



americanprogress.org

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



Introduction and summary

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. Yet, for centuries, communities across the country have experienced firsthand the negative effects of the rapid development of natural spaces.¹ As forests, wetlands, grasslands, coasts, and parks vanish, replaced by roads, buildings, energy systems, and agricultural development, Americans are losing access to nature and the values it provides.

To see the interactive versions of the figures in this report, see the online version [here](#).

When forests are cleared, wetlands filled, and grasslands paved over, communities do not just lose vistas and views. They lose the natural infrastructure that people need to thrive: trees that filter air pollutants and reduce asthma rates, canopy that cools neighborhoods and prevents heat-related deaths, wetlands that purify drinking water, and green spaces that provide opportunities for physical activity and mental health restoration.² Access to nature and time spent outdoors provide measurable health benefits across virtually every dimension of well-being, reducing blood pressure, lowering stress hormones, improving immune function, and decreasing rates of cardiovascular disease, depression, and premature mortality.³

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.⁴

While nearly all Americans are affected by nature loss, the consequences of nature's destruction and decline are not felt equally across race or income. A new analysis from Conservation Science Partners, commissioned by the Center for American Progress and Justice Outside, finds that across the United States, communities of color are three times more likely than white communities to live in nature-deprived areas. Furthermore, three-quarters of individuals living in nature-deprived places have low household incomes.

This report dives into new data, looking at 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. This report highlights bright spots and firsthand lessons learned from communities striving to close the nature gap.

Abundant, accessible nature is crucial for everyone. It can mean the difference between a healthy community and one at risk of profound health inequities. Access to nature should be a right, not a privilege, and it is imperative that all communities have protected nature nearby and readily available.

Glossary

The nature gap is the uneven and inequitable distribution of forests, streams, wetlands, and other intact natural places. This gap is most often found between communities of color and white communities and between low-income communities and those communities who hold more wealth. This gap is largely rooted in a history of discrimination, dispossession, segregation, violence, and exclusion on U.S. lands.

Nature loss refers to the distribution and intensity of humans' impact on the environment. For this analysis, nature loss was measured using a new metric that combines the distribution and intensity of human land use types, including agriculture and managed forests, transportation, urban development, and energy development.

A **nature-deprived area or community** is a census tract in the top 25 percent in terms of nature loss in its state; this can be considered an area of extreme nature loss.

Communities of color refer to census tracts with a percentage of communities of color—including Black, Native American, Asian, and Latino communities—greater than the state average. A single census tract may be identified as belonging to multiple racial and ethnic groups.

Low household income refers to communities with median household incomes below their state mean.

Analyzing the inequities of nature loss

Natural areas are disappearing at an alarming clip across the United States, but until 2020, there were no national data showing who was most affected by this loss.⁵ CAP's landmark 2020 analysis, "The Nature Gap," documented what communities of color and those living in poverty had known for generations: In America, environmental harm is not equally shared.⁶

Five years later, a new analysis from Conservation Science Partners, CAP, and Justice Outside provides an updated look at who bears the brunt of nature loss by taking a deeper dive into understanding the nationwide problem. This new analysis uses a new metric to map the latest available data on human land use and degradation across agriculture and managed forests, transportation, urban development, and energy infrastructure. The metric's intensity layers account for factors such as pesticide use, nighttime lighting, and density of industrial facilities that capture not only where development exists but also how severely these areas are affected. In essence, it measures both the distribution and the severity to which humans are affecting the environment.⁷ This report refers to the findings of this new metric as measuring nature loss, which is essentially a descriptor for contemporary environmental degradation, or the ways in which natural areas have been developed for human use.

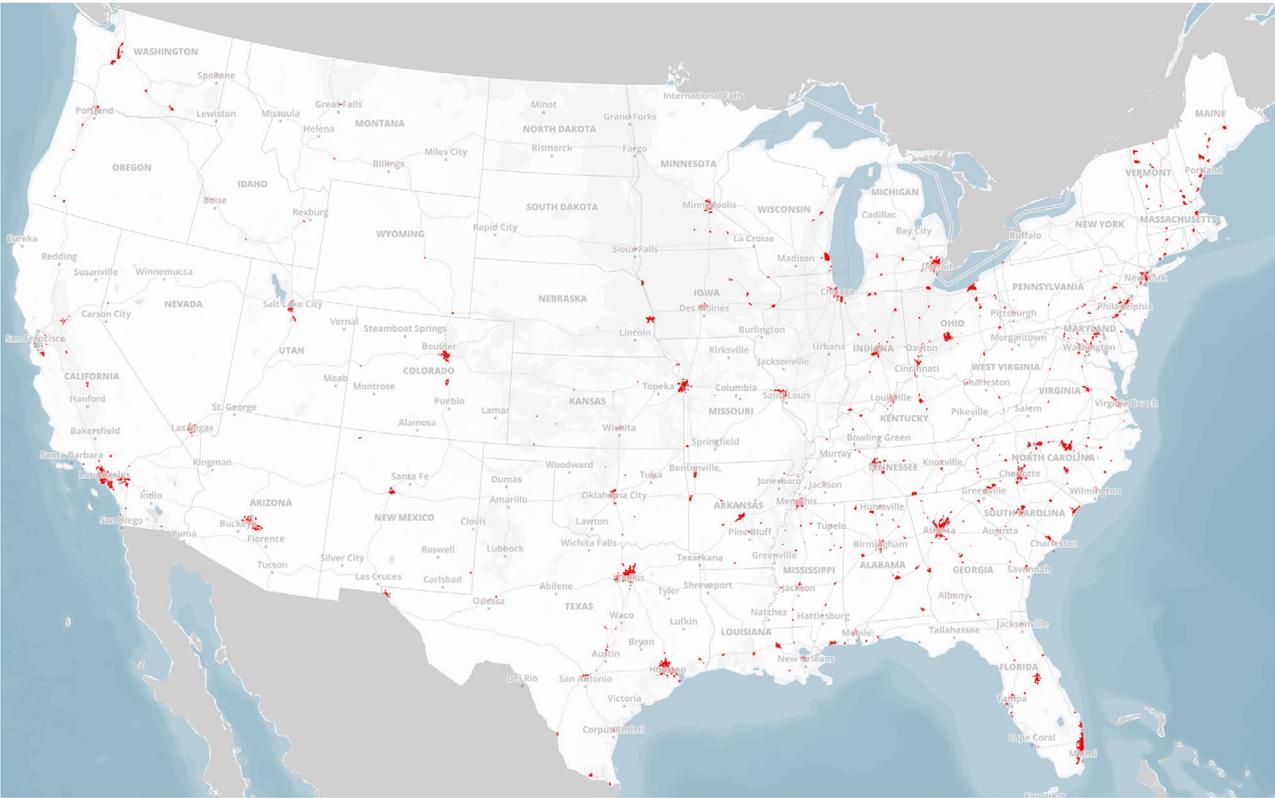
Given the advancements in methodology, the findings of this new analysis cannot be directly compared with the results of the 2020 analysis. Still, five years later, the conclusion is clear: The nature gap persists and addressing it should be a critical national priority.

The new analysis explored in this paper examines nature loss across the contiguous United States and how it affects people's health and well-being. To determine how different communities experience nature loss, it looks at how nature loss is geographically distributed across race, ethnicity, income level, education level, housing affordability, and household composition using demographic data from the 2020 U.S. Census and the 2019-2023 American Community Survey. These data were then compared across more than 50 measures of climate risk, pollution, and infrastructure. The analysis uses the top 25th percentile of each state to define nature deprivation. By using state percentiles rather than a national percentile, this analysis accounts for the relative experiences of communities, by state, and how these experiences contribute to nature loss.

Nationally, nature deprivation hotspots are found across every state in the continental United States, with the most acute impacts around urban areas and along the East Coast. The main drivers of nature loss vary by state and region, but the pattern is consistent: Communities that experience the most severe nature loss also suffer the worst health outcomes. These harms are nationwide but are most persistent among communities of color and low income.

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

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, communities of color are three times more likely to live 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.⁸

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

The nature gap is not accidental. It is the result of policy choices deeply rooted in America's racist history.⁹ Forced migration, broken treaties with Native American Tribes, disenfranchisement of people of color, discriminatory restrictions on property ownership, economic segregation, and racist policies and practices such as redlining have ultimately led to today's disparity in access to nature.¹⁰

The exclusion of people of color and marginalized groups from the mainstream U.S. conservation movement, combined with the underfunding of BIPOC-led environmental organizations, has exacerbated these disparities. As a result, modern-day segregation of nearby nature persists across the nation.¹¹ This analysis confirms that the disparities in who is able to live near nature are not random but are systematic and tied to multiple layers of discrimination and inequality.

Economic inequities in nature loss

This analysis also shows that communities with low household incomes experience some of the most severe and overlapping environmental inequities. Nearly 74 percent of nature-deprived communities have low household incomes, meaning a median household income below the mean value for their state. Similarly, 60 percent of nature-deprived communities are living below the poverty line, which is the threshold set by the government to indicate the minimum income needed to afford basic needs.¹²

Access to nearby nature is directly correlated with longer life expectancy and better health outcomes.¹³ Residents of low-income communities are already more likely to have shorter lifespans and be in poorer health than those living in higher-income communities, so it is especially crucial that these communities are able to benefit from nearby nature.¹⁴ Studies suggest that access to green space has significantly stronger protective health effects for people of lower socioeconomic status than for higher-income populations. However, these same low-income communities continue to be excluded from the health benefits of nearby nature.¹⁵ The health outcomes tied to nature are so substantial that every \$1 invested in parks saves nearly \$3 in health care costs.¹⁶ Recent research from California has shown that the average health care savings for individuals living in areas with abundant green space and tree coverage is \$374 per year.¹⁷ The nature gap is fundamentally a health gap because whenever nature disappears, community health declines.

The nature gap is fundamentally a health gap because whenever nature disappears, community health declines.

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

Housing and the poverty trap

Decades of research show that low-income housing is disproportionately located near environmental hazards such as Superfund sites and highways, which create significant health risks for those living in nearby communities.¹⁸ These policy choices—in addition to a lack of access to higher wage jobs, education, and health care as well as poor environmental conditions—result in what are known as poverty traps.¹⁹ The additional factor of nature deprivation essentially exacerbates existing poverty traps, where families experiencing low household incomes can only afford housing in areas with significant nature loss.

The results of this study highlight this: Seventy percent of nature-deprived communities are composed of households that experience severe housing cost burdens, meaning that housing costs account for more than 50 percent of their income. Affordability is a major concern among many Americans today, with economic studies showing that working-class Americans are carrying debt and missing payments at higher rates than in the past.²⁰ Those who live in low-income households face additional barriers to overcoming the circumstances caused by the nature gap. For example, the high cost of housing may leave families without sufficient money to:

- Buy a car, which can provide transportation to access to nature elsewhere
- Afford comprehensive health care coverage to address pollution-related illness
- Move to a “healthier” area
- Make home renovations or improvements, such as adding flood vents and storm shutters, that can mitigate the environmental risks they face due to the location of their homes

When examining housing status, renter-majority communities occupy 83 percent of all nature-deprived areas. The dominance of renters in nature-deprived areas is significant for several reasons. First, areas with higher concentrations of renters often reflect a legacy of historical redlining that created communities with higher concentrations of Black and Latino residents. Historical patterns of discrimination are tied to present-day income disparities that make homeownership more difficult for individuals of color.²¹

Second, renters have little to no control over their environment. Renters do not have the same rights as homeowners, who can plant trees, create personal gardens on their property, or simply advocate on behalf of the neighborhood for long-term improvements. Nor can renters build equity or increase property values through these types of actions, leading them to pay more for nearby nature, if it exists at all, without the long-term financial benefits.

Furthermore, renters are excluded from the political power and influence homeowners have over political and development decisions, such as zoning decisions, land use policy, and major development projects.²²

Seventy percent of nature-deprived communities are composed of households that experience severe housing cost burdens, meaning that housing costs account for **more than 50 percent** of their income.

Nature deprivation trends by state

To better understand how nature loss is experienced across the United States, this report highlights demographic trends in nature deprivation by state. In nearly every state, there is a notable disparity in nature deprivation by race and income. Disparities in nature deprivation for communities of color are most pronounced in many northeastern states, including Rhode Island (94 percent), New Jersey (93 percent), Connecticut (92 percent), and New Hampshire (85 percent). Similarly, states where communities with low household incomes are most prevalent in nature-deprived areas include Connecticut (94 percent), Delaware (90 percent), Rhode Island (88 percent), Maryland (88 percent), and New Jersey (88 percent).

TABLE 3

Nature loss is experienced inequitably across every state in the contiguous United States

Percent of U.S. residents living in nature-deprived areas, by state and demographic, 2020

STATE	Low household income	Communities of color	White	Black	Native American	Asian	Latino
NATIONWIDE	74%	74%	26%	55%	41%	44%	54%
Alabama	76%	73%	27%	64%	19%	42%	41%
Arizona	71%	65%	34%	70%	14%	50%	53%
Arkansas	62%	74%	26%	52%	42%	56%	46%
California	80%	74%	25%	45%	53%	36%	61%
Colorado	74%	60%	40%	55%	50%	51%	50%
Connecticut	94%	92%	8%	80%	77%	36%	84%
Delaware	90%	79%	21%	71%	42%	21%	52%
District of Columbia	42%	12%	88%	15%	23%	81%	17%
Florida	70%	81%	19%	44%	31%	32%	65%
Georgia	68%	76%	24%	57%	36%	44%	36%
Idaho	64%	63%	38%	63%	21%	65%	42%
Illinois	70%	78%	22%	41%	47%	40%	49%
Indiana	82%	75%	25%	58%	57%	32%	57%
Iowa	71%	81%	19%	67%	44%	61%	57%
Kansas	72%	69%	31%	58%	41%	53%	55%
Kentucky	61%	79%	21%	68%	56%	54%	65%
Louisiana	62%	60%	40%	51%	18%	49%	61%
Maine	58%	77%	23%	61%	13%	78%	86%
Maryland	88%	74%	26%	60%	38%	29%	37%
Massachusetts	69%	79%	21%	54%	53%	56%	56%
Michigan	80%	72%	26%	59%	20%	26%	31%
Minnesota	74%	79%	21%	75%	28%	53%	63%
Mississippi	66%	70%	29%	63%	17%	48%	51%
Missouri	71%	66%	34%	53%	40%	45%	56%

TABLE 3

Nature loss is experienced inequitably across every state in the contiguous United States (cont.)

Percent of U.S. residents living in nature-deprived areas, by state and demographic, 2020

Montana	67%	45%	55%	79%	19%	81%	77%
Nebraska	67%	66%	34%	53%	39%	58%	48%
Nevada	79%	83%	18%	71%	24%	51%	56%
New Hampshire	69%	85%	17%	76%	55%	60%	72%
New Jersey	88%	93%	7%	51%	64%	27%	73%
New Mexico	67%	49%	50%	74%	10%	62%	47%
New York	73%	76%	24%	50%	47%	43%	59%
North Carolina	64%	71%	29%	61%	10%	54%	49%
North Dakota	71%	73%	27%	90%	12%	60%	62%
Ohio	81%	76%	24%	63%	53%	36%	50%
Oklahoma	74%	65%	34%	55%	5%	55%	53%
Oregon	70%	75%	25%	65%	37%	54%	54%
Pennsylvania	76%	76%	23%	62%	57%	45%	44%
Rhode Island	88%	94%	8%	90%	79%	48%	83%
South Carolina	61%	58%	42%	49%	31%	53%	42%
South Dakota	67%	58%	42%	71%	17%	62%	75%
Tennessee	71%	73%	27%	62%	46%	46%	49%
Texas	72%	71%	29%	48%	50%	45%	50%
Utah	79%	76%	26%	65%	41%	69%	62%
Vermont	71%	82%	18%	76%	42%	60%	87%
Virginia	63%	76%	24%	53%	49%	47%	50%
Washington	76%	67%	33%	55%	26%	49%	48%
West Virginia	70%	78%	22%	65%	50%	58%	67%
Wisconsin	82%	77%	24%	50%	22%	54%	51%
Wyoming	77%	77%	23%	69%	12%	62%	62%

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 the 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. "Low household income" refers to communities with median household incomes below their state mean.

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

Chicago Adventure Therapy is combating nature loss

Chicago's neighborhoods are rich in cultural diversity and bastions of long-standing community resilience—from youth-led mutual aid networks to cultural festivals that bring together Black, Latino, Asian, and immigrant communities along local parks, schoolyards, and riverfronts. Families have nurtured connection, creativity, and collective strength across generations, even in the face of disinvestment and segregation.²³ Yet many of these same communities face significant environmental inequities linked to nature loss. In Chicago, 85 percent of communities are nature deprived, most of them nonwhite and low income – a reflection of historic land use decisions, industrial development, and longtime discrimination from safe, accessible green spaces. These patterns leave urban families more vulnerable to heat islands, pollution, limited tree canopy, and reduced opportunities for outdoor play and restoration.²⁴

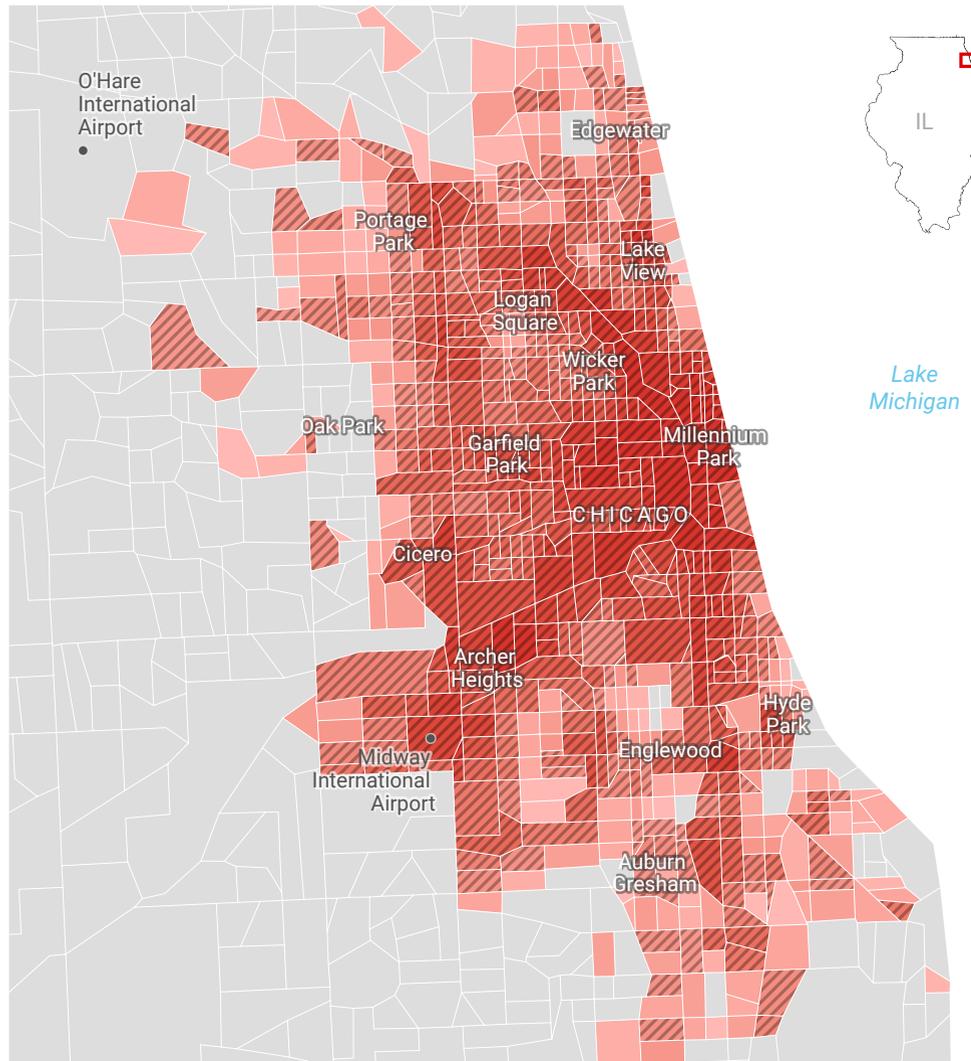
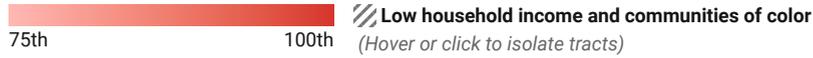
Chicago Adventure Therapy (CAT), a nonprofit focused on making the outdoors accessible to Black, Brown, LGBTQ+, and low-income youth, helps address these disparities by expanding meaningful, community-centered access to nature.²⁵ Through activities such as paddling, camping, cycling, hiking, and rock climbing, CAT creates safe, close-to-home outdoor recreation experiences that support confidence, joy, and healing for youth and families who have often been excluded from the outdoors due to cost, access, or safety barriers. The programs—ranging from “Family Adventures” to “Adventure Communities” and after-school nature activities—build mental well-being, empowerment, and social connection while increasing opportunities to enjoy and take care of Chicago's parks and waterways. By meeting communities where they are and creating consistent, welcoming pathways into nature, CAT offers a powerful model for how urban-centered outdoor programs can advance justice and strengthen community resilience.

FIGURE 2

In Chicago, 85 percent of communities are nature deprived

Chicago communities that are in the top 25 percent of nature deprivation, overlaid with demographics, 2020

Nature deprivation (state percentile)



Notes: The state percentiles of nature deprivation across census tracts in the city of Chicago are shown on a graduated color scale. Census tracts with crosshatching indicate tracts with a percentage of Black, Native American, Asian, or Latino residents (communities of color) above the state average and median household incomes below the state mean (low household income). A nature-deprived area or community is a census tract in the top 25 percent in terms of nature loss in their state.

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

Rural communities face nature loss differently

While this analysis depicts how nature loss and pollution sources are largely concentrated around major metropolitan areas, significant nature loss also occurs in some rural areas, especially across the Midwest. Agricultural land is a significant driver of nature loss in the Midwest, taking up more than 160 million acres of the region's land.²⁶ Farmland dominates many Midwestern states—for example, 83 percent of Iowa land and nearly three-quarters of Illinois land.²⁷ While these farmlands serve a vital purpose, the extensive and concentrated nature loss that results has profound impacts.

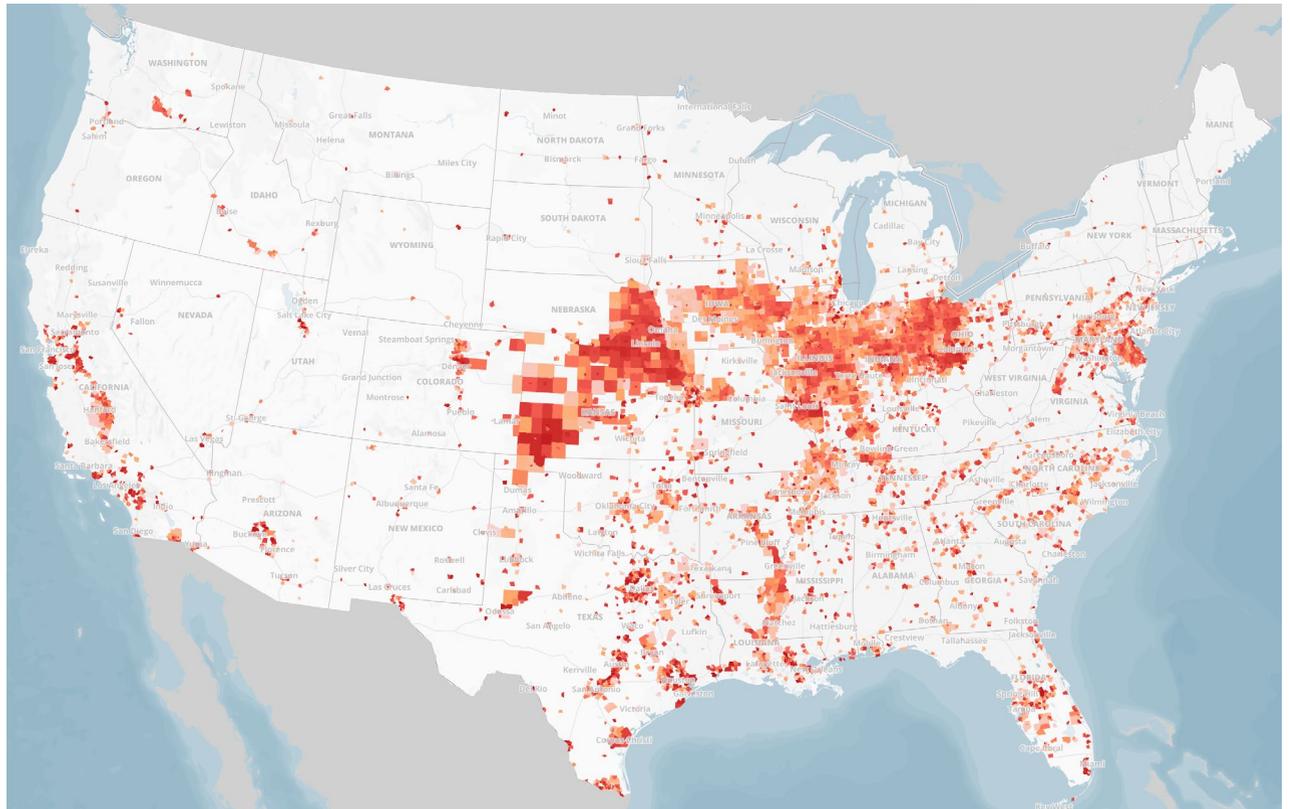
To evaluate nature loss for rural communities, these select findings isolate nature loss for rural areas to show the scale and severity of nature deprivation for rural communities. In rural areas, 70 percent of white rural communities experience nature deprivation compared with 30 percent of rural communities of color. Additionally, in rural areas, places with an above average concentration of families with children constitute almost 60 percent of nature-deprived areas. Living near farmland not only limits access to undisturbed nature for many rural residents but also poses harmful risks to community health.²⁸ In particular, the use of nitrogen fertilizer and pesticides on croplands impairs water quality and exposes communities to harmful chemicals through the air and water, making agriculture one of the leading sources of water quality impairments nationwide.²⁹ This study finds that 65 percent of communities in rural areas most exposed to agricultural pesticides have low household incomes. While nature loss in rural areas may not be as pervasive as in urban settings, these communities still experience severe adverse effects.

FIGURE 3

Rural communities are also facing nature loss

Presence and severity of nature-deprived rural census tracts across the contiguous United States relative to other rural tracts, 2020

Nature deprivation (rural percentile)



Note: This map isolates nature loss for rural areas to show the scale and severity that rural communities are facing nature deprivation. Levels of nature deprivation relative to other rural communities are shown in red on a graduated color scale, with all highlighted communities falling within the definition of rural nature deprivation.

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

7 Directions of Service combating nature loss in rural North Carolina

Rural Indigenous communities across the United States have deep relationships to land, culture, and community—carried through ceremony, stewardship traditions, and intergenerational knowledge. These cultural tenets persist even amid growing environmental pressures. Agricultural expansion, land conversion, resource extraction, and infrastructure projects, such as pipelines, are accelerating nature loss, fragmenting habitats, and degrading sacred sites across rural landscapes.³⁰ Yet Indigenous residents are not granted sufficient tools to safeguard the forests, wetlands, and open spaces that sustain cultural practices, biodiversity, and community health. In this context, defending the land is inseparable from protecting culture, identity, and community well-being.

7 Directions of Service (7DS), a grassroots organization focused on environmental justice, cultural revitalization, and Indigenous rights, is addressing the challenges posed by nature loss. It employs an Indigenous-led approach that strengthens cultural sovereignty, land stewardship, and community leadership on the ancestral homelands of the Occaneechi-Saponi in rural North Carolina.³¹ Rooted in traditional Yesah teachings, 7DS works to protect sacred places, advance “rights of nature” advocacy, and is building a land, language, and cultural center that restores deep relationships between people and land. Through cultural revitalization, community-based education, land stewardship, and grassroots organizing, 7DS empowers rural Indigenous communities to defend sacred landscapes, regenerate ecological health, and shape long-term solutions to nature loss. The organization’s work demonstrates how cultural knowledge and ecological restoration—carried forward together—can strengthen community agency and build durable environmental and cultural resilience.

Analyzing pollution-related 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.³² Air pollution, water pollution, and other sources of pollution can lead to negative health consequences including developmental and immunological risk, cancers, and more. It is well documented that people of color and low-income communities are more likely to be exposed to pollution from sources such as brownfields, chemical manufacturers, Superfund sites, oil and gas wells, and wastewater treatment facilities.³³ This analysis further finds that communities located nearest to pollution sources are almost twice as likely to be located in nature-deprived areas.

Communities located nearest to pollution sources are almost **twice as likely** to be located in nature-deprived areas.

Pollution and nature loss often share a common origin: the development of industrial sites such as mines and manufacturing plants. Of the communities located 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. Nature deprivation exacerbates the negative health outcomes that result from proximity to pollution sources because affected communities not only face pollution-related health risks, but they also face the added health risks from lack of nearby nature. This is most prevalent in states such as Montana and South Dakota, where communities in areas with the highest concentration of pollution sources are 2.5 times more likely to also be in nature-deprived areas.

Proximity to pollution sources results in significant, lifelong, negative health outcomes. Areas that experience the most developmental, immunological, kidney, liver, neurological, and reproductive effects of air toxins are more than twice as likely to have the highest pollution risks. The increased rates of disease and chronic illness that communities of color in the United States face can be attributed in part to the systems and policies that have created an unequal distribution of pollution.³⁴ When the health risks of pollution proximity overlap with the health risks of nature loss, communities suffer.

Duwamish River Community Coalition combating nature loss in Seattle

The Duwamish Valley—home to Seattle’s South Park and Georgetown neighborhoods—is a vibrant, culturally rich community where Vietnamese-, Khmer-, Somali-, Spanish-, and English-speaking families have long nurtured place-based stewardship, youth leadership, and deep intergenerational connection to the land and river.³⁵ This strong community fabric persists even as residents face some of the most disproportionate environmental burdens in Washington state. A long history of industrial siting, segregation, and chronic disinvestment has left these neighborhoods among the most nature-deprived census tracts in the state.³⁶ Fifty-nine percent of communities in Seattle lack sufficient access to forests, wetlands, streams, and other natural spaces—and the Duwamish Valley experiences this deprivation at some of the highest levels in the state. Industrial land use, freight corridors, and rapid urban development have accelerated nature loss, leaving residents with greater exposure to pollution, heightened climate risks, and elevated rates of asthma, heat vulnerability, and other health disparities.³⁷

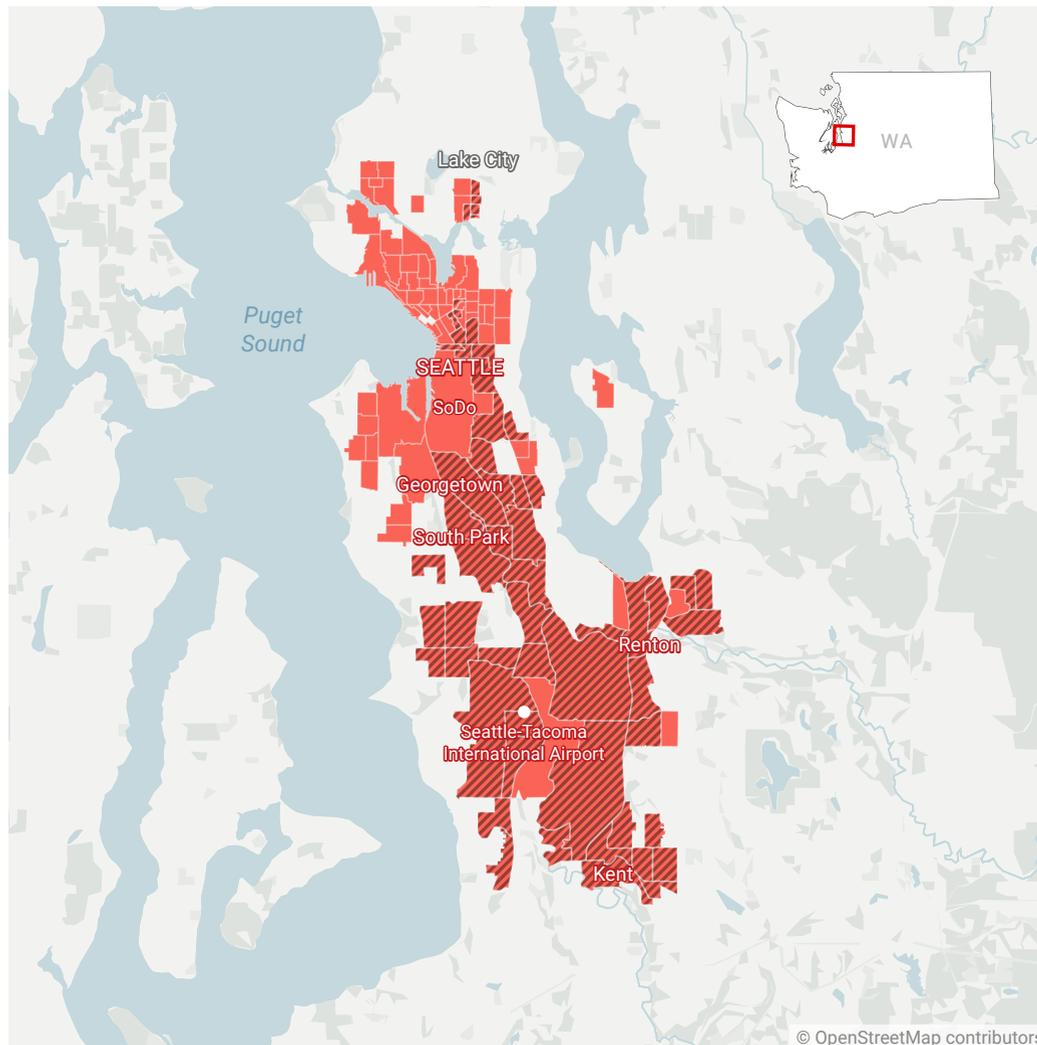
The Duwamish River Community Coalition (DRCC) is helping to build a healthier, more resilient future for the South Park and Georgetown neighborhoods.³⁸ DRCC’s Clean Air Program offers a powerful example of how community-driven solutions can address these inequities. By creating a neighborhood-based air quality monitoring network, providing air filtration for children with asthma, and guiding data use through their Community Advocacy team, DRCC enables residents to generate and interpret their own environmental data—and use it to influence policy, planning, and investment. Paired with youth leadership programs and deep engagement in climate adaptation, green infrastructure, and flood mitigation planning, DRCC helps build long-term community power. Their work demonstrates how community-led capacity building can transform nature-deprived places into healthier, more resilient, and more equitable neighborhoods.

FIGURE 4

59 percent of communities in Seattle are nature deprived

Seattle communities that are in the top 25 percent of both nature deprivation and proximity to pollution sources, overlaid with demographics, 2020

 Pollution and nature deprivation  Low household income and communities of color



Notes: Nature-deprived census tracts proximal to pollution sources are shown in red. Census tracts with crosshatching indicate tracts with a percentage of Black, Native American, Asian, or Latino residents (communities of color) above the state average and median household incomes below the state mean (low household income). A nature-deprived area or community is a census tract in the top 25 percent in terms of nature loss in their state.

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

Proximity to oil and gas wells and the demographic communities that bear the brunt

Energy production—particularly oil and gas drilling—is a major driver of nature loss and pollution. Oil and gas development produces various air and water pollutants, including methane, benzene, and particulate matter, which are known to cause issues ranging from asthma and headaches to cancer.³⁹ Some states, such as Colorado, New Mexico, and California, have recently passed laws requiring that new oil and gas wells be built a certain distance away from schools, homes, and other sensitive places due to their health effects for nearby communities.⁴⁰ But the Trump administration has sued California in an attempt to revoke these protective laws.⁴¹

According to this analysis, nearly half of all areas with the highest concentration of oil and gas wells also have more families with children than average. Furthermore, nearly 60 percent of these communities have low household incomes. White communities comprise 60 percent while communities of color make up 40 percent of the areas with the highest concentration of oil and gas wells. But in certain states with some of the most drilling, communities of color, and particularly Latino communities, are disproportionately harmed. For example, in Texas, which produces more oil than any other state, nearly half of those living near areas with concentrated numbers of oil and gas wells are people of color, 40 percent of whom are Latino.⁴² In New Mexico, nearly half of those living near areas with concentrated numbers of oil and gas wells are Latino. Dirty energy production has consequences for both health and nature, and communities concentrated near this type of activity bear the compounded effects of pollution and nature loss.

The Diné Nihí Kéyah Project is combating nature loss across the Navajo Nation

Across the Navajo Nation, Diné families and Tribal members sustain deep relationships to land, rooted in Diné culture and teachings and generations of stewardship. This mentality is increasingly important as nature loss and climate risk converge across Indigenous lands. Land conditions are deeply shaped by the region's long history of conquest and industrial extraction.⁴³ Within the Navajo Nation, 98 percent of communities are both nonwhite and have a low household income. Nonwhite, low-income, and nature-deprived Navajo communities are 1.25 times more likely to live in closer proximity to oil and gas wells than other communities. More than 100 years of drilling, mining, pipeline expansion, and inadequate environmental protections on and around Diné lands have nearly normalized daily exposure to pollution, degraded ecosystems, and reduced

access to the natural systems that buffer extreme climate impacts such as heat, drought, and flooding.⁴⁴ Uranium mining on Diné Bikéyah, or Navajo land, from the 1940s to 1980s has created a lasting health crisis, with severe links to lung, kidney, stomach, liver, and bone cancers.

The Diné Nihi Kéyah Project directly confronts these intertwined harms by advancing stewardship-based land governance rooted in Indigenous values and self-determination.⁴⁵ Through governance education, community mapping, land use planning, and advocacy for Diné sovereign solutions, the project builds both technical and political capacity among residents who have historically been excluded from federal and Tribal governance and land management decisions, helping residents reclaim agency over how their homelands are understood, valued, and governed. The project's integrated approach strengthens ecological health through familial-unit stewardship that resists further landscape fragmentation encouraging the restoration of habitats and watersheds harmed by both extraction and neglect. Primarily, the project aims to strengthen cultural health, affirming that protecting the land is inseparable from protecting Diné identity, language, and future generations. By moving away from reactive responses toward proactive, community-driven land governance, the Diné Nihi Kéyah Project offers a powerful model for addressing climate risk, nature loss, and environmental injustice in extraction-impacted Indigenous regions.

Proximity to brownfields and nature loss – and the communities that bear the brunt

Across the United States, more than 450,000 brownfields—contaminated or potentially contaminated sites—pose a heightened risk of mortality, birth defects, and chronic health harms.⁴⁶ Brownfields are not simply nature-absent areas; they can be actively dangerous places where pollution and lack of green space compound one another. Across the country, more than 10 percent of communities are in areas experiencing both extreme nature loss and the highest impacts from brownfields. Within that group, 78 percent are communities of color and 80 percent have a low household income.

TABLE 4

Communities experiencing both nature deprivation and the highest impacts of brownfields nationwide

Percent of U.S. residents, by demographics, who live within the top 25 percent of nature loss and near brownfields compared to their state, 2020

Demographic communities	Percent living in nature-deprived areas near brownfields
Renters	89%
Low household income	80%
Severely housing cost-burdened	75%
Below poverty line	70%
Communities of color	78%
<i>Black</i>	62%
<i>Latino</i>	54%
<i>Native American</i>	44%
<i>Asian</i>	36%
White	22%

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. "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. 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

In some states, the disparity is even more dramatic. For example, Maine has the highest proportion of communities experiencing both nature deprivation and proximity to brownfields of any state. This is due at least in part to the region's history as a hub of the country's industrial revolution and the manufacturing plants—particularly for pulp and paper—that are still leaching contaminants into nearby communities decades later.⁴⁷ Keeping in mind that more than 90 percent of Maine's population is white, of those communities at the intersection of nature loss and brownfields in Maine, 82 percent are communities of color.⁴⁸ This disparity reflects a long history of discriminatory land use policies, industrial siting, and systemic racism that have left many communities without clean land, healthy waterways, or access to restorative green spaces.

Center for Social Sustainable Systems is combating nature loss in Albuquerque

In New Mexico's South Valley, generations of Chicano, Latino, and Indigenous families have sustained vibrant land, water, and cultural stewardship rooted in acequia – a type of irrigation canal – traditions, community self-governance, and deep intergenerational relationships to place.⁴⁹ The Center for Social Sustainable Systems (CESOSS) builds on this strong foundation by supporting residents in reclaiming open space, restoring irrigation corridors, and protecting culturally significant landscapes through bilingual education, youth leadership, and hands-on restoration efforts. These community-led practices are increasingly critical as development pressures and historic disinvestment have left 72 percent of Albuquerque communities nature deprived. CESOSS' work affirms that safeguarding land and water is a continuation of ancestral responsibility – and a powerful strategy for confronting today's inequities.

CESOSS directly confronts these intertwined harms through community-driven land and water stewardship, cultural revitalization, and grassroots organizing. By coordinating acequia associations, leading community limpieas, and rebuilding irrigation corridors through efforts such as the Pajarito Landmarks and Acequia Trails projects, CESOSS restores ecological function in areas adjacent to former industrial and agricultural sites. Their education programs – such as the Ciclos de la Tierra curriculum – blend Traditional Ecological Knowledge with science-based restoration, strengthening local capacity to advocate for sustainable land use and oppose harmful megadevelopments. Through bilingual workshops, youth engagement, and community-led monitoring, CESOSS equips South Valley residents with the technical, cultural, and civic tools needed to demand remediation, fight inequitable development, and protect their communities from encroaching nature loss. Their work demonstrates how rural and peri-urban communities can transform contaminated, threatened landscapes into places of cultural continuity, environmental health, and community power.

Communities with the greatest nature loss face the most severe climate risks

Climate disasters—from the Texas floods to the Los Angeles wildfires to extreme cold and heat—have taken a heavy toll on communities over the past few years.⁵⁰ These events cost lives, infrastructure, homes, and economies and test the resilience of communities. Protected nature is proven to increase the resilience of communities in the face of extreme weather.⁵¹ For example mangroves reduce flood risk from sea level rise, tree cover offers shade and lower temperatures against urban heat, and floodplains reduce physical and property damage from flooding.⁵²

National analysis shows that areas with the most severe nature loss also face the **highest climate dangers.**

Communities nationwide face growing climate risks—risks that intensify where nature loss is greatest.⁵³ National analysis shows that areas with the most severe nature loss also the face the highest climate dangers: more severe flooding, deadlier extreme heat, stronger storms, and increasing coastal hazards.

Flooding and sea level rise

Nationwide, 6 percent of communities are located where extreme flood risk and nature deprivation converge, and the vast majority of these places are coastal communities. Of this group, 73 percent are communities of color and 26 percent are white communities. Additionally, among those individuals living in areas with both extreme nature loss and the greatest flood risk, 82 percent are renters and 71 percent have a low household income.

In Mississippi, a state with a small coastline relative to its size, Latino communities are nearly 12 times more likely to experience sea level rise than non-Latino communities. Along the Delaware River in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Native American communities are more than 3.5 times more likely to experience flooding than white communities. Coastal flooding and sea level rise risk communities' safety, property, and recreation areas by the water. Climate change is rapidly impeding coastal access across the country as vulnerable areas are disappearing or being forced to close for ecosystem restoration. Losing access to these places not only risks mental and physical health for these communities but it also risks gathering spaces, places to cool down, and affordable summer vacation spots.

Extreme heat

Every year, extreme heat kills more Americans than any other weather event and leads to numerous heat-related injuries.⁵⁴ Across the country, 72 percent of communities of color live in areas with both nature deprivation and the greatest extreme heat, compared with only 28 percent of white communities. Nearly 80 percent of severely cost-burdened communities live in areas with both factors. Climate change is fueling a rise in extreme heat-related incidents.⁵⁵ People of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities, and children are the most vulnerable to the harms of extreme heat.⁵⁶

Nationally, areas that experience extreme heat are 1.4 times more likely to coincide with nature-deprived areas. These impacts are pronounced in Rhode Island, where communities that experience the most extreme heat are more than 2.5 times more likely to be affected by extreme nature loss. Similarly, communities in Massachusetts that feel the most extreme heat are nearly 2.5 times more likely to have extreme nature loss. Nature can help to mitigate the impacts of extreme heat, such as by increasing urban tree cover to reduce the temperatures in heat islands or conserving and restoring bodies of water nearby areas prone to extreme heat.⁵⁷ Yet the communities that need to mitigate the impacts the most are those that are most nature deprived.

The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition is combating nature loss on the Carolina coasts

The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition is leading powerful, community-based efforts to protect land, culture, and ecological heritage across the Sea Islands and Lowcountry in South Carolina.⁵⁸ Rooted in the traditions, knowledge, and sovereignty of the Gullah/Geechee people—descendants of Africans enslaved on these coastal islands—the coalition works to secure land rights, reacquire ancestral property, strengthen cultural continuity, and build community resilience in the face of rapid environmental change. Through initiatives such as Greening Gullah/Geechee Communities, shoreline restoration projects, and climate-resilience planning, it centers the lived experience and leadership of coastal residents who have safeguarded these landscapes for generations.

The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition directly addresses the intersection of climate vulnerability and nature loss by restoring the very ecosystems that protect coastal communities. Their work to rebuild wetlands, strengthen native vegetation, restore marshes and shorelines, and reclaim traditional land uses

creates natural buffers that reduce flooding, storm surge, and erosion—offering community members tangible protection against rising seas and extreme weather. By centering land inheritance, cultural landscapes, and community-led stewardship, the coalition affirms that ecological resilience and cultural survival are deeply intertwined for the Gullah/Geechee people. Their approach demonstrates how protecting and restoring nature is not only an environmental strategy but a cultural and climate justice strategy—ensuring that front-line coastal communities have the natural infrastructure, political power, and cultural autonomy needed to withstand the accelerating impacts of climate change. The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, which was the first organization in world history to have “Gullah/Geechee” in its name, is celebrating 30 years of protecting the human, land, and water rights of native Gullah/Geechee people.

President Trump is widening the nature gap

The nature gap has developed over centuries, and its impacts cannot be attributed to any single presidency. But the Trump administration’s relentless efforts to expand drilling, mining, logging, and other extractive industries on public lands will only accelerate nature loss and its associated health consequences.⁵⁹ The removal of protections for 88 million acres of public lands will be felt by communities who are already bearing the brunt of nature deprivation.⁶⁰ Furthermore, gutting the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act, which provide essential ecosystem protections, will drive even more nature loss close to communities. Huge funding and staffing cuts to agencies that manage natural resources will further diminish the capacity to preserve and protect nature for all.⁶¹ The administration’s tireless attacks on historically marginalized communities have included stripping the stories and names of U.S. lands and censoring history.⁶² The nature gap is already wide and disproportionately harms marginalized communities; rather than addressing the issue, policies of the current administration are intensifying the problem.

Read more at:
[“The Trump Administration Is Erasing American History Told by Public Lands and Waters”](#)

Building a movement: Lessons from communities combating nature loss

This analysis clearly highlights the burdens faced disproportionately by communities of color and low income and other historically disenfranchised communities. But these same communities are working tirelessly to combat nature loss and fight for justice. Across the country, several front-line organizations are demonstrating what it means to build a powerful environmental and climate justice movement rooted in lived experience, cultural strength, and intergenerational vision. Their leadership illustrates that movements grow strongest when they center joy, invest in young people, build from the ground up, honor relationships, connect local struggles to broader systemic change, and look to nature itself for lessons on resilience. When these lessons converge, they create a movement that is grounded in community power, reflective of lived experiences, and capable of transforming both policy and culture.

Movements grow strongest when they center joy, invest in young people, build from the ground up, honor relationships, connect local struggles to broader systemic change, and look to nature itself for lessons on resilience.

Black Surf Santa Cruz: Creating intentional, inclusive, and supportive environments for Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color with ocean and outdoor recreation spaces

Movements cannot thrive on urgency alone; they require joy, healing, and spaces where people can experience freedom. Black Surf Santa Cruz exemplifies this truth by creating ocean access and a sense of belonging for Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color in places where they have long been excluded.⁶³ Through surfing, community gatherings, and ocean education, they reclaim the shoreline as a site of joy, possibility, and cultural connection.

In a world where structural inequities have limited who feels safe and welcome in natural spaces, Black Surf Santa Cruz proves that joy is not an afterthought—it is a strategy. Their work reframes joy as an act of resistance against erasure and gatekeeping. By making the ocean a place of play, healing, and community, they show that joy strengthens people for the long fight toward equity and justice.

African Youth and Community Organization: Organizing immigrant and refugee communities from the ground up

Effective movements begin with the wisdom of the people most affected. African Youth and Community Organization (AYCO) embodies this lesson by organizing East African immigrant and refugee communities in Oregon to build collective power.⁶⁴ The organization’s work starts with deep listening—understanding families’ day-to-day experiences with housing, education, transportation, and environmental access—and shaping advocacy that reflects those lived realities. AYCO organizes from the ground up: supporting community members in defining their needs, identifying barriers, and cocreating solutions. By centering the full spectrum of community concerns, AYCO ensures that environmental justice is not siloed but interwoven with economic, social, and cultural well-being. This approach builds durable leadership and ensures that advocacy is grounded, relevant, and accountable to the people it aims to serve.

Youth on Root: Empowering youth on the front line of the fight for environmental justice

Young people are not the movement’s future—they are its present. Youth on Root demonstrates the power of investing in youth leadership by equipping young people from front-line communities with the tools, mentorship, and political education needed to influence change.⁶⁵ Their programs teach participants how to navigate policymaking spaces, share their lived experiences, and develop youth-led campaigns. Through this process, young people become powerful advocates not because they are told to lead but because they are supported to lead in ways that honor their identities, stories, and visions. Youth on Root shows that when young leaders are trusted with real decision-making power, they transform not only policy outcomes but entire movements.

Pueblo Action Alliance: Protecting Pueblo cultural sustainability and community by addressing environmental and social impacts in Indigenous communities

Pueblo Action Alliance links community-based resistance to land and water degradation with national and global climate justice movements. Their work emphasizes sovereignty, resource justice, and cultural continuity—ensuring that local organizing informs broader policy debates. Pueblo Action Alliance translates community knowledge into systems-level advocacy by strengthening connections between Indigenous leadership, political education, and legislative action.⁶⁶ Their model shows how local struggles become catalysts for structural change when they are intentionally connected to larger movements, networks, and strategies.

Camping to Connect: Using outdoor recreation and nature immersion to confront the challenges faced by young men of color

Movements must not only resist harm—they must also cultivate renewal. Camping to Connect underscores this lesson by creating intentional outdoor experiences where communities of color can rest, heal, and reconnect to land.⁶⁷ Their camping programs center storytelling, cultural practice, and reflection as essential elements of advocacy readiness. By offering a space for collective rest and regeneration, they demonstrate that resilience is not something communities must shoulder alone; it is something nurtured through community and connection to nature. Camping to Connect is a program that exemplifies that movements grow stronger when they honor the need for restoration and create practices that sustain people for the long haul.

These front-line organizations are not simply responding to environmental challenges; they are shaping a future where communities define the conditions for justice, belonging, and collective thriving. They illuminate how these principles come alive in practice—and how communities are modeling the future of environmental justice organizing. When these lessons converge, they create a movement that is grounded in community power, reflective of lived experiences, and capable of transforming both policy and culture.

Conclusion

The findings of this report confirm that environmental racism is real, and it persists. Communities of color continue to face three times the burden of nature loss compared with white communities. Furthermore, 3 out of 4 people living in nature-deprived areas have low household incomes. 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.

Today's nature gap was not inevitable. It is the result of decisions about zoning, conservation priorities, and public health. These choices include where oil and gas wells are built, where parks are protected, and who is invited to the table and has a say when making these decisions. This report provides essential data to inform and guide future conservation decisions. Now, the challenge is whether policymakers can muster the courage and commitment to take actions that will ensure everyone has the right to live in a community with nearby access to nature.

Nature loss affects everyone, but its 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.

A note from Kim Bailey of Justice Outside

When our colleagues at the Center for American Progress invited us to co-author this updated version of the Nature Gap report, we were honored to be part of this process. This report offers essential data on who has access to the benefits of nature in the United States—and who has been systematically denied it. The findings are powerful. They give us a clearer picture of where nature is disappearing, where environmental burdens are growing, and where communities have been excluded from green spaces, clean air, and safe outdoor environments.

Where we saw the greatest opportunity, and the value of what Justice Outside could provide, was simple: a deep knowledge that data alone will not move us toward justice. These numbers can help us name inequities, but they cannot, on their own, heal our communities or compel decision-makers to act with courage and accountability. Maps can show us where nature is missing, but they cannot capture the grandmothers tending gardens in concrete courtyards, the young people organizing for climate justice, or the grassroots leaders who have protected land and water for generations.

That is why our work does not stop with data. It is imperative that we breathe life into these findings—that we bring forward the stories, brilliance, and solutions that communities have already been cultivating. The data show us where change is needed; our communities show us how to make it. When we center lived experience, cultural knowledge, and community-led vision alongside the numbers, we transform statistics into a roadmap for justice.

In releasing this report, we honor the truth that Black communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color have always held, that our relationship to land, water, and nature is fundamental to our well-being, our safety, and our liberation. The insights in this report become most powerful when paired with the leadership of those who are closest to the challenges—and closest to the solutions.

We offer this report not simply as an analysis but as an invitation: to policymakers, funders, advocates, and all of us committed to a just future: an invitation to act boldly, to resource community-led solutions, and to build a movement where every person has the right to joy, belonging, and connection in nature.

This is our collective task—and I am grateful to be in this work alongside you.

— Kim Bailey, President and CEO of Justice Outside

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Conservation Science Partners, Sophie Conroy, Nicole Gentile, Drew McConville, Will Roberts, Cathleen Kelly, Jill Rosenthal, Cody Hankerson, Jamie Friedman, Carl Chancellor, Anh Nguyen, Bill Rapp, Bianca Serbin, and Cindy Murphy-Tofig for their insights and contributions to this report, and the local and national conservation leaders who are building impactful and equitable conservation solutions every day.

Methodology

This study used comprehensive spatial data covering every census tract in the contiguous United States to examine how environmental burdens and benefits are distributed across different communities. CSP created an Anthropogenic Impact Metric (AIM) that maps human land use across agriculture, transportation, urban development, and energy infrastructure, while also adding in intensity layers accounting for factors such as pesticide use, nighttime lighting, and density of industrial facilities that capture not only where development exists but also how intensely these areas are affected.⁶⁸ They also compiled metrics of social vulnerability, which encompass 57 indicators across climate risk (for example, flooding, heat, storms), pollution exposure (for example, proximity to brownfields, superfund sites, oil and gas wells, and chemical plants), and infrastructure deficits (for example, lack of access to vehicles, parks, protected nature, and clean water), converting all measures to percentile ranks so that they are able to be compared. Finally, they overlaid demographic data on race, ethnicity, income, education, housing affordability, and family composition, using state-based thresholds to categorize communities. By combining these three layers—anthropogenic impact, social vulnerability, and demographic data—they identified which populations experience the highest burdens of nature loss, compounded vulnerabilities, and where the nature gap is most severe, at the granular census tract-level. Further detail about the methodology can be found in Conservation Science Partners' report.⁶⁹

Endnotes

- 1 U.N. Environment Programme, "Facts about the nature crisis," available at <https://www.unep.org/facts-about-nature-crisis> (last accessed January 2026).
- 2 Tamara Lungman and others, "Cooling cities through urban green infrastructure: a health impact assessment of European cities," *The Lancet* 401 (10376) (2023): 577–589, available at [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(22\)02585-5/abstract](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)02585-5/abstract); Nicole Karwowski and Marin Skidmore, "Nature's Kidneys: the Role of Wetland Reserve Easements in Restoring Water Quality," *Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists* (2025), available at <https://doi.org/10.1086/739287>.
- 3 Caoimhe Twohig-Bennett and Andy and Jones, "The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes," *Environmental Research* 166 (2018): 628–637, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935118303323>; Lisa Andersen and others, "Nature Exposure and Its Effects on Immune System Functioning: A Systematic Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (4) (2021), available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7913501/>; Kristine Engemann and others, "Residential green space in childhood is associated with lower risk of psychiatric disorders from adolescence into adulthood," *Environmental Science* 116 (11) (2019): 5188–5193, available at <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1807504116>; David Rojas-Rueda and others, "Green spaces and mortality: a systematic review and meta-analysis of cohort studies," *Lancet Planetary Health* 3 (11) (2019), available at [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196\(19\)30215-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(19)30215-3/fulltext).
- 4 Richard Mitchell and Frank Popham, "Effect of exposure to natural environment on health inequalities: an observational population study," *The Lancet* 372 (9650) (2008): 1655–1660, available at <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS014067360861689X/abstract>; Xia Dong and Liuna Geng, "Nature deficit and mental health among adolescents: A perspective of conservation of resources theory," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 87 (2023), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272494423000439>; Marcia P. Jimenez and others, "Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (9) (2021), available at <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094790>.
- 5 Matt Lee-Ashley, Jenny Rowland-Shea, and Ryan Richards, "The Green Squeeze" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-green-squeeze/>.
- 6 Jenny Rowland-Shea and others, "The Nature Gap: Confronting Racial and Economic Disparities in the Destruction and Protection of Nature in America" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2020), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-nature-gap/>.
- 7 Conservation Science Partners, "Revisiting the Nature Gap: Quantifying the discrepancies in access to natural lands among diverse communities, in light of conservation momentum – and potential backsliding" (Truckee, CA: 2025), available at <https://csp-inc.org/public/CAP-Nature-Gap-2025-Technical-Report-20250815.pdf>.
- 8 Census tracts identified as communities of color, as well as those identified by racial and ethnic group, are those with a greater proportion of their population falling within that given racial or ethnic group compared with the proportion within the state. It is possible that a single census tract could be identified as belonging to multiple racial and ethnic groups, which is why these demographic percentages do not total 100.
- 9 Jedediah Purdy, "Environmentalism's Racist History," *The New Yorker*, August 13, 2015, available at <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history>; Lawrence Kaleb Pittman, "His-tory of Redlining and the Environmental Legacy Inherited," *American Bar Association*, October 30, 2024, available at <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/resources/human-rights/2024-october/history-redlining-environmental-legacy/>; Erin Key, "How the Effects of Historically Racist Laws Are Still Keeping BIPOC from the Outdoors," *Outside*, July 20, 2021, available at <https://www.outsideonline.com/culture/essays-culture/how-the-effects-of-historically-racist-laws-are-still-keeping-bipoc-from-the-outdoors/>; Carolyn Merchant, "Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," *Environmental History* 8 (3) (2003), available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/3986200>.
- 10 Sarah Pruitt, "Broken Treaties With Native American Tribes: Timeline," *History*, available at <https://www.history.com/articles/native-american-broken-treaties> (last accessed February 2026); Sara Rimer, "California's Alien Land Laws," *Equal Justice Initiative*, May 3, 2025, available at <https://eji.org/news/californias-alien-land-laws/>; D.R. Williams and C. Collins, "Racial residential segregation: a fundamental cause of racial disparities in health," *Public Health Reports* 116 (5) (2001): 404–416, available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC1497358/>; National Archives, "The Great Migration (1910-1970)," available at <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/migrations/great-migration> (last accessed December 2025); Keith Aoki, "No Right to Own?: The Early Twentieth Century 'Alien Land Laws' as a Prelude to Internment" (Fayetteville, AK: The National Agricultural Law Center, 1998), available at https://nationalaglawcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/aoki_right.pdf.
- 11 Dorceta E. Taylor, "Enhancing diversity and justice in environmental institutions in times of chaos," *One Earth* 8 (6) (2025), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S259033222500171X>; InDEEP Initiative, "Executive Summary: Race to the Board: Strategies for Readiness, Recruitment, and Retention of Black Trustees on Green Nonprofit Boards" (2020), available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/582a3bdf6a4963a0eccfee40/t/6160680421f7c04571dce16a/1633708036804/InDEEP+R2B+ExecSummary+v2+%283%29.pdf>; InDEEP Initiative, "Closing the Gap: Insights from the Field to Close the \$2.7 Billion Funding Gap Between White-led and BIPOC-led Environmental and Conservation Organizations" (2021), available at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/582a3bdf6a4963a0eccfee40/t/6138b08269cc2f3a04ee9738/1631105157391/InDEEP+CTG+Final+Report+v2.pdf>.
- 12 Institute For Research On Poverty, "What Are Poverty Thresholds And Poverty Guidelines?," available at <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resources/what-are-poverty-thresholds-and-poverty-guidelines/> (last accessed January 2026).
- 13 Neelam C. Poudyal and others, "Evaluating natural resource amenities in a human life expectancy production function," *Forest Policy and Economics* 11 (4) (2009): 253–259, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1389934109000471>; Michael R. Greenberg and Dona Schneider, "Income disparities and risk: Geographical manifestations of extreme inequalities in the United States," *Risk Analysis* 45 (11) (2024): 3414–3426, available at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/risa.14349>.
- 14 Raj Chetty and others, "The Association Between Income

- and Life Expectancy in the United States, 2001-2014," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 315 (16) (2016): 1750-1766, available at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2513561#>.
- 15 Alessandro Rigolon and others, "Green Space and Health Equity: A Systematic Review on the Potential of Green Space to Reduce Health Disparities," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18 (5) (2021), available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7967323/>.
 - 16 Guijing Wang and others, "A cost-benefit analysis of physical activity using bike/pedestrian trails," *Health Promotion Practice* 6 (2) (2005): 174-179, available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15855287/>.
 - 17 Stephen K. Van Den Eeden and others, "Association between residential green cover and direct healthcare costs in Northern California: An individual level analysis of 5 million persons." *Environment International* 163 (2022), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412022001003?via%3DIihub>.
 - 18 Emily Coffey and others, "Poisonous Homes: The Fight for Environmental Justice in Federally Assisted Housing" (Chicago, IL: Shriver Center on Poverty Law and Earthjustice, 2020), available at https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/environmental_justice_report_final_rev2.pdf.
 - 19 Scott W. Allard, "Poverty Traps," *Pathways* (2019), available at https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Pathways_Winter2019_Place.pdf.
 - 20 Angela Hanks and Julie Margetta Morgan, "Survey: The Affordability Crisis Is Here, and It's Hitting the Working Class the Hardest," *The Century Foundation*, December 11, 2025, available at <https://tcf.org/content/report/survey-the-affordability-crisis-is-here-and-its-hitting-the-working-class-the-hardest/>.
 - 21 Sebastian Linde and others, "Historical Residential Redlining and Present-Day Social Determinants of Health, Home Evictions, and Food Insecurity within US Neighborhoods," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 38 (15) (2023): 3321-3328, available at [10.1007/s11606-023-08258-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-023-08258-5).
 - 22 N.R. Brouwer and Jessica Trounstine, "NIMBYs, YIMBYs, and the Politics of Land Use in American Cities," *Annual Review of Political Science* 27 (2024): 165-184, available at <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041322-041133>; Lydia Lo, Eleanor Noble, and Yonah Freemark, "Who Makes Planning Choices?: How Women, People of Color, and Renters Are Systematically Underrepresented on Land-Use Decisionmaking Bodies" (Washington: Urban Institute, 2023), available at <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/Who%20Makes%20Planning%20Choices.pdf#:~:text=In%20other,represented%20they%20are%20in%20land%20Duse>.
 - 23 Metropolitan Planning Council, "The Cost of Segregation," available at <https://metroplanning.org/the-cost-of-segregation-2/> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 24 Sam Becton, "City of Chicago planting trees to battle climate change," November 1, 2021, available at <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/9b3372c5005046008669104d40cb1c95> (last accessed February 2026).
 - 25 Chicago Adventure Therapy, "Home," available at <https://www.chicagoadventuretherapy.org/> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 26 U.S. Department of Agriculture, "State Summary Highlights: 2022," available at https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_2_US_State_Level/st99_2_001_001.pdf (last accessed February 2026).
 - 27 Ibid.
 - 28 Deven M. Patel and others, "Residential proximity to agriculture and risk of childhood leukemia and central nervous system tumors in the Danish national birth cohort," *Environment International* 143 (2020), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412020319103>; Mariana Simões and others, "Residential proximity to crops and agricultural pesticide use and cause-specific mortality: A prospective census-based cohort study in the Netherlands," *Science of the Total Environment* 817 (2022), available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969722000213>.
 - 29 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Nonpoint Source: Agriculture," available at <https://www.epa.gov/nps/nonpoint-source-agriculture> (last accessed January 2026); U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Introduction to Pesticide Drift," available at <https://www.epa.gov/reducing-pesticide-drift/introduction-pesticide-drift> (last accessed January 2026); U.S. Geological Survey, "Agricultural Contaminants," March 1, 2019, available at <https://www.usgs.gov/mission-areas/water-resources/science/agricultural-contaminants>.
 - 30 Stephanie Hall Barclay and Michalyn Steele, "Rethinking Protections For Indigenous Sacred Sites," *Harvard Law Review* 134 (4) (2021), available at <https://harvardlawreview.org/print/vol-134/rethinking-protections-for-indigenous-sacred-sites/>.
 - 31 7 Directions of Service, "Home," available at <https://7directionsofservice.com/> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 32 U.N. Environmental Programme, "Why does environment, health and pollution matter?," available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/chemicals-and-pollution-action/pollution-and-health/why-does-environment-health-and> (last accessed February 2026).
 - 33 Jill Johnston and Lara Cushing, "Chemical Exposures, Health, and Environmental Justice in Communities Living on the Fenceline of Industry," *Current Environmental Health Reports* 7 (1) (2020): 48-57, available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7035204/>; Rebecca Schewe, "Raw Sewage and Environmental Racism: Racial Disparities in Sewage Backup Risk In Syracuse, New York," (2024), available at <https://assets-eu.researchsquare.com/files/rs-5060590/v1/43ce0bb1-8727-4dfe-9a1a-79bbecccd81.pdf?c=1740006223>.
 - 34 James H. Price and others, "Racial/ethnic disparities in chronic diseases of youths and access to health care in the United States," *BioMed Research International* (2013), available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3794652/>; Sustainability Directory, "What Causes Unequal Pollution Exposure?," July 12, 2025, available at <https://pollution.sustainability-directory.com/question/what-causes-unequal-pollution-exposure/>.
 - 35 Duwamish River Community Coalition, "Why is our work important?," available at <https://www.drcc.org/our-work-matters> (last accessed February 2026).
 - 36 The Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, "Segregated Seattle," available at <https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/seggregated.htm> (last accessed February 2026).
 - 37 Troy D. Abel, Jonah White, and Stacy Clauson, "Risky Business: Sustainability and Industrial Land Use across Seattle's Gentrifying Riskscape," *Sustainability* 7 (11) (2015): 15718-15753, available at <https://doi.org/10.3390/su71115718>.
 - 38 Duwamish River Community Coalition "State of the Duwamish River Valley," August 2025, available at <https://www.drcc.org/>.
 - 39 Jonathan J Buonocore and others, "Air pollution and health

- impacts of oil & gas production in the United States," Environmental Research: Health 1 (2) (2023), available at <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/2752-5309/acc886>; Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, "Oil and gas and your health," available at <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/dehs/oghealth#:~:text=Scientists%20continue%20to%20learn%20how,depends%20on%20many%20factors%2C%20including> (last accessed January 2026); Williams SB, et al, "Proximity to Oil Refineries and Risk of Cancer: A Population-Based Analysis," JNCI Cancer Spectrum 4 (6) (2020), available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7691047/>.
- 40 Protect Colorado, "What are setbacks?," available at <https://www.protectcolorado.com/what-are-setbacks/> (last accessed January 2026); State of New Mexico Commissioner of Public Lands, "Executive Order No. 2023-001: Moratorium on New Oil and Gas Leasing Within One Mile of Schools," June 2023, available at <https://www.nmstate-lands.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Executive-Order-School-OG-Leasing-Buffer-Signed-6-1-23.pdf>; Governor Gavin Newsom, "Governor Newsom signs legislation to restrict polluting oil & gas operations near schools, daycares, and across communities," Press release, September 2024, available at <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2024/09/25/governor-newsom-signs-legislation-to-restrict-polluting-oil-gas-operations-near-schools-daycares-and-across-communities/#:~:text=California%20law%20requires%20that%20oil%20drilling%20is,or%20prohibiting%20new%20oil%20and%20gas%20developments>.
 - 41 Hayley Smith, "Trump administration sues California over law keeping oil wells from homes, schools," Los Angeles Times, January 15, 2026, available at <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2026-01-15/trump-administration-sues-california-over-law-keeping-oil-wells-from-homes-schools>.
 - 42 U.S. Energy Information Administration, "Texas: End-use energy consumption 2023, estimates," available at <https://www.eia.gov/states/TX/overview> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 43 The University of Arizona University Libraries, "Indigenous History in the Borderlands," available at <https://libguides.library.arizona.edu/indigenous-history-borderlands/navajo> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 44 Doug Brugge and Rob Goble, "The History of Uranium Mining and the Navajo people," American Journal of Public Health 92 (9) (2002), available at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3222290/>.
 - 45 Indian Country Grassroots Support, "Diné Nihí Kéyah Project," available at <https://dinelanduse.org/> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 46 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Brownfield Overview and Definition," available at <https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/brownfields/brownfield-overview-and-definition.html> (last accessed January 2026); Chien, S.-C., & Knobler, C., "Uneven Burdens: The Intersection of Brownfields, Pollution, and Socioeconomic Disparities in New Jersey, USA," Sustainability 16 (23) (2024), available at <https://doi.org/10.3390/su162310535>; Weiji Wang and others, Brownfield land and health: A systematic review of the literature," PLOS One 18 (8) (2023), available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37540700/>.
 - 47 Kevin Miller, "Trail of 'forever chemicals' leads to Maine paper mills," Portland Press Herald, July 18, 2021, available at <https://www.pressherald.com/2021/07/18/trail-of-forever-chemicals-leads-to-maine-paper-mills/>.
 - 48 U.S. Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Maine," available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ME/PST045224> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 49 Center for Social Sustainable Systems, "Home," available at <https://www.cesoss.org/> (last accessed January 2026); Ralph Vigil, "Acequias: More Than a Traditional Irrigation System; It Embodies a Way of Life Deeply Rooted in My Culture and Family," Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors, April 7, 2025, available at <https://www.hechoonline.org/blog/acequias-more-than-a-traditional-irrigation-system-it-embodies-a-way-of-life-deeply-rooted-in-my-culture-and-family>.
 - 50 Climate Central, "U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters," available at <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-services/billion-dollar-disasters> (last accessed February 2026).
 - 51 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Green Infrastructure and Extreme Weather," available at <https://www.epa.gov/green-infrastructure/green-infrastructure-and-extreme-weather> (last accessed December 2025).
 - 52 Heather Luedke, "Fact Sheet | Nature as Resilient Infrastructure – An Overview of Nature-Based Solutions," Environmental and Energy Study Institute, October 16, 2019, available at <https://www.eesi.org/papers/view/fact-sheet-nature-as-resilient-infrastructure-an-overview-of-nature-based-solutions>.
 - 53 Surendra Maharjan and others, "The future intensification of hydrological extremes and whiplashes in the contiguous United States increase community vulnerability," Communications Earth & Environment (6) (2025), available at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-025-02672-9>; Resources for the Future, "As Climate Change Intensifies and Populations Grow, Southeastern Counties Are In the Hot Seat," Press release, December 4, 2024, available at <https://www.rff.org/news/press-releases/as-climate-change-intensifies-and-populations-grow-southeastern-counties-are-in-the-hot-seat/>.
 - 54 Center for American Progress, "Extreme Heat," available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/topic/extreme-heat/> (last accessed December 2025).
 - 55 Jessica Ordóñez-Lancet and others, "Climate Change Is Subjecting More Americans to Unbearable Extreme Heat" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2025) available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/climate-change-is-subjecting-more-americans-to-unbearable-extreme-heat/>.
 - 56 Ibid.
 - 57 Ailene K. Ettinger and others, "Street trees provide an opportunity to mitigate urban heat and reduce risk of high heat exposure," Scientific Reports 14 (2024), available at <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-51921-y>.
 - 58 Gullah/Geechee Nation, "Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition," available at <https://gullahgeecheenation.com/gullahgeechee-sea-island-coalition/> (last accessed January 2026).
 - 59 Sam Zeno and Jenny Rowland-Shea, "Inside Trump's Plan to Sell Out America's Public Lands to Mining" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2025), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/inside-trumps-plan-to-sell-out-americas-public-lands-to-mining/>; Drew McConville, "A Historically Bad Year for Public Lands Under President Trump," Center for American Progress, December 11, 2025, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/a-historically-bad-year-for-public-lands-under-president-trump/>.
 - 60 Drew McConville, Mariel Lutz, and Jenny Rowland-Shea, "The Trump Administration's Expansive Push to Sell Out Public Lands to the Highest Bidder" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2025), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-trump-administrations-expansive-push-to-sell-out-public-lands-to-the-highest-bidder/>.

- 61 Sam Zeno and Jenny Rowland-Shea, "The Trump Administration Is Recklessly Axing Funding and Staff for America's National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands," Center for American Progress, July 1, 2025, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-trump-administration-is-recklessly-axing-funding-and-staff-for-americas-national-parks-forests-and-public-lands/>.
- 62 Angelo Villagomez, Sam Zeno, and Gianna Sala, "The Trump Administration Is Erasing American History Told by Public Lands and Waters," Center for American Progress, October 23, 2025, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-trump-administration-is-erasing-american-history-told-by-public-lands-and-waters/>.
- 63 Black Surf Santa Cruz, "Home," available at <https://www.blacksurfsantacruz.org> (last accessed January 2026).
- 64 African Youth & Community Organization, "Home," available at <https://aycworld.org/> (last accessed January 2026).
- 65 Youth on Root, "Home," available at <https://www.youthonroot.org/> (last accessed January 2026).
- 66 Pueblo Action Alliance, "The Pueblo Revolt Never Ended," available at <https://www.puebloactionalliance.org> (last accessed January 2026).
- 67 Camping to Connect, "Home," available at <https://www.campingtoconnect.com/> (last accessed January 2026).
- 68 Conservation Science Partners, "Revisiting the Nature Gap."
- 69 Ibid.



americanprogress.org

1333 H Street, NW, 10th Floor, Washington, DC 20005 • Tel: 202-682-1611 • Fax: 202-682-1867