



SEVERAL PEOPLE took advantage of the nice weather last weekend by going for a walk on the Ozaukee Interurban Trail, which has become increasingly more popular because of a marketing campaign and the pandemic.

Photo by Sam Arendt

A magnet for bicyclists, pedestrians

■ *Ozaukee Interurban Trail experiences a ‘massive’ increase in use that officials attribute to new website, marketing campaign and pandemic stir-craziness*

By DAN BENSON

Ozaukee Press staff

The Ozaukee Interurban Trail saw a “massive” increase in the number of people using it in 2020, in part due to a marketing campaign but also due to the impact of Covid-19, which pushed people outdoors seeking recreation.

But the big increase began before Covid arrived, according to trail counters placed along the trail in fall 2019, Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Director Andrew Struck told the county Natural Resources Committee last week.

“The trail counters captured a massive increase in the 2019-2020 fall and winter season, compared to the 2018-2019 season, showing an increase of 78,072 users following the marketing campaign,” which ran from June 2019 through spring 2020, Struck said in a report.

The campaign included development of a new trail website, email marketing effort, advertising the trail in print and on social media, development of a trail logo and a public relations campaign.

On an annual basis, the number of trail users jumped from 216,345 in 2018 to 354,707 to 514,162 in 2020, the report said.

Other evidence of increased interest included 35,120 page views in 2020 of the trail’s website, interurbantrail.com, compared to 1,340 in 2018; an increase in the number of trail maps distributed; and higher occupancy rates at local hotels that can be attributed to the trail.

It all added up to an estimated increase of \$7.84 million in visitor spending in the county that could be attributed to increased trail usage, Struck said.

The campaign was financed with

a \$35,000 Wisconsin Department of Tourism Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) Grant to develop and implement a marketing strategy to promote usage of the Ozaukee Interurban Trail during the fall and winter “shoulder” seasons.

“It is indisputable that the JEM dollars that ran in fall of 2019 and spring of 2020 contributed to the significant shoulder-season growth seen, as well as the significant increase in year-round users across the board,” the report said.

The project was a partnership between the county, the local Tourism Council and the Grafton, Cedarburg, Mequon-Thiensville, Port Washington and Belgium chambers of commerce.

The campaign targeted travel-minded Wisconsin and Midwest families within driving distance of Ozaukee County “who See Trail on page 11B

Trail: *County considering plowing northern stretches*

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are active and like to enjoy and experience new things,” the report said.

The secondary target were biking, hiking, nature and cross country skiing enthusiasts who live within driving distance of Ozaukee County.

The marketing plan also included a survey of trail users, but that was scrapped because of restrictions caused by the pandemic.

A survey is still planned at a future date.

Meanwhile, Struck said his department is looking at plowing the trail of snow in the winter north of Port Washington.

The trail is currently plowed in the

winter time from the Milwaukee County line through Port Washington by the county or by crews from the municipalities of Mequon, Thiensville, Grafton and Port Washington, Struck said.

He said some groups have requested that the trail north of Port be plowed to allow more hikers and bicyclists to use the trail.

Doing so would cut into its use by snowshoers and cross-country skiers but the data he has so far suggests they are a smaller group, he said.

Struck said he would dig further into the data and come back to the committee with more information.