

# The COVID-19 Pandemic is Changing Expectations for Public Land Management

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to alter daily life and lead to changes in the way we spend time outside. In an effort to gather timely and relevant data on national outdoor recreation patterns before, during, and after the pandemic, the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics and its academic partner, Pennsylvania State University, have been working to conduct a study that can offer guidance to land managers, recreation providers, and outdoor enthusiasts across the United States. The second phase of this research was designed to provide information to public land managers concerning recreationists' expectations for management during the pandemic. As parks and protected areas begin to welcome back visitors, it is important to understand what measures recreationists expect agencies to take to keep them safe. Research suggests that expectations are changing in response to COVID-19. While recreationists are generally less favorable of limiting use and restricting visitor freedom, they appear to be willing to accept these restrictions in an effort to keep themselves and their fellow outdoor enthusiasts safe.

**48 Hrs.**  
Data collected over two-day period beginning on April 30th, focused on recreation trends since April 9th, 2020

**823**  
Responses

**47**  
States Yielding Responses



## Recreationists expect public land agencies to **limit capacity**.

On average, respondents strongly agreed that public land agencies should implement capacity limits and use timed entries in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who perceive themselves to be at higher risk of illness from COVID-19 were significantly\* more in favor of direct management strategies like limiting capacity.



## Recreationists expect public land agencies to **encourage social distancing** in recreation areas.

On average, respondents strongly agreed that managers should both place signage in high traffic areas and indicators on paths encouraging visitors to stay six feet apart. Additionally, respondents strongly agreed that managers should encourage visitors to wear face masks.



## Recreationists expect **increased health safety measures** in public land recreation areas.

Strong agreement was found for public land agencies providing and requiring employees to use personal protective equipment (e.g., masks and gloves), providing hand sanitizer to visitors, increasing sanitation practices, and communicating details about increased sanitation practices.



## Recreationists' behavior will be most strongly based on **personal health motivations** and **clear communication** from trusted sources.

When making outdoor recreation decisions, respondents indicated that their desire to support their health by spending time outdoors, the open/closed status of public lands and facilities, orders from their home state regarding allowed behaviors, and behavioral recommendations from the CDC were some of the most important factors.



## Recreationists are **unsupportive of opening their communities to tourists** without restrictions.

On average, respondents were slightly supportive of welcoming tourists with restrictions on capacity in place. However, those who perceive themselves to be at higher risk of illness from COVID-19 were significantly\* less supportive of opening their communities with restrictions in place.



Learn more at [lnt.org/research-resources/leave-no-trace-covid-19-research/](https://lnt.org/research-resources/leave-no-trace-covid-19-research/)

See full results at [doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/dghba](https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/dghba)

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\*Statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval



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