



Gulf Coast Conservancy
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Nature Pays Its Way

"Rivers, trails and greenway corridors are traditionally recognized for their environmental protection, recreational values, and aesthetic appearance. These corridors also have the potential to create jobs, enhance property values, expand local businesses, attract new and relocating businesses, increase local tax revenues, decrease government expenditures, and promote a local community."

National Park Service Report, 1995



"When one tugs at a single thing in Nature,...

Land Preservation Pays

Nature provides infinitely ingenious ways of meeting the needs of mankind. Science has improved on a few, and created some effective alternatives but, generally, the most efficient and cost-effective systems are the natural ones. In addition, most people enjoy nature. They like living, working and vacationing in attractive surroundings with trees, flowers, birds and wildlife nearby.

Our natural resources are limited and they are being consumed or destroyed at an unprecedented rate, all in the name of progress. If a reasonable balance between growth and preservation is not achieved and maintained, the consequences will be as serious for humans as they will be for the many forms of wildlife facing extinction. **Public land ownership is the only reliable way of assuring preservation.** The cost is negligible when the astounding financial and quality-of-life benefits are considered.

Natural areas increase the value of nearby properties.

* A 1978 Boulder, CO study found that property value decreased by \$4.20 for every foot of distance away from public open space.

* A 3-mile greenbelt around Lake Merritt, near the center of Oakland, CA, was found to add \$41 million to surrounding property values.

* A developer in San Diego County found he could increase the sale price of his houses 25% by scaling back his development 15% and adding natural space corridors visible from every home.

* A 1994 study of *Community Features Home Buyers Pay For* by America LIVES, Inc., states that "open space ... is a very high priority."

* An investment in trails and parks is credited as one of the most important components in a highly successful economic revitalization in Pueblo, CO.

Benefits of Nature

The natural resources on our planet are limited. If they are destroyed or exploited beyond the point of sustainability, man-made alternatives will be required. These will be far more costly than natural solutions, and our quality of life will almost certainly be compromised.

* Drinking water supplies come from the aquifer which requires large, undeveloped areas for recharge.

* Wetlands help purify water which is eventually consumed by people.

* Coastal marsh areas provide the spawning and nursery grounds for approximately two-thirds of the shellfish, commercial and sport fish which are available for harvest.

* Undisturbed floodplains reduce or prevent flood damage and erosion.

* Natural areas help reduce air pollution;

* Agricultural lands provide most of the world's food supplies and timberlands produce the raw materials for a wide-range of products utilized in our daily lives.

* Drugs and pharmaceuticals which are derived in some form from plants are valued at more than \$20 billion a year in the U.S.

* Nature provides a wealth of data used for technological developments.

* Natural areas provide recreational and ecotourism opportunities, which are a source of jobs and revenue for communities.

* Ecotourism is the largest growth sector in the \$3 trillion worldwide tourism industry, growing at a rate of 30 percent annually.

Did you know that growth is almost always more expensive for taxpayers than preservation? Most people assume that if the number of people paying taxes are increased, the cost to each individual will be less. They think the only way for a community to prosper is for it to grow. They also think that removing sensitive lands from the tax rolls will make the remaining taxpayers pay more. These ideas seem logical, but they simply are not true.

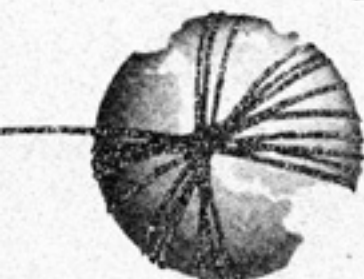
In reality, more people in an area create a need for more roads, schools, water and wastewater treatment facilities, fire and police protection, and many other support services. These cost more to provide, and taxes invariably increase rather than decrease. Think about it. When was the last time your taxes went down because of growth in your community?

Natural, open areas, on the other hand, provide many financial benefits which are often over-looked or taken for granted. Preservation of natural open areas is far more essential than most of us realize and is a huge bargain in terms of tax savings and benefits which improve the lives of human residents.

The point here is not that growth is bad, but simply, that it does not result in a net financial gain for most communities, while the preservation of natural resources is a wise investment which pays generous dividends.

Linda Pedersen

*Gulf Coast Conservancy
In Memoriam, 2000*



... (s)he finds it attached to the rest of the world."

—JOHN MUIR

The Cost of Growth

Over 700 objective studies analyzing the impact of growth on communities have been conducted by municipalities, universities, state and federal agencies, and a wide-range of interest groups. The results have been almost unanimous, finding that the typical cost of growth is greater than the associated revenues which can realistically be generated.

* *Seventy community services studies completed between 1989 and 1999 by the American Farmland Trust in Idaho, Utah, Montana, Ohio, Minnesota and twelve Northeast states determined that, for every dollar of residential tax revenue collected, the cost of providing infrastructure and services ranged from \$1.02 to \$2.11.*

* *Communities pay a high price for unplanned growth. Scattered development frequently causes traffic congestion, air and water pollution, loss of open space, and increased demand for costly public services. This is why it is important for citizens and community leaders to understand the relationships between residential and commercial growth, land conservation and their municipality's bottom line.*

* *Similar studies conducted in Florida determined the following average costs for each tax dollar collected:*

Hillsborough County	\$1.53
Collier County	\$1.20
Lake County	\$1.56
Palm Beach County	\$1.10

* *"Growth in population and in tax base results in higher, not lower, tax bills on the median-value home," according to the Northern Forest Lands Council.*

* *A significant relationship between increasing development and increasing property taxes was*

revealed by a study of 133 tax districts in Dupage County, IL.

✱ "County taxpayers are providing a substantial subsidy to sellers of land, private contractors and individual homeowners in order to allow [residential] development," concluded a Palm Beach County study.

✱ A statewide study on The Effects of Development and Land Conservation on Property Taxes in Connecticut towns found that, on average, towns with the highest residential tax bills have:

- Larger tax bases
- Higher commercial and retail sales
- Higher populations
- Higher employment

✱ A hypothetical 150-unit subdivision of \$150,000 homes in Bowdoinham, ME was expected to generate considerable tax benefits for the community, but an analysis of required government expenditures for services revealed a \$2,000 per unit net cost, resulting in a 3.3 mil increase for all taxpayers.

✱ "If a tract of land in South Walton County, FL, were preserved as open space instead of being developed with housing for 1,000 residents, even if the land were publicly owned and no property taxes were paid on it, the County and School District would save \$750,300 over a 20-year period," according to a study which was partially funded by the State.

✱ Commercial and industrial development typically costs less in public services than it pays in taxes, but tends to increase residential development, with a net loss of public revenues.

Bottom Line:

GROWTH IN A COMMUNITY ALMOST ALWAYS CAUSES TAXES TO INCREASE, NOT DECREASE.

"Development and an expanding population pose a threat to Florida's delicate natural environment. But careful planning and sensitivity to the environment by everyone in our state will provide innovative solutions to balance continued growth with the preservation of our precious resources."

Florida Power Corporation
Corporate Communication 892

"Look back at Florida the way it was ... then look closely at what it is becoming. Look ahead ten, twenty, thirty years and what do you see? What will have become of our precious woodlands, our wetlands, our coral reefs, our dwindling reserves of fresh water, clean air and unspoiled wilderness? The Florida so many of us cherish could be a different place altogether."

Florida Advisory Council
On Environmental Education

"Even though Cliff Manual's own engineering firm, Coastal Engineering, suffered an enormous blow when the Oak Sound (6,000-home development) project collapsed, he still endorses the land being preserved. 'I think in the long term that business, residential and commercial will all greatly benefit by being close to it. I think it signals to people that we can have growth and have preservation, and the two can work together.' "

Maddux Report, March, 1995

"It's quite obvious we're on the wrong path if we just look around ... Are we going to become a country with far more people, more pollution, more poverty, more crime and more authoritarian government, all in a more degraded environment?"

Charley Reese
Syndicated Columnist
Citrus Chronicle, 5/1/97