

A Shared Love for the Outdoors

While partisan politics might be dividing us on social media and in the online world, Westerners' experiences in the outdoors and an interest in nature are common ties. Nearly universally they worry about kids not spending enough time outdoors and say getting out in nature would help the mental health crisis in youth today. Western voters tell us they have "loved" many natural places they have visited and a whole host more are on their "bucket list." Not only do the vast majority engage in outdoor recreation pursuits, but they are following news about nature, downloading nature apps or podcasts and contributing to nature-related causes. Importantly in this election year, they continue to say that a candidates' stance on outdoors issues is very important even when compared to other prominent issues.

A love for the outdoors and public lands is a shared bond among Westerners. The vast majority (87 percent) have visited national public lands in the last year, with no partisan distinction and a modest age gap (94 percent of Gen Z and Millennials have visited national public lands in the past year, compared to 80 percent of Baby Boomers).

This year, Westerners shared what public lands they have visited and absolutely "loved." Their love letter is lengthy – with nearly 200 different locations mentioned and many flat out saying that they loved "all" they have visited. While we heard about locations as diverse as Saguaro National Park to the Medicine Bow National Forest to state and local parks too numerous to mention, Westerners are most likely to "just say yes" to their favorite public lands...



- ♥ Yellowstone (24%)
- ♥ Grand Canyon (10%)
- ♥ Glacier National Park (7%)
- ♥ Zion National Park (6%)
- ♥ Rocky Mountain National Park (5%)

Many of these parks pop up on their bucket list as well, but even more public lands outside of the Western U.S. enter the top tier for their desired travels, from Denali to the Everglades, to the Appalachian trail, Niagara Falls and the Great Smoky Mountains.

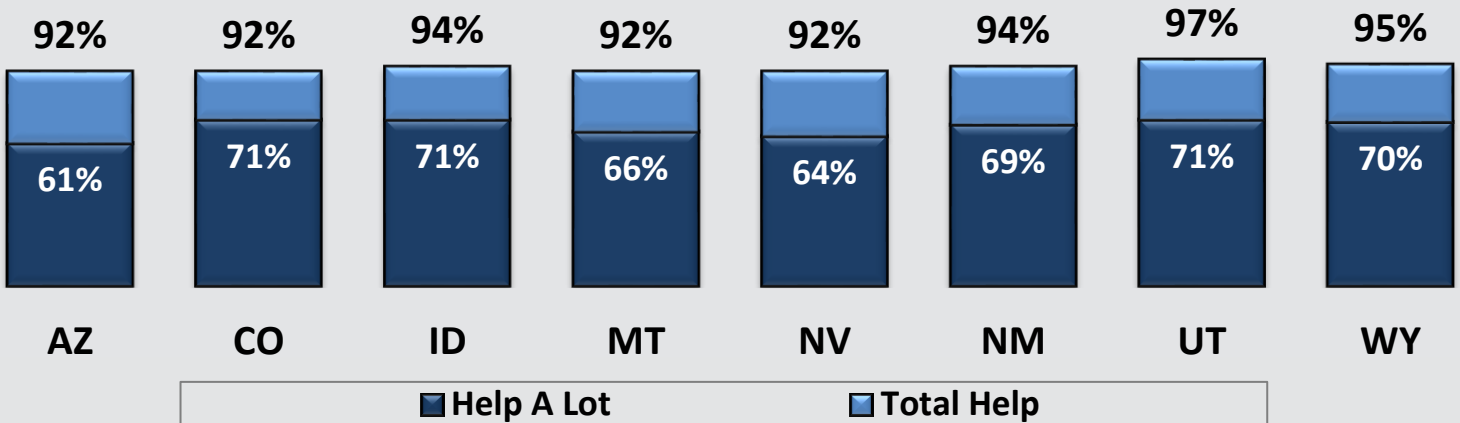
Westerners' appreciation for these public lands is evident in many comments, with one Latino man in Colorado expressing his gratitude for these places having been conserved: *"Thank you Teddy Roosevelt, you knew what was up."*



Westerners want the next generation to share in this appreciation for the outdoors and believe that a lack of time spent in nature is a problem. A majority of Western voters view children not spending enough time outdoors as a very serious problem, and nearly all think more time in nature would help the mental crisis in our kids. A majority (53 percent) say that

"children not spending enough time in the outdoors" is an extremely or very serious problem, with 87 percent saying it is at least a somewhat serious problem. More than nine-in-ten in every state say that spending more time in nature would help mental health problems in children, with two-thirds of Westerners saying it would help "a lot."

Spending More Time Outdoors in Nature Would Help Mental Health of Young People



A majority of Republicans (68 percent), independents (67 percent) and Democrats (64 percent) all say nature could alleviate the mental health crisis “a lot.” Moms (76 percent), rural residents (73 percent) and hunters and anglers (71 percent) are some of the most likely to say nature would help kids’ mental health a lot.

Western voters not only get outdoors themselves, but engage with nature and wildlife in a host of ways. Voters in this region live up to the stereotype as outdoorsy



people. More than nine-in-ten say that they regularly engage in some sort of outdoor recreation, with hiking (73 percent), camping (49 percent), picnicking (43 percent) and viewing wildlife/birding (38 percent) the most popular in every state. While there are a few partisan distinctions – Republicans tend to camp more than Democrats, for example, while Democrats are more likely to hike – both ends of the partisan spectrum engage regularly in some form of outdoor recreation.

For the first time in the 14-year history of this survey, Westerners were asked how else they engage with nature, wildlife and outdoor recreation. The survey found that:

- ✓ **57** percent sought out news on nature, wildlife or recreation;
- ✓ **39** percent donated money or volunteered to help nature or wildlife;
- ✓ **38** percent had a recreation, hiking or nature app on their phone; and,
- ✓ **34** percent listened to a podcast or followed someone online who focuses on nature or the environment.

Fully three-quarters (75 percent) have taken part in at least one of these actions related to the outdoors, with 29 percent engaging in three or all four of these actions. The most “outdoors engaged” voters are younger (41 percent of Millennials and Gen Z engaged in most of these actions – 20 points higher than their older counterparts); college-educated (34 percent); sportsmen (37 percent); voters who engage in outdoor recreation pursuits especially camping (44 percent); and who visit national public lands frequently (57 percent of those who visited 20 or more times).

Most Western voters say that conservation and outdoors issues will be a factor in their decisions about who to support in this election year. Fully 85 percent say that compared to other issues like the economy, health care and education that “issues involving clean water, clean air, wildlife and public lands”



are very or somewhat important. Only 14 percent say these issues are not important. Notably, those saying these outdoors issues are at least somewhat important has ticked up over time from, 75 percent in 2016 to 80 percent in 2020 and 85 percent today. The recent increase from the last presidential election has actually been more pronounced among Republicans in the West (74 percent say these issues are important, up 6 points from 2020), while it has dropped slightly among independent voters and remained relatively stable among Democrats.

Importance of Issues Involving Clean Water, Clean Air, Wildlife & Public Lands

