

# Environmental Impact Survey

Exploring the impact of the environment on teens



Jan 2022



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PART 1:

# Introduction & Methodology



# Background & Objectives

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?



# Methodology

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.





# Executive Summary

## 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:
  - **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”
  - 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:

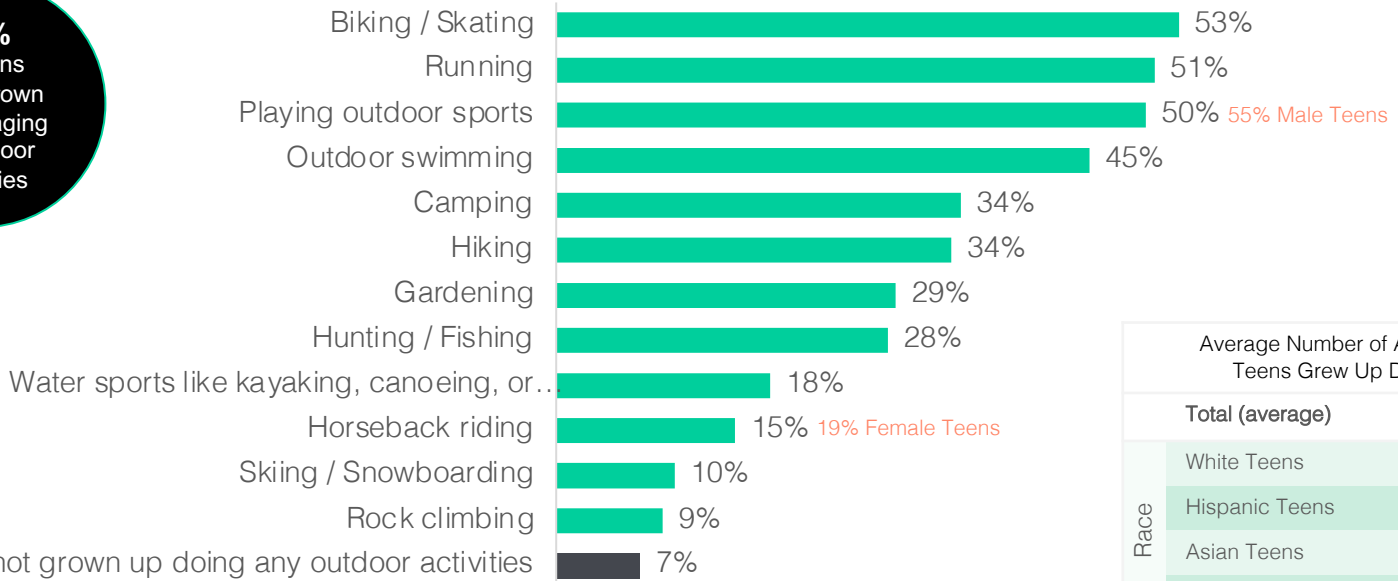
# Teens' experience with the outdoors



# Over 9 in 10 teens grew up engaging in a number of outdoor activities

## Outdoor Activities Teens Grew Up Doing

**93%**  
of teens  
have grown  
up engaging  
in outdoor  
activities



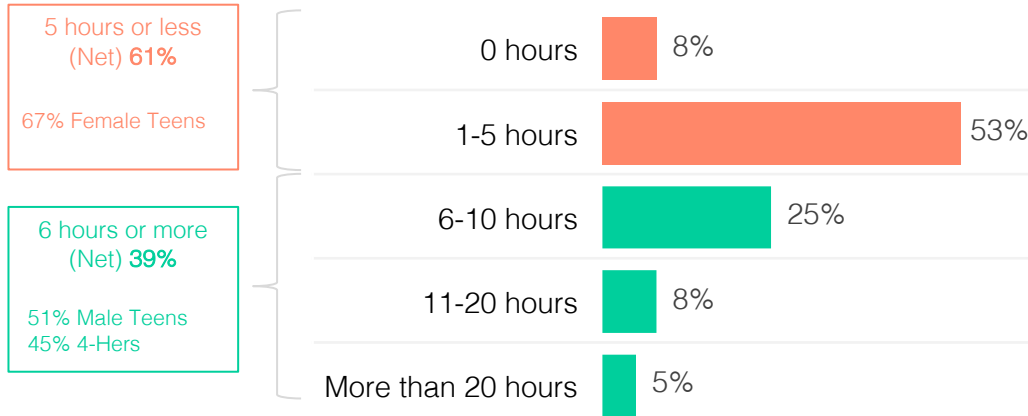
Average Number of Activities Teens Grew Up Doing		
<b>Total (average)</b>	<b>3.9</b>	
Race	White Teens	4.5
	Hispanic Teens	3.5
	Asian Teens	3.3
	Black Teens	2.9

Q3. Which of the following outdoor activities, if any, have you grown up doing? Please select all that apply. (Base: Total n=1,500)



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

### Hours Spent Outside



54% of teens agree,

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

60% Black Teens  
59% Asian Teens

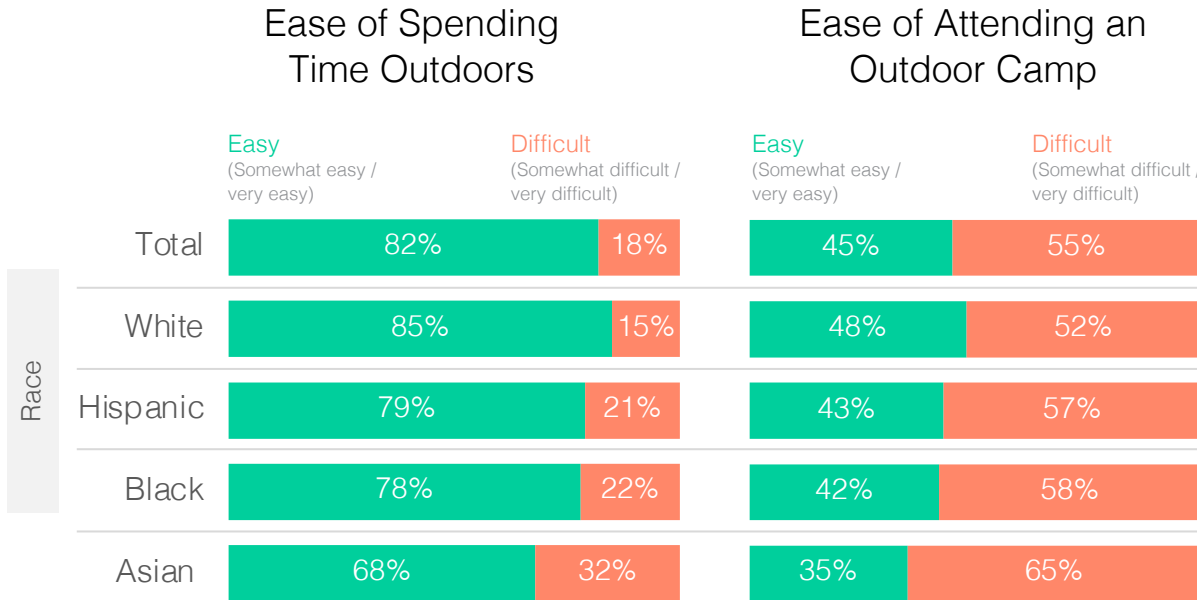
50% of teens agree,

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

56% Hispanic Teens



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



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

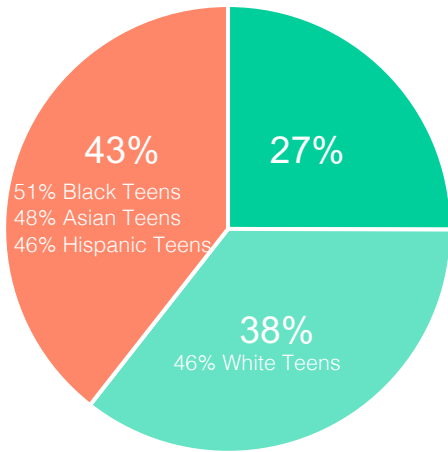
20% of teens agree, "I am intimidated or frightened by outdoor activities."

Q7. If you wanted to do the following, how easy would it be to do so? (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)



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

## Experiences with Outdoor Camps



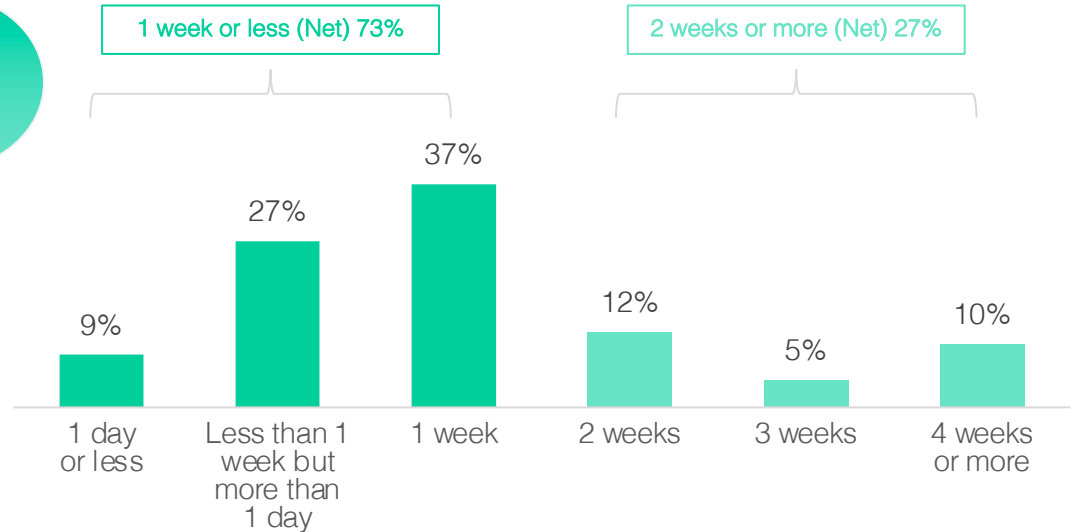
- Yes, Attended Day Camp
- Yes, Attended Overnight Camp
- No, Never Attended Outdoor Camp

57% (Net) have attended an outdoor camp.



## Longest Outdoor Camp Attended

(Of those who have attended an outdoor camp)



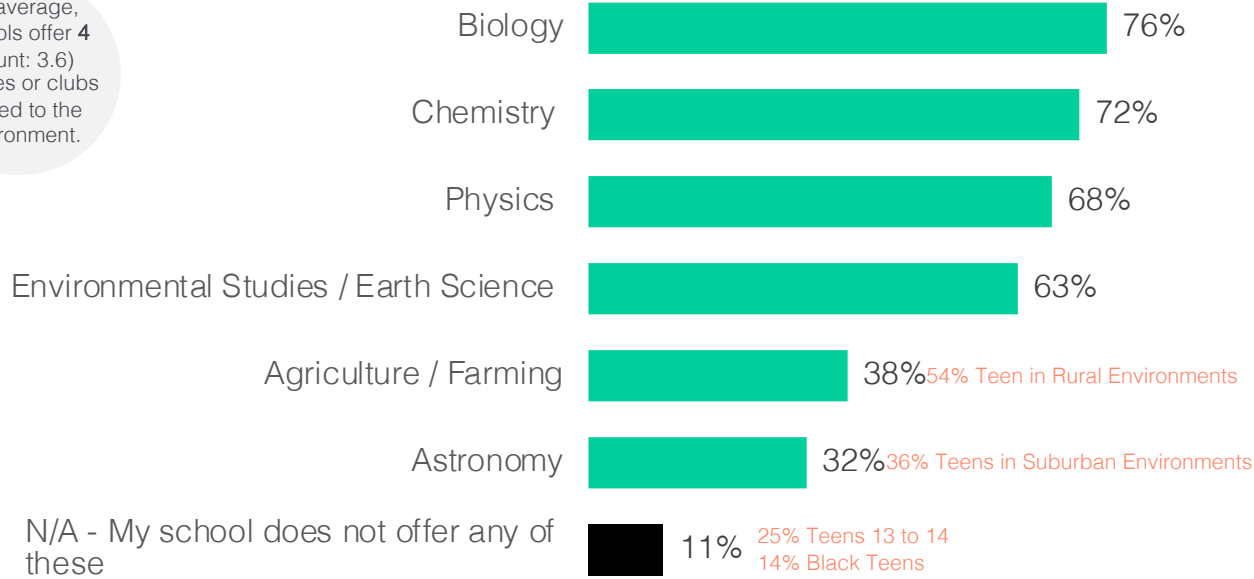
Q4. Have you ever attended outdoor camp? By 'outdoor camp,' we mean any type of camp that includes outdoor activities such as playing sports, hiking, swimming, or spending time in nature. Please select all that apply. (Base: Total n=1,500) | Q5. You indicated that you have attended an outdoor camp. What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



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

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."

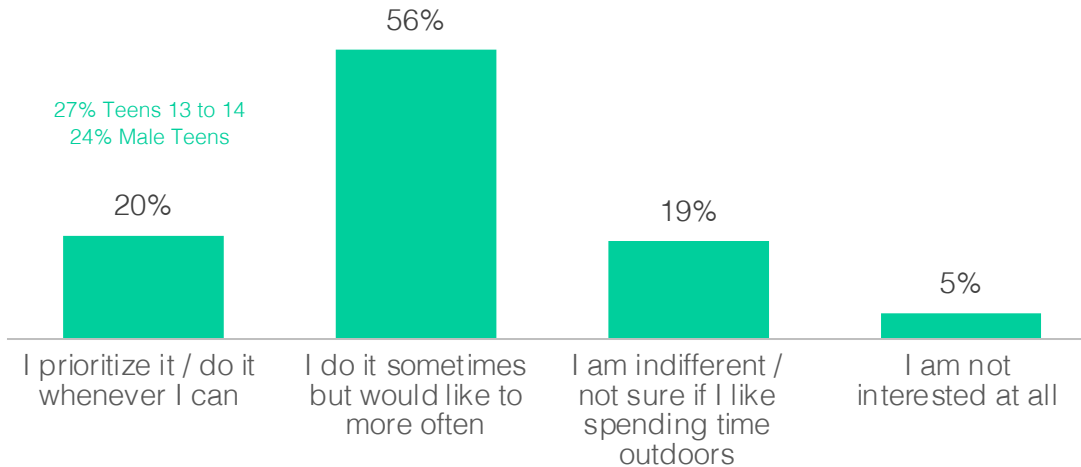
Teens most commonly participate in environmental studies (31%) and earth day celebrations (30%).

Q18. Which of the following courses or clubs, if any, does your school provide? Please select all that apply. (Base: Total n=1,500) | Q19. Have you ever participated in any of the following? Please select all that apply. (Base: Total n=1,500) | Q20. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Top 2 Box: Strongly / somewhat agree) (Base: Total n=1,500)



# 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.”

68% Asian Teens

48% of teens agree,

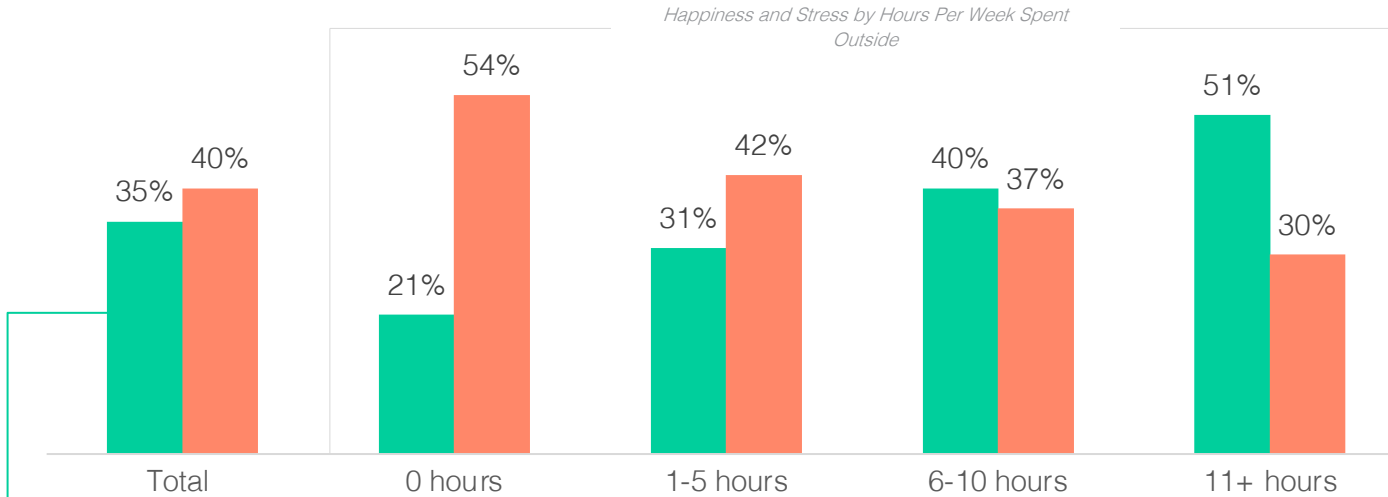
“I would like to spend more time outdoors but am not sure where to start.”

55% Hispanic Teens



For those who can break away, the benefits are clear: teens who spend more time outside are happier and less stressed

### Teens Overall Levels of Happiness and Stress



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

66% of teens agree, "After I spend time outside, I feel less stressed."  
 71% 4-Hers  
 70% White Teens

**Teen Groups with Higher Levels of Happiness:**

- 4-Hers report higher levels of happiness (44%) compared 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%)

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%)



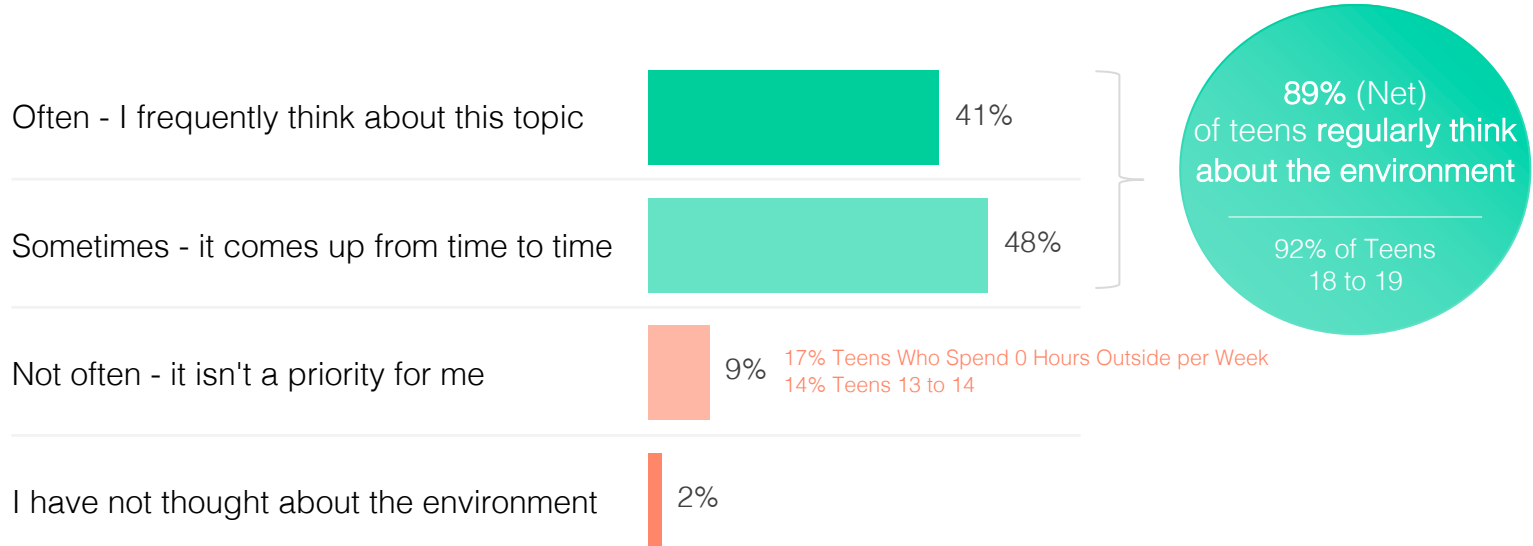
PART 3:

# Teens' attitudes about nature, climate, and the future



Teens regularly think about the environment, with older teens (18 to 19) being especially tuned in

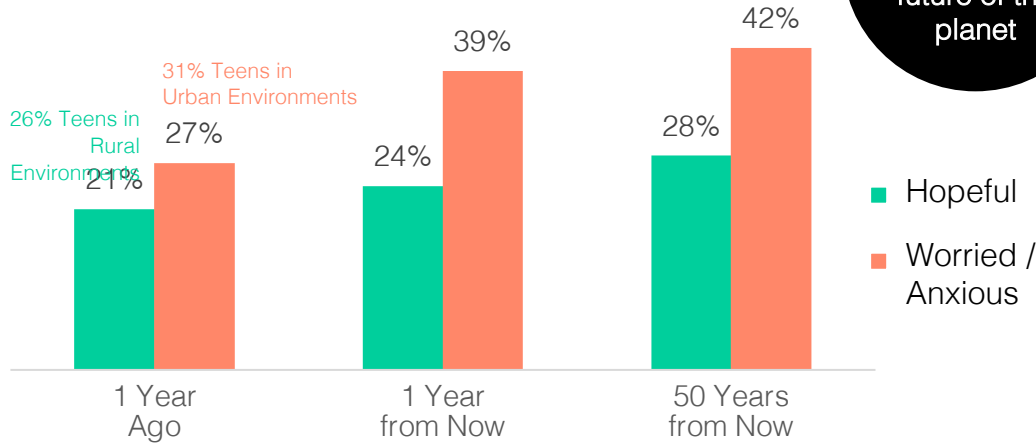
### How Often Teens Think About the Environment





# 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



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,

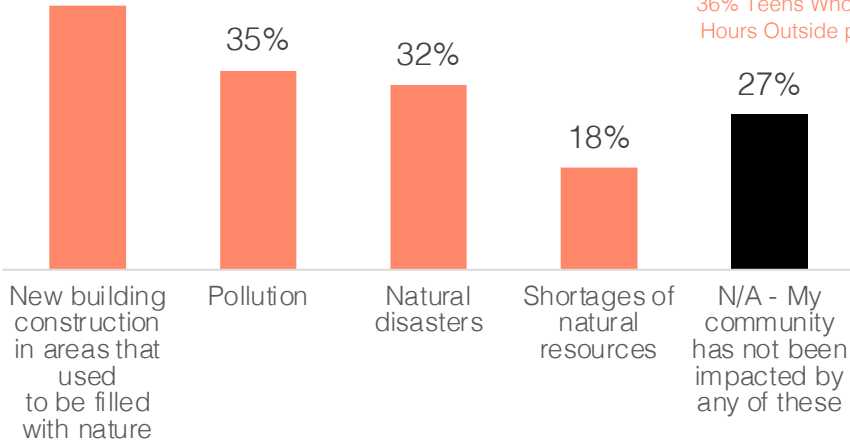
“If we don't do more to protect the environment today, I expect to have to make future life decisions based on the state of the environment, including where I live, what kinds of jobs will be available, or if I will have children.”



# 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

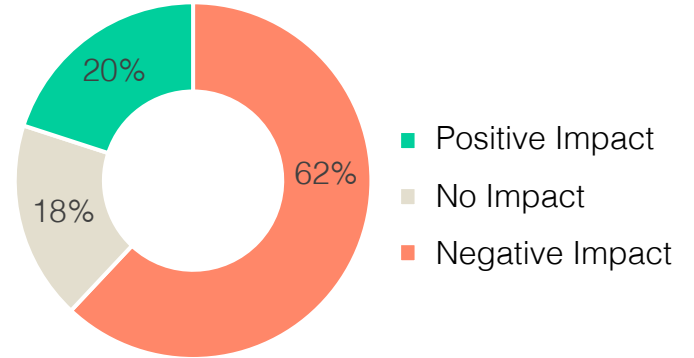
53% Teens Who Spend  
11+ Hours Outside per  
Week



73% of teens say their community has experienced at least 1 environmental impact

36% Teens Who Spend 0 Hours Outside per Week

## Impact of Older Generations on the Environment



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.”

92% Asian Teens

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.”

93% Asian Teens

69% of teens agree,

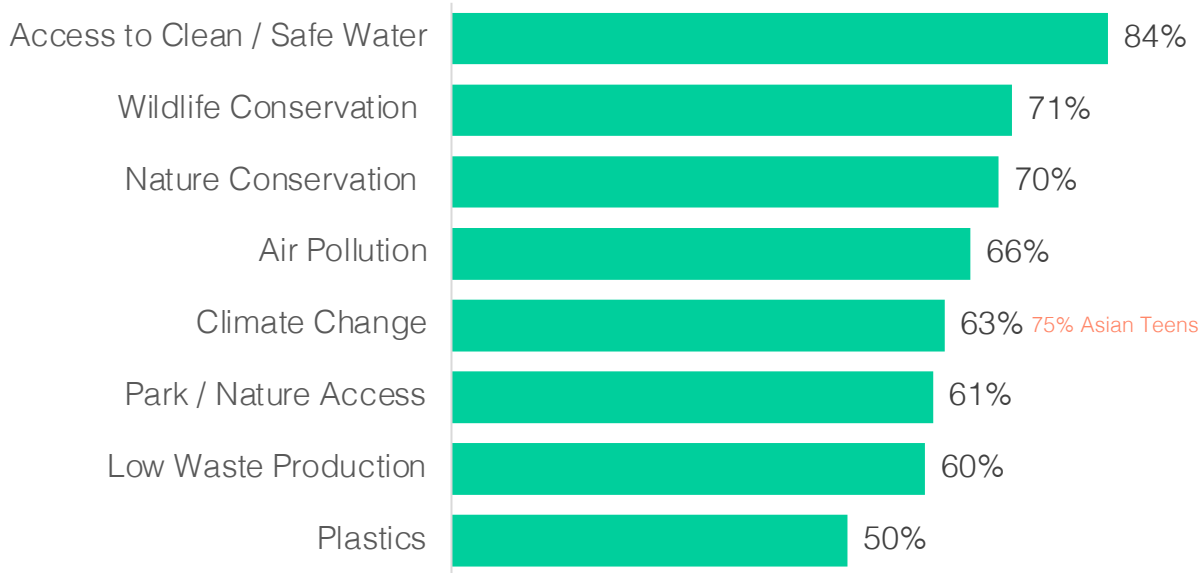
“I am worried that my family and I will be affected by climate change in the near future.”

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...  
(Important, 8-10 on a 10-point scale)



83% of teens agree,

“I am motivated to improve the environment so everyone can have access to clean water and air.”

Female teens place more importance on:

- **Wildlife Conservation** (74%, compared to 67% of male teens)
- **Nature Conservation** (72%, compared to 66% of male teens)
- **Park / Nature Access** (64%, compared to 56% of male teens)
- **Low Waste Production** (63%, compared to 56% of male teens)



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.”

81% Teens Who Spend 6+ Hours Outside per Week

77% of teens agree,

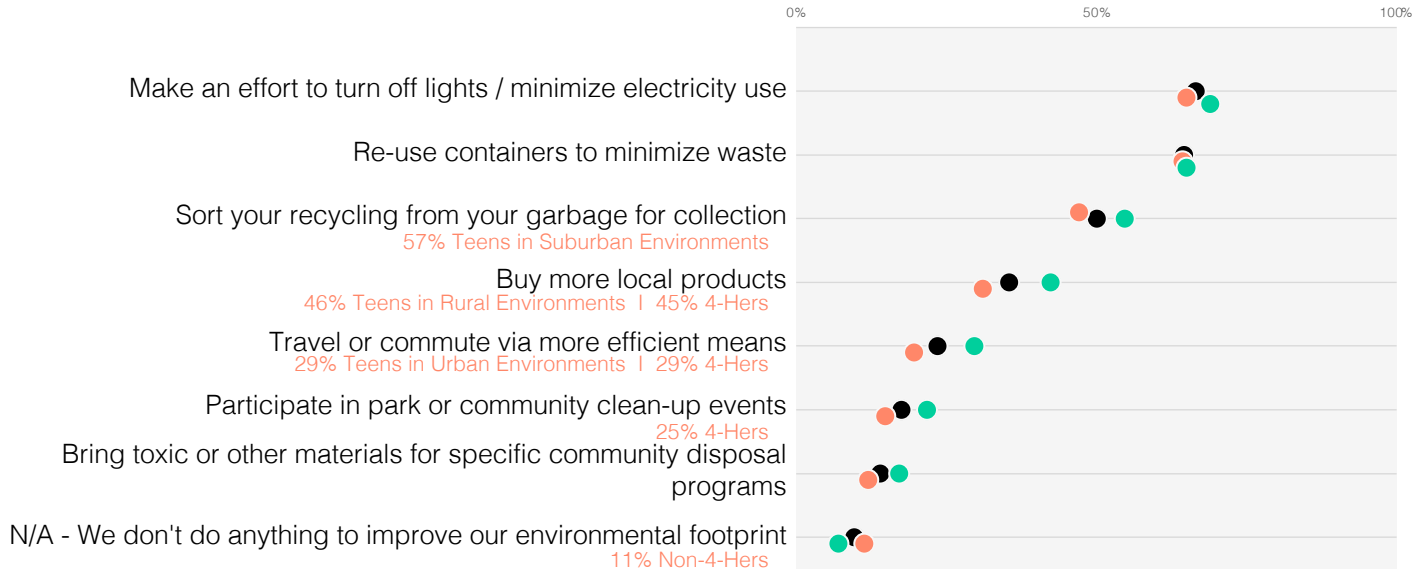
“I feel responsible to protect the future of our planet.”



# Teens actively make an effort to reduce energy consumption, minimize waste and recycle

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

■ Total   
 ■ Teens Who Spend 0-5 Hours Outside (per week)   
 ■ Teens Who Spend 6+ Hours Outside (per week)



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."



## 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.”

64% Teens Who Spend 11+ Hours Outside per Week  
58% Male Teens

48% of teens agree,

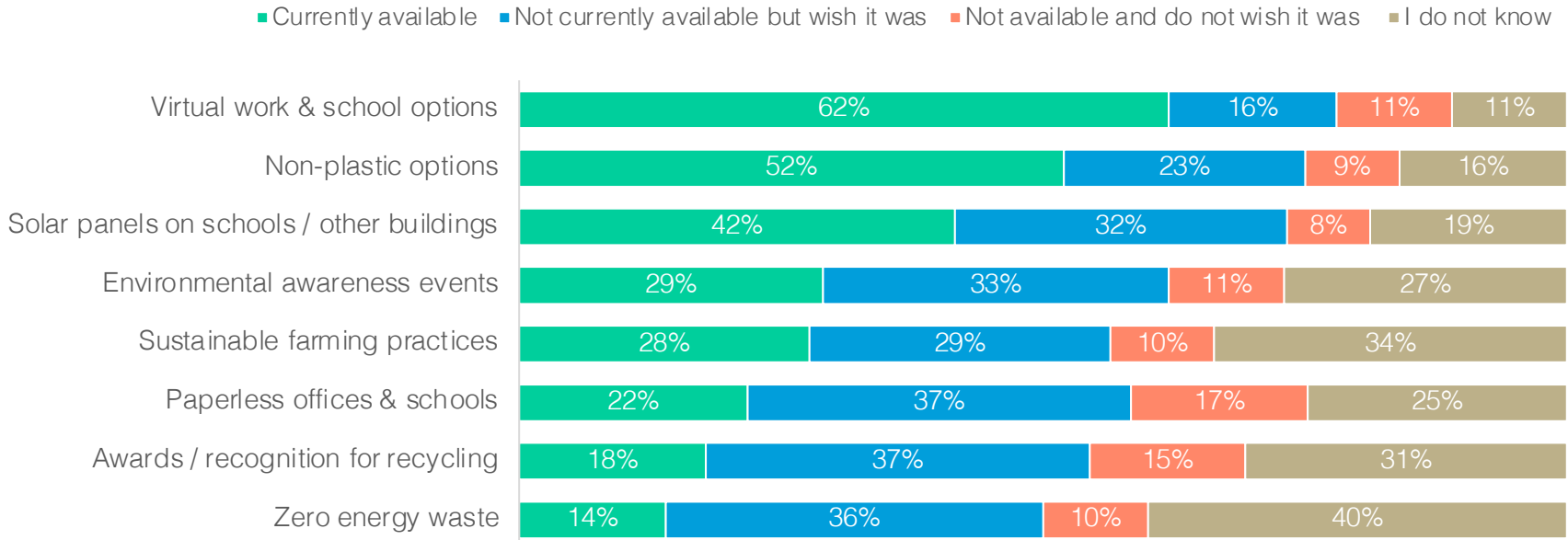
“My local community actively tries to teach its citizens about the importance of conservation and preserving the natural world.”

58% Teens Who Spend 11+ Hours Outside per Week



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

### Initiatives Available / Wish Were Available in Community





## 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.”

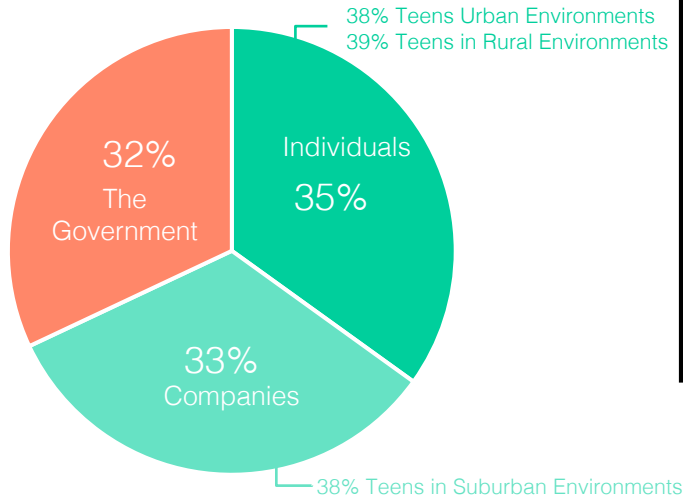
83% of teens agree,

“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



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.”**



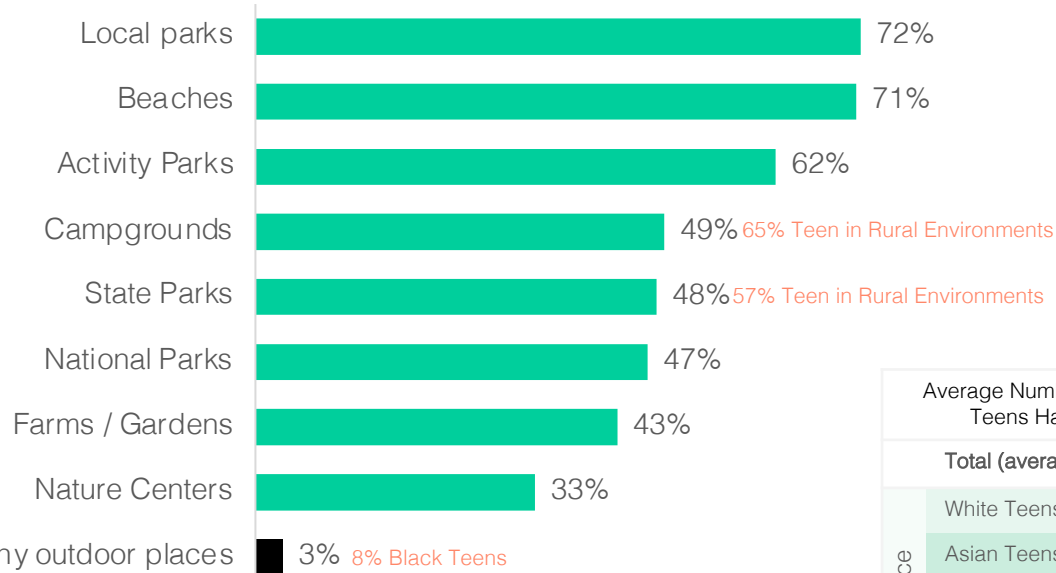
PART 5:

# 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



Average Number of Outdoor Spaces Teens Have Engaged With	
<b>Total (average)</b>	<b>4.3</b>
White Teens	4.9
Asian Teens	4.2
Hispanic Teens	3.8
Black Teens	3.1

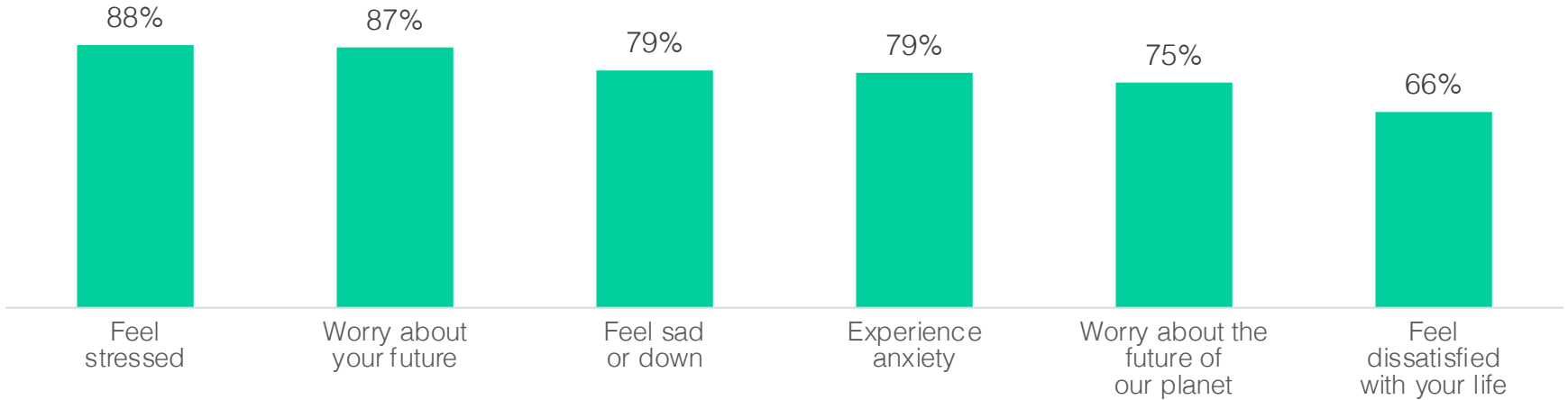
Q6. Have you visited any of the following outdoor places to engage in recreation/fun activities? Please select all that apply. (Base: Total n=1,500)



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

## Percent of Teens Who Feel...

(% Sometimes / Always)



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%)



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...

