Choosing "Greenspace" as a Brownfields Reuse

EPA's Brownfields Program is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. EPA's Brownfields Program provides financial and technical assistance for brownfield revitalization, including grants for environmental assessment, cleanup, and job training.

Returning Brownfields to Natural and Recreational Open Land is an Emerging Trend

EPA is helping local communities transform brownfields across the nation into prized greenspaces through technical assistance and Brownfields grants. EPA recognizes that establishing and restoring greenspace is an important and viable reuse for brownfields. Greenspace can include parks, playgrounds, trails, community gardens, natural habitats, and recreational open land. While redevelopment of brownfields for commercial, residential, and industrial uses can be essential to a community's economic revitalization, redevelopment into greenspace can provide aesthetic, recreational, and quality-of-life advantages that surpass economic benefits.

With effective planning, brownfields can be converted to greenspace without compromising the need to protect human health and the environment. Of the 669 EPA Brownfield Pilots to date, many Pilots have redeveloped their properties for natural open space or recreational purposes or are working to include greenspace components into their long-range goals. Successful greenspace projects now serve as models for other communities interested in incorporating greenspace into their brownfields redevelopment plans.

Incorporating Natural Space into Site Designs

One example is the Northampton County, Virginia Brownfields Pilot, which partnered with the town of Cape Charles to revitalize a former town dump into a nationally renowned Sustainable Technology Park. The 200-acre eco-park includes environmentally friendly manufacturing facilities adjacent to natural habitat, pedestrian walkways, and trails. Approximately one-half of the eco-park site was retained or restored as natural habitat, including a 30-acre Coastal Dune Natural Area Preserve and 60 additional acres of open space.

Not far from the eco-park, the Brownfields Pilot is now working to turn property surrounding the Northampton County landfill into a new Seaside

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Former wastewater treatment plant transformed into greenspace in Denver, Colorado.

JUST THE FACTS:

- While economic development is an essential component of EPA's Brownfields Program, creation and restoration of greenspace can provide recreational options, improve aesthetics, or simply provide the open space that many communities need to enhance their quality of life.
- Greenspace can include parks, playgrounds, trails, community gardens, natural habitats, and recreational open land.
- With effective planning, brownfields can be converted to greenspace without compromising the need to protect human health and the environment from a site's former uses.

Park that will feature the two-county Seaside Heritage Trail. This trail will include more than 12,000 feet of paths, with interpretive signage introducing visitors to the four major habitats on site: a freshwater pond, grasslands, a maritime forest, and saline seaside marshes of the Atlantic Ocean. On the coast and protected by barrier islands, the Seaside Park will provide much-needed recreational and social opportunities within its core area, and ecotourism opportunities on its more remote locations. Working with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Northampton County's plans for the Seaside Park include ball fields, a horseshoe pit, volleyball courts, and other sport facilities. The park's developers will also partner with the local school system to provide "outdoor classrooms" for students to learn about their regional habitat. Currently, the park is planned to open in 2005.

Recreational Reuses that Benefit the Local Community

The St. Louis County, Missouri Brownfields Pilot partnered with the City of Wellston to bring much-needed greenspace and recreational facilities to families in the growing community. A former parking lot was chosen to be the site of the new Wellston Neighborhood Park. When complete, the 2.5-acre park will feature a new ball field, a playground area, a basketball court, a concession stand and restrooms, and walking paths. The park will be located in a neighborhood where Habitat for Humanity of St. Louis and a local developer have built 37 new homes, with plans to construct an additional thirteen. EPA Brownfields Assessment Pilot funds played a role in preparing these sites for eventual use by Habitat for Humanity of St. Louis.

Brownfields redevelopment plays a crucial role in preserving undeveloped "greenfields" and reducing associated environmental impacts related to urban sprawl. An estimated 4.5 acres of greenfields are preserved for every one acre of brownfields redeveloped.

In Portland, Oregon, EPA's Brownfields Program assisted a community-led grassroots effort to clean up the site of a former creamery and convert it into a community park. Eight years after the closing of Senn's Dairy, the community began envisioning the abandoned property as future greenspace. Working with the Portland Brownfields Showcase Community awarded by EPA and the Brownfields National Partnership to leverage support, the community launched a neighborhood effort to construct the park. A private developer donated the environmental assessment and cleanup work necessary to prepare the site for redevelopment. Local high school students and AmeriCorps volunteers helped landscape the property, while neighborhood residents assisted with the park's design. Although the park's development is still in progress, the project is expected to become a model for future open space redevelopment efforts in the area.

Volunteers help with landscaping at a new community park in Portland, Oregon.

In Bridgeport, Connecticut, the Park City Brownfields Redevelopment Partnership was awarded an EPA New England Environmental Merit Award in May 2002, for its work to restore the sites of a former metal extrusion company and an engraving/printing business for recreational reuse. One of the largest community-based projects in the country, this project involved a partnership among Bridgeport's EPA Brownfields Pilot, the state, the city, and community groups to expand a six-acre park to ten acres by revitalizing two adjacent brownfields properties. With few existing recreational options in the impoverished surrounding neighborhood, the expanded park has significantly enhanced the community's quality of life.

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In 2000, the City and County of Denver, Colorado, won a Phoenix Award, which recognizes excellence in brownfields redevelopment, for their work on the former Northside Wastewater Treatment Plant property. An EPA Brownfields Pilot grant helped to fund a study of reuse options for the site, which went on to be a model of greenspace creation. The former wastewater treatment plant was combined with an adjacent, city-owned brownfield that together were transformed into 65 acres of open space, including a recreational park, wetlands, and natural habitat for wildlife. The surrounding community is experiencing an economic resurgence that is attributable, in part, to this project's success.

The Providence, Rhode Island Brownfields Pilot followed a fast-growing reuse trend of creating new greenspace in the form of golf course greens. In the spring of 1999, the Golf Foundation of Rhode Island approached the state regarding its desire to redevelop the 25-acre Button Hole site, a state-owned brownfield, into an affordable golf course for nearby residents and youths. The state accepted this proposal and included the project in its State of Rhode Island Brownfields Assessment Pilot. A former gravel pit, the Button Hole site is located in Providence and lies adjacent to the Woonasquatucket River, a metals recycling plant with numerous environmental violations, and several multifamily housing complexes. Because of its proximity to the metals recycling plant, the site was thought to have environmental contamination. The Pilot funded $30,000 site assessments that revealed low levels of lead and arsenic at a small portion of the site. As a result, 10,000 cubic yards of contaminated soil were excavated and encapsulated onsite in accordance with state regulations. The Pilot assisted the Golf Foundation in creating the golf course development plan. The course quickly became tremendously popular with local residents. Garry Waldeck, of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, stated, "these urban recreational areas, including golf courses, provide additional recreational alternatives and can increase community pride."

Former gravel pit redeveloped into a golf course in Providence, Rhode Island.

Benefitting the Environment and Local Residents

These and additional examples nationwide illustrate that incorporating greenspace into redevelopment plans can be beneficial not just to the environment, but to the same communities that these brownfields had once negatively affected. While economic development is an essential component of EPA's Brownfields Program, creation and restoration of greenspace can provide recreational options, improve aesthetics, or simply provide the open space that many communities need to enhance their quality of life.

For more information about EPA's Brownfields Pilots and greenspace reuses, visit EPA's web page at www.epa.gov/brownfields/ or call EPA's Office of Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment at (202) 566-2777.