

A Community Playbook for  
Closing the Nature Gap



Outside  
in



ALL  OUT

*#OptOutside* isn't as  
easy as it sounds

**A third of us lack access to outside spaces close to home.**

**But together we can change that.**

Data reveals our country is rich in enthusiasm for the outdoors, but has inconsistent access and infrastructure—especially for those in historically and systemically disenfranchised communities. In total, more than 100 million of us don't have easy access to outside spaces.

We asked the nation to #OptOutside with us. Now, it's time we break down the barriers to getting there—for everyone—because time outside is not an amenity or luxury. It is a necessity.

We're calling on our members, customers and co-op community to join us in supporting locally led projects across the country that break down human-made barriers to time outside. Whether you live in a neighborhood with limited access to parks and trails, one without adequate public transit to those places, or even a place with ample—but inequitable—access, there are challenges to recreating outside that every one of us can help address.

From supporting local projects to writing your representatives, speak up. Raise your outside voice to reclaim the places, create more green spaces, and attack the inequalities that stand in the way of everyone spending time outside.

We assembled this playbook so that no matter where you live and what you do, you can join us on this journey and take action to help get everyone—regardless of where we live—Outside in 5 minutes or less.

Together we can make getting to the park a walk in the park.

**ERIC ARTZ | CEO, REI CO-OP**



# Time Outside Is Fundamental to Our Well-Being

At REI Co-op, we know that time outside is fundamental to the well-being of all people.

Outside is more than just green space. It's the clarity of a walk around the block. The comfort of a well-maintained bike lane and sidewalk. The joy of a day in the park. We envision a world where everyone has easy, welcoming access to these multiple benefits. It ought to be easy to find shade and beauty in the neighborhood tree canopy. Easy to feel at home hitting a trail, setting up a picnic or paddling a river.

Living near nature provides opportunities to walk, hike, bike or play sports. Studies show that engaging in these activities helps improve cardiovascular health, strengthen muscles and bones, maintain a healthy weight, and reduce the risk of chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease<sup>1</sup>.

Spending time in nature also has a calming effect on the mind and helps reduce anxiety and stress levels. Immersion in natural environments, such as parks, forests or gardens, can reduce mental fatigue, restore attention, and improve concentration, cognitive function, memory and creativity<sup>2</sup>.

Still, in today's America, 1 in 3 people have little to no easy access to green spaces or other ways of enjoying time outside. Much of the inequity that holds us back as a nation is the result of design decisions made over the course of decades.



## Contents

- 3 INTRODUCTION**
- 8 A ROADMAP TO 5**
- 10 CHAPTER 1 — Close-to-Home Green Spaces**
  - Solution 1: Tree Canopies and Tree Equity
  - Solution 2: Green Schoolyards
  - Solution 3: Park Equity
- 18 CHAPTER 2 — Safe Sidewalks, Bike Lanes and Multiuse Trails**
  - Solution 1: Protected Bike Lanes and Complete Streets
  - Solution 2: Create and Connect Multiuse Trails
- 26 CHAPTER 3 — Enable Belonging and Access Outside**
  - Solution 1: Support for Outdoor Programs and Equity Funds
  - Solution 2: Environmental Education for All
  - Solution 3: Easy Access to Gear, from the Basics to E-Bikes
  - Solution 4: Establish and Protect Culturally Significant Places
- 36 COOPERATIVE ACTION**
- 42 CITATIONS**



## A Community Playbook for Closing the Nature Gap

# A Roadmap to 5

The challenge we face goes by various names—the Nature Gap, the Green Gap, the Outdoor Equity Gap.

It refers to the disparities in access to nature and outdoor spaces that exist among different populations. It is the difference in the amount and quality of time outside for people of different socioeconomic or demographic groups.

The gap results from various factors, including exclusionary public planning, economic barriers, physical isolation and lack of transportation. People who live in urban areas, low-income neighborhoods, isolated rural communities and communities of color, as well as people from other marginalized communities, are often most affected by this gap.

The deeper you dig into the numbers, the more sobering the reality:

- Approximately 40% of Black Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2022, compared with 57% of white Americans<sup>3</sup>.
- One in four adults in the U.S. live with a disability of some kind<sup>4</sup> that impacts their ability to access or enjoy time outside.
- Veterans report transportation, cost, experience, health challenges and injuries, and other barriers that prevent them from experiencing the full benefits of time spent in nature<sup>5</sup>.
- The LGBTQ+ community is 9% more likely to feel unwelcome in the outdoors<sup>6</sup>.

Advocates from these communities, organizational leaders and forward-leaning policymakers have identified a range of tools that can be deployed to close these gaps. They generally fall into three categories in need of policy prioritization and investment:

### 1. Close-to-home green spaces

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### 2. Safe sidewalks, bike lanes and multiuse trails

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### 3. Programs that enable belonging and access outside

74% of people who identify as Black, Indigenous and other people of color live in a census tract that is considered nature deprived<sup>7</sup>

CHAPTER 1

# Close-to-Home Green Spaces



For much of America, the mere act of stepping outside immerses us in the soothing sights, sounds and scents of the natural world. That exposure helps reduce anxiety, improve mood, enhance cognitive function and increase access to solace and rejuvenation.

For children, outdoor play fosters creativity, collaboration and problem-solving skills. A deep connection with nature at a young age can also enhance performance in the classroom<sup>8</sup>.

Welcoming, well-maintained parks and green areas also serve as gathering places that nurture social bonds and promote a sense of community pride. When neighbors come together for picnics, sports, cultural events and celebrations, they can forge stronger relationships while enjoying the natural world.

To close the nature gap, communities across the country are pursuing policy in the form of: Tree Canopies and Tree Equity, Green Schoolyards, and Park Equity. We explore these below.



**Solution 1 —**

**Tree Canopies and Tree Equity**

*Everyone should enjoy the benefits of trees.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

The story is the same across the United States. Trees and tree canopies are more sparse in economically disadvantaged communities and in neighborhoods of color<sup>9</sup>. On average, the lowest-income neighborhoods have 41% less tree cover than communities of higher income and, regardless of income, neighborhoods of color have 33% less cover<sup>10</sup>.

As a consequence, these communities suffer from associated environmental and health disparities like more extreme heat islands, worse air pollution and less green space to play in or enjoy.

**THE SOLUTIONS**

Achieving tree equity across the U.S. will require planting and growing 522 million trees<sup>11</sup>. A national tree equity movement is emerging to plant trees where they are needed most. This is especially important in communities where transit infrastructure such as bus stops are used at higher rates than average.

By the end of this century, heat-related deaths are projected to rise from current rates of 12,000 per year to nearly 100,000 per year, representing the single greatest health threat from climate change<sup>12</sup>. Tree canopy will help mitigate this risk, since trees can lower air temperature by up to 7°F during the day and 22°F at night<sup>13</sup>. Healthy urban forests also capture nearly one-sixth of the nation's carbon emissions<sup>14</sup>.

The city of Detroit has looked to tree planting to address these challenges. Mayor Duggan joined with American Forests and local community groups to form the Detroit Tree Equity Partnership, which is working to plant 75,000 trees and invest \$30 million in communities most in need<sup>15</sup>.



**OUTSIDE IN 5 PARTNER IN ACTION**

**Friends of Anacostia Park**

Located along the Anacostia River in southeast Washington, D.C., sits one of the region's largest green spaces: Anacostia Park.

But in communities near the national park, poorly planned infrastructure investments—from the legacy sewage systems that polluted the river to interstate construction in the 1950s—reflect racial and economic inequities still being felt today.

In Wards 7 and 8, the largest physical activity deserts in D.C., communities are dominated by stretches of concrete and shopping plazas with fast-food restaurants. Getting outside is a privileged pleasure for Washingtonians of



means. For Anacostians, it is a necessity that can determine physical, mental and social health outcomes.

Today, Friends of Anacostia Park works with the National Park Service and community partners to center the needs of the surrounding community in a revitalization effort directly informed by residents.

Thanks in part to this work, the Anacostia River, the park and the surrounding neighborhoods are undergoing a renaissance of restoration and recreation. It is reestablishing its profile as a popular destination for organized athletics, picnicking, biking, kayaking, walking, roller skating and recreational fishing.





**Solution 2 —**

**Green Schoolyards**

*More than 28 million kids in America live without a quality park near home. A solution is hiding in plain sight: schoolyards.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

Too many U.S. children are nature deprived. The average kid spends less than 10 minutes outside each day and up to 44 hours per week in front of screens<sup>16</sup>. Particularly in communities that experienced redlining or other forms of discrimination, the one place where children could regularly access time outside—their schoolyard—offers little but concrete and chain-link fences.

**THE SOLUTIONS**

Across the country, pioneering school districts and advocates are transforming asphalt into green spaces for kids, families and communities alike.

These “green schoolyards” offer spaces for hands-on learning, environmental education and physical activity. During the school day, they enhance academic performance by fostering creativity, improving concentration and bolstering problem-solving skills. They promote connection to nature and cultivate a sense of responsibility to care for the planet. After school, they provide refuge and relaxation for all, serving as community gathering places that strengthen community bonds.

In Newark, New Jersey, the Trust for Public Land partnered with Sussex Avenue School to engage students in a design process that transformed their schoolyard into a half-acre of open space with a turf field, drinking fountain, trees and outdoor classroom spaces. The renovation had significant positive impacts, including improved attendance, reduced disciplinary actions and increased test scores<sup>17</sup>.



**Solution 3 —**

**Park Equity**

*Everyone deserves a quality park near home.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

1 in 3 Americans lack access to a park within a 10-minute walk of their home<sup>18</sup>. Communities of color have 44% less park space than predominantly white neighborhoods, and similar disparities exist between low-income and wealthier communities<sup>19</sup>.

While the solution may seem simple—build more parks—the reality is that funding and coordination challenges among local government and stakeholders continue to hold communities back<sup>20</sup>.

**THE SOLUTIONS**

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored how nearby green space contributes to more livable communities and quality of life. As a result, efforts to invest in parks, particularly for underserved communities, are on the rise.

For example, voters supported ballot measures that provided \$8.4 billion in state and local funding to improve and create parks in the November 2022 election<sup>21</sup>. The National Park Service received \$1 billion from the Inflation Reduction Act for maintenance needs, staffing backlogs, climate resilience and more<sup>22</sup>. And more recently, the Outdoors for All Act has been reintroduced to increase funding for parks in communities most in need. Thanks to the efforts of the Trust for Public Land, more than 300 mayors have pledged to reenvision their cities and accelerate equitable access to parks for all.

But closing the gap for 100 million people is a long-term challenge. We need to be persistent if we’re to ensure that every community can realize the benefits of parks near home.



## 5 ways to act FOR GREEN SPACES

### 1 — Raise Your Voice

[Take Action with REI](#) and tell Congress to pass the Outdoors for All Act, which would secure funding for parks and green spaces in underserved communities.

### 2 — See How Your Parks Measure Up

How does your town measure up when it comes to green spaces? Explore the Trust for Public Land [10-minute walk campaign](#) and find your [community park score](#).

### 3 — Check Your Community's Tree Equity

Discover if your neighborhood shares the benefits of trees equally by exploring the American Forests [tree equity score](#). Get inspired by Phoenix, Arizona's [Cool Corridors Program](#) by watching a [video celebrating the completion of their first of 100 projects](#).

### 4 — Build Parks Near Home

The National Recreation and Park Association offers a community engagement guide to walk leaders through the process of siting and garnering [community engagement](#) in the park planning process. Take a look to support creating equitable access to high-performing parks.

### 5 — Be a Parks Voter

Budget measures for parks often show up on the ballot. That means as voters, we can help ensure that our communities are adequately funded to establish and maintain parks. Use the Trust for Public Land [LandVote](#) database to research ballot initiatives coming up for vote near you.



CHAPTER 2

# Safe Sidewalks, Bike Lanes and Multiuse Trails

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that 25% of Americans are inactive and that boosting physical activity is one of the best things that we can do for our health<sup>23</sup>



For many in America, a walk out their front door leads to sidewalks and streets that connect to broader trail systems where long adventures await. We know the benefits of easy and safe access for walking, biking, running, roller-skating and more. People are healthier. Communities are more connected and less dependent on cars. Children can safely walk or ride their bicycles to school. Families can get to the park or the grocery store without needing a car. There are ample opportunities for recreation and connection with our natural world.

But much of the nation lacks this vital infrastructure. We envision a 21st century America where these features are routinely installed, retrofitted and maintained in the built environment. Bike fatalities, carbon emissions from transportation, heart disease, obesity, anxiety disorders and more will decrease, adding years to our lives and saving us millions in taxpayer dollars.

The challenge is to ensure that every community, no matter income, background, age or ability, can realize this vision. To do so, we need bold, consistent action to:

1. **Ensure every community has complete streets for walking and biking**
2. **Create and connect regional, multiuse recreation trails**

More than half of all trips in the United States are within a 20-minute bike ride, and a quarter are within a 20-minute walk<sup>24</sup>

**Solution 1 —**

**Protected Bike Lanes and Complete Streets**

*Let's make it safer to walk or ride a bike around town.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

Across decades, neighborhood streets have been laid out without safe spaces for walking or bicycling. Surveys consistently find that lack of safe infrastructure is the No. 1 barrier to new riders taking up cycling. While many nations have fostered cycling through safe streets, 64% of fatal bicycle crashes involve motor vehicles in the U.S.<sup>25</sup> According to PeopleForBikes, only 39% of the U.S. population has access to a safe and comfortable bike path within a half-mile of their home<sup>26</sup>.

**THE SOLUTIONS**

Cities are leading the way when it comes to improving walking and biking for local communities. The “complete streets” movement emphasizes planning and building streets that offer safety and access for all—walkers, bicyclists, drivers and mass transit. And it centers the needs of communities that have faced ongoing underinvestment.

Now is the time to act. An unprecedented \$13 billion in funding for walkable streets, bike lanes and trails is available right now—a sixfold increase for cities and communities to improve their human-scale infrastructure<sup>27</sup>.

By addressing safety concerns, we can encourage more people to choose sustainable, active transportation—thereby improving public health, reducing traffic congestion and lowering carbon emissions.



**OUTSIDE IN 5 PARTNER IN ACTION**

**Friends of Big Marsh**

Big Marsh Park in Chicago has faced significant pollution challenges stemming from its industrial past.

Industrial use leached heavy metals, chemicals and toxins into the soil and water, leaving communities disconnected from a place that was once one of the largest natural wetlands and waterways in North America.

Friends of Big Marsh, alongside partners from Chicago Park District Natural Areas, Student Conservation Association and a host of foundational community partners, has been instrumental in the park’s remarkable transformation, spearheading initiatives like community cleanup events where volunteers remove litter, debris and other remnants of the park’s industrial past. These efforts have not only beautified the park, but fostered a more safe and inviting space for visitors.

In addition to restoration efforts, Friends of Big Marsh has centered community engagement and equity in the park’s evolution, advocating tirelessly for better public transit and bike infrastructure near the park so that residents in underserved areas can more easily reach it. Now, biking trails and a bike park include features for riders of all skill levels.

Because of their work, Big Marsh Park is a recreation destination for bike enthusiasts from all walks of life and a center of community building in Chicago.

More than 100 million Americans ride bikes, but 52% worry about being hit by a motor vehicle<sup>29</sup>

**Solution 2 —**

**Create and Connect Multiuse Trails**

*Connecting communities to each other and to active transportation.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

More than 40% of Americans lack access to safe and convenient walking and biking routes<sup>28</sup>. This dearth of active transportation options hinders connectivity between neighborhoods, schools, workplaces and other destinations. It limits opportunities for fun.

**THE SOLUTIONS**

Interconnected and protected trails and greenways support quality of life, healthy transportation options, community cohesion and economic revitalization.

Rails to trails initiatives take unused or abandoned railways and transform them into multiuse recreation trails. Instead of allowing these corridors to fall into disrepair, they repurpose them into valuable assets that connect communities.

For example, the Atlanta BeltLine converted a former railway corridor into a 33-mile multiuse trail and transit loop, improving connectivity and accessibility for residents and visitors. Similarly, the High Line in New York City remodeled an elevated railway into a linear park, enhancing transportation connections and revitalizing surrounding neighborhoods.

Together with partners like Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, we can transform 40,000 miles of railways into accessible multiuse trails across every community. And with regional partners like the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, we can connect street-level trails to each other and into larger systems.



## 5 ways to act

### FOR SAFE SIDEWALKS, BIKE LANES AND MULTIUSE TRAILS

#### 1 — Raise Your Voice

Take Action with REI and tell Congress to fund better places to bike, run, walk and stroll nationwide. Connect with PeopleForBikes to receive [news and action alerts](#) for national and local issues you care about.

#### 2 — Learn More About Safe Streets

Explore Smart Growth America's [Complete Streets](#) approach to planning, designing, building, operating and maintaining streets that enable safe access for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities.

#### 3 — Know Your Hometown's Bike Score

Look up your city's Bicycle Network Analysis Score with the PeopleForBikes [City Ratings tool](#) and find the [report card on your state](#) by the League of American Bicyclists. [Connect with local advocacy coalitions](#) making your community safer with the League of American Bicyclists.

#### 4 — Discover Trails Near You

Look up trails and greenways in your community with Rails-to-Trails Conservancy [TrailLink](#) tool.

#### 5 — Be a Bike Voter

The League of American Bicyclists [I Bike, I Vote](#) resource helps track ballot initiatives and provides election guides for voters interested in supporting safe streets for all.



“Clean drinking water, clean air, public parks and beaches, biodiversity and open spaces are shared goods to which every person in the United States has an equal right both in principle and in law.”

Nature is supposed to be a ‘great equalizer’ whose services are free, universal and accessible to all humans without discrimination.

In reality, however, American society distributes nature’s benefits—and the effects of its destruction and decline—unequally by race, income and age.”

— CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS  
“THE NATURE GAP”



## CHAPTER 3

# Enable Belonging and Access Outside

If time outside and connecting to nature is fundamental to human well-being, then we need to grapple with the fact that much of America faces barriers to enjoying those benefits. Income disparities, barriers related to physical abilities, lack of familiarity and awareness, and environments that may explicitly or implicitly signal exclusion can create a different reality for many who might otherwise seek time outside.

Income is the single most significant predictor of whether someone enjoys outdoor recreation<sup>30</sup>. Financial constraints include access to equipment, availability of transportation and time to recreate. Research has found that youth from low-income households were far less likely to have experiences in outdoor activities, particularly in the United States<sup>31</sup>.

Recreation is also not seen as universally safe or welcoming. In 2022, nearly 1 in 5 recreation participants reported experiencing discrimination in the outdoors. Women also reported greater feelings of fear of men when in the outdoors, a 16% rise from 2020<sup>32</sup>. And lack of accessible recreation continues to be a crucial obstacle for people with disabilities to participate<sup>33</sup>.

Fortunately, communities, governments and the recreation sector are leaning into programs and policies to change this trajectory. Several important categories of work are underway:

1. **Support for outdoor programs and equity funds**

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2. **Environmental education for all**

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3. **Easy access to gear, from the basics to e-bikes**

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4. **Establish and protect culturally significant places**

**Solution 1 —**

**Support for Outdoor Programs and Equity Funds**

*The outdoors should be a welcoming place for all.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

Less than half of Black American children participated in outdoor recreation in 2021, the lowest by far of any other demographic<sup>34</sup>. Merrell’s *Inclusivity in the Outdoors* report found that communities of color still feel concerned about safety in outdoor spaces. They also found that LGBTQ+ people feel left out despite a desire to participate<sup>35</sup>.

**THE SOLUTIONS**

Proximity is not the only requirement to Opt Outside. We must create positive, welcoming and accessible experiences that foster safety and belonging for participants, and we must give every community a voice in shaping the future of a life outside—especially those from historically excluded communities.

A city or town can make their spaces more welcoming via simple things like signage, benches and picnic tables or with culturally relevant art. Transportation agencies can redirect bus routes, especially on weekends, making it easier to get to beaches, lakes or the mountains. The public sector can support youth groups that bring kids on immersive multiday outings.

Legislatures and agencies have started investing in programs like outdoor equity funds to enhance access and participation in outdoor activities by underserved communities.

For example, the New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund has supported 128 organizations to get more than 40,000 youth of color into the outdoors since the program was created in 2020<sup>36</sup>. Beneficiaries of the program, including youth from The Semilla Project, testified that the Equity Fund changed their lives.

In Washington state, the No Child Left Inside program has supported more than 135,000 youth getting outside for a total of 4.6 million hours<sup>37</sup>. Colorado’s Generation Wild has supported 12 communities that have created 2,140 regionally relevant opportunities for more than 40,000 youth<sup>38</sup>.

Now, the opportunity is to bring these programs to every community.



“Environmental education connects people and nature, prepares students for the future, empowers environmental stewards of all ages, builds community and absolutely changes lives. It’s the secret sauce for creating healthier and more just communities. Although education is one of the most strategic investments we can make, it remains critically underfunded.”

—JUDY BRAUS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

**Solution 2 —**

**Environmental Education for All**

*Helping to ensure a more just and sustainable future.*

**THE CHALLENGE**

All schoolchildren deserve high-quality education, including outdoors. Studies of environmental education programs for at-risk populations show that students who spend time in nature improve their science test scores and increase skills in cooperation and conflict resolution, with these benefits persisting for months<sup>39</sup>.

Unfortunately, not everyone has access to safe outdoor spaces or the educational experiences that can help promote learning. Funding remains the largest barrier to scaling programs that get students outside and provide educational experiences for adults.

**THE SOLUTIONS**

Environmental education, across all ages, plays a critical role in cultivating environmental stewardship values by increasing awareness and knowledge, empowering individuals to get engaged in creating healthier communities, promoting more sustainable behaviors, nurturing critical thinking, fostering environmental stewardship and developing a connection with nature.

States and schools are increasing investments in educational experiences in green spaces on schoolyards, and in communities, as part of formal school initiatives or part of learning outside of school. Through activities like field trips, nature walks or outdoor workshops, students can observe and interact with the natural world, fostering a sense of wonder and respect.

We can also bring the benefits of environmental education to all ages and communities. For example, community-based citizen science is something that can engage communities and help scientists and local governments understand more about issues in the community. However, these programs require ongoing public support and community investment.

1 in 4 people in the U.S. are living with a disability

### Solution 3 —

## Easy Access to Gear, from the Basics to E-Bikes

*Time outside should be accessible and affordable for all.*

### THE CHALLENGE

Too often, outdoor culture can appear unwelcoming or exclusive. It can suggest that you have to look, act or dress a certain way; or have particular skills and aspirations to achieve certain performance levels in order to be considered “outdoorsy.” This is compounded by financial considerations: costs of accessing quality gear or outdoor experiences<sup>40</sup>. For instance, lower-income households may not be able to afford e-bikes<sup>41</sup>, leading to disparities in access to this new, sustainable mode of transportation.

### THE SOLUTIONS

Especially in the last two decades, the country has seen a proliferation in gear and apparel for outdoor activities—at a range of price points<sup>42</sup>—meaning the basics are more and more attainable.

Still, some outdoor recreation gear can seem too expensive. Here, the nonprofit and for-profit sectors are working on new business models and companies are working on “circular pathways” to put that gear to greater use. REI recently launched Re/Supply™, a used gear trade-in program to extend the lifespan and increase affordability of gear<sup>43</sup>. Our partners at Outdoors Empowered Network are leading the creation of gear lockers across the country<sup>44</sup>.

Perhaps most ambitious, cities and states are adopting e-bike incentives. These programs are typically designed to help lower-income communities access e-bikes, with incentives ranging upward of \$1,500. Others are developing lending libraries or ride-to-own programs.

One such program in Denver is already delivering results. In the first few months of their e-bike rebate program, Denver issued more than 4,700 rebates with 67% going to low-income residents. Low-income residents reported using their e-bikes 50% more than standard recipients (32 miles per week)<sup>45</sup>. As of April 2023, seven states have passed e-bike incentive programs, with more than a dozen cities and states actively considering proposals<sup>46</sup>. Momentum is growing for policies to make e-biking available for all.







7 out of every 10 outdoor recreation participants are white

#### Solution 4 —

### Establish and Protect Culturally Significant Places

*Protecting and embracing the diverse narratives that shape our landscapes.*

#### THE CHALLENGE

Who and what do we remember, and how? Whose stories and milestones matter enough to be celebrated on a national scale? Which communities see places that are meaningful to their histories protected and preserved? Today, U.S. national parks, monuments and other public lands preserve an imbalanced collection of cultures and stories. In fact, just one-quarter of national parks and monuments are dedicated to telling the stories of diverse communities. This is one of the most visible expressions of the nature gap<sup>47</sup>.

#### THE SOLUTIONS

Over the last several years, renewed attention has been paid to efforts to designate parks and places that are significant to communities who have traditionally been left out of the narrative. By and large, these efforts have been led by communities most impacted by the nature gap. From Stonewall National Monument in New York City that honors a watershed moment in LGBTQ+ history to the Castner Range National Monument outside of El Paso, Texas, newly established to provide critical recreation areas for nature-deprived Latino communities and to honor the region's military history—the work to protect culturally significant places has spurred dialogue across our society. It is an endeavor helping our country to embrace the diverse narratives that shape our landscapes and to protect and steward new places for the enjoyment of all.

#### OUTSIDE IN 5 PARTNER IN ACTION

## Avi Kwa Ame National Monument

Spanning more than 500,000 acres in southern Nevada that sit at the edge of the world's largest Joshua tree forest, Avi Kwa Ame National Monument preserves cultural resources for dozens of tribal communities, precious wildlife habitat and areas for recreation.

But the establishment of this monument is a story of how park creation not only extends access to the outdoors for countless individuals, but also helps us explore our country's fuller history.

For 10 Yuman-speaking tribes in the region, Avi Kwa Ame (pronounced Ah-VEE kwa-ah-may)—also known as Spirit Mountain—is a sacred site connected to their creation stories and ancestors. For other tribal communities like the Hopi and Southern Paiute, it holds importance for customs that have been practiced for millennia. Since the 1950s, tribal elders sought formal protection for this mountain and its surrounding landscapes from growing development

pressures from the greater Las Vegas area. Over time, conservationists also recognized its unique ecological profile, which is home to more than 200 native plant species, the high-desert tortoise, near-threatened Gila monster, endangered desert bighorn sheep, gilded flickers and bald eagles. More recently, the value of the area to address the region's dramatic nature gap, where 93% of people of color are nature deprived, became another animating reason to protect Avi Kwa Ame.

By 1999, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property, but it wasn't until 2023 that collective efforts were finally rewarded with the establishment of Avi Kwa Ame National Monument by President Biden. With this designation, Avi Kwa Ame is protected from future industrial development.

To date, Avi Kwa Ame is one of the only national monuments to honor the history of Indigenous peoples in the U.S.—people who have stewarded our natural world since time immemorial<sup>48</sup>.

## 5 ways to act

### ENABLE BELONGING AND ACCESS OUTSIDE

#### 1 — Learn More

Explore research compiled by the North American Association for Environmental Education that shows how [environmental education leads to positive outcomes](#) in early childhood.

#### 2 — Raise Your Voice

Take Action with REI to pass the [Living Schoolyards Act](#), which provides grants to schools to transform their schoolyards into outdoor learning environments.

#### 3 — Get Inspired

Learn more about the [New Mexico Outdoor Equity Fund](#), which has helped more than 40,000 youth have a positive experience outside since 2020.

#### 4 — Check for Community E-Bike Incentives

Look up existing e-bike incentive programs on the [Transportation Research and Education Center's tracker](#) to make sure you don't miss a good deal or to advocate for incentives in your community. Want to support the creation of an e-bike incentive program? Take a look at [PeopleForBikes toolkit of e-bike incentive programs](#) to learn about best practices and success to date.

#### 5 — Share Your Ideas

The Youth Outdoor Policy Partnership has created a tool for legislators and community leaders to help share the benefits of the outdoors with more young people through the Youth Outdoor Policy Playbook. [Read about their ideas and share your own.](#)



# Engage in Cooperative Action

Across the history of REI Co-op, we have been bringing people and nature closer together, pursuing our unwavering belief that time outside makes for a life well lived.

For decades, we've supported volunteer and philanthropic initiatives aimed at fostering nature access and promoting conservation. We've donated \$125 million to the outdoor recreation nonprofit sector. But clearly there is more to do.

To accomplish our goal of getting everyone in America—regardless of where they live—Outside in 5 minutes or less, we are leaning on what we call Cooperative Action.

We need to do more as a broader community of thousands of employees, millions of members and hundreds of partners across the country—who are all connected by a shared love of the outdoors and a belief that everyone should be able to enjoy it.

## Here are 5 ways that you can join us

### 1 — Support the Local and National Community of Nonprofit Change Agents

The U.S. has thousands of nonprofits working tirelessly to close the nature gap. To help grow and sustain this community of change agents, REI launched the [REI Cooperative Action Fund](#) in 2021. The Fund is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Because of REI's ongoing financial and in-kind contributions, 100% of donations to the Fund from the general public can be aimed at impactful organizations working to create a more equitable outdoors.

### 2 — Take Time to Volunteer

Volunteers help with stewardship projects by giving lessons to folks looking to learn a new activity, supporting events and more. Volunteer opportunities bring together people with similar outdoor passions and strengthen the broader community. To see just a sampling of organizations where you can volunteer, visit [REIfund.org/grantees](#).

### 3 — Write Your Lawmaker

The [REI Cooperative Action Network](#) mobilizes our millions-strong community in the broader movements to create a more just and inclusive outdoors. We make it easy for our community to join us in advocating for life outside to decision-makers. Through timely calls to action, compelling stories and easy-to-use resources, we inspire meaningful action for the outdoors and for our community. Find easy ways to connect, educate and advocate on Outside in 5 at [REI.com/outside-in-5/act](#).

### 4 — Speak Up With Your City Council and State Legislature

The saying that “all politics is local” is especially true when it comes to creating green spaces and making access to the outdoors easier. Local leaders often respond to the neighborhoods and community members who speak out the most often and the loudest. It can be a challenge to find time to attend town council meetings, but with dedication and persistence it can pay off. Visit your local jurisdiction's website for information on the cadence of meetings and their agendas.

### 5 — Vote

Every election can have a major impact on Outside in 5 and offers a chance to elect leaders who influence things like park funding, maintenance, access to green spaces and so much more. Especially as lawmakers grow more aware of the importance of nature access, we can expect more options to vote for trails, bike lanes, clean air and candidates who support them.

## REI COOPERATIVE ACTION FUND

REI has long believed that our connection to nature is fundamental for the health and well-being of all people and that time outside is a human right.

But today, millions of Americans lack access to the outdoors, and far too many people do not feel a sense of safety or belonging outside.

That is why REI founded the REI Cooperative Action Fund, a community-driven nonprofit that gives grants and other support to nonprofit organizations across the country doing the deep and essential work to create a more equitable outdoors for everyone.

There is no simple or singular solution to this challenge. It takes community-wide action to ensure all people have their right to the outdoors honored and protected. To catalyze this work, the REI Cooperative Action Fund intentionally focuses on marginalized groups. It is these very groups who are leading the way in addressing barriers and creating newfound opportunities to evoke joy and belonging outside, resulting in improved health and well-being for people, communities and our planet.

Whether connecting people outside, creating spaces outside or centering health outside, the Fund's grantmaking strategy allows it the familiarity and flexibility to respond to the needs of communities across the country through a trust-based approach. They invite fellow outdoor lovers to join in the mission to close the nature gap and champion the health and well-being of people and communities everywhere.

To learn more, visit [REIfund.org](https://REIfund.org)

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## COOPERATIVE ACTION NETWORK

The Cooperative Action Network began with a premise we've long known to be true. When people come together around a shared love of the outdoors, they are unstoppable.

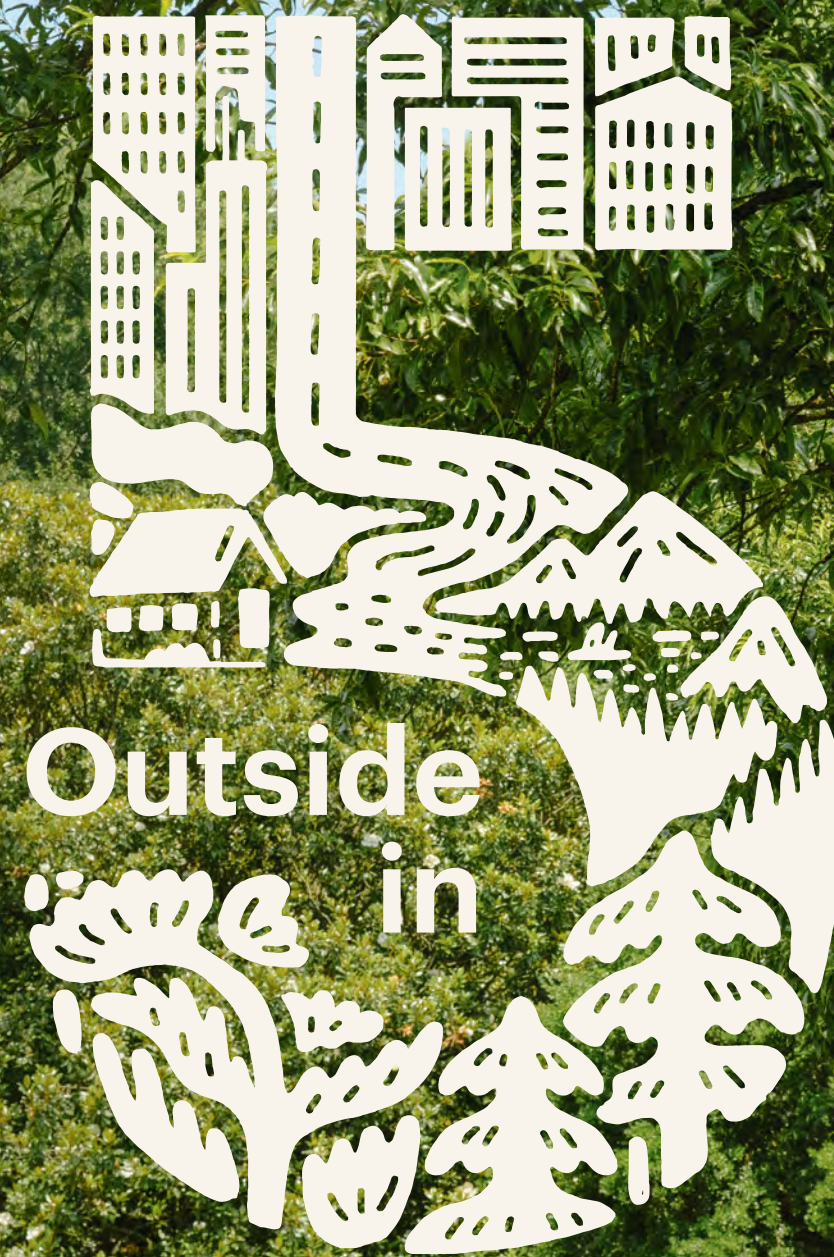
Now a community of millions of members, thousands of employees and hundreds of partner organizations nationwide, REI Co-op created the Cooperative Action Network to mobilize them in the movements to take climate action and create a more just and inclusive outdoors. Working together, we identify the most pressing opportunities to make a difference and make it easy to advocate for policies that matter.

Our community is powerful. Since launching this program, more than 100,000 individuals have sent almost half a million messages to decision-makers on issues that matter and helped to pass historic bills that are shaping the future of life outside. From the largest reforestation bill in decades to new federal funding for safe and connected biking and running trails near home, the Cooperative Action Network is already securing victories for the outdoor community and making a real impact in people's lives.

Visit [REI.com/act](https://REI.com/act) for the latest opportunities to engage, with easy-to-use tools, powerful storytelling and civic engagement resources that inspire, inform and empower our movement.

Cooperative  
Action  
NETWORK

Because time  
outside is  
fundamental to  
a life well lived



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# Outside in

