

# Using Data to Improve Outdoor Access

October 2025

We are  
**connecting  
everyone  
to the outdoors**



# PUBLIC LAND FOR PUBLIC GOOD **SINCE 1972**

WE'VE COMPLETED OVER

**5,000** projects  
parks, trails, schoolyards,  
and iconic outdoor places



GENERATED OVER

**\$110B** in public funding for  
parks and access to  
lands and waters



AND CREATED ACCESS TO OVER

**4 million +** acres  
of public land





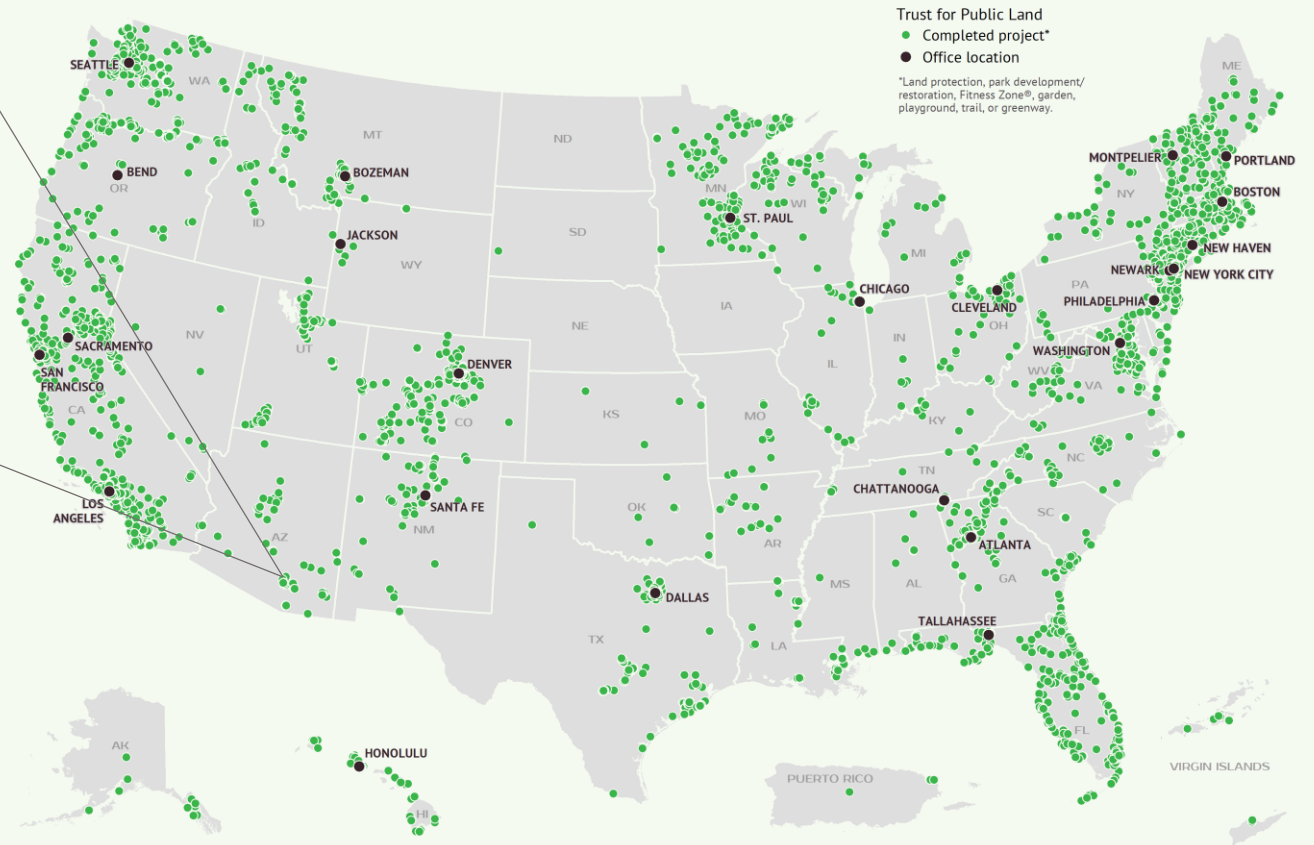


## Expansion and Protection, Saguaro National Park

1M+ population in Tucson metro

Supports community priority to connect  
national park with nearby county preserve  
& protects desert habitat

Funded in part by LWCF

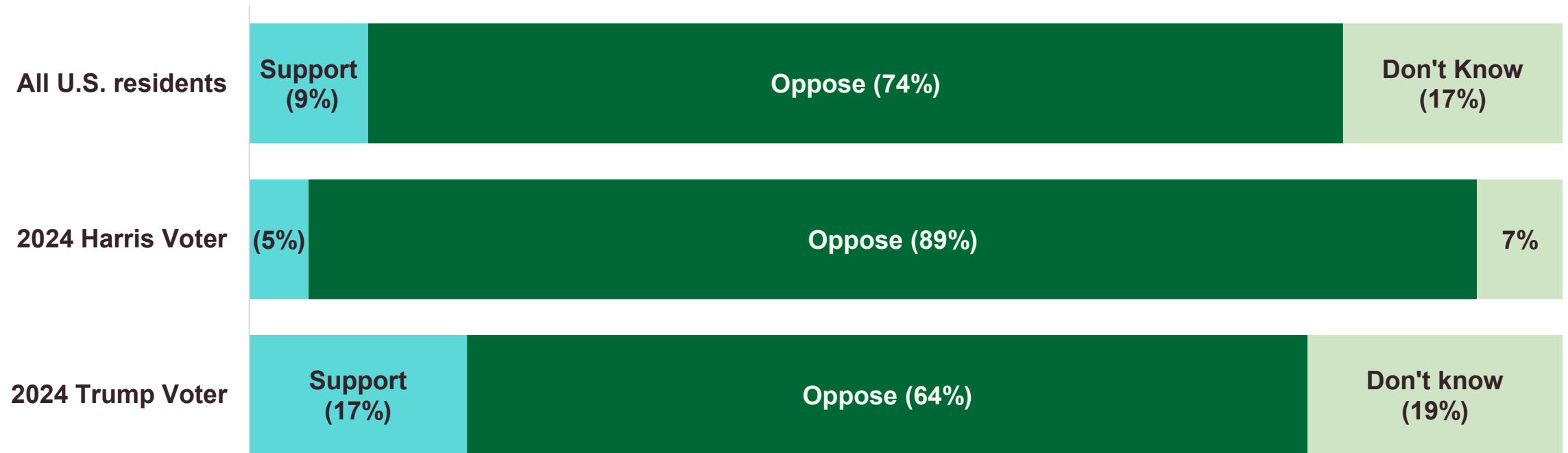


Connecting everyone to the outdoors™

# Public Land for Public Good

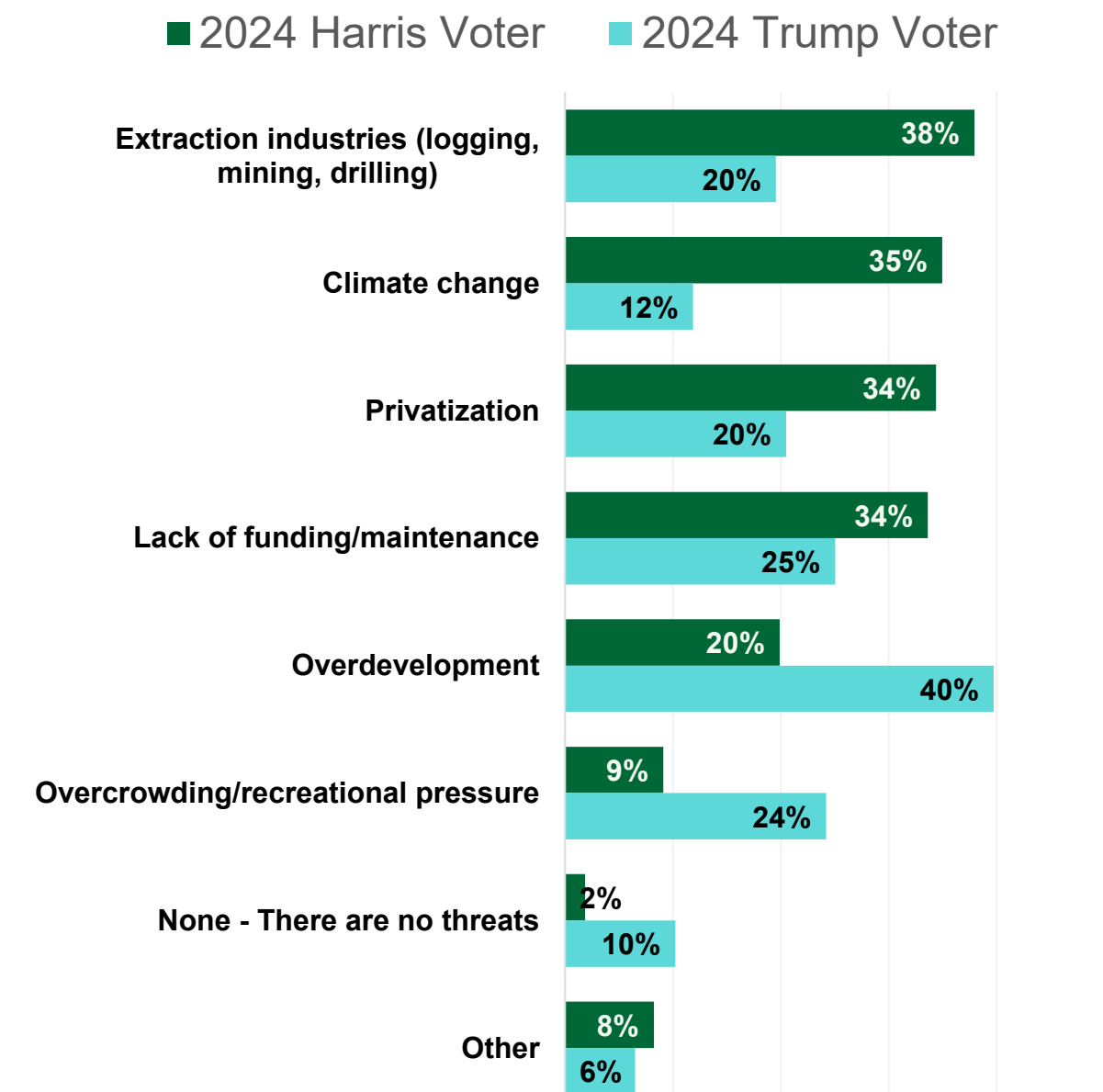
# 74% of Americans oppose the closure of national public lands

*In general, do you support or oppose the closure of national public lands – including visitor centers, campsites, trails, and recreation areas – in an effort to reduce federal spending?*



Source: Trust for Public Land / YouGov Survey of 4,000 U.S. adults conducted March 2025

What do you think is the biggest threat to public lands? (Select up to two)

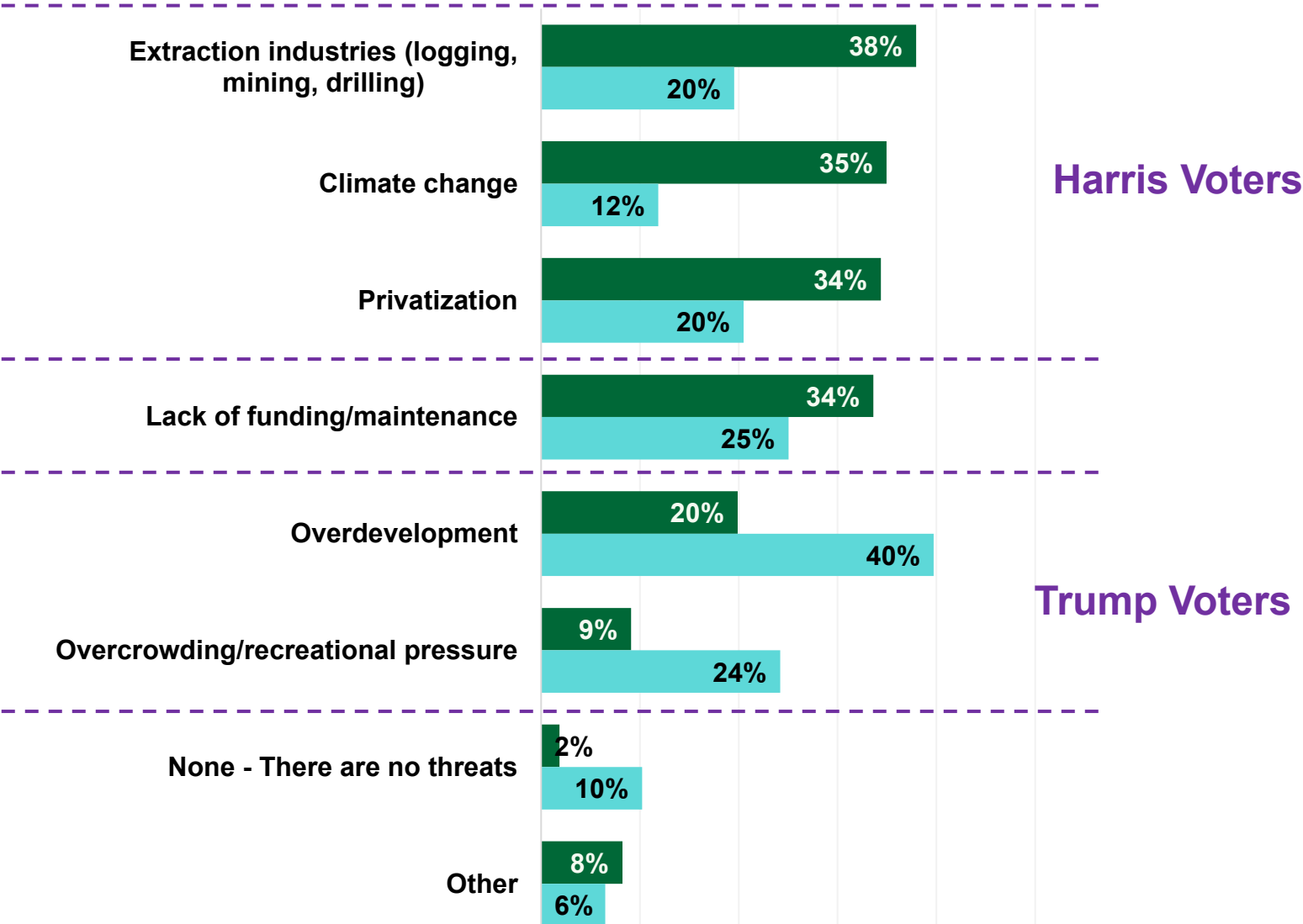


Beneath broad support for public lands are a wide range of beliefs on the **why**

Source: Trust for Public Land / YouGov Survey of 4,000 U.S. adults conducted March 2025

What do you think is the biggest threat to public lands? (Select up to two)

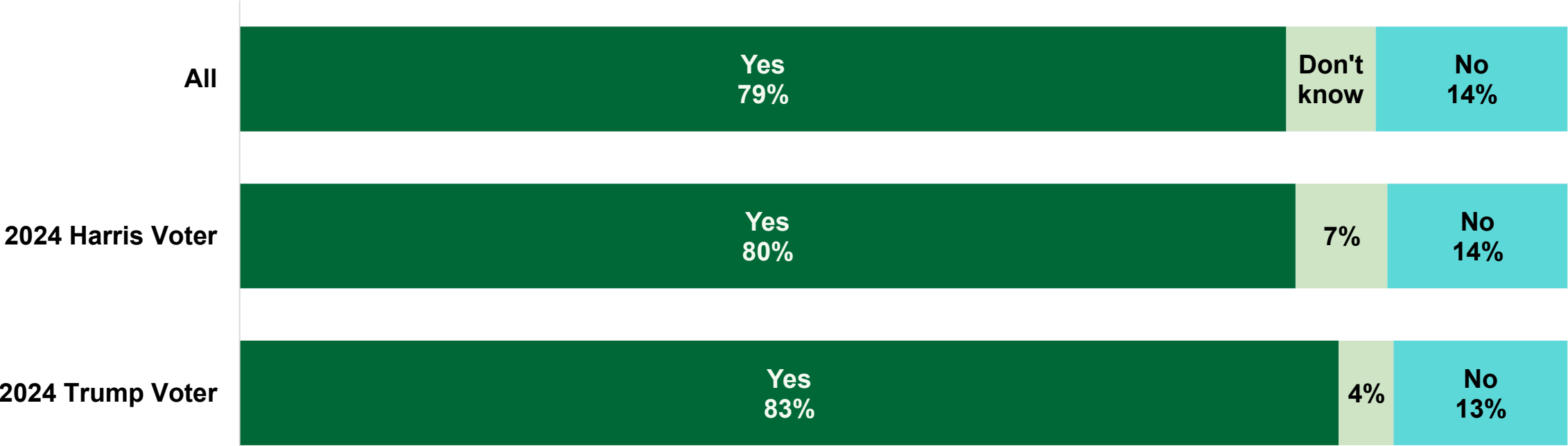
■ 2024 Harris Voter   ■ 2024 Trump Voter



Source: Trust for Public Land / YouGov Survey of 4,000 U.S. adults conducted March 2025

# 79% of Americans have a connection with at least one outdoor place

*Regardless of distance, is there at least one outdoor public space (such as a park, natural area, trail, or schoolyard open outside of school hours) where you feel both comfortable and want to visit on a regular basis?*



Source: Trust for Public Land / YouGov Survey of 2,000 U.S. adults living in 100 biggest cities conducted March 2025





**The outdoors bring people joy**  
“Anywhere outdoors”  
was the **#1** place Americans  
wish they spent more time  
last year



Parks are where we  
make new friends  
and meet our  
neighbors. Nearly  
**2/3 said they met  
someone new** in  
their local park!







Park Pride 2022 Inspiration Award Winners. Atlanta, GA.

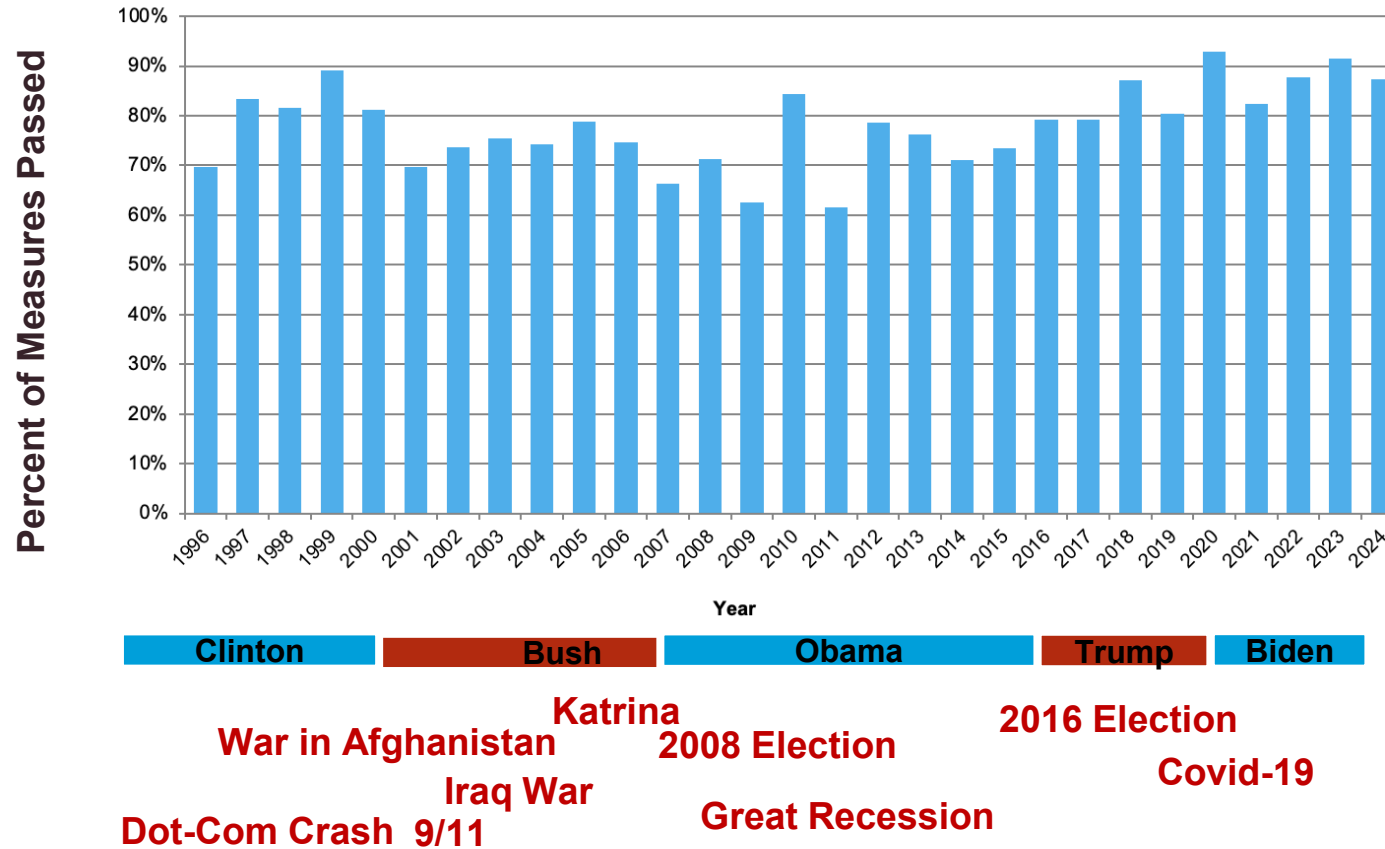
## Public spaces develop civic leaders

“ We knew going in that if we were to be credible at all, we could not be just a neighborhood group. We are kind of like the steward of this \$40 million asset.

- Carrie Salvary, Alliance for Cook Park

# Political Winners

77% long-term approval rate, good times and bad





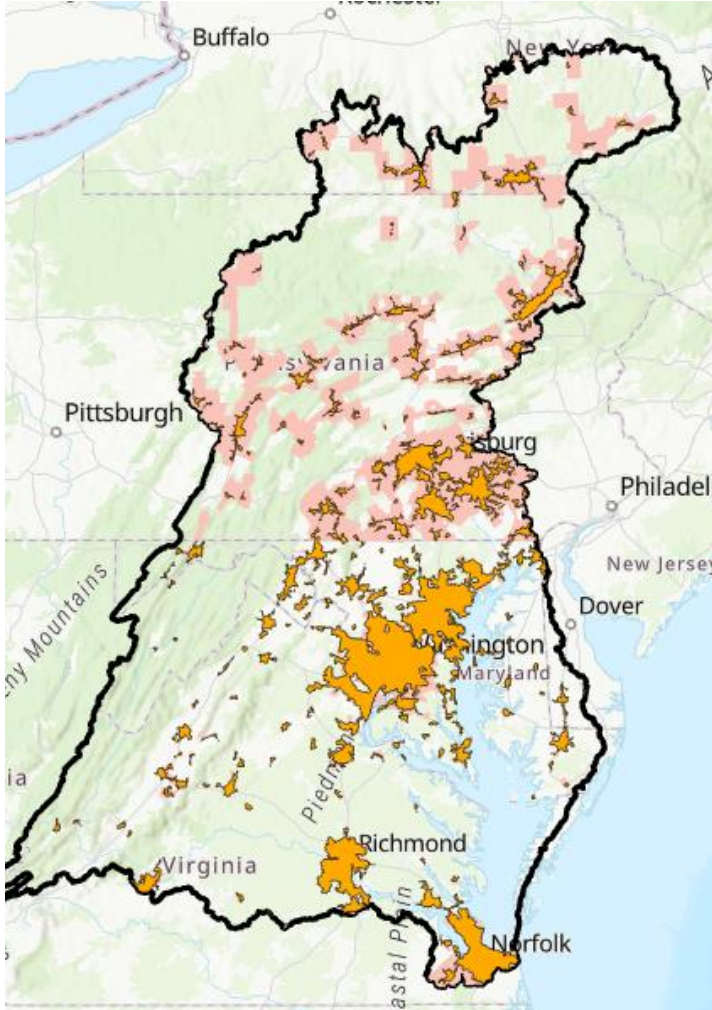


# Access matters.

How to...  
measure?  
influence?



# Access is an important complement to regional conservation goals



## In the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, urban areas contain:

**79%** of population (14.7M of 18.6M)

**8%** of land area (3.4M acres of 42.5M)

**3%** of protected lands (.3M of 9.1M acres)

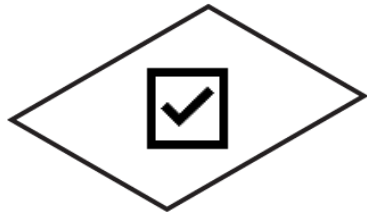
*About 2/3 are publicly accessible*

**6M people**, or ~40% of all urban residents, don't have a publicly accessible outdoor space within walking distance of their home

 Chesapeake Bay watershed urban areas

# Three Common Measures of Access

## PROXIMITY



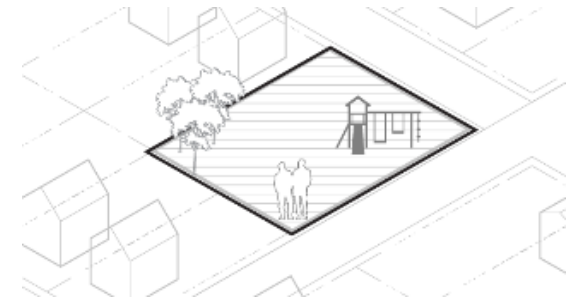
'That's the  
**nearest** place'

## USE



'That's the place  
**everybody goes to**'

## CONNECTION



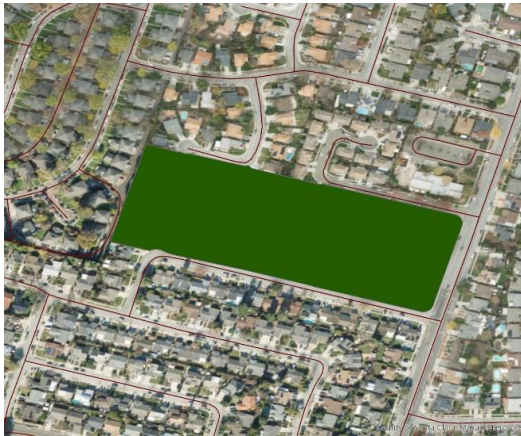
'That's my **favorite**  
place'

Physical Access

Social Access

# PROXIMITY

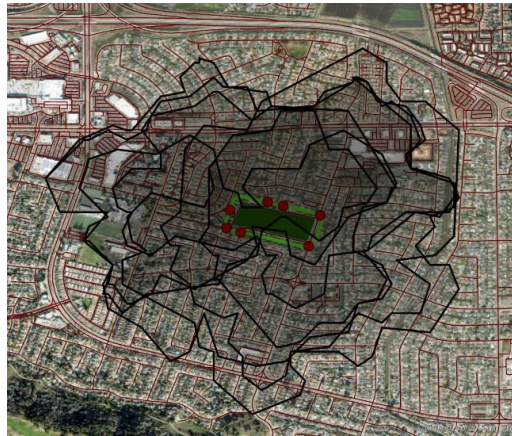
## How we calculate



Public Space



Access points



“Walkable” routes



“Walkshed”



# PROXIMITY

## Is your public space in an area of highest need?



“Walkshed”

In an area **without other public spaces?**

**Near populations with barriers to access?**

Race/ethnicity

Income

Age

**Highest rate of health risks?**

Physical Inactivity

Poor mental health

**High climate vulnerability (e.g. hottest)?**

Heat island

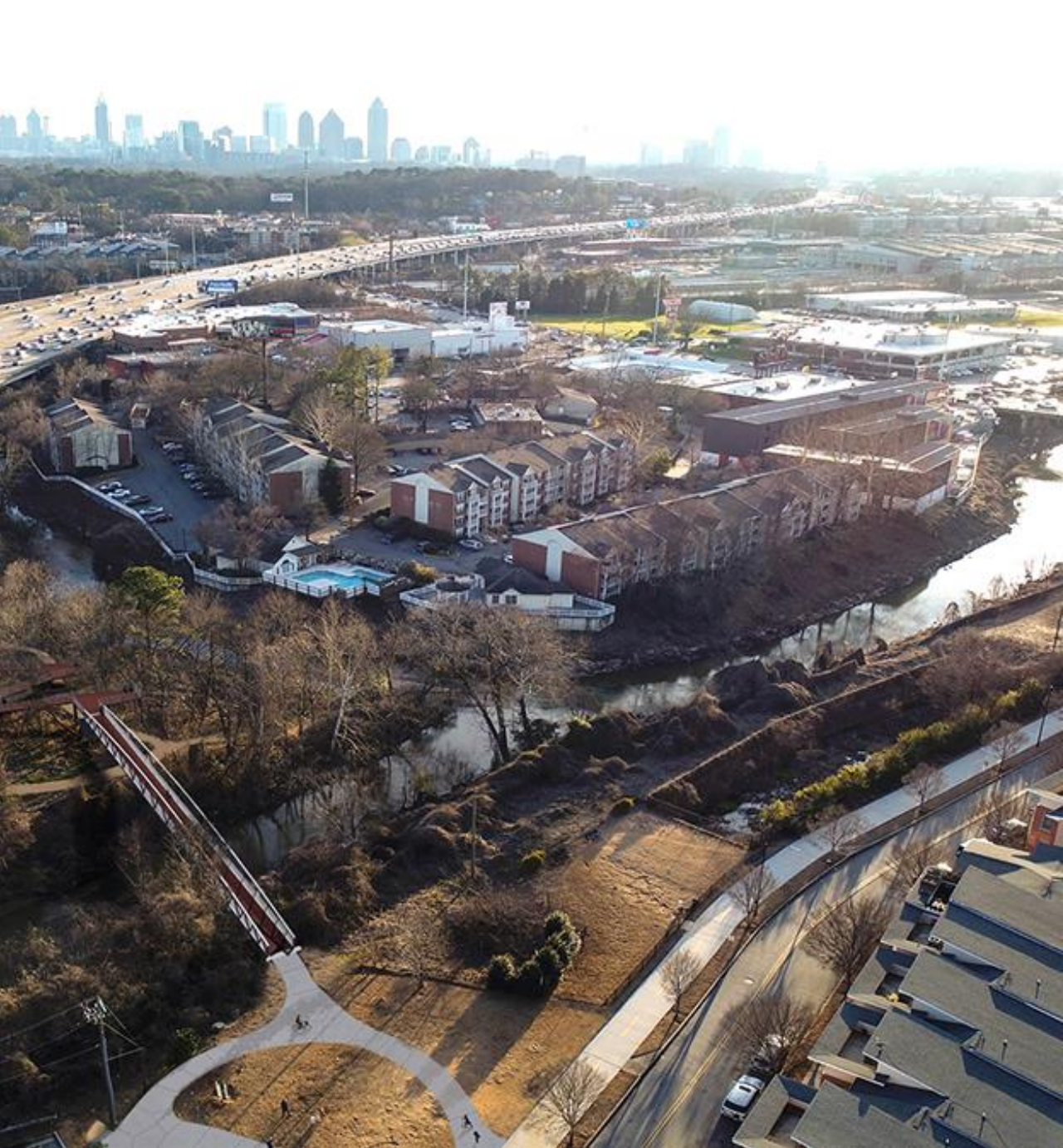
Flood risk

Wildfire risk

**With high civic or economic opportunity?**

Civic organizations

Economic conditions



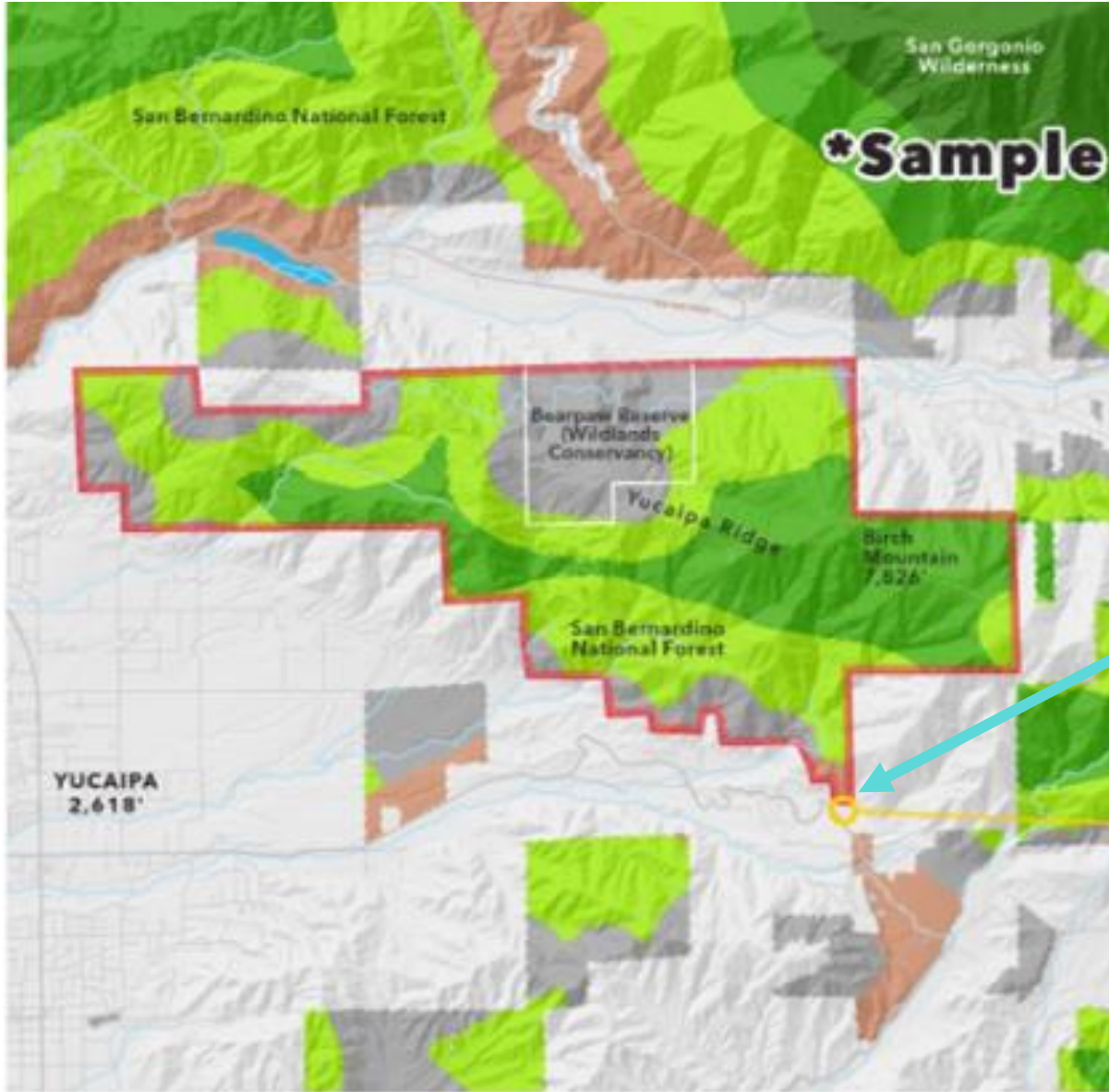
# Pinpointing needs

South Fork Conservancy | Atlanta, GA

The site also had topography issues and loads of utilities. With such a challenging site, I was often asked, **‘Why here?’**

ParkServe gave me the back-up I needed to prove why it had to go in this precise location.





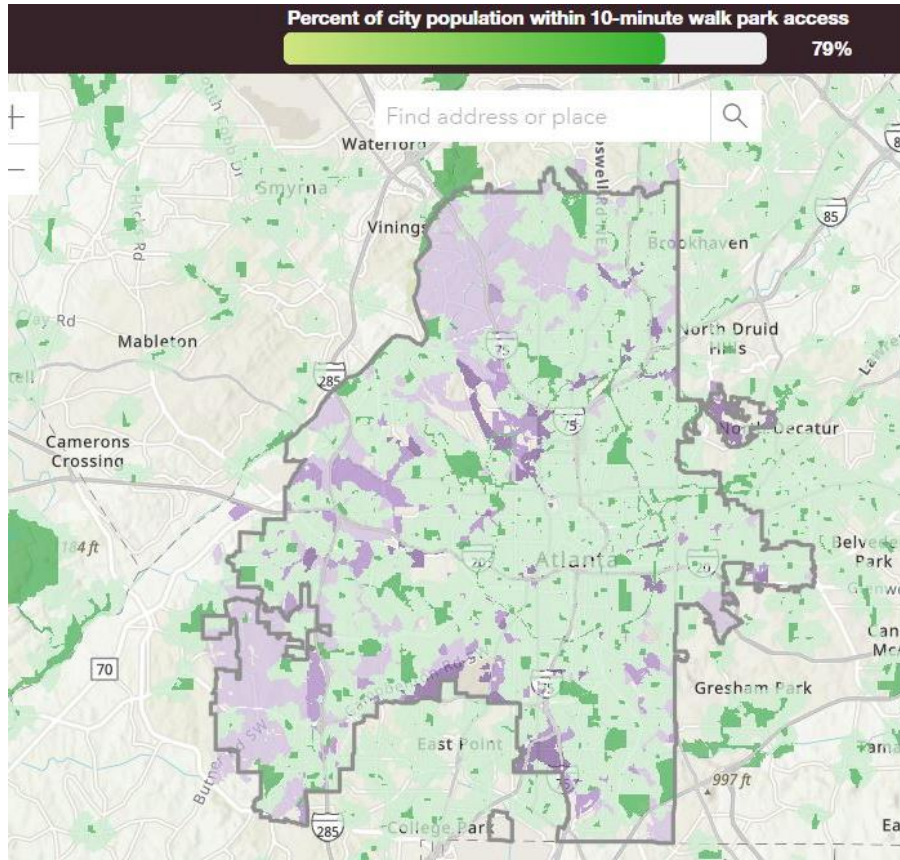
# Pinpointing needs

Example Wilderness Area

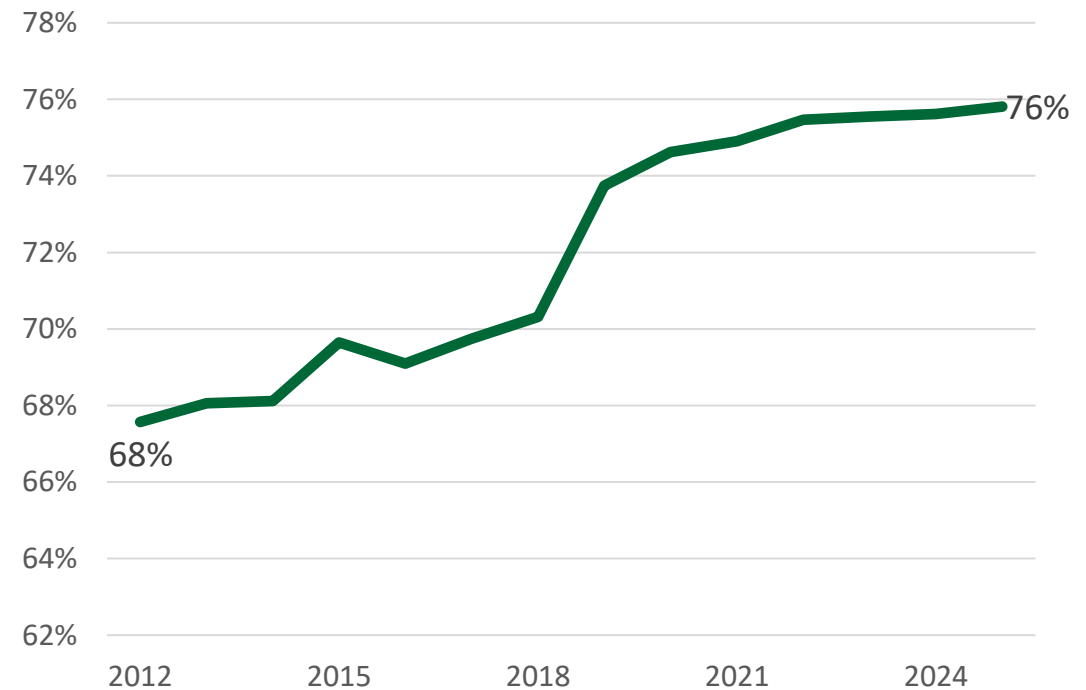
Identifying 'private' parcels that, when made public, would disproportionately connect more people to wilderness areas

# PROXIMITY

## Identifying priority neighborhoods in cities and towns



### Record-high park access

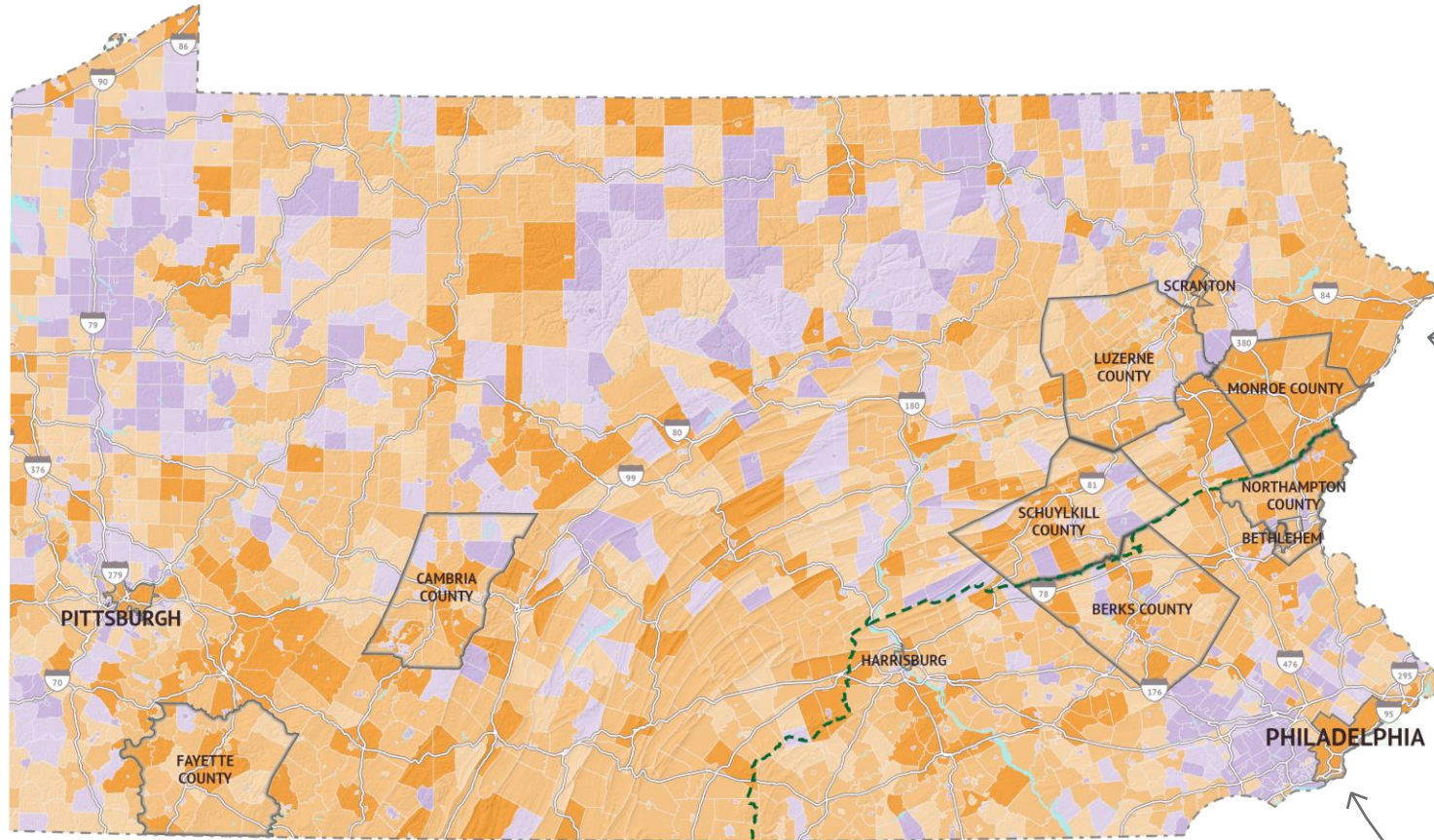


Source: Trust for Public Land ParkScore Index. The number of cities reflected here increased from the 40 most populous in 2012 to the 100 by 2016.



# PROXIMITY

## Identifying priority communities across a state



Out of over 1,600 townships and cities, 200 emerge as the strongest candidates for gains from conservation efforts, mainly in **rural areas** like Berks, Schuylkill, and Luzerne Counties, as well as Fayette and Cambria Counties in SW Pennsylvania.

Philadelphia also ranks highly, underscoring conservation opportunities in **urban areas** to support vulnerable populations and mitigate climate risk.

Some of the highest-scoring townships hug the **Appalachian Trail**, reflecting the economic potential of capitalizing on proximity to the iconic greenway amid surging interest in outdoor recreation.

Highest Opportunity



Lowest



# PROXIMITY

## Access to Destination Parks



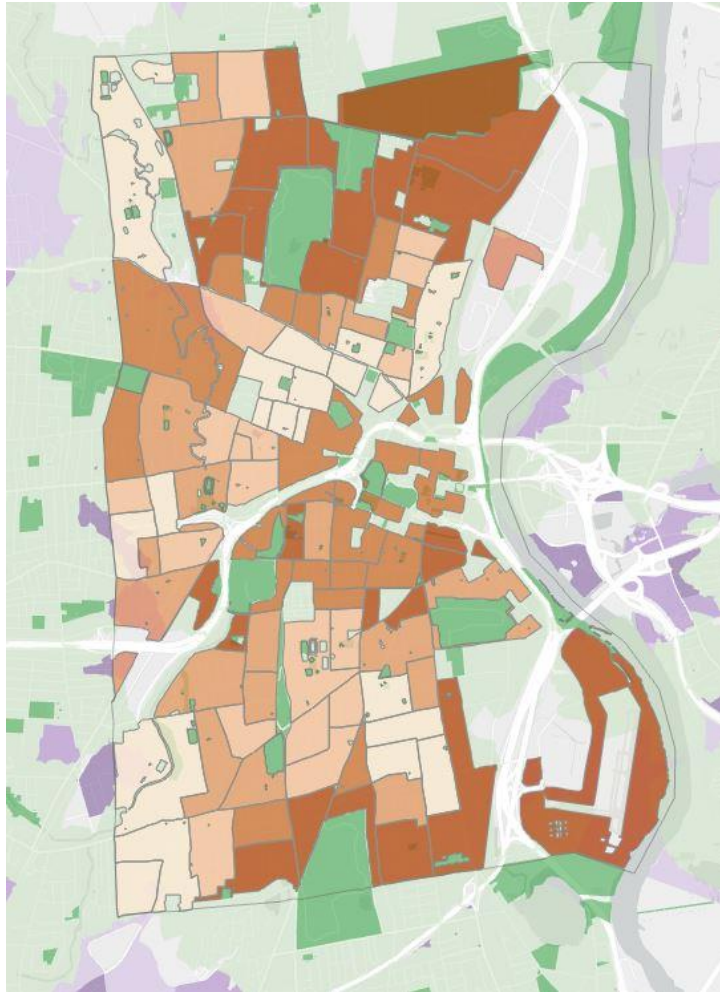
Texas Healthy Parks Plan



# PROXIMITY

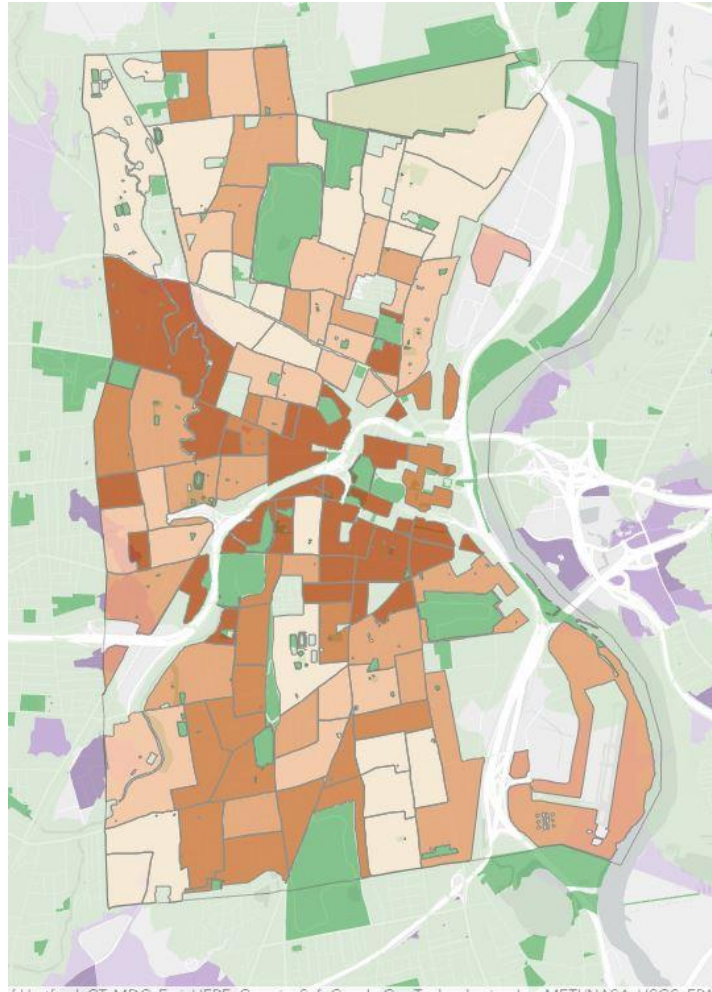
## Accounting for “Quality”

Park Acreage *per capita*



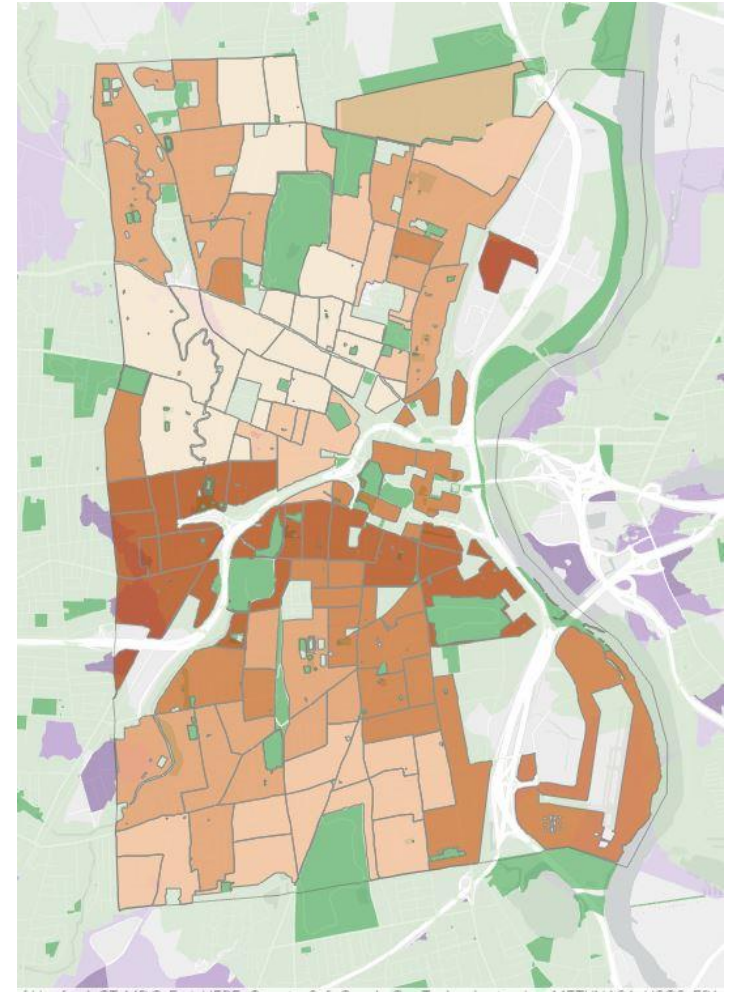
Very low acreage    Very high acreage

Park Amenities *per capita*



Very low amenities    Very high amenities

Park Condition *per capita*

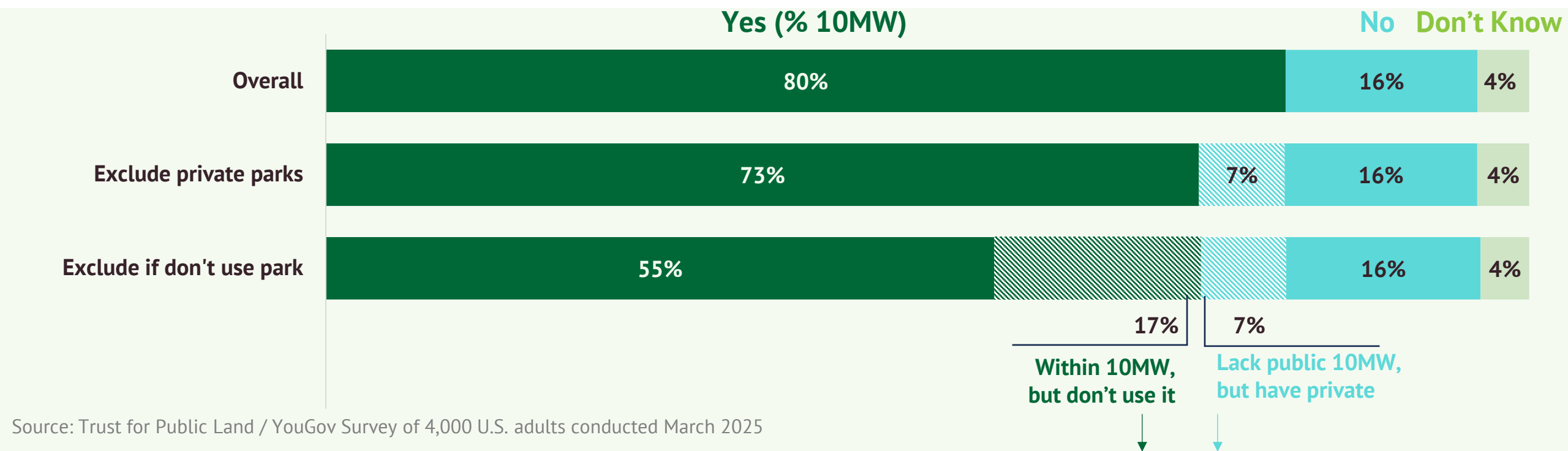


‘Worst’ conditions    ‘Best’ conditions



# Proximity Alone Masks a “Belonging” Gap

Is there at least one outdoor public space, such as a park, natural area, trail, or schoolyard that is open outside of school hours, within a 10-minute walk of your home?  
In the past year, have you spent what you would consider to be 'meaningful' time in at least one of these nearby outdoor spaces?



For 1 in 5 Americans (17%), address via **improving quality or belonging**

For 1 in 4 Americans (23%), address via **creating new outdoor spaces**



Proximity

**Connection**

Use

# CONNECTION

## Survey-derived measures

### Access

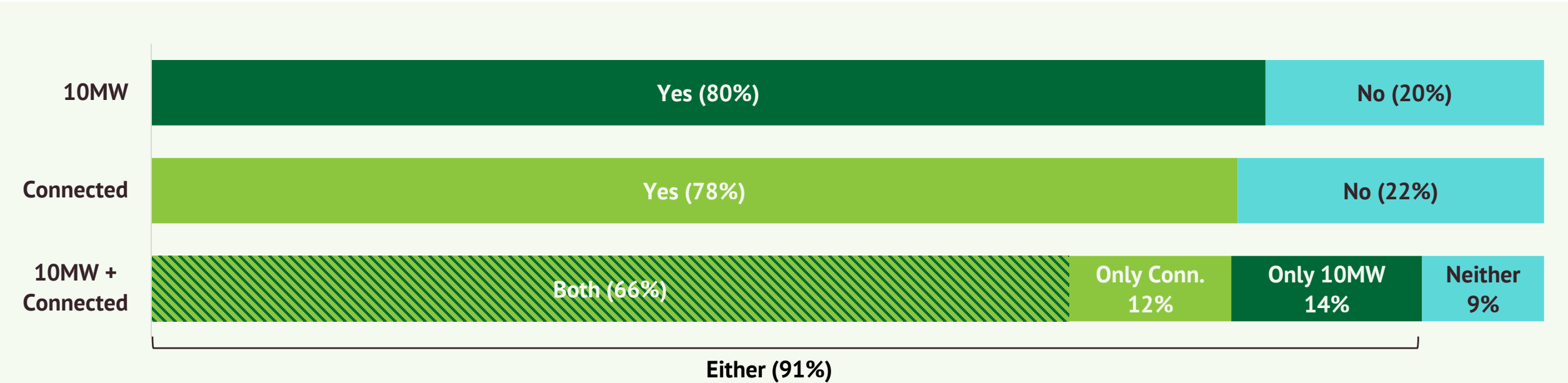
- Is there at least one outdoor public space, such as a park, natural area, trail, or schoolyard that is open outside of school hours, within a 10-minute walk of your home?

### Connection

- Regardless of distance, is there at least one outdoor public space (such as a park, natural area, trail, or schoolyard open outside of school hours) where you feel both **comfortable** and **want to visit on a regular basis**?

# CONNECTION

## Similar to proximity

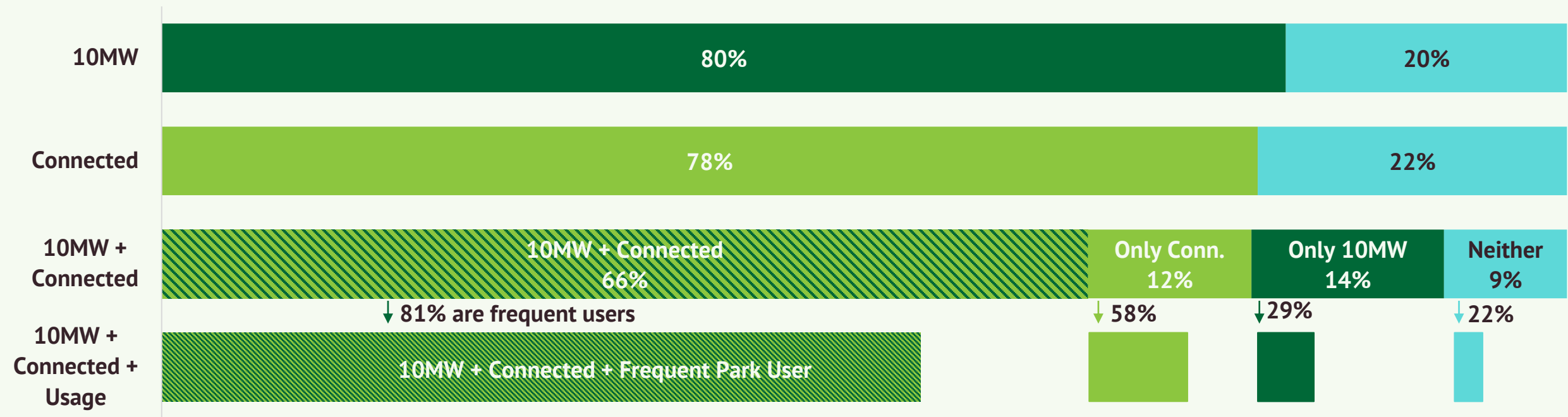


Source: Trust for Public Land / YouGov Survey of 4,000 U.S. adults conducted March 2025

# CONNECTION

## But stronger correlation with usage

Connection, as a metric, is more correlated with outdoor visitation than 10MW



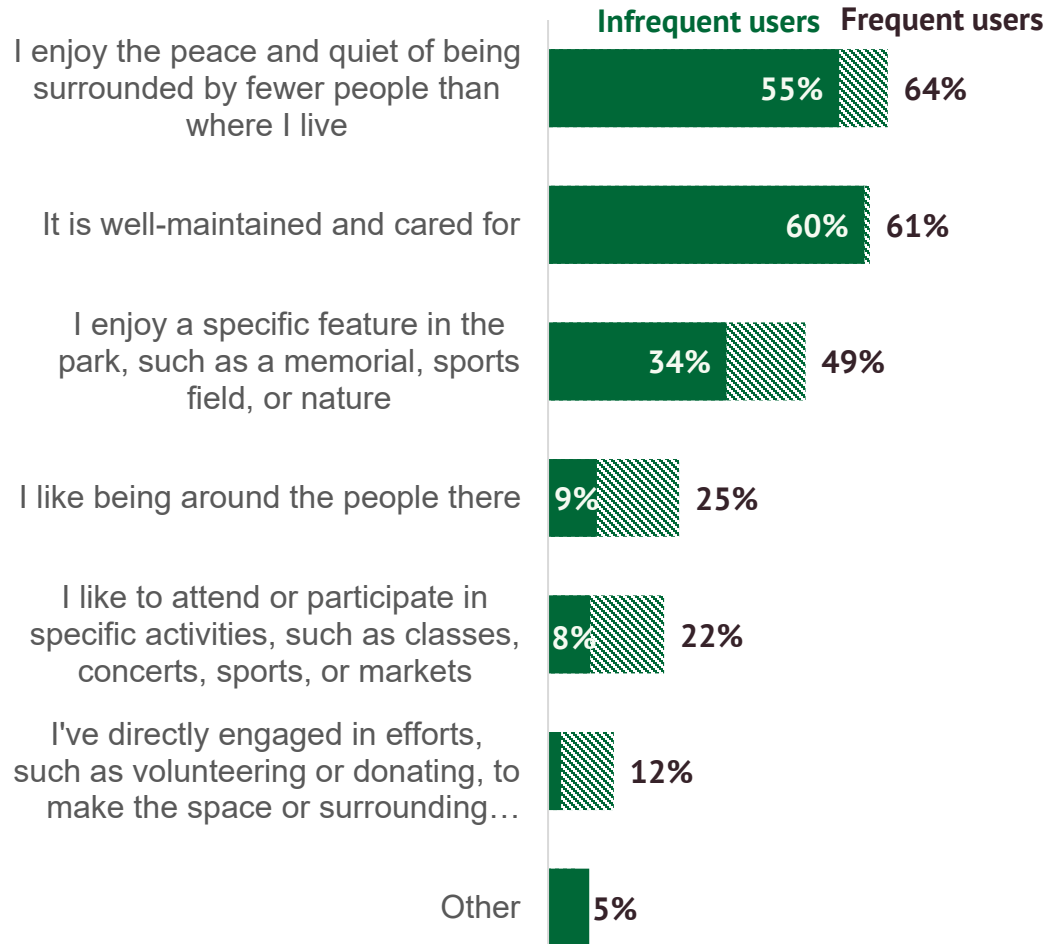
\*Frequent means spend time in outdoor public spaces at least once/month



# CONNECTION

## Factors creating connections

Of 80% of U.S. population that has an outdoor space they feel comfortable and use regularly, regardless of distance ('connected'):  
*What about this space makes you feel comfortable? Check all that apply.*



### Core requirements for having a connection:

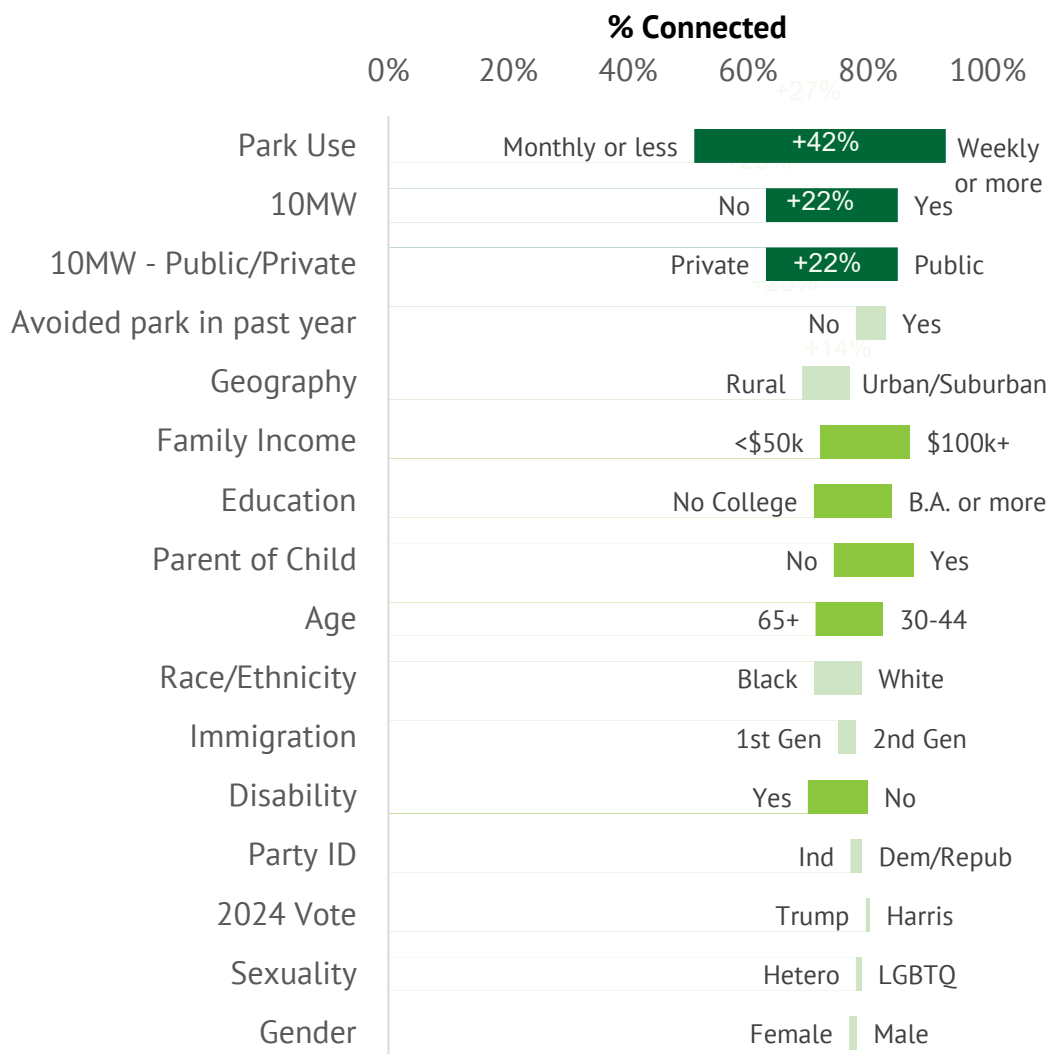
- Enjoy peace and quiet
- Well-maintained and cared for
- Have a specific reason to visit

### Social factors are differentiator to stronger connections:

- Frequent (Weekly+) outdoors users are **2-5 times more likely to have a social connection** with their outdoor space of choice than infrequent (less than monthly).

# DISPARITIES Connection

*Regardless of distance, is there at least one outdoor public space (such as a park, natural area, trail, or schoolyard open outside of school hours) where you feel both comfortable and want to visit on a regular basis?*



## Significantly more likely to have connection:

- Higher income and higher educated
- Parents of children
- Younger adults (seniors less likely)
- People without disabilities

**Remainder of demographics don't exhibit significant disparities in terms of 10MW access**



# Pinpointing needs

Crotched Mountain Foundation | Greenfield, NH

Investing in a school and rehabilitation hospital to assist children and adults with disabilities

Includes 2.5 miles of wheelchair accessible trails





# Pinpointing needs

Generation Wild | Colorado

Introduces young people to the outdoors through weekend outings



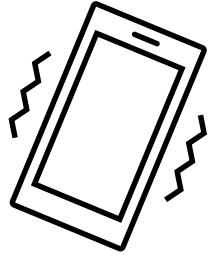
Proximity

Connection

**Use**



# Measuring Use via Cellphone Data



## Location tracking via

Phone apps

+

Advertiser networks

| lat_of_visit | lon_of_visit | unix       |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| 37.88309     | -84.39817    | 1619186335 |
| 37.89620     | -84.39502    | 1619190361 |
| 37.89513     | -84.39395    | 1619190364 |
| 37.89830     | -84.39515    | 1619191139 |
| 37.89311     | -84.39399    | 1619193809 |
| 37.88818     | -84.39815    | 1619194449 |

## Pings

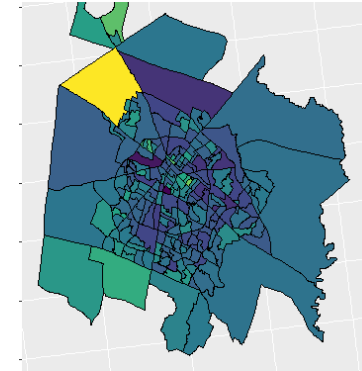
Location

+

Timestamp

+

Device's 'home' location



## Normalization

Geographic

+

App / Device



# Estimates of relative popularity

| Facility             | Popularity Score |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Pier A               | 100%             |
| State Park           | 89%              |
| Neighborhood Park #1 | 85%              |
| Mini Park            | 50%              |
| Neighborhood Park #2 | 35%              |
| Regional Park        | 12%              |
| Pier B               | 10%              |
| Golf Course          | 1%               |

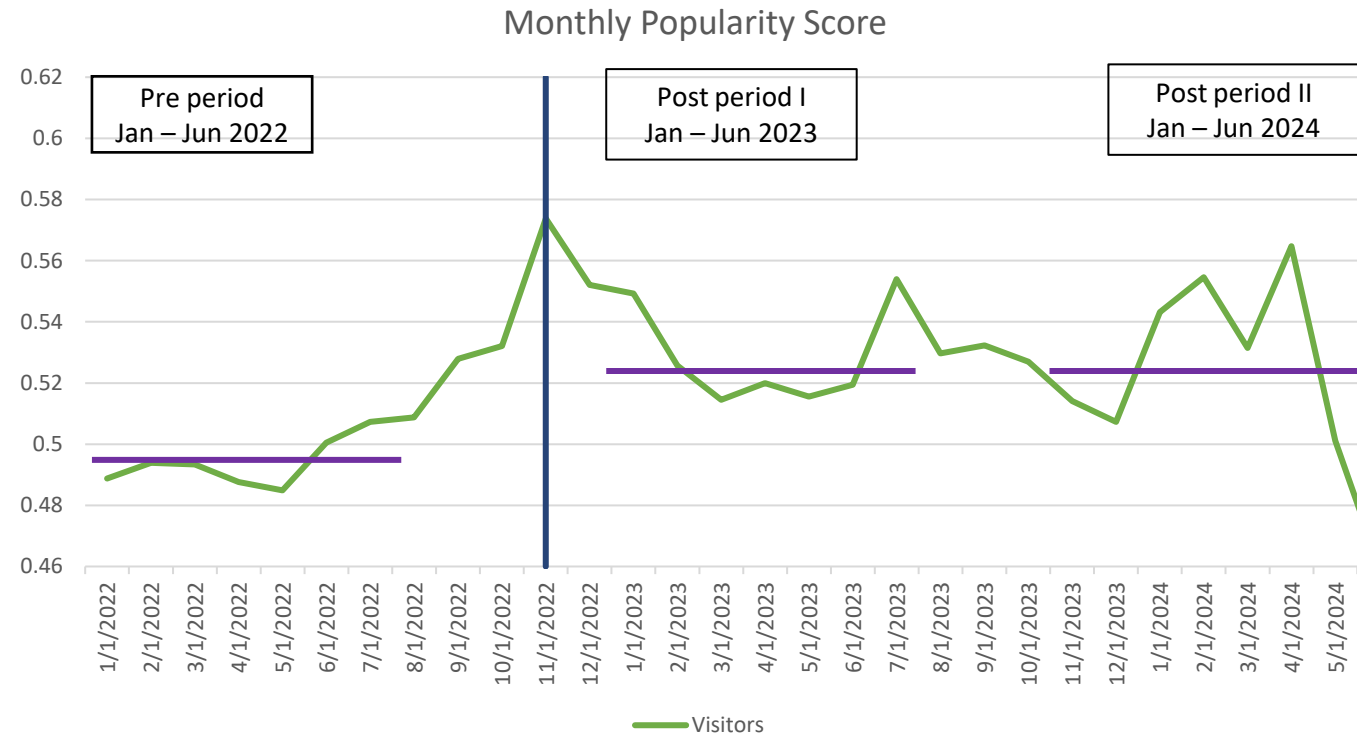
In which communities are people ‘skipping past’ their closest outdoor space to use something nicer that’s further away?

# USE

## Evaluate pre/post of renovations



This third and final phase of construction brings new turf sports fields to the park – Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> 2022



# USE

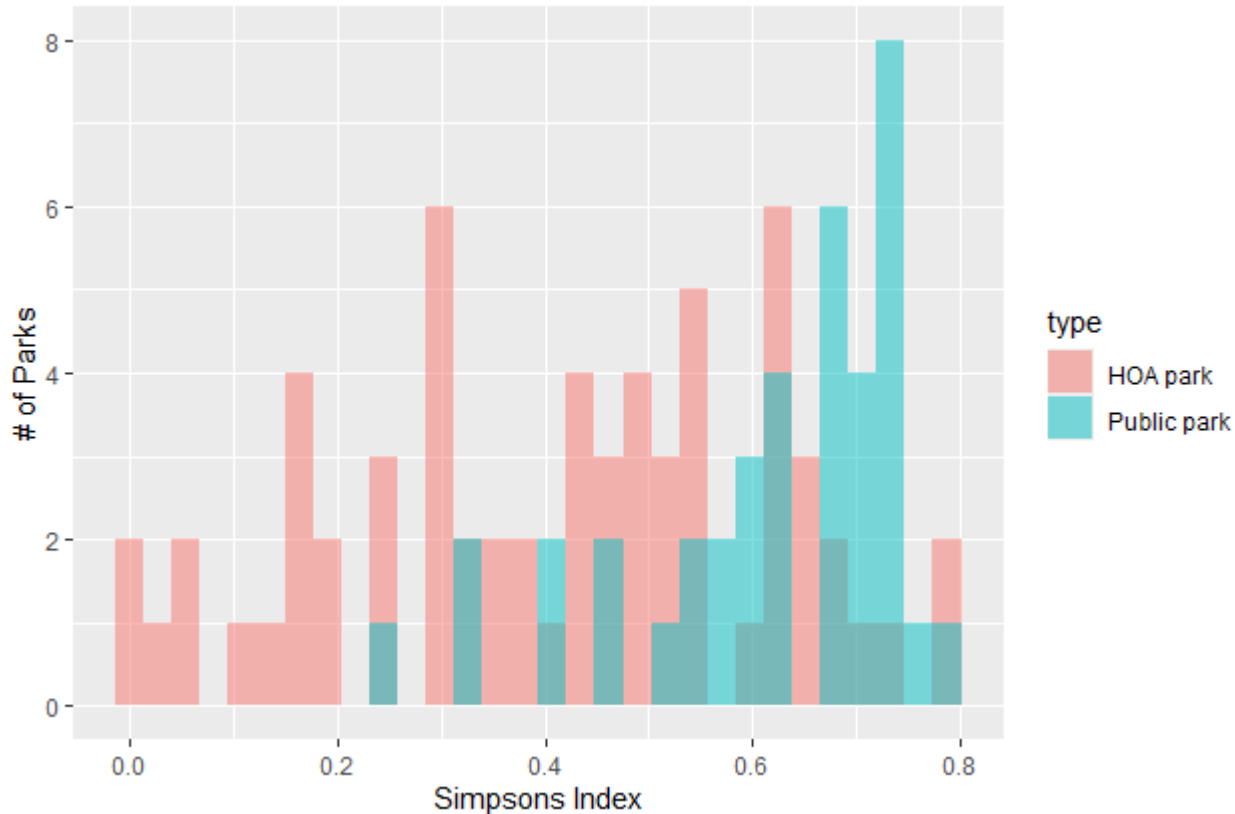
## Summarize visitor characteristics

| <b>Classification</b>                  | <b># Parks</b> | <b>Avg miles traveled</b> | <b>% Local (&lt;1/2mi)</b> | <b>% Low-Income</b> |
|--|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Pier</b>                            | 25             | 3.15                      | 18.1%                      | 35.6%               |
| <b>State or National Park</b>          | 7              | 2.71                      | 19.9%                      | 27.1%               |
| <b>Civic Plaza or Square</b>           | 35             | 2.53                      | 37.7%                      | 34.5%               |
| <b>Indoor Facility or Pool</b>         | 7              | 2.32                      | 38.1%                      | 42.5%               |
| <b>Regional Park</b>                   | 11             | 1.78                      | 37.2%                      | 29.5%               |
| <b>Mini Park</b>                       | 123            | 1.58                      | 51.7%                      | 32.9%               |
| <b>Neighborhood Park or Playground</b> | 151            | 1.56                      | 49.4%                      | 32.2%               |
| <b>Community Garden</b>                | 19             | 1.19                      | 67.2%                      | 27.6%               |



# USE

## Advanced understanding of visitor interactions



*Amount of 'mixing' (diversity) of visitors from different economic neighborhoods in a given public space (higher is more).*

Are you more likely to encounter **people of different economic backgrounds** in publicly managed parks vs. privately managed parks (e.g. HOA)?



Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit that works to connect everyone to the benefits and joys of the outdoors. As a leader in equitable access to the outdoors, TPL works with communities to create parks and protect public land where it is needed most.

Since 1972, TPL has protected more than 3 million acres of public land, created more than 5,000 parks, trails, schoolyards, and iconic outdoor places, raised \$84 billion in public funding for parks and public lands, and connected more than 9 million people to the outdoors.

**Connecting everyone to the outdoors™**

Will Klein  
Director of Research  
[William.Klein@tpl.org](mailto:William.Klein@tpl.org)

# Thank You