

# Building Welcoming Outdoor Communities

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## Introduction and Contents

### Building Welcoming Outdoor Communities

This lecture focuses on exploring how welcoming communities enhance outdoor spaces for everyone. We'll discuss the importance of creating a sense of belonging through open conversations, supportive actions, and personal reflection. Our goal is to inspire you to take meaningful steps toward building outdoor spaces where everyone—regardless of their background—feels safe, included, and truly welcome.

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## 2. Why Building Welcoming Outdoor Communities Benefits Everyone

Before we dive into the unique experiences of different communities, it's important to understand why creating safe and welcoming outdoor spaces benefits everyone.

While public lands are open to all, diversity among visitors remains limited due to historical exclusions, systemic barriers, and ongoing fears related to accessibility, prejudice, and safety. As our population grows more diverse, ensuring that outdoor spaces are truly welcoming isn't just a matter of fairness—it's essential for the future of these spaces. Here's why:

- **Environmental stewardship:** Increased park visitation fosters a stronger commitment to environmental protection, ensuring parks remain preserved for future generations.
- **Economic growth:** Diverse participation in outdoor spaces drives local tourism, supports small businesses, and boosts recreation-based economies.
- **Cultural connection:** Celebrating and embracing diverse cultural relationships with nature enriches everyone's outdoor experience.

- **Representation matters:** Seeing diversity among park staff, leadership, and outdoor storytelling builds trust, connection, and a sense of belonging.
- **Innovation in conservation:** A variety of perspectives leads to fresh ideas and creative solutions to environmental challenges.
- **Sustainability:** Inclusive engagement ensures continued advocacy, funding, and care for public lands across generations.
- **Mental and physical well-being:** Nature supports human health, offering space for reflection, healing, and connection. Access for all strengthens community well-being.
- **Equity and accessibility:** Thoughtful design and intentional outreach reduce barriers, making outdoor spaces more practical and welcoming for everyone.

When outdoor spaces feel welcoming to everyone, we all benefit. Together, we can build trails, parks, and natural spaces that are not just open to all, but truly belong to everyone—places where every visitor feels safe, valued, and inspired to connect with nature.

## 2. What Does a Welcoming Outdoor Community Look Like?

Imagine an outdoor community where everyone feels safe, valued, and excited to explore the beauty of nature—whether it's a local park, a hiking trail, or a national recreation area. Nature, after all, should be a shared space where everyone feels they truly belong.

Spending time outdoors isn't just about having fun—it's also incredibly beneficial for our health. Activities like hiking, walking, or simply sitting under a tree can lower blood pressure, boost the immune system, improve fitness, reduce stress, and ease feelings of depression. These benefits should be equally available to everyone, and that starts with creating outdoor spaces that are welcoming and accessible to all.

Creating these spaces means fostering an atmosphere where everyone feels encouraged to participate, explore, and connect with nature. It's about our behavior—following leave-no-trace principles, being mindful of others, and creating an environment where all feel comfortable. Every action, no matter how small, sets a tone of respect and inclusion. When we approach outdoor spaces with care and intention, we help build places where health thrives, communities grow stronger, and everyone can share in the joy and beauty of nature.

## 3. How Are Diverse Communities Impacted?

While nature is often seen as open to everyone, systemic barriers continue to exclude many people from fully experiencing outdoor spaces. Cost, transportation, physical accessibility, and cultural disconnects create practical challenges. More serious issues, such as racism, harassment, and safety concerns, deepen feelings of exclusion and fear.

These barriers are amplified by a lack of diverse representation in outdoor leadership and decision-making roles. For example, despite people of color making up nearly 40% of the U.S. population, less than 20% of National Park employees identify as non-white, highlighting a significant gap in representation that impacts trust and inclusivity in these spaces. Diverse leadership is not just representation—it's a pathway to building trust, fostering cultural connection, and creating spaces where all feel they belong.

For communities facing daily stress and systemic inequities, nature offers essential opportunities for healing, resilience, and renewal. For example, initiatives like Outdoor Afro have successfully created safe, welcoming spaces for Black communities to connect with nature, while organizations like Disabled Hikers advocate for improved accessibility on trails, demonstrating the transformative power of inclusion and representation. But these benefits are only realized when outdoor spaces feel safe and welcoming.

## Hikers Who Are Women and Femme-Identified

### Challenges, Courage, and Community

Women and femme-identified individuals face unique challenges when engaging with outdoor spaces. From safety concerns and societal stereotypes to practical barriers, these factors shape their experiences in ways that are often overlooked or misunderstood.

Safety remains a significant issue. Many women report feeling vulnerable when hiking alone or in isolated areas, often making extra preparations and carrying protective tools that men might not consider. Even in group settings, some women feel pressure to keep pace or prove their abilities, especially in male-dominated environments.

Stereotypes persist. Outdoor culture and media often spotlight men as leaders and adventurers, while women are portrayed as followers or relegated to less demanding activities. These stereotypes can undermine confidence, making women hesitant to take on challenges like solo camping or advanced trails. Practical barriers, such as limited access to well-fitting gear, fewer outdoor training opportunities, or discouraging societal messaging, add further complexity.

Despite these barriers, women continue to step onto trails, pitch tents, and venture into wild spaces with courage and resilience. Their presence challenges outdated perceptions and helps pave the way for others to follow.

Women's hiking groups and online communities have become powerful spaces for support, empowerment, and connection. These groups foster confidence, share knowledge, and create belonging free from judgment. Men also play a role as allies by promoting respect, speaking up against inappropriate behavior, and being mindful of their impact in shared outdoor spaces.

By challenging stereotypes, addressing safety concerns, and amplifying diverse voices, we can ensure everyone—regardless of gender—feels empowered, capable, and safe to explore and enjoy the outdoors.

### Calls to Action

- Engage in conversations about respect:** Discuss equality, diversity, and mutual respect with men and young people to encourage positive attitudes and behaviors toward women in outdoor spaces.
- Challenge inappropriate behavior:** If you witness a friend or colleague acting in a sexually aggressive or harassing manner, don't stay silent—speak up and address it directly.
- Approach with consideration:** When passing a woman alone, offer a friendly greeting or smile, lower your hood if wearing one, and give her plenty of space for a comfortable passage.
- Avoid startling others:** Especially when approaching from behind, make your presence known in advance. A distant, friendly greeting can ease any potential discomfort, particularly if you're running.

5. **Refrain from comments on appearance:** Avoid remarks about a woman's attire or physical appearance. These comments, regardless of intent, are unnecessary and often unwelcome.
6. **Respect boundaries for assistance:** Don't offer unsolicited help to a woman alone on a trail unless she explicitly asks. Reflect on whether you would make the same offer to a man in a similar situation.
7. **Be mindful in group settings:** Large groups of walkers or bikers can feel intimidating. Make space so that a woman can pass without feeling crowded or surrounded.
8. **Be a supportive ally:** If a female friend shares feelings of discomfort or fear, take her concerns seriously. Listen, offer support, and explore ways to address or improve the situation together.

## Women's Hiking Groups and Blogs

- [Women Outdoors](#) is a national network of diverse women who are engaged in the enjoyment of outdoor activities.
- [Women's Wilderness Institute](#), a nonprofit organization based in Boulder, CO, that offers wilderness experiences and outdoor adventures for women and teen girls in the Rocky Mountains and deserts of the Southwest.
- [#SafeOutside](#), an initiative designed by the American Alpine Club to combat sexual harassment and sexual assault.
- [SheJumps](#), an organization founded to increase the participation of women and girls in outdoor activities, with the understanding that confidence in the outdoors can translate to reaching one's highest potential in other aspects of life.
- [Camber Outdoors](#), which aims to accelerate equity in the outdoors from the boardroom to the backcountry.
- [GirlTrek](#), a campaign to heal intergenerational trauma, fight systemic racism and transform Black lives.

## Further Reading

- Women and the Wilderness: a Review of Barriers to Participation, Current Coping Strategies, and Guidance for Future Programs , Naiyear Khajavei , Portland State University,  
<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1527&context=honortheses>

## Hikers Who Are Black, Indigenous and People of Color

### A History Marked by Displacement and Exclusion

America's outdoor spaces carry a complex and often painful history for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). While national parks are celebrated as places of beauty, refuge, and connection, their foundations are intertwined with exclusion, displacement, and systemic racism.

Many national parks were established by forcibly removing Indigenous communities from their ancestral lands. Influential conservationists, such as Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir, held colonialist and racist views that shaped policies and narratives still echoed today. Jim Crow laws and segregation further restricted access to state and national parks for Black Americans, while many outdoor spaces were deliberately designed to exclude communities of color. This legacy of slow violence—a gradual, deeply embedded harm—continues to affect who feels welcome in these spaces.

Yet, the contributions of BIPOC individuals to America's parks are profound. Figures like George Melendez Wright, a Salvadoran-American biologist who championed wildlife conservation, and the Buffalo Soldiers, African-American members of the U.S. Cavalry who served as some of the first park rangers, played pivotal roles in protecting and shaping these landscapes. Their stories remind us of the importance of acknowledging diverse contributions to our shared outdoor heritage.

## Current Realities and Barriers

Today, barriers persist. Less than 20% of National Park employees are non-white, and Black visitors remain significantly underrepresented. Language barriers, racial profiling, and park ranger uniforms—resembling law enforcement attire—can create discomfort, unease, and even fear for some visitors. Latino hikers, in particular, have reported feeling scrutinized by park rangers, an experience intensified in areas where rangers carry firearms or wear militarized gear.

Recognizing these realities is essential for meaningful change. Efforts to address these barriers must go beyond surface-level fixes and instead focus on building trust, increasing representation, and removing systemic obstacles. By amplifying diverse voices, addressing these ongoing challenges, and prioritizing equity in every step, we can move closer to fulfilling the promise of public lands as places where everyone feels they truly belong.

## Calls to Action

1. **Be welcoming to all:** Create an outdoor environment where people of all cultures and backgrounds feel valued and respected. A friendly smile or a kind word can go a long way.
2. **Extend an invitation:** Invite a friend from a different background or culture to join you on a hike or outdoor activity. Shared experiences help build trust and understanding.
3. **Share your story:** If you're a member of the BIPOC community, consider sharing your experiences in outdoor spaces. Your voice adds representation and visibility to outdoor culture.
4. **Support BIPOC voices:** Follow and amplify BIPOC outdoor athletes, advocates, creatives, influencers, and organizations. Your support helps their work reach broader audiences.
5. **Connect locally:** Seek out local BIPOC outdoor groups and initiatives. These connections foster community and shared experiences.
6. **Engage with community resources:** Get involved with BIPOC nonprofits, affinity groups, scholarships, and outdoor meetups. These spaces offer valuable opportunities for connection and growth.

## BIPOC Outdoor Organizations Websites

- [Brown People Camping](#) is a social media initiative that utilizes personal narratives and digital storytelling to promote greater diversity in our public lands and outdoors community.
- [LatinXhikers](#) is a community dedicated to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the outdoors through digital storytelling and community outreach.
- [NativesOutdoors](#) empower indigenous communities through our products and storytelling for a sustainable world.
- [OutdoorAfro](#), group that celebrates and inspires Black connections and leadership in nature.
- [Outdoor Asian](#), group mission is to create a diverse and inclusive community of Asian and Pacific Islanders in the outdoors.

## Further Reading

- National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public 2018 – Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors, <http://npshistory.com/publications/social-science/comprehensive-survey/nrr-2019-2042.pdf>

## Hikers from the LGBTQ2S+ Community

### Terminology

The acronym LGBTQ2S+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Two-Spirit, plus other diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. It represents a broad spectrum of sexual and gender identities. In this article, we'll use the term "Queer" as an umbrella term to encompass identities that are not straight and/or cisgender.

### Safety, Visibility, and Being Yourself Outdoors

A significant concern for the Queer community is the uncertainty often felt in remote or unfamiliar outdoor areas. Questions like, "Will I be safe here?" or "How will people react to me?" can add an extra layer of anxiety. In areas with deep-rooted social norms, Queer individuals may feel pressure to stay cautious or guarded about their identity. For some, the unpredictability of others' reactions can feel more daunting than concerns about wildlife or trail conditions.

Opportunities for connection with nature, such as summer camps or group outdoor programs, have not always felt fully accessible to Queer individuals. Many have faced unspoken expectations to hide or suppress parts of their identity, turning what should be a time for exploration and self-expression into an experience marked by hesitation or restraint.

Thankfully, acceptance of Queer individuals has improved significantly in recent decades, even in regions where progress has been slower. Despite ongoing challenges, this shift has paved the way for safer outdoor exploration and has been supported by the growth of Queer-focused outdoor programs. These spaces not only provide safety and connection but also celebrate the joy, resilience, and adventurous spirit of Queer hikers.

Each step on the trail and every moment spent outdoors, supported by our actions and respect, helps pave the way for Queer individuals to feel safer, more confident, and at home in these spaces.

### Calls to Action

1. **Respect personal identity:** Creating a welcoming outdoor space begins with recognizing and respecting each individual's identity. Understand that not everyone identifies strictly as male or female, and many are navigating their own journey with gender. Outward appearance may not always reflect someone's internal identity, and that's okay.
2. **Use gender pronouns thoughtfully:** Pronouns are an essential part of someone's identity. If you're unsure of someone's pronouns, kindly ask. If you make a mistake, apologize, correct yourself, and move on without making it a big deal. Small actions like this help create spaces where everyone feels seen and respected.
3. **Honor personal stories and privacy:** Along the trail, you might share meaningful conversations with others about their sexuality or personal experiences. Treat these moments with care by respecting their trust, maintaining confidentiality, and

approaching every story with an open mind. If your personal beliefs about Queer identities differ, keep those thoughts private in these interactions.

### **LGBTQ2S+ Outdoor Organizations Websites**

- [The Venture Out Project](#) takes queer and trans people out into the wilderness for short day hikes and longer wilderness trips.
- [Queer Nature](#) is a trans-run nature-based/naturalist education project serving mostly LGBTQ2S+ people.
- [Diversify Outdoors](#) is a coalition of social media influencers – bloggers, athletes, activists, and entrepreneurs – who share the goal of promoting diversity in outdoor spaces.
- [OUT There Adventures](#) takes queer and trans youth and adults on wilderness adventures.

### **Further Reading**

- Making outdoor field experiences more inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community  
<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/eap.2771>

## **Hikers with Socioeconomic Challenges**

### **Breaking Down Financial Barriers to the Outdoors**

While spending time outdoors may seem simple, it can be surprisingly expensive. Costs for travel, park fees, clothing, and gear create substantial barriers. Travel is a particular challenge—many low-income families do not own cars, and in cities like San Diego and Los Angeles, limited public transit systems make accessing outdoor spaces even more difficult. This lack of transportation disproportionately affects Black and Hispanic communities, limiting their opportunities to explore national parks and natural spaces.

The high cost of gear is another significant obstacle. Essential items like hiking shoes, outerwear, and basic equipment can quickly total hundreds of dollars—a steep investment, especially for newcomers. Beyond the cost, there's often an unspoken elitism around outdoor gear, where owning the latest equipment is seen as a mark of credibility. This culture can unintentionally create feelings of inequity and exclusion for those who cannot afford premium gear.

Addressing these barriers goes beyond simply lowering costs—it's about fostering a culture of care, resourcefulness, and shared responsibility. From offering transportation solutions and lending gear to discovering free local trails, small, thoughtful actions can make a significant difference. The outdoors itself remains an open and abundant space, and with intention and collaboration, we can create outdoor experiences that are more practical, welcoming, and accessible to everyone.

### **Calls to Action**

There are several meaningful ways we can help reduce these barriers and create more welcoming outdoor spaces.

1. **Share rides:** Organize ride-sharing systems within hiking groups to help those without access to reliable transportation. A simple offer of a carpool can open the trail to someone who might not otherwise make it there.

2. **Be mindful about gear conversations:** It's natural to feel excited about new equipment, but let's keep discussions inclusive and avoid assumptions about what others can afford. Focus on sharing experiences rather than comparing gear.
3. **Lend or share gear:** If you have extra hiking gear sitting unused, consider lending or donating it to someone who might need it. A pair of hiking boots, a backpack, or a warm jacket can make all the difference.
4. **Advocate for accessible programs:** Support initiatives that provide free or discounted outdoor education programs, gear libraries, or low-cost entry passes to public lands.

## Resources

- [Outdoor Outreach](#) is a San Diego, CA based nonprofit that is connecting youth with the transformative power of the outdoors through outdoor activities.
- [Bay Area Wilderness Training](#) (BAWT) works to provide equitable access to outdoor experiences for low-income youth and youth of color.
- [Big City Mountaineers](#) provides under-resourced youth with opportunities to have transformative experiences in the outdoors.
- [Adventures Without Limits](#) mission is to provide opportunity and adventure for all people, regardless of their ability levels, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity or age.
- [Backpackers](#) is an organization meeting those at the intersection of underrepresentation and economic vulnerability to create economic equity in outdoor recreation.
- [Inclusive Woods & Us](#) aim is to increase equitable access to the outdoors for children, families and communities of people of color in lower socioeconomic standing
- [Nature for All](#) mission is to build a diverse base of support to ensure that everyone in the Los Angeles area has equitable access to the wide range of benefits that nature provides.

## Hikers Who Are Plus Sized

### Challenging Stereotypes about Body Size in the Outdoors

Our society has a deeply ingrained preference for thinness, especially within white American culture. This focus on fitness, youth, and body shape has led to widespread and often mistaken assumptions about people with larger bodies, resulting in unfair victim-blaming and exclusion from certain spaces.

Historically, the outdoor community has maintained a narrow definition of what it means to be "outdoorsy"—often depicting an image that is white, cisgender, and thin. This limited representation has excluded many, including those with larger bodies, from feeling welcome or capable in outdoor spaces. Thankfully, grassroots movements and advocates are challenging this narrative, helping shift perspectives toward body neutrality and fat acceptance.

Body neutrality encourages acceptance of our bodies without tying self-worth to appearance. Unlike body positivity, which can feel unattainable in a society with rigid beauty standards, body neutrality focuses on respecting our bodies for what they can do, regardless of how we feel about them on any given day.

It's essential to recognize that outdoor spaces are for everyone, regardless of body size. Challenging our biases means unlearning assumptions about size, health, and beauty. It also involves understanding that body size is influenced by complex factors, including genetics, social environments, and health conditions.

When we challenge stereotypes, amplify diverse voices, and foster spaces where all bodies are celebrated, we move closer to a world where everyone feels confident exploring the outdoors. After all, strength, resilience, and a love for nature aren't determined by size—they're qualities that exist in every body.

### Calls to Action

1. **Challenge assumptions:** Avoid judging someone's abilities or fitness based solely on their body size. Strength and skill come in all shapes and forms.
2. **Reflect on biases:** Take time to consider how societal norms may have shaped your beliefs about body size and fitness. Awareness is the first step toward change.
3. **Recognize privilege:** Understand the advantages often associated with being thinner and approach conversations about body size with empathy and compassion.
4. **Amplify diverse voices:** Follow and support influencers, advocates, and creators who promote body neutrality and share their outdoor experiences, helping to expand perspectives and foster understanding.

### Podcasts and Groups

- [The Hiker Podcast](#), hosted by Andy Neal, a plus-sized hiker from Oregon. Neal began sharing the lessons he learned from the outdoors — and how it's changed the relationship with his body — on his podcast.
- [Plus Size Backpacking](#). A judgment-free online community for people of all body types to ask questions and share resources about backpacking.
- [Fat Girls Hiking](#) is a fat activism and outdoor community that leads group hikes and focuses on body liberation, self care and healing.

### Clothing and Gear

Finding hiking gear suited for larger or more muscular bodies—including broader chests and hips—can be challenging. Ill-fitting clothing and equipment not only cause discomfort but also pose safety risks, especially in activities like rafting or rock climbing, where secure gear is essential. Beyond practical concerns, limited options can contribute to feelings of exclusion and body shaming. Thankfully, some outdoor clothing companies are beginning to address these gaps by expanding their size ranges, creating safer and more welcoming experiences for all adventurers.

- [REI](#) and [Patagonia](#) are offering more inclusive outdoor apparel, as well as brands like [Youer](#) and [Alder](#). Columbia has also expanded its [plus-size outdoor clothing](#). [Macpac](#) has a smaller range of extended sizes.
- [Kinsa Active](#) is a clothing and gear store for plus size women, providing athletic wear for camping, hiking, fishing, and hunting.

## Hikers Who Are Seniors

### Respect for Elder Wisdom vs. Ageism

Our perceptions of senior hikers matter, especially on the trail, where it's crucial to avoid ageist stereotypes. Seniors are not inherently frail or helpless, though they may face unique challenges that younger hikers do not. Acknowledging and accommodating these differences is essential for building welcoming outdoor communities.

It's equally important to recognize the wisdom experienced senior hikers bring to the trail. Their years of outdoor knowledge often make them focused, level-headed, and dependable. Many know the best routes, have deep insights into wilderness safety, and possess resilience honed from a lifetime of challenges. These qualities make them invaluable members of any hiking group.

### Unique Physical Realities

Senior hikers may encounter physical considerations on the trail. Hydration becomes more critical, and preparing for longer hikes may require more time and intentional training. Balance can also be a concern, with tools like trekking poles offering valuable support. Endurance levels may vary, and frequent breaks or a slower pace are often preferred to prevent fatigue. Well-fitted footwear and lightweight gear can significantly improve comfort and mobility.

Yet, older hikers often feel overlooked in outdoor marketing, which tends to spotlight younger, elite adventurers. Some may worry about slowing down group hikes or struggle to find partners who match their pace and interests, leading to hesitation in joining group activities.

### A Shared Trail Experience

While senior hikers may need to make certain adjustments, their presence enriches outdoor spaces in meaningful ways. Their wisdom, patience, and steady approach to challenges often set a tone of care and connection for the entire group. By valuing their contributions, being mindful of their needs, and creating space for all ages, we build trails that are welcoming, connected, and shared with mutual respect and understanding.

### Resources

- [National Park Pass](#). Discounted senior rate for entrance into National Parks.
- [Sierra Seniors](#) Sierra Club seniors hiking information.
- [Great Old Broads For Wilderness](#) National organization bringing together elders to protect public lands in the USA.
- [Over Forty Hiker community](#) of women hikers a female, private group which allows us to discuss topics, exchange trail wisdom, post triumphs, great photos, and more.

## Hikers Who Are Disabled

### Navigating the Outdoors with Disabilities

The cultural stigma surrounding disability creates barriers, from physical obstacles to social assumptions and institutional gaps. Addressing these issues benefits not only the disabled community but also families using strollers, elderly hikers, and others, fostering a more welcoming outdoor culture.

In the U.S., over a quarter of adults have some form of disability, with higher rates among Black and Indigenous communities. Disabilities span a wide spectrum, from mobility challenges to neurodivergence, each with unique needs. Recognizing this diversity is essential for creating genuinely accessible outdoor spaces.

Disabled hikers often seek slower, more attentive experiences in nature—something overlooked in outdoor spaces designed around speed or endurance. Common obstacles include uneven terrain, limited accessible facilities, insufficient signage, and the high cost of specialized equipment. While improvements are underway, significant work remains. Enhancing accessibility not only benefits all hikers but also helps preserve natural areas by encouraging people to stay on designated trails.

Outdoor recreation isn't solely about reaching the highest peaks—it's about experiencing nature in ways that are meaningful for everyone. With greater awareness, advocacy, and thoughtful design, we can create trails and spaces where disabled hikers feel welcomed, valued, and empowered to explore the outdoors alongside everyone else.

### Calls to Action

1. **Assume competence:** Treat everyone you meet on the trail with kindness and respect, assuming competence in all individuals, regardless of their abilities.
2. **Be considerate:** When encountering people with disabilities, be mindful. Move aside or approach slowly, understanding that everyone's needs and abilities may differ.
3. **Practice flexibility in trail rules:** Strict enforcement of trail etiquette or "Leave No Trace" principles can unintentionally exclude disabled hikers. Some individuals may not be able to step aside for uphill hikers or might navigate trails differently. Approach these situations with understanding and flexibility, recognizing the unique challenges they may face.
4. **Engage and advocate:** Take time to listen to disabled individuals in your outdoor community to better understand their needs. Support efforts to improve accessible trail infrastructure, inclusive park designs, transit options, and community resources.
5. **Respect language preferences:** Language matters. Many people prefer identity-first language (e.g., "disabled person") while others use person-first language (e.g., "person with a disability"). Avoid euphemisms like "differently abled," "special needs," or "handicapped," and never refer to wheelchair users as "wheelchair bound." When in doubt, ask about and honor each individual's preference.

### Resources

- [Disabled Hikers](#) is working toward building a community of people who feel like they belong outdoors.
- [Unlikely Hikers](#) is a diverse, anti-racist, body-liberating outdoor community featuring the underrepresented outdoorsperson.

- [Wildability](#)'s mission is to empower disabled youth to become the next generation of climate leaders.
- [Adaptive Adventures](#) provides progressive outdoor sports opportunities to improve quality of life for children, adults and veterans with physical disabilities and their families.

## 4. Building Welcoming Outdoor Communities: A Guide for Collective Action

1. **Expand your understanding of outdoor engagement:** Embrace diverse ways of connecting with nature, such as storytelling, barbecues, or simply being outside.
2. **Educate yourself and others:** Learn about the history of exclusion in outdoor spaces and share that knowledge.
3. **Be a thoughtful advocate in conversations:** Avoid assumptions about others' abilities or outdoor experiences.
4. **Advocate through personal invitation:** Invite friends from different backgrounds to join you outdoors.
5. **Celebrate small wins:** Highlight progress, from new accessible trails to diverse representation in outdoor media.
6. **Support diverse outdoor organizations:** Follow and contribute to groups like [Outdoor Afro](#), [GirlTrek](#), and [Unlikely Hikers](#).
7. **Advocate for inclusive gear:** Support brands offering a wide range of adaptive and size-inclusive equipment.
8. **Organize community hikes:** Plan inclusive group hikes to foster connection.
9. **Contribute to nonprofits:** Nonprofits play a critical role in advancing equity in outdoor spaces. Use resources like [Guidestar.org](#) to research organizations aligned with your values.
10. **Engage with authorities:** Advocate for inclusive outdoor policies with park officials and policymakers.

### A Shared Responsibility

Building welcoming outdoor communities isn't a one-time effort—it's an ongoing commitment. Every conversation, every invitation, and every small step brings us closer to a world where outdoor spaces are shared, celebrated, and truly belong to everyone.

Thank you for your dedication to this cause. Together, we can ensure nature remains a space of connection, joy, and belonging for all.

### Sources

- Historic Discrimination to Blame for Diversity Gap in US Parks, Andrew Moore, <https://cnr.ncsu.edu/news/2022/02/discrimination-to-diversity-gap-in-parks/>
- America's national parks face existential crisis over race, Stephanie Ebbs and Devin Dwyer, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/americas-national-parks-face-existential-crisis-race/story?id=71528972>
- Five ways to make the outdoors more inclusive, <https://www.theatlantic.com/sponsored/rei-2018/five-ways-to-make-the-outdoors-more-inclusive/3019/>
- Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2014 to 2060 <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.pdf>