

Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Urban Natural Areas

Survey's Key Findings

About the Survey

The Natural Areas Conservancy surveyed municipal and nonprofit partners from 12 cities across America to better understand COVID-19's impact on urban natural areas. The survey asked questions about changes in park usership and organizational capacity, including budgeting and staffing management, from March to May 2020.



Map of Survey Participants

The 12 cities surveyed contain 360,000 acres of parkland. 80% of those acres are natural areas.

Why Natural Areas?

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the natural areas — forests and grasslands — in America's cities have proven to be an invaluable resource for millions of residents. They provide space for socially distanced time out in nature, which can reduce stress and improve moods. Natural areas also enhance city living by cleaning the air, mitigating extreme summer heat, and providing essential habitat for wildlife. 84% of urban parkland in the U.S. is comprised of natural areas — and they function as critical pieces of city infrastructure and contribute meaningful public health and environmental benefits to city residents.

Use of natural areas has increased



83% of organizations reported an increase in visitation to natural areas

Organizations have fewer resources



72% of organizations reported impacts on their budgets



94% saw a decrease in volunteer events



72% experienced decreased capacity to manage and care for natural areas (less planting, unable to hire seasonal staff)

Economic downturn and increased visitation will further strain organizations doing this work



Only **17%** were confident in their organization having adequate funding in 2021

Why This Matters

The data above illustrates the importance of providing city residents with access to natural areas, especially during a time of crisis. These often overlooked pieces of parkland make city living more enjoyable. But, the data shows that the municipal and nonprofit partners that maintain these natural resources are experiencing significant financial losses due to COVID-19. As our country recovers from the pandemic, local governments and communities will need to implement a combination of sustained budgets and recovery plans in order to manage and protect our cities' natural areas.