



Worried about Crime on the Eastern Trail?

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“There is no crime problem caused by Saco’s Trails. - None whatsoever.” – Chief Paul, Saco Police Department. At first, Chief Paul seemed surprised at our question because there simply had been no reported crime. As a founder of Saco Bay Trails, I have also not heard of any crime on our trails. But we do hear comments about the reduction in litter after the trails are opened. We frequently hear reports of volunteers quietly removing trash left by others.

We also asked South Portland's Chief of Police Edward Googins what his department had experienced on the South Portland Greenbelt. That trail, which is the eastern end of the Eastern Trail, crosses South Portland from Casco Bay to Scarborough. The Chief told us, “South Portland does not have a crime problem related to its Greenbelt Trail. The heavier the use, the safer they are, because, bad guys are concerned about being detected.” Is it safe to conclude that trails are generally free of crime, or are these just two unusual reports?

Often when residents first learn of proposals to develop a neighborhood trail, there are legitimate questions about the possible influx of undesirable visitors. Many trail developers have heard these questions, which have resulted in several nationwide studies. In 1998 Rails-to-Trails Conservancy in cooperation with the National Park Service published the results of their survey of the impact of 372 trails. Two statements from that 33 page report indicate the good experiences in Saco and South Portland are typical.

“Compared to the abandoned and forgotten corridors they recycle and replace, trails are a positive community development and a crime-prevention strategy of proven value. By generating lawful activities such as walking, running, bicycling and in-line skating, rail-trails are also bringing communities together and reintroducing neighbors to each other.

Trails are actually one of the safest places to be and the incidence of crime on trails is minor in comparison to other locations.”

The report also quotes the Chief of Police in South Burlington, Vermont who wrote to a local planning agency, “Crime and the fear of crime do not flourish in an environment of high energy and healthy interaction among law abiding community members.” He went on to say, “The trail may be one of the safest places in the city.”

The Eastern Trail Alliance wishes you many safe, and “Happy Trails.”

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