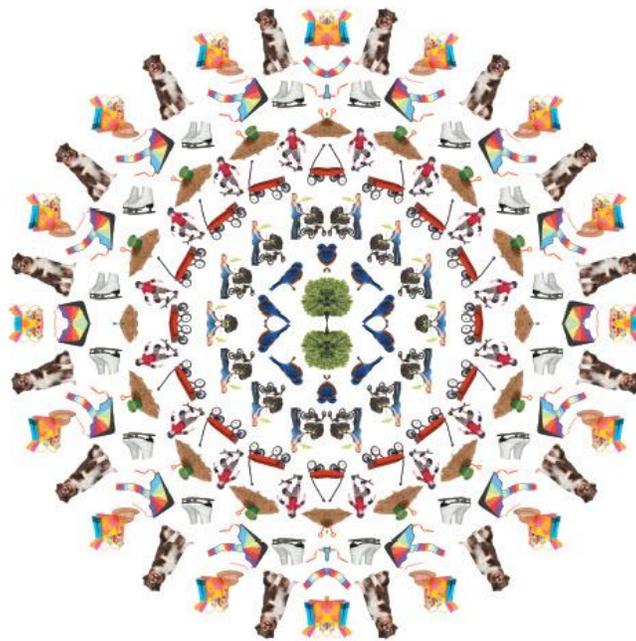


# Literature Review:

## imagineParks Executive Summary



*imagine*Parks  
what do you see?

November 22, 2012  
The City of Calgary Parks  
Strategic Planning & Policy Development

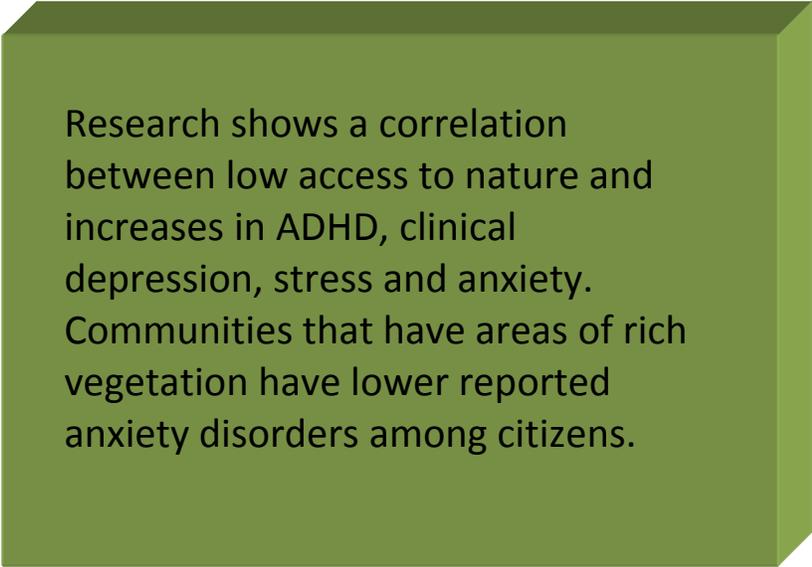
## Executive Summary

A park has long been understood as a space for recreation, both organized and informal. Beyond parks as a space to be programmed for active recreation, there are natural parks that provide spaces to admire “nature” and to find respite from urban life. The research has largely been anecdotal in reference to the positive benefits that passive recreation provides. More recently, however, empirical observations are being made that recognizes the mutual value of healthy public open space and healthy people.

Studies have shown that there are physiological benefits to walking in a natural park. Further, hospitals that provide visual access to nature see patient recovery time shortened, as well as lessening the amount of prescribed pain medications and fewer post-op complications. Green views improve cognitive function, impulse control, resilience to stressful life events and overall mental health. In addition, time spent in parks correlates with improved concentration.

Research shows a correlation between low access to nature and increases in ADHD, clinical depression, stress and anxiety. Communities that have areas of rich vegetation have lower reported anxiety disorders among citizens. These settings, the research is saying, help induce a greater sense of

community, generosity, trust, and civic-mindedness. As a result, loneliness, aggression and crime decrease. All of this is broadly indicating that humans need to have physical ties to nature. In this light, parks, a physical element in our city fabric, can be understood as an element in health care and human wellness service. They also provide context for a larger understanding and appreciation of life.

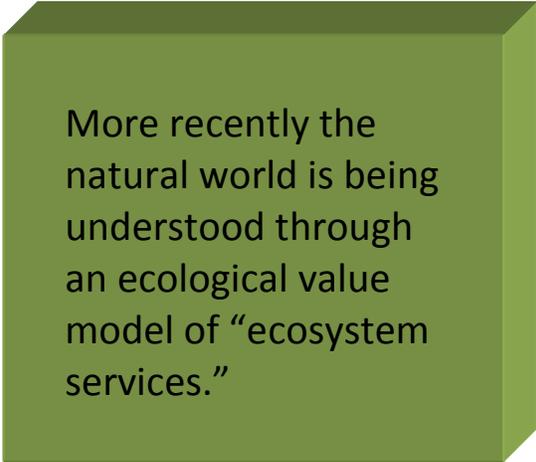


Research shows a correlation between low access to nature and increases in ADHD, clinical depression, stress and anxiety. Communities that have areas of rich vegetation have lower reported anxiety disorders among citizens.

In summary, having access to – and spending time in – beautiful, healthy parks correlates with the overall wellbeing of humans. It gives us a sense of place, of meaning, imprints on our collective memory and a fundamental structure in creating connections in both ourselves and the greater community.

Natural environment parks are synonymous with nature, nature understood here as the natural world. More recently the natural world is being understood through an ecological value model of “ecosystem services.” Essentially parks provide goods and services for humans. The human benefit derived from nature such as clean drinking water, pollination and flood control are goods and services provided by nature. These services have been synthesized into four main categories by the United Nations Environment Programme. They are,

- Regulating services: climate, water, natural hazard and disease regulation, water purification and waste treatment, which are often strongly affected by the overuse of provisioning services;
- Provisioning services: freshwater, energy (especially the emerging issues around biofuel production) and capture fisheries;
- Cultural services: Recreation and ecotourism service;
- Supporting services: nutrient cycling and primary production which underlie the delivery of all the other services but are not directly accessible to people.



More recently the natural world is being understood through an ecological value model of “ecosystem services.”

These services provide both direct and indirect economic value. Parks, therefore, in this model have a role in economic wellbeing. Strictly, as a function of geography, properties near green space tend to have higher prices. Unique and beautiful parks can also be associated with tourism, which correlates to economic stimulation. Local business that operate in or near a park generate wealth through transactions. Simply, parks provide spaces for the exchange of goods and services which generate financial wealth.

## **Links: A short list for more information on the multitude of benefits public open space provides**

*\*Summaries of the research should be understood as citations from the links they speak to.*

### **Ecology**

<http://benefitshub.ca/entry/urban-landscape-conservation-and-the-role-of-ecological-greenways-at-local/>

There is a critical role of ecological greenways and parks in urban species conservation.

<http://benefitshub.ca/entry/promoting-ecosystem-and-human-health-in-urban-areas-using-green-infrastruct/>

Ecosystem services provided by a Green Infrastructure can provide healthy environments and physical and psychological health benefits to the people residing within them. Healthy environments can contribute to improved socio-economic benefits for those communities as well.

## Human wellness

[http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/david-suzuki/nature-education\\_b\\_983082.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/david-suzuki/nature-education_b_983082.html)

Studies show that spending time in nature helps with recall and memory, problem-solving, and creativity. Children (and adults) who spend more time outside are also physically healthier.

<http://benefitshub.ca/entry/a-healthy-dose-of-green/>

More greenery in residential areas is linked to residents' tendency to being more physically active and less overweight and obese. Residents in environments with visible greenery and vegetation were 3.3 times more likely to take up frequent physical exercise than those in the lowest greenery category.

## Economics

<http://benefitshub.ca/entry/the-economic-benefits-of-land-conservation/>

Parks and open space generate increased property tax revenue and yield a better return on investment than development. A strategy of conserving parks and open space is not contrary to a community's economic health, but rather it is an integral part of it.

<http://benefitshub.ca/entry/economic-and-fiscal-impact-analysis-executive-summary/>

Parks provide quality of life, recreation, aesthetic and environmental benefits, but they also provide positive economic benefits: they enhance property values, attract corporations, bring in buyers, increase County tax revenues and draw tourists.