



# Profile of Mesabi Trail Visitors: People Traveling More than 50-Miles or Staying Overnight to Use the Trail

A REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS PROGRAM

Authored by Brigid Tuck and Neil Linscheid, in partnership with John Bennett



**PROGRAM SPONSORS:** CLUB MESABI, INC., ST. LOUIS AND LAKE COUNTIES REGIONAL RAILROAD AUTHORITY, NORTHEAST MINNESOTA REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP, IRON RANGE RESOURCES AND REHABILITATION BOARD



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May 2016

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## Executive Summary: Profile of Mesabi Trail Visitors –People Traveling Over 50-Miles or Staying Overnight to Use the Trail

Located in northeastern Minnesota, the Mesabi Trail currently stretches from Grand Rapids to just past Giants Ridge Golf and Ski Resort in Biwabik, with additional sections in Tower/Soudan, Ely, and a spur to Aurora, collectively offering more than 120 miles of paved, multi-use trail. During the warmer weather season, the trail is used primarily for bicycling, but other uses include walking, hiking, and in-line skating. While not groomed specifically for winter use, the trail is used in limited areas by snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, winter hikers, and fat tire bicyclists. Future construction will extend the trail to Ely, its ultimate destination, giving users more than 145 miles of trail to enjoy.

The Mesabi Trail's length, scenic location, multi-use, and ease of pedestrian movement elevate it to a destination trail. As a destination trail, it attracts thousands of riders annually. Trail sensors captured more than 217,400 passes in 2014, with nearly 145,000 of those occurring during the bicycling season. This represents an 85 percent increase since 2007.

Two organizations directly support the Mesabi Trail. The St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority develops and maintains the trail. Club Mesabi promotes the trail and hosts the Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Tour.

**Profile of Trail Visitors:** As a destination trail, the Mesabi Trail attracts visitors to the region. Visitors are defined as people traveling more than 50-miles, or staying overnight, while using the trail. To learn more about Mesabi Trail visitors, an intercept survey was conducted on the trail. The surveying occurred in the months between April and September, thus focusing primarily on warm weather bicycle trail use. The following conclusions were drawn from those surveys:

- *The Mesabi Trail has a solid base of repeat visitors and appeals to new visitors.* More than half (56 percent) of the visitors surveyed were on the trail for the first time. Of the 44 percent of visitors reporting using the trail previously, 72 percent had visited more than once. Drawing a mix of new and repeat visitors is necessary for the success of the Mesabi Trail.

Overall, the Mesabi Trail has a positive reputation among the Minnesota biking community. Nearly one-third of all trail visitors learned about the Mesabi Trail via a recommendation from others. In addition, those riding the trail tend to be active. Forty-four percent of respondents had ridden more than 12 times on other trails in the past year.

The appeal of the Mesabi Trail varies. Scenery, trail length, location, and trail conditions are all important factors in selection of the trail by visitors. Continuing to lengthen the trail and keeping it in good condition will be important for its future success.

- *The Mesabi Trail increases the length of visits to the region.* A majority of visitors (70 percent) indicate the Mesabi Trail factored into the length of their trip to the region. On average, visitors extended their stay in the area by two days due to the Mesabi Trail.

The Mesabi Trail attracts visitors from across the United States. Visitors also come from across Minnesota, particularly the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and the northern half of the state, including Duluth. Although not surveyed, anecdotal evidence from staff and volunteers indicates international visitors, especially Canadians, also ride on the trail.

Interestingly, “close to home” is not an important factor in the decision to visit the Mesabi Trail. Results indicate visitors are willing to travel a considerable distance to access a desirable trail. The Mesabi Trail has a certain level of attractiveness to entice those living further away.

More than 90 percent of visitors report staying overnight in the region while visiting the trail, spending three nights on average. The majority of visitors patronizes local lodging establishments or otherwise pays for accommodations. Fifty three percent stayed in a hotel, motel, inn, bed and breakfast, or hotel; 17 percent stayed at a private or public campground; and 9 percent stayed in a rental home, cabin, or resort. Less than one-quarter (24 percent) stayed in non-paid accommodations (own vacation home or with friends/family).

Mesabi Trail visitors spend an average of \$143.90 per person per day during their visit to the region. Major per person expenditures per day include lodging (\$56.60), prepared food and beverage (\$30.40), transportation alternatives in the region, such as shuttles, rentals, and tours (\$11.80), and gasoline (\$11.50).

Given that the average person stays three days, total spending during the trip is \$431.70. The average party size is four, translating into average trip party spending of more than \$1,700. A party of four Mesabi Trail visitors generates an estimated \$2,762.10 in economic activity during their three day trip. An increase in Mesabi Trail visitors could have implications for regional tourism.

- *Opportunities exist to increase the influence of the Mesabi Trail.* For example, extending the trail to Ely may open up more visitor opportunities for the city. Attracting more millennials might also open new markets.

There appears to be room for collaboration between local recreational and tourism attractions and the Mesabi Trail to increase the number of visitors to each. Survey participants were asked if they engaged in other activities (visiting a state park, mining-related attraction, or museum, or participating in hiking, fishing, swimming, or golfing) during their trip to the trail. More than 70 percent of respondents did not engage in these activities. Increasing collaboration between tourism destinations and the trail may offer opportunities to both increase trail ridership and increase participation in other activities.



## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Located in northeastern Minnesota, the Mesabi Trail currently offers more than 120 miles of trail for bikers, hikers, walkers, and inline skaters during the biking season. In the winter, the trail is used in limited areas by snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, snowshoers, winter hikers, and fat tire bicyclists, but the trail is not groomed specifically for winter use. According to the Mesabi Trail website (mesabitrail.com), “The trail traverses forest, meadows, rivers, streams and lakes in a region bounded on the east end by the great Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and on the west by the Mississippi River. In between, the Mesabi Trail takes visitors past the edges of the open pit mines of the Iron Range, and areas abundant with wildlife, nature and the rich heritage of hearty pioneers.”

The Mesabi Trail’s length, scenic location in Northeast Minnesota, multi-use, and ease of pedestrian movement elevate it to a destination trail (Steiner & Butler 2007). As such, the Mesabi Trail draws thousands of people to the trail each year. In 2014, trail sensors recorded more than 217,400 passes. Of those, approximately 145,000 were measured during the bicycling season. The number of 2014 passes represents an 85 percent increase since 2007.



The Mesabi Trail was developed as a result of efforts led by the St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority (RRA). The mission of the RRA is to preserve abandoned railroad for future transportation use. Work on the Mesabi Trail began in 1986, and construction continues to complete the final 25+ miles. When finished, the Mesabi Trail will offer more than 145 miles of paved trail connecting 28 communities in northeast Minnesota from Grand Rapids to Ely. The RRA continues to invest annually in the trail—both through operational support and investments in maintenance and development.

Club Mesabi is an organization that promotes and supports the Mesabi Trail through education and advocacy, encouraging its use as part of a healthy lifestyle. Club Mesabi also organizes and hosts the annual Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Tour. The route varies every year, but the tour itself is an opportunity for riders of all levels to experience the trail. Several ride options are offered with different lengths to meet the desires of participants. In addition to riding the trail, participants enjoy a live concert and picnic dinner at the finish line, along with commemorative T-shirts, wheel passes, transportation for riders and bicycles, and rest stops with food, refreshments, and entertainment.

Given the volume of trail users, and the increase in trail use, Club Mesabi is interested in learning more about trail users, particularly those traveling to the region with the purpose of recreating on the trail. In order to understand visitors, Club Mesabi, with support from its partners, commissioned University of Minnesota Extension to conduct a visitor profile.

Club Mesabi provided guidance and volunteer services for the research. The project was funded by the Northeast Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnership, St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Rail Authority, and the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board.

## ATTRIBUTES OF MESABI TRAIL VISITORS

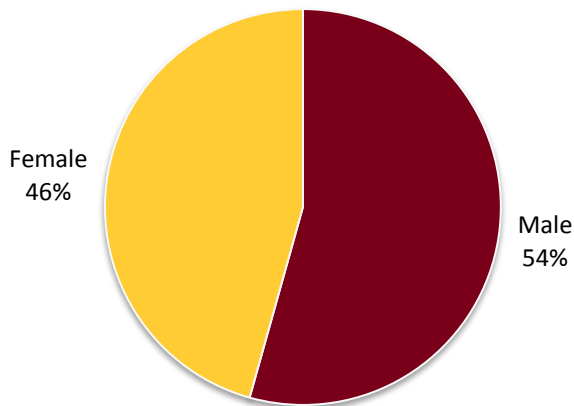
As a destination trail, the Mesabi Trail attracts visitors to the region. Visitors are defined as people traveling more than 50-miles, or staying overnight, in the region while recreating on the trail. To learn more about Mesabi Trail visitors, an intercept survey was conducted on the trail from July 2013 to June 2014. Surveys were collected only during warm weather months, therefore, the results reflect warm weather bicycle users of the trail. A full explanation of the survey process is provided in the methods section.

The following section describes key attributes of Mesabi Trail visitors (those traveling more than 50 miles or staying overnight to use the trail) and provides a discussion of these key attributes.<sup>1</sup>

### Respondents

Of those responding to the trail visitor survey, slightly more than half (54 percent) were male and slightly less than half (46 percent) were female (Chart 1).

**Chart 1: Gender of Mesabi Trail Survey Respondents**



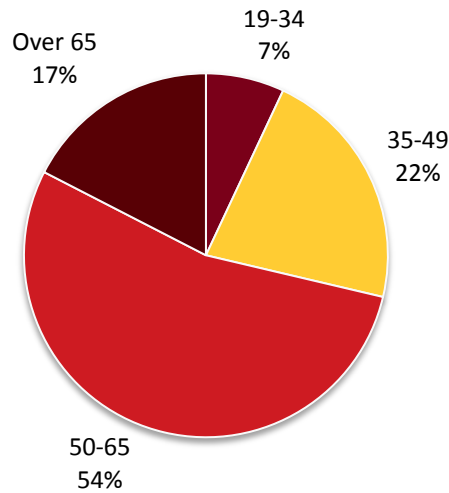
The average age of Mesabi Trail survey respondents was 55 years old. The majority of survey respondents (54 percent) were between the ages of 50 and 65 years old (Chart 2). Roughly a quarter of respondents were between the ages of 35 and 49. Only those over the age of 18 were asked to complete the survey.

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<sup>1</sup> The summary data includes information related only to Mesabi Trail visitors. Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Tour riders are not included in the summary data, unless noted.

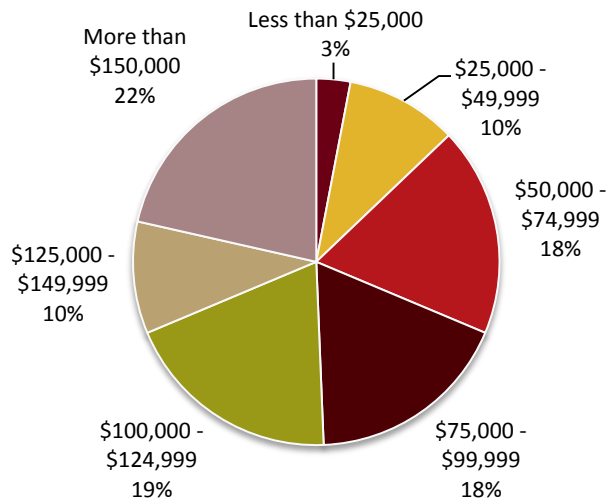


**Chart 2: Age of Mesabi Trail Survey Respondents**



Mesabi Trail visitors also span the household income spectrum but skew toward higher income households. The largest income category of visitors is more than \$150,000, which accounts for 22 percent of visitors (Chart 3). However, this percentage is very close to the income categories of \$100,000 to \$124,999 (19 percent) and \$75,000 to \$99,999 (18 percent), as well as \$50,000 to \$74,999 (18 percent). In comparison, the 2013 median household income in Minnesota was \$59,800 (United States Census).

**Chart 3: Income Levels of Mesabi Trail Survey Respondents**



The Mesabi Trail draws visitors nationwide, reinforcing the Mesabi Trail as a destination trail. Slightly more than 70 percent of survey respondents reported a primary zip code in Minnesota (Table 1). Eleven percent reported a zip code in Wisconsin. Illinois is the third most represented state (2.3 percent). While all respondents were from the United States, anecdotal evidence indicates the trail also draws international visitors, especially Canadians. Trail volunteers and staff report they often encounter international guests while on the trail.

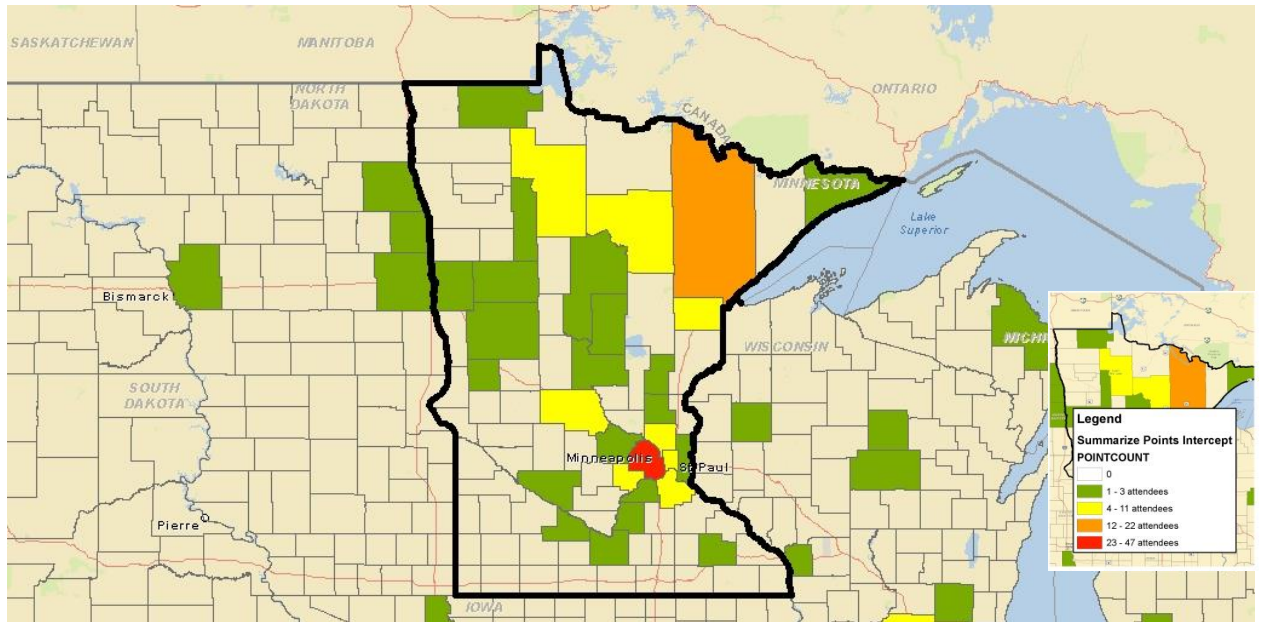
**Table 1: State of Primary Residence, Mesabi Trail Survey Respondents**

State	Percent of Respondents
Minnesota	71.1
Wisconsin	11.0
Illinois	2.3
Ohio	1.8
North Dakota	1.8
Wyoming	1.4
Michigan	1.4
Nebraska	1.4
Virginia	0.9
New York	0.9
Arizona	0.9
South Dakota	0.5
Montana	0.5
Missouri	0.5
Oregon	0.5
North Carolina	0.5
California	0.5
Pennsylvania	0.5
Alabama	0.5
Indiana	0.5
All Other States	0.9

Within Minnesota, most visitors are from the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Specifically, 42 percent of respondents come from the Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington Metropolitan Statistical Area.<sup>2</sup> However, the trail does draw visitors from across the state and particularly across northern Minnesota.

Duluth, northern Minnesota's most populous city, also has many visitors to the trail—12 percent of respondents report being from the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Statistical Area.

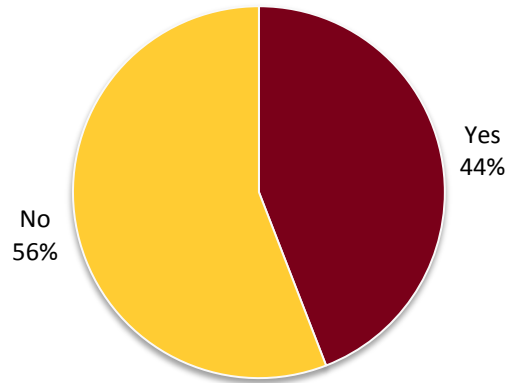
**Map 1: County of Primary Residence, Mesabi Trail Survey Respondents**



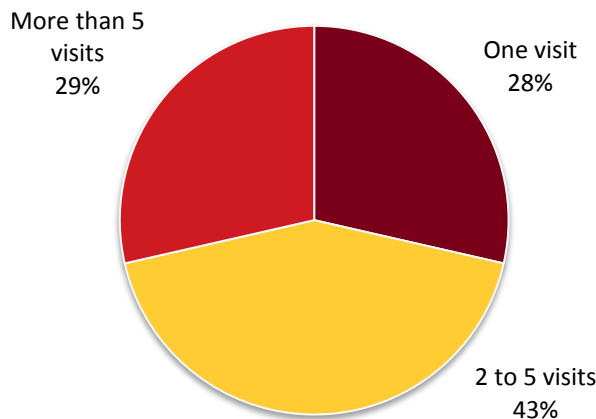
<sup>2</sup> For definitions of the MSA's, please visit <https://apps.deed.state.mn.us/assets/lmi/areamap/msa.shtml>.

Forty-four percent of those surveyed were repeat visitors to the Mesabi Trail, and 56 percent were new visitors (Chart 4). Nearly three-quarters of repeat Mesabi Trail visitors visited the trail more than once in the past three years (Chart 5). More than one-quarter of repeat visitors have been to the trail more than five times during that three-year period.

**Chart 4: Have You Visited the Mesabi Trail Before Today?**



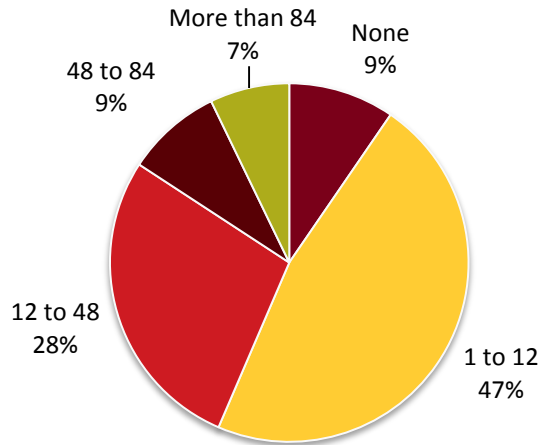
**Chart 5: In the Past Three Years, How Many Times Have You Visited the Mesabi Trail?**



Mesabi Trail visitors are fairly active in their use of trails. Only 9 percent of visitors reported not having used other trails in the year prior to the survey (Chart 6). Nearly 50 percent reported recreating on a different trail between one and 12 times during the one-year time period. Twelve visits are approximately one visit per month (year round) or two visits per month during April through October. Sixteen percent of trail visitors used trails other than the Mesabi Trail 48 or more

times in the past 12 months. This translates into four or more visits per month (year round) or eight visits or more per month between April and October.

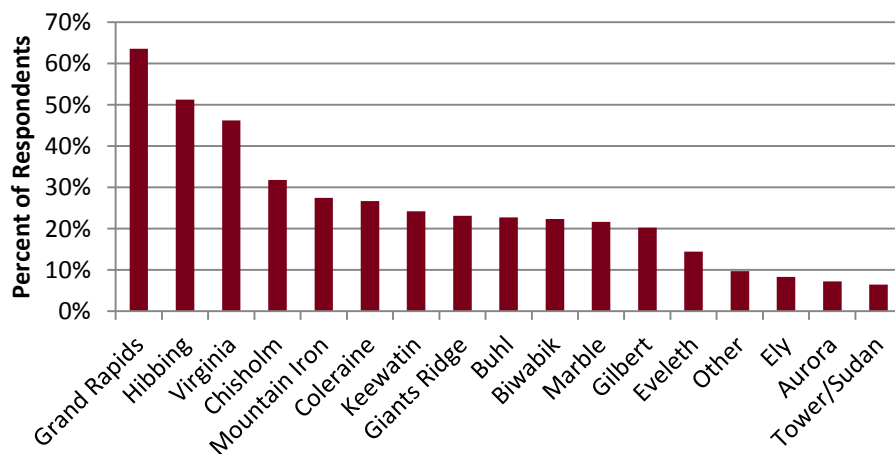
**Chart 6: In the Past 12 Months, How Many Times Have You Used Other Trails?**



### Trip Information

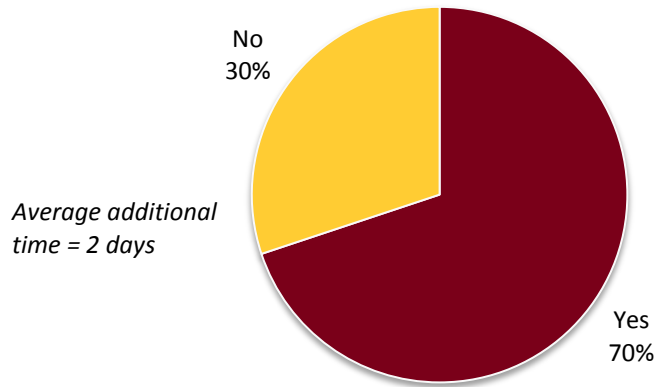
More than 60 percent of respondents reported visiting Grand Rapids during their trip, more than 50 percent visited Hibbing, and approximately 45 percent visited Virginia (Chart 7). The sampling plan (detailed in the methodology section) called for equal collection of surveys at various points along the trail. In the end, a higher number of surveys were collected at the Grand Rapids location. Club Mesabi reports a higher percentage of wheel passes sold in the Grand Rapids area, supporting the theory of higher usage at this location.

**Chart 7: What Communities Did You Visit on Your Trip to the Mesabi Trail? Circle All That Apply**



The Mesabi Trail also influences the length of time visitors spend in the area. Seventy percent of surveyed visitors indicated the trail was a consideration in how long they stayed in the area (Chart 8). On average, visitors stayed an additional two days in the area because of the trail.

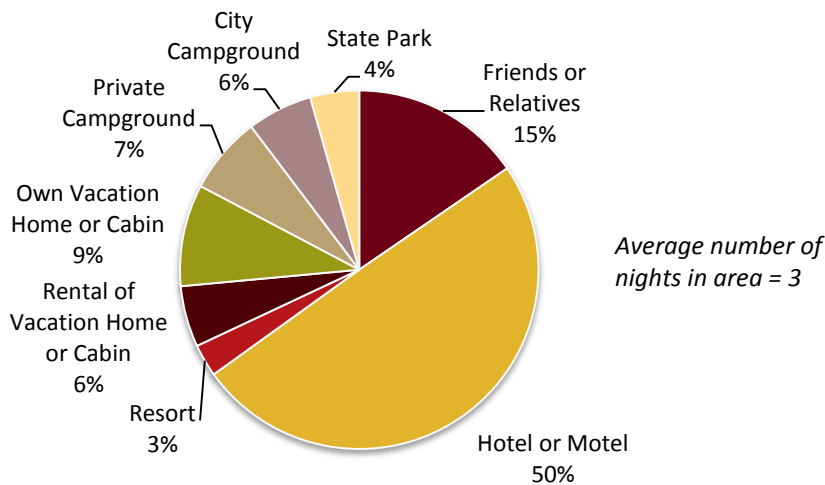
**Chart 8: Did the Mesabi Trail Factor Into Your Decision on How Long to Stay in the Area?**



Mesabi Trail visitors spend time in the region as part of their visit to the trail. Ninety-two percent of respondents reported spending at least one night in the area during their trip. The average length of stay for Mesabi Trail visitors is three nights.

Half of respondents reported staying overnight in a hotel, motel, inn, or bed and breakfast while visiting the trail (Chart 9). Staying with friends or relatives is another common choice.

**Chart 9: Overnight Accommodations During Visit to Mesabi Trail**

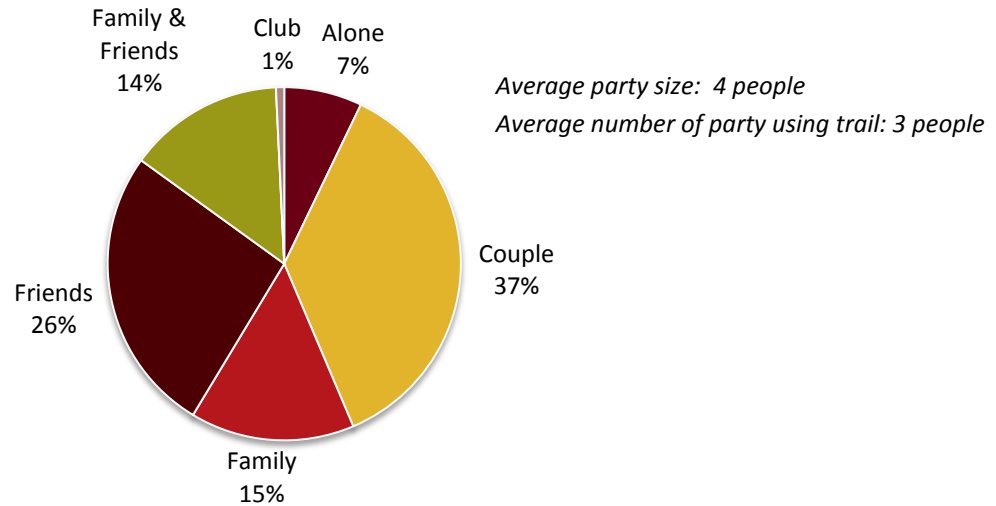


The Mesabi Trail also draws relatively large travel groups to the region. Based on survey results, the average travel party is four people. Of those in the travel party, an average of three people uses the trail. In other words, for every three people on the trail, there is another one person in the group not

using the trail. Visiting the trail as a couple is the most common travel party arrangement, followed by visiting with friends, family, or a combination of friends and family (Chart 10).

In addition to Club Mesabi's annual trail tour, other independent organizations host trail rides. Examples include the Bike MS: TRAM Ride (hosted by the National Multiple Sclerosis Society), Habitat for Humanity, Bicycling around Minnesota (BAM), and commercially-run tours. The survey did not capture any of the riders from these events.

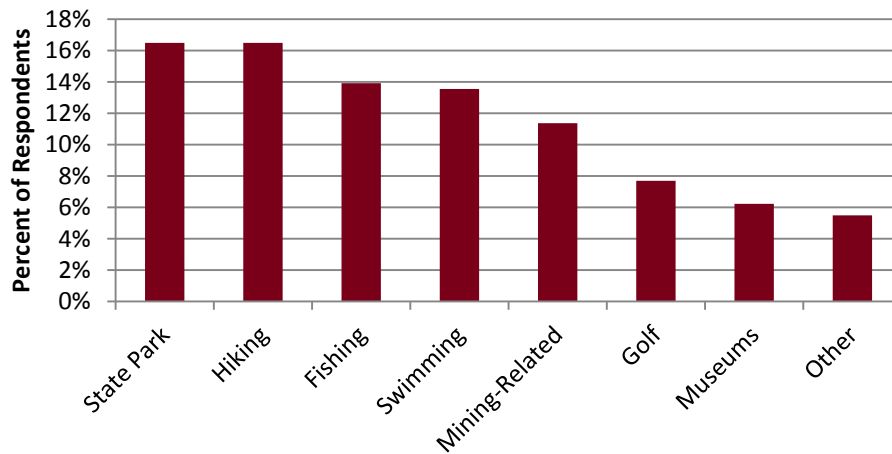
**Chart 10: Travel Party for Trip to Area**



### Trip Activities

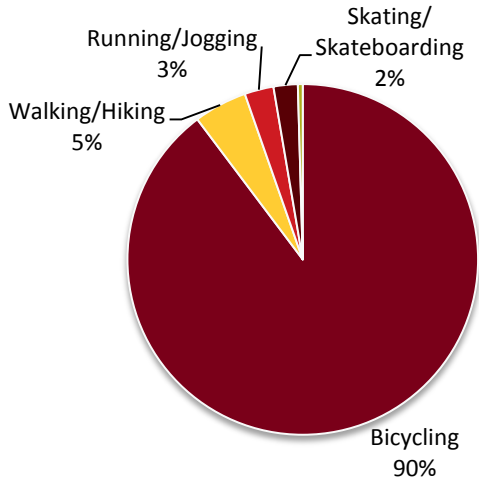
Mesabi Trail visitors also participate in other activities while in the region. More than 16 percent of visitors go to a Minnesota state park or hiking during their trip (Chart 11).

**Chart 11: What Other Activities Did You Participate In During Your Trip to the Mesabi Trail? Circle All That Apply**



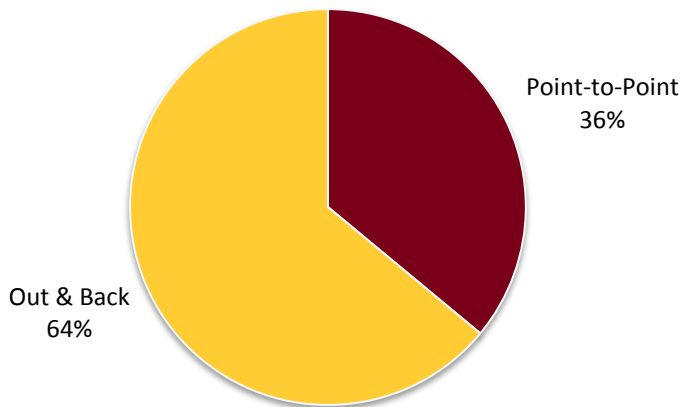
Mesabi Trail visitors engage with the trail in a variety of ways. While bicycling is the primary use of the trail (90 percent biked), the trail is multi-modal and attracts walkers, hikers, runners, inline skaters, and skateboarders (Chart 12).

**Chart 12: What is Your Primary Activity on the Mesabi Trail Today?**



Nearly two-thirds of Mesabi Trail visitors travel out and back on the trail (Chart 13). In other words, they begin and end their trail activities at the same location. Approximately one-third of trail visitors go from point-to-point. The ability to ride from one point to another point is facilitated by a trail shuttle that brings equipment and luggage from the starting point to the ending point.

**Chart 13: On Your Mesabi Trail Trip Today, Will You Travel...?**

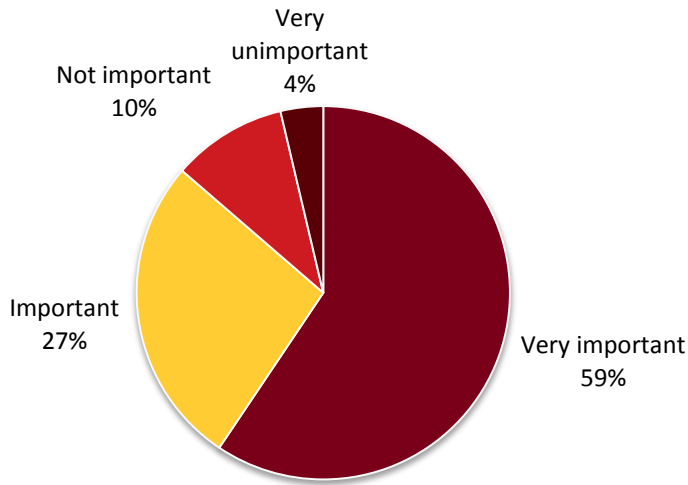




### Trip Purpose and Planning

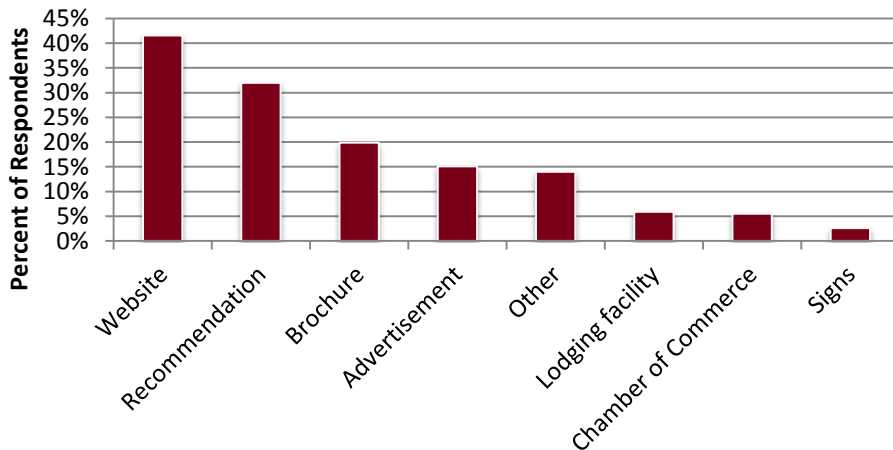
Of all respondents, 86 percent indicated the trail was “very important” or “important” in their choice to visit the region (Chart 14). Only 14 percent indicated it had little influence over their decision, with four percent indicating it was very unimportant.

**Chart 14: How Important Was the Mesabi Trail in Your Choice to Visit the Area on this Trip?**



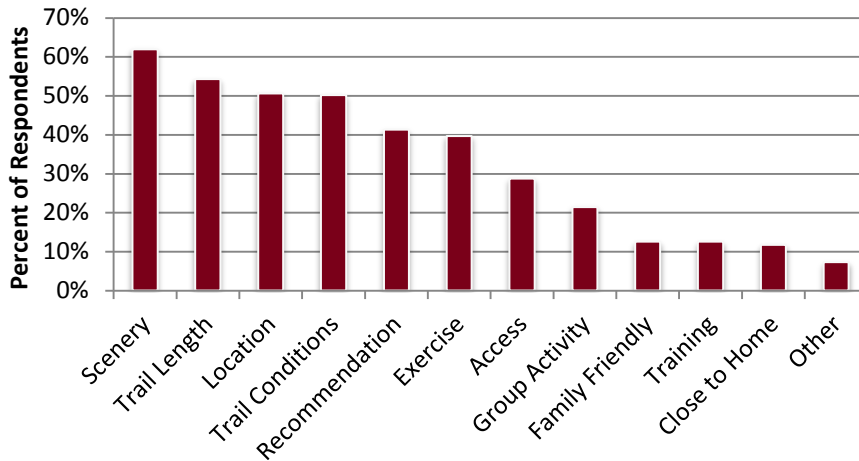
More than 30 percent of respondents indicated they learned about the Mesabi Trail via a recommendation or word-of-mouth (Chart 15). The Mesabi Trail website is also effective, with more than 40 percent of visitors indicating they learned about the trail via this medium.

**Chart 15: How Did You Become Aware of the Mesabi Trail?**  
Circle All That Apply



More than 60 percent of respondents indicated scenery influenced their decision to visit the trail. Trail length (54 percent), location (51 percent), and trail conditions (50 percent) were also key factors in decisions to use the trail (Chart 16).

**Chart 16: Why Did You Decide to Visit the Mesabi Trail?**  
**Circle All That Apply**



**Daily Expenditures by Mesabi Trail Visitors**

Mesabi Trail visitors reported spending an average of \$143.90 per person during the 24-hours prior to the completion of the survey (Table 2). The majority of per day spending was on lodging (\$56.60) and prepared food and beverage (\$30.40).

Using a separate survey form, participants in the Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Tour were also surveyed regarding expenditures. These visitors reported spending an average \$140.50 per person in the 24-hours prior to the completion of the survey. Trail tour visitors spent slightly less per person and per day on lodging (\$41.70) and prepared food and beverage (\$20.20) but more on groceries and retail purchases. Club Mesabi provides food to participants during the ride.

**Table 2: Average Daily Expenditures Per Person by Mesabi Trail Visitors (rounded)**

Expenditure Type	General Trail Visitors	Trail Tour Visitors
Lodging (e.g. hotel, resort, campground fees, private rental fees)	\$56.60	\$41.70
Prepared food and beverage	\$30.40	\$20.20
Groceries	\$9.10	\$12.40
Retail purchases (including souvenirs)	\$5.80	\$13.70

Arts and Entertainment (e.g. performance tickets, admission fees)	\$3.10	\$5.60
Service Purchases (e.g. spa treatments, outfitting, guides)	\$2.70	\$4.10
Recreation Use Fees (permits)	\$3.10	\$1.60
Gas stations	\$11.50	\$20.00
Other transportation (e.g. rentals, tours, transit fees, repairs)	\$11.80	\$7.10
Other	\$9.80	\$14.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$143.90</b>	<b>\$140.50</b>

Estimates by University of Minnesota Extension based on surveys

On average, a Mesabi Trail visitor spends \$143.90 per day while visiting the region. Given that the average person stays 3 days, total spending during the trip is \$431.70. The average party size is 4, translating into average trip party spending of more than \$1,700 (Table 3).

While in the region, Mesabi Trail visitors trigger additional economic activity at the businesses they patronize. These businesses, in turn, generate additional activity as they demand more from their suppliers and pay their employees. In total, a party of four Mesabi Trail visitors generates an estimated \$2,762.10 in economic activity during their three day trip.

**Table 3: Average Expenditures by Mesabi Trail Visitors**

Expenditure Type	Mesabi Trail Visitors
Expenditure Per Day Per Person	\$143.90
Expenditure Per Person Per Trip	\$431.70
Expenditure Per Party Per Trip	\$1,726.80
Total Economic Activity Generated Per Party Per Trip	\$2,762.10

Estimates by University of Minnesota Extension based on surveys

### Discussion of Mesabi Trail Visitor Attributes

Several implications can be drawn from the Mesabi Trail visitor surveys.

#### Conclusion 1: The Mesabi Trail Influences Visits to the Region

The Mesabi Trail influences visits to communities near the trail. A majority of visitors (70 percent) indicate the Mesabi Trail factored into the length of their trip to the region. On average, visitors extended their stay in the area by two days due to the trail.

The Mesabi Trail attracts visitors from a wide geographic area, including both the East and West Coast of the United States. Within Minnesota, a large proportion of visitors come from the Minneapolis-St Paul metropolitan area. However, they also come from across the state, particularly the northern half, including Duluth. Additionally, anecdotal evidence from staff and volunteers indicates international visitors also ride the trail.

Interestingly, “close to home” is not an important factor when choosing to visit the Mesabi Trail. Results indicate visitors are willing to travel a considerable distance to access a desirable trail.

More than 90 percent of visitors report staying overnight in the region. On average, they spend three nights during their trip. The majority of visitors patronizes local lodging establishments or otherwise pays for accommodations. Fifty percent stayed in a hotel, motel, inn, or bed and breakfast; 17 percent stayed at a campground, and 9 percent stayed in a rental home, cabin, or resort. Less than one-quarter stayed in non-paid accommodations (own vacation home or with friends/family).

Travel parties are relatively large. While the majority of visitors are couples (37 percent), the average party size is four people. This indicates that groups and families using the trail are larger in size. On average, three people in each party use the trail, with one person not on the trail. This additional person is likely looking for activities to participate in while the rest of the party is on the trail, and is a marketing opportunity for tourism-related businesses in the region.

Mesabi Trail visitors spend a daily average of \$143.90 per person during their visit. Major expenditures include lodging (\$56.60), prepared food and beverage (\$30.40), transportation alternatives in the region, such as shuttles, rentals, and tours (\$11.80), and gasoline (\$11.50).

Given that the average person stays three days, total spending during the trip is \$431.70. The average party size is four, translating into average trip party spending of more than \$1,700. A party of four Mesabi Trail visitors generates an estimated \$2,762.10 in economic activity during their three day trip. An increase in the number of Mesabi Trail visitors could have implications for regional tourism.

## **Conclusion 2: The Mesabi Trail has a Solid Base of Repeat Visitors and Appeals to New Visitors**

More than half (56 percent) of those surveyed were on their first visit to the Mesabi Trail which reinforces the observed growth in trail use.

The Mesabi Trail visitor survey indicates the trail has a solid base of repeat visitors. Of the 44 percent of visitors that had used the trail previously, 72 percent had visited more than once. Continuing to draw a mix of new and repeat visitors is necessary for the success of the Mesabi Trail.

Overall, the Mesabi Trail has a positive reputation among the Minnesota biking community. Nearly one-third of all trail visitors learned about the Mesabi Trail via a recommendation from others. In addition, those riding the trail tend to be active on trails in general. Fifty-three percent of respondents had ridden on other trails more than 12 times in the past year.

The appeal of the Mesabi Trail varies. While 90 percent of trail visitors were biking on the trail on the day they were surveyed, 10 percent were using the trail for other purposes, such as walking, jogging, or in-line skating. While the trail is predominantly used for biking, some of the other uses offer opportunities to increase the number of trail visitors. Having a more diversified visitor portfolio will likely be beneficial for the trail’s long-term success.

Scenery, trail length, location, and trail conditions were all important factors for respondents when choosing to visit the trail. Continuing to lengthen the trail and keeping it in good condition will also be important for the trail’s future success.

### **Conclusion 3: Opportunities Exist to Increase the Influence of the Mesabi Trail**

The Mesabi Trail has been successful on many levels, and opportunities exist to build on this success.

First, a relatively low percentage of respondents indicated they visited Ely on their trip. The trail's planned expansion to this community will provide increased tourism opportunities for Ely.

Second, there appears to be room for cross-collaboration between local recreational and tourism attractions and the Mesabi Trail. This cross-collaboration may lead to an increase in visitors to each of the locations. Survey participants were asked if they engaged in other activities (e.g., visiting a state park, mining-related attraction, or museum, as well as hiking, fishing, swimming, or golfing) during their trip. The most common activities were visiting state parks and hiking, each selected by 16 percent of respondents. Visiting a museum, however, was only selected by 6 percent of respondents. More than 70 percent of respondents did not engage in any of the listed activities; therefore, increasing collaboration between tourism destinations and the trail may offer opportunities for both to increase participation in other activities.

Third, millennials are the smallest age group of trail visitors. This is may be partly due to the trail location and the surrounding communities' demographics, but given that "close to home" isn't an important factor in trip decision, there is likely an opportunity for the trail to attract younger and perhaps more bike-friendly visitors.

Finally, to broaden and increase trail use, there may be an opportunity to attract lower income groups, as survey responses indicate the trail appeals to visitors on the higher end of the income spectrum.

### **METHODS: TRAIL COUNTS AND SURVEY METHODS**

In order to understand Mesabi Trail visitors, four surveys were conducted. The four surveys included 1) an intercept survey of daily trail users, 2) a survey of shuttle service users, 3) an online survey of wheel pass holders, and 4) a survey of Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Tour participants. The same survey form was distributed to the first three groups. Based on the total population of trail users, the goal was to collect 400 responses. A special survey form was designed for riders in the Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Bike Ride. Both survey forms are provided in the appendix.

#### **Intercept Survey of Trail Visitors**

The first targeted population was trail visitors. Survey collection occurred between June and October of 2013. Club Mesabi volunteers were stationed at various points along the trail, each location representing a section of the trail. Volunteers were deployed at different times of the day and on different days of the week to capture data reflecting the different types of trail visitors. After the 2013 survey completion, Club Mesabi and Extension agreed it would be beneficial to continue surveying during the 2014 season. Therefore, additional surveys were collected between May and October 2014.

The intercept survey form was developed by the Economic Impact Analysis (EIA) team based on previous survey forms from similar tourism-related studies. The survey form was reviewed internally by University of Minnesota Tourism Center staff and externally by project sponsors.

Similarly, the sampling plan was developed by the EIA team and reviewed by Tourism Center staff.

## Screening Respondents

Volunteers were instructed to randomly approach trail users. Each potential participant was asked two questions to determine whether they were locals or visitors. Visiting trail users (living more than 50-miles from the trail or staying overnight to use the trail) were asked to complete the survey form. Local trail users were asked for their zip code and tracked as having been stopped.

According to the sampling plan, only those over the age of 18 were asked to complete the survey.

The sampling plan also called for survey collection on different days at different locations along the trail. The goal was to collect a higher number of surveys during the prime months of June, July, and August, with a slightly smaller number of surveys collected in the months of April, May, September, and October.

In total, 175 completed and usable surveys were collected.

## Survey of Trail Shuttle Service Users

Bicyclists riding the Mesabi Trail can opt to use a trail shuttle service for those who want to ride point-to-point. The shuttle service assists riders in moving their luggage and equipment along the trail. In order to measure this population, Club Mesabi volunteers distributed survey forms to shuttle service drivers, and bicyclists were asked to complete the survey during their shuttle rides.

In total, 60 completed and usable surveys were collected from visitors using the shuttle service.

## Online Survey of Mesabi Trail Wheel Pass Holders

Bicyclists over the age of 18 are required to purchase a wheel pass. The wheel pass costs \$5 for a three-day period or \$15 for the year. When individuals purchase a wheel pass, they fill out a form that collects their email address. To supplement data collection, an online survey was sent to wheel pass holders during the winter of 2014-2015.

In total, 47 completed and usable online surveys were collected.

## Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Tour Survey

Each August, Club Mesabi, Inc. hosts the Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Tour. In 2014, the ride attracted 717 registrants; in 2013, it attracted 683. Historically, following the ride, Club Mesabi distributes a survey to evaluate participant experience. In 2013 and 2014, questions were added to the survey to measure participant spending. In 2014, 269 trail ride participants completed the survey. Of those, 166 participants (62 percent) met the definition of visitor. In 2013, 250 participants completed the survey. Of those, 174 participants (70 percent) met the definition of visitor.

## Analysis

In total, 296 surveys were collected from general trail riders and 340 were collected from trail tour participants. Completed surveys were entered, cleaned, and analyzed using Excel. Outliers were removed from the spending profile dataset if their response was plus or minus three times the standard deviation.

## APPENDIX: SURVEY FORMS

### Mesabi Trail Visitors Intercept Survey

#### PART 1 – The Mesabi Trail and Your Visit

1. Have you visited the Mesabi Bike Trail before today? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No
  - 1b. If yes, how many times have you used this trail in past 12 months? past 3 years?
2. What is your primary activity on the trail today (please circle)?  
Bicycling Walking/Hiking Jogging/Running Inline Skating/Skateboarding Wheelchair  
/Motorized Cart Other (list here \_\_\_\_\_)
3. How many times will you participate in that activity on this trail during your entire trip to the area?
4. How important was the Mesabi Bike Trail in your decision to visit the area for this entire trip?  
\_\_\_Very important, it was the main purpose of the trip  
\_\_\_Important, it was one of several factors  
\_\_\_Unimportant, it was of little consideration in decision  
\_\_\_Very unimportant, didn't even know it was here
5. Did the Mesabi Bike Trail factor into your decisions on how long to stay in the area? Yes No
  - 5b. If yes, by how much did you extend your trip due to the trail? \_\_\_\_\_days or \_\_\_\_\_hours
6. How far did you or do you plan to travel today on the trail? \_\_\_\_\_miles
7. Did you or will you ride ... (circle one) out to a certain point & turn around or point-to-point?
8. In the past 12 months, how many times have you used other bicycling trails? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Why did you decide to visit the Mesabi Bike Trail (circle all that apply)?  
Location Recommendation Scenery/Natural Amenities Trail Length/Route Trail Riding  
Conditions Ease of Access Family friendly Close to 2<sup>nd</sup> home/cabin Part of a planned group  
activity Exercise Training Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
10. How did you become aware of the Mesabi Bike Trail (circle all that apply)?  
Advertisement Brochure Website Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Bureau Lodging  
Establishment \_\_\_\_\_Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

#### PART 2 –Your Visit to the Area

1. Please characterize your travel party for your entire trip to the area, not just for the ride today.  
Alone Couple Family Friends Family & Friends  
Tour Group Organized club Other (please  
specify\_\_\_\_\_)
- 1a. How many people are in your travel party for your entire trip? \_\_\_\_\_
- 1b. How many people from your travel party are using the trail with you today? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many nights will you be spending in the area during this trip?

\_\_\_\_Daytrip, no overnight (go to question 4)                      \_\_\_\_Number of nights in the area

3. If you are staying overnight, where have you or will you stay?

With friends/relative                      Hotel/motel/Inn/B&B    Resort  
 Rented vacation home/condo/cabin    Own vacation home/condo/cabin  
 Private campground/RV Park                      City campground    State Park Other, please  
 describe\_\_\_\_\_

4. Which communities along the trail have you or do plan to visit during your trip (listed from west to east)?

Grand Rapids                      Coleraine                      Marble                      Keewatin                      Hibbing                      Chisholm  
 Buhl    Mt Iron                      Virginia    Eveleth/Fayal                      Gilbert                      Biwabik                      Giants Ridge  
 Aurora Tower/Soudan                      Ely                      Other (list)\_\_\_\_\_    I don't  
 know

5. What other local attractions or recreational activities have you or do you plan to visit/participate in during your trip (circle all that apply)?

Museums (specify:                      )                      Mining-Related (specify:                      )                      State Park  
 Golf                      Fishing                      Hiking                      Swimming                      Other (please list)\_\_\_\_\_

**PART 3 – Spending in the Area**

1. In the past 24 hours, about how much has your travel party spent on the following items?

Arts/Entertainment (e.g. performance tickets, admission fees)	\$_____	Services Purchases (e.g. spa treatments, outfitting, guides)	\$_____
Groceries	\$_____	Gas Stations	
Dining/Drinking Out	\$_____	Other Transportation (e.g. rentals, tours, transit fees, repairs)	\$_____
Recreational Use Fees (permits)	\$_____	Retail Purchases (including souvenirs)	
Lodging (e.g. hotel, resort, campground fees, private rental fees)	\$_____	Other	\$_____

**PART 4 – About You**

1. What is your permanent home zip code? \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Are you:                      \_\_\_\_Male or \_\_\_\_Female  
 2. In what year were you born? 19 \_\_\_\_\_  
 3. Which pretax income category best represents your household?  
 \_\_\_\_Less than \$25, 000                      \_\_\_\_\$25,000-49,999                      \_\_\_\_\$50,000-74,999



\_\_\_\_\$75,000-99,999

\_\_\_\_\$100,000-124,999

\_\_\_\_\$125,000-149,000

\_\_\_\_\$150,000+

### Great River Energy Mesabi Trail Bike Tour Survey

1. Overall, how would you rate the tour?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

2. How would you rate our emergency and safety precautions?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

3. How would you rate the entertainment?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

4. How would you rate the food at the finish in Virginia?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

5. How would you rate the friendliness & effectiveness of the volunteers?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

6. How would you rate the online registration system and information?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

7. How would you rate bike transportation?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

8. Rider bus transportation?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

9. How would you rate the tour instructions you received in the mail?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

10. How would you rate the Mesabi Trail?

1=poor, 2=needs improvement, 3=average, 4=good, 5=excellent

11. How many people traveled with you to the event today (your travel party)?

12. If you overnighted (or plan to) in the area, how many nights did you/will you stay?

13. Did you stay a) with family or friends, b) hotel/motel/resort/rental home, c) campground, d) own vacation home, e) other

14. In the past 24 hours, about how much has your travel party spent on the following items?

Arts/Entertainment (e.g. performance tickets, admission fees)	\$_____	Services Purchases (e.g. spa treatments, outfitting, guides)	\$_____
Groceries	\$_____	Gas Stations	
Dining/Drinking Out	\$_____	Other Transportation (e.g. rentals, tours, transit fees,	\$_____

		repairs)	
Recreational Use Fees (permits)	\$_____	Retail Purchases (including souvenirs)	
Lodging (e.g. hotel, resort, campground fees, private rental fees)	\$_____	Other	\$_____

15. What is the zip code of your permanent residence?

16. Any general comments?