

Conservation: An Investment that Pays
The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space
Trust for Public Land 2009 – Written by Erica Gies

Purpose: The main focus of this paper is to discuss the economic importance of parks and open spaces to communities surrounding the areas.

Location: The research conducted for this paper encompassed locations across the United States. However, the author used large metropolitan areas—like Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—when providing real world examples of the theories and concepts presented throughout the paper.

Study Design: The majority of the information presented by Gies was collected through secondary research using literature reviews.

Key Findings:

- Increasing Property Values and Taxes
 - In 2007, Trust for Public Land’s (TPL) Center for City Park Excellence found that “...Philadelphia properties within 500 feet of parks or recreation land were worth an average of 5% more...” than land further away. Properties surrounding the city’s parks and recreational areas were found to have a total increased value of \$688.8 million and additional property taxes of more than \$18.1 million. (3)
 - Parks and open spaces will increase property values and taxes more in urban areas than in rural areas due to the higher demand for space found in cities. Also, “passive parks” are more desirable than active parks—where ball fields would be located for example. (4)
- Boosting Local Economies
 - “Quality of space”—defined as the environmental state of the places we live and work—was ranked the number one amenity for attracting and retaining high technology workers. Businesses located in less desirable areas must compensate for the lack of environmental quality with higher salaries. (5)
 - A community’s quality of space is also important in retaining retirees who look to live in areas where recreational opportunities are easily accessible and widely varied (6).
- Urban Parks Generate Tourism Dollars
 - “TPL’s Center for City Park Excellence found that out-of-town tourists who came to Philadelphia primarily because of its parks (including the well-known Independence National Historic Park) spent \$40.3 million in that city in 2007” (7).
- Conserving versus Developments
 - Some communities are opting to conserve land in order to avoid sprawl—lower population density development. Sprawl increases costs of public goods like roads and emergency services; and the cost of sewer and water services to first the developers who then pass the burden onto the consumers—the residents.
 - The land being conserved does not have to be unused forests or open spaces; it can also be farms and ranches—sometimes referred to as “working lands.” (10-11)
- Value of Ecosystem Services
 - Properly functioning natural systems provide services of economic value that are otherwise done by man—but at a usually high cost. These services range from providing drinkable water and breathable air to pollinating food crops and providing physical protection against storms. (16)
 - TPL’s Center for City Park Excellence estimated the value of storm water retained by Philadelphia parks amounted to approximately \$5.9 million in annual savings of water treatment costs. (18)
- Reducing Healthcare Costs
 - “Parks, greenways, and open space that support walking, biking, jogging, active sports, and other exercise help keep people healthy, reducing the nation’s \$2 trillion annual health care bill” (22)