Benefits of Trails and Greenways

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Benefits from Trails and Greenways

- Physical
- Psychological
- Knowledge
- Social
- Economic
- Environmental
- Spiritual
Physical Benefits

- Cardio vascular system workout
- Support range of activity
  - Vigorous, competitive event training
  - Moderate physical exercise/recreation
  - Joint flexibility
    - Especially valuable for two most common disabilities
      - Arthritis
      - Heart disease
- Tremendous benefits to young through Safe Routes to Schools
  - Active youth = healthy adults
  - Active youth involve parental activity
Psychological Benefits

- **Confidence from competence**
  - Trail users choose how they want to use trail
    - Opportunity to develop skills, voluntary activity

- **Family/group friendly setting**
  - Facilitates individuality while part of a group
    - Some walk, some skate, some ride bike, some use adaptive mobility device, etc

- **Opportunity to volunteer/give back**
  - Safety patrol
  - Friends group
    - Maintenance, fund raising, special projects
Knowledge Benefits

- **Environmental knowledge**
  - Use interpretive signage/brochures to promote discovery learning about diverse habitats and unique ecosystems
  - Relate trail connectivity to environmental interdependence

- **Community awareness**
  - Better acquaintance with businesses, neighborhoods, etc.

- **Historical sense**
  - Most trails and greenways use former railroads, waterways, Native American foot trails, etc.
  - Interpretive signage/brochures/historic sites make history come alive
Social Benefits

- Trails are the community’s front porch
  - Everyone is welcome
  - Common positive interest in the welfare of trail
- Diversity in trail uses/users promotes tolerance
  - Different motivations for trail use
  - Promotes interaction about diverse equipment, clothing, activity, attractions, etc.
- Trails are a link, not a barrier compared to some infrastructure
Economic Benefits

- **Direct spending**
  - Trail equipment
    - Bike, blades, shoes, etc.
  - Travel
    - Fuel, food/beverage, souvenirs, repairs, etc.

- **Indirect spending**
  - Multiplier effect where what is spent positively reverberates through the economy
    - Trail-side restaurant owner expands business to build porch to better serve trail users
      - Carpenters, masons, banker all benefit
More Economic Benefits

- Reduced fuel use from increased non-motorized transportation
- Trail attracts visitors who are linked to other attractions by trail use
- Keeps locals near home to enjoy amenities
- Improve property values
  - Almost every trailside residence creates their own access rather than their own barrier
  - Real estate agents more likely to report more rapid home sales for trail-side homes
Cautions About Economic Benefits

- Beware of magic numbers about trails
  - Annual dollar value benefit per mile
- Challenges
  - Which scale of the economy?
    - Local, regional, state or beyond?
  - All spending is not equal in value
    - Much goes beyond region, especially on equipment, fuel
    - Other uses of equipment make it difficult to attribute to one specific trail/facility
    - People would eat whether at the bowling alley or the trail
  - Consider money coming from outside region versus money staying in region
    - Both valuable but a different measure
      - Think like filling the tub, some water comes in, some leaks out
Spiritual Benefits

- **Body is a temple**
  - Not a cosmetic concept, but a physical health one that is based on taking care of a divine creation
    - Look in the Bible at Paul’s letter to the Romans

- **We are stewards of the earth**
  - Not a concept of dominance but one of long-term care and concern about a divine creation
    - A key basis of transcendentalism influencing Thoreau, Emerson
    - Look in the Bible at Genesis

- **What we do matters as we can destroy and impair as well as steward the environment**
  - Basic thesis of George Perkins Marsh’s 1864 book “Man and Nature” about the Middle East/Biblical lands and poor stewardship of the environment
  - The seminal work in the science of ecology
Environmental Benefits

- Corridors provide path for plant and animal migration
  - Link rather than separate habitats
- Blueways preserve especially sensitive habitats
  - Surface waters, floodplains, wetlands
- Non-motorized transportation and recreation reduces energy usage
In Summary

- Don’t be at a loss of words or information in response to “What good are trails and green ways?”
- Use the DVD Rail-Trails: Making the Connection whenever possible, letting many tell the story from across the state
- Put the benefits you experience in your own language and tell your story
- Keep in touch
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