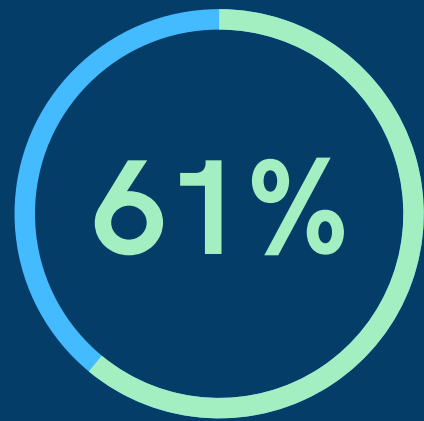


# Access to Parks: Across the Urban/Rural Spectrum

Access to parks and other public greenspaces for recreational purposes is tied to a wide variety of beneficial public health outcomes, including physical and mental health, community connections, and other social health factors. Parks and greenspaces also provide important environmental services, such as absorbing and filtering floodwater and harboring biodiversity, that nearby populations benefit from.



Americans who live >0.5 miles from a park ("areas of public open space")

Environmental justice research focuses disproportionately on proximity to environmental "hazards" as opposed to environmental "goods," as well as tending to focus on urban communities. However, important similarities and differences can be found by applying an EJ lens to the issue of access to public parks for urban and rural communities.

## Rural Challenges      Shared Challenges      Urban Challenges

- Poverty inversely correlated with spatial access to parks, but not green space (even excluding agriculture)
- Underlying health disparities may be tied to difficulties accessing and utilizing rural outdoor recreation areas

- Lack of safe and accessible public transportation connecting low-income and disparate residents to recreation areas
- Need for improved safety and quality of existing parks and green spaces to meet resident needs

- Low SES correlated with closer proximity to parks, but does not equate to "social access" - controlling for safety, land use, and other factors negates findings
- Barriers to access tend to focus on safety and walkability

## Uniquely Rural Challenges

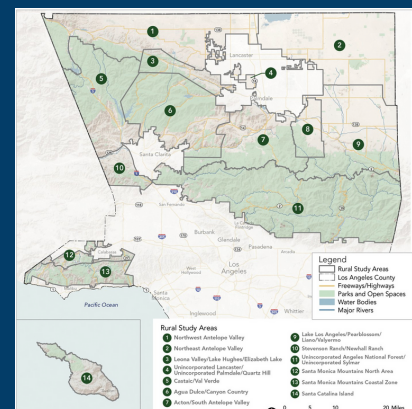
Uniquely rural challenges tend to center more exclusively on spatial proximity and access. Even when similar amenities are provided, urban and rural parks are utilized differently, with rural parks often used for more "sedentary" community-building activities, like picnics and gatherings. Rural communities also tend to "host" recreation areas used by urban residents, leading to unique challenges surrounding the infrastructure needed to support seasonal demand.

## Uniquely Rural Solutions

Solutions to address park and green space access in rural areas often begin with building more parks closer to low-income rural communities, whereas urban solutions should focus more on improving quality and safety of existing park spaces. However, just as in urban areas, the challenges and recommendations can vary intensely by locale.

**There are no cookie-cutter answers to understanding and meeting residents' needs**

A study of rural communities and parks in unincorporated Los Angeles county found that citizens' concerns with their parks ranged widely by region, from maintenance issues to access to facilities like pools and playgrounds. The survey also, perhaps unsurprisingly, found that issues of access center less on "walkability" and more on public transportation to and from parks for communities located >10 miles from a rural recreation site.



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