

Trail Benefits in General

The “Oregon Trails 2005-2014: A Statewide Action Plan” enumerates many of the benefits of non-motorized trails, from which much of the material below was copied, paraphrased or adapted.

1. Economic Benefits

a. Money Spent in Communities by Trail Users

Local trail users and tourists provide direct economic benefit to restaurants, hotels, and other businesses for soft goods such as gasoline, food, drinks and durable goods such as clothing, bicycles, shoes, bike rentals, etc. This attracts new businesses and bolsters existing ones, which, in turn, creates jobs and increases public revenue.

Specific evidence of the economic benefits is available from various studies.

For example, in a 1992 study, the National Park Service estimated the average economic activity associated with three multi-purpose trails in Florida, California and Iowa was \$1.5 million annually.

b. Property Value Impacts

It is clear that home buyers make their house purchasing decisions based on a variety of extrinsic factors and these include such intangibles as availability of trails.

In a survey sponsored by the National Association of Home Builders, recent homebuyers 55 years and older were asked to identify amenities that would seriously influence their decision to purchase a home. According to study results, walking and jogging trails are the most desirable amenity, with roughly half of active adults and older seniors (52%) saying the presence of trails would seriously influence the home buying decision. This number increases substantially with annual incomes greater than \$75,000 (65%). Outdoor spaces (especially parks) were second on the list at 51%...

A study of property values in Eugene, Oregon examined the effects of the South Ridgeline Trail on the property values of nearby homes. The study found that distance to the nearest trailhead was strongly significant in the sale price of a home. The study concluded that the value of a home increased \$6.77 for every foot of decrease in this distance.

c. Attracting Businesses

Many communities want to attract new, expanding, or relocating businesses to their area in order to increase their employment and tax bases. The importance of "quality of life" is

increasingly cited as a major factor in corporate and business location decisions. As an amenity that plays an important role in increasing a community's "quality of life", trails are becoming more and more attractive to businesses and their employees.

The City of Pueblo, Colorado attributes the investment in trails and parks along the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek as one of the most important components in the economic revitalization efforts of this industrial city.

The River Walk is often visited by prospective businesses looking to relocate to the San Antonio, Texas area. A business location along the River Walk is considered very desirable because the pedestrian system provides a retreat for employees during lunch and access to valuable green space within the central business district.

A survey of 71 economists rated factors for Arizona's attractiveness as a place to live, work, vacation, retire, and locate future plants and corporate headquarters. The strongest factors contributing to Arizona's positive image were climate, job opportunities, and open space including abundant outdoor recreation opportunities. Seventy firms relocated or expanded their businesses in Arizona, creating 27,800 jobs and \$970 million in indirect salaries and wages. Chief executive officers of these firms said they chose Arizona for its "outdoor lifestyle and recreation opportunities.

d. Deterring Forest Lands Encampments

A growing cost to the Ashland community as well as the Forest Service is dealing with forest land encampments. Many folks pitch tents and bring their belongings into the forest lands above Ashland. Campfires, trash and human waste are just some of the many concerns.

Recently, communities are finding that trail user presence is enough to discourage many campers.

“If more people use city woods for recreational purposes, fewer homeless people may use those woods for campsites,” said city (Portsmouth, New Hampshire) environmental planner Peter Britz.”

While this plan does not take a stand on homelessness, it does have a vested interest in the mitigation of fire hazards and human waste in the watershed. If promoting trail use will help in that regard, this plan should include this as a benefit.

2. Health And Fitness Benefits

Trail activities such as walking, jogging or running, in-line skating, cross-country skiing, and bicycling are well documented to help improve health and fitness when done on a regular basis. Physical activity need not be unduly strenuous for an individual to reap significant health benefits. Even small increases in light to moderate activity, equivalent to walking for about 30 minutes a day, will produce measurable benefits among those

who are least active. This health benefit accrues to the individual, and, in the form of reduced health-care costs, to society as well.

Many people realize exercise is important for maintaining good health in all stages of life, however many do not regularly exercise. The U.S. Surgeon General estimates that 60% of American adults are not regularly active and another 25% are not active at all. In communities across the country, people do not have access to trails, parks, or other recreation areas close to their homes. Non-motorized trails provide a safe, inexpensive avenue for regular exercise for people living in rural, urban and suburban areas.

Exercise derived from trail-related activities lessens health related problems and subsequent health care costs. Regular, moderate exercise has been proven to reduce the risk of developing coronary heart disease, stroke, colon cancer, hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, obesity, and depression. This kind of exercise is also known to protect against injury and disability because it builds muscular strength and flexibility, which is important in later years of life.



Runners and hikers on the Ashland Loop Road

A nationwide study on the cost of obesity concluded that increasing participation in the amount of regular moderate activity by the more than 88 million inactive Americans over age 15 could reduce annual national medical costs by \$76 billion in 2000 dollars. A recently completed plan entitled, *A Healthy Active Oregon: The Statewide Physical Activity Plan*, points out that the current epidemic of obesity has also hit Oregon hard. At 22%, our state has the highest percentage of adult obesity of any state west of the Rockies. Add that to 38% of Oregon adults who are overweight and we have the startling total of 60% of Oregonians not at a healthy weight. Our youth follow closely behind, with 28% of eighth graders and 21% of eleventh graders currently overweight. The *Statewide Physical Activity Plan* is a call to action for all who can have an impact on promoting daily physical activity to improve the health of Oregonians. The plan has identified the need for more community trails as a top priority.

The Oregon Outdoor Recreation Survey was conducted over a one-year period from February 2001 to January 2002 by Oregon State University's (OSU) College of Forestry as a part of Oregon Parks and Recreation's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation planning effort. The findings of the Oregon Outdoor Recreation Survey identified that the most popular everyday activities in Oregon are running and walking for exercise and walking for pleasure. According to the OSU report, these activities are generally engaged in near home, and on a regular basis. These findings help to make the case that neighborhood trails are essential in providing all Oregonians with a means to realize the health and fitness benefits associated with daily exercise.



Finally, every year, premature deaths cost American companies an estimated 132 million lost workdays at a price tag of \$25 billion. Each year, finding and training replacements costs industry more than \$700 million. In addition, American businesses lose an estimated \$3 billion every year because of employee health problems (National Park Service, 1983). Providing close-to-home access to trails can encourage regular exercise, improve overall employee health and help to reduce these work-related costs.

3. Social Benefits

Trail projects help build partnerships among private companies, landowners neighboring municipalities, local government, and advocacy groups. Each trail contains elements of local character and regional influence, and reflects the hard work, enthusiasm, and commitment of individuals, organizations, elected officials, and agencies. All are able to take pride in having worked together to successfully complete a trail project. In addition, when residents are encouraged to become involved in a trail project, they feel more connected to the community.



AWTA members and others in the community install a bench on the White Rabbit Trail

Because of their linear design, trails act as a meeting place for the community. As a result, trails promote family unity as well as strengthen friendships and neighbor relations. They are places where entire families, friends and neighbors can gather and recreate together safely.

Neighborhood trails can improve pride in a community in other ways as well. A trail that runs through a community often leads to the residents and business owners showing their "best side" by cleaning or fixing up their property. A popular and well-managed trail can also serve as a focal point for a community for special events and a gathering place. These activities can lead to greater interaction between residents and improve the cohesion of a community.



Local high school students gain some volunteer hours in an AWTA project

4. Educational Benefits

Trails present a unique opportunity for education. People of all ages can learn more about nature, culture or history along trails. Of particular importance, trails provide firsthand experiences that educate citizens about the importance of the natural environment and respect for nature. This education can be accomplished using comprehensive trail guides, signage, public outreach, and informative classes to encourage awareness of the natural, cultural, and historical attributes of the trail.



Never too young to start helping out

5. Recreation Benefits

Linear corridors offer several benefits over traditional park facilities. These benefits include providing greater perimeter area, multiple visitor experiences, increased access, and lower acquisition and development costs. Many trails provide access to areas for enjoying solitude, observing wildlife and experiencing the natural environment. Finally, multiple-use trails serve a wide range of recreationists including bicyclists, walkers, joggers, equestrians, hikers, bird-watchers, parents with strollers, picnickers, and people who just want to sit in the sunshine.

6. Preserving Our History And Culture

Trails have the power to connect us to our heritage by preserving historic places and by providing access to them. They can give people a sense of place and an understanding of the enormity of past events, such as Native American trails, the Lewis and Clark expedition, gold rush mining efforts and westward migration along the Oregon Trail. Much of the Ashland watershed trail history and culture is not clear or obvious. While Lamb Mine Trail clearly acknowledges the presence of an historic mine, many other trails could acknowledge mining and other activities.



"Sap and Salt" cabins formerly located in the Ashland Watershed near several trails.