

# RETURN ON ENVIRONMENT

## **The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania**

### **SUMMARY REPORT**

November 2010 | Reprinted August 2017

# THEY SAY MONEY DOESN'T GROW ON TREES.

They're right. But the trees, stream valleys, farms, and forests of southeastern Pennsylvania account for millions of dollars each year in savings, earnings, and avoided costs.

More than just pretty places that contribute to our way and quality of life, our open spaces are productive assets that generate significant economic value for our region. They contribute to our local economies and property values, and they help us save on everything from health care to recreation. They also naturally improve the air we breathe and the water we drink, reducing the cost of providing these basic needs.



# THREE-BEDROOM COLONIAL. LARGE YARD. NEAR PARK.

A home's square footage, its school district, and its structural condition can all raise or lower its value. So can its proximity to open space. Whether it's parks, playgrounds, or scenic areas, people will pay a premium to be near preserved open space.

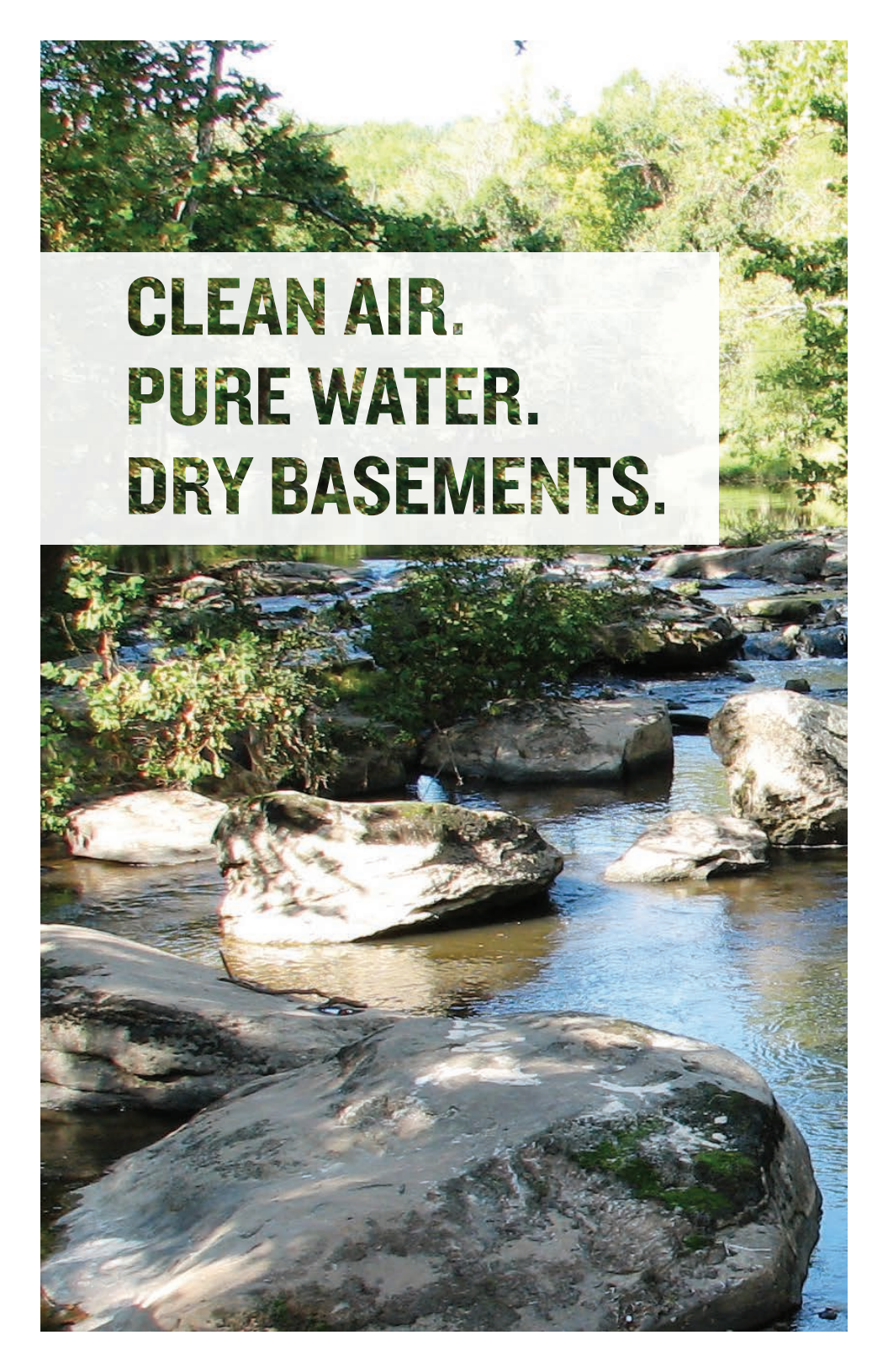
While homes that are closer to open space enjoy a more significant property value increase, on average, all homes in our region are worth \$10,000 more because of access to open space. When you add it all together, it's a gain of more than \$16.3 billion for our region's homeowners and economy.

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## OPEN SPACE ENHANCES HOME VALUES.

- Open space adds **\$16.3 billion** to the value of southeastern Pennsylvania's housing stock.
- Protected open space generates **\$240 million** annually in property tax revenues to support county and municipal governments and local school districts.





**CLEAN AIR.  
PURE WATER.  
DRY BASEMENTS.**

These are things that many of us take for granted. Only when we don't have them will we realize how valuable they are. As we consider the importance of our region's open spaces, it's essential that we recognize the roles our trees, fields, and forests play in filtering our water, cleansing our air, controlling flooding, and providing other environmental services.

Although these vital services are provided naturally by the environment that surrounds us, they would be costly to replicate. If our region's open space were lost to development, we would need to spend more than \$132.5 million per year to do what our preserved lands already do.

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## **OPEN SPACE PROTECTS PROPERTY, FILTERS DRINKING WATER, AND CLEANS THE AIR.**

- Southeastern Pennsylvania realizes nearly **\$61 million** in annual cost savings from protected open spaces' ability to naturally filter out pollutants and replenish water supply.
- The total annual benefit generated by natural flood mitigation services is more than **\$37 million**.
- Trees on protected open space are estimated to provide **\$17 million** in annual air pollution removal and carbon sequestration services.



How much would you pay for access to the countless free and low-cost recreational opportunities available through our region's open spaces? \$392 per year? That's how much each household in the region saves by having open space available for hiking, biking, and other recreational pursuits. This is money that families would have to pay out-of-pocket to enjoy these same activities if not for open space.



Access to open space improves not just our bottom lines but our waistlines, too. Outdoor exercise improves our health and wellbeing and reduces the risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, certain cancers, and obesity. Improved health prevents nearly \$800 million in medical care costs annually.

The economic value increases to nearly \$1.3 billion in savings when you add avoided workers' compensation costs, and costs related to lost productivity in addition to direct use benefits and avoided medical care costs.

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## **OPEN SPACE FURNISHES LOW - OR NO COST RECREATION THAT SAVES MONEY AND IMPROVES HEALTH.**

- Responses to the 2009 statewide outdoor recreation survey indicate that, on average, **41%** of moderate or strenuous physical exercise is performed in a park or on a trail.
- Nearly **\$577 million** in benefits accrue annually to residents who participate in recreational activities on protected open space within southeastern Pennsylvania.
- Each household in the region saves **\$392** per year by having open space available for recreation and exercise.
- The health-related cost savings resulting from physical activity on protected open space amount to **\$1.3 billion** per year including avoided workers' compensation costs and avoided productivity losses.
- **\$795 million** of those health-related cost savings are medical cost savings.

Our parks, trails, and farms are destinations that attract visitors who spend millions of dollars in our regional economy. Each year open space accounts for \$566 million in expenditures and almost \$299 million in salaries.

This is money that stays in our local economies and helps to create and sustain jobs in both the public and private sectors. Regionally, preserved open space accounts for roughly 6,900 jobs annually in industries including agriculture, tourism, hospitality, recreation, and open space management and preservation.

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## **OPEN SPACE CREATES JOBS AND ATTRACTS PEOPLE WHO SPEND IN OUR COMMUNITIES.**

- Economic activity associated with protected open space in southeastern Pennsylvania results in more than **6,900 jobs** and **\$299 million** in annual earnings.
- Total annual expenditures in the five-county region associated with protected open space equal **\$566 million**. Specifically **\$174 million**, or **31%**, is attributable to spending associated with the management and maintenance of publicly protected open space; **\$206 million**, or **36%**, accounts for agricultural sales associated with preserved farmland; and **\$187 million**, or **33%**, is generated through tourist activity associated with protected open space.
- Agricultural jobs associated with protected farmland make up **45%** of employment related to protected open space in southeastern Pennsylvania, totaling **3,100 jobs**.
- Economic activity associated with protected open space generates **\$30 million** per year in state and local tax revenue.



# **PLACES THAT ATTRACT SPENDING AND CREATE JOBS.**



**PROTECT OUR  
LAND. PRESERVE  
YOUR MONEY.**



Photo by Jeffrey Marshall, Heritage Conservancy

It's simple, really. When we save our land, you save your money, and we preserve a quality of life in which we all can grow and thrive.

We can't afford not to protect our region's open space. These places are assets that are essential to our health, our economy, and our future.

**Learn more about the Return on Environment and download the full Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania study at [www.dvrpc.org/openspace/value/](http://www.dvrpc.org/openspace/value/).**

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This report was originally commissioned by the GreenSpace Alliance and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission in 2010, and was the first study ever to quantify the economic value of protected open space in the five-county (Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia) area of Southeastern Pennsylvania. Since that time, the five counties have preserved an additional 70,000 acres of parks, farmland and land trust lands. If the study was updated with current data, findings would show even higher returns for our region's economy, communities and residents.

This reprinting honors the memory of friend and colleague Donna Pitz, former Executive Director of the GreenSpace Alliance, for her dedication, inspiration and tenacity in promoting open space preservation.

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Photo by Daniel Barringer, Natural Lands Trust