

Economic Benefits of Trails

Trails and national parks are good for economic growth.

Protecting trails concerns more than just the preservation of our nation's flora, fauna, and greenways. Our nation's forests and parks are a source of billions of dollars of revenue through recreation, maintenance jobs, and considerable offset of the effects of global warming.

Retail

According to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, outdoor recreation is responsible for 6.5 million jobs and contributes \$730 billion to the national economy. That means that 1 in 20 employed Americans works in some form with the outdoor recreation industry.¹

Additionally, it is estimated that 50 to 70 million Americans use trails every year. While some of these trails might be local, millions of Americans are driving long distances to get to a trailhead. Nearly 14 million visits to National Parks were multi-day trips, while almost half of the visits to National Forests were more than just day hikes². All of these trips require expenditures on gas, food, lodging, and sometimes souvenirs that also boost the local economy.

Real Estate

Suburbs and even urban areas also house many of the nation's trails. New development plans that incorporate green housing codes include footpaths to promote recreation and decrease automobile use. In fact, these trails increase the property values in the area. Cities that have redesigned their antiquated industrial sectors into lush green zones have experienced an economic boom over the last several decades.³

Transportation

Increasingly using these trails (whether it be by bike or foot) to get to work or shopping near home reduces the dependence on automotive transportation. Individuals themselves save money on the cost of gasoline as well as decreased maintenance cost for their auto.



¹ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy*. Boulder Colorado, 2006, pp. 6

² Ibid, pp. 15.

³ Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. *The Economic Benefits of Trails and Greenways*. Rails-to-Trails, October 2006.

Healthcare

An investigation by the National Park Service on the overall health benefits of outdoor recreation found that regular exercisers filed 14% fewer claims for insurance than people with sedentary lifestyles. More shocking was that healthy people filed 41% fewer claims that were over \$5000. Hikers in good health often enjoy paying less for their health insurance than people who do not regularly exercise⁴. So hiking seems to be a form of insurance that pays for itself!



⁴ Greenways Incorporated, Transportation Potential and Other Benefits of Off-Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities (for FHWA), Washington, D.C., 1992.

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