



2024 TRENDS REPORT YOUTH OUTDOOR POLICY PLAYBOOK

Prepared by the Youth Outdoor Policy Partnership

The Youth Outdoor Policy Partnership shares state policies that help young people get outside more. Every year, we put out a report to inspire lawmakers, community leaders, and young people themselves. Our Annual Trends Report shares innovations to inspire legislators, advocates, communities, and youth to replicate, rethink, and collaborate to build equitable youth outdoor opportunities. This year, we relaunched our website with easier navigation, updated [Policy Areas](#), and new monthly [Community Spotlights](#).

Outdoor policy continued to grow in 2024 with 47 states and territories introducing over 350 bills on outdoor recreation, education, access, and equity.

This report summarizes policy trends, initiatives, and specific bills enacted in 2024 across:

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These bills were identified by the [Youth Outdoor Policy Partnership](#):



As a partnership, we do not endorse any specific bills or policy ideas. We share these examples to inspire local champions and legislators to consider what might work in their state.

Your Feedback Matters

We work to offer resources that support community-driven and inclusive youth outdoor opportunities. This is not a comprehensive list. Please reach out to [Grant](#) with your thoughts, ideas, additions, and suggestions!

Outdoor Equity & Justice

States explored ways to address historic and ongoing injustices with a renewed focus on disability access and greenspace equity. Greenspace equity is making green spaces like parks, greenways, gardens, and trails more fairly distributed. Seventy-four percent of communities of color and 70% of low-income communities live in [nature-deprived areas](#).

This year also saw a growing interest in transportation to outdoor spaces. Transportation remains one of the [most significant barriers](#) to outdoor recreation. Illinois ([H.B.5277](#)) is considering a unique transit to trails program that would create a fund to connect public transit to recreation sites.

14 Bills Enacted in
10 States.



104 Bills Introduced in
30 States.

At least six states introduced legislation to help disabled people spend meaningful time outside. Iowa built on a successful [study bill](#) in Colorado. Iowa also dedicated \$1.3 million to make state parks more accessible for disabled people. Newly-built Maryland playgrounds will now feature communication boards with simple illustrations that help children of all abilities, ages, and languages communicate.

- **Iowa** [H.F. 2364](#) will equitably study disability accessibility in state parks and make recommendations to improve state park access for all.
- **Maryland** [H.B. 420](#) requires all newly built public playgrounds to include communication boards.
- **New Jersey** [A.2374](#) created a Parks and Open Space Foundation to promote equity, access, recreation, and outdoor learning on public land.
- **New Mexico** [S.B.169](#) improves Land and Water Conservation Fund equity with assistance for applicants and by prioritizing Tribal requests.
- **Virginia** [H.B.1186](#) establishes a two-year pilot program to develop guidelines for providing all-terrain power wheelchairs in state parks.

Outdoor & Environmental Learning

States explored schools as a key site for equitable youth time outdoors. Schools, especially public schools, can reach almost every young person and account for over [one-third of youth waking time](#). Unfortunately, many schools are getting less and less funding. States are working to explore lower-cost options that grow existing resources, such as expanding the use of citizen science in state agencies. Nevada [A.B.164](#) (2023) is [successfully exploring](#) sharing recreation resources for education.

With models available from states like California and Connecticut, multiple states considered offering climate education for holistic, interdisciplinary learning and student wellbeing. [9 in 10](#) teachers and parents support climate education in schools.

9 Bills Enacted in
8 States.



49 Bills Introduced in
21 States.

Colorado joined Washington, Oregon, and Maryland in licensing outdoor preschools, and Kentucky became the sixth state to introduce an outdoor preschool bill. For more information on outdoor preschool policy, please visit the [Natural Start Alliance](#),

- **Colorado** [S.B.24-14](#) authorizes schools to grant a high school diploma endorsement in climate literacy. Equity-minded diploma seals can [create and reward](#) connections with meaningful outdoor jobs.
- **Colorado** [S.B.24-078](#) provides for outdoor preschool licensing, making nature-based preschool more accessible and equal for all.
- **New Mexico** [H.B.303](#) includes outdoor careers as high-demand, living wage jobs in the state [TANF](#) workforce development program.
- **New Mexico** [S.M.1/H.M.34](#) convenes a working group between state agencies to establish and expand the use of citizen science.
- **Puerto Rico** [R.S.0854](#) integrates climate and environmental education into required curriculum, including mitigation, resilience, and justice.

Outdoor Health & Wellbeing

States are prioritizing health and well-being through a range of outdoor-focused policies. This includes legislation on search and rescue operations (ensuring safety in nature), trail maintenance (promoting safe exploration), and the use of safer materials in playgrounds. Additionally, New Jersey (A.3243) explored how outdoor education can improve student well-being. Similarly, California, Hawaii, Maryland, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania considered ways to make playgrounds safer and more accessible for all. Underscoring this trend, the NCEL's [Outdoors as a Health Solution Briefing Book](#) highlights how states are increasingly turning to outdoor initiatives to improve public health.

8 Bills Enacted in 6 States

[Hawaii](#) and [Delaware](#) both enacted resolutions on safety. Resolutions are sometimes seen as weaker than normal bills because resolutions are not laws. However, resolutions express the opinion or position of the legislature and can help legislators establish shared goals and priorities. Resolutions can support state agency actions and support future legislation and funding.

- **Colorado** [HB24-1309](#) sets criteria for search and rescue aircraft and operators contracted by government officials and limits liability.
- **Delaware** [H.R. 18](#) recognizes the importance of swimming safety and awareness.
- **Hawaii** [H.C.R.124/S.C.R.81](#) requests a search and rescue working group to prevent dangerous trail behaviors
- **Maryland** [H.B.1147](#) prohibits installing new playground surfacing materials with unsafe levels of lead or PFAS and prevents localities from making rules less strict than the act.
- **Minnesota** [H.F.3436/S.F. 3944](#) (omnibus), previously [H.F. 4652/S.F. 3817](#) - Requires fatal or otherwise serious accidents on trails be reported and documented.

Outdoor Access & Leadership

Funding and leadership are the most common limiting factors in states executing environmental and education goals. However, recent budget cycles have seen a continued focus on investing in outdoor spaces and learning opportunities as a result of people spending more time outdoors during the pandemic and in response to climate change.

States explored creative new ways to empower leaders and administrators like protecting parks and sharing schoolyards. Park lands are often in highly desirable locations, making them vulnerable to conversion or trade. Connecticut [S.B.294](#) and New York [S.252](#) would require municipalities to provide comparable replacement land when park lands are repurposed or converted. Hawaii [H.C.R. 90/S.C.R. 30](#) would request for the Department of Education to offer access to school recreational facilities during off-school hours and non-school days similar to [Arkansas](#). Establishing joint use agreements between state education and recreation agencies can offer [low-cost, high-impact](#) outdoor access for all.

20 Bills Enacted in 11 States

States found new ways to promote and fund outdoor access, especially through supporting state agencies. Maine and Washington established new funding for key outdoor spaces, and many states solved structural barriers like [recreational use liability](#).

- **Iowa** [H.F. 35](#), **Oregon** [S.B.1576](#), **Tennessee** [H.B. 2859/S.B. 2827](#) closed loopholes in public recreational use liability protections that [could otherwise close](#) recreational sites.
- **Louisiana** [H.R.130](#) requests for the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to find ways to increase youth use of Wildlife Management Areas.
- **Maine** [LD 1156 / HP 728](#) authorizes \$28 million in general bonds to develop trails and active transport opportunities.
- **Washington** [H.B.2165/S.B.6043](#) allows the Department of Natural Resources to assess fees for the use of agency-managed land for events. Event rentals can offer revenue and direct incentives to improve the quality and quantity of public outdoor spaces to the benefit of all.

Federal Policy

States are often referred to as the “laboratories of democracy” where ideas can be tested and refined and state policy often inspires federal action. Additionally, states play a pivotal role in carrying out federal programs in both deploying federal funding and collaborating with the federal government on state plans. Here are current federal policy proposals and programs that relate to state efforts around youth outdoor engagement:

- **The EXPLORE Act** is bipartisan outdoor recreation legislation that was passed by the House of Representatives. If enacted by the Senate, the EXPLORE Act will increase access to the outdoors for [youth](#), [families](#), [military veterans](#), [people with disabilities](#), and outdoor [service providers](#).
- **Living Schoolyards Act** would provide grants to schools and districts to transform their schoolyards into dynamic outdoor learning environments, increase the use of sustainable infrastructure, and pave the way for school forests and tree canopies to fight the heat. For more information on the legislation, please visit [Green Schoolyards America](#).
- **Inflation Reduction Act** promotes [tree equity](#) and supports schools (nontaxable entities) to access investment tax credits for renewable energy. For more information, please visit [This Is Planet Ed](#).
- **Land and Water Conservation Funding** (LWCF) will exceed \$1 billion in 2024. The Great American Outdoors Act ([H.R.1957](#)) permanently allocated \$900 million annually; GOMESA ([P.L.109-432](#)) National Park Formula Grants will exceed \$117 million in 2024.
- **America the Beautiful Challenge** (ATB) will distribute over [\\$140 million](#) to protect, conserve, restore, and expand access to nature.

Exciting Ideas

It's not uncommon for policy ideas to be introduced multiple times before becoming law. The following concepts were considered in the previous legislative session and are likely ones to watch for the future.

1

Hawaii [H.C.R. 90/S.C.R. 30](#) would request for the Department of Education to offer access to school recreational facilities during off-school hours and non-school days. Establishing joint use agreements between state education and recreation agencies can offer [low-cost, high-impact](#) outdoor access for all.

2

Arizona [S.B.1552](#) would establish an Outdoor RX program providing grants for outdoor therapy programs. The program encourages innovation, healthy living, and stewardship and prioritizes veteran leadership.

3

Wisconsin [A.B.814/S.B.776](#) would ensure people in correctional facilities receive the health and rehabilitation benefits of time outdoors by setting a minimum of three hours a week outdoors for state and county inmates.

4

New Jersey [A.3243](#) would direct the Commissioner of Education to develop guidelines for outdoor education opportunities to promote student mental health and wellbeing.

5

Illinois [H.B.5277](#) would establish a need-based Transit-to-Trails grant program to link public transportation to public outdoor recreation sites. Transportation is one of the [most significant barriers](#) to outdoor recreation.