

The value of outdoor recreation

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Dr. Nathan Reigner is the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' new director of outdoor recreation. Reigner explained the value of outdoor recreation at a March 23 webinar sponsored by Friends of White's Woods.

Outdoor recreation benefits local communities in many ways, Reigner emphasized. "Green infrastructure," such as community forests and parks provide a significant return to communities via environmental "ecosystem services:" stormwater management, air and water purification, carbon absorption, wildlife habitat, and temperature mediation.

According to Reigner, recent studies have indicated that heavily treed areas in Philadelphia are at least 20 degrees cooler than other parts of the city.

The economic benefits of outdoor recreation are equally important. In fact, outdoor recreation is a bigger part of the Pennsylvania economy than mining, quarrying and gas production put together.

Studies indicate that outdoor recreation, along with historical preservation, and cultural services (such as the arts) are the three key components of a community's "quality of life." And it is this "quality of life" that correlates with an area's potential for economic and population growth.

The very first question businesses often ask about a community is "what are your trails like?" And then they inquire about schools and industrial "infrastructure," such as broadband, roads, and utility access.

Outdoor recreation also provides health, mental health, and public health benefits, as well as "social well-being." In addition to building muscles, outdoor recreation provides individual peace, solitude, and even stress-relief.

Public health benefits provided by outdoor recreation include reduced rates of chronic disease and overall health care costs. What's more, outdoor recreation provides essential opportunity for social bonding and is one of the few areas of modern life that provides places for all of us to be together.

Both young and old are leaving Pennsylvania “in droves.” To keep our residents and to attract new ones — and to attract new businesses — we need to offer a “mosaic” of outdoor recreation opportunities, said Reigner. The range of outdoor recreation available in a community is one key to long-term community resilience.

To view this webinar, visit “Events” at [friendswhiteswoods.org](https://www.friendswhiteswoods.org).

Fred Heilman

White Township