

Benefits of Trails and Greenways

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Benefits from Trails and Greenways

- Physical
- Psychological
- Knowledge
- Social
- Economic
- Environmental
- Spiritual

Physical Benefits

- Cardio vascular system workout
- Support range of activity
 - Vigorous, competitive event training
 - Moderate physical exercise/recreation
 - Joint flexibility
 - Especially valuable for two most common disabilities
 - Arthritis
 - Heart disease
- Tremendous benefits to young through Safe Routes to Schools
 - Active youth = healthy adults
 - Active youth involve parental activity

Psychological Benefits

- Confidence from competence
 - Trail users choose how they want to use trail
 - Opportunity to develop skills, voluntary activity
- Family/group friendly setting
 - Facilitates individuality while part of a group
 - Some walk, some skate, some ride bike, some use adaptive mobility device, etc
- Opportunity to volunteer/give back
 - Safety patrol
 - Friends group
 - Maintenance, fund raising, special projects

Knowledge Benefits

- Environmental knowledge
 - Use interpretive signage/brochures to promote discovery learning about diverse habitats and unique ecosystems
 - Relate trail connectivity to environmental interdependence
- Community awareness
 - Better acquaintance with businesses, neighborhoods, etc.
- Historical sense
 - Most trails and greenways use former railroads, waterways, Native American foot trails, etc.
 - Interpretive signage/brochures/historic sites make history come alive

Social Benefits

- Trails are the community's front porch
 - Everyone is welcome
 - Common positive interest in the welfare of trail
- Diversity in trail uses/users promotes tolerance
 - Different motivations for trail use
 - Promotes interaction about diverse equipment, clothing, activity, attractions, etc.
- Trails are a link, not a barrier compared to some infrastructure

Economic Benefits

- Direct spending
 - Trail equipment
 - Bike, blades, shoes, etc.
 - Travel
 - Fuel, food/beverage, souvenirs, repairs, etc.
- Indirect spending
 - Multiplier effect where what is spent positively reverberates through the economy
 - Trail-side restaurant owner expands business to build porch to better serve trail users
 - Carpenters, masons, banker all benefit

More Economic Benefits

- Reduced fuel use from increased non-motorized transportation
- Trail attracts visitors who are linked to other attractions by trail use
- Keeps locals near home to enjoy amenities
- Improve property values
 - Almost every trailside residence creates their own access rather than their own barrier
 - Real estate agents more likely to report more rapid home sales for trail-side homes

Cautions About Economic Benefits

- Beware of magic numbers about trails
 - Annual dollar value benefit per mile
- Challenges
 - Which scale of the economy?
 - Local, regional, state or beyond?
 - All spending is not equal in value
 - Much goes beyond region, especially on equipment, fuel
 - Other uses of equipment make it difficult to attribute to one specific trail/facility
 - People would eat whether at the bowling alley or the trail
 - Consider money coming from outside region versus money staying in region
 - Both valuable but a different measure
 - Think like filling the tub, some water comes in, some leaks out

Spiritual Benefits

- Body is a temple
 - Not a cosmetic concept, but a physical health one that is based on taking care of a divine creation
 - Look in the Bible at Paul's letter to the Romans
- We are stewards of the earth
 - Not a concept of dominance but one of long-term care and concern about a divine creation
 - A key basis of transcendentalism influencing Thoreau, Emerson
 - Look in the Bible at Genesis
- What we do matters as we can destroy and impair as well as steward the environment
 - Basic thesis of George Perkins Marsh's 1864 book "Man and Nature" about the Middle East/Biblical lands and poor stewardship of the environment
 - The seminal work in the science of ecology

Environmental Benefits

- Corridors provide path for plant and animal migration
 - Link rather than separate habitats
- Blueways preserve especially sensitive habitats
 - Surface waters, floodplains, wetlands
- Non-motorized transportation and recreation reduces energy usage

In Summary

- Don't be at a loss of words or information in response to “What good are trails and green ways?”
- Use the DVD Rail-Trails: Making the Connection whenever possible, letting many tell the story from across the state
- Put the benefits you experience in your own language and tell your story
- Keep in touch
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