



Recreation & Community Resilience

COVID-19 ENGAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS



RECREATION AND PARKS ARE ESSENTIAL TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Parks, trails, and outdoor recreation spaces are essential components of strong and vibrant communities. They provide respite from stress, a setting for exercise, and an opportunity to breathe fresh air. In an effort to ensure that all New Brunswickers have access to these benefits, local recreation and parks agencies have been working under the guidance of public health officials to keep neighbourhood parks, trails, and other outdoor recreation assets safe and open wherever possible during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RECREATION AND PARKS ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

To better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting our sector, Recreation NB developed a survey. The results broaden our understanding of how New Brunswickers have been engaging with their local outdoor recreation assets and if this engagement has changed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also explored the pandemic's impact on other recreational pursuits, safety perceptions, and citizen support for recreation and parks. This information helps shed light on the important role that recreation and parks play in the lives of citizens in times of crisis and every day.

METHODOLOGY

To better understanding of the role that COVID-19 has played in recreation and parks engagement in our province, Recreation NB developed a survey for New Brunswickers. The survey was prepared using Survey Monkey and distributed, in both French and English, via email to the Recreation NB membership, who were then asked to share it with their community members. The survey was also shared on Recreation NB's social media platforms throughout the month of June. The survey dealt with New Brunswickers' engagement with various public outdoor recreation assets prior to and since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

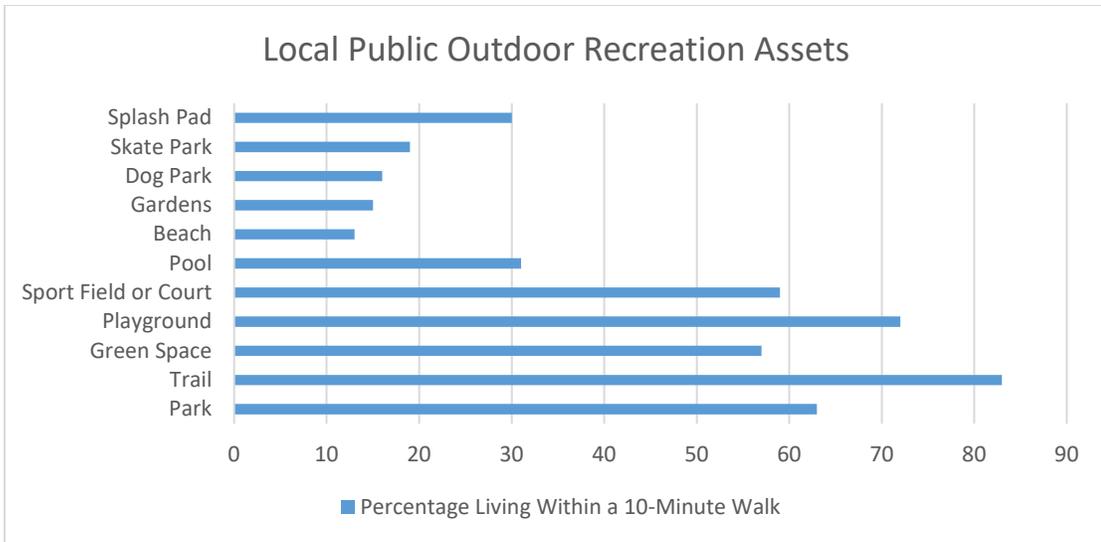
The first section of the survey focused on individuals' recreation and parks engagement since March 19th. This included their frequency of engagement, how important access to outdoor recreation assets has been to them, how safe they felt while using outdoor recreation assets, and what types of activities they have been engaging in. The second section of the survey asked similar questions about individuals' recreation and parks engagement prior to March 19th. The final portion of the survey included questions that gauged individuals' support for recreation and parks.

STUDY RESULTS

The study included surveys completed by 162 New Brunswick citizens. While representative, this low response rate means that the findings are suggestive rather than conclusive. There was also an imbalance in the origins of the respondents. Although the majority of survey respondents did not indicate the city or town in which they live, approximately a third (30%) of those who did were located in Fredericton. The majority (61%) of citizens were between the ages of 25 and 45 years old. Nearly half (47%) of respondents were individuals living with a partner and child(ren), 28% were living with a partner or roommate(s), and 14% were living alone.

LOCAL PUBLIC OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS

Respondents indicated whether or not they lived within a 10-minute walk of various public outdoor recreation assets. Trails (83%), playgrounds (72%), and parks (63%) were the most common nearby assets.

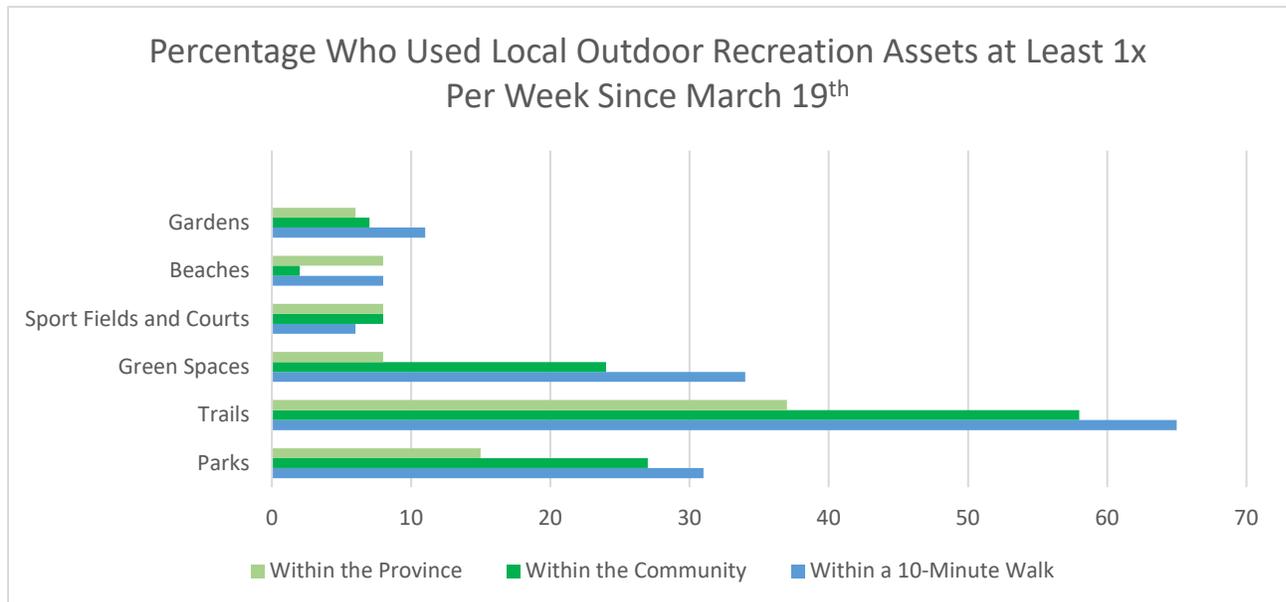


Respondents reported that the majority of their local public outdoor recreation assets were closed during the pandemic, with a few exceptions. Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated that the trails in their community remained open, while only 29% of respondents lived in communities where parks remained open. The vast majority of respondents reported that all other assets were closed.

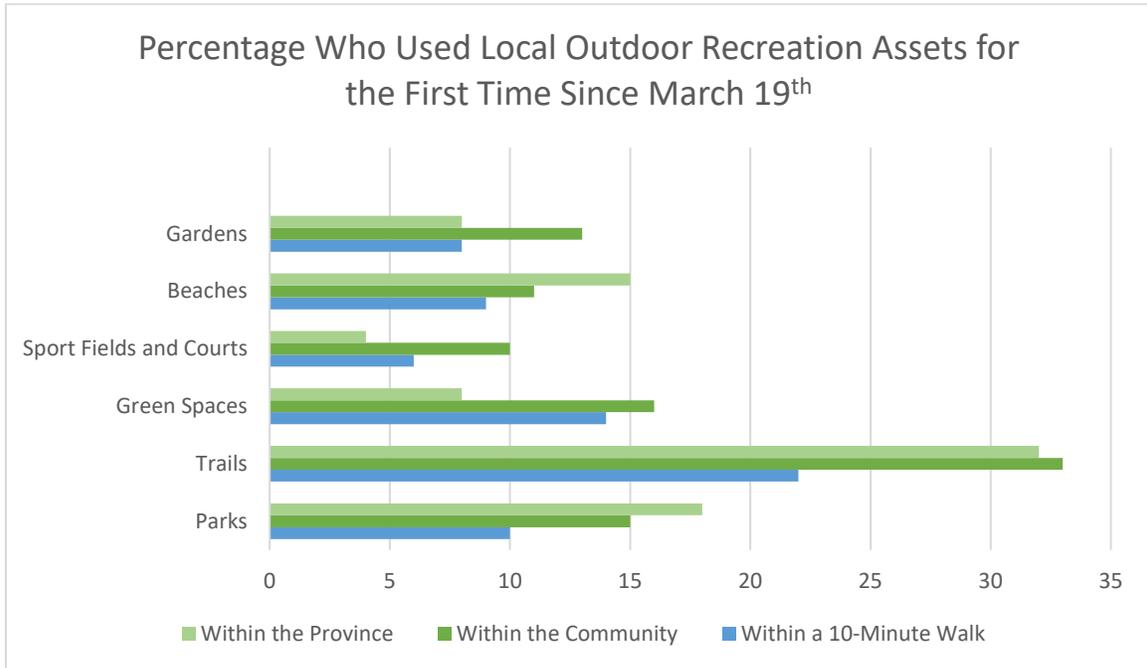
RECREATION AND PARKS ENGAGEMENT SINCE MARCH 19th, 2020*

*For the purposes of this survey, March 19th, 2020 was selected as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in New Brunswick. This is when the provincial government declared a state of emergency. Physical distancing and self-isolation strategies, as well as the closure of some outdoor recreation assets were initiated at this time.

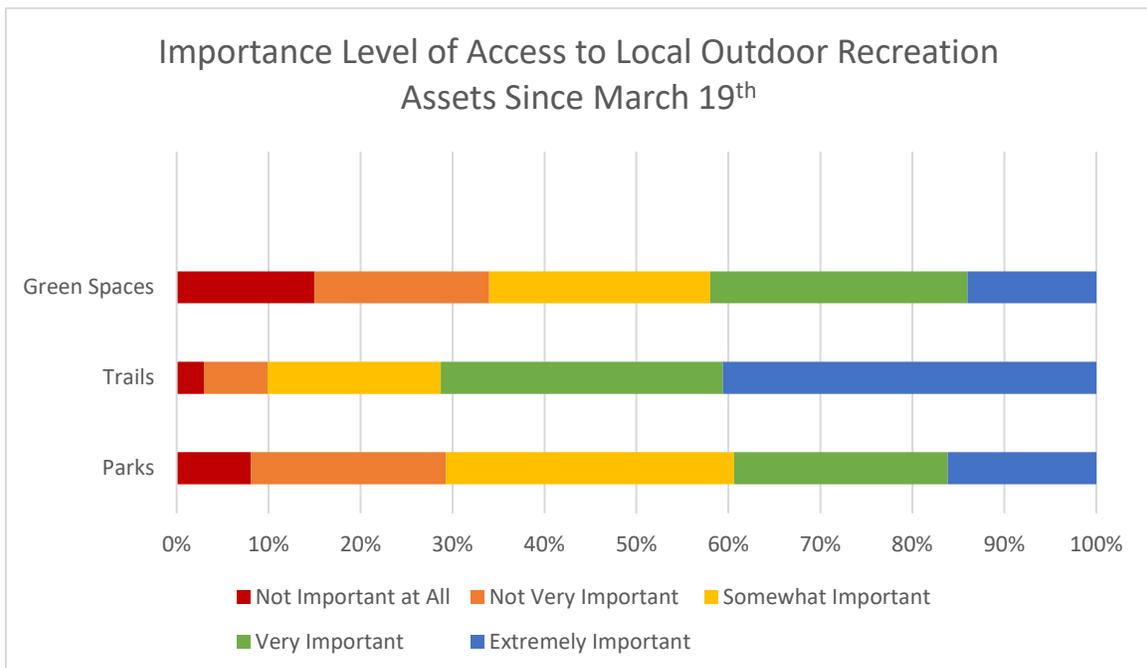
Respondents reported on the frequency in which they used various outdoor recreation assets since March 19th. The most frequently used asset was trails, followed by parks and green spaces.



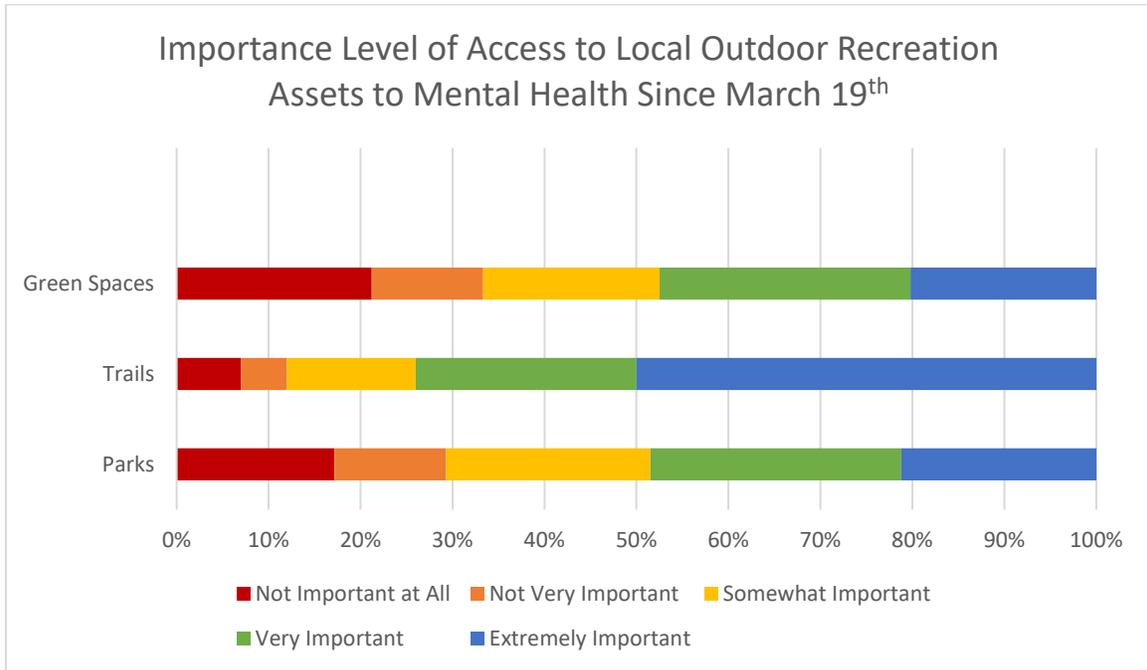
Respondents reported using various outdoor recreation assets for the first time since March 19th. More than a third of respondents used a trail in their community for the first time during the pandemic.



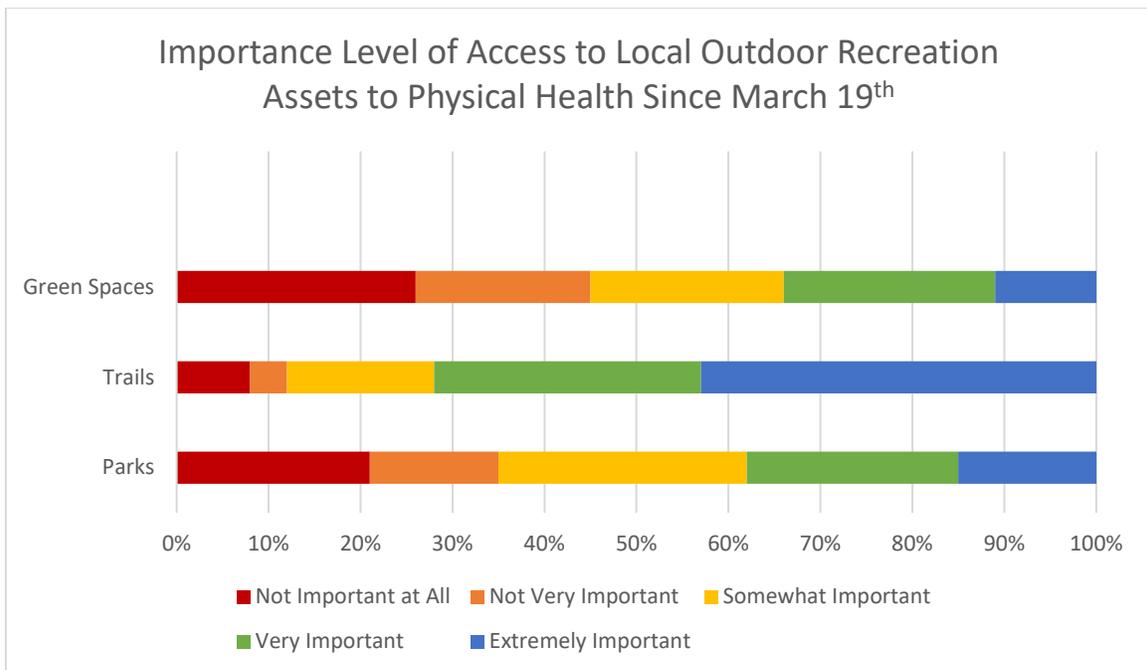
Respondents indicated how important access to various outdoor recreation assets has been since March 19th. Trails were reportedly the most important to respondents; however, the majority of respondents felt that access to green spaces, parks, trails were all at least “Somewhat Important” during the pandemic.



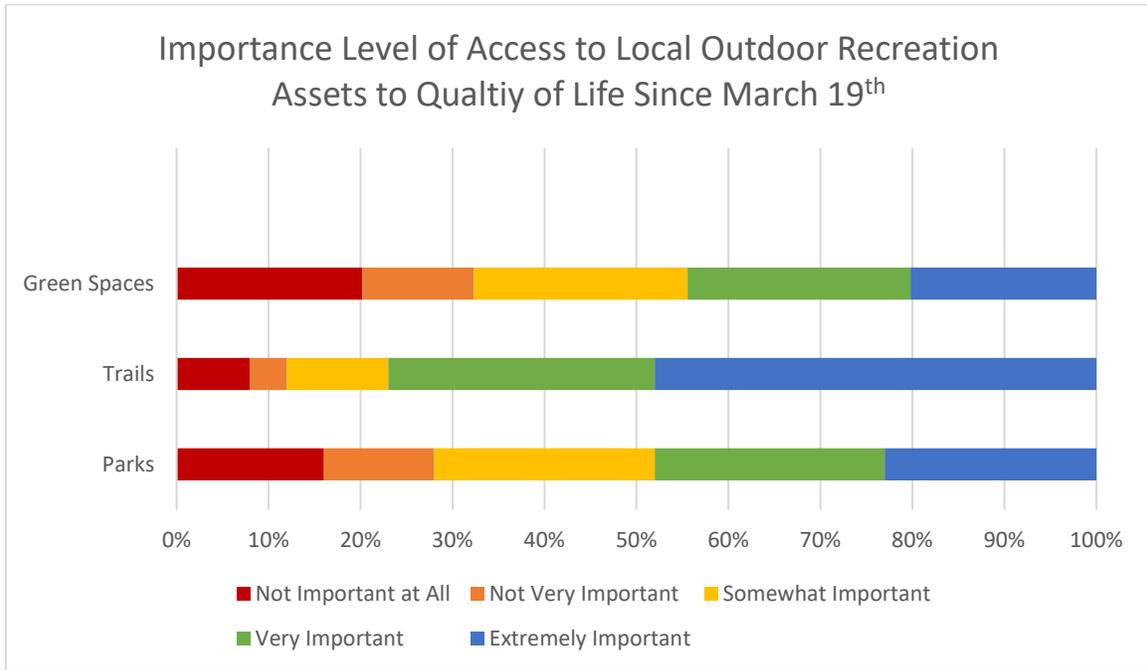
Respondents indicated how important access to various outdoor recreation assets has been for their mental health since March 19th. Half of respondents felt that access to trails was “Extremely Important” during the pandemic.



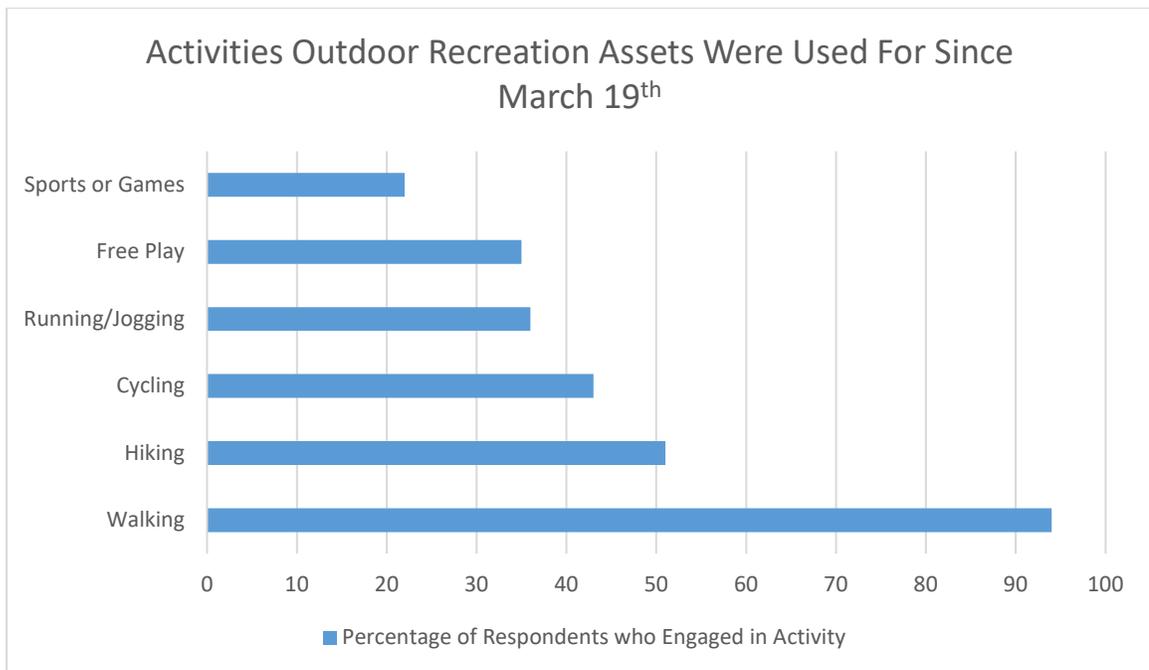
Respondents indicated how important access to various outdoor recreation assets has been for their physical health since March 19th. Trails were considered the most important asset to physical health.



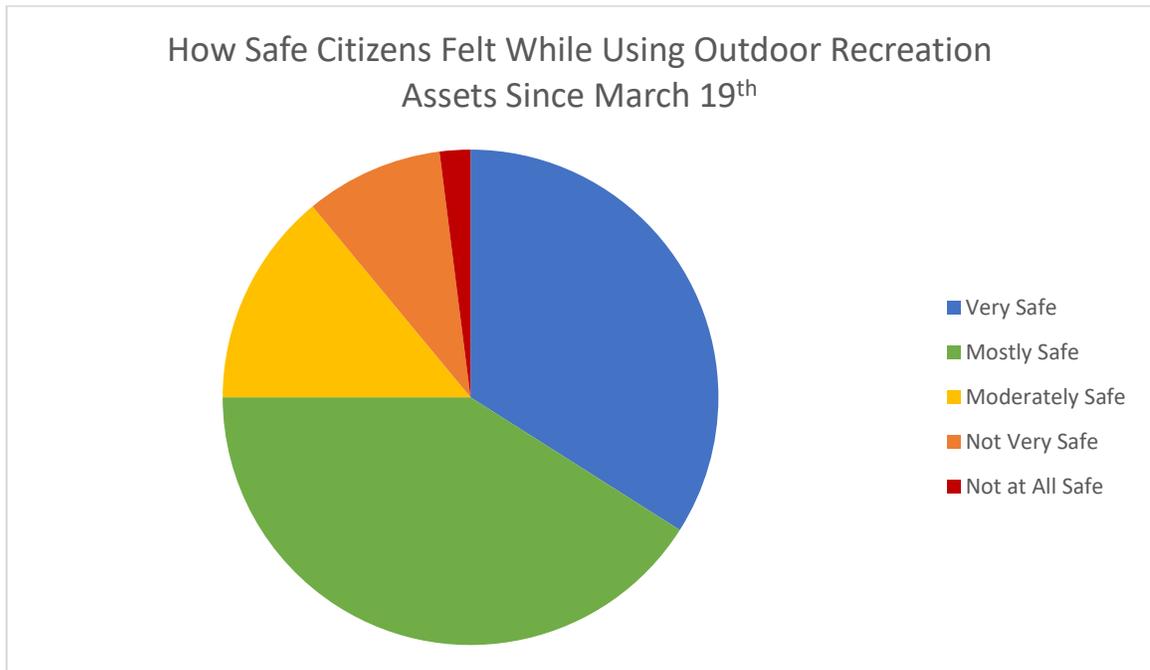
Respondents indicated how important access to various outdoor recreation assets has been for their quality of life since March 19th. Trails were considered “Very Important” or “Extremely Important” more than three-quarters of respondents.



Respondents reported which activities they used outdoor recreation assets for since March 19th. The most common activities were walking (94%), hiking (51%), and cycling (43%).



Respondents indicated how safe they felt when using public outdoor recreation assets since March 19th. Three-quarters of respondents felt “Mostly Safe” or “Very Safe” during the pandemic.



Respondents described their biggest safety concern when using public outdoor recreation assets since March 19th. The most prominent concern (47%) was overcrowding and the inability to keep the recommended physical distance from others. The second most common concern (18%) was the cleanliness of surfaces and touch points.

Respondents listed measures recreation and parks agencies could take to help alleviate this concern. Popular suggestions included increased cleaning of surfaces and touch points (19%) and improving or increasing signage (13%).

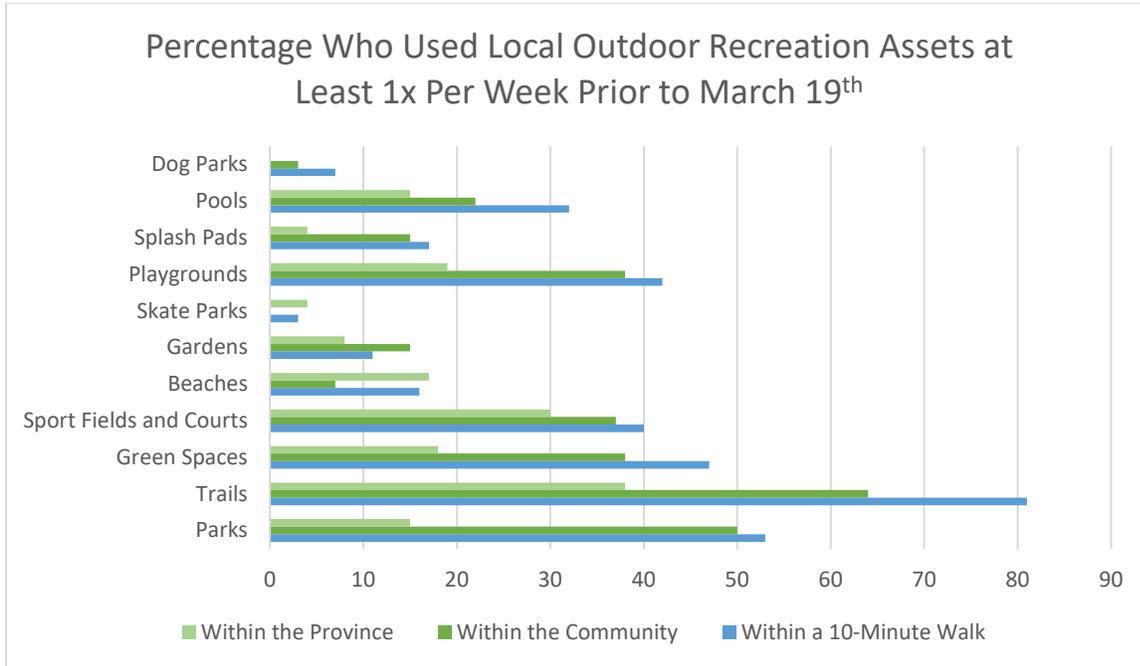
Since March 19th, 57% of respondents have discovered or rediscovered recreational pursuits/hobbies. The most common activities included: arts and crafts (26%), walking/hiking/jogging (19%), gardening (18%), cooking/baking (16%), cycling (15%), and reading (15%). Ninety percent of respondents intend to continue these recreational pursuits once things return to normal.

Since March 19th, 79% of respondents have had to stop or put on hold some of their normal recreational pursuits/hobbies. The most common suspended activities included going to the gym or fitness classes (27%) and organized sport (26%). Ninety-three percent of respondents intend to return to these recreational pursuits once things return to normal.

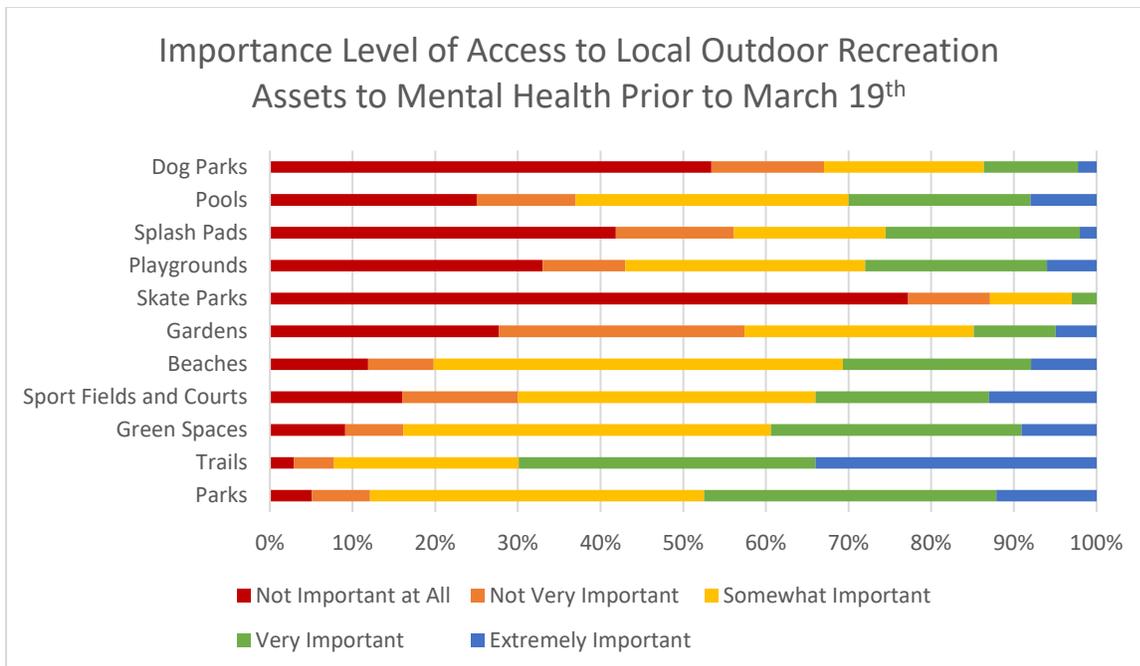
PARKS AND RECREATION ENGAGEMENT PRIOR TO MARCH 19th, 2020*

*For the purposes of this survey, March 19th, 2020 was selected as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in New Brunswick. This is when the provincial government declared a state of emergency. Physical distancing and self-isolation strategies, as well as the closure of some outdoor recreation assets were initiated at this time.

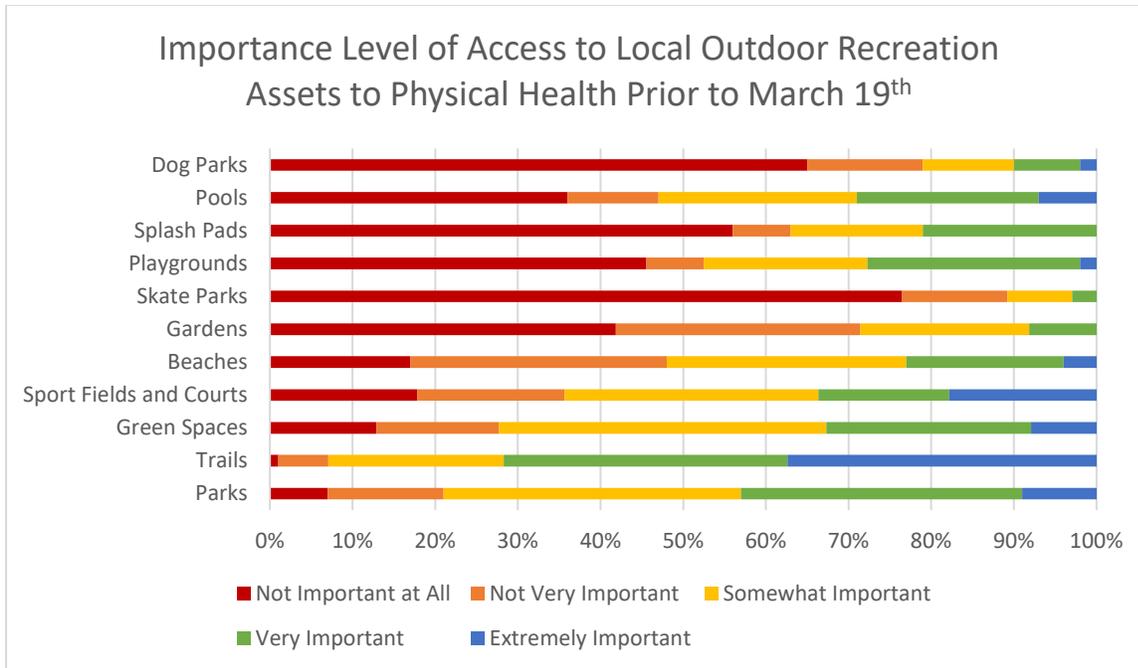
Respondents reported on the frequency in which they used various outdoor recreation assets prior to March 19th. The most frequently used asset was trails, followed by parks, and green spaces. The least frequently used assets were skate parks and dog parks. Overall, assets were used more frequently prior to the pandemic than during the pandemic.



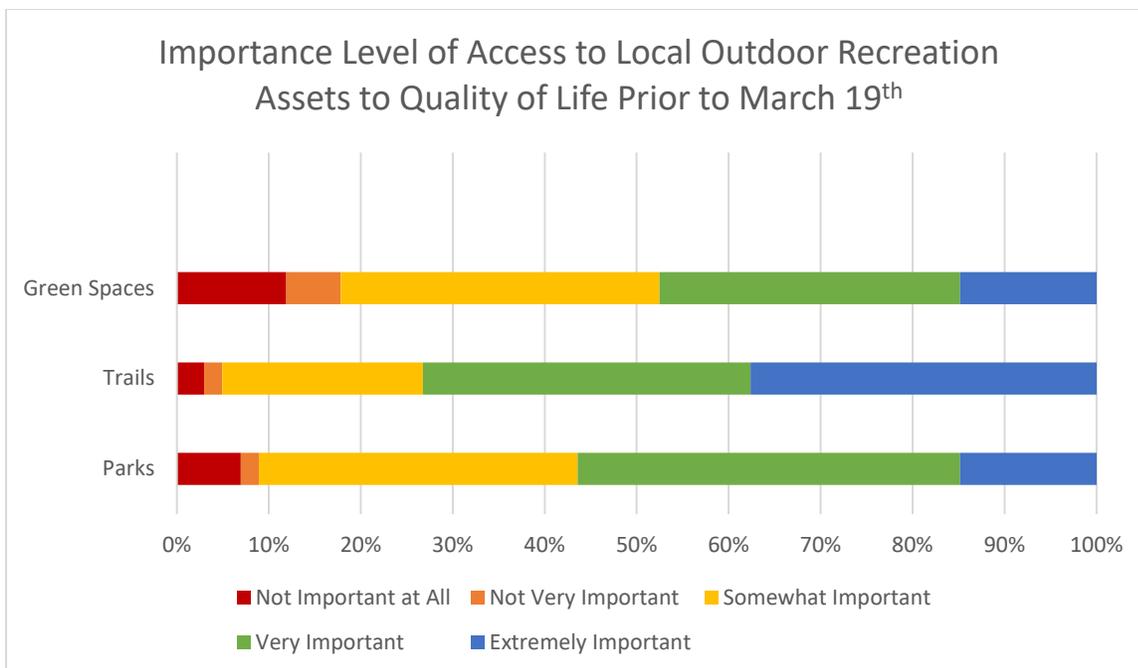
Respondents indicated how important access to various outdoor recreation assets has been for their mental health prior to March 19th. Nearly three-quarters of respondents felt that access to trails was “Very Important” or “Extremely Important” before the pandemic. In general, respondents felt that these assets played a more significant role in their mental health during the pandemic than prior to it.



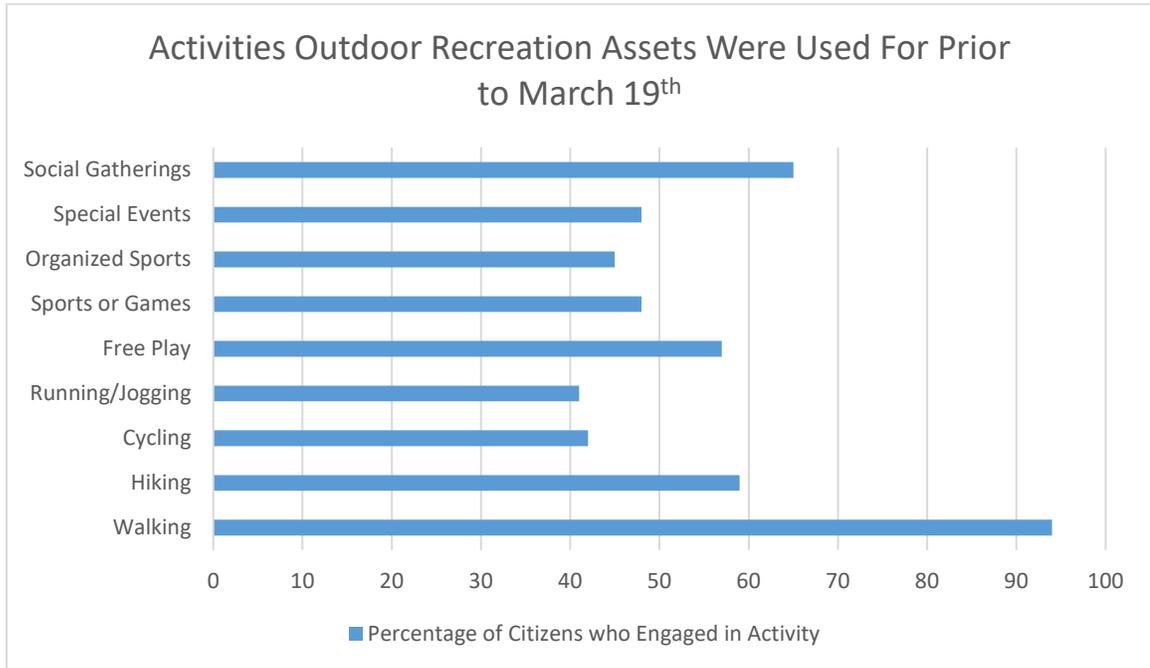
Respondents indicated how important access to various outdoor recreation assets has been for their physical health prior to March 19th. Similar to during the pandemic, trails were considered the most important asset to physical health. In general, respondents felt that these assets played a more significant role in their physical health prior to the pandemic than during it.



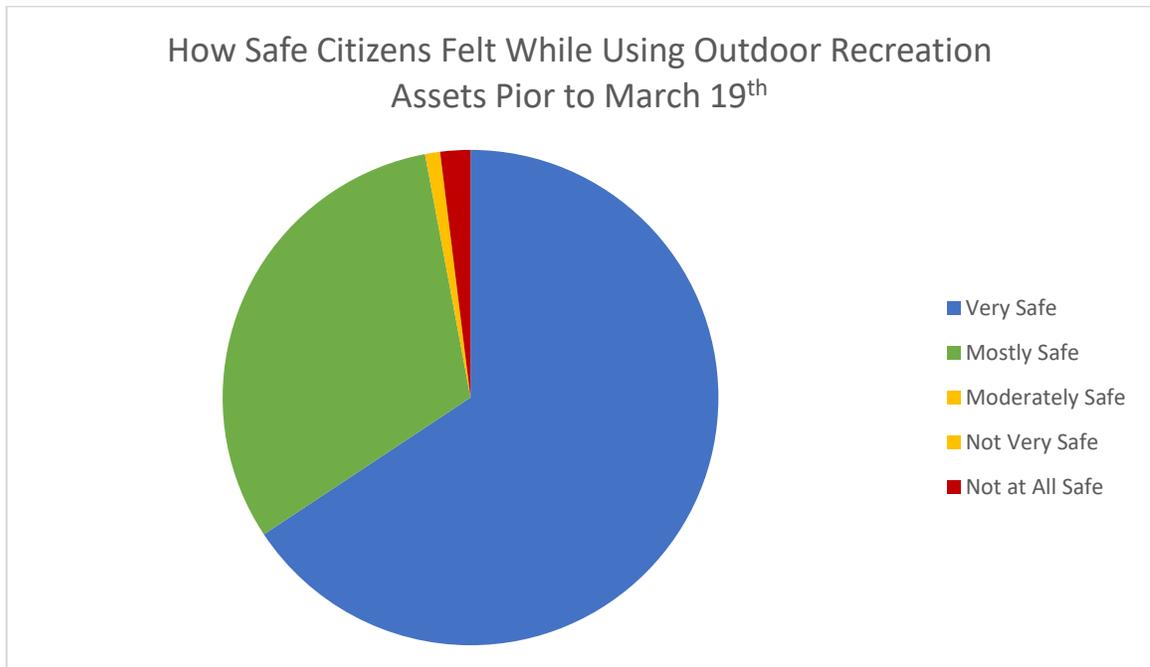
Respondents indicated how important access to various outdoor recreation assets was to their quality of life prior to March 19th. Similar to during the pandemic, trails were considered the most important asset to quality of life. In general, respondents felt that these assets played a slightly more significant role in their quality of life prior to the pandemic than during it.



Respondents reported which activities they used outdoor recreation assets for prior to March 19th. The most common activities were walking (94%), social gatherings (65%), hiking (59%), and free play (57%).



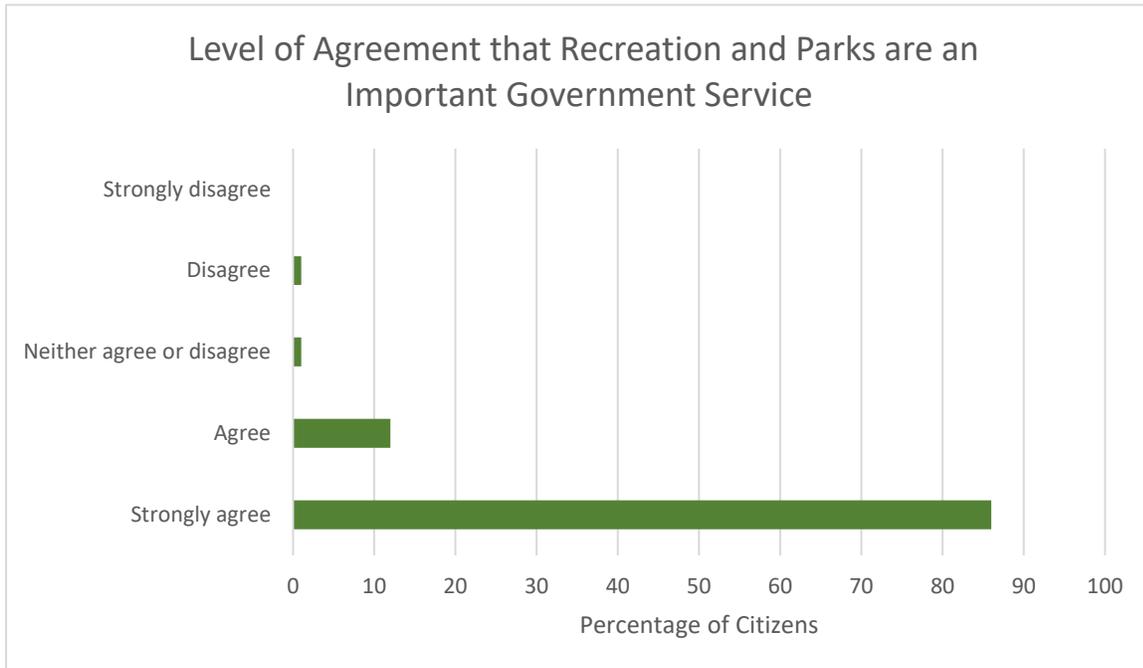
Respondents indicated how safe they felt when using public outdoor recreation assets prior to March 19th. Only 3% felt unsafe prior to the pandemic, while the majority felt “Very Safe”.



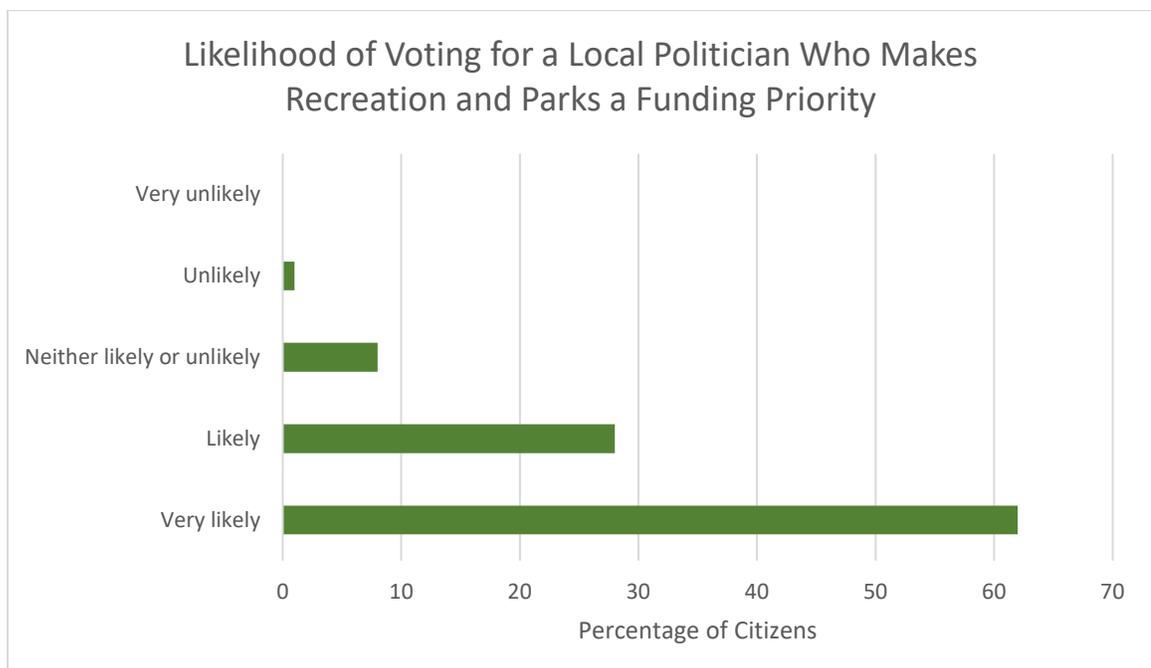
Respondents described their biggest safety concern when using public outdoor recreation assets prior to March 19th. Nearly half (43%) of respondents had no safety concerns prior to March 19th. The most common concern (17%) was the cleanliness of the spaces.

SUPPORT FOR RECREATION AND PARKS

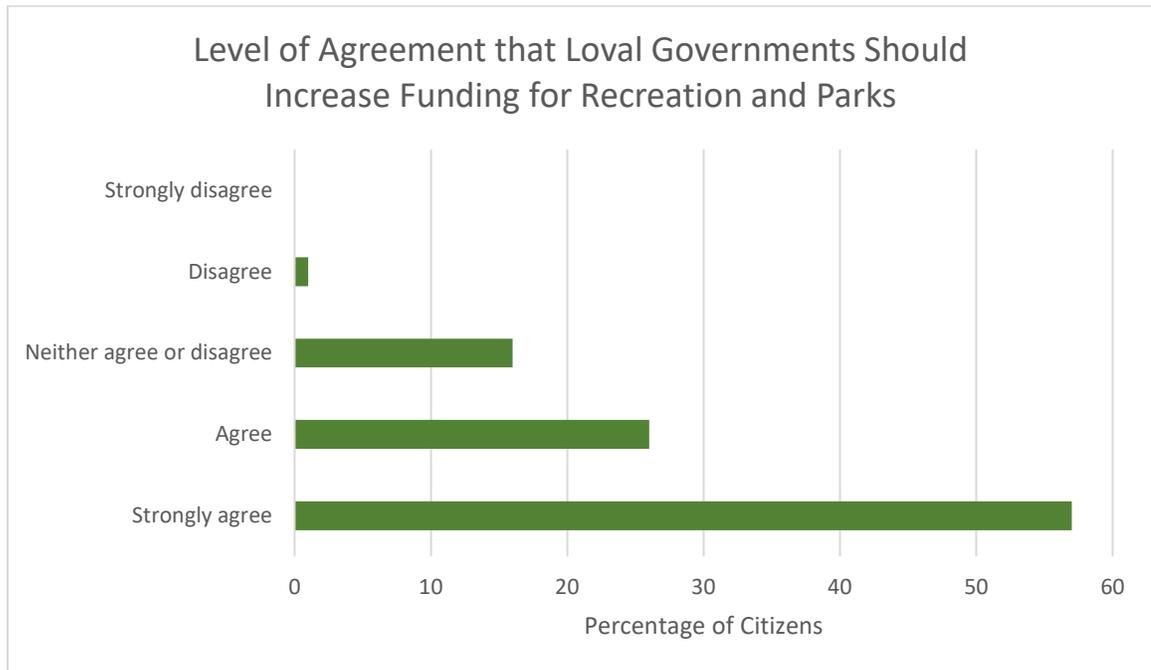
Respondents indicated their level of agreement with the statement: “Recreation and parks are an important local government service.” Ninety-eight percent of respondents agreed with the statement, with the overwhelming majority in strong agreement.



Respondents indicated the likelihood that they would vote for a local politician that makes recreation and parks a funding priority. Ninety percent indicated that they would be inclined.



Respondents indicated their level of agreement with the statement: “Local government funding for parks and recreation should be increased.” The majority of respondents were in strong agreement.



CONCLUSION

Research illustrates that outdoor recreation assets help build strong communities, enhance mental and physical health, connect people to nature, and provide economic benefits. Less understood is the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on recreation and parks engagement in New Brunswick. The data that has emerged from this study expands this understanding and helps shed light on the important role that recreation and parks play in the lives of New Brunswickers in times of crisis and every day.

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of citizens live within a 10-minute walk of a trail, playground, park, green space, and sport field or court. Less than half of citizens live this close to a pool, splash pad, skate park, dog park, public garden, or beach.
- Engagement with public outdoor recreation assets was less frequent during the pandemic than prior to this time. However, more than a third of citizens used a trail in their community for the first time during the pandemic.
- The majority of citizens felt that access to parks and green spaces was at least “somewhat important” to their mental health, physical health and quality of life both prior to and during the pandemic. Access to trails was highly valued, with over 70% of citizens deeming it “very important” or “extremely important” by their mental health, physical health and quality of life both prior to and during the pandemic. Citizens deemed skate parks and dog parks least important to these elements of wellbeing. The way that individuals valued access to public outdoor recreation assets did not change significantly after the onset of the pandemic.
- With 94% of citizens using public outdoor recreation assets for walking both prior to and during the pandemic, it was the most common activity these spaces are used for. Hiking was also a

popular activity prior to and during the pandemic, with the majority of individuals taking part. Social gatherings and free play were more common before the onset of the pandemic.

- While 75% of citizens felt “mostly safe” or “very safe” while using public outdoor recreation assets during the pandemic. Individuals felt even safer prior to the pandemic. The most prominent safety concern during the pandemic was overcrowding and the inability to keep the recommended physical distance from others during the pandemic. This was not a concern prior to the pandemic.
- During the pandemic, the majority of citizens discovered or rediscovered recreational pursuits and hobbies. The most common new activities included: arts and crafts, walking/hiking/jogging, and gardening. Ninety percent of individuals who took up new activities intend to continue these recreational pursuits once things return to normal.
- During the pandemic, most individuals had to stop or put on hold some of their normal recreational pursuits and hobbies. The most common suspended activities included going to the gym or fitness classes and organized sports. Ninety-three percent of individuals who had to put activities on hold intend to return to them once things return to normal.
- Support for recreation and parks was strong, with 98% “agree[ing]” or “strongly agree[ing]” with the statement: “Recreation and parks are an important local government service.” Furthermore, ninety percent of citizens indicated that they would be “likely” or “very likely” to vote for a local politician who makes recreation and parks a funding priority. Ninety percent also “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement: “Local government funding for parks and recreation should be increased.”

The myriad of environments and individual realities across the province make it impossible to discern the exact influence that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on citizen engagement with recreation and parks. However, the data collected indicates robust public value for outdoor recreation assets, most notably trails. The findings also evidence public understanding of the importance of recreation and parks to individual and community wellbeing. Finally and encouragingly, the survey results show strong support for the development of our sector.