

Economic (and other) Benefits of Trails, Greenways and Open Space

Compiled by Rory Robinson, National Park Service - Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance – May, 2007

Expenditures by Residents - Spending by local residents on greenway related activities supports recreation oriented businesses and employment as well as other businesses which are patronized by greenway and trail users.

- A 2004 Study of the 45- mile long Washington & Old Dominion Trail, a transportation and recreation corridor running from Arlington to Purcellville, VA, finds that an estimated 1.7 million adult W&OD users put about \$7 million directly in the northern Virginia economy.
 - The estimated 1.6 million **local** visits accounted for about \$5.3 million of spending directly related to the use of the W&OD.
- According to a Fall 2006 publication by the Outdoor Industry Foundation
 - The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy is a \$730 Billion annual contribution to the U. S. Economy
 - In sales comparisons, active outdoor recreation retail sales are second only to the telecommunications industry
 - Active outdoor recreation supports nearly 6.5 million jobs across the U. S.
 - **Participation by numbers:**
 - **Bicycling (paved, road and off-road)– 60 million**
 - **Paddling – 24 million**
 - **Trail (running on unpaved trail, day hiking, backpacking and rock climbing – 56 million**
 - **Wildlife viewing – 66 million**
- In Los Angeles County hikers supported a \$300 million hiking equipment industry

BUILD IT THEY WILL COME (STAY) if you don't, they will go (FIND)

Commercial Uses - Greenways provide business opportunities, locations and resources for commercial activities such as recreation equipment rentals and sales, lessons, special events, on-site concessions and other related businesses.

- Opening of Mineral Belt Trail in Leadville, CO, led to a 19% increase in sales tax revenues helping the city recover from a mine closure in 1999.
- Downtown Dunedin, FL – suffering a 35% storefront vacancy rate in early 1990 until an abandoned CSX railroad track became the Pinellas Trail. Storefront occupancy is now 100 percent, business is booming.
- The \$100 million Carmel, IN City Center mixed use development is bisected by the Monon Trail. The Carmel mayor points to the trail as the catalyst for this development.



Tourism – National Park Service states that outdoor recreation and leisure expenditures account for a substantial part of tourist’s discretionary spending, as ecotourism continues to be one of the fastest growing sectors of the travel industry. Greenways are often major tourist attractions generating expenditures on lodging, food and recreation oriented services and improving the overall appeal of a community to tourists and new residents.



➤ **Impact of Bicycling on N. Carolina Outer Banks**

(Case Study of NC Northern Outer Banks, NC Department of Transportation, April 2004)

- 680,000 visitors bicycle in area annually, represents 17% of area tourists
 - 43 % cite bicycling as an important factor in selecting area for vacation
 - 53 % cite bicycling as a strong influence in decision for return visit
 - Bicycling visitors generate economic impact of \$60 million
- Recreation spending by non-locals visiting the Washington & Old Dominion Trail supported approx. \$1.8 million of economic output, about 34 full-time job equivalents, and around \$642,000 of personal income in the northern Virginia economy.
- A 2002 user survey done by the University of Pittsburgh for the Allegheny Trail Alliance found that a little over \$3 million was spent on small items and \$522,000 on lodging in communities along the trail.
- In Indiana In 2000, an annual bike event held in the Bloomington area, the Hilly 100, drew in 5000 riders that contributed over \$1 million to the local economy in just lodging and food expenditures. The Indiana Bike Fest in Jasper, IN drew in 250 bringing \$120,000 to the local economy in 2005.

Corporate Relocation and Retention – The Center for Regional Economic Issues at Case Western Reserve University defines five focus areas in a working model for economic development. These are Brainpower, Innovation, Marketing and Awareness (Branding), Dialog and Inclusion, and **Quality Place** which underscores the importance of building sustainable, connected places to live and for businesses to compete focusing on building places that are competitive, cool, and connected.

- The results of an ongoing survey as a part of Michigan’s Cool Cities Initiative found that while job opportunities are important in choosing a place to live, quality of life is significantly more important than previously thought. Of the 31 attributes of preferred places to live, participants identified: safe streets as #1, walkable streets as #3, gathering places as #7, sense of community as #9, scenic beauty as #11, and trails and parks as #13
- Gambling casinos, #31, Pro sports #28 and malls/shopping centers #27 **do not** play a big role in choosing a place to live



- Survey of 1,200 high tech workers in 1998 by KPMG found that quality of life in a community increases job attractiveness by 33 %.
- Ruby Tuesdays, Inc. moved its Restaurant Support Center to a site adjacent to the Greenway Trail in Maryville, TN. The CEO stated, “I was very impressed with the beauty of the park, which helps provide a sense of community to this area, as well as the many benefits it provides to our more than 300 employees.”

Public Cost Reduction – According to the American Planning Association, “perhaps one of the greatest values of an interconnected green space system is the financial benefit that may be gained through the reduction of the need for the built environment.”

- The least cost substitute for the water quality services provided the wetlands of Congaree Bottomland Hardwood Swamp in South Carolina would be a water treatment plant costing \$5 million
- American Forests estimates that the 187,767 acres of tree canopy in the Washington, D. C. metro region provides 949 million cubic feet in avoided storage of water - value \$4.7 billion
- The tree canopy in Charlotte, North Carolina, covers 53% of the county’s land area. This urban forest removes 17.5 million pounds of pollutants from the air each year; a benefit American Forests estimates is worth \$43.8 million each year.



Can we afford it? - According to U.S. Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN), constructing one mile of urban freeway costs an average of \$46,000,000 a mile.

- Comparatively, costs for: 12-foot shared paths = \$128,000/mile, 5-foot bicycle lanes = \$189,000/mile, 5-foot paved shoulders on rural roads = \$102,000/mile.
- As far back as 1993 Maryland's Northern Central Rail-Trail found that while the trail's management and maintenance cost to the public was \$191,893, the trail-related tax income to the state totaled \$303,750.
- The annual economic impact of cyclists at the North Carolina Outer Banks is 9 times the one-time cost of building the facilities.

Property Values - In 2001 Dr. John Crompton of Texas A&M University compiled results of 25 studies on the effects of open space on property values - 20 of 25 studies concluded that open space and parks increased proximate property values - 4 of 5 other studies reached ambivalent conclusions.

- A 2002 survey in Nebraska in which realtors evaluated the impact of a trail on the home sale reported; 65.7 % easier to sell, 15.3% no effect. Only 1.5% reported it was harder to sell.
- A developer in Front Royal, VA, who donated a 50-foot-wide, seven-mile-long easement along a popular trail sold all 50 parcels bordering the trail in only four months.
- Denver-73% say a home near a trail is more appealing

Trails are on top

The National Association of Homebuilders surveyed 2,800 people nationwide and asked them what they like to see in a new community. Here is what people said they want:



Source: National Association of Homebuilders

The Register

2004 survey by the National Association of Realtors and National Association of Home Builders

2001 Indiana Trails Study: 86% to 95% of trail neighbors indicated the trail had either positive or no effect property value, 81 to 93 % indicated trail had no negative effect or made it easier to sell.

- Further study of 1999 home sales in Indianapolis found that homes along greenways sold for as much as 10% more

“It may not have sand and crashing waves, but the Monon Trail is the equivalent of beachfront property in the Indianapolis area.”

Bill Ruthhart Indianapolis Star

Intrinsic Value - Humans benefit from access to recreation that can improve physical health and fitness, improve quality of life and increase community pride and sense of regional character. 2001 Indiana Trails study

- On average, 79% of all trail users indicated they participate in their preferred activity more because of the trail.
- Over 70 %, and as many as 95 % of trail neighbors reported using the trail during the prior 12 months.
- Over 65 % of the users identify health and fitness as their reason for being on the trail.



Create safer neighborhoods – Neighborhoods that provide trails, greenways, parks, sidewalks, neighborhoods increase opportunities to be out and active, connect and interact in a shared environment.

- 85.5% of trail users responding to the IN Trails Study viewed the trail as safe.
- An average of 61% of trail neighbors felt the trail was a better neighbor than expected.
- An average of 69% indicated that the trail IMPROVED their neighborhood.

(Summary of Indiana Trails Study can be found at www.in.gov/dot/projects/trails)

Open space amenities are more prominently featured than they used to be. In the 2003 rankings, Money magazine chose to highlight park or trail amenities in 63% of the best places to retire.

Proposals to “develop” land as open space should be scrutinized just as much as proposals to build subdivisions and shopping centers. Increasingly, proponents of preserving open space have successfully persuaded local officials that the benefits of *not* developing the land for homes and businesses are greater than converting the land to developed uses.

Through Green Infrastructure (trails and greenways) we; enrich habitat and biodiversity, maintain natural landscape processes, clean the air and water, reduce the cost of traditional “grey infrastructure” and community services, increase recreational and transportation opportunities, improve health, provide connection to nature and sense of place and we enhance economic vitality!