Your guide to the benefits of trails for individuals, communities, and economies.
OVERVIEW

Trails drive economic success in a number of ways. When trails are brought into a community studies have shown that property values near the trail increase, businesses near trails flourish, trail tourism provides an influx of money to communities, and jobs are created due to the trails impact. More and more we are seeing individuals take outdoor recreation opportunities, largely driven by trails, into consideration when choosing where to live.

RECENT STUDIES

- A five year study of the Spearhead ATV Trail System in Virginia showed an economic benefit of $18 - 21 million between opening in 2012 thru 2017. The trail system created up to 390 full time jobs in an economically depressed area.
- A study from the Progress Fund Initiative showed trail tourism on The Great Allegheny Passage generated an average of $18 per day for single-day trail users, and $124 a day for overnight trail users. This trail sees well over 850,000 users per year.
- A recent study from Helena, Montana showed their South Hills trail system generating $4.3 million in economic impact annually from 63,000 users. Helena itself has a population of around 32,000 residents, so the majority of trail users are tourists.

Find information on studies and more at www.americantrails.org
A 2018 study from the Outdoor Industry Association showed the outdoor recreation industry generating more money for the United States economy than even gas and oil.

TRAILS ARE THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY

According to the Wilderness Society, the most popular outdoor activities are, in order: hiking and camping, hunting and fishing, rafting and kayaking, sailing, biking, rock climbing, horseback riding, skiing, and finally restoration and conservation work.

None of these activities, with the exception of sailing, would be possible without trail access. Hiking trails, equestrian trails, OHV trails, water trails, biking trails, and snow trails are all integral to the $887 billion dollars brought in annually by outdoor recreation.

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TRAILS AND MENTAL HEALTH

- Spending even 20 minutes outside will have short term effects on the brain to reduce stress.
- Countless studies show people self-reporting reduced stress, clearer thought patterns, more optimism, and an overall heightened sense of well-being after being outdoors.
- We are now seeing more medical practitioners prescribe time in the outdoors as a way to combat depression, anxiety, and other health related issues.

TRAILS AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

- For every one dollar spent in trails, there is a three dollar savings in healthcare costs.
- More overall physical activity is measured in communities after trails are built.
- Cardiovascular benefits are seen across all trail user types. This means healthier hearts, and a reduction in preventable disease for trail users.
- Commuting by foot or bike gains popularity when trails go into a community. This both reduces traffic and creates a healthier, more physically active community.

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STUDIES ON HEALTH

Study Name: Economic and Health Benefits of Bicycling in Northwest Arkansas, 2018

Conclusion: This study looked at both economic and health benefits to the Northwest Arkansas region after significant investment in trail infrastructure in the area. The study concluded that the residents of the region cycled on average 11 percent more than the national average. The healthcare savings attributed to this increased cycling use was measured at $86 million for 2017.

Study Name: Behavioral Effects of Completing a Critical Link in the American Tobacco Trail, 2016

Conclusion: In Durham, North Carolina by building one bridge which connected to previously un-connected sections of the American Tobacco Trail, overall trail use went up 133%. This led to a measurable increase in physical activity for the community, with public health benefits.

Study Name: The impact of green infrastructure on human health and well-being: The example of the Huckleberry Trail and the Heritage Community Park and Natural Area in Blacksburg, Virginia, 2019

Conclusion: This study concluded that those who live near greenspaces take advantage of those greenspaces at higher rates than those who do not live near greenspaces. Additionally, the study concluded that there are measurable health benefits to a community for having these greenspaces. Interestingly, the study noted that women reported increased physical health benefits, while men reported greater psychological benefits alongside the physical benefits they were gaining.

Study Name: Accelerometer and GPS Analysis of Trail Use and Associations with Physical Activity, 2018

Conclusion: Although not associated with a specific community, the data collected in this study still reflects the importance of trails to communities. By studying GPS and Accelerometer data gathered from the app use of participants, researchers concluded that on days the participants used trails their overall physical activity was much higher than on days they didn’t use trails, highlighting the importance of trails in supporting overall physical activity.

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TRAILS ARE INCLUSIVE

Trails, by their very nature, promote social, racial, gender, and economic equity. They are almost always free to use, are available 24/7/365, and provide transportation alternatives no matter what mode of travel you use.

TRAILS ARE FOR EVERYONE, AND EVERYONE DESERVES ACCESS TO HIGH QUALITY TRAILS.

Recent studies have shown that people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities want to live in active, authentic communities that provide a true vibrancy of life, based on unique cultural assets and environment.

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TRAILS MATTER

- Trails are an investment both economically and sociologically.
- Trails have shown a return of up to nine times on monetary investment.
- By building trails a community is investing in its future, its citizens, its economy, its well-being, and its culture.
- Trails attract new residents, increase real estate prices, bring in new businesses, and contribute to the prosperity of a community.
- Trails help create a culture of health, both mental health and physical health, and spur health savings for everyone.

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American Trails is a trail advocacy organization that has been working for over 30 years to educate about trails, advocate for trails, and help get more and better trails built. We are the only organization that supports all trail types, including hiking, cycling, equestrian, motorized, water trails, and more.