

HEALTH AND WELLNESS BENEFITS

WHAT ARE TRAILS AND GREENWAYS?

Greenways are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. Greenways often follow natural land or water features, and link nature reserves, parks, cultural features and historic sites with each other and with populated areas. Greenways can be publicly or privately owned, and some are the result of public/private partnerships. Trails are paths used for walking, bicycling, horseback riding or other forms of recreation or transportation. Some greenways include trails, while others do not. Some appeal to people, while others attract wildlife. From the hills of inland America to the beaches and barrier islands of the coast, greenways provide a vast network linking America's special places.

HOW DO TRAILS AND GREENWAYS HELP MAKE A HEALTHIER COMMUNITY?

Trails and greenways create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible and low — or no — cost places to bike, walk, hike, jog or in-line skate. In doing so, they make it easier for people to engage in physical activity.

- In southeastern Missouri, 55% of trail users (who responded to the Bootheel and Ozark Health Projects survey) are exercising more now than before they had access to a trail.¹
- Trails connect people with places, enabling them to walk or cycle to run errands or commute to work. A 1991 Harris Poll found that 46% of the 1,250 adults surveyed said that they would bike to work if designated trails were built.²
- They provide natural, scenic areas that cause people to actually want to be outside and physically active. Cities, such as Chattanooga, Tennessee and Providence, Rhode Island have transformed unsightly urban decay into inviting and popular greenways and walkways that make their communities more livable and walkable. Both cities promote their riverside greenways to attract visitors, businesses and residents.

“...THE PIEDMONT PORTION OF THE ASPHALT-PAVED TRAIL TOUCHED OFF A HEALTH REVIVAL SINCE IT OFFICIALLY OPENED LAST SEPTEMBER. SUDDENLY TOWNSPEOPLE CAN WALK, BIKE OR SKATE WITHOUT LOOKING OVER THEIR SHOULDER FOR MOTORIZED TRAFFIC.”

— ERIC LARSON SPEAKING OF THE CHIEF LADIGA TRAIL IN ALABAMA



Trails, like the Bizz Johnson Trail in California, offer exceptional places to exercise. (Photo: Rails-to-Trails Conservancy)

- They connect neighborhoods and schools so children can cycle or walk to their friend's homes or to school, especially in communities that lack sidewalks. Elementary-aged children are the primary users of the Weir Gulch Trail in Denver, Colorado, on which they travel throughout the neighborhood.³
- In this age of expensive indoor gyms and health clubs, trails and greenways offer cost-effective places to exercise.

BREAKING BAD HABITS

Most Americans make the connection between exercise and health, but many people still lead sedentary lives.

- According to the Surgeon's Report on Physical Activity and Health, 60% of Americans are not regularly active and 25% are not active at all. This report also suggests that creating safe places for people to bicycle and walk will be critical to persuading sedentary people to become more active.⁴
- According to the Centers for Disease Control, almost half of the 12-21 year olds are not vigorously active on a regular basis. And 40% of all high school students are not even enrolled in physical education classes.⁵

The simple fact that everyone should know is that exercise reduces the incidence of a myriad of illnesses, including heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, high



Trails provide safe and enjoyable places for families to experience the outdoors. A family cycles along Minnesota's Cannon Valley Trail. (Photo: Patricia Schmid)

blood pressure and obesity. In addition to preventing these illnesses, exercise builds muscle, bone and joint health. It also helps raise self-esteem and increase our bodies' energy levels.

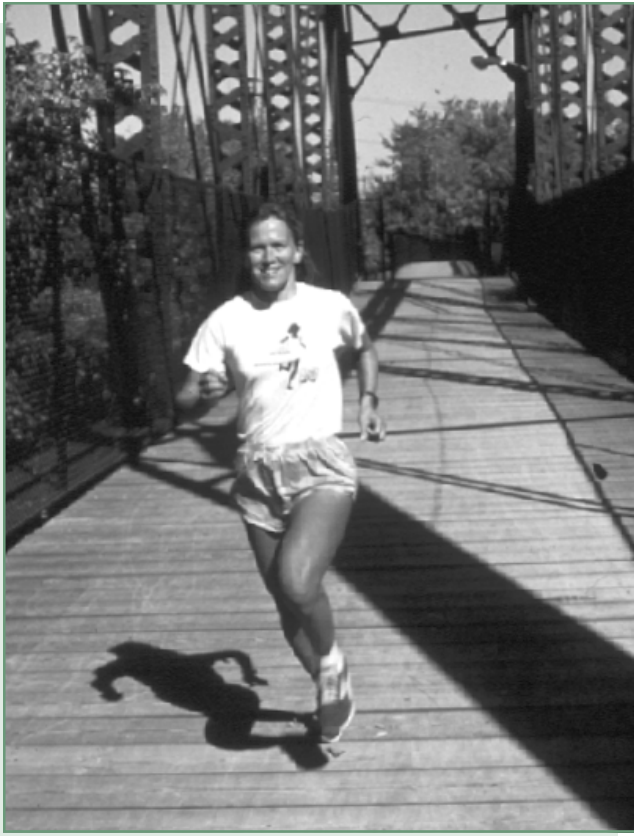
CREATING HEALTHY HABITS BY BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Individuals must choose to exercise, but communities can make that choice easier. Lack of time or access to convenient outlets for healthy transportation and recreation opportunities are reasons commonly cited by all populations as barriers to regular exercise. Communities can use trails and greenways as the tools to help make exercise more convenient and neighborhoods more exercise-friendly. By doing so, they can help change bad habits into healthy ones.

- Use trails and greenways as tools to provide alternative transportation options. Connect neighborhoods and business districts so that people can walk or cycle to work and school, to complete errands, or to visit friends and neighbors. This reduces traffic congestion, reducing smog and making air cleaner.
- Build trails and greenways through neighborhoods and along rivers and other natural landscapes to create attractive and accessible places to exercise.
- Connect parks and playgrounds with trails and greenways to create a network of recreational areas.

The lack of physical activity impacts all of society through health care costs. As a result, many communities increasingly support exercise, including advocating and creating trails and greenways.

- A 1999 study in South Carolina found that the lack of physical activity causes nearly 2,000 deaths annually and costs the state \$157 million or more annually in hospital charges.⁶
- With the help of the American Heart Association, American Hiking Society, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and other organizations, *The Walking Magazine* chose the most walkable cities in America. These include Eureka Springs, Arkansas; Clayton, California; Washington, D.C.; Portland, Maine; and Boston, Massachusetts. Cities were chosen for their network of sidewalks and trails, safe and aesthetically pleasing walking areas,



Joggers, walkers, bicyclists, and equestrians use the Illinois Prairie Path for exercise and to enjoy the scenery. (Photo: RTC)

compact and diverse development, and a “culture of promoting walking in citizen activism, civic planning and administration.”⁷

- The North Central Texas Council of Governments supports alternative transportation initiatives that promote healthy living in their transportation plan, *Mobility 2020: The Metropolitan Transportation Plan*. The plan calls for bicycle mobility projects, such as Bicycle Transportation Districts, trails, bicycle parking, and bicycle commuter locker rooms.⁸
- As part of a strategy to encourage healthy living, the Texas Department of Health’s Chronic Disease Community and Worksite Wellness Program actively promotes trail building.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control
 National Center for Chronic Diseases
 Prevention and Health Promotion
 Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity
 MS K-46, 4770 Buford Highway NE
 Atlanta GA 30341
 (888) 232-4674
www.cdc.gov

Benefits of Bicycling and Walking to Health, National Bicycling and Walking Study, FHWA Case Study No. 14. Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, June 1992.

Available through:

FHWA RNT Report Center,
 9701 Philadelphia Court, Unit Q,
 Lanham, MD 20706,
 fax: (301) 577-1421
www.fhwa.dot.gov/hep10/biped/study.html.

“WITHOUT HEALTH THERE IS NO HAPPINESS. AN ATTENTION TO HEALTH, THEN, SHOULD TAKE THE PLACE OF EVERY OTHER OBJECT.”

— THOMAS JEFFERSON, 1787

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Ross C. Brownson, "Promoting and Evaluating Walking Trails in Rural Missouri," Saint Louis University School of Public Health.
- ² Martin Guttenplan and Robert Patten, "Off-Road but On Track," *TR News*, 178, May-June 1995.
- ³ The Conservation Fund and Colorado State Parks State Trails Program, *The Effect of Greenways on Property Values and Public Safety*, March 1995.
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, 1996.
- ⁵ Centers for Disease Control, "CDC's Guidelines for School and Community Programs, Promoting Physical Activity," www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/phactaag.htm, March 1997.
- ⁶ The Prevention Research Center at the University of South Carolina School of Public Health, *Good Health: It's Your Move — Physical Activity in South Carolina*, May 14, 1999, prevention.sph.sc.edu.
- ⁷ Dave McGovern, "America's Best Walking Towns," *The Walking Magazine*, May/June 1998.
- ⁸ *Bicycle Commuting for Health and Fitness*, North Central Texas Council of Governments, p. 1.



ABOUT THE CLEARINGHOUSE: The Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse provides technical assistance, information resources and referrals to trail and greenway advocates and developers across the nation. Services are available to individuals, government agencies, communities, grassroots organizations and anyone else who is seeking to create or manage trails and greenways. The Clearinghouse is a joint project of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and The Conservation Fund's American Greenways Program.

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