**Bicycling Provides $137 Million in Economic Benefits
to Northwest Arkansas**

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Foundation's Studies Highlight Economic Impact,
Trail Usage and Regional Standing

**BENTONVILLE, Ark., March 29, 2018 –** With an increasing number of locals and tourists taking advantage of its network of natural-surface trails and shared-use paved paths, bicycling provided $137 million in economic benefits to Northwest Arkansas in 2017. According to three new studies from the Walton Family Foundation, the region has reaped these positive economic, social and health benefits while still managing to keep its trail building costs lower than many regions with comparable bicycle infrastructure.

“While the energy generated by trails and paved paths is palpable across Northwest Arkansas, these findings validate cycling as a regional economic engine that supports local businesses, attracts tourists and builds healthier communities,” said Tom Walton, Home Region Program Committee chair.

The [first study](https://8ce82b94a8c4fdc3ea6d-b1d233e3bc3cb10858bea65ff05e18f2.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/d0/97/cf26b21948308adae6828624729a/march-2018-nw-arkansas-final-report-corrected.pdf), commissioned in partnership with PeopleForBikes, showed bike tourism is a significant economic driver for the region, with visitors spending $27 million at local businesses last year. In the last 12 months alone, more than 90,000 mountain bike tourists visited Northwest Arkansas at a rate comparable to notable destinations like Oregon and British Columbia. The report also showed locals reported spending more than $21 million in 2017 on bicycling goods and events. Many residents cite proximity to bicycle infrastructure as a major consideration when deciding where to live, work or locate businesses. Residents’ cycling habits are also above the nation as a whole. According to the study, 27 percent of locals rode bikes six or more days in the last year—a rate 11 percentage points higher than the national average. This level of activity contributed approximately $86 million in annual health benefits in 2017.

The foundation has partnered with PeopleForBikes to offer the study’s templates free of charge to cities and regions across the country. This will be a resource for communities interested in measuring the economic benefits of cycling in a standardized way by utilizing the Northwest Arkansas study as a national industry model. The templates will be available through PeopleForBikes later this year.

“Northwest Arkansas is a shining example of the positive impact cycling can have on a community,” said Steuart Walton. “We hope to inspire other towns and cities by sharing the lessons and impact we’ve observed, such as the importance of quality miles over quantity of miles, the proximity of trails to downtowns and advocating for female and youth cyclists.”

Over the last 10 years, the foundation has provided $74 million to support the construction of 163 miles of natural-surface trails and paved paths in Northwest Arkansas. To measure the impact of these investments, the foundation commissioned a [second study](https://8ce82b94a8c4fdc3ea6d-b1d233e3bc3cb10858bea65ff05e18f2.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/99/7b/c3d83bab42bab2054d68a04e1eb1/trails-usage-report-final-2017.pdf) analyzing trail usage across the region. The study showed a 24 percent increase in average annual bicycle usage and a 10 percent increase in average annual pedestrian usage over the last two years. Comparing cycling levels per capita, Northwest Arkansas reports higher daily cyclist trail use than bike-friendly areas like San Francisco. Similarly, the region reports more pedestrians per capita using trails than heavily populated areas like San Diego County. While the region’s trails and paved paths are being used for both practical and recreational use, the study showed the highest levels of use by cyclists and pedestrians in densely populated and low-to-medium income areas.

In an effort to obtain benchmark data on policy, funding, design trends and best practices for similar trail programs, the foundation’s third study evaluated information from eight peer cities and two aspirational ones—Austin and Minneapolis—against data from Northwest Arkansas. When compared to other cities with vibrant greenway trail programs, Northwest Arkansas ranked in the lower third for its trail costs. While the average cost of trails in peer cities was $313.75 per linear foot, Northwest Arkansas reported an average cost of $217.09 per linear foot.

Outside of Northwest Arkansas, the foundation is supporting the development of a 30-mile expansion of the Big River Trail in the Arkansas Delta through its Home Region Program. Additionally, Steuart Walton and Tom Walton have provided grant funding for trail building initiatives, such as a 16-mile natural-surface trail system in Hot Springs; a bike and skate park in Fort Smith; mountain biking and hiking trails in Eureka Springs; and a 12-mile natural-surface trail system at Camp Orr on the Buffalo River. To ensure a quality riding experience all year round, they have also provided funding for a maintenance program for the state’s designated International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) Epic Trails. With this investment, Arkansas is now the only state in the nation with a professional maintenance crew. Last month, Steuart and Tom partnered with IMBA to announce new Trail Labs educational programming and matching Trail Accelerator grants to bring more trails across the U.S., with matching funding available to communities in the American Heartland.

For additional highlights from the foundation’s studies, visit *[*[*click here*](https://trello-attachments.s3.amazonaws.com/57488744275b6c3cd6b72fc5/5a453727209d69a10e8028d9/e2817a0503f0f2d9fcacb3009e67c0e4/WFF_Trail_Peer_Report_Final2.pdf)*].*

**About the Walton Family Foundation**
The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. The children and grandchildren of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving K-12 education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. In 2016, the foundation awarded more than $454 million in grants in support of these initiatives. To learn more, visit [waltonfamilyfoundation.org](http://www.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/) and follow us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/waltonfamilyfoundation) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/waltonfamilyfdn).

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