

Socio-economic benefits of protected areas: how to build your case

Protected areas are often thought of as being contrary to economic development. However, although their main objective is to protect biodiversity, they can also be great tools for development and include many health co-benefits.

Here are a few ideas to help you build a case for the co-benefits associated with your protected area project.

Enhancing the value of the territory: outdoor activities, appeal and heritage

Would your project protect:

- A municipal or regional trail network?
- An outdoor activity site (canoeing, climbing, rustic camping, etc.)?
- A structured territory (zec, outfitters, regional park, wildlife reserve)?
- Viewsheds, i.e. the landscape visible from a point of interest (trails, lookouts, etc.)?
- An emblematic landscape (e.g. Île-Bizard)?
- An area used for traditional activities?

Health benefits

Would your project protect:

- A natural environment already used by the community (wildlife observation, informal paths, etc.)?
- A natural environment that is easily accessible (e.g. near a town or village)?

Other ecological services

Would your project protect:

- An ecosystem contributing to the fight against climate change (peat bog, old forest, etc.)?
- An ecosystem protecting the quality of drinking water in your town or municipality?
- A natural environment that slows down erosion and run-off and limits flooding?

Examples of socio-economic benefits:

According to a report by the [ministère de l'Environnement](#), protected areas:

- Promote the diversification of local and regional economies.
- Help to safeguard habitats and species of fauna and flora, which constitute a renewable natural resource that is the basis of many activities, such as hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering.
- In a very significant way, they also support the tourism industry.

According to the [SÉPAQ's annual report 2022-2023](#):

- For every day spent in the area, \$62 is spent in neighbouring communities.
- Contribution to GDP: \$934 million

According to a survey conducted by [Visages régionaux](#) 2019¹ of over 2,000 respondents aged 18 to 40:

- One of the most important reasons for moving out of large city centers among millennials was to be closer to nature and have easy access to outdoor activities.
- For most respondents, nature contributes to their quality of life.

According to a study carried out by the [Chaire de tourisme Transat de l'ESG UQAM](#) in 2017:

- Being in contact with **nature and the beauty of the landscape** are important factors in motivating people to take up outdoor activities.
- Quebec has natural treasures that are ideal for outdoor activities, but maintaining the landscape is one of the main obstacles to their development.
- It is estimated that the outdoor sector contributes 2.2 billion dollars to Quebec's economy every year and sustains more than 30,000 full-time jobs.

A study of the 239-hectare [Parc du Grand-Coteau](#) in Mascouche revealed that:

- The value of the combined ecological services provided by this urban park is estimated at 2.5 million dollars a year.
- The most important services in economic terms are: i) erosion, run-off and flood control, ii) local temperature regulation, iii) recreation and tourism, and iv) carbon storage.

According to [Au Québec, on bouge en plein air](#), a publication produced by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec in 2017:

- Accessibility to parks and natural areas is associated with a higher level of physical activity.
- Living close to nature means living better, longer and healthier.

According to a [study](#) on the value of ecological services in Quebec's national parks (published in 2018):

- More than 70 ecological services are extracted from the ecosystems of Quebec's 23 parks; their value is estimated at \$1 billion a year (e.g. regulating and purifying watercourses).
- Over time, local life and identity become increasingly linked to the national park. The prosperity of these villages contributes to a sense of belonging and pride in being associated with the national park.