



## **Preserving our environment: It benefits our health, economy and communities**

<http://www.theday.com/article/20171022/OP03/171029958>

**Maryam Elahi** : Op-Ed/Guest Opinion: Published October 22. 2017 12:01AM

From our coastline to our forests and hills, Connecticut boasts a range of breathtaking natural environments. Beaches, recreation areas, hiking trails, and nature preserves abound and are enjoyed by countless residents and tourists each year. In these times of budgetary cutbacks, what are parks and open spaces worth to our communities?

If you've spent any time by the water or on a trail, you've experienced the deep effect of nature on improved mental and physical well-being. And on a larger scale, the health of our environment significantly affects public health outcomes. The quality of our air, water and soil affect a range of health issues, from asthma and lead contamination to cancers.

There are also tremendous economic benefits to environmental preservation. A 2011 Economic Impact Study by the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis found that state residents and visitors spent \$1 billion on outdoor activities in 2010. This figure included state park and forest visits, as well as boating, camping, fishing, and hunting expenditures. The study concluded that "for every dollar the state spends on the state park system, it receives an estimated \$38 in economic activity."

Numerous studies have shown that walkable communities, proximity to parks, and ecotourism help increase community desirability and property values.

Our community leaders must continue to consider how to balance economic growth and environmental preservation to support vibrant communities. Our towns need parks and parking lots; they need recreation areas and conserved spaces, diverse housing stock and thriving business districts. All are important land uses—managing the mix is a balancing act that shapes a region's character, resilience, and outcomes from wealth to health and quality of life.

Preserving the environment is a priority investment area for the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut and its generous donors. In 2017, our environmental grants will top \$524,000. Together with our donors, grantees, land trusts and other partners, we are invested in preserving and protecting environmentally significant land, waterways and wildlife habitats for the benefit of the ecosystem and for the well-being, health, livelihood and enjoyment of residents.

Our investments also aim to engage youth in environmental education and activities in natural settings, teaching them to become good stewards of their environment.

On October 24 at 4 p.m., we will host a Thriving Community Conversation at the CT Audubon Society in Pomfret on balancing economic growth with environmental preservation. The dialogue encourages contrasting points of view on a range of solutions. If you think this a conversation worth having, we invite you to join us and add your voice.

Maryam Elahi is president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. Serving 42 towns and comprised of 476 charitable funds, the community foundation has assets over \$72 million and has awarded more than \$48 million in grants and scholarships since its founding in 1983. Visit [cfect.org](http://cfect.org).