

# The Partnership Between Conservation and Economy

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Often when we talk about conservation easements or protecting land from development, somewhere inside we think this means that it will deprive us of an income or prevent us from creating a stronger economy. As it turns out, that's pretty far from the truth. At MCEDA's January breakfast held for investor/members, Travis Custer from the Montezuma Land Conservancy discussed many of the economic benefits Colorado enjoys by preserving our agricultural lands and open spaces.

Colorado is widely celebrated for its sweeping mountain vistas and vibrant landscapes that create the natural and agricultural heritage of Colorado. It is also what fuels our economy through all aspects of agriculture and farming, tourism and our fast growing outdoor recreation industry.

Conservation in Colorado is focused on ecologically sensitive and vital areas that can provide economic stimulation to area residents. As you likely know, conservation easements are perpetual, and these benefits can increase in value as populations grow and open land becomes scarce. Conservation easements protect and maintain working lands as well as wildlife and their habitats for future generations, providing increased economic value on a wide range of levels.

The **Trust for Public Land's Conservation Economics Service** measures and analyzes the economic benefits and fiscal impacts of land conservation. 2011 studies have shown:

- That conservation returns from \$4 to \$10 for every dollar invested.
- It also provides recreational opportunities, controls flooding, and protects air and drinking water quality, wildlife habitat, and farms while supporting industries such as tourism, agriculture, and fisheries.

They determined the economic impact of investments in parks and open space in three ways:

- Measure the economic and fiscal value of land conserved through existing programs
- Analyze the economic and fiscal effectiveness of conservation programs and achievement of program goals
- Forecast the economic benefits and fiscal impacts of a new program

In 2009 researchers in Colorado found that \$595 million investment in conservation easements returned \$3.51 billion in public benefits. A return of \$6 for every \$1 invested. Some of the measurable benefits that result from permanently protected privately owned land include:

- water supply protection

- scenic views
- flood control
- fish and wildlife habitat
- recreation (hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, etc.)
- aesthetics
- carbon sequestration
- dilution of waste water
- erosion control
- agricultural crop production

A more recent study done by CSU, **“Investing in Colorado”**, published in 2017 on Colorado’s Return On Investment in Conservation Easements found:

- State investments in conservation easements have conserved up to 1.5 million acres of mapped crucial habitat
- Conserved up to 300,000 acres of prime farmland and 270,000 acres of elk severe winter range
- Preserved up to 4,100 miles of stream, creek or river frontage
- Residents have received an estimated \$5.5 - \$13.7 billion of economic benefits from land conserved by easements
- This represents a ROI for Colorado residents of \$4-\$12 of public benefits provided by conserved land for each \$1 invested by the state. That’s up from the 2011 survey that stated the ROI was \$4-\$10!

Conserving our open space, agricultural land and wildlife habitat pays big dividends for Montezuma County in tourism, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation. Support MCEDA and the Montezuma Land Conservancy!