



CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL COMMUNITY SURVEY 2025



Photo by Jasmine Starr



Gateway Communities



About This Report

The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT) connects communities, cultures, and landscapes across the Rocky Mountain West. Within this report, the Continental Divide Trail Coalition (CDTC) elevates the perspectives of the CDT community, uplifts the value of the CDT and the Divide landscape, and looks ahead to the future of our work in relationship with the people who live along and love the Continental Divide.

Acknowledgements

CDTC would like to acknowledge the growing community of supporters of the CDT who responded to this survey, shared it with their networks, and continue to inform and support the future of our work.

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Gateway Communities

Community	Population
Silver City, NM	9,386
Grants, NM	8,968
Cuba, NM	755
Chama, NM	995
Hidalgo County, NM	4,178
Pagosa Springs, CO	2,147
South Fork, CO	349
Lake City, CO	391
Salida, CO	6,373
Leadville/Twin Lakes, CO	10,586
Grand Lake, CO	516
Steamboat Springs, CO	13,764
Winter Park/Fraser, CO	2,766
Encampment & Riverside, WY	462
Rawlins, WY	8,122
Pinedale, WY	1,788
Lemhi County, ID	8,027
Butte, MT	33,964
Anaconda, MT	7,632
Helena, MT	33,124
Lima, MT	237
Lincoln, MT	898
Lander-South Pass City, WY	7,581

A hiker trekking through the Arapaho Roosevelt National Forest
(Photo Credit: Polly Murray)

About the Continental Divide Trail

Designated by Congress as a National Scenic Trail in 1978, the CDT follows the Continental Divide for 3,100 miles through New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana, traversing nationally significant scenic terrain and areas rich in the heritage and life of the Rocky Mountain West. As it travels along the nation's spine, the CDT connects biodiverse landscapes, unique communities, and countless cultures.

About the Continental Divide Trail Coalition

The Continental Divide Trail Coalition's mission is to complete, protect, and elevate the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and inspire a diverse community to steward the trail and its connected landscapes. CDTC has staff across the Divide landscape, with offices in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Golden, Colorado, and Helena, Montana.

The Gateway Community Program

CDTC elevates local communities along the Divide and helps them leverage the benefit of having the CDT in their backyard. Currently, there are 23 designated Gateway Communities spanning from Hidalgo County in Southern New Mexico to the town of Lincoln in north-central Montana. Gateway Community designation is pursued by local entities who want to be recognized as welcoming destinations along the trail and who are dedicated to the stewardship of the Continental Divide Trail.

Timeline of the Gateway Community Program

2012

The CDT Coalition is founded to complete, protect, and promote the CDT.

2016

CDTC launches the Ambassador program, recruiting community members to serve as local organizers, advocates, and champions of the CDT.

2025

Winter Park/Fraser in Colorado and Lima in Montana become the 22nd and 23rd designated Gateway Communities of the CDT.

2013

Silver City, New Mexico, becomes the first designated CDT Gateway Community!

2020

CDTC hosts its first annual Gateway Community Summit, bringing together trail enthusiasts and community members to discuss opportunities for stewardship and economic growth.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

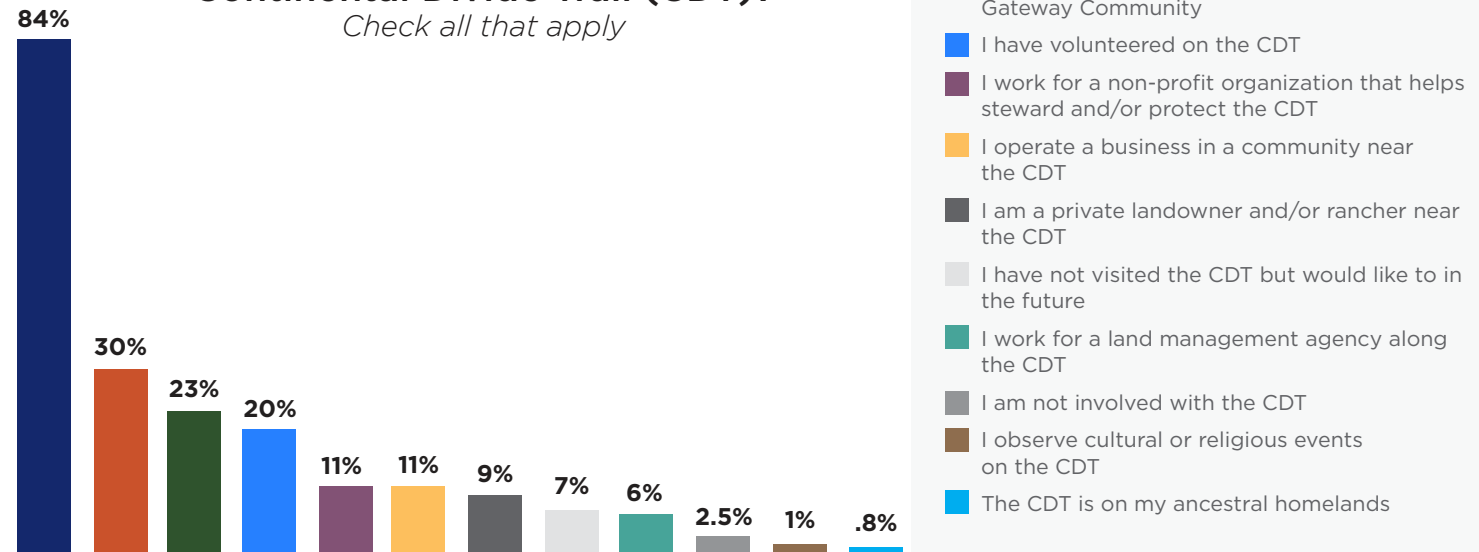
During the survey response window from August to November of 2026, **648 members** of the CDT community, including close to **100 business owners**, responded to the CDT Community Survey. CDTC circulated the survey through partner and community networks, shared it at over a dozen in-person events, promoted it online and through social media, included it in newsletters, and used word of mouth to reach every corner of the CDT community.



Llama packing in East Helena, MT (Photo Credit: Mat Wilder)

What is your relationship with the Continental Divide Trail (CDT)?

Check all that apply

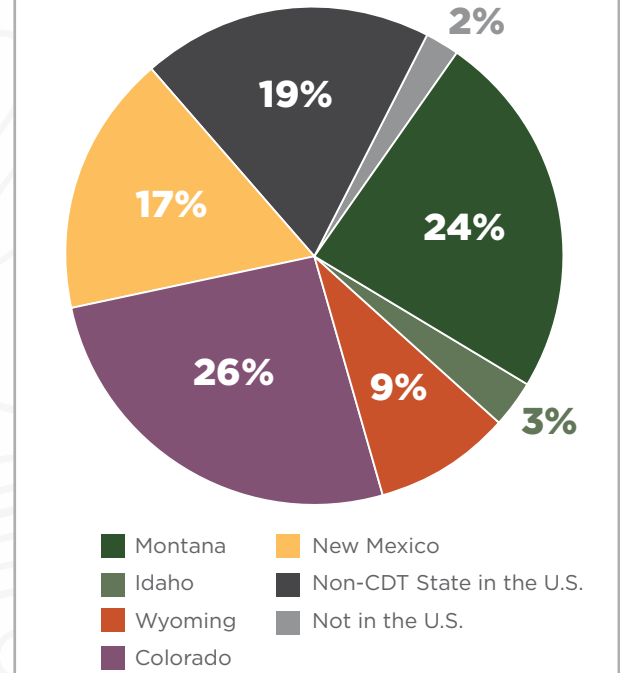


- I have visited/recreated on the CDT
- I live in a designated CDT Gateway Community
- I live near the CDT but not in an official CDT Gateway Community
- I have volunteered on the CDT
- I work for a non-profit organization that helps steward and/or protect the CDT
- I operate a business in a community near the CDT
- I am a private landowner and/or rancher near the CDT
- I have not visited the CDT but would like to in the future
- I work for a land management agency along the CDT
- I am not involved with the CDT
- I observe cultural or religious events on the CDT
- The CDT is on my ancestral homelands

Experiences on the CDT in 2025



Geographic Diversity



Time Spent on the CDT



Age

- 6% 20-29 years old
- 15% 30-39 years old
- 18% 40-49 years old
- 19% 50-59 years old
- 26% 60-69 years old
- 17% 70+ years old

Gender Identity

- 53% Male
- 46% Female
- 0.8% Genderqueer
- .16% Transfeminine
- .16% Transmasculine

Racial Identity/Ethnicity

- 93% White
- 3% Latino/Latina/Latinx
- 2% Indigenous American Indian or Alaska Native
- .8% Asian American
- .3% Black or African-American











Thru-hikers enjoying the view of the Green River Valley in Bridger-Teton National Forest (Photo Credit: Eric "DG" Shaw)

MAINSTREET TO MOUNTAINTOP: SMALL BUSINESS VOICES

CDTC's small business network connects business owners across the Divide who live in rural communities that see the economic impact of the CDT. In the 2025 Community Survey, we heard firsthand from **89 business owners** from across the trail. As more Gateway Communities become designated, business owners are a central part of informing how and where trail travelers are making an impact at the local level. What may seem like a trickle of dollars from individual hikers, when put into perspective, is shown to be a flood of investment into regional and rural economies.

How would you categorize your business?

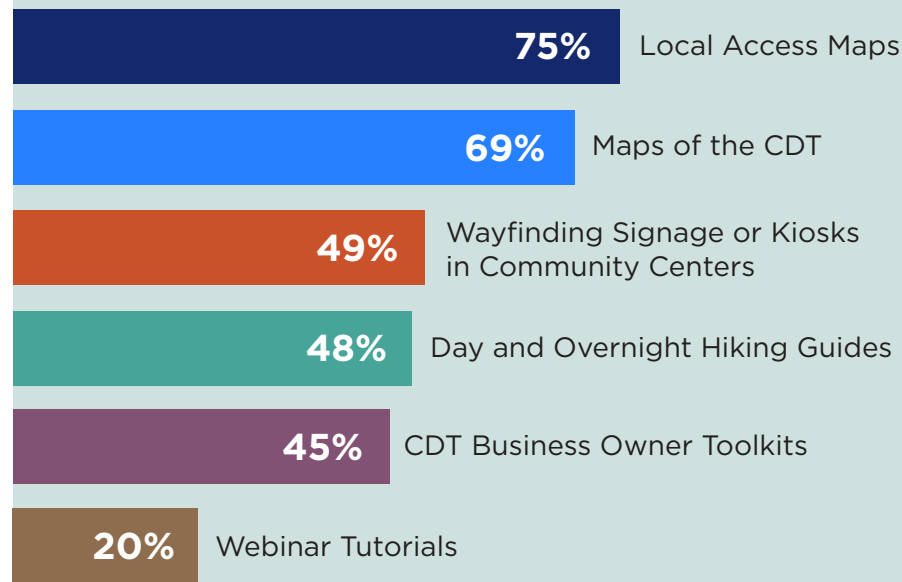
Check all that apply

-  **36%**
Education-focused organization
-  **22%**
Outdoor clothing or gear store
-  **18%**
Hotel, motel, or hostel
-  **16%**
Restaurant, bar, dispensary, or similar
-  **12%**
Outdoor guide service
-  **9%**
RV park or campground
-  **8%**
Airbnb, short-term rental, inn, or guesthouse
-  **5%**
Grocery or convenience store



What resources or opportunities can the Continental Divide Trail Coalition provide to support local businesses like yours?

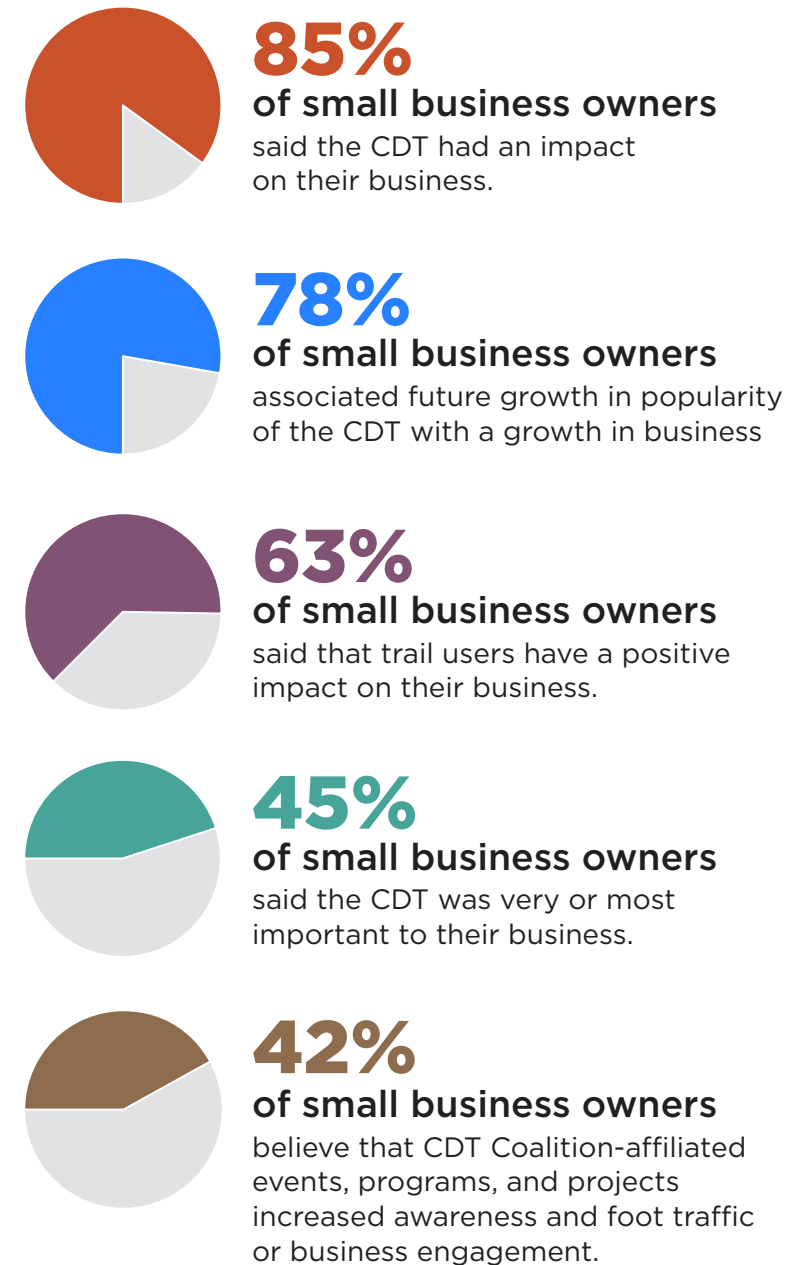
Check all that apply



Yankie Creek Coffee House on Yankie St. in Silver City, NM
(Photo Credit: Silver City Arts and Culture District).

“ I think the CDT helps bring new energy and visitors to our small community. Thru-hikers and outdoor enthusiasts **connect with locals and create relationships, sometimes forever friendships.** They support local business and share stories, creating a connection that's both economic and emotional.”

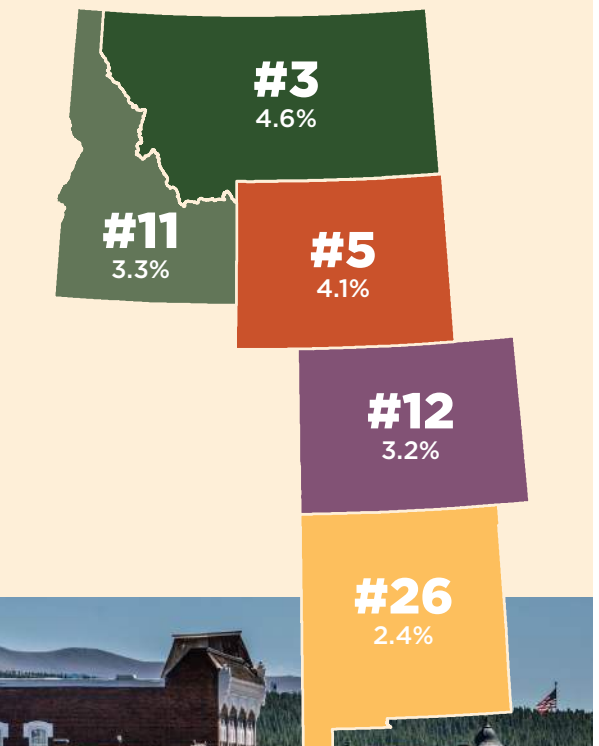
- CDT Gateway Community Member



CDT SOBO TRAIL DAZE attendees gather at Zero Day Coffee and Gear in Leadville, CO.
(Photo Credit: Jordan Williams).

OUTDOOR RECREATION AS A % OF STATE GDP

When Headwaters Economics ranked states by outdoor recreation as a percentage of state GDP in 2023, CDT states ranked highly:



Downtown Leadville, CO (Photo Credit: Justin Talbot).

VALUE OF THE DIVIDE: HEARTH, HEALTH, AND HOME

When we asked the CDT community about how they value the Divide, the responses painted a picture of the holistic benefits that the trail provides for quality of life, for the places people love, and for the longevity that the lands and waters provide for their town culture and wellbeing. As CDTC works alongside partners and stakeholders to complete the trail, these responses reinforce the importance of seeing beyond the tread and looking at the significance of the entire Continental Divide landscape.

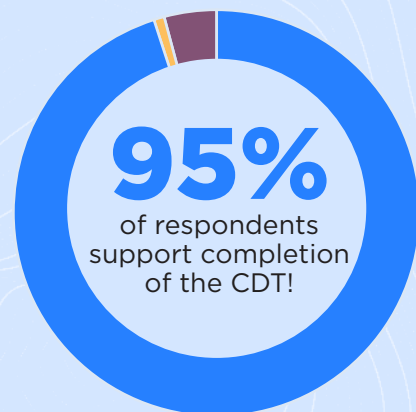
96% Agree that “the outdoor recreation economy is important for the future well-being of my community.”

87% believe that public lands and waters are **very or most important** to the well-being of businesses, jobs, and the local economy.

TRAIL COMPLETION

Since its designation as a National Scenic Trail in 1978, stewards across the CDT have worked toward completing the trail, bringing it to 96% complete in 2025. Of the 3100 miles of trail, only 160 miles of the trail remain gap areas where trail travelers often must travel on busy roadways and highways instead of protected trails.

Trail completion is a top priority for CDTC, and CDT communities recognize that a completed trail provides better connectivity to the trail and public lands for trail travelers and community members alike.



■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure



To learn more about our Trail Completions efforts, visit cdtcoalition.org/our-work

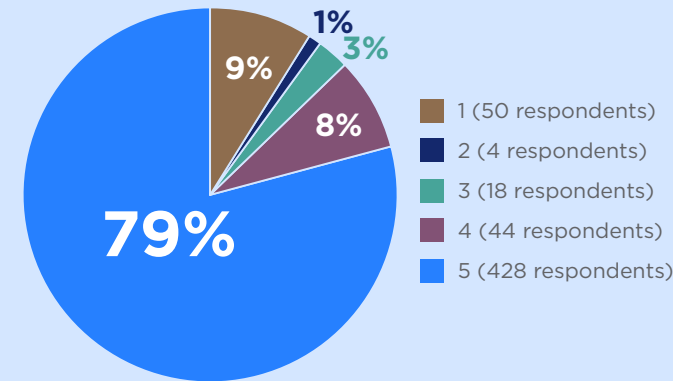
What aspects of the CDT appeal to you?

Check all that apply

- 92%** Scenic views
- 81%** Remote/primitive experience
- 69%** Exploring public lands
- 58%** Opportunity for long-distance travel
- 56%** Opportunity for short-distance travel
- 50%** Range of recreational use
- 46%** Gaining better understanding of the Divide landscape
- 37%** Status as a congressionally-designated National Scenic Trail

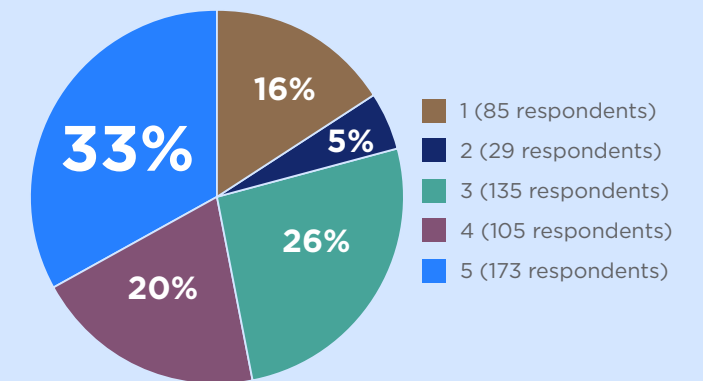
On a scale of 1-5, how strongly do you agree with the following statement:
“The CDT is an important part of the culture of my community.”

1 = Lowest | 5 = Highest



On a scale of 1-5, how strongly do you agree with the following statement:
“Public lands are important to my personal health.”

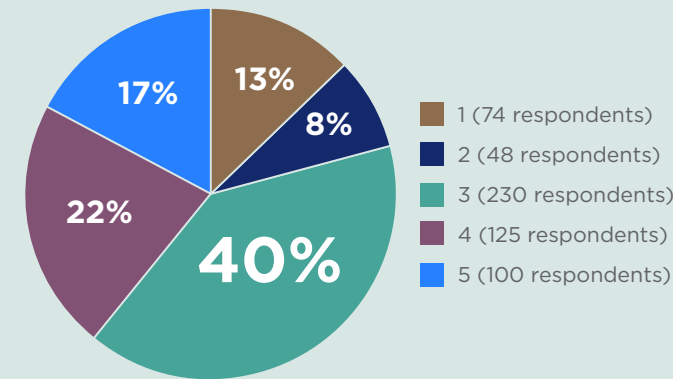
1 = Lowest | 5 = Highest



On a scale of 1-5, how strongly do you agree with the following statement:
“It is easy to stay informed on actions taking place on the CDT and public lands near me.”

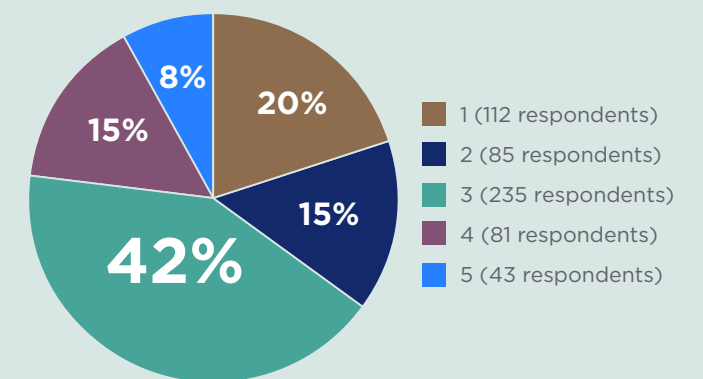
(For example: Forest Planning processes, wildfire closures, etc.)

1 = Lowest | 5 = Highest



On a scale of 1-5, how strongly do you agree with the following statement:
“My voice impacts decisions about the management of public lands (like the CDT) near my community.”

1 = Lowest | 5 = Highest



EXPLORE THE CDT: DARK SKIES

The CDT traverses areas that have some of the darkest skies in the continental U.S. From Pie Town, New Mexico, to Glacier National Park, visitors on the CDT are able to enjoy the stars for navigation, reflection, and storytelling.

When asked about the importance of dark skies and attitudes toward protecting them, **the majority of respondents shared that protecting dark skies was important.**

When asked, “How do you experience dark skies?,” **camping, hiking, and stargazing were all popular ways of experiencing dark skies along the Continental Divide.**

62% Strongly support measures to protect dark skies in their community

GATEWAYS TO THE CDT: ELEVATING SENSE OF PLACE

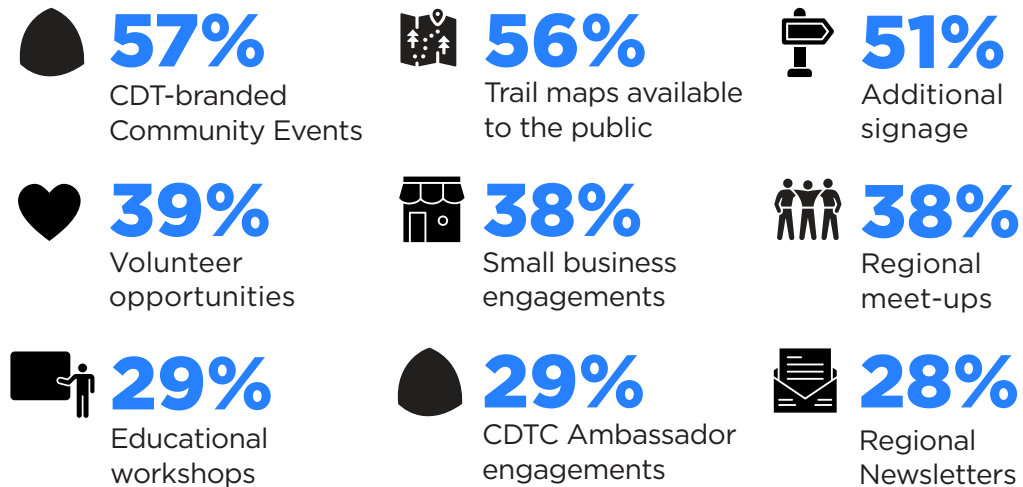
More than just a dirt path, the CDT is a connector of landscapes, communities, and cultures. The trail is a place where families can break bread, classrooms of students can learn, young professionals can sharpen their skills, and storytellers can share the history of belonging in this place, some with connections since time immemorial. As future generations continue the legacy of stewardship across the Divide, the stories shared with us through the survey of the people who have lived on the land act as important guideposts to the future of this work and the continued enjoyment of the lands and waters along the CDT.

What resources or events in your community would help elevate awareness of the CDT?

Check all that apply



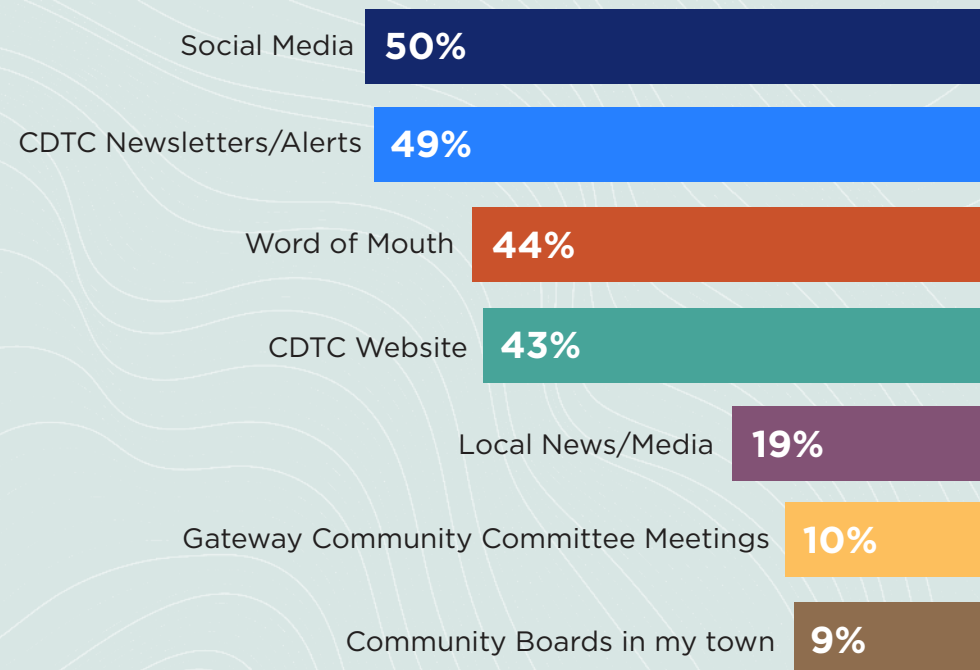
Hikers traveling through Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. (Photo Credit: Heidi Zhang)



TRAIL INFORMATION

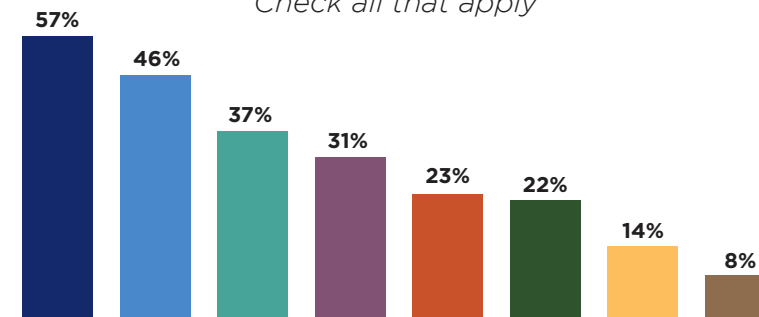
Visitors to the CDT can get more information about the trail through social media, the CDTC website, newsletters, word of mouth, and even paper maps!

For a snapshot on where people are getting their information from in 2025, we asked "How do you stay informed about what's happening on the CDT?"

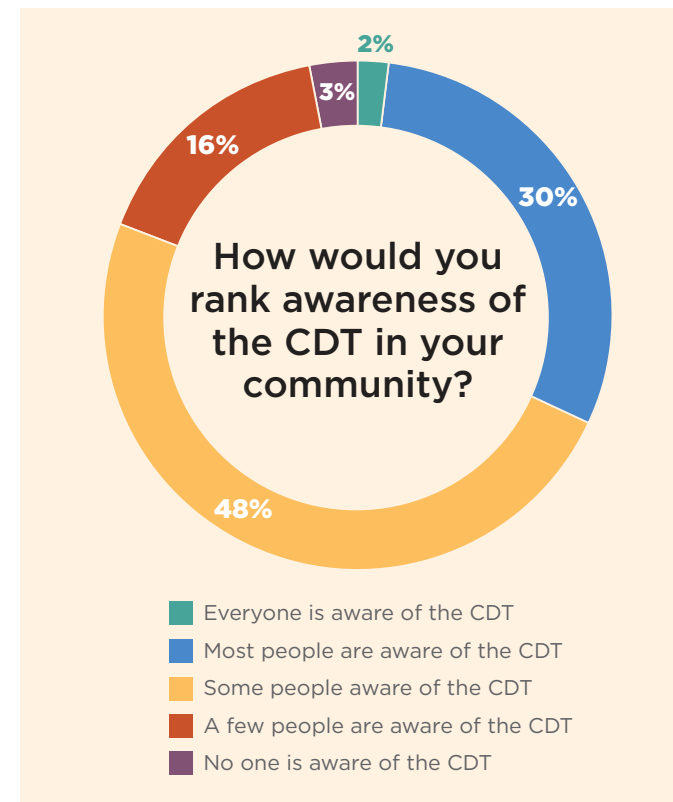


What opportunities would make the CDT more accessible and welcoming for you, your friends and family, and community at large?

Check all that apply



- A completed CDT with less walking on highways and roads
- Educational Materials (maps, brochures, planning guides, etc.)
- Improved Trailhead Infrastructure
- Greater Access to Trailheads (shuttles, walking paths, etc.)
- Inclusive Community Hikes
- Transportation
- Informational Sessions (skills training, how-to videos, resource or gear recommendations)
- User Conflict Monitoring & Meditation



- Everyone is aware of the CDT
- Most people are aware of the CDT
- Some people aware of the CDT
- A few people are aware of the CDT
- No one is aware of the CDT

Hikers looking at a map at Herman Gulch Trailhead (Photo Credit: Janelle Paciencia)



"How do impacts from protections for public lands and waters rank in importance to your community?"

The 5 impacts that ranked the highest in importance included...

- #1** Improving the quality of life in my community
- #2** Providing outdoor recreation opportunities for residents such as hiking, biking, paddling
- #3** Increasing the number of outdoor enthusiasts visiting my community
- #4** Improving public health and wellness in my community
- #5** Increasing volunteerism and outdoor learning opportunities

50% of CDT community members

felt "increase stress on volunteer local organizations to maintain trails, clean bathrooms and other facilities, and ensure public access" as an impact from recent land management actions.

38% of CDT community members

reported "resource damage/impact on public lands" as impacts from recent land management actions.



Explore the CDT with Us!

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