

# WHY TRAILS

**2020 EDITION**

Advancing Trails



For those who build,  
maintain, use,  
and dream of trails...

American Trails



**Your guide to  
the benefits of  
trails for  
individuals,  
communities,  
and economies.**

# ECONOMIC BENEFITS

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Trails have consistently been shown to provide economic benefits across many spectres, including:



**JOB CREATION**



**LOCAL BUSINESS SALES**



**TOURISM AND LODGING**



**HEALTH CARE SAVINGS**



**RECREATIONAL GEAR SALES**



**AND MORE**

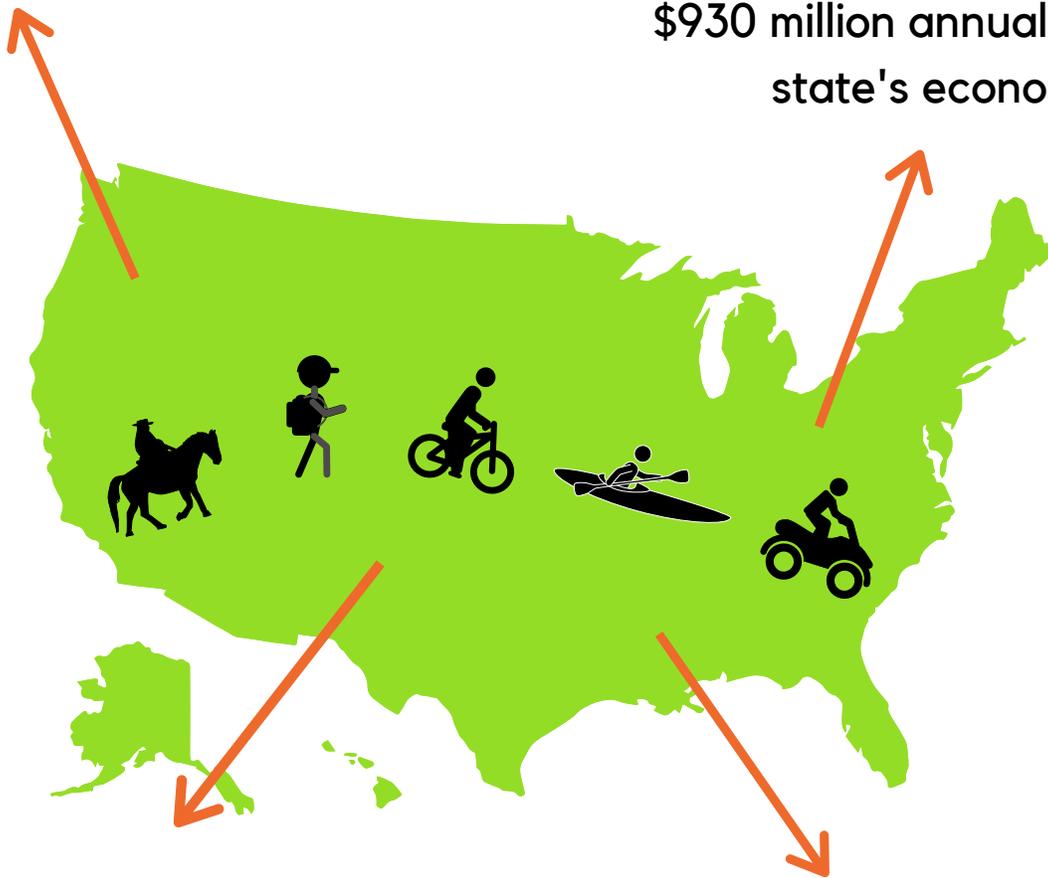
**According to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, outdoor recreation creates 6.5 million jobs.**

# STUDIES ACROSS THE USA

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Two studies completed in 2019 showed that trails in Washington State contributed more than 8.2 billion to the economy, save \$390 million in medical costs, and create 81,000 jobs annually.

A 2019 study showed that Pennsylvania's 2,000 plus miles of rail-trails generate \$930 million annually for the state's economy.



A 2019 study showed Steamboat Springs, Colorado, a town of 13,000 residents, had an annual economic benefit of \$24 million from local trails.

A 2019 Kansas City study showed implementing the city's 20 year plan for hundreds of miles of new bike trails would pump \$500 million into the economy, and save up to 700 lives in yearly bike crash fatalities.

# TRAILS AND MENTAL HEALTH

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- Spending even 20 minutes outside will have short term effects on the brain to reduce stress.
- Countless studies show people self-reporting reduced stress, clearer thought patterns, more optimism, and an overall heightened sense of well-being after being outdoors.
- We are now seeing more medical practitioners prescribe time in the outdoors as a way to combat depression, anxiety, and other health related issues.

# TRAILS AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

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- For every one dollar spent in trails, there is a three dollar savings in healthcare costs.
- More overall physical activity is measured in communities after trails are built.
- Cardiovascular benefits are seen across all trail user types. This means healthier hearts, and a reduction in preventable disease for trail users.
- Commuting by foot or bike gains popularity when trails go into a community. This both reduces traffic and creates a healthier, more physically active community.



# THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

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**The healthcare industry is increasingly working in collaboration with the outdoor industry to create healthier and happier citizens.**



Park RX helps community health providers across the country institute park and nature prescription programs, aimed at improving health by prescribing outdoor recreation.

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- Vermont Adaptive's Executive Director Erin Fernandez says, "People with disabilities are more likely to have other health issues like heart disease, stroke, or diabetes which is why it is so important to provide programs for people to be active and live a healthy lifestyle." This has prompted Vermont to take action to expand adaptive outdoor recreation options through the program Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sport
  - In Lebanon, Pennsylvania the Lebanon Community Health Council has provided a grant towards a bike park that will be aimed at promoting exercise in children.
  - Baton Rouge has opened a Health Loop Trail that connects shopping and pedestrian areas to the city's medical complex.
  - The annual "Trail to Zero" rides are put on by the non profit BraveHearts to bring awareness to the epidemic of veteran suicide, and to promote horseback riding as a form of therapy for veterans.
  - These are just some examples of the programs across the country bringing together the outdoor recreation industry and the health industry to promote both mental and physical health.

# TRAILS BUILD COMMUNITIES

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**Trails add real estate value to communities. A recent study out of West Virginia University about a local rail-trail found that "property values along the trail, are about 170 percent or so median value"**

**The National Real Estate Association has endorsed trails and greenways for enhancing real estate values for communities.**

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**Trails have been shown to improve quality of life, promote health, sense of community, and more. When communities invest in trails, they are also building a trail culture. Outdoor recreation opportunities attract new residents, new businesses, and create a sense of pride for the communities that build them.**

**Trails bring people together by building a social infrastructure that bonds its citizens by bringing them outdoors. Community events such as races, trail days, and fundraising drives bring even more opportunity for these community bonds to grow.**



# TRAILS ARE FOR EVERYONE

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Increasingly communities are building trails that are inclusive for everyone. This includes shared-use trails, ADA accessible trails, trails for children (such as storybook trails that promote literacy alongside outdoor recreation, sensory trails, and trails designed for those with autism. These trails enrich understanding and fellowship for all people.

- Sky Meadows State Park in Virginia recently opened a sensory trail designed to create a sensory experience for all, including those who are visually, hearing, or mobility impaired.
  - Montana recently released a trail plan for 2020 - 2024 with a focus on access for all abilities and ages.
  - The River Trail in Hanover, New Hampshire is very popular for bird-watching, but until recently was not ADA accessible. As of 2020 there is now 3,700 feet of accessible trail for all to enjoy.
  - The Letchworth State Park in New York is working to open an Autism Nature Trail to create a unique and safe experience for those on the autism spectrum.
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### About us:

American Trails is a trail advocacy organization that has been working for over 30 years to educate about trails, advocate for trails, and help get more and better trails built. We are the only organization that supports all trail types, including hiking, cycling, equestrian, motorized, water trails, and more.