Environmental Impact Survey

Exploring the impact of the environment on teens

Jan 2022
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PART 1:
Introduction & Methodology
National 4-H Council and The Harris Poll are working together to understand how teens aged 13-19 interact with the environment, their attitudes about nature and climate, and how they want to see society move forward in order to protect and preserve the environment for future generations. The survey’s goal is to use primary research that spotlights youth voice to generate change and create conversation focused on the relationship teens have with the environment.

**Hypothesis**
Access and involvement with the outdoors directly impacts how young people feel about the state of the environment as well as they’re empowerment to create change.

**Key Research Questions:**
- How do teens interact with the environment (e.g., time spent outdoors, common activities, exposure to camps, etc.)?
- How does their interaction influence their happiness and stress?
- Do demographic factors like urbanicity, ethnicity, or gender amplify or mute some of these experiences and attitudes?
- Does participation in positive youth development programming (like 4-H) influence how empowered they feel to change the future?
- Do teens feel empowered to create positive change for the future?
This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of 4-H from January 5 to January 18, 2022, among 1,500 respondents ages 13-19.

Data was collected and analyzed on a variety of factors including gender, age, race, urbanicity, 4-H involvement.
Teens’ experience with the outdoor:
• Over 9 in 10 teens grew up engaging in a number of outdoor activities, yet today a majority of teens spend 5 hours or less outside per week - or less than 11 days a year
• Despite agreement that access to the outdoors is a basic human right, accessibility varies by race
• For those who can break away, the benefits are clear: teens who spend more time outside are happier and less stressed

Teens’ attitudes about nature, climate and the future:
• 89% of teens regularly think about the environment, with the majority feeling more worried than hopeful
• Teens are already feeling the short-term impacts as 73% say their community has experienced at least 1 environmental impact, and 69% are “worried that my family and I will be affected by climate change in the near future”
• They are also concerned about the long-term ramifications for themselves and for future generations:
  o 82% “expect to have to make future life decisions based on the state of the environment, including where I live, what kinds of jobs will be available, or if I will have children”
  o 84% believe, “if we don’t address climate change today, it will be too late for future generations, making some parts of the planet unlivable”

Teens’ perceived empowerment to change the future:
• Teens feel “responsible to protect the future of our planet” (77%), with majorities actively making an effort to minimize energy use (67%) and waste (65%)
  • Teens who spend more time outdoors are more likely to engage in activities to improve their environmental footprint
• Yet feel everyone can be part of the solution with their day-to-day actions as 88% of teens agree, “Small actions to improve our environment can have a big impact long-term.”
• Teens are looking for more action from the world’s leaders as less than half agree (45%) that “political and global leaders are making a meaningful effort to prevent environmental hazards to protect their citizens”
• 79% of teens also agree, “Protecting the environment should take priority over economic growth.”
PART 2:

Teens’ experience with the outdoors
Over 9 in 10 teens grew up engaging in a number of outdoor activities

**Outdoor Activities Teens Grew Up Doing**

- Biking / Skating: 53%
- Running: 51%
- Playing outdoor sports: 50%
- Outdoor swimming: 45%
- Camping: 34%
- Hiking: 34%
- Gardening: 29%
- Hunting / Fishing: 28%
- Water sports like kayaking, canoeing, or paddleboarding: 18%
- Horseback riding: 15%
- Skiing / Snowboarding: 10%
- Rock climbing: 9%
- N/A - I have not grown up doing any outdoor activities: 7%

**Average Number of Activities Teens Grew Up Doing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Total (average)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White Teens</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Teens</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Teens</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Teens</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

93% of teens have grown up engaging in outdoor activities.
PART 2: TEENS’ EXPERIENCE WITH THE OUTDOORS

Yet today a majority of teens spend 5 hours or less outside per week - or less than 11 days a year

**Hours Spent Outside**

- **0 hours**: 8%
- **1-5 hours**: 53%
- **6-10 hours**: 25%
- **11-20 hours**: 8%
- **More than 20 hours**: 5%

**54% of teens agree,**

“I have spent less time outdoors during the pandemic than I did before it.”

- **60%** Black Teens
- **59%** Asian Teens

**50% of teens agree,**

“My family doesn’t participate in outdoor activities very often.”

- **56%** Hispanic Teens

Q1: If you had to estimate, about how many hours per week do you spend outside? (Base: Total n=1,500) | Q8. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Top 2 Box: Strongly / somewhat agree) (Base: Total n=1,500)

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Despite agreement that access to the outdoors is a basic human right, accessibility varies by race.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ease of Spending Time Outdoors</th>
<th>Ease of Attending an Outdoor Camp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td><strong>Easy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

85% of teens agree, “Access to the outdoors is a basic human right.”

20% of teens agree, “I am intimidated or frightened by outdoor activities.”
PART 2: TEENS’ EXPERIENCE WITH THE OUTDOORS

Half of teens have attended an outdoor camp, with white teens being the most likely to attend overnight camp.

Experiences with Outdoor Camps

- Yes, Attended Day Camp
- Yes, Attended Overnight Camp
- No, Never Attended Outdoor Camp

Longest Outdoor Camp Attended
(Of those who have attended an outdoor camp)

- 1 week or less (Net) 73%
- 2 weeks or more (Net) 27%

Q4. Have you ever attended outdoor camp? By “outdoor camp,” we mean any type of camp that includes outdoor activities such as playing sports, hiking, swimming, or spending time in nature. Please select all that apply. (Base: Total n=1,500)  |  Q5. You indicated that you have attended an outdoor camp. What is the longest camp you have ever attended? (Base: Attended an Outdoor Camp, n =861)
PART 2: TEENS’ EXPERIENCE WITH THE OUTDOORS

On average, teens are exposed to 4 environmental courses or clubs at school, but are looking to schools to provide more outdoor experiences and learning opportunities.

Courses and Clubs Provided by School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Studies / Earth Science</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture / Farming</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astronomy</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A - My school does not offer any of these</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, schools offer 4 (count: 3.6) courses or clubs related to the environment.

82% of teens agree, “I wish my school did more to provide outdoor experiences and learning opportunities to students.”

Teens most commonly participate in environmental studies (31%) and earth day celebrations (30%).
Most teens are looking for the opportunity to spend more time outside, but find themselves committed to other activities.

Feelings About Spending Time Outdoors

- 62% of teens agree, “I wish I had more time to spend outdoors but I am too committed to other activities.”
- 56% of 24% Male Teens
- 27% Teens 13 to 14

- 68% Asian Teens
- 48% of teens agree, “I would like to spend more time outdoors but am not sure where to start.”
- 55% Hispanic Teens
For those who can break away, the benefits are clear: teens who spend more time outside are happier and less stressed.

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**Teens Overall Levels of Happiness and Stress**

- **Happy** (8-10 on a 10-point scale)
- **Stressed** (8-10 on a 10-point scale)

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**Teen Groups with Higher Levels of Happiness:**
- 4-Hers report higher levels of happiness (44%) compared to non-4-Hers (33%)
- Male teens report higher levels of happiness (42%) compared to female teens (31%)
- Younger teens 13 to 14 report higher levels of happiness (40%), compared to older teens 15 to 17 (36%), and 18 to 19 (34%)

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**66% of teens agree,**
"After I spend time outside, I feel less stressed."

- 71% 4-Hers
- 70% White Teens

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**Teens who spend 0 hours outside are most likely to feel stressed (97%), sad or down (92%), experience anxiety (85%) and feel dissatisfied with their life (74%).**
PART 3:

Teens’ attitudes about nature, climate, and the future
Teens regularly think about the environment, with older teens (18 to 19) being especially tuned in.
Most teens are worried and anxious about the environment today, and the potential long-term effects it will have on their life.

**Attitude Towards the State of the Environment**

- **1 Year Ago**: 21% Hopeful, 79% Worried / Anxious
- **1 Year from Now**: 24% Hopeful, 76% Worried / Anxious
- **50 Years from Now**: 28% Hopeful, 72% Worried / Anxious

**31% Teens in Urban Environments**

- **26% Teens in Rural Environments**

84% of teens agree,

"I am concerned that if we don't do more to protect the environment, humans and other species, wildlife will suffer and possibly go extinct."

82% of teens agree,

"If we don't do more to protect the environment today, I expect to have to make future life decisions based on the state of the environment, including where I live, what kinds of jobs will be available, or if I will have children."
Over 7 in 10 teens say their community has experienced at least 1 environmental impact and most feel older generations have had a negative impact.

**Environmental Impacts in Community**

- **New building construction in areas that used to be filled with nature**: 46%
- **Pollution**: 35%
- **Natural disasters**: 32%
- **Shortages of natural resources**: 18%
- **N/A - My community has not been impacted by any of these**: 27%

**Impact of Older Generations on the Environment**

- **20% Positive Impact**
- **62% No Impact**
- **18% Negative Impact**

Q11. Has your community been impacted by any of the following? Please select all that apply. (Base: Total n=1,500)

Q12. What impact, if any, do you believe older generations have made on the environment? (Base: Total n=1,500)

Q14. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Top 2 Box: Strongly / somewhat agree) (Base: Total n=1,500)

56% of teens agree, “International governments are working towards global initiatives and policies to protect our planet.”
Teens feel climate change will impact everyone, and action needs to happen now

84% of teens agree, “Climate change will impact everyone in my generation through global political instability.”

84% of teens agree, “If we don’t address climate change today, it will be too late for future generations, making some parts of the planet unlivable.”

69% of teens agree, “I am worried that my family and I will be affected by climate change in the near future.”

92% Asian Teens

93% Asian Teens

74% Female Teens
74% Teens 18 to 19
Teens feel motivated to improve the environment, with a focus on water and conservation efforts.

**Importance of the Following…**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental Issue</th>
<th>Importance (Top 2 Box: Strongly / somewhat agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to Clean / Safe Water</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife Conservation</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature Conservation</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Pollution</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park / Nature Access</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Waste Production</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastics</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Female teens place more importance on:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75% Asian Teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Wildlife Conservation (74%, compared to 67% of male teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Nature Conservation (72%, compared to 66% of male teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Park / Nature Access (64%, compared to 56% of male teens)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Low Waste Production (63%, compared to 56% of male teens)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

83% of teens agree, “I am motivated to improve the environment so everyone can have access to clean water and air.”
PART 4:

Teens’ perceived empowerment to change the future
Most teens feel empowered and want to be involved in shaping the future success of the planet.

84% of teens agree, “I would like to be involved in shaping the future of our environment.”

77% of teens agree, “I feel empowered to make a difference in the future of our climate.”

77% of teens agree, “I feel responsible to protect the future of our planet.”

81% Teens Who Spend 6+ Hours Outside per Week
Teens actively make an effort to reduce energy consumption, minimize waste and recycle.

### Activities Teens / Family Engage in to Improve Environmental Footprint

#### Total
- Make an effort to turn off lights / minimize electricity use
- Re-use containers to minimize waste
- Sort your recycling from your garbage for collection
- Buy more local products
- Travel or commute via more efficient means
- Participate in park or community clean-up events
- Bring toxic or other materials for specific community disposal programs
- N/A - We don’t do anything to improve our environmental footprint

#### Teens Who Spend 0-5 Hours Outside (per week)
- Make an effort to turn off lights / minimize electricity use
- Re-use containers to minimize waste
- Sort your recycling from your garbage for collection
- Buy more local products
- Travel or commute via more efficient means
- Participate in park or community clean-up events
- Bring toxic or other materials for specific community disposal programs

#### Teens Who Spend 6+ Hours Outside (per week)
- Make an effort to turn off lights / minimize electricity use
- Re-use containers to minimize waste
- Sort your recycling from your garbage for collection
- Buy more local products
- Travel or commute via more efficient means
- Participate in park or community clean-up events
- Bring toxic or other materials for specific community disposal programs

88% of teens agree, “Small actions to improve our environment can have a big impact long-term.”

75% of teens agree, “Technological advances are helping provide the world with products and services that are more “green” or environmentally friendly.”
PART 4: TEENS’ PERCEIVED EMPOWERMENT TO CHANGE THE FUTURE

Teens feel communities aren’t doing enough to better the environment

- **55%** of teens agree, “My local **community** makes a meaningful effort to prevent environmental hazards to protect its citizens.”
- **54%** of teens agree, “My local **community** actively tries to preserve the environment.”
- **48%** of teens agree, “My local **community actively tries to teach its citizens about the importance of conservation** and preserving the natural world.”

**64% Teens Who Spend 11+ Hours Outside per Week**
**58% Male Teens**
PART 4: TEENS’ PERCEIVED EMPOWERMENT TO CHANGE THE FUTURE

There is a particular interest in seeing their community go paperless, offer awards/ recognition for recycling and focus on zero energy waste.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiatives</th>
<th>Currently available</th>
<th>Not currently available but wish it was</th>
<th>Not available and do not wish it was</th>
<th>I do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virtual work &amp; school options</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-plastic options</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar panels on schools / other buildings</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental awareness events</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable farming practices</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paperless offices &amp; schools</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards / recognition for recycling</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero energy waste</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teens are calling for action from companies and government alike

84% of teens agree,
“We need **more corporate action from companies today** to improve our climate for tomorrow.”

83% of teens agree,
“We need **more legislative action from government today** to improve our climate for tomorrow.”
Teens feel responsibility falls on everyone equally to preserve the environment, but political and global leaders are falling short placing greater focus on economic growth.

Biggest Impact on Improving the Environment in the Future

- 32% Individuals
- 33% Companies
- 38% Teens in Suburban Environments
- 38% Teens in Rural Environments
- 35% The Government

79% of teens agree, “Protecting the environment should take priority over economic growth.”

45% of teens agree, “Political and global leaders are making a meaningful effort to prevent environmental hazards to protect their citizens.”

Q22. Which of the following do you believe could have the most impact on improving the environment in the future? (Base: Total n=1,500)  
Q23. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Top 2 Box: Strongly / somewhat agree) (Base: Total n=1,500)
PART 5:

Appendix
Local parks and beaches are popular recreational spots for teens, while farms and gardens, and nature centers are less common.

### Outdoor Places Teens Have Engaged With for Recreation / Fun

- **Local parks:** 72%
- **Beaches:** 71%
- **Activity Parks:** 62%
- **Campgrounds:** 49%
- **State Parks:** 48%
- **National Parks:** 47%
- **Farms / Gardens:** 43%
- **Nature Centers:** 33%

N/A - I have not experienced any outdoor places: 3% (8% Black Teens)

#### Average Number of Outdoor Spaces Teens Have Engaged With

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Average Number of Outdoor Spaces Teens Have Engaged With</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (average)</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Teens</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Teens</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic Teens</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Teens</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART 2: TEENS’ EXPERIENCE WITH THE OUTDOORS

Nearly all teens are stressed, with most worried about their future and the future of the planet.

Q17. How often do you...? (Base: Total n=1,500)

- **Feel stressed**: 88%
- **Worry about your future**: 87%
- **Feel sad or down**: 79%
- **Experience anxiety**: 79%
- **Worry about the future of our planet**: 75%
- **Feel dissatisfied with your life**: 66%

Teens who spend 0 hours outside are most likely to feel stressed (97%), sad or down (92%), experience anxiety (85%) and feel dissatisfied with their life (74%).

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Teens most commonly participate in environmental studies and Earth Day celebrations; younger teens (13 to 14) are less likely to have exposure to these activities.

Percent of Teens Who Participated In…

- Environmental Studies Classes: 31%
- Earth Day Programs / Celebrations: 30%
- Youth Development Organizations: 25%
- Farming or Agriculture: 21%
- Summer / Part-time Job Related to Parks or Nature: 20%
- An Environmental Agency or Organization: 9%
- National Park Service's Junior Ranger Program: 7%
- N/A - I have not participated in any of these: 30%