



RETURN ON ENVIRONMENT

The Economic Value of Protected Open Space
in Chester County, Pennsylvania

May 2019

Chester County Unveils *Return on Environment* Report

Did you know there are so many more benefits to preserving open space than what meets the eye? In addition to keeping Chester County beautiful, protected open space provides valuable economic, environmental, and public health benefits.

These benefits have been documented in a new study, *Return on Environment: The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Chester County*, which was unveiled by the Chester County Commissioners during an Open Space Summit in early May.

In 1989, Chester County became the first in the region to formally set aside funds for a rigorous open space preservation program through the passage of a \$50 million bond referendum. Today, about 28.8 percent of land, or 140,000 acres, has been preserved as protected open space in Chester County, which is more land than the size of Philadelphia. Study results demonstrate the valuable economic, environmental, and public health benefits that open space preservation has provided, including:

- Homes in the county are valued at over \$11,000 more when they are located within a half-mile of preserved open space, according to the study. In total, it's a gain of more than \$1.65 billion for Chester County's homeowners and economy.
- If protected lands were lost to development, Chester County would need to spend \$97 million a year to replicate vital services such as flood control and air and water pollution mitigation through costly alternative methods.
- Recreational activities on open space account for over \$170 million in avoided medical costs every year.
- Protected open space creates jobs and attracts people who spend in the community. Each year, open space accounts for \$238 million in spending and \$69 million in salaries earned through 1,800 jobs.
- Agriculture on protected farmland puts about \$135 million back into the economy each year.
- Developing open space into housing can be costly for municipalities and school districts. For every \$1 received from residential developments through taxes, local governments spend \$1.11 on services, whereas only 7 cents are spent on services for each dollar in tax received from farmland and preserved open space.

The report was prepared by Chester County departments, land conservancies, municipal representatives, economic development agencies, and Econsult Solutions, Inc., an economic consulting firm that provides econometric and analytic expertise to businesses and policymakers nationwide.

View the report and video: <http://chescoplanning.org/openspace/roe.cfm>