

COMMUNITY BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE

“...accumulating evidence indicates that open space conservation is not an expense but an investment that produces important economic benefits.” – Will Rogers, President
The Trust for Public Land



Attract Investment

Parks and open space create a high quality of life that attracts tax-paying businesses and residents to communities.

Corporate CEOs and small business owners alike rank quality of life, including parks and open space, among the top three priorities for choosing a business location.¹



Revitalize Cities

Urban parks, gardens, and recreational open space stimulate commercial growth and promote inner-city revitalization.

“The key to restoring [neighborhood] economic vitality is restoring the residential vitality.”²



Boost Tourism

Open space boosts local economies by attracting tourists and supporting outdoor recreation.

“At present rates of growth, the tourism/leisure industry will soon become the leading U.S. industry of any kind.”³



Prevent Flood Damage

Floodplain protection offers a cost-effective alternative to expensive flood-control measures.

One study shows that a 1% increase in protected wetlands along a stream corridor reduced peak stream flows by 3.7%.⁴



Protect Farms and Ranches

Protecting agricultural lands safeguards the future of farming economies and communities.

Like open space, agricultural lands contribute much more in revenues than they require in public service costs, and provide environmental values.⁵



Promote Sustainable Development

Open space preservation helps communities prevent the higher costs of unplanned development.

Studies show that costs to support typical suburban development often outpace tax revenues.⁶



Safeguard the Environment

Open space conservation is often the cheapest way to safeguard drinking water, clean the air, and achieve other environmental goals.

Wetlands are the nursery for 75-90% of recreationally and commercially valuable fish and shellfish.⁷

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

The text for the Community Benefits of Open Space fact sheet is taken from:

Lerner, Steve and William Poole. The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space. San Francisco: The Trust for Public Land, 1999.

and from the following references cited therein:

- 1 National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance. Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors. Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1995, 4th ed. 7-3.

Crompton, John L., Lisa L. Love, and Thomas A. More. "An Empirical Study of the Role of Recreation, Parks and Open Space in Companies' (Re) Location Decisions," Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, 1997: 37-58.
- 2 Grogan, Paul. Local Initiative Support Coalition, a community development group in New York City, 1999.
- 3 National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance, 1995. 3-5.
- 4 Misganaw Demissie and Abdul Khan. Influence of Wetlands on Streamflow in Illinois. Champaign, IL: Illinois State Water Survey, October, 1993.
- 5 American Farmland Trust. Saving American Farmland: What Works. Washington, DC: American Farmland Trust, 1997. 150.

Browne, BortZ & Coddington Inc. (updated by William S. Devenney Consultants). Model Economic Impact of Hunting and Fishing. Colorado: Colorado Division of Wildlife Economic Impact, 1997. 10-11.
- 6 Nantucket Land Council, Inc. Balancing Today's Development & Tomorrow's Taxes. Nantucket, MA: Nantucket Land Council, 1989. Included in Land Trust Alliance InfoPak Series: Economic Benefits of Open Space, compiled by Ted Jackson and edited by Rosemary Infante. Washington, DC: Land Trust Alliance, April 1994.

National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance, 1995. 8-4.
- 7 National Wildlife Federation, <http://www.nwf.org/wetlands/facts/wetben02.html>.



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Effects on Property Values, Tax Revenues and Expenditures

“The cumulative research findings of the studies reported ... suggest that developing outdoor recreation amenities is likely to lead to a rise in proximate property values which will generate more revenue than is lost by removing the land from the tax base.” -- Dr. John L. Crompton ¹

Value of the Average House and Greenbelt Proximity (Boulder, CO study)²

<i>Walking Distance from Greenbelt</i>	<i>Average Value of House</i>
30	\$54,379
1,000	\$50,348
1,283	\$49,172
2,000	\$46,192
3,200	\$41,206

The Impact of Different Types of Parks on Residential Property Values (Spokane, WA study)³

	<i>Active Recreation Areas</i>	<i>Combined Active and Passive Recreation Areas</i>	<i>Passive Recreation Areas</i>
<i>% change in adjoining lots relative to average value of their census tracts</i>	+ 10%	+ 33%	+ 70%
<i>% change in residential blocks surrounding the parks relative to the average value of their census tracts</i>	+ 7%	+ 14%	+ 63%

A Comparison of Revenues and Expenditures (Massachusetts example)⁴

<i>Source of Revenues</i>	<i>Residential</i>	<i>Commercial / Industrial</i>	<i>Farm / Open Space</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Revenues</i>	\$27,473,481	\$6,007,512	\$375,567	\$33,856,560
<i>Expenditures</i>	\$28,922,750	\$2,499,361	\$112,850	\$31,534,961
<i>Balance</i>	\$ -1,449,269	\$3,508,151	\$262,717	\$ 2,321,599
<i>Ratios (\$ Revenues: \$ Costs)</i>	1 : 1.05	1 : 0.42	1 : 0.30	

Cost of Community Services (Hays County, TX study)⁵

	<i>Residential</i>	<i>Commercial / Industrial</i>	<i>Agriculture / Open Space</i>
<i>Total County Revenues</i>	\$82,662,828	\$16,461,526	\$13,105,427
<i>Total County Service Expenditures</i>	\$104,387,478	\$4,935,185	\$4,385,261
<i>Ratio of Revenues to Expenditures</i>	1 : 1.26	1 : 0.30	1 : 0.33

Note: See reverse for references.

¹ Crompton, John L. The Impact of Parks and Open Space on Property Values and the Property Tax Base. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Parks Association, 2000.

² Ibid., Ch. 3, p. 50.

³ Ibid., Ch. 3, p. 54.

⁴ Ibid, Ch. 4, p. 74.

⁵ American Farmland Trust. Cost of Community Services: The Value of Farm & Ranch Land in Hays County, Texas.

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Examples From Across the Nation *

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

☛ *Real estate industry analysts confirm quality of life as a determining factor in real estate and economic vitality.*

☛ *A national poll cites low crime with safe streets and access to greenery and open space as crucial for a satisfactory quality of life.*

☛ *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.*

☛ *Homes bordering the 12-mile Burke Gilman trail in Seattle, WA, sold for 6 percent more than other houses of comparable size.*

☛ *Five percent of the selling price of homes near the Cox Arboretum and park in Dayton, OH, was attributable to the proximity of that open space.*

☛ *A three-mile greenbelt around Lake Merritt, near the city center in Oakland, CA, was found to add \$41million to surrounding property values.*

REVITALIZING CITIES

☛ *"The creation of quality open space in the neighborhood translates into a quality neighborhood," argues the manager of the Philadelphia Green Program.*

☛ *A two-acre, 500,000-square-foot parking garage in the midst of Boston's financial district was converted to an underground garage covered by a park with spreading lawn, polished granite walls, teak benches, a 143-foot formal garden, a walk-through sculpture fountain, and a café, increasing the value of the properties across the street.*

☛ *In Burlington, VT, a former 20-acre fuel tank farm will become a park on the Lake Champlain waterfront, and the city purchased an adjacent 25 acres as a reserve for commercial development.*

☛ *The renovation of nine-acre Bryant Park in New York City led one organizer to say, "If building owners and the agents help protect urban open space they will be more than paid back for their efforts, both in increased occupancy rates and in increased rent – all because their building has this attractive new front yard."*

BOOSTING TOURISM

☛ *Outdoor recreation, in particular, represents one of the most vigorous growth areas in the U.S. economy, and much of this recreation is supported by public and private parks and open land.*

☛ *Amount spent by Americans on the purchase of canoes and kayaks in 1996: \$99.1 million.*

☛ *Estimated annual value of open space to the economy of New Hampshire: \$8 billion, 25 percent of the state's total economy.*

☛ *Visits to national wildlife refuges in 1995: \$27.7 million, and revenue of local businesses from these visitors: \$401 million.*

☛ *"The lake frontage, river frontage, hillsides, and ridges – those are the places people want to build homes. But if communities don't preserve these lands, they will lose their future economic base," notes the conservation director of the Appalachian Mountain Club.*



* Source: Lerner, Steve and William Poole. [The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space](#). San Francisco: The Trust for Public Land, 1999. And references cited therein.

PREVENTING FLOOD DAMAGE

☛ *Building in floodplains leads to expense piling on expense as residents and businesses demand costly drainage improvements, flood control projects, flood insurance, and disaster relief.*

☛ *The estimated cost to restore a floodplain, or “fix” a river, in Napa County, CA, that had done \$500 million in flood damage from 1960-1998: \$160 million.*

☛ *FEMA estimates that government funds spent to move out of harm’s way in floodplains after the 1993 Mississippi floods – a total of \$203 million – would save \$304 million in reduced future damages.*

☛ *The Katy Prairie Conservancy is purchasing some agricultural land west of Houston to serve as a safety valve for seasonal flooding.*

☛ *The amount Atlanta’s current tree cover has saved by preventing the need for stormwater retention facilities: \$883 million.*

☛ *Near Boston, more than 8,000 acres of wetlands along the Charles River were purchased as an alternative to a \$100 million system of dams and levees.*

PROTECTING FARMS AND RANCHES

☛ *The American Farmland Trust estimates that by 2050 farmers and ranchers could be required to produce food for 50 percent more Americans on 13 percent less land.*

☛ *The USDA reports farmland losses of 14 million acres from 1992 to 1997 – nearly 320 acres every hour.*

☛ *Agricultural productivity can be irreplaceable – the result of geologic and climatic factors that cannot be reproduced.*

☛ *Farm and ranchland provide the vistas and open landscapes that tourists love.*

☛ *More than 40 studies from 11 states have found that farms can save communities money by contributing more in taxes than they demand in tax-supported services.*

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

☛ *In some instances a city’s bond rating may actually rise after it has shown it can control growth by purchasing open space.*

☛ *In Loudoun County, VA, costs to service 1,000 new development units exceeded their tax contribution by as much as \$2.3 million.*

☛ *A developer notes, “People will pay a premium for an environmentally well-thought-out community.” What makes a development look attractive, such as preserved open space, also makes housing units easier to sell.*

☛ *Planning for housing, open space, and recreation is what’s going to enrich the desired development zone. People will be able to work and live in the same area,” notes an Austin, TX, city councilmember.*

☛ *Open space makes higher-density living more attractive, providing a richer, more complex infrastructure.*

☛ *While every community is different, one study showed that Massachusetts towns that had protected the most land enjoyed, on average, the lowest property tax rates.*

SAFEGUARDING THE ENVIRONMENT

☛ *More and more communities are realizing that keeping water clean is almost always cheaper than cleaning it up.*

☛ *Estimated annual value of water quality improvement by wetlands along a three-mile stretch of Georgia’s Alchovy River: \$3 million.*

☛ *Natural space provides free ecological services, services that society must pay for otherwise.*

☛ *Protected buffers along rivers, lakes, streams, and reservoirs help clean waters that generate profits from tourism and fisheries.*

☛ *In Massachusetts, development may cause a loss of as much as 30 percent of the state’s natural groundwater recharge.*