

Measuring Trails Benefits: Overall Benefits

What kind of benefits can trails bring?

Trails can bring a wide range of benefits to communities, including increased business, improved public health, and higher property values. Measurable benefits from trails in similar communities with similar goals can support investments in new trail projects.

A growing body of research measures how trails bring benefits to communities. This research shows that not all trails bring all benefits. Matching a community's priorities—such as increasing local employment, encouraging more physical activity among residents, or attracting new residents—to the type of trails that can deliver these benefits will increase the likelihood of success.

Research highlights across four categories are summarized below. Additional details on each of these topics, as well as other relevant research, are available at <http://headwaterseconomics.org/trail>.

Select Research Highlights

Business Impacts

- Overnight stays are the biggest contributor to total spending. At a mountain bike race in [North Carolina](#), for example, each additional night adds \$101 to a visitor's total spending.¹ Along the [Great Allegheny Passage](#), overnight users spend seven times more than day users.²
- Communities can capitalize on trails when the trails are [directly linked](#) to towns via [spur trails](#) or [shuttles](#).^{3,4,5}
- Although events are short-lived, [participants often return](#) to the community [after the event](#), increasing events' economic impact.^{6,7}
- After visiting an area, some tourists [become residents](#) or second home owners, bringing their businesses, [supporting the local economy](#), and paying taxes.^{8,9}
- In places that have become destinations, like [North Carolina's Outer Banks](#), the economic contribution of visitors far exceeds the original public investment.¹⁰

Quality of Life

- In [Bloomington, Indiana](#), property owners adjacent to trails most commonly identified convenience and access to recreation, physical fitness, social connection, and connection to the natural environment as benefits of living near trails.¹¹
- In [Jackson, Wyoming](#), nine out of ten respondents use pathways and trails. Residents use area pathways and trails every other day in the summer and every three days



How to use this information:

This research is meant to help community leaders, transportation planners, and economic development staff better understand how benefits from trails can be measured.

This summary is one of several handouts describing the state of research related to the benefits of trails. The other summaries address:

- Public health
- Business impacts
- Property value
- Quality of life
- Access

This series offers a succinct review of common benefits identified in the 130+ studies in Headwaters Economics' free, online, searchable **Trails Benefits Library**.

in the winter. Ninety-six percent of residents stated that outdoor recreation was an important factor in their decision to move to or stay in the area.¹²

- Along three trails in rural [northern and eastern Nebraska and western Iowa](#), 74 percent of respondents indicated that they used the nearby trails for recreation daily, weekly or occasionally. Sixty-eight percent said the trails had a positive impact on their community.¹³

Public Health

- In [Morgantown, West Virginia](#), 60 percent of trail users report they exercise more regularly since they began using trails, and 47 percent of trail users report getting their recommended physical activity through trail use alone. Twenty-three percent of respondents did not exercise regularly before using the trails.¹⁴
- Walking trails in rural, [southeastern Missouri](#) increase exercise particularly among people most at risk of inactivity: those who were not already regular walkers, have a high school education or less, or who earn less than \$15,000 per year. Trails that are at least a half mile long, paved, or located in the smallest towns are associated with the largest increases in exercise.¹⁵
- More residents using trails and pathways means [fewer accidents](#) between pedestrian and motor vehicles.¹⁶

Property Value

- In suburban [New Castle County, Delaware](#), homes within 50 meters of bike paths commanded a 4 percent price premium.¹⁷
- In rural [Methow Valley, Washington](#), homes within one-quarter mile of trails benefited from a 10 percent price premium.⁹
- Along a popular trail in [Austin, Texas](#), the price premium ranged from 6 to 20 percent, depending on whether the neighborhood had views of the greenbelt surrounding the trail and whether it had direct neighborhood access to the trail.¹⁸ This price premium translated to roughly \$59,000 per year in additional tax revenue for the city.¹⁹

Surveys have found that trails play an important role in determining where many residents locate and whether they stay in an area.

Methods

Original studies and additional details on methods can be found in the Trails Benefits Library at <http://headwaterseconomics.org/trail>.

Contact

Megan Lawson, Ph.D. megan@headwaterseconomics.org, 406.570.7475.

Footnotes

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