



ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TRAILS AND GREENWAYS

WHAT ARE TRAILS AND GREENWAYS?

Greenways are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. Greenways often follow natural land or water features, and link nature reserves, parks, cultural features and historic sites with each other and with populated areas. Greenways can be publicly or privately owned, and some are the result of public/private partnerships. Trails are paths used for walking, bicycling, horseback riding or other forms of recreation, exercise or transportation. Trails and greenways often follow abandoned rail corridors, canals, and utility rights-of-way. Some greenways include trails, while others do not. From the hills of inland America to the beaches and barrier islands of the coast, greenways provide a vast network linking America's special places.

“GREENWAYS ARE AMERICA'S PARKS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY. PUBLICLY OR PRIVATELY OWNED, GREENWAYS REPRESENT A GRAND DESIGN FOR CREATING NEW GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR AMERICA.”

— BRUCE BABBITT,
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR



COMMUNITY GEMS

Like a magnificent gem on display, trails and greenways attract visitors from near and far. Many communities realize the economic potential of these highly desirable recreation destinations. Trails and greenways bring job growth in construction and maintenance as well as tourism-related opportunities like river rafting tours, bike rentals, restaurants and lodging. A National Park Service study revealed that the total economic impact of a trail involves a combination of newly created trail-related jobs and the expansion of existing businesses related to travel, equipment, clothes, food, souvenirs and maps.¹ Visitors to Ohio's Little Miami Scenic Trail spend an average of \$13.54 per visit just on food, beverages and transportation to the trail. In addition, they spend an estimated \$277 each year on clothing, equipment and accessories to use during these trail trips. The economic potential is astounding considering there are an estimated 150,000 trail users per year.²

Service-related businesses such as equipment rental and gift shops, and cafes like the Prairie Path Delicatessen in Illinois, spring up near trails and greenways to take advantage of their popularity. (Photo: Jean Mooring)

AN ECONOMIC BOON FOR COMMUNITIES

Across the United States, trails and greenways are stimulating tourism- and recreation-related spending. Lodging and food, as well as river rafting, horseback riding, bicycling and snowmobiling, demonstrate the economic value that trails and greenways provide to communities. Trail and greenway systems have become the central focus of tourist activities in some communities and the impetus for kick-starting a stagnating economy.

- Total spending estimates for six trail-heads along the Allegheny Trail ranged from \$5.4 million to \$14.1 million in 1998. Trips to the trail are expected to increase by more than 50%.³
- The average economic activity associated with three multi-purpose trails in Florida, California and Iowa was \$1.5 million annually.⁴
- The San Antonio Riverwalk in Texas is reported to be the second most important tourist attraction in the state of Texas and the anchor of the city's \$1.2 billion annual tourist trade. Only a short distance from the Alamo, the Riverwalk links popular shops, restaurants and art galleries with recreational activities such as boating and walking.⁵
- The Mineral Wells to Weatherford Rail-Trail near Dallas, Texas attracts approximately 300,000 people annually and generates local revenues of \$2 million.⁶

IMPACTS ON QUALITY OF LIFE

Whether they live in rural, suburban or urban communities, more Americans demand that green places be protected as a way to maintain their quality of life. Trails and greenways provide the tools for all Americans to shape their communities, by preserving open recreational spaces. They are valued for their ability to connect people with places and enhance the beauty of urban centers. Famous greenways such as Washington, D.C.'s Rock Creek Park and New York City's Central Park are prominent examples of planned greenways improving these cities and quality of life for their inhabitants.

Local governments can no longer permit poorly planned development if they are to compete for residents and businesses and pay for the infrastructure costs associated with sprawling growth. Many businesses rate the livability of cities when determining where to locate. They look at schools, housing, proximity and abundance of outdoor recreational spaces. Cities such as Providence, Rhode Island and Chattanooga, Tennessee, transformed industrial blight into beautiful and useful riverfront greenways and trails as part of strategic plans to attract businesses and residents.

- A 1998 report by the Center for the Continuing Study of the California Economy found that conservation of open space and higher density development were essential to preserve a higher quality of life, an important factor in attracting employers and employees to California localities.⁷

- Investments in parks and trails along the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek are credited as being important components in the economic revitalization efforts of Pueblo, Colorado.⁸



Cyclists stop at the Hartsburg Cafe and General Store while traveling along the Katy Trail State Park, Missouri. (Photo: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

IMPACTS ON PROPERTY VALUES

Trails and greenways increase the natural beauty of communities. They also have been shown to bolster property values and make adjacent properties easier to sell. Within 15 years of the completion of New York City's Central Park, property values doubled and the city raised millions of dollars through taxes.⁹ These economic impacts are seen across the country:

- A 1998 study of property values along the Mountain Bay Trail in Brown County, Wisconsin shows that lots adjacent to the trail sold faster and for an average of nine percent more than similar property not located next to the trail.¹⁰
- According to a 1995 study, 73 percent of the real estate agents surveyed in Denver, Colorado believed that homes adjacent to trails would be easier to sell.¹¹
- Realizing the selling power of greenways, developers of the Shepherd's Vineyard housing development in Apex, North Carolina added \$5,000 to the price of 40 homes adjacent to the regional greenway. Those homes were still the first to sell.¹²

COMBINING ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Trails and greenways can play an important role in improving water quality and mitigating flood damage. Greenways preserve critical open space that provides natural buffer zones to protect streams, rivers and lakes from pollution run-off caused by fertilizer and pesticide use on yards and farms. They also can serve as flood plains that absorb excess water and mitigate damage caused by floods. Such conservation efforts make good sense, because they save communities money in the long-run.

- The estimated annual value of the water filtration attributed to wetlands along a 3-mile stretch of Georgia's Alchey River is \$3 million.¹³
- The lowest cost estimate for a water treatment alternative to natural water filtration created by wetlands in the Conagree Bottomland Swamp in South Carolina was \$5 million.¹⁴



The Monterey Peninsula Recreational Trail meanders along the California coast. (Photo: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

- Almost 10 million homes are located in floodplains across America. The Federal Emergency Management Agency estimates that flooding causes over \$1 billion in property damages every year.¹⁵ Converting these areas to greenways would free that money to be spent on other needed projects. After years of devastating losses from flooding, Tulsa, Oklahoma designed a greenway along Mingo Creek that preserved and enhanced the floodplain to include woodlands, wetlands, parks and trails. The result of this and other important measures, flood insurance rates in Tulsa dropped by 25 percent.¹⁶

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ROPERTIES ALONG THE TRAIL HAVE TAKEN
OFF...I’VE GOT A LIST OF 300 PROSPECTIVE BUYERS
WAITING FOR PROPERTY ALONG THE RIVER AND
TRAIL, AND THEY’RE WILLING TO WAIT JUST FOR
THOSE PROPERTIES.”

— SUZAN BEAL, A SALES ASSOCIATE
WITH COLDWELL BANKER REAL ESTATE

HELPFUL RESOURCES

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ENDNOTES

¹ *The Impacts of Rail-Trails, A Study of Users and Nearby Property Owners from Three Trails*, National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, 1992.

² Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments, *Trail Users Study, Little Miami Scenic Trail*, 1999, p. 15-32.

³ Stephen Farber, University of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania Economy League, Inc., *An Economic Impact study for the Allegheny Trail Alliance*, January 1999, i-ii.

⁴ *The Impacts of Rail-Trails, A Study of Users and Nearby Property Owners from Three Trails*, National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, 1992.

⁵ *Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors*, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, National Park Service, 4th edition, 1995, p.5-6.

⁶ *A Guide to Transportation Enhancements*, National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse, 1999, p. 11.

⁷ Steve Lerner and William Poole, *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*, The Trust for Public Land, p. 4.

⁸ *Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors*, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, National Park Service, 4th edition, 1995, p. 7-5.

⁹ Neighborhood Open Space Coalition, *Urban Open Space: An Investment that Pays*, New York City, 1990.

¹⁰ *Recreation trails, Crime, and Property Values: Brown County's Mountain-Bay Trail and the Proposed Fox River Trail*, Brown County Planning Commission, Green Bay, July 6, 1998.

¹¹ *The Effects of Greenways on Property Values and Public Safety*, The Conservation Fund and Colorado State Parks, State Trails Program, Marcy 1995.

¹² Don Hopey, "Prime Location on the Trail," *Rails-to-Trails*, Fall/Winter 1999, p.18.

¹³ Steve Lerner and William Poole, *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space*, The Trust for Public Land, 1999, p. 41.

¹⁴ Floodplain Management Association, "Economic Benefits of Wetlands," *MFA News*, July 1994.

¹⁵ "Mitigation, Reducing Risk Through Mitigation," Federal Emergency Management Agency, www.fema.gov/mit/flood.htm.

¹⁶ "Floodplains," *American Rivers*, www.americanrivers.org/floodcase.html.



ABOUT THE CLEARINGHOUSE: The Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse provides technical assistance, information resources and referrals to trail and greenway advocates and developers across the nation. Services are available to individuals, government agencies, communities, grassroots organizations and anyone else who is seeking to create or manage trails and greenways. The Clearinghouse is a joint project of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and The Conservation Fund's American Greenways Program.



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