



FACT SHEET

# The Nature Gap

## Communities of Color and Those With Low-Incomes Are Bearing the Brunt of America's Nature Loss

By Sam Zeno, Mariam Rashid, Jenny Rowland-Shea, Kim Bailey, and Rena Payan February 23, 2026

Nature is more than awe-inspiring scenery; it serves as infrastructure to support healthy, thriving communities. Every American should have the right to readily access its benefits. Access to nature and time spent outdoors provide [measurable](#) health benefits across virtually every dimension of well-being. In contrast, nature loss translates directly into lives shortened and lost. It means sicker lives for those trapped in landscapes stripped of the life-sustaining benefits that nature provides. Communities without nearby nature are more vulnerable to [extreme](#) weather and climate change, experience worse [health outcomes](#) across nearly every measure, and leave the next generation with a diminished inheritance of health and a greater gap in its innate connection to nature.

[Read the full report: "The Nature Gap: Communities of Color and Those With Low-Incomes Are Bearing the Brunt of America's Nature Loss"](#)

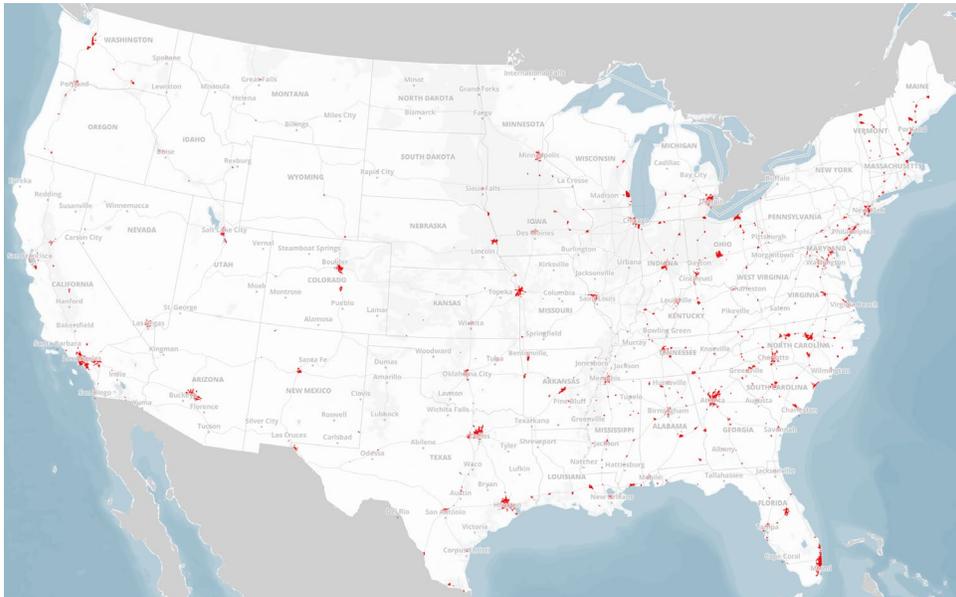
A new [analysis](#) from the Center for American Progress, Justice Outside, and Conservation Science Partners provides an updated look at who bears the brunt of nature loss by taking a deeper dive into understanding the nationwide problem. The analysis finds that across the continental United States, there are three times more communities of color living in nature-deprived areas than white communities, and three-quarters of those living in nature-deprived places have low household incomes. This new analysis uses the latest available data and a new metric to measure both the distribution and severity of humans' impact on the environment and how nature loss is connected to racial disparities, social vulnerabilities, public health issues, pollution, and climate risks across the contiguous United States.

The nature gap is not experienced equally across all communities; those with limited access to nature also often face the greatest exposure to pollution sources and climate risks. However, across the country—from Seattle to Albuquerque to the Carolina coasts—there are local organizations dedicated to confronting the nature gap and its causes and effects in their communities. [A new report](#) from CAP, Conservation Science Partners, and Justice Outside highlights bright spots and firsthand lessons learned from communities striving to close the nature gap.

FIGURE 1

## Nature deprivation hotspots are distributed across the contiguous United States

Census tracts in the top 25 percent in terms of nature loss in their state, 2020



Source: Conservation Science Partners, "Revisiting the Nature Gap," available at <https://csp-inc.org/public/CAP-Nature-Gap-2025-Technical-Report-20250815.pdf> (2025).

Map: Center for American Progress

## Racial disparities in nature loss

This new analysis found that nationwide, communities of color comprise 74 percent of those living in nature-deprived places, with white communities making up the other 26 percent. This means that across the United States, there are three times more communities of color living in nature-deprived areas than white communities. Of the communities of color living in nature-deprived places, 55 percent are Black, 54 percent are Latino, 44 percent are Asian, and 41 percent are Native American.

TABLE 1

## Communities of color are three times more likely to live in nature-deprived areas than white communities

Percent of U.S. residents living in nature-deprived areas by demographics, 2020

Demographic communities	Percent living in nature-deprived areas
Communities of color	74%
Black	55%
Latino	54%
Asian	44%
Native American	41%
White	26%

*Notes: The use of black and white text for values in this table serves to meet visual accessibility standards and does not represent a specific finding. A nature-deprived area or community is a census tract in the top 25 percent in terms of nature loss in their state. "Communities of color" refers to census tracts with a percentage of Black, Native American, Asian, or Latino residents greater than the state average. It is possible for a single census tract to be identified as belonging to multiple racial and ethnic groups.*

Source: Conservation Science Partners, "Revisiting the Nature Gap," available at <https://csp-inc.org/public/CAP-Nature-Gap-2025-Technical-Report-20250815.pdf> (2025).

Table: Center for American Progress

## Economic inequities in nature loss

This analysis shows that low-income communities experience some of the most severe and overlapping environmental inequities. Nearly 74 percent of nature-deprived communities have low household incomes. Similarly, 60 percent of nature-deprived communities are living below the poverty line.

## Housing and the poverty trap

Seventy percent of nature-deprived communities are composed of households who experience severe housing cost burdens, meaning their housing costs account for more than 50 percent of their income. When examining housing status, renter-majority communities make up 83 percent of all nature-deprived areas.

TABLE 2

**Low-income households are more likely to be nature deprived**

Percent of U.S. residents living in nature-deprived areas based on income status, 2020

Demographic communities	Percent living in nature-deprived areas
Renters	83%
Low household income	74%
Severely housing cost-burdened	70%
Below poverty line	60%
High median gross rent	54%

Notes: A nature-deprived area or community is a census tract in the top 25 percent in terms of nature loss in their state. "Low household income" refers to communities with median household incomes below their state mean. The "poverty line" is the threshold set by the government to indicate the minimum income needed to afford basic needs. "High median gross rent" refers to census tracts with median gross rent as a percentage of income above the state average. Severely housing cost-burdened communities are renters or owners with housing costs that account for more than 50 percent of their household income.

Source: Conservation Science Partners, "Revisiting the Nature Gap," available at <https://csp-inc.org/public/CAP-Nature-Gap-2025-Technical-Report-20250815.pdf> (2025).

Table: Center for American Progress

**Rural communities face nature loss differently**

While this analysis depicts that nature loss and pollution sources are largely concentrated around major metropolitan areas, significant nature loss also occurs in some rural areas. In rural areas, 70 percent of white rural communities are nature deprived, compared with 30 percent of rural communities of color.

**Analyzing pollution health hazards and nature loss**

Communities burdened by the effects of pollution often also experience nature loss. These two factors—pollution and nature loss—compound one another, increasing the severity of the health [risks](#) where they overlap. This analysis finds that the communities located nearest pollution sources are almost twice as likely to be in nature-deprived areas. Among communities in areas with both the greatest concentration of pollution sources and nature loss, 77 percent are communities of color and 75 percent are communities with a low household income.

**Communities with less nature experience more negative effects of climate risk**

Protected nature is proven to increase the [resilience](#) of communities in the face of extreme weather. Yet communities nationwide face growing climate [risks](#)—[risks](#) that intensify where nature loss is greatest. National analysis shows that areas with the most severe nature loss also face the greatest climate dangers: more severe flooding, deadlier extreme heat, stronger storms, and increasing coastal hazards.

For example, of the communities nationwide who live in the convergence of extreme flood risk and nature deprivation, 73 percent are communities of color and 26 percent are white communities. Nearly 80 percent of severely cost-burdened communities live in areas with both nature deprivation and the greatest extreme heat.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis underscores that addressing the nature gap will require not only traditional conservation efforts but also direct confrontation of the systemic racism and economic and health inequities that create and perpetuate environmental injustices. Nature loss affects everyone, but the burdens are not equally shared. This report highlights who is most affected by nature deprivation and demands an immediate change in course. Most pressing, policymakers must prioritize guidance from the communities on the front lines fighting for access to neighborhood parks, to fresh air, to local lakes and rivers—fighting for their right to nature.