

THE ECONOMICS OF CONSERVATION

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When it comes to conservation, many people see the ecological impacts right away. Protected ecologically significant wetlands on the Boothbay peninsula include Penny Lake, Lobster Cove Meadow and Wildcat Creek. Wildlife habitat for birds, deer, fox, porcupine, snow shoe hare, coyote, muskrat, otters, raccoons, squirrels, and other native animals at preserves such as Zak Preserve and Ovens Mouth is also clear. The historical significance of a conserved property is often obvious such as Damariscove and Indiantown Islands.

Now the economic benefits of conservation, both locally and nationally, are becoming very apparent. An October 2006 Brookings Institution report goes so far as to say that conservation is an economic development tool. The report suggests that Maine should “augment land and farm conservation; protect traditional uses of and access to Maine forests, farms, and lakes; and promote high-quality tourism and outdoor recreation given their importance to Maine’s economic well-being.”¹ The report encourages action now due to the pace of development, specifically poorly planned development, throughout the state. Of the nearly 300,000 acres of land in Lincoln County, 36,000 acres were developed in Lincoln County from 1980-2000. During that same time, the six Lincoln County based land trusts, including Boothbay Region Land Trust (BRLT), conserved 3,774 acres.

National, state and local studies also support the Brookings findings. Over 20% of Maine’s overnight visitors come to enjoy the outdoors and in 2000 they spent over \$600 million on recreation.² Furthermore, wildlife related activities contributed over one billion dollars to the Maine economy. Wildlife related activities supported more than 17,000 jobs and more than half of Maine residents participated in these activities.³ When tourists were asked in another state survey the purpose for sightseeing, the top four responses were: beautiful scenery, exceptional coastal scenery, great wilderness areas, and good for viewing wildlife/birds. The same survey recorded the top recreational opportunity identified by tourists as hiking and backpacking.⁴ According to a 2006 survey conducted by the BRLT, the BRLT’s 30+ miles of trails attract 38,000 hikers annually. Approximately 75% of these hikers are from out-of-town. These out-of-town hikers hike for free, leaving their money available to spend in local hotels, local campgrounds, local restaurants and local stores. The BRLT trails and wildlife viewing opportunities provide a reason for them to come here and offer a reason for them to stay longer.

Conservation not only impacts tourism but also small and medium sized business attraction and retention. Owners of small companies rank recreation/park/open space as the highest priority when choosing a new location for their business.⁵ Local real estate firms have taken notice of conservation as evidenced by their advertisements. A home adjacent to a BRLT preserve is worth noting and often increases the appeal and value of the home. This, in turn, increases the property tax revenue for the towns.

The Boothbay region’s traditional fisheries are critical to its economic diversity and culture. The BRLT supports working waterfront opportunities on Damariscove Island and is in the process of making access

¹ The Brookings Institute’s Metropolitan Policy Program, *Charting Maine’s Future*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 2006.

² “Maine Tourism Facts”. The Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, <http://www.econdev.maine>

³ *Watching Out for Maine’s Wildlife*, Maine Audubon, 2000.

⁴ *The Profile of First-time and Repeat Trips to Maine*. Prepared by Longwoods International for the Maine Office of Tourism. November 2004.

⁵ John L. Crompton, Lisa L. Love, and Thomas A. More, “An Empirical Study of the Role of Recreation, Parks and Open Space in Companies’ (Re) Location Decisions,” *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration* (1997), 37-58.

available at Roberts Wharf adjacent to the Porter Preserve. Clam and worm diggers also access the tidal zone from the BRLT's Colby, Saunders and Ovens Mouth Preserves. The BRLT strives to provide water access to fisherman, lobstermen, clammers and wormers where traditionally available on the land it conserves.

The BRLT provides and maintains local green space, augmenting local parks and recreation opportunities. BRLT, a non-profit organization, is supported wholly through grants and donations and not through tax revenue. The need for recreational opportunities for Maine residents is great. According to the State Bureau of Health, more than half of Maine residents lead sedentary lives. The BRLT's hiking trails provide a healthy and safe environment for walkers and joggers. Walking can improve physical health and dramatically reduce health care costs – at least 50% of which are linked to lifestyle choices.

Conserved land also provides economically valuable water filtration, flood control and clean air. The Boothbay Harbor Water District and the BRLT conservation efforts support this. In fact, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that the costs of treating contaminated groundwater supplies is, on average, 30 to 40 times more (and up to 200 times greater) than preventing contamination.⁶

To encourage conservation, conserved land for tree growth, farm and open space has a lower property tax burden. Despite this, the property tax revenue generated from a property, less service costs related to that property; is consistently higher for conservation land than residential land. Based on a national survey, for every dollar of revenue a town collects from residential land, \$1.16 is spent on services. For every dollar of revenue a town collects from working or open land, \$.36 is spent on services.⁷ Although commercial and industrial use at \$.27 results in the lowest cost for services based on tax revenue, a town cannot sustain itself with only commercial and industrial use; a mix of uses is needed to sustain a healthy town. Though it is not legally obligated to do so, in recognition of its partnership with the four towns on the Boothbay peninsula, the Boothbay Region Land Trust (BRLT) sends voluntary payments for each property it owns in each town in the same amounts a private owner would pay on land designated as open space/forever wild and open to the public.

Given the ecological, cultural, and economic benefits of conservation, the BRLT will strive to conserve the special places in the region. For more information, please contact Boothbay Region Land Trust at 633-4818 or brlt@bbrlt.org or visit the BRLT office at 1 Oak Street.

⁶ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Drinking Water Source Protection Programs*, Source Water Protection: Best Management Practices and Other Measures for Protecting Drinking Water Supplies, <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/dwa/electronic/presentations/swp/swpbmp.pdf>

⁷ *Cost of Community Services Study*. American Farmland Trust, November 2002.