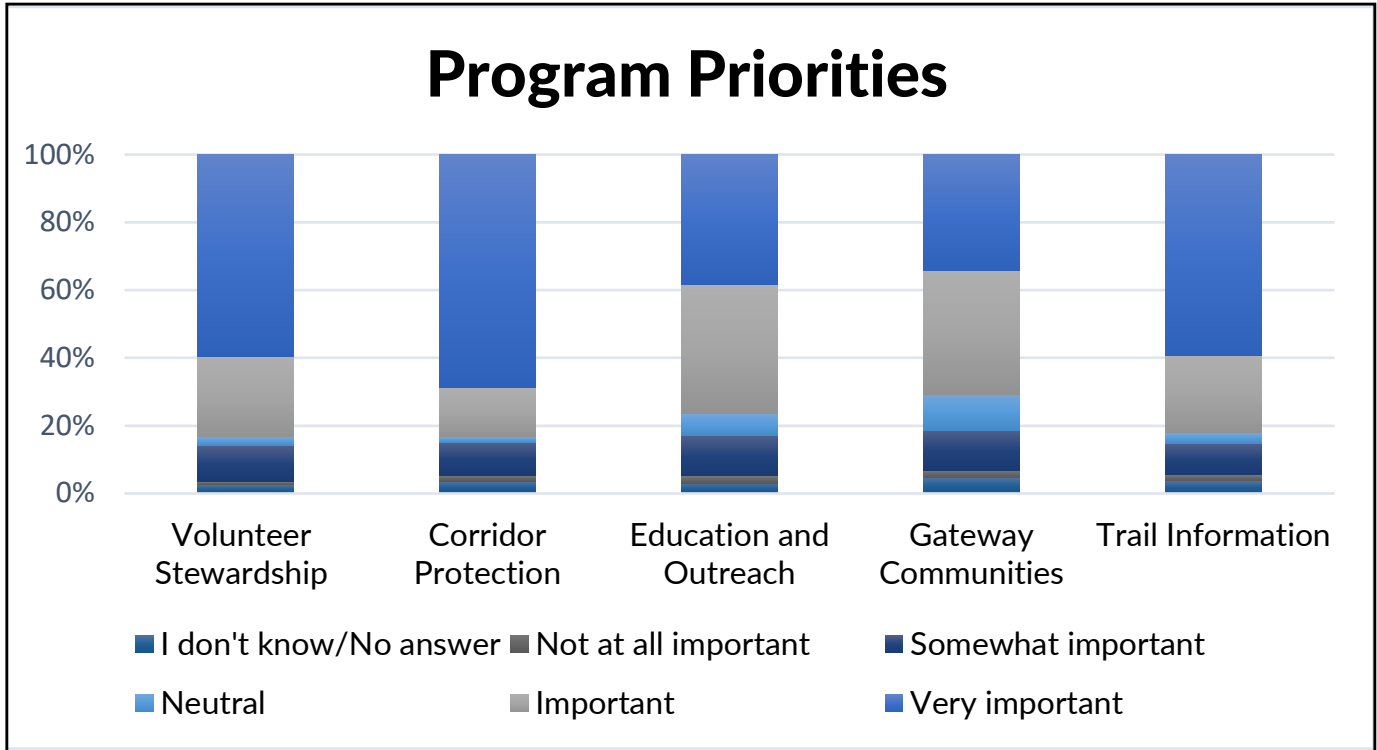
When asked “if you have not visited the CDT, what has kept you from visiting,” 186 people reported at least one reason for not visiting the CDT. Almost half (49%) responded that it is too far from where they live. Reasons reported as “other” included future trips to the CDT that are already planned (predominately long-distance hikes), “I just haven’t,” and recent discovery of the trail’s existence.



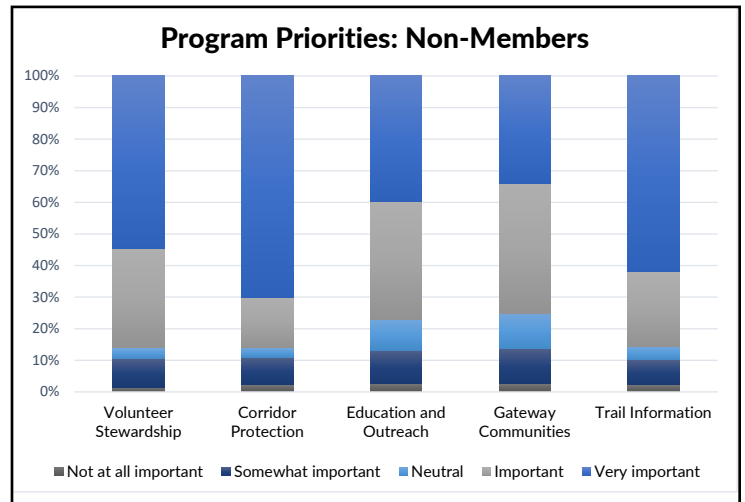
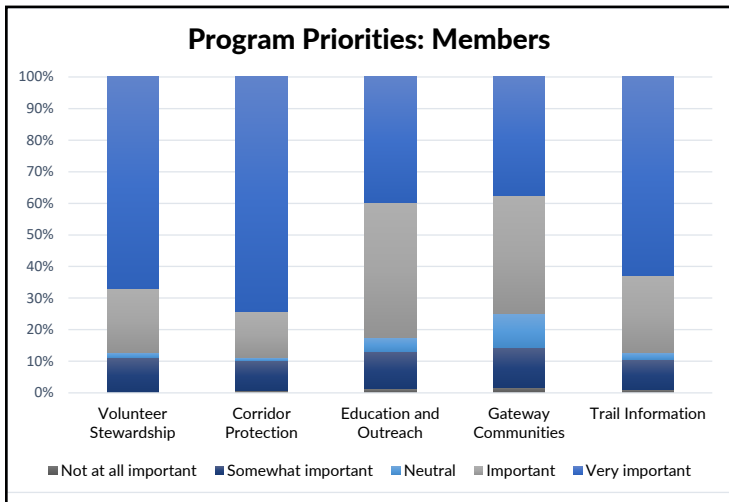
CDTC Priorities and Scope of Work

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they support CDTC's current priorities and scope of work. At least 75% of respondents identified each of CDTC's five programmatic priorities - volunteer stewardship, corridor protection, outreach and education, Gateway Communities, and trail information - as "important" or "very important."

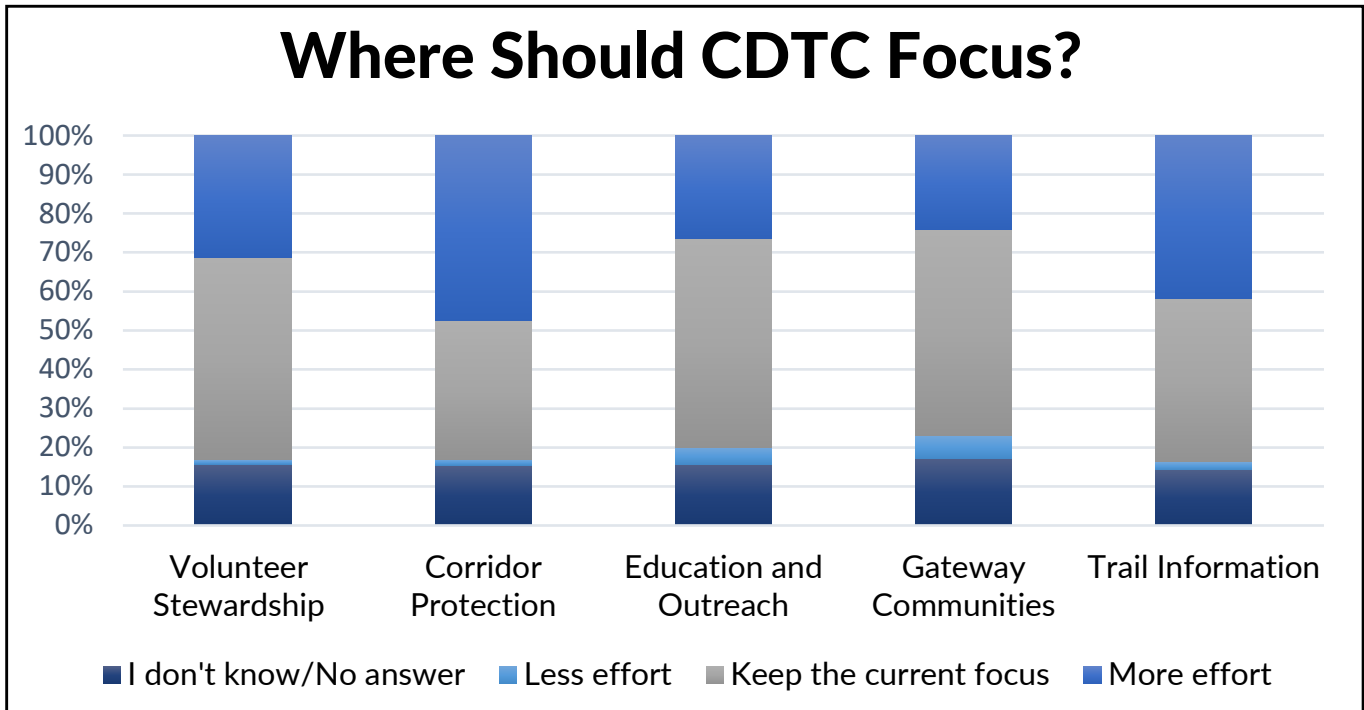
Corridor protection is seen as the most important priority for CDTC, with 70% of respondents rating it as "very important," and almost 50% responding that CDTC should focus more effort on this work - including more than half (52%) of current CDTC members who responded.



Members and non-members have similar priorities for the organization; the largest difference across program areas was in feelings about volunteer stewardship: 67% of members feel that it is "very important," while just 55% of non-members agree. However, this difference is virtually erased once you include those who feel volunteer stewardship is "important" (81% vs. 80%).



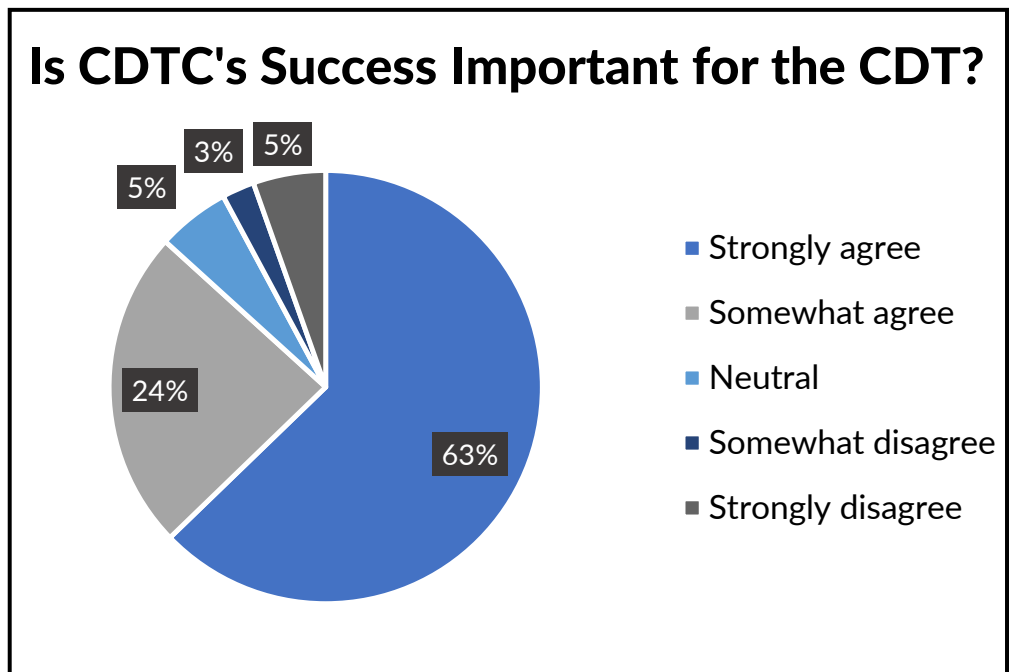
60% of respondents feel that volunteer stewardship and trail information are both “very important” priorities, but they are split on whether more focus should be placed on these areas. 297 (43%) respondents indicated that CDTC should focus more on trail information, and 298 said that CDTC should keep its current level of focus. The majority (53%) of respondents indicated that CDTC should keep the current focus on volunteer stewardship, while 32% said more effort should be dedicated to these programs.



Very few respondents feel that the CDTC should shift its focus away from any of its current program areas. 41 respondents indicated that CDTC should spend less effort on Gateway Communities - a higher number than any other program, but still fewer than 6% of total respondents.

The high level of support for CDTC’s current scope of work is reflected in the high percentage of respondents who feel that CDTC’s success is “critical to the future protection of the Continental Divide Trail.” 87% of respondents agreed with this statement.

While 84% of non-members agreed with this statement, only 55% of them strongly agreed - as opposed to 68% of members. Similarly, overall agreement was similar (within 10%) across age groups, but strong agreement increased with age (67% of respondents aged 65+ versus 50% of respondents 18-25).

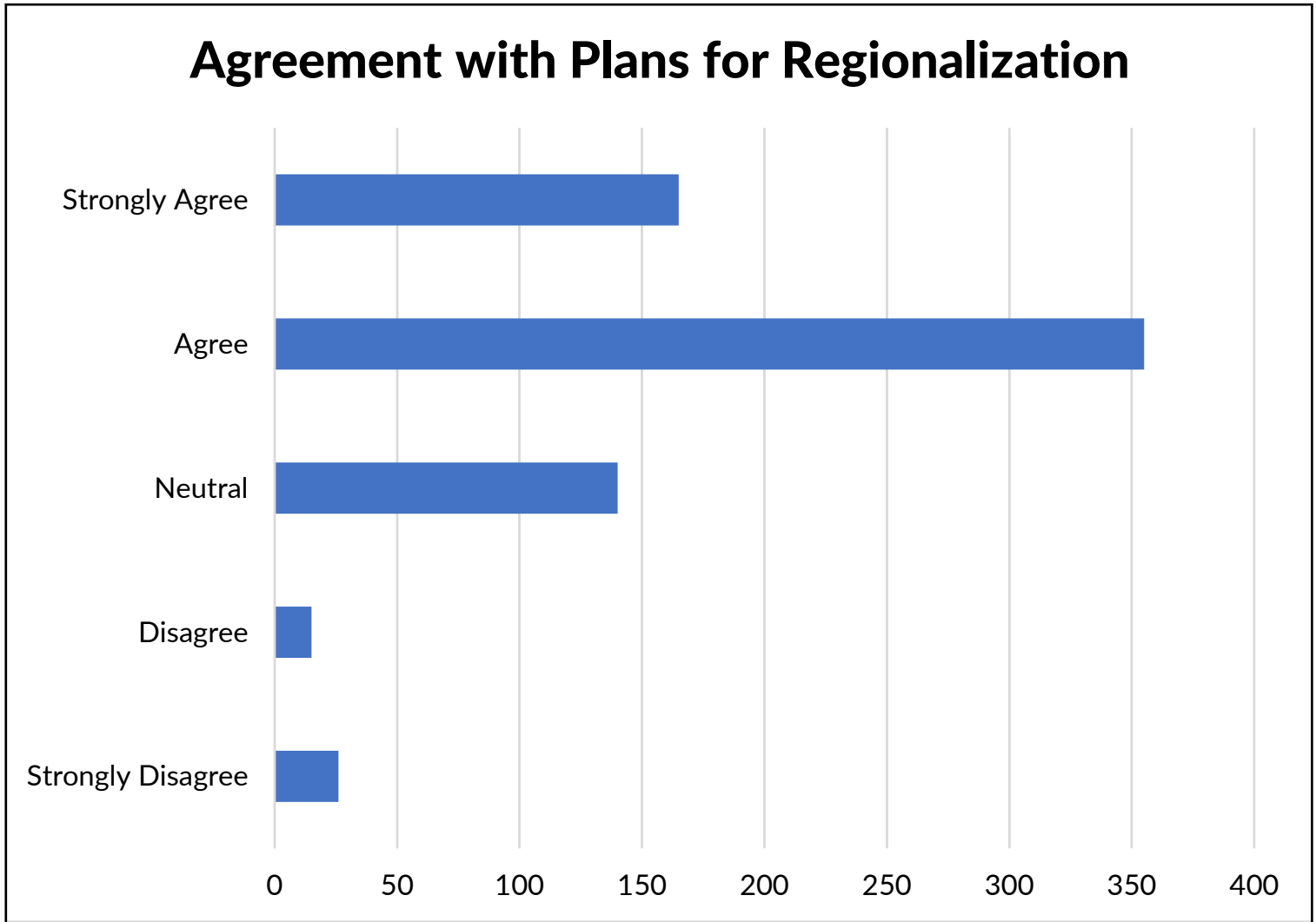


Support for Future Plans

Regionalization

“Presence is important. Running into a steward of a trail I’m using says to me the trail is loved and cared for, and inspires me to do the same.”

74% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the plan of placing new staff regionally along the CDT as CDTC continues to grow, while less than 6% disagree or strongly disagree.



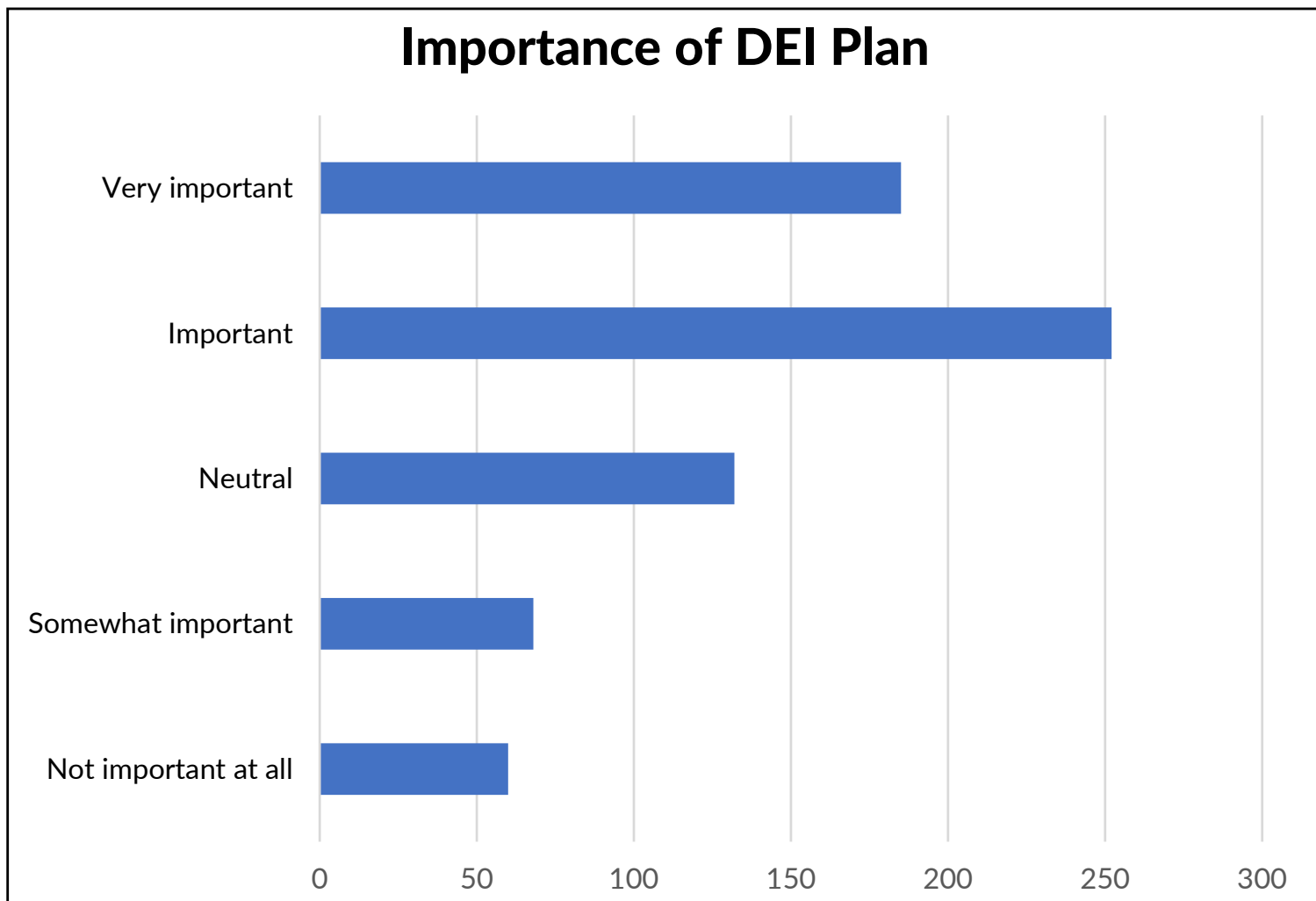
Of those who offered additional comments about this plan (257), the most common comment (30) was that regional offices would be helpful in creating local awareness, knowledge, and ownership of the trail.

Additional responders offered that regionalization would be helpful by providing information about recreational opportunities on local CDT sections (16) and current local trail conditions (11), providing more volunteer opportunities (13), hosting local events (10), helping Gateway Communities be successful (9), and building more effective partnerships with local land managers and other stewards (8).

A small but noticeable number of respondents (14) expressed concern about CDTC expanding too quickly and overreaching capacity or losing effectiveness in the process.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

More than 60% of respondents feel that the development of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plan is “important” or “very important” to the future of the CDTC. 19% feel neutrally, while 9% feel that it is “not at all important.”



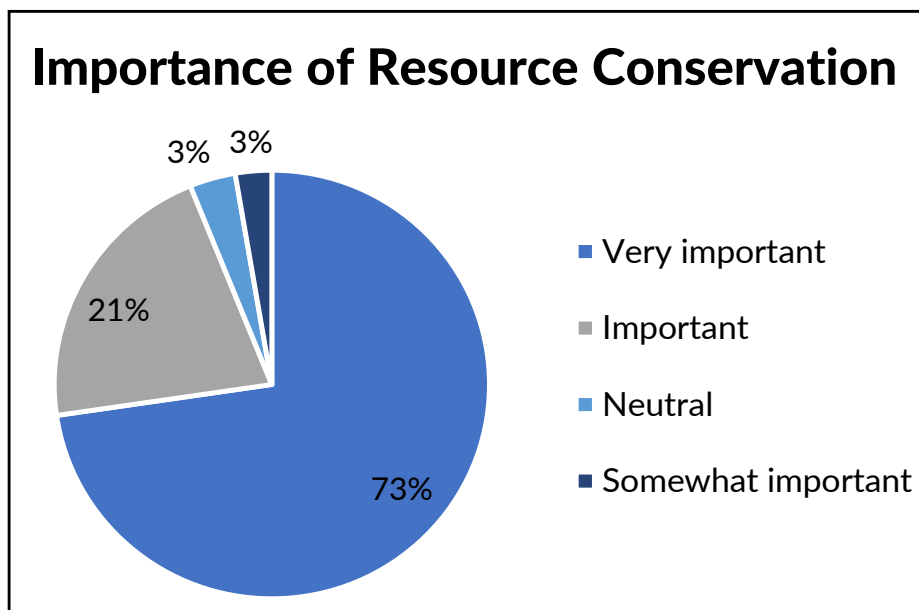
“Supporting the rights of indigenous and native people is incredibly important, as this land is often sacred or was forcibly taken from them in the past. All National Trails should also welcome and be accessible to any and all people.”

Respondents were asked to comment on their answer and to identify what (if any) communities they feel are missing from CDTC’s stakeholders. Of the 194 respondents who offered further comment, the most common answer (23) was that people would like to see more engagement with Native Americans along the trail.

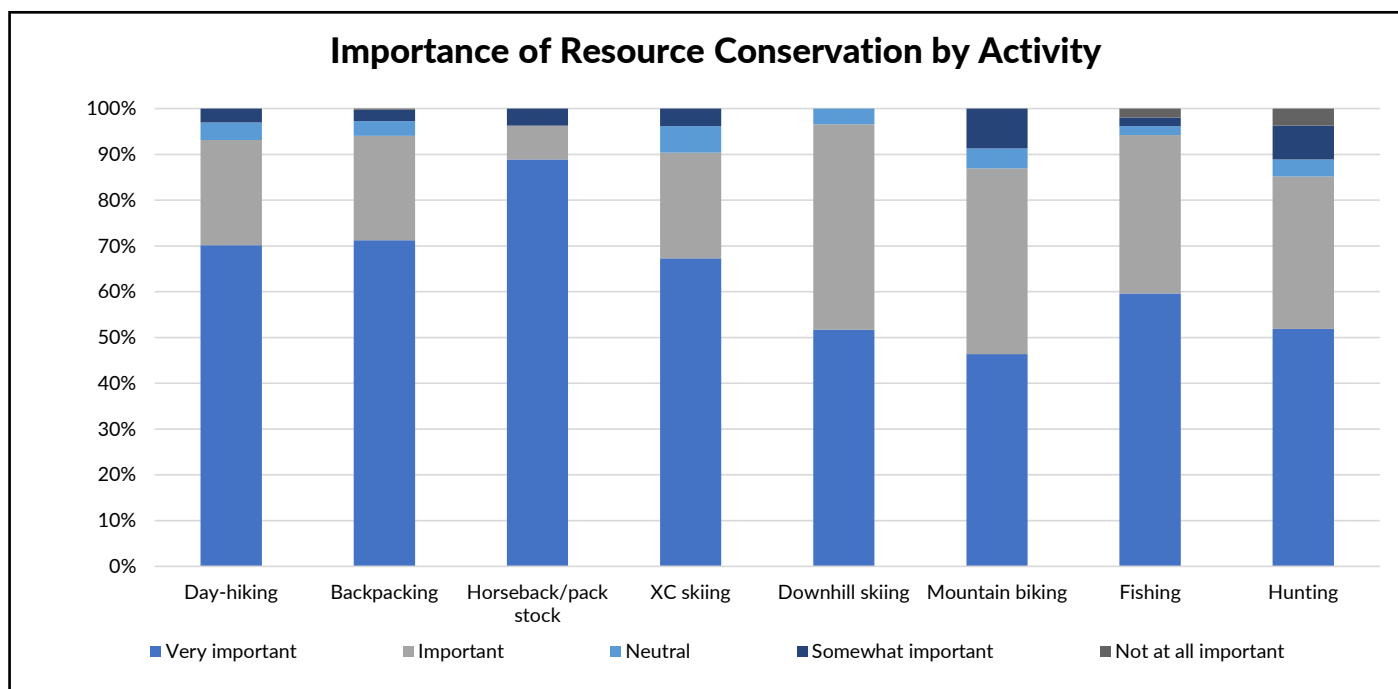
12 respondents noted the importance of maintaining or even increasing the focus on Gateway Communities and other rural areas along the trail. Other potential stakeholders that were identified included communities of color (10) and differently-abled and adaptive athletes (8). 21 people said something similar to “nature doesn’t see color.” Six people responded that DEI is important to the CDTC, but in order to maintain focus and avoid over-extending organizational capacity, it may be more beneficial to find unique ways to partner with DEI-focused groups rather than making this work a primary focus of CDTC.

Vision for the Trail

Several questions focused around the nature and purposes of the trail and other potential uses of the CDT. Respondents showed strong agreement on the importance of the “conservation of the natural, historic, and cultural resources along the CDT corridor:” 94% feel that it is “important” or “very important.”

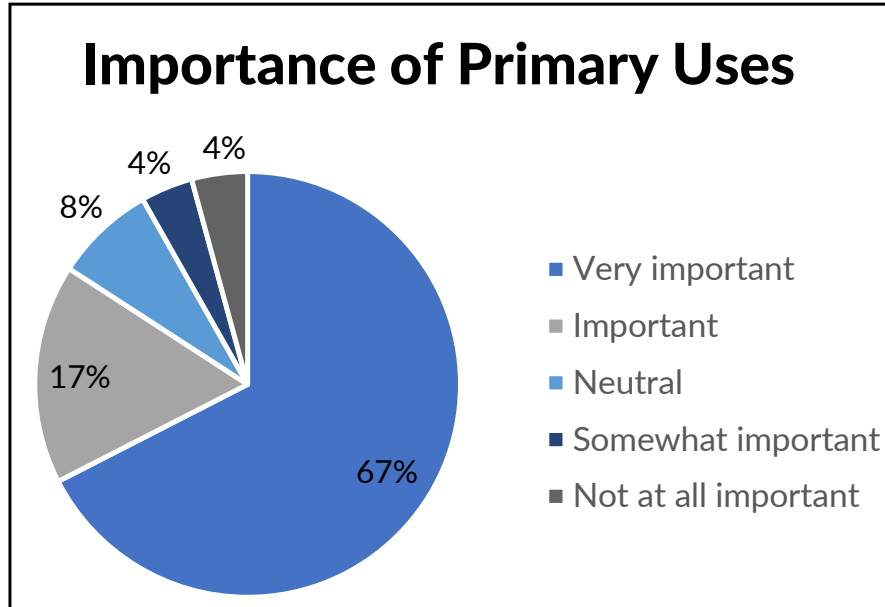


There was virtually no difference in how members and non-members of CDTC responded about the importance of resource conservation. Responses were somewhat more varied across recreation modes, but overall support for resource conservation remained quite high across all users, with at least 87% of every user group reporting that it is “important” or “very important.” The highest variance was seen in percentages of respondents that feel that resource conservation is “very important:” 88% of equestrians gave this response, while just 46% of mountain bikers agree (the largest variation).*

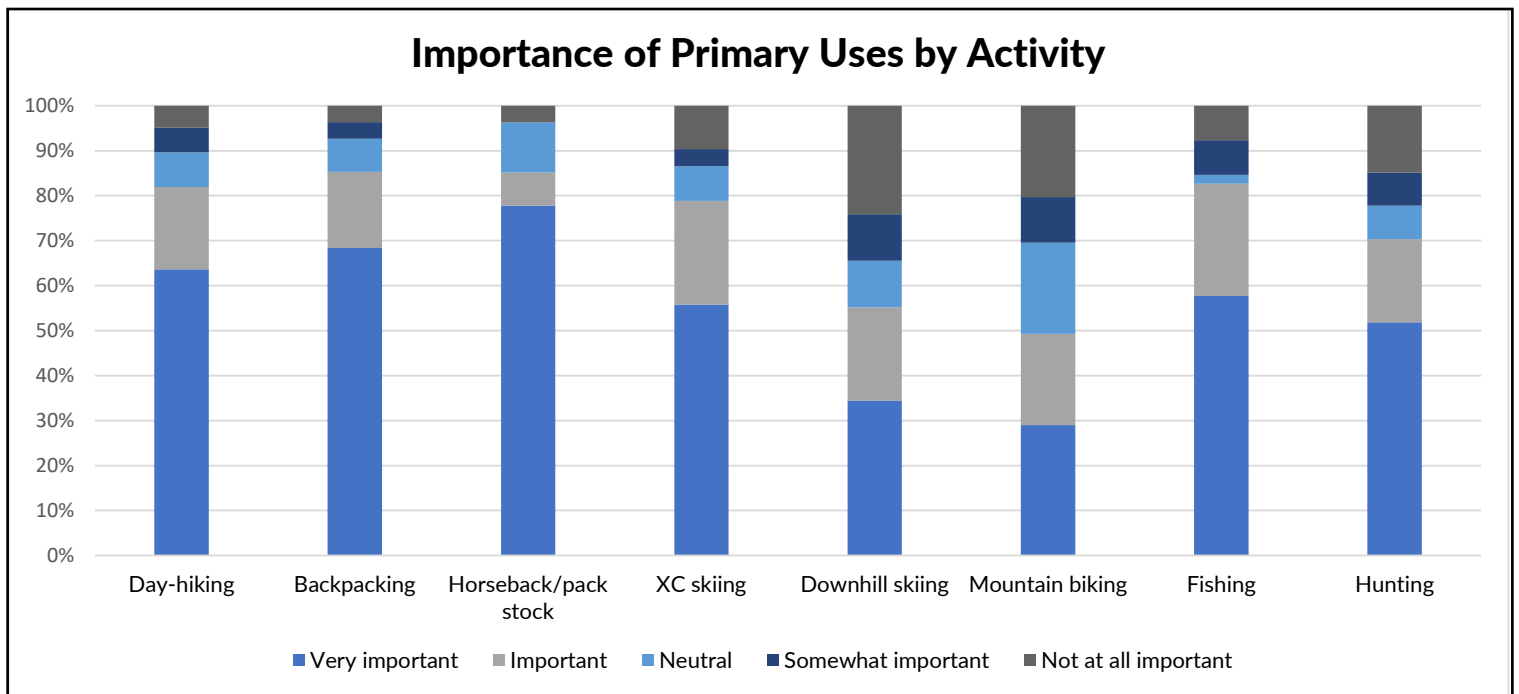


NOTE: This variance may have been affected by the wide variety in user group sizes and the resulting outside effect that individual users’ answers may have had on that group’s data (see executive summary for more info).

Similarly, the vast majority of respondents (84%) feel that it is “important” or “very important” that “the CDT is primarily for hiking and equestrian use.”



Mountain bikers and downhill (backcountry) skiers were significantly less likely than other users to report that it feels important that “the CDT is primarily for hiking and equestrian use,” although a majority of all user groups rated the primary uses as important.

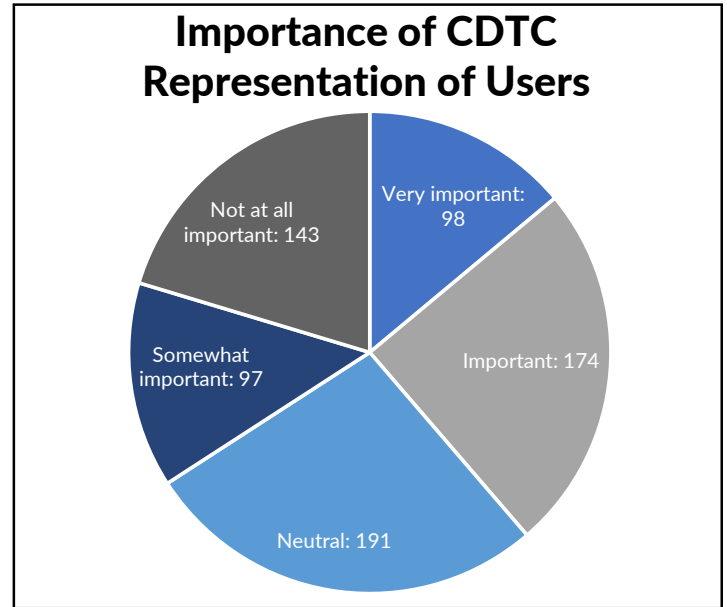
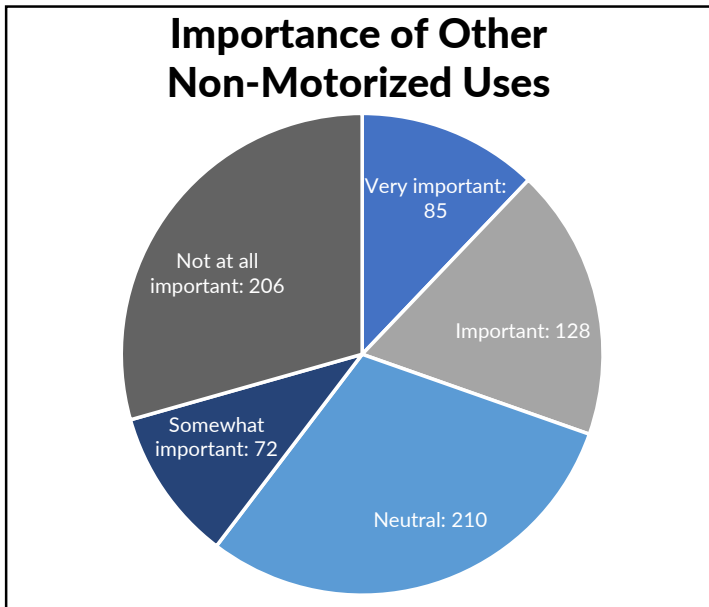


CDTC members were somewhat more likely than non-members to respond that the primary uses are “very important” (72% versus 61%), but this was the most significant difference between these two groups. Overall, 87% of CDTC members reported that the primary uses are “important” or “very important,” and 80% of non-members agreed.

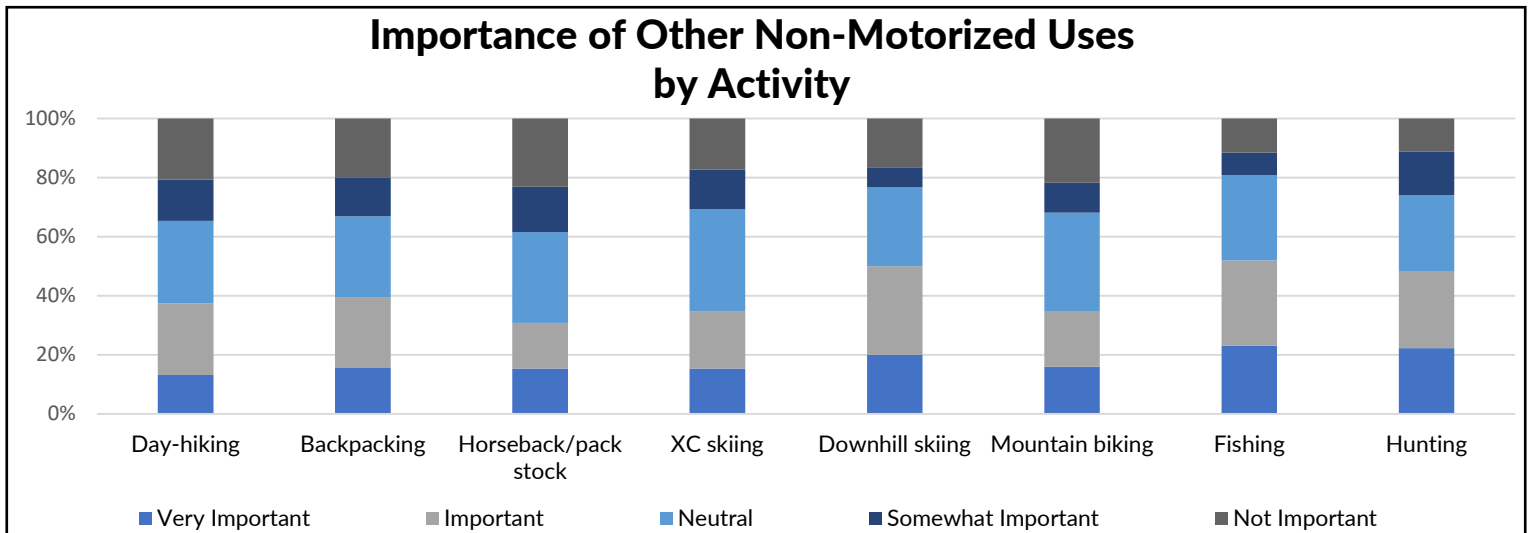
Vision for the Trail

The survey also asked two questions about non-primary users of the CDT. The first question asked respondents to identify how important it feels “that the CDT allows for opportunities for other non-motorized recreational uses, as long as they don’t substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trail.” The second question asked how important it is “that CDTC represents a wide range of recreational users.”

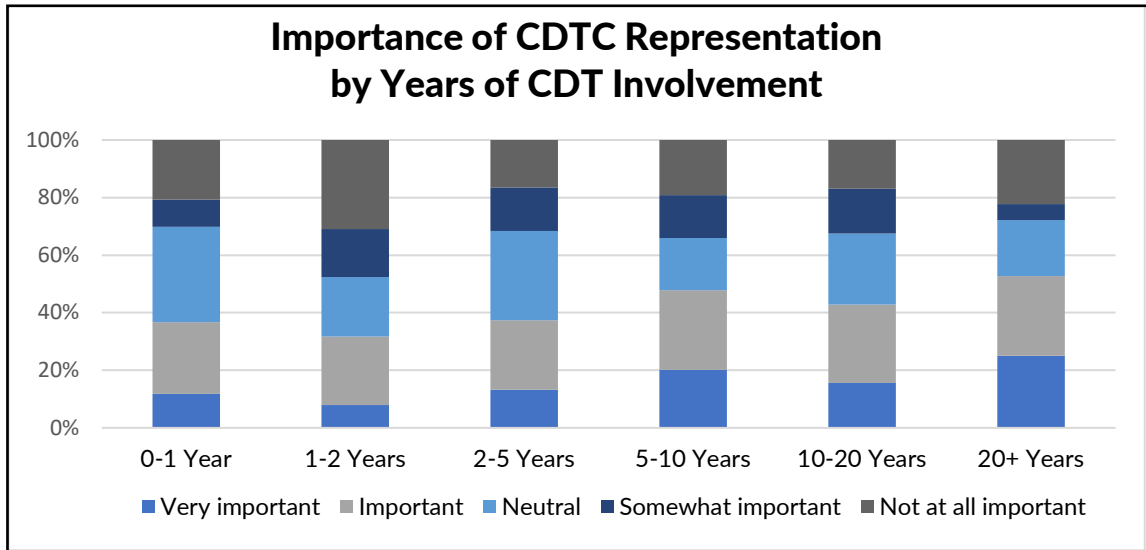
The most common answer to both of these questions (30% and 27%, respectively) was “neutral.” Interestingly, 30% feel that other non-motorized uses are “not at all important,” but only 20% feel that it is “not at all important” that CDTC represent a wide variety of recreational users. In a similar vein, 30% of respondents feel that other non-motorized uses are “important” or “very important.” but a full 39% feel that CDTC representation of those uses is “important” or “very important.”



Across activities, a plurality of each group felt neutrally about the importance of other non-motorized uses beyond the CDT’s primary uses. However, there was some significant variation between user groups at either end of the spectrum of feeling. While 23% of equestrian users feel that other uses are “not important at all,” just 11% of hunters and anglers agree; conversely, only 30% of equestrian users feel that other uses are “important” or “very important,” but approximately 50% of hunters, anglers, and mountain bikers agree.



We also analyzed how answers to the question about CDTC’s representation of users compared to how long the respondent has been involved with the CDT. Overall, respondents who have been involved with the CDT for five years or more find it more important that the CDTC represents a wide range of trail users - 47% of these respondents feel that this is “important” or “very important,” as opposed to just 34% of those who have been involved with the trail for less than two years. Meanwhile, there was virtually no difference between how CDTC members and non-members responded to this question.



“My vision for the CDT? The completion of a trail off roads, where everyone along the corridor takes pride in what the CDT is and represents.”

367 respondents chose to share their personal vision for the future of the CDT. The most common answer, given by 54 individuals, was a vision of a completed CDT, with as much non-road trail on public land as possible.

The second and third most common answers point to the conflict of user desires along the CDT: 48 responded that they see the CDT as a hiking and equestrian trail only with no mountain bikes, while 40 responded that they hope to see mountain biking allowed on the CDT where it isn’t otherwise prohibited.

Many respondents noted the importance of protecting the undeveloped nature of the CDT, often in comparison to more popular long-distance trails: 35 people envision the CDT as a wild corridor that protects natural settings and wildlife, while 32 others envision a recreation experience that remains wild, flexible, and difficult.

Several other answers were echoed by at least 15 individuals:

The CDT is well maintained and well marked. (30)

The CDT continues to provide an enjoyable, significant experience in nature that everyone should feel empowered to access if and when they want to. (29)

The CDT is completely non-motorized. (26)

The CDT is open only to hiking and closed to equestrian use. (17)

CDT adventures are more attainable for average recreationists (more loops, better signage, etc.). (17)

Communities near the CDT value the trail and serve as its active stewards. (16)



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