

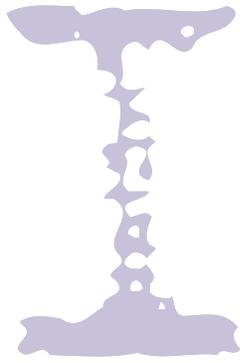
Boosting Tourism

**Open space boosts local economies
by attracting tourists and
supporting outdoor recreation.**



PHIL SCHERMEISTER

Rock climber in
Cantara, California.



In 1996, the Trust for Public Land helped add 17 acres to the Gauley River National Recreation Area in Nicholas County, West Virginia. The acquisition helped protect the river’s water quality, wooded banks, and scenic canyon. But it was also driven by a bottom-line economic motive. Tourism is West Virginia’s fastest growing industry, and whitewater rafting is one of that industry’s fastest growing segments. Each fall whitewater rafters come to run a 24-mile scenic stretch of the Gauley River, pumping \$20 million into the local economy.⁴⁹ Elsewhere in West Virginia, rafting provides 1,000 seasonal jobs in Fayette County while contributing \$50 million to the local economies—mostly from the sale of videos, photos, T-shirts, cookbooks, food, and lodging.⁵⁰

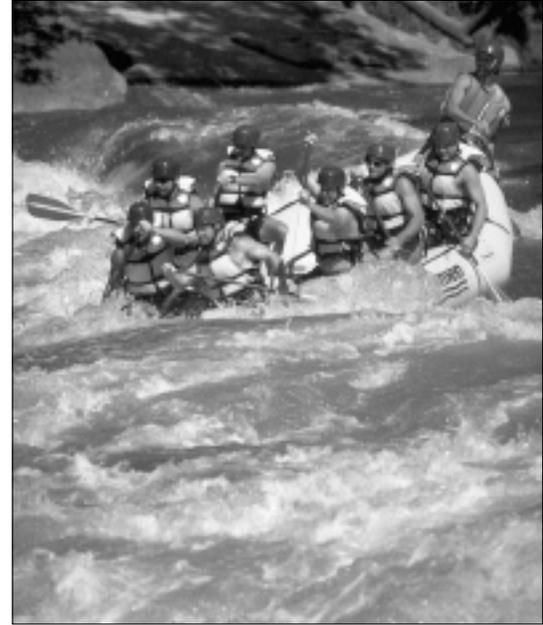
Across the nation, parks, protected rivers, scenic lands, wildlife habitat, and recreational open space help support a \$502-billion tourism industry. Travel and tourism is the nation’s third largest retail sales industry, and tourism is one of the country’s largest employers, supporting 7 million jobs, including 684,000 executive jobs. At present rates of growth, the tourism/leisure industry will soon become the leading U.S. industry of any kind.⁵¹

Outdoor recreation, in particular, represents one of the most vigorous growth areas in the U.S. economy. Much of this recreation is supported by public and private parks and open land. Popular outdoor recreational activities include hiking, camping, biking, birding, boating, fishing, swimming, skiing, and snowmobiling. According to the Outdoor Recreation Coalition of America, outdoor recreation generated at least \$40 billion in 1996, accounting for 768,000 full-time jobs and \$13 billion in annual wages.⁵²

Protecting Tourism and Recreation Resources

Where do Americans go for recreation? A poll for the President’s Commission on Americans Outdoors found natural beauty and quality of view to be the most important criteria for tourists seeking outdoor recreation sites.⁵³

Recognizing this, many communities now work to attract tourists by protecting scenic views and vistas, moving utility wires underground, and preserving trees and historic build- ▶



THOMAS R. FLETCHER

Whitewater rafting is an economic mainstay of West Virginia’s rural communities. Gauley River National Recreation Area.

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In land we trust



WILLIAM POOLE

How interested are Americans in guiding growth and protecting quality of life? One striking measure is the increasing

number of local, state, and regional land trusts, grassroots nonprofit organizations that help communities conserve land—most often by purchasing or accepting donations of land or conservation easements.

According to the Land Trust Alliance, the number of land trusts jumped 63 percent, to more than 1,200, between 1988 and 1998, with the most dramatic growth coming in the Rocky Mountain states (160 percent), the Southwest (147 percent), and the South (118 percent).

In that same decade, land trusts conserved an area nearly the size of Connecticut, more than doubling the land protected by land trusts to 4.7 million acres.

Of that 4.7 million acres, 1.4 million are protected by conservation easement, by far the fastest growing land protection strategy of local land trusts. A conservation easement, sometimes called a “purchase of development rights,” limits development on land. Depending on how the easement is written, it may also preserve such essential productive uses as farming, ranching, watershed protection, and recreation.

Land on which local land trusts hold conservation easements increased nearly 400 percent between 1988 and 1998. In Montana, where easements have become an important tool for protecting ranchlands, land trusts hold easements on more than a quarter million acres. New York land trusts hold easements on nearly 200,000 acres; Vermont land trusts on nearly 140,000 acres.

More than one million Americans are members and financial supporters of local land trusts. Land protected by local land trusts includes forests, wetlands, wildlife habitat, historic landscapes, farmland, and ranches.⁵⁶

*If you develop everything,
you destroy what people come
here to see.*

—BRUCE NOURJIAN
President, Stowe Land Trust

- ings. In Stowe, Vermont—a popular resort and winter sports center—developers seeking building permits must guarantee preservation of scenic vistas and signature landscapes.

“People come to Vermont to see cows, pastures, green fields and meadows, so protecting open space is healthy for our local economy. If you develop everything, you destroy what people come here to see,” says Bruce Nourjian, a sometime developer and president of the Stowe Land Trust, which over the past 12 years has protected over 2,500 acres in the Stowe Valley. In Stowe, Nourjian adds, most developers support land conservation, because they know that by preserving the area’s rural character they are protecting the value of their investment.

The Value of Recreation on Federal Lands

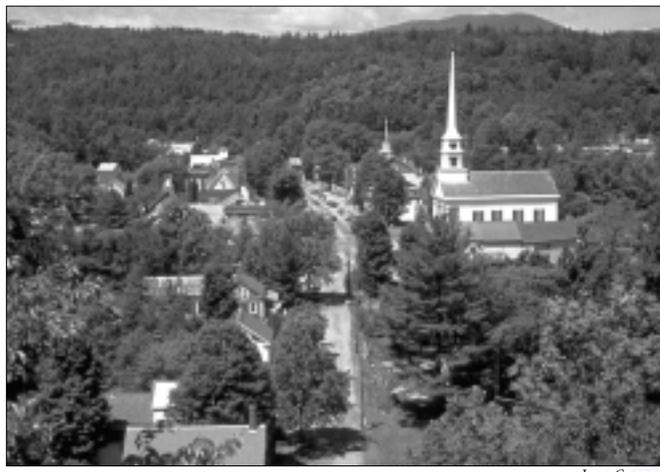
Other communities benefit from tourism and recreation on nearby federal lands. The National Park Service estimates that in 1993 national park visitors contributed more than \$10 billion in direct and indirect benefits to local economies.⁵⁴ And recreation is the second largest producer of direct revenue from U.S. Forest Service lands—bringing in more than grazing, power generation and mining combined—and may account for as much as 74 percent of the economic benefit from these lands when indirect contributions are taken into account.⁵⁵

Many towns that traditionally have depended on logging, mining, and other extractive industries on public lands are now working to bolster local economies by attracting tourists.

Wildlife watchers spent \$29.2 billion on trips, equipment, and other expenditures in 1996, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



CAROLYN FANNON



JEFF CLARKE

Preserving open space is key to protecting the rural character that attracts people to Stowe, Vermont.

In Berlin, New Hampshire—a paper mill town adjacent to the White Mountains National Forest, which attracts 6 million visitors each year—environmentalists and businesspeople are conducting “moose tours,” and planning excursions that explore the history and heritage of the paper and pulp industry. Tourists would learn how trees are grown and harvested, and they would visit a paper mill and a model logging camp to understand what life was like when the local Androscoggin River was filled with logs on the way to the mill.

“We want to nurture the constituency that sees the economic value in conserving natural resources, because we think that will lead to more conservation,” says Marcel Polak, who explores alternative business opportunities that promote conservation efforts for the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) in the upper Androscoggin Valley.⁵⁷

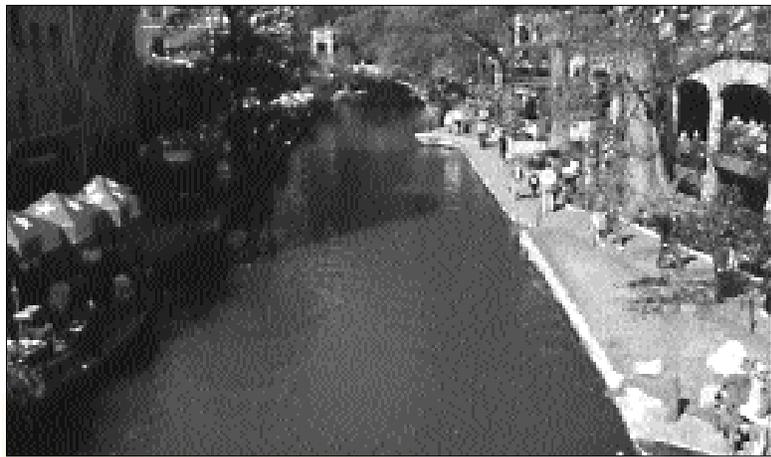
For such programs to succeed it is essential to protect forestlands across a broad swath of New York and New England. These forests have supported communities for generations, but global competition has weakened the forest products industry, and many timber companies seek to sell land for development. Unfortunately, the most desirable land for second homes and other development is also the most important for wildlife habitat and recreation. ▶

Open space brings billions to New Hampshire

- ▶ Estimated annual value of open space to the economy of New Hampshire: **\$8 billion**
- ▶ Approximate fraction of the state's total economy this amount represents: **25 percent**
- ▶ Number of jobs supported by New Hampshire's open space: **100,000**
- ▶ Annual contribution of open space to state and local taxes: **\$891 million**
- ▶ Fraction of all state and local tax receipts this contribution represents: **35 percent**⁵⁹

State land protection programs

- ▶ Amount that Maryland's Rural Legacy Program will spend to preserve farms and other rural open space in the next five years: **\$70 million to \$140 million**
- ▶ Amount of land that will be protected by these funds: **50,000-75,000 acres**
- ▶ Amount of land conserved over the past ten years with funds from Florida's Preservation 2000 Program: **1 million acres**
- ▶ Proportion of voters that approved an extension of the Preservation 2000 Program in November 1998: **70 percent**
- ▶ Annual amount from state lottery proceeds that Oregon voters set aside to purchase river corridors, watersheds and wetlands, and native salmon habitat in November 1998: **\$45 million**
- ▶ Proportion of Oregon voters approving this investment: **67 percent**
- ▶ Minimum annual amount set aside by the North Carolina legislature for dedicated Clean Water Management Trust Fund: **\$30 million**
- ▶ Amount granted for land conservation projects from the North Carolina Clean Water Trust Fund since its inception in 1997: **\$36 million**⁵⁸



LAURA A. McELROY

The San Antonio Riverwalk is the most popular attraction in the city's \$3.5-billion tourist industry.

Remember the Riverwalk

In the early 1900s, engineers in San Antonio, Texas, planned to bury the San Antonio River to prevent recurrent flooding. But citizens envisioning a riverfront park stopped the project.

Eventually a channel was cut, and flood-gates were added to control flooding. Trees and shrubs were planted, and a mile and a half of walkways were added along the shore. Stairways connected the walkways to city streets, and 21 pedestrian bridges spanned the river. Riverside buildings, which had long faced away from the waterway, were given new entrances facing the park.

Created for \$425,000, the park has been enlarged twice, including the addition of new canals and walkways. Today, Paseo del Rio is lined with outdoor cafés, shops, bars, art galleries, and hotels—an irreplaceable retreat for city residents and workers. The Riverwalk has also overtaken the Alamo as the single most popular attraction for the city's \$3.5-billion tourist industry.⁶⁵

- ▶ “The lake frontage, river frontage, hillsides and ridges—those are the places people want to build homes,” says Tom Steinbach, the AMC’s director of conservation. “But if communities don’t preserve these lands, they will lose their future economic base.”

The Impact of Trails and Wildlife Tourism

Hiking and biking trails can also stimulate tourism. Each year 100,000 people come to ride the famous Slickrock Mountain Bike Trail near Moab, Utah. The trail generates \$1.3 million in annual receipts for Moab, part of \$86 million spent by visitors to nearby desert attractions that include Arches and Canyonlands National Parks. In 1995, tourism in Moab supported 1,750 jobs, generated nearly \$1.7 million in taxes, and accounted for 78 percent of the local economy.⁶⁰

Trails along former railroad corridors also pay handsome dividends. In recent years the federal government has invested more than \$300 million in more than 9,500 miles of rail trails in 48 states, and this investment is already paying off.⁶¹ For example, in Dunedin, Florida, store vacancy rates tumbled from 35 percent to zero after the Pinellas Trail was built through town beginning in 1990.⁶² In 1994 the Maryland Greenway Commission authorized a study of the 20-mile Northern Central Rail Trail near Baltimore. Researchers found that whereas the trail cost \$191,893 to maintain and operate in 1993, that same year it returned \$304,000 in state and local taxes.⁶³ In another study, the National Park Service found that three rail trails—in Iowa, Florida, and California—contributed between \$1.2 million and \$1.9 million per year to their home communities.⁶⁴

Natural open space supports fishing, hunting, and other wildlife-based tourism. Sport fishing alone boosted the nation’s economy by \$108.4 billion in 1996, supporting 1.2 million jobs and generating household income of \$28.3 billion.

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—NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Sport fishing added \$2.4 billion to state tax coffers—nearly 1 percent of all state tax receipts—while contributing \$3.1 billion in federal income taxes.⁶⁶ Another \$85.4 billion is generated for the U.S. economy each year by people who feed birds or observe and photograph wildlife.⁶⁷

Funding Resources for Tourists

Recognizing the connection between open space and tourism, some communities have begun taxing tourists to raise funds for park and open space preservation. In 1985 the Montana legislature authorized some small communities that derive a large portion of their income from tourism to levy a sales tax of up to 3 percent on tourist-related goods and services to pay for infrastructure and tourist services, including parks and recreational services. Using receipts from this tax, the town of Whitefish, Montana is building a bike path.⁶⁸

Flagstaff, Arizona, is another community that supports parks and land acquisition using funds generated by tourists. Two million tourists visit this community of 50,000 people each year, attracted by nearby Indian ruins, skiing, national forests and Grand Canyon National Park. In 1988, the city passed a 2 percent “bed, board, and booze” tax (known locally as the BBB tax), which currently raises \$3.3 million each year. A third of the money goes to city park improvements, and an additional portion goes to city beautification and land acquisition. The funds are helping to build a 27.5-mile urban trail system connecting neighborhoods, commercial areas, and national forest lands.⁶⁹

As travel and tourism swells to become the nation’s leading industry within the next few years, communities from coast to coast are coming to see their parks and open lands in a new light. Long appreciated as resources for residents, increasingly they are being appreciated for their attraction to visitors and as economic engines for the next millennium. ■

In 1996, sport fishing contributed \$7.1 billion to California’s economy. East Walker River, Bridgeport, California.

Recreation = Fun + Profit

- Annual contribution of river-rafting and kayaking to the economy of Colorado: **\$50 million**⁷⁰
- Amount outdoor recreation adds to the economy of Arkansas each year: **\$1.5 billion**⁷¹
- Amount of this figure contributed by canoeing: **\$20.1 million**⁷²
- Amount spent by Americans on the purchase of canoes and kayaks in 1996: **\$99.1 million**⁷³
- Amount spent on hiking footwear each year: **\$374 million**⁷⁴
- Contribution of sport fishing to the economy of California in 1996: **\$7.1 billion**⁷⁵
- Annual value of hunting, camping, fishing, and horseback riding on federal Bureau of Land Management lands: **\$376 million**⁷⁶
- Annual value of sport fishing on U.S. Forest Service land: **\$1.2 billion**⁷⁷
- Rank of recreation among all economic activities on U.S. Forest Service lands: **2⁷⁸**
- Visits to national wildlife refuges in 1995: **27.7 million**⁷⁹
- Revenue of local businesses from these visitors: **\$401 million**⁸⁰
- Income from the 10,000 jobs supported by these visitors: **\$162.9 million**⁸¹



PHIL SCHERMEISTER