



**Tennessee Citizens for
Wilderness Planning**

Taking Care of Wild Places Since 1966

Economic Benefits of the Rails to Trails Project

The Rails to Trails project is more than just a recreational resource — it's a proven economic driver. From job creation to tourism revenue, trails strengthen communities, attract visitors, and support local businesses.

1. Direct Job Creation

Trail construction and maintenance create jobs in construction, landscaping, and upkeep — providing year-round employment opportunities.

2. Indirect Job Creation through Tourism & Services

How visitors spend money locally: at local shops, hospitality (snack bars, food trucks, cafes, grocery stores) lodging (cabins, campgrounds, motels) and retail (souvenir shops, outdoor gear store, bicycle repair). Trails also inspire new business opportunities such as bike rental, shuttle services and guiding companies.

3. Increased Property Values & Tax Revenue

Proximity to trails often boosts property values, increasing local tax revenues that can be reinvested in community improvements. The increase in property values does not necessarily result in an increase in property taxes. In McMinn County those taxes have decreased.

4. Rural & Small-Town Economic Diversification

Trails help rural areas diversify beyond traditional revenue streams, creating a more resilient economy and attracting new residents.

5. Event & Seasonal Revenue

Trails host cycling marathons, charity walks, and festivals that bring visitors, media attention, and local spending spikes.

6. Year-Round Economic Activity

Unlike seasonal tourism, trails can draw visitors in all seasons — spring hiking, summer cycling, fall foliage tours, and even winter recreation in some regions.

[Trails Benefits Library – Headwaters Economics](#)



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ATVs & the Rails to Trails Project

The Rails to Trails project **will not allow motorized vehicles**, but that doesn't mean ATV riders can't benefit. By working together, we can make our region stronger for ALL types of outdoor recreation. Here's why ATV enthusiasts, businesses, and communities should support the trail:

1. Economic Synergy – More Visitors, More Spending

- Trail users = more customers for local restaurants, lodging, and retail.
- Visitors here for the rail trail might also extend their trip to include ATV rentals or visits to Windrock Park.
- Two recreation audiences, one economic benefit: different activity interests mean everyone has something to do.

2. Recreation Diversity Makes a Destination Stronger

- Communities with multiple outdoor options draw more tourists for longer stays.
- Visitors for the rail trail might discover ATV riding; ATV visitors might return with family or friends to enjoy the trail.
- 'Hub towns' with hiking, cycling, and ATV riding gain a competitive edge over single-activity destinations.

3. Trails as a Gateway to ATV Adventures

- The rail trail could connect (by car, not ATV) to ATV-friendly businesses, lodging, and gear shops.
- Market 'Stay and Play' weekends: bike or hike one day, ride ATVs the next.

4. It's Not Anti-ATV – It's Pro-Access

- **Clear signage and barriers will keep motorized vehicles off the trail surface for its intended uses.**
- ATV areas remain fully open and promoted; the trail adds another outdoor dimension.

5. Family-Friendly Crossover Appeal

- Many ATV riders have family members who don't ride.
- A scenic rail trail offers something for everyone in the family, encouraging longer visits.

6. Showcase 'Two-Trail' Tourism

- Promote as 'Where Trails Meet': one rail trail for cycling/walking, one for ATVs/off-roading.
- Promote the area as an outdoor adventure hub.

7. Success Stories from Elsewhere

- In places like Damascus, VA (Virginia Creeper Trail) and the Hatfield-McCoy region in WV, non-motorized and motorized recreation co-exist.
- Both types of recreation thrive and attract complementary visitor groups.



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Health Benefits of the Rails to Trails Project: Department of Health Support

The proposed Rails to Trails project will do more than provide a scenic route for walking and biking — it will bring lasting health benefits to your community. From improving physical fitness to reducing stress and building stronger connections between neighbors, trails are a proven investment in public well-being.

Physical Health

- Encourages regular exercise: Walking, jogging, or biking on a trail supports cardiovascular health, weight management, and lowers the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.
- Strengthens muscles & bones: Varied terrain improves balance, coordination, and bone density — especially beneficial for older adults.
- Promotes active transportation: Trails provide a safe, scenic alternative to short car trips, helping integrate more movement into daily life.

Mental & Emotional Well-Being

- Reduce stress: Time in nature lowers stress hormones and promotes relaxation.
- Boosts mood & mental health: Contact with nature can improve mood, reduce anxiety and depression, and enhance overall well-being.
- Improves cognitive function: Being in green spaces sharpens focus, improves memory, and stimulates creativity.
- Supports better sleep: Regular outdoor activity helps regulate sleep patterns.

Social & Community Benefits

- Fosters social connection: Trails act as community gathering spaces, where neighbors meet and friendships form.
- Encourages intergenerational activity: Trails offer safe, accessible spaces for all ages to enjoy physical activity together.

Public Health Impact

- Helps combat sedentary lifestyles: Provides an easy, no-cost way for residents to be more active, which can reduce healthcare costs over time.
- Accessible to all: Unlike gyms or sports leagues, trails are free, year-round, and open to people of all fitness levels.
- Promotes preventive health: Communities with active transportation networks see measurable improvements in population health indicators.



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Addressing Property Owner Concerns About the Rails to Trails Project

We understand that living next to a new trail can raise questions. Our goal is to address these concerns openly and share proven strategies from successful rail-trails nationwide.

Privacy & Noise

Trails attract quiet, respectful users. Landscaping, plant buffers, and fencing are sometimes installed to enhance privacy and reduce noise.

Crime & Safety

Active trail use and volunteer patrols create “eyes on the path,” which reduces crime compared to abandoned corridors.

Property Values & Community Benefits

Studies show that trails often raise property values, attract new residents, and support nearby businesses. Most use is by individuals or small groups, bringing economic benefit without overcrowding. The increase in property values does not necessarily result in an increase in property taxes. In McMinn County those taxes have decreased.

Maintenance & Cleanliness

Trail upkeep will be handled by the managing agency, with regular volunteer cleanup events and trash receptacles to keep the corridor safe and clean.

Trespassing Prevention

Clear signage, fencing, and well-marked access points keep trail users on the path and minimize accidental trespassing.

Emergency Response

Trails are mapped for local responders, and mile markers help emergency crews locate incidents quickly. In many areas, trails improve access for fire and rescue vehicles.

Liability Protection

State recreational use laws protect adjacent landowners from most liability if they do not charge for access.

Hours & Lighting

Trails are generally open only during daylight hours. Lighting is limited to trailheads, reducing nighttime disturbance.