

Appendix C

Benefits of Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces

Introduction

Parks, trails, and open spaces improve our physical and psychological health, strengthen pride in our communities, and make our County and neighborhoods more attractive places to live and work. Overwhelming evidence demonstrates the social, community, environmental, individual and economic benefits these places bring to a community and its residents. For example, they attract tourists, serve as community signature pieces, offer a marketing tool for communities to attract businesses and conventions and host festivals, concerts and athletics events. They provide the opportunity for participation in, and enjoyment of, a wide range of outdoor recreational experiences including resource and non-resource oriented activities.

Since their creation, parks and trails have been viewed as keys to the health and well-being of Washington County residents and focal points for community pride. The challenges facing society today may be different, but the expectations of parks have not changed. Today's parks and trails continue to have a positive influence by enhancing individual health and fitness by countering obesity, isolation from the community, and the stresses of hectic daily lifestyles. As explained in Chapter 3, Washington County residents recognize the importance of these amenities and their relationship to healthier lifestyles and a higher overall quality of life. Businesses recognize their importance in relation to lower health care costs and numerous other economic benefits. Parks, trails, and open spaces are links for Washington County residents of all ages, incomes, and physical abilities to live actively, experience better mental wellbeing, and live in strong and vibrant communities.

Parks, trails, and open spaces provide numerous benefits to residents, visitors, and the economy of Washington County. Some benefits are easily quantifiable while many are not. This appendix describes some of the most significant benefits afforded by the existence of parks, trails, and open spaces that have been proven to be experienced and valued by residents, visitors, and local communities of Washington County.

Social and Community Benefits

Among the most important benefits, though perhaps the most difficult to quantify, are the social benefits provided by the existence of parks, trails, and open spaces. These places provide a venue for people interact with other individuals in the community and increase awareness of the natural environment through the attachment of positive memories to experiences.

Publicly-accessible parks, trails and open spaces can serve as important community development tools.

Recreation Opportunities and the Importance of Play¹

Crime Reduction

Access to public parks and recreational facilities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and juvenile delinquency. Recreational facilities provide at-risk youth with a safe environment to interact with their peers, and fill up time within which they could otherwise experience trouble.

Child Development

For small children, playing is learning. Play has proved to be a critical element in a child's future success. Play helps kids develop muscle strength and coordination, language, cognitive thinking, and reasoning abilities. Play also teaches children how to interact and cooperate with others, laying foundations for success in school and the working world.

Stronger Communities

Green spaces build communities. Research shows that residents of neighborhoods with greenery in common spaces are more likely to enjoy stronger social ties than those who live surrounded by barren concrete. Studies have shown that communities with vegetation in common areas and neighborhoods with community gardens are more stable than other neighborhoods.

Community Benefits

Parks and open spaces benefit communities by providing a sense of community and opportunity for people of different cultures to interact. Parks contribute to a high quality of life for residents, can serve as a good place to take children, and provide opportunities for families to recreate together. In addition, parks and open spaces can strengthen a community by providing opportunities for shared management and ownership of resources. Accessible recreational services are critical to the quality of life of disabled and disadvantaged individuals. Park shelters are often more affordable to rent than many privately-owned venues such as country clubs and convention centers.

Examples of community benefits provided by parks and outdoor recreational sites within Washington County:

- Washington County Fair Park serves as a venue for large social and cultural events such as the Washington County Fair.
- Two Kiwanis clubs and two Rotary clubs donated \$200,000 for improvements at Regner Park which renovated the old food and/or beverage stands and constructed a shelter adjacent to them. Facilities at Kiwanis Park in the Village of Kewaskum were donated by three different



Washington County Fair Park serves as a venue for large social and cultural events such as the Washington County Fair and Enchantment in the Park.

¹ ConservationTools.org, Pennsylvania Land Trust Association, (http://conservationtools.org/library_items/729-The-Benefits-of-Parks-Why-America-Needs-More-City-Parks-and-Open-Space)

service organizations, and are maintained by two organizations. Having park facilities that are developed and maintained through donations and non-profit partnerships can result in a greater sense of community pride.

- Community parks often serve as a focal point for community gatherings. For example, River Hill Park in the Village of Kewaskum and Veteran’s Park in the City of Hartford serve as destinations for Independence Day parades and festivities.
- River Hill Park in the Village of Kewaskum also includes a historic log cabin and the Kewaskum Historical Society Museum (maintained by the Kewaskum Historical Society) which preserves community heritage.
- Many non-profit organizations utilize community parks as a venue for community events such as:
 - Action in Jackson
 - Seafood Fest at Regner Park
 - Washington County 4-H summer day camps and programs in local and County Parks

Environmental Benefits

The acquisition of land for parks, and open spaces and the establishment of public trails contribute to a broad range of environmental benefits. Green space provides substantial ecosystem services.

- ***Enhancement of water quality and natural stormwater management services***

Wetlands contribute to flood control by storing excess runoff temporarily, thereby tending to reduce peak flows. Wetlands may also serve as groundwater recharge and discharge areas. In addition, wetlands help to protect downstream water resources from siltation and pollution by trapping sediments, nutrients, and other water pollutants. Stream flowages decrease by 3.7 percent for every 1 percent increase in protected wetland along stream corridors.²

Tree City USA³

The Tree City USA program is a national program that provides the framework for community forestry management for cities and towns across America. Communities achieve Tree City USA status by meeting four core standards of sound urban forestry management: maintaining a tree board or department, having a community tree ordinance, spending at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry and celebrating Arbor Day.

As shown in Table C-1, two cities and three villages in Washington County are members of the Tree City USA program. The Arbor Day Foundation touts the following five primary benefits of being a member of the program:

² Misganaw Demissie and Abdul Khan, *Influence of Wetlands on Streamflow in Illinois*, (Illinois State Water Survey-Hydrology Division, October 1993): 20.

³ <http://www.arborday.org/programs/treeCityUSA/index.cfm>

- **Reduce costs** for energy, storm water management, and erosion control. Trees yield up to three times their cost in overall benefits to the city, averaging \$273 per tree.
- **Cut energy consumption** by up to 25 percent. Studies indicate that as few as three additional trees planted around each building in the United States could save our country \$2 billion, annually, in energy costs.
- **Boost property values** across your community. Properly placed trees can increase property values from 7-21 percent and buildings in wooded areas rent more quickly and tenants stay longer.
- **Build stronger ties** to your neighborhood and community. Trees and green spaces directly correlate to greater connections to the neighborhood and neighbors.
- **Honor your community** and demonstrate your commitment to a healthier environment through Arbor Day celebrations and Tree City USA recognition.

Table C-1
COMMUNITIES IN WASHINGTON COUNTY
PARTICIPATING IN THE TREE CITY, USA
PROGRAM: JUNE 2015

Community	Years in Program
City of Hartford	25
City of West Bend	30
Village of Germantown	12
Village of Jackson	21
Village of Slinger	3

Source: The Arbor Day Foundation and Washington County.

Individual Benefits

Access to public parks, trails, and open spaces can clearly affect the quality of life in a community and Washington County residents have made it clear how important park and open spaces are.

Individual Benefits

Individual benefits of parks and open spaces include opportunities for:

- Improvement of physical health
- Rest, relaxation, and revitalization which contribute to mental well-being
- Interaction with other individuals in the community
- Increased awareness of the natural environment

The following statements provide explanation and statistical evidence that parks, trails, and open spaces in Washington County provide important benefits to individuals living in the County:

- ***Improved Physical Health***

Now more than ever poor physical health, especially obesity, is a profound problem for residents of Wisconsin and Washington County. Increased physical activity is associated with lower risks of type 2 diabetes, cancer, stroke, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and premature mortality,

independent of obesity. Over recent decades, research has proven the importance of living actively. The following are facts that reflect the need to live actively at the national level:⁴

- Regular physical activity reduces the risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure and colon or breast cancer, lowers blood pressure and cholesterol, reduces stress, helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles and joints, and promotes psychological well-being.
- An obese 4-year old has a 20 percent chance of becoming an obese adult, and an obese teenager has up to an 80 percent chance of becoming an obese adult.

Statistical information on physical health and obesity for the State of Wisconsin and Washington County can be found on-line at www.countyhealthrankings.org/wisconsin. In 2017, of the 72 counties in the State of Wisconsin, Washington County ranked fifth best for “Health Outcomes” (how healthy a county is) and fourth best for “Health Factors” (what influences the health of the county).

Among health factors, “physical inactivity” was analyzed and 21 percent of adults aged 20 and over reported no leisure-time physical activity. Also among health factors, “access to exercise opportunities” was also analyzed. Washington County ranked in the 83rd percentile of Wisconsin counties. The role of the built environment is important for encouraging physical activity. Although ranked relatively high in comparison to other Wisconsin counties, establishment of additional parks, trails, and recreational opportunities within Washington County could improve this ranking as individuals who live closer to sidewalks, parks, and gyms are more likely to exercise.

- ***Improved Mental Health***

- Effects of Green Scenery*

- Beyond the recreational opportunities offered by parks, a growing body of research shows that contact with the natural world improves not just physical, but also psychological health. An extensive study published in 2001 in the Netherlands set out to determine the link between green space and health. The study produced several key findings including: people in a greener environment reported fewer health complaints, more often rated themselves as being in good health, and that all types of green (such as city parks, agricultural areas, and forest) seemed to be equally effective. A ten percent increase in nearby green space was found to decrease a person’s health complaints in an amount equivalent to a five-year reduction in that person’s age.

- Effects of Physical Activity*

- The U.S. Surgeon General has found that people who engage in regular physical activity benefit from reduced risk of premature death; reduced risk of coronary heart disease,

⁴ “Fast Facts” *Active Living Research* – Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Web. 9 April. 2010. (<http://www.activelivingresearch.org/resourcessearch/resourcesforpolicymakers/fastfacts>).

hypertension, colon cancer, and non-insulin-dependent diabetes; improved maintenance of muscle strength, joint structure, and joint function; weight loss and favorable redistribution of body fat; improved physical functioning in persons suffering from poor health; and healthier cardiovascular, respiratory, and endocrine systems. Physical activity also produces important psychological benefits.

- ***Improved Quality of Life***

Quality of life is the standard of health, comfort, and happiness experienced by an individual or group. In general, it is the general well-being of individuals and societies.

As explained in Chapter 3 (Key Finding #9), it has been statistically proven that Washington County's park and trail system has made a significant positive impact on residents' overall quality of life.

Economic Benefits

Parks, trails and outdoor recreation are major contributors to the economy. At the national level, the active outdoor recreation industry contributes \$730 billion annually to the nation's economy, supports nearly 6.5 million jobs, and generates \$49 billion in annual national tax revenue, and provides sustainable growth in many rural communities. At the state level, the active outdoor recreation industry contributes \$9.7 billion annually to Wisconsin's economy, supports 129,000 jobs, and generates \$570 million in annual state tax revenue and accounts for nearly four percent of the gross state product.⁵ Many economic benefits are also experienced in Washington County as a result of parks, trails, and open spaces existing in the county's local communities.

Just as public safety and water utilities are considered essential public services, parks and recreation facilities and offerings are equally important to establishing and maintaining a high quality of life, and ensuring the health and well-being of residents and visitors. While many people feel that there must be a choice between economic growth and open space protection, in most cases, however, no such choice is necessary. A community's park or trail system not only provides health and environmental benefits, a sense of community, and a higher quality of life, it is also good for the bottom line. Parks and trails also play a major role in economic growth by significantly increasing property values, attracting and retaining businesses, attracting and retaining a talented workforce, revitalizing cities and communities, boosting the tourism industry, creating jobs, and increasing tax revenues."⁶

Examples of economic benefits provided by parks and trails:

The information that a number of studies provide on the economic benefits of parks and trails can have significant policy implications. Planning for green infrastructure and enforcing its implementation through zoning ordinances requiring open space preservation or trail connections can benefit the larger community. Developers and real estate agents may gain from faster sales,

⁵ Outdoor Industry Association. *The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy*. ([ResearchRecreationEconomyStateWisconsin.pdf](#))

⁶ Open Space San Francisco. "The Economic Value of Parks." 2009.

property owners are at an advantage with convenient access to amenities, and local governments can profit from an increased tax base.⁷ It should be recognized that parks, trails, and open spaces need to be well-maintained to have a continuous positive impact on surrounding properties.

- ***Increased Property Values***

Homebuyers prefer homes close to parks, open space, and greenery. The real estate market consistently demonstrates that many people are willing to pay a larger amount for a property located close to parks and open space areas than for a home that does not offer this amenity. The following examples provide a sample of how this concept holds true across many communities throughout the nation.

- In Boulder, Colorado, a greenbelt added \$5.4 million to the total property values of one neighborhood. Other things being equal, there was a \$4.20 decrease in the price of residential property for every foot one moved away from the greenbelt, and the average value of homes next to the greenbelt was 32 percent higher than those 3,200 feet away.⁸
- In Salem, Oregon, land next to a greenbelt was found to be worth approximately \$1,200 per acre more than land just 1,000 feet away.
- In Oakland, California, a 3-mile greenbelt around a lake at the city's center added \$41 million to the surrounding area's property values.
- Golden Gate Park in San Francisco, California, increases the value of nearby property from \$500 million to \$1 billion while generating \$5-\$10 million in annual property taxes.

- ***Enchantment in the Park***

A large-scale display of holiday lights at Washington County Fair Park was organized to help local food shelters stock their shelves. The event, *Enchantment in the Park*, attracted approximately 30,000 visitors to Fair Park. On the first weekend of the event, over three quarters of the visitors identified themselves as residents of Washington County.⁹ The remaining portion of attendees, nearly 25 percent, came from outside of the County. The proportion of long distance travelers attending *Enchantment in the Park* illustrates how events at parks and outdoor recreation sites can act as regional tourist



A survey completed in 2009 asked Eisenbahn State Trail users if the trail has influenced their purchasing of certain items.

⁷ “*The Economic Benefits of Open Space, Recreation Facilities, and Walkable Community Design*” *Active Living Research*. Web. 17 June. 2010. (http://activelivingresearch.org/files/Synthesis_Shoup-Ewing_March2010.pdf).

⁸ ConservationTools.org, Pennsylvania Land Trust Association, (http://conservationtools.org/library_items/729-The-Benefits-of-Parks-Why-America-Needs-More-City-Parks-and-Open-Space)

⁹ Gretchen Vickney (Volunteer Chairperson, *Enchantment in the Park*), May 2010.

attractions. In addition, there was an increase in the number of reservations for holiday parties made by local companies at Fair Park in order to take advantage of the impressive light display. Increased reservations for Fair Park mean increased revenues for the County and greater contributions to the local economy.

- *Eisenbahn State Trail, Washington County Segment*

A survey completed in 2009 asked Eisenbahn State Trail users if the trail has influenced their purchasing of certain items. The majority of respondents, 57 percent, indicated that they were influenced to make purchases because of the trail. Approximately half of the respondents who made a purchase spent up to \$150 on trail-related items while another 36 percent of respondents reported spending over \$250 because of the trail. Local businesses may benefit economically by capturing a portion of the Eisenbahn State Trail user demographic.¹⁰

- *The Eisenbahn Marathon & Half Marathon*

The Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA) in Washington County hosted its first annual marathon and half marathon on the Eisenbahn State Trail in August 2010. The nonprofit organization operated the event as a fundraiser but the community also played a role in developing the marathon. According to an AODA board member, the push for a marathon in Washington County came largely from area runners, who wanted a long-distance race close to home.

- *The 2017 U.S. Open at Erin Hills*

In June of 2010, the United States Golfers' Association (USGA) announced plans to hold the 2017 U.S. Open at Erin Hills. The event will likely have a major economic impact in the County, extending from the Town of Erin to nearby towns, villages, and cities. Estimates for the 2017 U.S. Open vary, suggesting that the event could have an economic impact around \$100 million to double that amount.¹¹ Considering an analysis following the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines which estimated the tournament's economic impact at \$142 million, \$200

¹⁰ Debora Sielski and Joshua Glass, *Eisenbahn State Trail User Survey Final Survey Report*, (Washington County Planning & Parks Dept., May 2010).

¹¹ Gary D'Amato, "Open Arms Welcome Erin Hills" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. (June 16, 2010) Web. 2 September. 2010. (<http://www.jsonline.com/sports/golf/96489269.html>).

million a decade later may not be unlikely.^{12, 13} Though parts of Wisconsin have hosted major golf tournaments, the 2017 Open will be the first U.S. Open to be held in the State. Nonetheless, studies of past Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) events held in Wisconsin show that the economic benefits of hosting such tournaments are significant.



The United States Golfers' Association (USGA) announced plans to hold the 2017 U.S. Open at Erin Hills.

PGA Tours often get people excited to play golf. The immediate impact on the public is an increase in the attendance at golf courses as established golfers play more frequently. This population also tends to return to courses with newer equipment following PGA events.¹⁴ It is therefore likely that the 2017 U.S. Open will positively affect the numerous golf courses, driving ranges, and golf supply and equipment retailers, and associated establishments throughout the County. The Washington County Golf Course (WCGC) in particular, ranked second in the nation among municipal golf courses, has the potential to attract a vast number of tournament attendees as well as eager local golfers due to the Open at Erin Hills. Though golf courses are prevalent throughout the area, the County-run golf course is likely to offer golfers with a more affordable opportunity to play.¹⁵ Meanwhile, there are indications that the Erin Hills Golf Course may begin to benefit from the U.S. Open it is to host for years preceding the event as golfers flock to experience the course before prices there potentially rise.¹⁶

A study following the 2004 PGA Championship in Haven (Kohler) Wisconsin concluded that the event attracted more than 300,000 fans and gathered around \$76 million. Of that total, it was estimated that \$46 million came from outside Wisconsin. The U.S. Senior Open Championship at Whistling Straits in Kohler, Wisconsin drew about 188,000 fans and

¹² "2008 U.S. Open Economic Impact Analysis" Center for Hospitality and Tourism Research. San Diego State University. Web. 2 September. 2010. (<http://www2.cybergolf.com/kemper/images/173/2008-US-Open-Economic-Impact-Analysis.pdf>).

¹³ "Hitting the green: Landing a major golf tournament scores economic payback" Wisconsin Technology Council. (June 21, 2010) Web. 2 September. 2010. (<http://wisconsintechcouncil.com/newsroom/inside-wi/?ID=997>).

¹⁴ Brad Kane "PGA Tour has Ripple Effect on Sales" Hartford Business Journal. (June 28, 2010). Web. 8 September. 2010. (<http://www.hartfordbusiness.com/news13733.html>).

¹⁵ Web. 8 September. 2010. (<http://golfwgcg.com/golf/proto/golfwgcg/>).

¹⁶ Chris Baldwin, "U.S. Open favorite Erin Hills defies tired golf conventions" Wisconsin Golf (November 4, 2008) Web. 2 September. 2010. (<http://www.wisconsin-golf.com/articles/erin-hills-golf-course-hartford-wisconsin-8876.htm>).

generated an estimated \$20 million for the state economy in July 2007.¹⁷ Exemplifying the impressiveness of Erin Hills, the USGA awarded the 2008 U.S. Women's Amateur Public Links to the course before it even opened. Scheduled to host the U.S. Amateur Championship in August 2011, the 2017 U.S. Open will mark the third USGA championship in Erin Hills' short history. The USGA may envision Erin Hills as a model course in its search for a dynamic U.S. Open venue in the Midwest. Already, there has been talk of bringing more than one Open to the course.¹⁸ For Erin Hills, the future economic impact of an idyllic landscape is promising.

- *Brown County Trails*

Revenue from annual and day passes, available for purchase by those wishing to use any of Brown County's trails, increased significantly with the implementation of the Fox River Trail. From 1997 through 2000, the county's average annual revenue from day passes was around \$4,800 and annual trail passes was approximately \$7,500. With the completion of the Fox River Trail, revenues collected by the county for 2001 increased nearly eight-fold, to \$17,796 from donations (previously unattained) and the sale of day passes and \$58,618 from the sale of annual passes. According to real estate agents interviewed in the course of Brown County's Fox River Trail study, trails enhance the value of a property by at least \$5,000 and homes along trails sell for more money than homes very nearby that are not located along a trail.¹⁹ A 1998 study of the property values of lots adjacent to the Mountain Bay trail, a previously constructed state trail in Brown County, reveals that such lots sell for an average of 9 percent more than similar property not next to the trail.²⁰

After one season, a survey was distributed to businesses on or near the Fox River Trail. Its results follow:

- Approximately 40 percent of respondents reported that the trail led to an increase in sales.
- Over one third of respondents found that the trail had a very positive or positive impact on their business.
- No respondents expressed that the trail had a negative impact on their business.
- A variety of retail establishments were reported to benefit from the trail.
- Respondents' reports on the number of trail users visiting their establishments vary depending on business type, ranging from one or two customers or clients per day to 200.

¹⁷ "Landing a major golf tourney scores economic payback" *The Business Journal of Milwaukee*. (July 16, 2010) Web. 2 September. 2010.

(<http://milwaukee.bizjournals.com/milwaukee/stories/2010/07/19/editorial3.html>).

¹⁸ D'Amato. (June 16, 2010).

¹⁹ Brown County Planning Commission, *Fox River Trail Study*, (December 2001).

²⁰ Paul Roback, *Ozaukee Interurban Trail Enhancement Project*, (UW-Extension, March 2004).

Educational Benefits

Increasing amounts of scientific evidence are revealing correlations between experience in the natural world and children's ability to learn.²¹ Studies show that exposure to nature can boost student achievement, build students' critical thinking and social skills, improve student behavior, and can enhance teaching.²² Studies of students in California and nationwide show that schools using outdoor classrooms and other forms of experiential education produce significant student gains in language, math, science, and social studies. A 2005 California Department of Education study attributes a 27 percent increase in student's science test scores to a week-long science-oriented outdoor education class. Other notable benefits of exposing children to nature include increased self-esteem and a greater motivation to learn. Furthermore, the stimulation nature provides for children's imaginations can instigate their inventiveness and creativity.

Current trends reveal children receive far less exposure to the outdoors than previous generations. This shift causes concerns about children's well-being and the well-being of the environment. Growing amounts of research illustrate that humans have an innate need to connect with the natural world. The absence of such connections is psychologically harmful and children with little exposure to the outside world may experience significant threats to their mental health. Research supports that the withdrawal of children from nature may cause an impaired sense of independent judgment and a reduced perception of awe and wonder, qualities considered indispensable to innovative thinking. Other detrimental effects of nature-deficit disorder include a decrease in one's value of place and the lack of stewardship for the Earth. It is important to avoid the negative impacts of the absence of nature in children's lives and to instead ensure that children are provided with the skills and means with which they may thrive.²³

Increases in the awareness of people's need for and benefits from nature are inspiring numerous state and regional campaigns and a nationwide movement advocating the increase of children's exposure to the outdoors. One of these, the Senate's *No Child Left Inside Act*, seeks to have such an influence by requiring that educational programs incorporate environmental education. Additional goals are to ensure that school children are exposed to daylight and fresh air and that all curriculums incorporate field trips. Overall, the *No Child Left Inside* movement is leading to the formation of a variety of initiatives to reintroduce nature into our daily lives so that people of all ages can maintain a connection with the outside world.

Examples of educational benefits provided by parks in Washington County:

- Lizard Mound County Park preserves one of the largest and most diverse group of prehistoric effigy mounds. No other group of mounds in Wisconsin is so well preserved, so diversified in

²¹ Richard Louv, "Leave No Child Inside." *Orion Magazine*. (March/April 2007).

²² "No Child Left Inside Act" U.S. Committee on Education & Labor. Web. June 2010. (<http://edlabor.house.gov/no-child-left-inside-act/index.shtml>).

²³ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods* (Algonquin Books, 2005).

form or exhibits such outstanding examples of the prehistoric art of mound construction. Trail signs reveal the vast history of the extinct culture that built these unique features. The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and offers unlimited opportunities to learn about the Effigy Mound Builders who lived in Wisconsin between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1000.

- An educational fishing program is held annually at Sandy Knoll County Park. The event is intended to provide a learning opportunity for Washington County’s youth and enhance their appreciation of nature.
- River Hill Park in the Village of Kewaskum includes a historic log cabin and museum to educate the public on the community’s heritage.
- Lac Lawrann Conservancy, a 136-acre nature preserve which serves as refuge to over 300 species of plants, over 200 species of birds, and a wide variety of mammals as well as reptiles and amphibians, serves as an outdoor classroom for over 3,000 visitors each year, including over 1,200 school children. Visitors participate in self-guided hiking and skiing, guided tours, special events, school field trips, and a variety of public programs for families and individuals of all ages.

Active Living

What is “Active Living”?

“Active living” is defined as “a way of life that integrates physical activity into the daily routine, and is an important aspect of preventing obesity among children and families. The goal of active living is for youth to accumulate at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day, and for adults to get at least 30 minutes. People can do this in a variety of ways, such as walking or bicycling for transportation, exercise or pleasure; playing in the park; engaging in physical education classes or recess during school; working in the yard; taking the stairs; and using recreation facilities.”²⁴

The concept of Active Living emerged approximately twenty years ago after the United States Center for Disease Control (CDC) released a report on physical activity and health that highlighted increases in obesity and physical inactivity, especially in youth. Many studies have been conducted on how much our built environment contributes to physical activity and how it could be potentially increased. Active living encourages people to incorporate more physical activity into their daily routine.

²⁴ As defined by Active Living Research, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

A key finding was that public space for recreational opportunities is a key component of Active Living. By providing space for a variety of recreational purposes such as biking or walking, community gardens, playfields, and playgrounds, residents of any age are able to take advantage of recreational activities within Washington County.



Active living encourages people to incorporate more physical activity into their daily routine.

With more than 15,000 publicly accessible acres²⁵ and more than 50 miles²⁶ of publicly accessible trails that offer breathtaking views and access to serene woodlands, lakes, and ponds, Washington County has the resources for its residents to live actively through the County Park System, municipal park systems, and natural resources base. Washington County has year-round opportunities to recreate and improve physical health.

Spring, summer and fall activities can include hiking, picnicking, boating, swimming, nature/cultural trails, canoeing, fishing, basketball and sand volleyball and winter activities include ice-fishing, sledding, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing.

Furthermore, the concept of Active Living is a mindset and a way of life and can be promoted as a countywide effort in this Park and Open Space Plan. People create their own experiences, but planning can guide and create opportunities for experiences through the design and management of settings and activities.



²⁵ Number of acres includes lands with public access owned by Washington County, the State of Wisconsin, local governments, land trusts, nature conservancies, and golf courses.

²⁶ Number of miles includes the segments of the Ice Age Trail and Eisenbahn State Trail within Washington County.

Get Moving Washington County – Park and Recreation Locator

In 2009, Washington County Planning and Parks Department developed an active living website. The “*Get Moving Washington County*” website, now called the Washington County Park and Recreation Locator website, gisweb.co.washington.wi.us/Apps/parklocator/ serves as a convenient information source for Washington County residents who seek ways to live actively. The site includes an interactive mapping application that displays publically accessible parks, trails, and open spaces. Information can also be queried by specific physical activities such as walking, biking, running, playing, and swimming. Community events taking place in Washington County that promote healthy living can also be posted on the website.

In addition, to the website, a fold out Park and Trail Map was developed that identifies publically accessible parks and trails throughout Washington County.

