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ECONOMIC BENEFITS

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Downtown associations, commercial district groups, and special event organizers are common groups to seek economic impact studies. These studies provide rationale for additional funding, expansion, and investment. The same type of economic impact analysis can also apply to recreation. Parks and trails are economic development should be evaluated under the benefits they provide. This Chapter provides preliminary insight into economic benefits for Dubuque County.

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# THE CASE FOR PARK AND TRAIL INVESTMENT

## THE MEANING OF ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Economic impact studies are complicated to conduct and often require many assumptions. Criticisms are that economic impact studies merely tailor to produce positive or negative results depending on the respective entity conducting the study. Therefore, insights below present total potential expenditures rather than total impact or monetary benefits directly to Dubuque County Conservation. The scope of study and availability of information are essential elements for the reader to understand:

### Economic benefit considers:

- How much people may spend when visiting Dubuque County parks and trails.
- An assumption that unique and high-quality park and trail improvements will attract and drive future expenditures.
- How much of these expenditures are from non-local visitors, therefore, new money flowing into the local economy.

## NOT THE WHOLE STORY.

### Other benefits:

- **Revenue.** There is a multiplier effect resulting from initial expenditures by non-local visitors. For example, spending at a restaurant goes towards employee wages, which gets spent on other food and services in the community.
- **Social.** The use of the system improves physical and mental health, which can translate into lower individual spending on healthcare, replaced with increased savings or spending on other needs. For example, adults who exercise regularly save \$1,180-2,360 a year
- **Environmental.** Improved and protected environmental features translate into savings on water quality and pollution.

### Associated cost considerations:

- It takes costs to realize the economic benefits - park and trail investments to keep people coming.
- The future cost of maintenance and upkeep.

\* Source: County health rankings and roadmap, <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org>

# ECONOMIC BENEFITS IN DUBUQUE COUNTY

The Dubuque County parks and trails systems already produces great benefits for the county, not to mention the variety of city parks and recreation areas in the county. Economic benefits derive mostly from those camping in Dubuque County Parks, with some other benefits from day visitors to parks and trails who spend money for things like food in the county.

## DIRECT ECONOMIC BENEFITS

### Heritage Trail

- **Usage, 2017:** 130,000
- **Potential direct related economic expenditures :** \$1.3 million+
  - Local residents: \$625,000+
  - Non-local residents: \$750,000+

### County Campgrounds Overnight Visitors

- **Usage, 2019:** 8,000+ total campers
- **Potential direct related economic expenditures:** \$308,000 - \$490,000
  - Local residents: \$150,000 +
  - Non-local residents: \$330,000+

### County Parks Visitors

- **Usage Estimate:** 830,000+ visitors
- **Potential direct related economic expenditures:** \$24+ million

Based on survey data, trends, market area characteristics, and implementation of the concepts in this plan, Dubuque County could expect nearly \$26 million in total direct expenditures associated with outdoor recreation in Dubuque County parks and trails. Direct expenditures do not account for indirect benefits that accrue from the multiplier effect of these expenditures cycling through the local economy.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The limited scope and detail of the data for this plan provide only a glimpse into the economic rationale for park and trail improvements. Establishing metrics that benchmark future improvements are important to understand changes in use and associated benefits.

Ways to measure success and future economic benefits include:

1. Trail counts every two years at the same locations.
2. Trail use surveys every two years that at a minimum ask about zip code, annual usage, expenditures, and areas for improvement.
3. Summer and fall surveys at every campground every two years that at a minimum ask about zip code, party size, annual usage, expenditures, and areas for improvement.
4. Options to increase sample size and accuracy of metrics include third party subscriptions that track location via phone GPS such as Strava and UberMedia.

# DUBUQUE COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN

## ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Parks and trails in Dubuque County provide a significant economic return in terms of fees, visitor spending, and indirect spending from supported jobs. The natural environment features in Dubuque County are a great competitive advantage to draw visitors from nearby counties, the state, and the larger region. The enhancements described in the master plan can create additional advantages by enhancing the experiences of visitors from both the number of activities and accessibility for different ages and abilities.

The Heritage Trail, Swiss Valley Park, and Whitewater Canyon are frequently visited park system components that can illustrate the potential growth in economic impact attributed to park enhancements. The examples below make some assumptions on usage in the future

and spending habits based on the case studies and information presented earlier in Chapter 11. The general assumption is that as facilities are improved, they will attract more users and longer visits, prompting people to spend money in Dubuque County, such as snacks, lunch, or dinner before returning home.

Note the examples below do not include:

- The costs of implementation
- Existing and future maintenance costs
- Indirect economic benefits from increased jobs
- Indirect economic benefits from the multiplier effect of non-local spending in Dubuque County.
- The social and health benefits to society from more outdoor recreation of local residents.

### Heritage Trail

The plan recommends paving the Heritage Trail, with improvements to trail connections and enhancements of trailhead locations. Potential realized economic impacts

**FIGURE 60: POTENTIAL IMPACT OF HERITAGE TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS**

	<i>Spending Per Visitor</i>		<i>Spending</i>		<i>Trail Spending**</i>	<i>Total Spending</i>	<i>Spending Change</i>
	<i>Local</i>	<i>Non-Local</i>	<i>Local</i>	<i>Non-Local</i>	<i>Non-Local</i>	<i>Non-Local</i>	<i>Non-Local</i>
<b>Amenity Improvements*</b>	\$10	\$50	\$1,072,500	\$1,787,500	\$715,000	\$1,787,500	\$1,017,763
	75%	25%					
<b>Trail Paving Part 1*</b>	\$14	\$56	\$1,528,800	\$2,620,800	\$1,310,400	\$2,620,800	\$1,851,063
	70%	30%					
<b>Trail Paving Complete*</b>	\$20	\$60	\$1,737,450	\$4,738,500	\$3,159,000	\$4,738,500	\$3,968,763
	55%	45%					

\*Amenity Improvement increases visitors by 10%; Part 1 increases visitors by 20% and includes paving and other improvements from Dubuque to Durango; Paving completion increases visitors by 35%.  
 \*\*Those non-local visitors that come to Dubuque County specifically to use the Heritage Trail. In true economic impact analysis, these are the impacts that are a direct result of trail improvements. The allocation of total non-local visitors that came specifically for the trail is based on the case studies presented earlier. The increase estimates are 10% with amenity improvements, 15% with phase 1 paving, and 30% with full trail paving. The total non-local spending includes spending for those that use the trail but are in Dubuque County for different reasons. Or rather, improvements to the Heritage Trail did not cause them to visit Dubuque County.

from such improvements, and natural population growth, are shown (see Figure 60, previous page).

### Swiss Valley Park

Swiss Valley Park is the most visited park in the Dubuque County park system. The high visitorship is largely because of the nature center and unique educational opportunities. The plan recommendations will make the park more accessible to more people while increasing the function and comfort of visiting the park. The recommended enhancements to the park have the potential to increase the annual number of visitors through new camping spaces and increases in the number of features to attract people. Figure 61 shows the potential.

### Whitewater Canyon Park

Whitewater Canyon Park is one of the unique parks in the state of Iowa. However, improvements recommended in this plan can make the park accessible to more people. While there are no additional camping spots proposed for the park, enhancements for

attractions, shelters, and services have the potential to attract more visitors to the park and Dubuque County. Additionally, with more things to do in the park, people may be enticed to stay longer, which leads to more spending in Dubuque County on needed snacks, lunches, or dinners (see Figure 62).

### Dubuque County Park System

Using the generally estimated impacts in Swiss Valley Park and Whitewater Canyon to the other parks in Dubuque County shows the potential magnitude of system-wide enhancements. The estimates are based on visitor projections and campground counts and what market data indicates are trends for the future, assuming enhancements in the Dubuque County system captures some of the growth in outdoor recreation participation. Figure 63 summarizes these potential impacts.

**FIGURE 61: POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SWISS VALLEY PARK IMPROVEMENTS**

	<b>Camp &amp; Visitor Increase*</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Non-Local</b>	<b>Total Local Spending**</b>	<b>Total Non-Local Spending***</b>	<b>Non-Local Spending Change</b>
<b>Existing</b>	-	Campers: 55% Visitors: 80%	Campers: 45% Visitors: 20%	\$3,432,424	\$4,208,088	\$ -
<b>Phase 1 Improvements</b>	+5%	Campers: 55% Visitors: 75%	Campers: 45% Visitors: 25%	\$3,632,923	\$6,021,398	\$1,813,310
<b>Phase 2 Improvements</b>	+15%	Campers: 55% Visitors: 70%	Campers: 45% Visitors: 70%	\$3,947,287	\$8,584,503	\$4,376,415

\*Both from increases in amenities in the park and regional trends in increased participation in outdoor recreation, which Dubuque County can expect to capture a portion when quality facilities are available.  
 \*\* Estimated \$152 spent per camping group and \$11 spent per visitor, with up to a 20% increase in spending for visitors as improvements are made. Based on the 2011 ISU study and 2019 project survey.  
 \*\*\* Estimated \$198 spent per camping group and \$41 spent per visitor, with up to a 20% increase in spending for visitors as improvements are made. Based on the 2011 ISU study and 2019 project survey.

**FIGURE 62: POTENTIAL IMPACT OF WHITEWATER CANYON PARK IMPROVEMENTS**

	<b>Camp &amp; Visitor Increase*</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Non-Local</b>	<b>Total Local Spending**</b>	<b>Total Non-Local Spending***</b>	<b>Non-Local Spending Change</b>
<b>Existing</b>	-	Visitors: 80%	Visitors: 20%	\$739,707	\$684,296	\$ -
<b>Phase 1 Improvements</b>	+5%	Visitors: 75%	Visitors: 25%	\$800,964	\$987,952	\$303,656
<b>Phase 2 Improvements</b>	+15%	Visitors: 70%	Visitors: 70%	\$893,197	\$1,416,493	\$732,197

\*Both from increases in amenities in the park and regional trends in increased participation in outdoor recreation, which Dubuque County can expect to capture a portion when quality facilities are available.

\*\* Estimated \$11 spent per visitor, with up to a 20% increase in spending for visitors as improvements are made. Based on the 2011 ISU study and 2019 project survey.

\*\*\* Estimated \$41 spent per visitor, with up to a 20% increase in spending for visitors as improvements are made. Based on the 2011 ISU study and 2019 project survey.

**FIGURE 63: POTENTIAL IMPACT OF DUBUQUE COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM-WIDE IMPROVEMENTS**

	<b>Camp &amp; Visitor Increase*</b>	<b>Local</b>	<b>Non-Local</b>	<b>Total Local Spending**</b>	<b>Total Non-Local Spending***</b>	<b>Non-Local Spending Change</b>
<b>Existing</b>	-	Campers: 55% Visitors: 80%	Campers: 45% Visitors: 20%	\$4,797,287	\$7,005,388	\$ -
<b>Phase 1 Improvements</b>	+5%	Campers: 55% Visitors: 75%	Campers: 45% Visitors: 25%	\$4,989,049	\$10,025,601	\$3,020,213
<b>Phase 2 Improvements</b>	+15%	Campers: 55% Visitors: 70%	Campers: 45% Visitors: 70%	\$5,306,146	\$14,294,540	\$7,289,152

\*Both from increases in amenities in the park and regional trends in increased participation in outdoor recreation, which Dubuque County can expect to capture a portion when quality facilities are available.

\*\* Estimated \$152 spent per camping group and \$11 spent per visitor, with up to a 20% increase in spending for visitors as improvements are made. Based on the 2011 ISU study and 2019 project survey.

\*\*\* Estimated \$198 spent per camping group and \$41 spent per visitor, with up to a 20% increase in spending for visitors as improvements are made. Based on the 2011 ISU study and 2019 project survey.

