



Stroud Region Open Space & Recreation

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For Immediate Release

One in a series of educational essays on the essential community services of parks and recreation systems.

Recreation Trails and Green Spaces: Are They Worth It?

by Rich Cramer

In tough economic times, should communities be spending limited funds on recreation trails and “green” open spaces? The easy and almost too frequent answer is “no,” but a closer look at the benefits of these spaces reveals a much different picture.

We have all heard the statistics about the connection between exercise and good health. We have all heard the often shocking facts about the percentage of Americans who are either obese or overweight. In 1999 about 30% of American adults were considered obese. By 2010 that figure had risen to nearly 36%. Nearly one in three children 6 to 19 years old are now classified as overweight or obese. We spend over 147 billion dollars per year on obesity related health costs. Unfortunately, only 6 percent of U.S. schools offer the recommended two hours of physical education classes per week and only five states require physical education for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. First Lady Michelle Obama’s push to improve children’s exercise habits along with other efforts by a variety of groups and agencies has caused obesity rates to level off but no significant decrease has been seen.

Communities like those found in Monroe County need to look for inexpensive, easily accessible ways to provide its residents with opportunities to improve their health through exercise. Schools can’t always

offer those avenues due to budget limitations which restrict their physical education offerings. Many of our residents do not have the financial resources to join health or country clubs. Establishing and expanding recreation paths and open spaces can be an excellent way to encourage our residents to get outside and walk, run or bike their way towards a more healthy lifestyle. The Levee Loop Trail which runs along the Brodhead Creek plus the many beautiful parks contained within the Stroud Greenway offers a wide variety of options for local residents.

One study estimates that for every dollar invested in trails designed for physical activity, there was a \$2.94 direct medical benefit to the community. The bottom line: healthier people spend fewer dollars on medical care.

It is reasonable to wonder if investing in outdoor recreation sites makes good sense in a weak economic climate. The facts point to a resounding “yes,” as the answer to that concern. Outdoor recreational activities add nearly \$730 billion to the U.S. economy each year and support about 6.5 million jobs. State and federal governments realize roughly \$88 billion dollars in tax revenue from recreation related industries. The nearby Great Allegheny Passage trail in Pennsylvania and Maryland estimates that over 800,000 trips are taken within their system each year. Businesses estimate that 25 percent of their revenue is a result of their proximity to that trail system.

Communities with opportunities for walking and trail activities are generally perceived as being safer and more attractive, thereby raising property values and luring businesses. Homes adjacent to greenway corridors, on average, sell for higher prices. Our local business and civic leaders can look at the Stroud Greenway as a positive way to raise local economic standards with minimal effort.

The Stroud Region has gotten a late start compared to many areas in developing open spaces and recreation paths. The Levee Loop Trail, our many parks within the Stroud Greenway boundaries, and the nearby Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area McDade Trail are excellent first steps in providing our residents with safe, attractive options for exercise and recreation. One goal of the Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission is to maintain and expand its park and trail system so that more of our residents and visitors will be able to have a healthy, economically responsible experience. To achieve this worthwhile objective, we need the support and encouragement of the entire community. For specific ways in which you can help, visit www.stroudgreenway.org.

Rich Cramer is a retired school principal and a member of the Board of Directors of the Friends of Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation.

The Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission provides essential public services of regional economic stimulation, environmental stewardship, and social stability through healthful recreational and cultural programming and responsible stewardship of parks and open space.

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