

THE GRASSROOTS REACH FOR THE SKY

Anne Lusk

Chair, Vermont Trails and Greenways Council, 1531 River Road, Stowe, VT 05672

In a light-hearted departure from typical conference proceedings, this paper identifies the need for research related to greenways and attempts to entice the conference scholars into undertaking such studies. Greenways are long, skinny connecting corridors for nature, recreation and transportation which need the attention of academicians and researchers to move into mainstream America.

Introduction

The Conference organizers called up and asked me to speak about greenways at the 1991 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium in Saratoga Springs. I said, "Fine (remembering Saratoga's pretty)...just tell me what you want me to say." I was told to describe my local experience with greenways and take it all the way up to the international level where I'm now working. I said, "Sure."

Then I was sent the 1990 Conference proceedings. I was so intimidated by the report. It includes tables, statistics, charts. I looked at it and said, "I can do that."

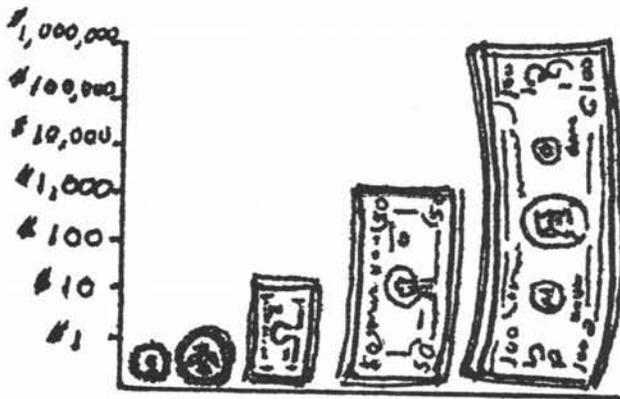


Figure 1. INCOME SCALE: Greenways benefit everyone from the broke to the really rich.

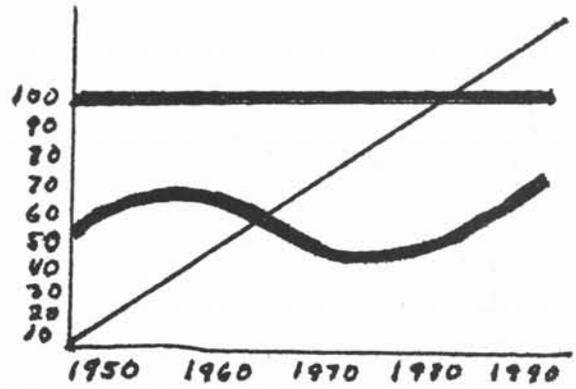


Figure 2. TREND CURVE: The data show that the number of greenways being created is going up. These include greenways that are straight, like Rails-to-Trails, and greenways that curve, like those along a river.

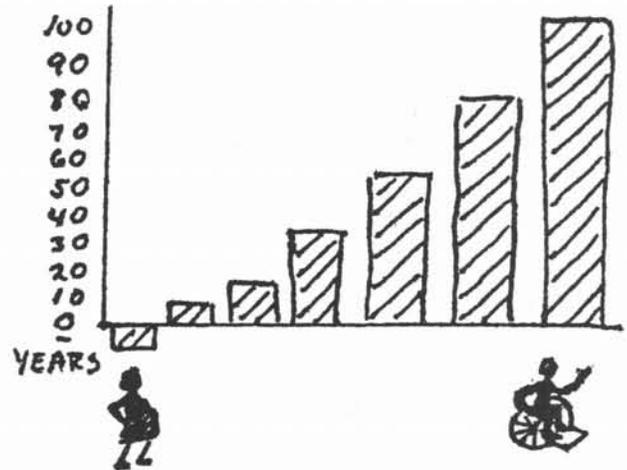


Figure 3. AGE PROFILE: The greenway users include everyone from minus a few months old to more than 100 years old.

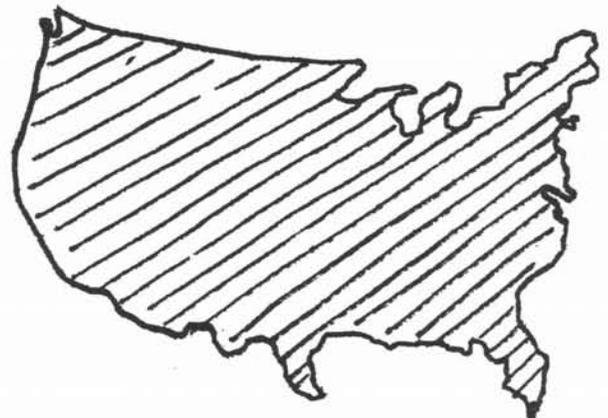


Figure 4. DEMOGRAPHICS: In the United States, every state should have a greenway.

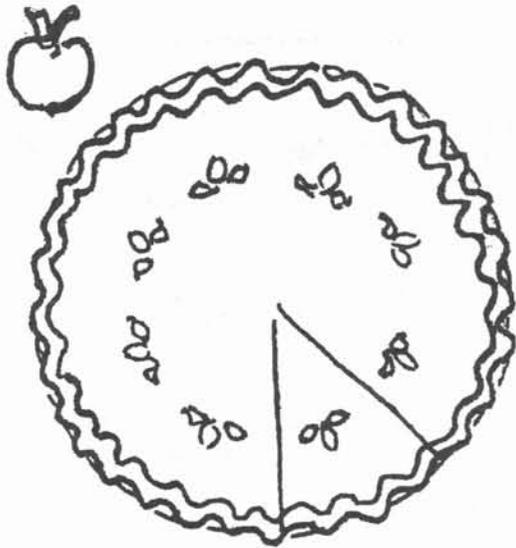


Figure 5. PIE CHART: Greenways are as American as baseball and apple pie.

Okay, so I've been found out. I don't do research. But *you* do research...and greenways should be built nationwide and even worldwide. So my goal here today is to get *you* sufficiently excited about greenways so that you'll do research. Then we'll have more studies, more people talking about greenways, more solutions proposed and benefits identified and, in the end, because of your work, we'll have more greenways.

So here is a story titled *The Grassroots Reach for the Sky*, as told by Anne Lusk.

Method

This all started in a little town called Stowe, Vermont, population 3,000. In 1981, I was hired by the Town of Stowe, for the princely sum of \$10,000 for two years, to see if it was feasible to build a bikeway along the Mountain Road which connects the Village to the Mountain. Working with the locals, second home owners and tourists, committees were formed and we started work. The work was broken into Phase I, which was 2.7 miles, and Phase II, which was 2.6 miles. Each phase took about three years and the same system was employed.

The first year was spent doing publicity. I'd write about anything related to the path, seeking suggestions more than handing out advice. What was created had the familiarity of an Ann Landers column. People I didn't know would approach me in the grocery store aisles and suggest, "Anne, have you thought about going over the river after the Mayo farm to get to the land by Percy's gravel yard?" Also in that first year, the landowners knew they had full control over where the path went on their land. They would draw in pencil on the map exactly where they wanted the path to go.

The second year was spent raising the money. We did a Greenways Gala Black Tie Dinner Dance with truffles, champagne, Peter Duchin, perfume party favors and a silent auction. We raised \$40,000 in one night with no overhead and one hundred percent of the proceeds going to the path. On the cross country ski race derby, a course which is a race from the top of the Mountain to the Village, I did Burma Shave signs

with appropriate rhymes and a plug for fund raising. We sold pieces of the path at \$2 per inch, \$14 per foot, \$45 per rod, and on up through chains, links and furlongs. Combined with Land and Water Conservation Funds, revenue sharing and some town tax dollars, we raised \$300,000 for Phase I and \$380,000 for Phase II.

During the second year we also acquired the land. Phase I included deeds of easement 18 feet wide from 27 different property owners. Phase II was 5 deeds of easement. Plans and specs were written and we went out to bid.

The third year was the construction phase. During this phase, I had been told to just tell the subcontractors what to do and not have lengthy conversations with them. But it also is a small town and, in a small town, you happen to know the backhoe and bulldozer operators. So I'd describe in detail how we wanted the path to meander, hug the river in the trees, then come out to the blinding sun in the farm field. These guys would get so into the project that on several occasions when I couldn't be there to tell them exactly which way to go, I'd arrive at the site after the work was done. They'd explain, "Well, we had to cut over here so you'd go back into the woods and then you'd get a surprise view of the river." The backhoe and bulldozer operators would get so involved in the job that the story was that they had been ruined. They never wanted to go back to digging sewer lines or cellar holes.

The 5.3-mile Stowe Recreation Path was completed in 1989 and the awards include:

1. Land and Water Conservation Fund Award;
2. Take Pride in America Finalist Award;
3. Rudy Bruner Finalist Award for Urban Excellence;
4. Selection as the 786th National Recreation Trail;
5. Designation by President Bush as the 119th Point of Light.

In 1987 the Report of the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors came along, which suggested that...communities establish greenways, corridors of private and public recreation lands and waters, to provide people with access to open spaces close to where they live, and link together the rural and urban spaces in the American landscape.

The Report was so exciting that we decided Vermont needed a television public service announcement about greenways. With \$75 from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, a 30-second spot was written, cast, choreographed and taped in just two takes. The greenway public service announcement ran on four channels for two summers.

Then the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council came along and the National Park Service chose two states, Washington and Vermont, to receive as a cooperative agreement \$50,000 to develop a model trails plan for the states. We decided to track a model town so we offered \$2,500 to a community in a competition. For a meager \$2,500, we had 60 applications. Instead of funding only one community, we funded three, but that was still 57 inquirers we had to disappoint. The Vermont Trails and Greenways Council decided to turn over every rock to find some money for the communities wanting greenways. A representative from the Vermont Agency of Transportation found out we could receive \$4.5 million per year 100% funding for independent bikeways and walkways. These funds could be used for highways and bridges, but greenways can compete since they are non-polluting and non-gas-consumptive transportation alternatives. Bikeways and walkways had also recently received

the support of the Federal Highway Administration in Washington.

In Vermont, we did a quick poll and found \$2.5 million in projects ready to go. We went to the Agency of transportation and they gave us \$500,000 because they felt we couldn't get sufficiently organized to collect projects in one month's time and have them ready for plans, specifications, permits and land acquisition in four months. Twenty-four communities have come to us with over \$5 million in projects and we are hoping the Legislature will appropriate more than the \$500,000 this year so we can have more ribbon cuttings. And, of course, all of this is setting the stage for not only continued greenways funding in Vermont, but also aggressive use of these funds in every state in America.

Which brings us to the Nation. There is a movement afoot to see greenways created all across the country. Greenways should become as household a word as wetlands. That familiarity is spreading as more and more communities either create their own greenway or covet their neighbor's greenway.

Now to the world. In June 1990, National Geographic featured an article on greenways which also included the address for American Greenways. Letters came in asking for information from Poland, Israel, Czechoslovakia, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Hungary, New Zealand, England, Jordan, Argentina, Italy, Germany, the Philippines, Spain, Pakistan, Yugoslavia. In response to this worldwide demand, Greenways International is now being formed. That's how the grassroots has reached to the sky.

Conclusion

And now, we come back to you. *You* have the ability to do research, write articles, talk to colleagues and even create a greenway in your hometown. We need more studies so that people like me can use your information to lend credibility to what we say. We need hard documentation to prove to the naysayers that greenways are beneficial. We need your voices to reinforce the greenway movement. We need your firsthand knowledge to help a community, perhaps even your own community, create a greenway.

Literature Cited

Lusk, Anne. 1989. Greenway in Vermont. Parks and Recreation. January.

Lusk, Anne. 1989. Stowe, Vermont builds a greenway: A multipurpose path rejuvenates community life. Smalltown. Vol. 20 (3).

Lusk, Anne. 1986. How to build a path in your community. In cooperation with Vermont Forests, Parks and Recreation Resource E-34.

Lusk, Anne. 1990. Building greenways to connect neighborhoods. Creating Excellence. February/March.

Lusk, Anne. 1989. Building community support for linear parks. Keynote: International Parkways, Greenways, Riverways. North Carolina. September.