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Users, Friends say Bike Trail Safe

In light of a recent assault on a jogger, supporters of the Milford Upper Charles Trail say the path has had a stellar safety record.

By [Keith Regan](#) | [Email the author](#) | October 29, 2010

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An assault Monday night on the bike trail around [Louisa Lake](#) may have unnerved some local residents and raised safety concerns, but supporters of the trail say it remains a safe family destination.

"It's a public trail and that means public responsibility," said John Edmonson, a board member of the Friends of the [Milford Upper Charles Trail](#). "Safety has been something that we have taken seriously from the start."

The nonprofit Friends group has donated trail signs and benches and works closely on safety issues with Police Sgt. John Sanchioni, who heads the motorcycle unit, he said.

As of Thursday, no arrests had been made in connection with the incident, which occurred at about 9:20 p.m. Monday. Police responding to a 911 call from the parking lot at Louisa Lake found a disoriented, distraught woman, who told them she had started off on a jog down the trail when a man grabbed her from behind and threw her to the ground. The woman escaped and ran back to the parking area. Police extensively searched the area, and a K-9 unit from Bellingham followed a scent trail into a neighborhood bordering the bike path before losing the trail.

On Thursday, the trail and the park at Louisa Lake were humming with activity, a reflection of the Indian Summer weather that bathed the park in strong sun.

A sign at Louisa Lake advertises a closing time of 10 p.m. for the park and in summer months, people use the trail well into the evening, even though there is no direct lighting for much of the trail.

Edmonson said he has noticed an increased police presence in the area since the attack, but that motorcycle units have always been seen frequently in the area.

One trail user said the reported assault didn't change her thoughts on the trail's safety.

"I'm not a fearful person. I feel comfortable going pretty much anywhere in any city or town, but this has always felt like a safe place to be," said Milford resident Alison Dann, who was waiting for her husband, Paul, to arrive for an afternoon walk.

"I probably wouldn't be alone out here after dark. But I could say that about a lot of places. It's not the fact that it's a bike trail that makes me say that," she said.

The 2.8-mile first phase of the Milford portion of the Upper Charles River Trail is used by bikers, walkers—many pushing strollers or pulling on leashes—rollerbladers, snowshoers and cross-country skiers. The most recent annual count in May had more than 1,000 people on the trail. The most-used stretch of the trail runs from [Dunkin Donuts](#) and [Fino Field](#) to Louisa Lake, according to Edmonson, but Louisa Lake gets heavy use as well.

As a result, there is usually more than ample safety in numbers, especially during daylight hours and on weekends. "There are hundreds of people out on a nice Saturday afternoon," said Dann, a Philadelphia-area native who operates a custom cake business, Confectionism, and moved to town as the most recent portion of the trail was being completed.

"I think if you're smart and stay with somebody else if you can and keep your cell phone on you should be able to feel safe," she added. "I always have. I think it's a great asset and love to see people using and enjoying it."

Edmonson said the trail hasn't been the site of any other violent incidents of which he is aware.

"The only previous issues we've deal with were some ATVs that were on the trail early on and the police took care of it very quickly," he said. "I think most everyone in town sees the trail as one of the best things that has happened. Everyone wants to see it succeed and thrive, and we all have our part to do in making it safe."

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