



# SUPPORTING ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

## How Parks Advance Sustainability and Resilience

Healthy, functioning ecosystems are essential for human life, yet many are struggling due to human disturbances and climate change. Ecosystem restoration efforts help degraded lands and waterways recover from these impacts and can include a range of activities that help return an area to a more natural state.

Parks play an integral role in protecting ecosystems. Where parks already exist, restoration efforts can further enhance wildlife habitats and help preserve key ecological functions, such as improving water quality.

For real estate developers, integrating park space and supporting healthy ecosystems within a site can help projects attract investment, gain community support, and meet sustainability goals.

In areas where land is degraded from prior development or infrastructure, the creation of a park or green space can help reestablish natural systems

while also delivering social, economic, and health benefits to communities.

Ecosystem restoration activities may include the following:

- Controlling invasive species
- Reintroducing native species
- Enhancing or creating habitats
- Unburying (“daylighting”) streams and improving shorelines (riparian areas)
- Implementing erosion control measures
- Implementing controlled burns and other fire management techniques

## Health and Equity Considerations

Communities of color and those home to people with low incomes often bear a disproportionate burden of environmental degradation and pollution. They are more likely to be far away from natural spaces and closer to abandoned or undesirable infrastructure, such as decommissioned landfills, oil wells, utility



## Environment and Climate Change Mitigation

Restoration efforts can help reduce air and water pollution, enhance biodiversity, and improve landscapes.



## Public Health

Improved air and water quality and increased access to green spaces contribute to better health outcomes, including reduced rates of respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, and mental health disorders.



## Green Space Access

Restoration efforts can help bring nature to neighborhoods that have less green space and fewer parks.



## Resilience

Functioning natural systems improve resilience by absorbing and filtering stormwater, reducing flooding, and mitigating the urban heat island effect. Nature-based solutions reduce a community's vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather events.



## Economic Opportunities

Increasingly, real estate developers are prioritizing nature as part of their projects, due to increased demand for environmentally healthy spaces. In addition, restoration activities can provide employment opportunities for local workforces and spur further economic development.



## Social Cohesion

Restoring culturally significant landscapes, habitats, and native species can preserve cultural identity, promote intergenerational knowledge transfer, and enhance community connection—which is essential for health and longevity.

corridors, airports, and power plants. In many cases, these industrial areas threaten water and air quality, harming both the environment and the physical and mental health of nearby communities.

By transforming these spaces into parks, or thoughtfully integrating green space into future developments, cities can address issues of environmental justice and ensure that the benefits of nature are shared by all. For example, [studies](#) have shown that spending even 120 minutes in green spaces has been associated with higher levels of reported good health and well-being.



## Project Example

### **Cramer Hill Waterfront Park, Camden, New Jersey**

Cramer Hill Waterfront Park transformed an 86-acre municipal landfill into an urban oasis containing abundant green space and direct access to two rivers. Restoration efforts included a major cleanup and the construction of seven acres of new freshwater wetlands that provide critical habitat for native plants and animals and mitigate flooding to nearby areas. The development of the park also gave residents access to the Delaware River Waterfront for the first time in decades. Through intentional partnerships between residents, nonprofits, and government agencies, Cramer Hill reclaimed its riverfront for recreation, education, and the enjoyment of nature. Read more about Cramer Hill Waterfront Park in the ULI report, [Parks That Protect: Leveraging Waterfronts for Resilient Communities](#).