



# OUTDOOR FOUNDATION®

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside San Diego



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Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Twin Cities

## LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**2021 marked the 21st full year of operations by the Outdoor Foundation. Since our launch of the Thrive Outside Community Initiative in 2019, we have connected 49,855 youth and their families to the joy, wonder, and myriad benefits of the outdoors.**

Despite the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19, we made tremendous progress last year in building the Thrive Outside Network throughout the country, reaching a total of 14,849 youth in our eight communities of focus. As you read this report, you'll see evidence of the transformational impact our network delivers, insights from our 2021 research reports, and success stories from our partners across the country. Specifically, we are proud to look back on the following accomplishments:

- We launched and onboarded Thrive Outside Cohort Two, welcoming the communities of Maine, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and the Twin Cities region to the Thrive Outside family.
- We released groundbreaking research on outdoor participation trends in the summer, highlighting the critical need to help bring youth and their families outside and inspire them to build life-long relationships with the outdoors.
- We celebrated National Thrive Outside Day nationwide this fall, with inclusive and accessible outdoor programming and engagement opportunities in our eight Thrive Outside Communities, serving over 1,000 individual youth.

Our latest research demonstrates that Thrive Outside program providers and partner organizations highly value the network. Overall, more than 90 percent of Thrive program providers indicated they are highly satisfied with the network, particularly its ability to provide organizations with the following:

- **Opportunities to network with other program providers and share information and resources.**
- **Increases in individual organizations' capacities to serve their communities.**
- **Heightened public profiles of and potential for more funding for organizations who are working within the Thrive Outside Network.**

These successes have only increased our momentum for the work that lies ahead. I sincerely thank you for your generous contributions of time, energy, ideas and financial support that helped make 2021 such a successful year. This work would not be possible without your support.

Onward,



Executive Director



# We All Thrive Outside

The Outdoor Foundation is dedicated to getting people outside for their health, the health of communities, and the health of the outdoor industry. Through community investments and groundbreaking research, we work with partners across the country to address equity barriers and help make the outdoors accessible for all.

The Outdoor Foundation's Thrive Outside Initiative awards multi-year, capacity-building grants to diverse communities to build and strengthen networks that provide children and families with repeat and reinforcing experiences in the outdoors. This community-led initiative is built with trusted local and national partners and is supported by three years of funding and varying levels of ongoing capacity support after the initial three-year grant. Together, we're working

to create a more inclusive and accessible outdoor experience for all.

We know that in order to enact real change, we must utilize a systemic approach that focuses on relationships between organizations and all community partners. Because of this, the **collective impact model\*** is at the core of Thrive Outside. Collective impact brings people together—in a structured way—to achieve social change. Our work integrates mechanisms in which backbone organizations, service and program providers, and community partners can pool resources and insights as well as build relationships with each other. This boosts the capacity of every Thrive Outside Community and strengthens the full national network.



## \*What is Collective Impact?

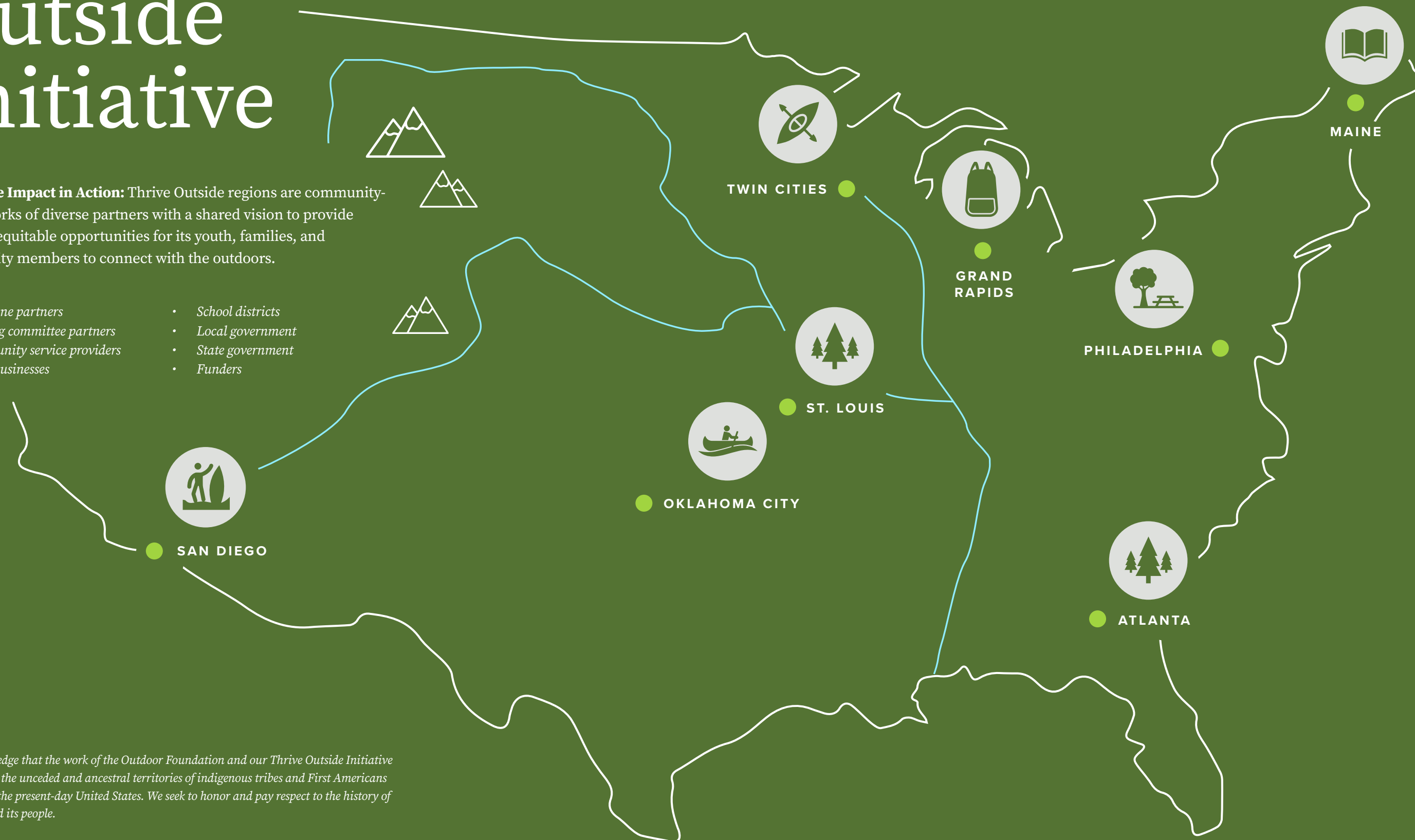
*Collective Impact Initiatives are long-term commitments by a group of stakeholders from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Their actions are supported by a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, and ongoing communication and are staffed by an independent backbone organization.*

COLLECTIVE IMPACT, STANFORD SOCIAL INNOVATION REVIEW, 2021

# 2021 Thrive Outside Initiative

**Collective Impact in Action:** Thrive Outside regions are community-led networks of diverse partners with a shared vision to provide positive, equitable opportunities for its youth, families, and community members to connect with the outdoors.

- Backbone partners
- Steering committee partners
- Community service providers
- Local businesses
- School districts
- Local government
- State government
- Funders



*We acknowledge that the work of the Outdoor Foundation and our Thrive Outside Initiative spans across the unceded and ancestral territories of indigenous tribes and First Americans throughout the present-day United States. We seek to honor and pay respect to the history of this land and its people.*





## Atlanta

**Backbone Organization:** West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (formerly The Trust for Public Land)

**Steering Committee Partners:** YMCA, Boys & Girls Club of Metro Atlanta, Greening Youth Foundation, Chattahoochee Nature Center, and Chattahoochee Riverkeeper

**Community Partners:** Georgia Forestry Foundation, Nantahala Outdoor Center, Atlanta Camp Best Friends, Atlanta Dept. of Parks and Recreation, and Trees Atlanta



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Atlanta



## Grand Rapids

**Backbone Organization:** Our Community's Children

**Steering Committee Partners:** Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation, Grand Rapids Public Schools, and Grand Rapids Environmental Education Network

**Community Partners:** Blandford Nature Center, Boys & Girls Club of Grand Rapids Youth, Commonwealth, Camp Newaygo, Expanded Learning Opportunities Network, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, Grand Rapids Audubon Club, Grand Rapids Children's Museum, Groundswell, John Ball Zoo, Latino Outdoors GR, Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds, Outdoor Afro, Sierra Club Michigan Chapter, Switchback Gear Exchange, and West Michigan Environmental Action Council



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Grand Rapids



## Oklahoma City

**Backbone Organization:** RIVERSPORT Foundation

**Steering Committee Partners:** OKC Parks & Recreation, Oklahoma City Indian Clinic, Latino Community Development Agency (LCDA), YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City, Bike Club, OKC Public Schools Native American Services, and John Rex Charter School

**Community Partners:** Boys & Girls Club of Oklahoma County, Last Frontier Council—Boy Scouts of America, National Park Service, Course for Change, ReMerge, Sunbeam Family Services, EmpowerOKC, and OKC Public Schools



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Oklahoma City



## San Diego

**Backbone Organization:** The San Diego Foundation

**Steering Committee Partners:** Outdoor Outreach, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, YMCA of San Diego, University of San Diego Nonprofit Institute, County of San Diego Parks and Recreation, and Parks California

**Community Partners:** Earth Discovery Institute, Ocean Connectors, San Diego Audubon Society, Friends of San Diego Wildlife Southwest Wetlands Interpretive, Southwest Wetland Interpretive Association, California State Parks, San Diego Zoo Global, Living Coast Discovery Center, San Elijo Lagoon Conservancy, Wildcoast, Casa Familiar, and Indigenous Regeneration



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside San Diego



## Maine

**Backbone Organization:** Nature Based Education Consortium

**Steering Committee Partners:** Maine Environmental Education Association, Schoodic Institute, Maine Science Teachers Association, Maine Environmental Changemakers, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Maine Audubon, Maine Dept. of Education, University of Maine, Farmington Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance, University of Maine Cooperative Extension 4-H Camp and Learning Centers, The Nature Conservancy, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and Maine Land Trust Network

**Community Partners:** Adaptive Outdoor Education Center, Bryant Pond 4H, Chewonki Foundation, Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust, Friends of Acadia, Participant Gulf of Maine Research Institute, Kennebunk Climate Initiative, Lead with Nature, Maine Ag in the Classroom, Maine Audubon, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, Maine Environmental Education Association, Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance, Maine TREE Foundation/Project Learning, National Park Service, Rural Aspiration, Schoodic Institute, Tanglewood 4H Center, Teens to Trails, The Ecology School, The Nature Conservancy, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Wassookeag Learning Community, Regional School Unit 89, Maine Science Teachers, The Sierra Club Maine, and Maine Initiatives

## Philadelphia

**Backbone Organization:** National Wildlife Federation

**Steering Committee Partners:** Pennsylvania Environmental Council, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, New Jersey Audubon, John Heniz National Wildlife Refuge, Berks Nature, Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed, and Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed

**Community Partners:** Alliance for Watershed Education (23 environmental and nature education centers), Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed (150+ NGOs), and the Circuit Trails Coalition (50 NGOs and 15 agencies)

## St. Louis

**Backbone Organization:** River City Outdoors Collaborative

**Steering Committee Partners:** Missouri Confluence Waterkeeper, Terrain Magazine, Mound City Foundation, Outdoor Afro, and Normalizing Black Women in Nature

**Community Partners:** Big Muddy Adventures, Great Rivers Greenway, St. Louis Public Schools, Maplewood Richmond Heights Public Schools, Boys & Girls Club, Earth's Classroom, Trailnet, GO! St. Louis, St. Louis BWorks, Missouri Interscholastic Cycling League, Gateway to the Great Outdoors, Shaw Nature Reserve (Missouri Botanical Garden), Missouri Botanical Garden's Outdoor Youth Corps, Missouri River Relief, and Upper Limits

## Twin Cities

**Backbone Organization:** Wilderness Inquiry

**Steering Committee Partners:** MEO Collaborative Career Pathways, Mississippi River Activation, Affinity Travel, and Outdoor Credit Recovery

**Community Partners:** St. Paul Public Schools, Minneapolis Public Schools, Friends of the Mississippi River, Minnesota Environmental Partnership, Environmental Initiative, Center for Energy and Environment, Clean Water Action, Climate Generation, Great Plains Institute, Metro Blooms, The Nature Conservancy, Freshwater Society, Conservation Corps, Capitol Region Watershed, Mississippi Park Connection, Wilderness Inquiry, Minnesota Academy of Science, City of St. Paul, National Park Service, Girl Scouts River Valleys, Lee Vue Consulting, Great River Greening, Lower Phalen Creek Project



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Maine



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Greater Philadelphia



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside St. Louis



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Twin Cities





Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Atlanta

COHORT ONE

# Atlanta

In 2021, the Thrive Outside Atlanta network, led by The Trust of Public Land, provided youth with unforgettable experiences along the Chattahoochee River and through events such as National Thrive Outside Day. The network also welcomed three new partners: Atlanta Dept. of Parks and Recreation (Camp Best Friends), Georgia Forestry Foundation, and the Nantahala Outdoor Center. Additionally, it was announced that West Atlanta Watershed will be the program's backbone partner beginning in 2022.

**Key Focus Areas:** Access and programming around Chattahoochee River, biking, and green space preservation and restoration

*"We're trying to expose them to everything so that they are able to sit back and be like, 'I want to take this path.' If we see kids begin to kind of take paths that they never would have traveled down, for us it's extremely successful because now we've opened their eyes to something that they've never thought they would be able to do, and now they see that there's an opportunity out there for something they enjoy doing."*

**TONY KIMBROUGH**  
Family YMCA Executive Director





Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Grand Rapids

COHORT ONE

# Grand Rapids

Thrive Outside Grand Rapids launched its Gear Library in 2021, expanding equitable access to outdoor recreation gear and partner programming to youth throughout the region. This included free walk-in camping workshops, tent setup demos, supplying yard games for Boys & Girls Club events, training partner organization staff on the use of camping stoves for use with the families they serve, and more.

**Key Focus Areas:** Gear Library, public-private partnerships, and school-based programming

*“The cold-weather gear we borrowed from the Thrive Outside Grand Rapids Gear Library made our camping trip exceptional since it was quite colder and wetter than we had planned! All of our first-time campers were able to put together all their tents unassisted!”*

GRANDVILLE AVENUE ARTS & HUMANITIES





Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Oklahoma City

COHORT ONE

# Oklahoma City

Thrive Outside Oklahoma City (OKC) celebrated its biggest summer of camps and field trips in 2021. Youth participants engaged in archery, kayaking, fishing, camping, beekeeping, knot-tying, backcountry cooking, wildlife education, and more. Thrive Outside OKC also partnered to provide adventure therapy programming for participants.

**Key Focus Areas:** Water sports including whitewater rafting and kayaking, Adventure Therapy Program, and biking and running programs

*“The Thrive Outside OKC initiative has given our Native American students who live in OKC the opportunity to experience this wonderful new world of water sports and outdoor activity. They can see that there are sports other than what is offered at their school and that movement and exercise can be fun. More importantly, it gives our students a sense of access and equity. This place no longer has to be seen as a place that only certain people can go to. It’s a place for everyone!”*

**DR. STAR YELLOWFISH**

Director, Native American Student Services, OKC Public Schools





Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside San Diego

COHORT ONE

# San Diego

Thrive Outside San Diego was active in a variety of programming, advocacy, and leadership-development work in 2021. They partnered with The San Diego Foundation and REI on a needs assessment survey. Interior Secretary Haaland visited the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge to discuss the important conservation work of urban wildlife refuges and honor Hispanic Heritage Month. Outdoor Outreach provided critical support and outdoor recreational activities for over 1,400 unaccompanied children sheltered at the San Diego Convention Center. Additionally, Leaders for Outdoor Equity (LOE) was launched to help build the next generation of land managers, conservationists, outdoor educators, and recreational outfitters.

**Key Focus Areas:** Ocean and mountain activities, collaboration with San Diego County Behavioral Health Initiative, local and state advocacy to address equity barriers, youth and BIPOC leadership development, (e.g., Leaders for Outdoor Equity)

*“My first overnight in Joshua Tree was just the first time that I felt like the world was OK. Someone did this for me. Someone helped me, encouraged me, and was there for me. It gave me the opportunity to build something within me that was stronger. Finding the outdoors and finding that inner peace—all I wanted to do was make that possible for others so that they could begin to heal.”*

**LEXUS MORROW**

Outdoor Outreach Program Graduate and Development Coordinator



## COHORT TWO

# Maine

Thrive Outside Maine spent the last year building a multi-sector network of organizations focused on building support for and equitable access to outdoor learning opportunities for all Maine youth. The network is driven by the shared belief that all Maine youth deserve the opportunity to learn outside in ways that connect them to their community and the natural world. Two major initial efforts of Thrive Outside Maine were helping to launch the Outdoor Equity Fund and creating a climate education bill in the state. In addition, the community's Stories for Change working group, a collaborative storytelling campaign centering BIPOC outdoor stories, published its first two stories. The network also launched the Maine GearShare library, with the goal of increasing outdoor participation and access to outdoor gear and equipment for Maine youth.

**Key Focus Areas:** Stories for Change working group, Maine GearShare library, advocacy to regrant Outdoor Equity Funds, and outdoor education curriculum

*“Being outside, being with friends, being in community, always sharing food, and sharing responsibilities ... was an opportunity to connect with the people who were around me in the absence of some of the distractions that happened in our day to day lives.”*

**RED FONG**

Nature Based Education Consortium Stories for Change Working Group



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Maine



COHORT TWO

# Philadelphia

Thrive Outside Greater Philadelphia's goal is to create pathways for equitable access that take into consideration the unique barriers different communities in the Philadelphia area experience. To meet this goal, the region has built a diverse steering committee and selected four subregional "hub" areas where they are focused on developing programs and coordinating activities designed to give community members access to lifelong outdoor recreational opportunities. The region's first National Thrive Outside Day brought together a diverse group of all ages to walk around Tacony Creek Park in northeast Philadelphia, one of the selected hubs.

**Key Focus Areas:** Delaware River Watershed, hub model, and experiential water and trail programming

*"Working with Thrive Outside will strengthen amazing conservation partnerships across the Delaware watershed to overcome the unique barriers our communities experience in getting outdoors. We are excited to team up with Thrive Outside to expand access to the outdoors for Black, Latinx, and frontline communities and implement on-the-ground activities that ensure everyone is able to safely enjoy nature."*

**COLLIN O'MARA**

National Wildlife Federation President and CEO



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Greater Philadelphia



COHORT TWO

# St. Louis

Thrive Outside St. Louis aims to activate a network of nonprofits, schools, health organizations, recreation providers, and corporate and governmental partners to build a coalition to engage the community in repeat and reinforcing outdoor experiences. With an emphasis on youth and underserved populations, its goal is to foster outdoor experiences to create passionate outdoor enthusiasts. Key initiatives include a St. Louis Public School Paddling Program, development of the Missouri River Recreational Water Trail, Mountain Bike and Adventure Club programs, support for grassroots outdoor community groups, and city park beautification programs. The region also celebrated National Thrive Outside Day, during which youth participants paddled with Big Muddy Adventures on the Mississippi River to the St. Louis Gateway Arch National Monument.

**Key Focus Areas:** Youth leadership programming, river-based activities in Missouri and on the Mississippi River, and city park/neighborhood beautification

*“We are activating an inclusive network of community partners that shatters barriers to access and empowers all St. Louisans to experience the transformative power of nature in our own backyard.”*

**RACHEL BARTELS**

River City Outdoors Steering Committee Member



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside St. Louis



COHORT TWO

# Twin Cities

In the Twin Cities, partners came together with the ultimate goal of increasing access to the outdoors for youth and families that have been traditionally underrepresented in the outdoors or experience barriers to outdoor participation. During the first few months, listening sessions were held to learn more about the landscape, known barriers to outdoor access, and potential solutions to increase participation. Key takeaways have driven how Thrive Outside Twin Cities is moving forward to address the needs to increase representation, break down cost barriers, ensure safety in the outdoors for BIPOC youth, and develop cultural relevance in programs. Key focus areas with multiple partners in each area include the following:

- Building career pathways through a collaborative partner group and supporting Twin Cities fellowship programs.
- Community engagement and program development through river activation and advancement of affinity group experiences. Toward the end of environmental education outcomes, young people responded favorably and quickly to low-dosage exposure to the outdoors. It may be likely that program providers can administer shorter, less expensive programs if the desired outcome is just environmental education.
- Program implementation and advancement through expansion of credit recovery outdoors and CanoeMobile opportunities in partnership with multi-sector organizations.

**Key Focus Areas:** Deep community engagement, landscape assessment and barrier mapping, and river-based activities on the Mississippi River

*“Wilderness Inquiry is thrilled to partner with the Outdoor Foundation to support a collective impact approach to youth outdoor engagement in the Twin Cities, breaking down barriers to access to ensure that all youth can learn, grow, and thrive in the outdoors. Thrive Outside Twin Cities provides an incredible opportunity to build meaningful, equitable pathways to outdoor participation for Minnesota youth and families.”*

**ERIKA RIVERS**

Wilderness Inquiry Executive Director

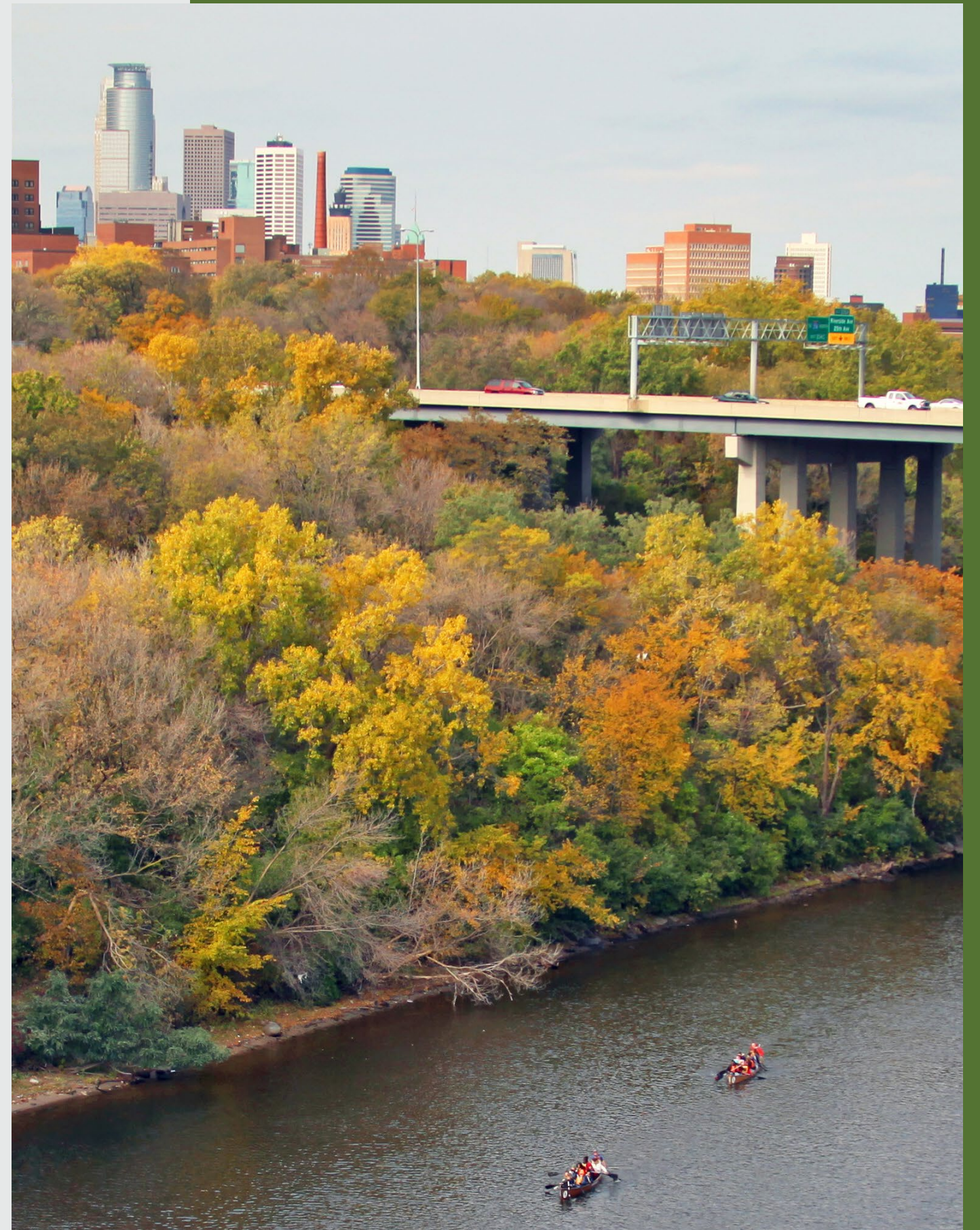


Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside Twin Cities



# Evaluation

**Our Hypothesis:** When children, youth, and families have access to repeat and reinforcing positive outdoor experiences, they are more likely to engage for the long term in the outdoors through time, care, and concern—creating healthy individuals, communities, and economies. Our 2021 evaluation focused on the “repeat and reinforcing” aspect of the Outdoor Foundation’s hypothesis by assessing the impact of outdoor experience dosage on Positive Youth Development (PYD) and environmental education outcomes. Working with cohort one backbone organizations, we created a youth survey and supplemented that data with youth interviews, interviews with backbone organizations, and a survey on network impacts. The youth survey had a completion rate of 3 percent in 2021, with 155 respondents providing full data. Those youth respondents were overwhelmingly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and between the ages of 11 and 14. In total, cohort one sites delivered 4,463 hours of programming and served 14,849 young people.

## Key Findings:

- All Thrive Outside retrospective survey questions showed improvements in desired outcomes, particularly in questions related to Connection to Nature and self-efficacy, an important element of Positive Youth Development (PYD).
- Toward the end of environmental education outcomes, young people responded favorably and quickly to low-dosage exposure to the outdoors. It may be likely that program providers can administer shorter, less expensive programs if the desired outcome is just environmental education.
- To realize improvements in PYD outcomes, doses greater than 1 day are most effective.



Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside San Diego





Photo courtesy of Thrive Outside San Diego

# Research

The Outdoor Foundation's research investigates the depth and effect of Americans' participation in outdoor recreation. Each year, the Outdoor Foundation produces the Outdoor Participation Trends Report—the largest, most comprehensive research report on outdoor recreation participation. The Outdoor Foundation also teams up with retailers and other organizations to produce reports on individual outdoor activities, like camping and fishing. The reports take a broad look at overall trends in participation, while providing detailed information on important demographics. Some also examine less tangible data, like perceptions and stereotypes. With dramatic demographic and lifestyle changes taking place in the U.S. and around the world, understanding these trends is more important than ever—informing and influencing critical outdoor programs, products, and public policy decisions.



## Highlights from the 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report

The 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report reveals that in 2020, 53 percent of Americans ages 6 and over participated in outdoor recreation at least once, the highest participation rate on record. Remarkably, 7.1 million more Americans participated in outdoor recreation in 2020 than in the year prior. These one-year gains, however, did not fundamentally alter the long-term challenges faced by the outdoor industry. Nearly half of the U.S. population did not share in the proven, positive health outcomes of the outdoors. Additional key findings and challenges detailed in the report include the following:

- **Lack of diversity:** Nearly 75 percent of outdoor participants were white. Participation rates declined 7 percent annually among Asian Americans for the past three years; stagnated for the last three years among Blacks and grew among Hispanics but remained well below whites.
- **Declining intensity:** There were fewer of the most devoted outdoor participants and more casual ones. A decade ago, 24 percent reported participating more than twice a week, while in 2020, just 20 percent did. The same pattern occurred among children, young adults, and adults.
- **Fewer outings:** The average number of outings per participant per year continued a steady, long-term decline, falling from 87 in 2012 to just 71 in 2020.
- **Stagnant female participation:** Although there are significant industry efforts to address gender disparities, for the last eight years, females have represented just 46 percent of outdoor participants, even though 51 percent of Americans are female.

## Highlights From New Outdoor Participant Report

This special report from research partner NAXION shares exclusive insights about Americans' engagement in outdoor activities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines demographics and psychographics of the new outdoor participant—defined as someone who participated in an outdoor activity for the first time during the pandemic or after a significant lapse. The report reveals the following:

- New participants are more likely to be female, younger, living in an urban area, and slightly more ethnically diverse than existing participants.
- New participants primarily sought socially-distanced outdoor activities in order to spend time with loved ones safely, exercise, stay healthy, or reduce screen-time fatigue.
- New participants are largely motivated by outdoor recreation opportunities with low barriers to entry that are available and accessible within 10 miles of their homes, including walking, running, biking, and hiking.

**There exists incredible opportunity.** Through the Thrive Outside Initiative, the Outdoor Foundation is championing new ways to engage outdoor participants and invest in making the outdoors accessible and welcoming to all Americans. Together, we can help bring individuals and entire communities outside and inspire them to build life-long relationships with the outdoors.

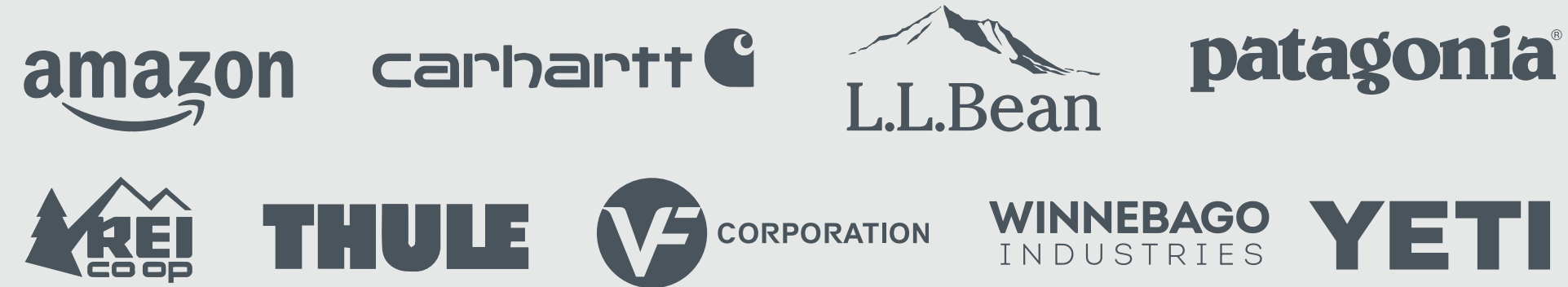


# Thank you to our funders.

Our work would not be possible without the generous support of our funder partners.

Thank you for your commitment to our shared vision for the future of the outdoors.

## THRIVE OUTSIDE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PARTNERS



## THRIVE OUTSIDE COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS



**catalysis**

*A special Thank You to our partner Catalysis for bringing the vision of the Thrive Outside Initiative to life.*