



# ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY OF POKA-BACHE CONNECTOR TRAIL

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Prepared for Poka-Bache Trail Coalition

Evaluating the economic impact of constructed trails, future trails, and visitor-retail spend for the Poka-Bache Connector in Allen, DeKalb, Steuben, and Wells counties

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## Executive summary

On behalf of the Poka-Bache Trail Coalition, the Community Research Institute (CRI) at Purdue University Fort Wayne (PFW) performed an economic impact study to identify the number of jobs supported and total economic impact of the Poka-Bache Connector multiuse trail, which has constructed and future sections in Allen, DeKalb, Steuben, and Wells counties in northeast Indiana.

Using IMPLAN software, this project measured the economic impact through the use of multipliers unique to the studied region's geography for the trail's construction and visitor and retail spending as a result of the Poka-Bache Connector.

Key findings from this project:

- Constructed trails in the Poka-Bache Connector supported a total of 264.76 jobs between 2008 and 2022 with a total economic impact of \$42.4 million in 2022 dollars.
- Future trails in the Poka-Bache Connector could have an economic impact of \$136.9 million in 2022 dollars and potentially support a total of 859 jobs from 2023 to 2045.
- Spending by visitors and trail users as a result of the Poka-Bache Connector in 2022 on overnight accommodations, food and beverage purchases, and retail purchases for items to use on the trail like bicycles or running shoes created a regional economic impact of \$6.9 million and supported 67.1 jobs in the four-county region.
- While the construction impacts create one-time economic events due to their temporary nature – the trail only gets built once and repair projects are intermittent – the visitor and retail spends will happen year over year, creating repeated economic impact from private dollars, not taxes. Furthermore, the data inputs for retail and visitor spends were conservatively estimated, meaning that growth in trail use and travel related to the Poka-Bache Connector could create a larger annual economic impact in the years to come.

## Introduction

Traveling through four counties in northeast Indiana, the Poka-Bache Connector trail will connect Pokagon State Park in Angola as the northernmost point down to Ouabache (pronounced as Wabash) State Park in Bluffton to the south. The 81-mile connector trail will join Steuben, DeKalb, Allen, and Wells counties through a multiuse trail that offers both recreational and transportation opportunities, while connecting to other trail networks in the respective counties. Once complete, it will be one of the longest connected trail routes in Indiana.

This trail, which was initially proposed in 2006 and has constructed and future sections, goes through seven cities and towns. When complete, the Poka-Bache Connector will link more than 121,000 people, 140 recreational areas, 10 libraries, and 50 schools within a mile of the trail. The Poka-Bache Connector is part of the United Trails Plan, which covers 12 northeast Indiana counties to provide an interconnected trail network within and between communities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the United Trails plan, including the regional map, visit <https://www.nircc.com/northeast-indiana-united-trails-plan.html>.

The Poka-Bache Trail Coalition, via Fort Wayne Trails, Inc., contracted with the Purdue University Fort Wayne (PFW) Community Research Institute (CRI) to conduct an economic impact analysis of the Poka-Bache Connector trail in three areas:

1. Constructed trails
2. Future trails
3. Spending by trail users and visitors as a result of the Poka-Bache Connector for overnight accommodations, retail purchases, and food and beverages

CRI used IMPLAN, an input-output economic impact software system, to calculate the direct, indirect, and induced jobs and economic activity of labor income and value added resulting from trail construction and visitor and retail activity.

The constructed and future trail spending was provided to CRI by members of the Poka-Bache Trail Coalition. To calculate the inputs for the retail and visitor spend, CRI Director Rachel Blakeman worked with professors from the PFW Department of Economics and Finance to calculate the inputs for the retail and visitor spends. Additional details about the visitor-retail spend calculations are in the annual visitor-retail spend section.

Not included in this analysis are cost savings in healthcare expenses as a result of trail use, changes in land or property values due to proximity to the Poka-Bache Connector, economic activity in the respective county outside the use of the Poka-Bache Connector including the economic impact of other trails within the respective geographies, cost savings to trail users who use the trail as a transportation network instead of a vehicle, environmental benefits of using the trail network in place of an internal combustion-powered vehicle, and qualitative quality-of-place improvements such as an improved sense of connectedness within a neighborhood that has trail access.

### [Poka-Bache Trail Coalition](#)

The Poka-Bache Trail Coalition's mission is to complete the State Visionary Trail between Pokagon State Park and Ouabache State Park by fostering equitable collaboration, coordination, and cooperation between public and private entities in northeast Indiana. The coalition envisions a complete and uniform trail that will improve northeast Indiana residents' health and wellness, spur economic development, improve access to the natural environment, and attract tourism.

The following people are part of the Poka-Bache Trail Coalition:

- Amanda Cope, City of Angola
- Brent Shull, Town of Hamilton
- Chip Porter, Steuben County
- Ken Shelton, Steuben County
- John Longenecker, Steuben County Trails
- Jennifer Sharkey, Steuben County Trails
- Pam Howard, Town of Waterloo
- Kellie Knauer, City of Auburn
- Eric Ditmer, City of Auburn
- Mike Watson, DeKalb County
- Rick Ring, DeKalb County
- Chris Gaumer, DeKalb County
- Bill Spohn, Auburn / Waterloo Trails
- Kathleen Alter, Community Foundation DeKalb County
- Tanya Young, Community Foundation DeKalb County
- Beth Shellman, Town of Hometown
- Shan Gunawardena, City of Fort Wayne
- Steve McDaniel, City of Fort Wayne
- Dawn Ritchie, City of Fort Wayne

- Patrick Zaharako, City of Fort Wayne
- Lara Dorsett, Allen County
- Bill Hartman, Allen County
- Jon Bomberger, Fort Wayne Trails
- Megan McClellan, Fort Wayne Trails
- Mike Kelly, Fort Wayne Trails
- Emily Hill, Visit Fort Wayne
- Luann Martin, Town of Ossian
- John Whicker, City of Bluffton
- Mike Lautzenheiser, Wells County
- Michael Galbraith, Regional Development Authority
- Dan Avery, Northeast Indiana Regional Coordinating Council
- Matt Peters, Northeast Indiana Regional Coordinating Council
- Jason Kaiser, Indiana Department of Transportation Fort Wayne office
- Dale Brier – Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Amy Marisavljevic, Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Rory Robinson, National Parks Service (retired)
- Dennis Kruse, State of Indiana
- Mary Martin, Senator Braun's Office

Map: Poka-Bache Connector trail

