



Metro Parks Tacoma's Parks and Recreation System Health Benefits at a Glance

Most people have an intrinsic understanding that parks add value to the quality of life in our community. What most may not stop to consider are the many economic benefits Tacoma's parks and recreation programs provide annually to our local economy.

In an Earth Economics' study of the economic value of Metro Parks Tacoma's parks and recreation system, we learned that we return just under \$27 million in measured health, education and ecosystem value annually.

Community Health Benefits

Why are parks imperative to a healthy community?

Health consequences of living in urban areas include mortality from excessive heat, extreme weather, vectorborne and waterborne infections, mental stress, respiratory disease and air pollution. Parks offer relief from congestion and many of the negative health effects of living in densely populated areas:

- The ecosystem cools the earth, reducing heat-related illnesses.
- Trees purify the air we breathe by removing toxins. Metro Parks maintains 20 percent of Tacoma's urban tree canopy.
- Park lands contribute to water filtration, healthy food chain systems, pollination and climate regulation.
- There is a significant relationship between use of urban green spaces and reports of decreased sickness, stress and depression.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention attributes \$147 billion in annual medical costs to obesity. Inactivity is a major contributor. The presence of parks increases attractiveness and incentive for the continuation of exercise through structured programs and park design. Runs and other fitness events also stimulate activity.



Want to learn more? For the full report, visit: MetroParksTacoma.org/Conservation



Adults who meet the national health standards save an average of \$351 per year in health costs, \$702 per year for those over age 65, by countering many major health challenges and diseases with exercise. About one third of the people who meet the standards use parks as part of their fitness routine through access to trails, bike routes, structured programs and park play spaces.

Nearly 30 percent of our nation's youth are obese. Parks and recreation systems can be an important avenue by which kids can develop active lifestyles through sports, dance, play and other recreational programs.

According to research in Scotland, visitors to natural sites experience between \$4.32 and \$28.77 in benefits from reduced health costs, skill development and reductions in antisocial behavior for every dollar they invested in outdoor activities.

Park systems teach people to swim, engage with nature safely and follow social rules that translate into healthy practices and social behaviors. Lower income families and larger communities are more likely to benefit from the social interactions made available through parks and recreation. Visit the full report on-line for details on the myriad of benefits yet to be fully valued.

Summary of Earth Economics, 2011 Economic Impact Report

Phase 2 Earth Economics Findings:	
Current annual value of ecosystem services provided by natural areas ¹	\$ 8,928,879
Health care cost reductions for adults ²	\$ 9,644,757
Social Capital (volunteers and donations)	\$ 6,892,720
Youth education value	\$ 1,373,715
Total Phase 2 – Annual Benefits	\$26,840,071

1. Estimated value annual of Natural Areas if all lands were in a restored state is \$12,484,576.

2. Includes only 18 years+; data currently available makes it difficult to accurately calculate park benefits to children.



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