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# THE BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION & GREEN SPACES

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Outdoor recreation and green spaces can have many benefits. With access to parks, families are more active. Being outdoors can also reduce overeating and stress. Natural amenities attract new residents, businesses, and visitors, and contact with nature can boost environmental awareness, stewardship, and advocacy. To inform policies and programs, researchers at land-grant universities across the country are working together to determine the actual extent of these benefits and how they occur. This is an essential part of ensuring healthier people, communities, and natural resources, especially as populations grow and become more urban.

Over the past five years, scientists used surveys, interviews, and focus groups to assess the benefits of parks and recreation. This research is providing the evidence and awareness needed for communities to provide more green spaces, for more doctors to include outdoor recreation in prescriptions, for policymakers to require outdoor recreation at school, and for land managers to plan for outdoor recreation. As researchers identify motivations for and barriers to using outdoor spaces, professionals will be able to design more attractive and accessible parks and recreation options. The resulting health benefits of more participation in outdoor recreation could help reduce healthcare costs across the nation.

Researchers are also examining how climate change will impact outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism, which are key parts of many local economies. Better predictions should enhance resilience in these communities. In addition, research is illuminating ways that nature and outdoor recreation can be used to inspire people to take actions that help address local and global environmental issues.



Surveys are examining the effects of opportunities for outdoor free play, learning, and contact with nature in Ohio childcare programs.



Work with the Boy Scouts of America is seeing how remote camping trips affect the environmental attitudes of minority youths.



Surveys of college students are determining the linkages between campus outdoor areas and student health, wellbeing, learning, and environmental literacy.

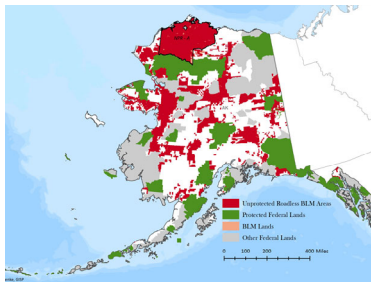


Researchers are exploring the ways parks can facilitate connections to nature across generations.

A Florida study found increased enthusiasm for outdoor recreation among middle school science students who participated in an outdoor learning project.

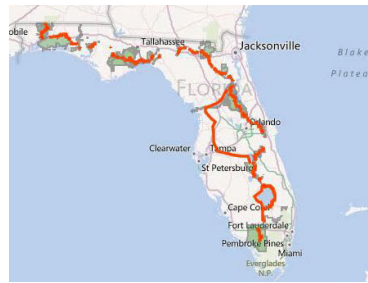


Surveys of wildlife refuge visitors and volunteers show outdoor recreation and nature-based activities increase environmental awareness and stewardship and familiarity with community members, all of which are keys to building resilient communities.



Researchers are assessing how Alaskan communities next to public lands benefit from direct use of these lands, other uses, or merely from the land's presence.

An online survey will detail how residents want to benefit from recreation on local public lands.



Data on the number and diversity of visitors along the Florida National Scenic Trail, their type of use, and motivation for use provided the US Forest Service with useful suggestions for management strategies that will improve recreation opportunities.



Interviews highlighted veterans' motivations for engaging in outdoor recreation and nature. Data and testimonies suggest that engaging with nature and outdoor recreation are beneficial for war veterans, especially women and wounded veterans.

Surveys of New York state park visitors and volunteers identified factors that encourage participation in park stewardship.



Data collected at 15 state parks is documenting their contributions to local economies in terms of sales, employment, and household income, in relation to their operating budgets.



Surveys of residents, visitors, community leaders, and tourism stakeholders showed how climate change will affect tourism and recreation in Maine, Minnesota, and rural coastal communities in North Carolina and how visitors will change their travel patterns if climatic and environmental conditions change. The surveys also illuminated ways the tourism industry can adapt.



A study of how birders make travel decisions will help North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service redesign a training program that helps rural entrepreneurs market and cater to birders.



Data from surveys on cycling and the cycling industry in Minnesota may be used by local government, organizations, and the industry to provide better infrastructure, events, and tourism.

A 25-year study of a group of young adults is measuring cycling's impacts on risk of obesity, heart disease, and diabetes. Data may encourage healthcare providers and policymakers to promote cycling.

*This multistate research project (NE1962: Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Other Green Environments: Understanding Human and Community Benefits and Mechanisms, 2012-2017) is supported by the Multistate Research Fund through USDA-NIFA and grants to project members from the following institutions: University of Alaska-Fairbanks, Auburn University, Cornell University, University of Florida, University of Maine, University of Minnesota, University of Missouri, North Carolina State University, University of Northern Iowa, Ohio Cooperative Extension, Plymouth State University, Purdue University, Rutgers University, University of South Carolina, Texas AgriLife Research, University of Utah, Utah Cooperative Extension, University of Vermont, Washington University in St. Louis, along with the USDA-ARS and National Park Service. This project has been renewed through 2022. Learn more: [bit.ly/NE1962](http://bit.ly/NE1962)*