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**THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF  
Parks and Recreation  
in Colorado Springs**

2025 Update

## **PRIMARY AUTHOR**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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# Letter from the Mayor

Our city is renowned for our excellent quality of life, and we are nationally recognized as the most desirable city and third best place to live in our great country. It's no secret that our parks, recreation and cultural services are a fundamental part of what makes Colorado Springs such an attractive and vibrant place to live and work, and play.

And that is why I am pleased to share the latest study from the Trust for Public Land which showcases the economic benefits of our park system. Consistently tracking and understanding this data is critical as we continue to invest in our public park infrastructure and services. I'd like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to TPL for this thorough review that will help us promote the importance of our parks and guide our planning efforts.

Friends, we are truly fortunate to call Colorado Springs home. From the awe-inspiring Garden of the Gods, consistently a top-ranked park by TripAdvisor, to the iconic Pikes Peak—America's Mountain, one of the most visited mountains in the world, Colorado Springs offers unmatched natural beauty and adventure right at our doorstep. The City of Colorado Springs' parks and recreation system spans nearly 19,000 acres, encompassing 156 parks, more than 150 miles of trails, 50 open space areas, a towering 14,115-foot mountain, and numerous recreational and cultural facilities.

These amenities serve as sources of inspiration and adventure and as magnets that attract visitors from around the globe, contributing to our local economy and enriching our community's character. As noted in this report, nearby parks and green spaces elevate property values in Colorado Springs by an impressive \$1.1 billion. This increase not only benefits homeowners but also enhances the desirability of our neighborhoods.

Our public spaces are more than just beautiful—they are economic engines and cultural cornerstones. They draw tourists, support small business, inspire creativity, and help define the character of our city. In fact, 12% of visitors to Colorado frequently cite spending time in nature as their primary reason for visiting, showcasing the appeal of our incredible outdoor spaces.

We also recognize that as our city continues to grow, so to must our public infrastructure, which includes access to and maintenance of our public parks, trails, open spaces and cultural services. Studies like this Economic Benefits Study are critical to informing what that future looks like and to accomplishing our vision to make Colorado Springs a safe, economically prosperous, culturally rich, welcoming, and vibrant worldclass American city on a hill that shines brightly.

Onward and Upward.

Sincerely,



Blessing "Yemi" Mobolade  
Mayor of Colorado Springs

30 South Nevada Avenue, Suite 601 • TEL 719-385-5900

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1575, Mail Code 610, Colorado Springs, CO 80901-1575

# Executive Summary

The Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department manages the city's parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities, including athletic fields, sports complexes, community centers, golf courses, spraygrounds, and more. The department is also responsible for some of the major cultural attractions in the city, including the Garden of the Gods Park, Pikes Peak—America's Mountain, the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, Rock Ledge Ranch Historic Site, Starsmore Visitor and Nature Center, and the Helen Hunt Falls Visitor Center.

The City of Colorado Springs engaged Trust for Public Land (TPL) to analyze the economic benefits of its parks, green space, and outdoor recreation. The research was an update to a 2017 economic benefits study by TPL, which estimated the millions of dollars that the park system provides residents, visitors, and the local business community through environmental, health, recreation, and economic development benefits.

The results of the 2024 analysis find that the economic value of the benefits of parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in Colorado Springs have increased for nearly every metric.

- Residents visited parks, trails, and open spaces an estimated 22 million times in 2024. The recreational use value of these visits is estimated at \$84.3 million.
- Residents who use the parks and trails for physical activity have an estimated avoided health care cost of \$60.8 million. Adults from 18 to 65 save an average of \$1,542 per year, and adults over 65 save \$3,084 per year.
- Parks absorb and slow stormwater runoff, reducing the pollutants reaching waterways and improving their water quality. The value of stormwater infiltration due to parks and open spaces in Colorado Springs is \$10.6 million per year.
- Trees and vegetation in parks absorb air pollution that has negative impacts on public health. Colorado Springs' green spaces provide \$142,000 each year in air pollution removal value.
- Carbon dioxide emissions are a major contributor to global climate change. The trees, shrubs, and vegetation in parks absorb and store carbon dioxide, mitigating the effects of climate change such as extreme storms and urban heat islands. Each year, the green spaces in Colorado Springs absorb an estimated \$217,600 worth of carbon dioxide, contributing to the overall total carbon storage which was estimated at \$8.5 million in value.
- Proximity to well-maintained parks increases the value of homes, as people prefer to live near parks and green space. Colorado Springs' parks raise the value of nearby homes by \$1.1 billion and increase property tax revenues by \$3.8 million per year.
- Colorado Springs residents spend money on gear, rentals, and fees when they participate in outdoor recreation activities. In 2023, residents spent an estimated \$88.5 million on sports, recreation, and exercise equipment; recreational vehicles and fees; and tickets to parks or museums.

Some of these values are annual figures, such as carbon sequestration, while others represent the existing baseline, like property value increases due to parks. Therefore, these values should not be summed into a single figure because each estimate represents different values with different time frames, and they accrue to different individuals or groups.

To allow for comparison between this current study and the 2017 economic benefits report, TPL maintained consistency in methodology while updating input values to the most recent year available. Both analyses relied on the



© City of Colorado Springs

most conservative methods supported by conservation economics literature, and results should be considered lower-bound estimates of the value of parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational facilities in Colorado Springs.

**Table 1. Summary of Estimated Economic Benefits Provided by Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Facilities in Colorado Springs**

Benefit Category	Total (2024\$)
<b>Enhanced Property Value</b>	
Total additional property value	\$1,110,000,000
Additional annual property tax	\$3,750,000
<b>Stormwater Infiltration</b>	\$10,511,000
<b>Air Pollution Removal</b>	\$142,000
<b>Carbon Dioxide Removed</b>	
Carbon Stored in Trees (One Time Value)	\$45,973,600
Carbon Sequestered by Trees (Annual Value)	\$1,178,500
<b>Tourism and Outdoor Activity</b>	
Total park visitor spending	\$268,560,000
Local sales tax on park visitor spending	\$10,068,000
<b>Recreational use</b>	\$91,676,000
<b>Human health (avoided healthcare costs due to physical activity)</b>	\$73,714,000
<b>Economic Development</b>	
Annual spending on sports, recreation, and exercise equipment by residents	\$192,964,000
Annual sales generated by sporting goods stores	\$130,259,000



# Introduction

**P**arks, trails, and open spaces are essential components of healthy communities.

Well-maintained green spaces provide benefits to residents, visitors, and the business community. Trees and vegetation reduce air pollution and absorb stormwater runoff, reducing respiratory illnesses and improving downstream water quality. Parks and trails facilitate outdoor recreation for low or no cost, improving quality of life and encouraging physical activity like bicycling and hiking. Local businesses benefit from green space in attracting and retaining the labor force, or increased pedestrian traffic near the parks and trails.

Many of these benefits provide tangible, measurable economic values that can be quantified through economic analysis. In 2017, Colorado Springs worked with Trust for Public Land to estimate the economic benefits of the parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities maintained by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department.<sup>i</sup> This current report, published in 2025, updates the findings to reflect current trends and values. The City of Colorado Springs is committed to a data-driven approach that allows it to make meaningful decisions that align with its strategic plans and the department's mission.

Since the publication of the first report, Colorado Springs has seen seismic shifts in population, housing, and park use. The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in remote workers, and social distancing measures encouraged people to spend more time in nature. Outdoor recreation amenities became increasingly important to people in choosing where to live, and Colorado Springs faced an increase in population that put significant pressure on the housing market. Since 2020, the number of housing units has increased (especially multifamily housing), but the lack of housing affordability continues to affect existing and potential residents.

The high-quality parks and green space in Colorado Springs continue to add to residents' quality of life, with the city being recognized as one of the best places to live in the country. *U.S. News and World Report* identified access to outdoor recreation as an important feature driving the city's high quality-of-life rankings.<sup>1</sup>

In this report, each section addresses a category of economic benefit in detail, describes the methodology for estimating the dollar value, and presents a lower-bound, conservative value of the benefit in Colorado Springs.<sup>2</sup> These economic values equip local decision-makers, park advocates, planners, and policymakers with quantifiable support to help fund, protect, and maintain parks, trails, and open spaces in Colorado Springs.

## Parks in Colorado Springs

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department (PRCS) in Colorado Springs stewards the public lands that define the city, including

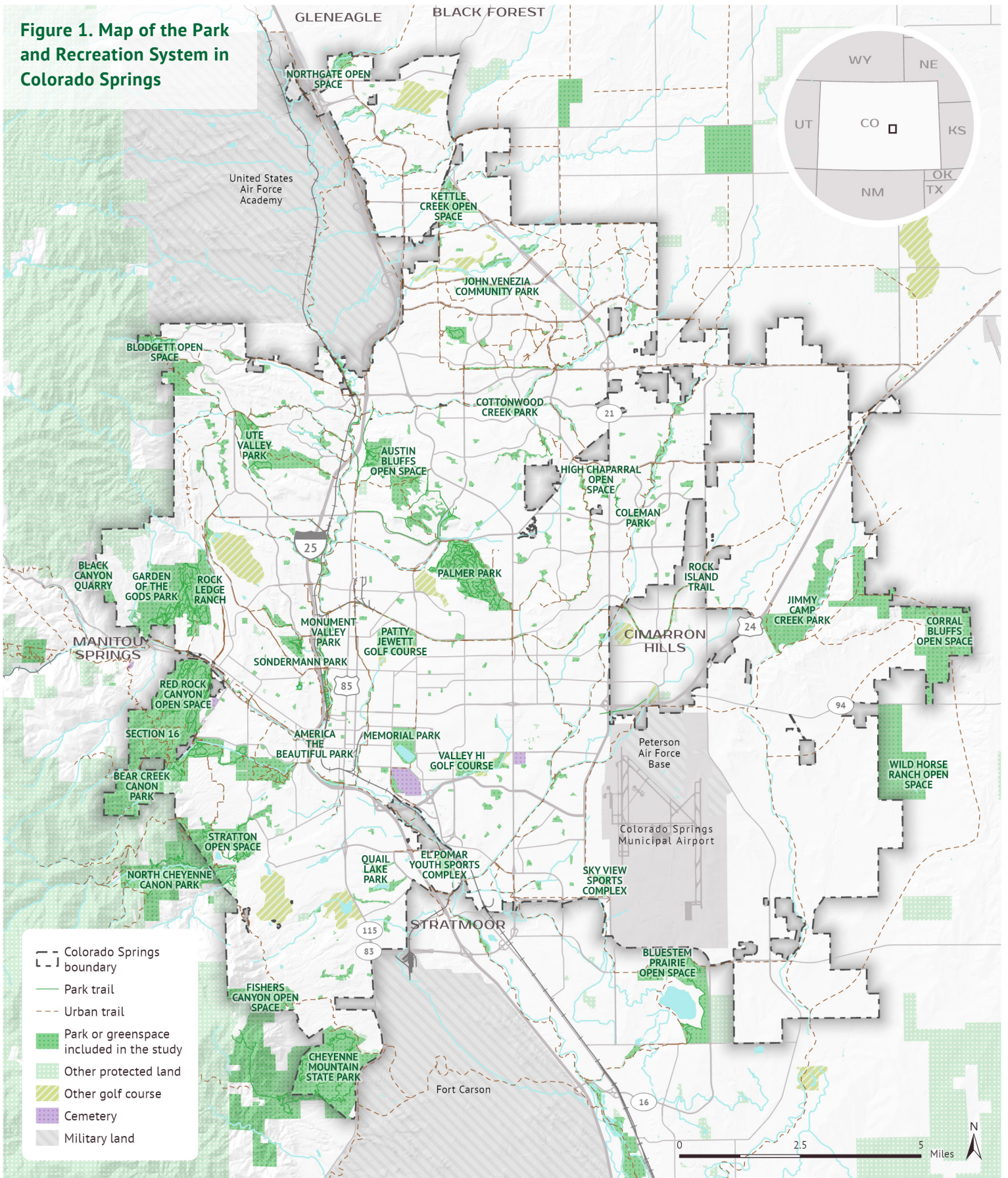
- 18,996 acres of land,
- 268 miles of trails,
- 66 open spaces, and
- 134 playgrounds.

These parks, trails, and open spaces include the world-renowned Garden of the Gods Park; Pikes Peak—America's Mountain, a 14,115-foot mountain; Monument Valley Park; and Red Rock Canyon Open Space. PRCS also manages outdoor recreation facilities, including community centers, sports complexes, golf courses, and a museum.

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i The 2017 Trust for Public Land report, *The Economic Benefits of Parks and Recreation in Colorado Springs*, is available at <https://www.tpl.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CO-Springs-econ-benefits.pdf>.

**Figure 1. Map of the Park and Recreation System in Colorado Springs**



# Colorado Springs Park System

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF COLORADO SPRINGS PARKS

April 30, 2025. Copyright © Trust for Public Land. Trust for Public Land and Trust for Public Land logo are federally registered marks of Trust for Public Land. Information on this map is provided for purposes of discussion and visualization only. [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)



TPL's economic benefits analysis focuses on the parks owned and managed by Colorado Springs ([Figure 1](#)).

In 2025, Colorado Springs will begin the public process to update the 2014 Park System Master Plan. The revised plan will reflect current demographic and park use trends, identify and address the community's preferences, develop a framework for project prioritization and resource allocation, and incorporate best practices for sustainability and environmental stewardship.<sup>3</sup>

## Trails, Open Space, and Parks Program

In April 2023, Colorado Springs voters renewed the dedicated sales tax that conserves and enhances the city's parks, trails, and open spaces for another 20 years. The [Trails, Open Space and Parks Programs](#) (TOPS) supports Colorado Springs by conserving lands that are threatened by development and that protect water quality; protecting wildlife habitat; reducing the risk of wildfires; maintaining regional parks and open spaces; and enhancing the quality of life for local residents. The TOPS program generates about \$12 million each year through its sales tax and is supplemented through grants and support from private donors.<sup>4</sup> As of 2024, TOPS funds have been used to preserve 7,588 acres; build or improve 67 parks; and support 66 miles of trails in Colorado Springs.<sup>5</sup>

## ParkServe and ParkScore in Colorado Springs

TPL provides the ParkScore® index each year, which presents data on park access in U.S. cities and identifies how many residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park. A 10-minute walk is equivalent to about a half-mile walk for an able-bodied person and is the average distance most people are willing to walk to reach a destination.<sup>6</sup> TPL uses the 10-minute walk metric to measure park access near people's homes.

According to the 2024 ParkServe results, 76% of Colorado Springs residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, while around 113,500 residents live farther than a 10-minute walk. This 76% 10-minute walk score is consistent with the median score across the 100 largest cities in the U.S. for 2024.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to data on 10-minute walk access, self-reported information on park acreage, public and private investment in parks, amenities, and equity in access determines the ParkScore ranking of the 100 most populous cities in the U.S. Colorado Springs ranked fifty-fifth in 2024, scoring highest on park access and lowest on amenity availability.<sup>8</sup>

## What Is Included in This Report

TPL analyzed the benefits that parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in Colorado Springs provide people. The benefits include enhanced property values, recreational use values, avoided health care costs, attracting nonlocal visitors, reducing air pollution, improving water quality through stormwater infiltration, and supporting the local economy. TPL continued to rely on conservative methods and values where multiple options were available, and the results of this economic benefits study should be considered a lower-bound estimate.

For this report, TPL maintained consistency with the 2017 report and analyzed the public parkland in the city's public park system, including city-owned and city-managed parkland outside the city boundary ([Figure 1](#)).

This report does not encompass all natural areas in Colorado Springs, as this research focused on publicly accessible areas. For example, the impact of street trees is excluded from the study, although they provide benefits like improved air quality, mitigation of the urban heat island effect and stormwater runoff, and mental health benefits. The benefits from natural areas on private property (e.g., the landscape areas of private residences) are also excluded from the analysis.



Grayhawk Park. © City of Colorado Springs

# Enhanced Property Value and Increased Tax Revenue

**W**ell-maintained parks can have a positive impact on nearby residential property values. When all other things are equal, people are willing to pay more for a home close to natural space and park amenities.

Through economic analysis, TPL can estimate the increase in value associated with these green spaces. Because a home's value also determines the amount of property taxes due, the increased value of homes near parks also leads to increased annual property taxes.

TPL estimated the increase in property value attributable to parks in Colorado Springs, and the associated tax revenue it generates every year.

The two park-related factors that affect property value are distance between parks and residences, and quality. Across the U.S., research shows that the premium for proximity to these spaces can extend up to 2,000 feet and can affect market values by as much as 20 percent.<sup>9</sup>

A 2021 study focused on the economic impact of parks on property values in Mesa County, Colorado, found that home values increased for residences near natural and recreational amenities. Homes within 250 meters (about 820 feet) of a trail sell for about 4.45% more, with all other property characteristics being consistent. Similarly, homes within 250 meters of the Colorado National Monument sold for 12.9% more.<sup>10</sup>

To accommodate the diversity of parks, including varying sizes and amenities, TPL conservatively uses a 500-foot buffer surrounding parks and a 5% premium, consistent with the 2017 analysis. The 5% premium is the value of a home attributable to parks alone. It takes into consideration lower-quality parks (such as those with noise, lights, or parking challenges) that could potentially decrease property values, as well as the high-quality parks that could increase property values closer to 20%.

First, TPL identified all homes within 500 feet of parks managed by Colorado Springs using parcel data provided by the city. For this analysis, homes were defined as single- or multifamily residential structures and condominiums, for a total of 150,299 units. The analysis excludes mixed-use structures and commercial buildings. The total market value for these units is \$84 billion.<sup>ii</sup>

In 2016, the homes in Colorado Springs had a total market value of \$10 billion—in today's dollars, that's just over \$13 billion. The increase in total property value by 2024 reflects major trends in the region since the original report was published, including significant construction of housing units and a population increase that put pressure on the housing market. Since 2020, an increase in remote work opportunities has led to "amenity migration," when people are moving to places based on quality of life factors rather than employment. In 2024, the city was ranked as the #1 most desirable and #3 best place to live by *U.S. News and World Report*.<sup>11</sup> Colorado Springs continues to attract new residents seeking great quality of life and access to outdoor spaces, and the market value of properties in the region reflect that demand.

ii All dollar values throughout the report are in 2024\$.

Overall, TPL found that 41,280 parcels (27.5%) were within 500 feet of parks in Colorado Springs (up from 38,900 homes in 2017). These homes had a total market value of \$22.2 billion in 2024. **Applying the 5% premium, TPL finds that an additional \$1.1 billion in residential property value exists due to proximity to public parks owned and maintained by the City of Colorado Springs.**

TPL used tax assessment data for 2023, the most recent year available at the time of the analysis, for El Paso County, Colorado. The total property tax revenue for the residences near green space in Colorado Springs is \$75.3 million (out of \$304.3 million across all residential parcels in the city). **The total annual property tax revenue that can be attributed to the parks and green spaces in Colorado Springs is \$3.8 million.**

**Table 2. Enhanced Residential Property Value Due to Proximity to Public Parks Maintained Colorado Springs (2024\$)**

Benefit Category	Total (2024\$)
<b>Within 500 feet of public parks in Colorado Springs*</b>	
Number of homes	41,395
Total market value	\$22,200,000,000
Additional market value due to parks	\$1,110,000,000
Total annual property tax revenue due to parks	\$3,750,000

\* Some parks extend outside the city boundary; they were included in this analysis to maintain consistency with the 2017 report.

These estimates are conservative, as the expected benefits of green space on property value may extend beyond 500 feet, especially in the case of regional and national parks. Additionally, the park premium may be higher than 5% for some parks. A 2020 literature review identified recent studies relating property value to distance to parks. Park premiums ranged from a negative impact (e.g., in Phoenix, where small parks were associated with nuisances like noise or crime) up to 22% in Dallas–Fort Worth, with variations based on location, neighborhood characteristics, park type and quality, and amenities.<sup>12</sup>

The property value attributed to parks has increased by nearly 74% since 2017 (when adjusting the findings of the 2017 study for inflation). This is driven by the expansion of housing in Colorado Springs, as well as the increase in the number and size of parks in the city. Similarly, the annual property tax revenue attributable to parks and green space has increased by 17.3% since 2017.

**Table 3. Comparing 2017 and 2025 Results: Enhanced Residential Property Value Due to Proximity to Public Parks Maintained by Colorado Springs (2024\$)**

Benefit Category	2017 Report Value	2025 Report Value	
<b>Within 500 feet of public parks in Colorado Springs*</b>			
Number of homes	38,857	41,395	6.5%
Total market value	\$13,069,993,792	\$22,200,000,000	69.9%
Additional market value due to parks	\$644,202,107	\$1,110,000,000	72.3%
Total property tax revenue due to parks	\$3,315,805	\$3,750,000	13.1%

All values have been updated to reflect inflation and are presented in 2024\$.



High Chaparral Open Space. © Jesse Vega

Housing affordability has greatly declined in the U.S. over the past decade. Between 2015 and 2023, the cost of purchasing a home in Colorado Springs increased by 101%, and affordability is at an all-time low. To accommodate the anticipated population growth in the city, Common Sense Institute for Colorado estimates that between 28,000 and 39,000 housing units will need to be built by 2028.<sup>13</sup>

Given the extreme challenges in the housing market, parks and green space can attract criticism because of their contribution to green gentrification and displacement. “Green gentrification” is an environmental justice issue that occurs when existing residents are displaced, excluded, or marginalized from areas surrounding sustainable or green urban (re)developments as they attract new, wealthier residents.<sup>14</sup>

Research from TPL finds that not all new parks and green space lead to gentrification and displacement. The 2024 report *Great Parks Should Not Uproot Communities* outlines the risk factors for green gentrification and identifies strategies to limit displacement near new green spaces. Communities can work proactively to protect vulnerable community members from displacement, implementing strategies to address

- housing (protecting renters, producing new affordable housing, preserving existing affordable housing),
- small businesses and jobs,
- hiring practices in green space agencies,
- community empowerment, and
- green space designs and programs that reflect the diversity of communities.

While high-quality parks provide multiple benefits to homeowners, communities should work intentionally and collaboratively to limit any potential displacement effects of new green spaces on vulnerable residents.



Patty Jewett Golf Course.  
© City of Colorado Springs

# Stormwater Infiltration

Colorado Springs experiences a continental climate with dry winters and summer monsoons. Although it has experienced lower than average precipitation in recent years, stormwater management remains an important issue. Rainwater and snowmelt that flow off roads, sidewalks, buildings, and other impervious surfaces can cause flooding, erosion, and water quality issues due to pollutants or litter being carried downstream.

Colorado Springs does not treat stormwater, so runoff flows directly into local waterways. The storm sewer system covers about 200 square miles in the city, running into Fountain Creek and several of its tributaries, including Monument Creek, Camp Creek, Cheyenne Creek, Shooks Run, Sand Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and Pine Creek.<sup>15</sup>

In 2020, the City of Colorado Springs reached a settlement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency over requirements to install and maintain stormwater management structures at residential and commercial developments, and to prevent stormwater runoff at active construction sites. In response, the city implemented improvements to its storm sewer system that will reduce pollutants like pesticides, fertilizers, and bacteria in Fountain Creek and its tributaries. The city has developed standard operating procedures and increased staff training and will continue to restore Fountain Creek and its tributaries to mitigate impacts to water quality and habitat.<sup>16</sup>

The city also signed an Intergovernmental Agreement with Pueblo County, committing to spend \$460 million on stormwater infrastructure, maintenance, and education programs over two decades to address water quality issues.<sup>17</sup> Voters in Colorado Springs also approved a stormwater fee, applied to all residential units and developed or improved properties, to meet the requirements of the U.S. Clean Water Act. These revenues are used by the city's Stormwater Enterprise for the planning, construction, operations, and maintenance of stormwater infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

Parks and green spaces play an important role in stormwater mitigation. Their soils, vegetation, and pervious surface capture and absorb precipitation, infiltrate and recharge groundwater, and filter out pollutants like phosphorus, nitrogen, and total suspended solids that would otherwise end up in waterbodies. Stormwater infiltration by natural areas reduces the costs the city would have incurred to treat polluted waters, filtering the water as it travels to ponds, lakes, and rivers.



Garden of the Gods Park. © City of Colorado Springs

Green infrastructure is defined in the U.S. Clean Water Act as “the range of measures that use plant or soil systems, permeable pavement or other permeable surfaces or substrates, stormwater harvest or substrates, stormwater harvest and reuse, or landscaping to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspire stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters.<sup>19</sup> Parks and green space are important green infrastructure features in Colorado Springs that help improve water quality from rainwater or snowmelt runoff before it reaches local waterways.

TPL uses the iTree Hydro model developed by the U.S. Forest Service to estimate the value of water quality enhancement provided by conserved lands, trails, and parks in Colorado Springs. The model calculates the incremental amount of stormwater runoff and pollutant loading that conserved lands, trails, and parks prevent from entering waterbodies, based on differences in tree canopy cover and impervious cover and their effects on stream flow and water quality. The model relies on several inputs, including maps of the parks, hourly weather data, land cover types, and elevation in Colorado Springs.<sup>20</sup>

Using these inputs, TPL creates a baseline and an alternative scenario. The baseline scenario represents existing conditions of conserved lands, trails, and parks. The hypothetical alternative scenario models conditions in which parks, trails, and conserved lands in Colorado Springs are not protected and therefore developed similar to the areas surrounding them.

The first step of the analysis was to collect data on the relevant characteristics of parkland and surrounding urban areas. TPL added files for park property boundaries to a database in Esri ArcGIS. From there, TPL researchers used Google satellite imagery from 2024 to randomly sample points across Colorado Springs and identify the land cover at each point. Analysts generate a baseline scenario, reflecting the current land cover in Colorado Springs, and an alternative scenario, in which parkland is developed like the land surrounding it.

Data show that parks in Colorado Springs have more porous surfaces (like soil, trees, grasses, and shrubbery) than impervious surfaces (like roads and sidewalks). There is also significantly more tree cover, herbaceous cover, and soil cover in the baseline scenario.

**Table 4. Land Cover Percentages of Baseline and Alternative Colorado Springs Scenarios (2023)**

Land Cover Type	Baseline	Alternative
	With Parks	Without Parks
Tree Cover	31.0%	15.3%
Shrub Cover	0.0%	0.0%
Herbaceous Cover	50.1%	43.5%
Water Cover	2.9%	0.3%
Impervious Cover	3.1%	36.6%
Soil Cover	12.9%	4.4%

The land cover inputs were then used to simulate stream flow and water quality for the region under the two scenarios. Thus, the model isolates the volume of stormwater that is absorbed, above and beyond what would have been absorbed by the conserved lands had they been developed. The volume of stormwater runoff is then combined with information about the concentration of pollutants to estimate the reduced pollutant loading attributable to Colorado Springs parks, trails, and conserved lands.

**The iTree model estimates that the parks, trails, and conserved lands in Colorado Springs reduce total suspended solids, phosphorus, and nitrogen by 326.1 tons, 1.5 tons, and 8.8 tons, respectively, each year.**

Next, TPL used the i-Tree Canopy model to calculate the avoided stormwater runoff generated in Colorado Springs due to trees and vegetated areas. The model estimated that parks and green spaces in Colorado Springs reduce stormwater runoff by about 6.51 million gallons per year, for a rate of 164,300 gallons of stormwater per square mile. Comparatively, outside of the park boundaries in Colorado Springs, the rate of reduced stormwater runoff is 80,900 gallons per square mile. **TPL finds that the parks and green space in Colorado Springs reduce stormwater runoff by an additional 3.3 million gallons per year due to infiltration that would not occur if the parks were developed like surrounding areas.**

**Table 5. Annual Stormwater Cost Savings from Public Parks in Colorado Springs (2024\$)**

Category	Amount
Amount of stormwater runoff with parks	6,510,000 gallons
Amount of stormwater runoff in no-parks scenario	3,205,000 gallons
Runoff reduced by parks	3,305,000 gallons
Per-gallon cost of stormwater management	3.18
Total stormwater management cost of parks in Colorado Springs	\$10,511,000

Finally, TPL estimated the economic value of the stormwater infiltration due to parks in Colorado Springs. Though the city does not directly treat stormwater, it does require treatment of stormwater from new and redevelopment activities. According to local experts, the average cost per acre-foot for new water quality treatment facilities is about \$3.18 per gallon.<sup>21</sup>

**If the parks and green spaces in Colorado Springs were developed in the same way as their surrounding land use types, the city could incur an additional \$10.5 million per year in stormwater treatment costs due to increased runoff.**

Since the publication of the 2017 report, TPL has updated the methodology used to estimate the cost of stormwater treatment. Adjusting the results of the 2017 stormwater analysis for inflation to 2024 dollars, the economic benefit of parks, trails, and conserved lands in Colorado Springs on stormwater infiltration is \$4 million per year. The current methodology using the iTree model and a new approach to per-unit cost estimation increases the value of stormwater savings due to parks, trails, and conserved lands in Colorado Springs by 162%.

## CASE STUDY

The City of Colorado Springs’ Stormwater Enterprise, Colorado Springs Utilities, and Pikes Peak Waterways recently partnered on a [COS Creek Plan](#) that sets a vision for stewardship of the Fountain and Monument Creek Corridor. The plan aims to restore the corridor’s natural functions and support economic revitalization while expanding recreation opportunities near Downtown Colorado Springs that takes advantage of nearby water access.

In addition to the recreational benefits of creating a premiere outdoor recreation destination, restoring the creek’s functionality will also have environmental and economic benefits for stormwater management. Functioning floodplains will mitigate flooding and enhance water quality, reducing the spending needed to capture, convey, and treat stormwater runoff. The COS Creek Plan identifies specific projects, like permeable parking areas, meadows, and boardwalks, that will treat or redirect stormwater and runoff from adjacent neighborhoods.

Investments in creek restoration, enhanced neighborhood connectivity, and expanded access to parks and local waterways will increase the recreational use value of Colorado Springs residents and create a new destination for visitors to the region while also meeting the area’s environmental and economic needs.<sup>22</sup>



# Air Pollution Removal

**T**he trees and vegetation in Colorado Springs parks help filter air pollution, including carbon dioxide, particulate matter, and ozone. These benefits are essential to residents, especially vulnerable populations like older adults, young children, and people with chronic illnesses.

The American Lung Association (ALA) analyzes air quality and its potential impacts on residents in the annual “State of the Air” report. In 2024, Colorado Springs received a failing grade for the number of days with high ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), which can especially affect people with respiratory illnesses like asthma and COPD.<sup>23</sup> However, the amount of particle pollution in Colorado Springs is exceptionally low, and the ALA ranked the city the eighth cleanest in the U.S. based on year-round particle pollution.<sup>24</sup>



**Ozone air pollution, sometimes known as smog, is one of the most widespread pollutants in the United States. It is a powerful lung irritant. When inhaled into the lungs, it reacts with the delicate lining of the airways, causing inflammation and other damage that can impact multiple body systems. Ozone exposure can also shorten lives.**

**Particle pollution is a deadly and growing threat to public health in communities around the country. The more researchers learn about the health effects of particle pollution, the more dangerous it is recognized to be. Short-term spikes in particle pollution that last from a few hours to a few days can kill. Most premature deaths are from respiratory and cardiovascular causes. Spikes in particle pollution also have many other harmful effects, ranging from decreased lung function to heart attacks.”**

– American Lung Association

TPL analyzed the benefits that Colorado Springs parks and open spaces provide to residents, as trees and vegetation absorb air pollution and improve air quality. To estimate these benefits, TPL used another tool in the U.S. Forest Service’s iTree suite, iTree Canopy. This model incorporates local tree canopy, weather, demographic data, and changes in pollutants for Colorado Springs to estimate air pollution reduction, focusing on carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter.<sup>25</sup>

TPL used the results of the random sampling from the Stormwater Infiltration analysis to assess and classify the canopy cover in Colorado Springs parks and open spaces. The iTree model processes these data and estimates hourly changes in air pollution removal based on the local vegetation as well as the value of these reductions for each pollutant. These values are based on a literature review by iTree researchers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Benefits Mapping and Analysis (BenMap) program.<sup>26</sup> These values were adjusted to 2024 dollars using the producer price index (the iTree model reports values in 2015 dollars).<sup>27</sup>

**Table 6. Value of Air Pollution Removed by Colorado Springs Parks (2024\$)**

Pollutant	Pollution Removed (Pounds)	Annual Pollution Removal Value
Carbon Monoxide	8,760	\$700
Nitrogen Dioxide	233,660	\$4,900
Ozone	495,720	\$69,100
Sulfur Dioxide	28,000	\$300
Particulate Matter 2.5	14,740	\$8,400
Particulate Matter 10	178,780	\$58,000
<b>Total Value</b>		<b>\$142,000</b>

All values have been updated to reflect inflation and are presented in 2024\$.

Overall, this represents a significant increase in air pollution removal since the 2017 report. The amount of pollutants removed more than doubled for each pollutant type. However, because the economic value per pound of air pollutant removal has a lower value in 2024, the total value provided by Colorado Springs parks declined.

**Table 7. Comparing 2017 and 2025 Results: Value of Air Pollution Removed by Colorado Springs Parks**

Pollutant	2017 Report Value	2025 Report Value	Percent Change
	Pollution Removed (Pounds)	Pollution Removed (Pounds)	
Carbon Monoxide	3,180	8,460	166.0%
Nitrogen Dioxide	80,300	233,660	191.0%
Ozone	179,000	495,720	176.9%
Sulfur Dioxide	9,710	28,000	188.4%
PM 2.5	4,980	14,740	196.0%
PM 10	60,200	178,780	197.0%

## Carbon Storage and Sequestration in Colorado Springs

In addition to the health benefits of air pollution reduction, parks also provide economic benefits by reducing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, thus mitigating climate change impacts like extreme storms, flooding, and extreme heat.<sup>28</sup> Trees and vegetation absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, storing it in their leaves, branches, and roots.

TPL used iTree Canopy to estimate the value of carbon storage and sequestration in Colorado Springs parks.

**Table 8. Carbon dioxide storage and sequestration in parks in Colorado Springs**

Category	Carbon (kT)	CO <sub>2</sub> Equivalent (kT)	Value (2024\$)
CO <sub>2</sub> Storage	269.56	988.39	\$45,973,600
Annual CO <sub>2</sub> Sequestration	6.91	25.34	\$1,178,500

The value of carbon storage and sequestration is based on the social cost of carbon, an estimate of the dollar value of damage done by an additional ton of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>29</sup> (The social cost of carbon is used to conduct cost benefit analyses of policy changes, and quantifies the dollar value of a policy’s impact on greenhouse gas emissions. If a policy increases greenhouse gas emissions and therefore exacerbates climate change impacts, the expected increase in emissions can be multiplied by the per-unit social cost of carbon to estimate the cost of the policy to society.)<sup>30</sup>



Corral Bluffs Open Space. © Trails and Open Space Coalition



# Tourism Spending and Outdoor Activity

**T**ravel and tourism are significant components of the economy in Colorado Springs and the Pikes Peak region. The most recent information from Visit Colorado Springs and Longwoods International Travel USA finds that total visitation was 24.8 million in 2023, and total spending was \$2.9 billion in the Pikes Peak Region (which includes Teller and Fremont counties, in addition to El Paso County, where Colorado Springs is located).<sup>31</sup> (Statewide, Colorado saw 93.3 million domestic (U.S.-based) visitors for a total tourism spending of \$28.3 billion in 2023.<sup>32</sup>)

Outdoor recreation and youth sports tournaments are important drivers for the tourism industry in Colorado Springs. For overnight travelers, 16% visited Colorado Springs for touring and 12% visited to explore the outdoors (the top two reasons after visiting family and friends).<sup>33</sup>

When people visit Colorado Springs to hike, visit parks, and participate in cultural activities, they also spend money in the local economy that in turn supports local employment and provides tax revenue. Visitors may spend money on hotels and accommodations, food and beverages, entertainment, transportation, and retail. Although parks and trails may be free to use, they can generate spending indirectly by supporting the broader tourism industry.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis publishes the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account annually to estimate the employment, compensation, and gross domestic product (GDP, or value added) of the outdoor recreation industry at the national and state level. In 2023, Colorado employed 132,594 people across all outdoor recreation industries, generating \$8.6 billion in annual compensation. “Conventional” outdoor recreation activities, like biking, fishing, climbing, and hiking, added \$5.5 billion to the state’s economy in 2023, and Colorado was ranked first in the U.S. by value added due to snow activities (skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing) and fifth for bicycling.<sup>34</sup>

## CASE STUDY

Garden of the Gods, a city-owned park in Colorado Springs, is a designated National Natural Landmark. It is one of the most popular destinations in the region, with over 1,300 acres of stunning red rock formations and hiking trails. The park was ranked one of the top tourist attractions in the U.S. by Tripadvisor in 2024.<sup>35</sup> Recently the Garden of the Gods Foundation published an economic impact study on the park to better understand how its visitors contribute to the region’s economy.

Researchers found that Garden of the Gods supported over 4,000 jobs, with an associated employment-related income of \$157.9 million in 2022. The total value added of the park (estimated to be the total revenues generated by the park, minus the cost of doing business) was \$271.7 million. Garden of the Gods also benefits the region through its contribution to local, county, state, and federal taxes. Overall, the park had \$65.2 million in tax impacts across all levels of government.

As the most visited park in the region, Garden of the Gods has a substantial economic impact in Colorado Springs, including nearby local businesses in hospitality, retail, and food and beverage.<sup>36</sup>

TPL used information from the most recent Colorado Springs tourism research conducted by Longwoods International and Dean Runyan Associates to estimate the value of parks, trails, and open space to the city’s tourism economy.

In 2023, Colorado Springs saw 24.8 million visitors.<sup>37</sup> In El Paso County, where Colorado Springs is located, visitors spent \$2.2 billion in 2023 in direct travel spending. These earnings are associated with 18,800 jobs; \$650.2 million in direct earnings; \$83.9 million in local tax receipts; and \$60.2 million in state tax receipts.<sup>38</sup> (Colorado Springs is the primary tourism destination in the county, and is the smallest scale at which direct tourism spending was available.)

Twelve percent of visitors to Colorado Springs stated that visiting the outdoors was the primary purpose of their visit.<sup>39</sup> However, many more visitors participate in outdoor activities as a secondary purpose; for example, 60% percent of overnight visitors to Colorado participated in some kind of outdoor activity during their trip (such as sightseeing; hiking and backpacking; visiting national or state parks; taking nature tours, wildlife viewing, and birdwatching; and visiting local parks and playgrounds). This rate is higher than the U.S. average of 47% participation in outdoor activities by overnight visitors, indicating a specialization in outdoor recreation tourism in the region.<sup>40</sup>

To estimate the economic impact of Colorado Springs’ outdoor spaces on the tourism economy, TPL applied the 12% value (overnight visitors for whom visiting the outdoors was the primary purpose of their visit) to the direct travel spending and tax receipts for El Paso County in 2023.

**In 2023, \$268.6 million in direct travel spending and \$17.3 million in direct tax receipts can be attributed to the parks, trails, and open space in the Colorado Springs region. This includes \$10.1 million in local taxes and \$7.2 million in state taxes, respectively.**

Because so many visitors participate in outdoor activities as a secondary purpose of their trip, TPL considers these estimates conservative for Colorado Springs.

**Table 9. 2023 Tourism Spending and the Outdoors in Colorado Springs (2024\$)**

Category	Value
Total direct travel spending by visitors to El Paso County	\$2,238,000,000
Estimated local tourism tax revenue in Colorado Springs	\$83,900,000
Estimated state tourism tax revenue in Colorado Springs	\$60,200,000
Percentage of tourists whose primary reason to visit Colorado Springs was the outdoors	12%
Estimated spending of tourists whose primary reason to visit Colorado Springs was parks and trails	\$268,560,000
Estimated local tourism tax revenue attributable to parks and trails	\$10,068,000
Estimated state tourism tax revenue attributable to parks and trails	\$7,224,000

In the 2015 economic benefits study, TPL relied on a Longwoods International report that focused specifically on Colorado Springs to help measure the value of parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in the city’s tourism economy. The 2015 study estimated that Colorado Springs had 20.5 million annual visitors overall—4.3 million less than in 2023. Additionally, more tourists now cite visiting the outdoors as a primary purpose of their visit to Colorado Springs (9% in 2015 compared to 12% in 2023).

Parks, trails, and outdoor recreation play an increasingly significant role in supporting the tourism economy in Colorado Springs. **In studying the contributions to tourism from parks, trails, and open space, direct spending by visitors increased 52.7% and state and local tax receipts increased 28.9% between 2015 and 2023.**

**Table 10. Comparing 2017 and 2025 Results: Tourism Spending and the Outdoors in Colorado Springs (2024\$)**

Category	2017 Value	2025 Value	Percent Change
Total visitation to El Paso County	20.5 million	24.8 million	
Total direct travel spending by visitors to El Paso County	\$1.49 billion	\$2.2 billion	
Percentage of tourists whose primary reason to visit Colorado Springs was the outdoors	9%	12%	
Estimated spending of tourists whose primary reason to visit Colorado Springs was parks and trails	\$175.83 million	\$268.6 million	
Estimated local tourism tax revenue attributable to parks and trails	\$8.31 million	\$10.2 million	
Estimated state tourism tax revenue attributable to parks and trails	\$5.1 million	\$7.2 million	

All values have been updated to reflect inflation and are presented in 2024\$.



Quail Lake. © Felicia Barnhart



Pikes Peak – America's Mountain. @ Scott Rokis

# Recreational Use Value

Parks, trails, and open spaces provide substantial economic benefits to people who use them. In Colorado Springs, these spaces provide direct recreational value to residents by facilitating access to outdoor recreation such as hiking, rock climbing, and birding.

In 2024, Colorado Parks and Wildlife in partnership with Colorado State University conducted a statewide survey of residents on the value of outdoor recreation. The survey found that 72% of respondents participated in outdoor recreation at least once a week over the past year.<sup>41</sup> In the survey, Colorado Springs is part of the Front Range region, which had the highest total spending by residents (compared with the Western Slope and Eastern Plains).

**Table 11. Colorado Residents Spending (in Millions) by Activity Type (2023)**

Activity	Western Slope	Front Range	Eastern Plains	State
Trail/Road	\$2,505	\$7,175	\$978	\$10,659
Water-Based	\$1,897	\$3,246	\$487	\$5,630
Winter	\$2,771	\$2,081	\$190	\$5,042
Wildlife-Related	\$2,190	\$3,225	\$837	\$6,251
Other Outdoor	\$1,478	\$2,362	\$436	\$4,275
<b>All Outdoor Activity</b>	<b>\$10,841</b>	<b>\$18,088</b>	<b>\$2,928</b>	<b>\$31,857</b>

Totals may not sum due to rounding.<sup>42</sup>

The Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department in Colorado Springs provides many outdoor recreation opportunities at low or no cost. But residents still get “value” from walking on trails and visiting playgrounds, even if they do not need to pay to participate.

The price someone pays for admission or participation in outdoor recreation is one way to understand its value. For activities people do not pay for, economists can calculate the value of what people are “willing to pay” instead. If the parks, trails, and facilities were not provided by the City of Colorado Springs, how much would residents be willing to pay for similar experiences in private or commercial places? Estimating residents’ willingness to pay for recreation represents the amount of money that residents save by not having to pay market rates for these activities.

TPL analyzed the recreational use value of Colorado Springs parks, trails, and facilities to residents. (This section focuses on Colorado Springs residents; nonlocal visitation is covered in the Tourism Spending and Outdoor Activity section, but these results can be considered a conservative estimate of the total recreational value.)



Deerfield Hills Community Center & Sprayground. © Deerfield Hills Community Center

To calculate the recreational use value of parks to Colorado Springs residents, TPL conducted a phone survey to determine the annual number of visits to parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities maintained by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department. (The survey instrument is included in the [Appendix](#)). Survey respondents provided information about the frequency of their visits to these places and the types of activities they participated in while visiting. Adults with children under 18 also provided information about their child's visitation and activity participation.

The survey questions were nearly identical to the survey conducted for the 2017 economic benefits report, though the list of activities residents were asked about was updated to reflect recent outdoor recreation trends (e.g., adding "visiting spraygrounds" and breaking out playground visits from other types of park visits).

The survey was conducted in September 2024 and collected data on a statistically representative sample of Colorado Springs residents, based on age, race, gender, and socioeconomic characteristics. TPL was therefore able to use the survey responses to estimate the annual visitation of all residents in Colorado Springs, with a 4.9% margin of error.

In total, the survey indicates that residents make 22 million visits per year to Colorado Springs parks, trails, and open spaces. In the last 12 months, 87% of adults and 90.6% of children living in Colorado Springs visited its parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities.<sup>43</sup>

TPL takes a conservative approach in estimating recreational use values of parks. First, activity frequency is adjusted based on the seasonality of activities, defined by PRCS staff. For example, while residents may use the parks year-round to go birding, they likely use the parks only in the summer for kayaking and canoeing. Second, TPL's analysis adjusts response data to account for participation in multiple activities during a single visit. Residents may walk local trails and go birding in a single visit, for example. Finally, TPL also adjusts for potential overreporting of park use by comparing estimated overall visitation with visits by activity type, choosing the most conservative of the values in estimating recreational use.

The survey results indicate that the most popular activities for adults are walking and hiking (72%), birding and viewing wildlife (65.3%), and attending special events (49.5%).

For children in Colorado Springs, the most popular activities are visiting playgrounds (76.3%), relaxing with friends and family (72%), and walking/hiking (71.1%).

**Table 12. Top Six Activities of Residents in Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Facilities in Colorado Springs (2024)**

Activity	Participation (Annual Visits)		
	Adults	Children	Total
Walking or hiking	4,185,528	938,705	5,124,233
Birding or viewing wildlife	2,851,779	683,426	3,535,205
Visiting playgrounds	1,202,669	991,090	2,193,759
Relaxing, visiting with family and friends, picnics	1,431,571	481,472	1,913,043
Biking	1,198,187	531,529	1,729,716
Running or jogging	1,389,803	180,049	1,569,852

Note: In the 2017 study, TPL combined “visiting playgrounds” and “relaxing, visiting with family and friends, picnicking” under “general park use”; it was disaggregated in 2025 .

The top activity overall (walking/hiking) is consistent with the results of TPL’s 2017 recreation use analysis. Previously, general park use included both visiting playgrounds and relaxing and visiting with family; the information was disaggregated in 2025 but still reflects their popularity for both parents and their children. Running/jogging fell to the sixth most popular activity and playing team sports is now the eighth most popular activity in 2025 (though this is in part due to the disaggregation of general park use). Dog park use increased to seventh on the list based on number of visits, while birding or viewing wildlife significantly increased in popularity among adults and children alike.

After determining the annual visitation to parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities, TPL estimated the dollar value of park visits in Colorado Springs based on activity type. Visiting parks provides value to people, regardless of any cost to participate. TPL uses an approach based on a methodology developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.<sup>44</sup> The dollar values are derived from economic studies on what people are willing to pay for different outdoor recreation activities. These estimates use different methods, including surveys and analyzing travel spending, to determine these values.

For consistency with the 2017 study results, TPL used the same per-activity dollar values and adjusted them for inflation to 2024 dollars. For the new activities added to the study, TPL reviewed published literature to identify the activity values most relevant to Colorado Springs and applied these values to the results of the recreation use survey.

In the previous study, the average value per visit was \$2.50 in 2016 dollars; adjusted for inflation, this value is \$3.26 in 2024 dollars. For the current survey, the average value per visit is \$4.04.

This study finds that the total annual economic value of residents’ recreational use of parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in Colorado Springs is \$91.7 million.

**Table 13. Annual Economic Value of Recreational Use of Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Facilities in Colorado Springs by Residents (2024\$)**

	Person Visits	Average Value per Visit	Total Recreational Use Value
Total	22,718,000	\$4.04	\$91,676,000

When adjusted for inflation, the total value of recreational use of parks and trails in the 2017 study is \$76.7 million. The 2024 results reflect a 18.8% increase in recreational use value since the first survey was conducted.



# Health Care Cost Savings

Physical inactivity is a global public health challenge. In the United States, CDC data show that at least one in five adults (20%) in each U.S. state is living with obesity.<sup>45</sup> Physical inactivity is a significant contributor to heart disease, the leading cause of death in the U.S. as of 2022.<sup>46</sup>

Fortunately, Colorado has the lowest rate of physical inactivity across the U.S., at 17.7%.<sup>47</sup> The rate of obesity, however, has slightly increased in recent years to 26.6%, up from 22.8% in 2017.<sup>48</sup>

The CDC recognizes that physical activity helps improve overall health and reduces the risk for chronic diseases, including obesity and heart disease. The CDC promotes physical activity guidelines for adults, defining recommended activity levels to support physical and mental health. Adults need 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity a week, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity. (This activity is in addition to at least 2 days of muscle-strengthening activity each week.)<sup>49</sup>

Outdoor recreation access helps people meet physical activity recommendations and achieve healthier lifestyles.<sup>50</sup> Parks provide essential, low-cost public recreation resources that can help combat rising obesity levels in the U.S., especially for economically disadvantaged communities.<sup>51</sup>

In this analysis, TPL leveraged the recreational survey results to estimate the avoided health care costs of residents who use parks and trails in Colorado Springs for physical activity. Based on the CDC's recommended levels of physical activity, TPL used the results of the telephone survey of Colorado Springs residents on their recreational use value (see [Recreational Use Value](#) section). The data on residents' frequency and intensity of outdoor activity were analyzed to estimate annual health care cost savings due to their moderate or vigorous physical activity in parks and on trails.

TPL used the definitions of vigorous- and moderate-intensity physical activity from the most recent *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>52</sup> Where any variations in intensity were possible, TPL conservatively assumed the lowest level of intensity possible for the type of physical activity noted; for instance, if the respondent reported bicycling, it was assumed that he or she did so on level terrain (which qualifies as a moderate activity) rather than bicycling at a brisk pace or on steep uphill terrain (which qualifies as a vigorous activity).

TPL assigned a level of intensity to each of the activities included in the telephone survey. The analysis did not include sedentary activities, as they do not contribute to reducing health care costs related to physical activity. This approach is consistent with TPL's methodology for the 2017 report.

Consistent with the 2017 study, residents must use the parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in Colorado Springs *exclusively* to meet these physical activity guidelines. Many more people use the parks and trails to partially meet their physical activity needs. For example, this value does not capture the reduction in health care spending if someone runs in the park once a week while exercising indoors the rest of the week. Therefore, the results of this analysis should be considered a minimum value for the annual health care cost savings associated with the parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in Colorado Springs. It also allows the results to be attributed to the spaces managed and maintained by the city's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department.

**TPL's analysis finds that 46,600 residents in Colorado Springs use the city's parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities to meet recommended physical activity guidelines.** This includes 39,500 adults aged 18 to 64, and 4,100 adults over 65.

Previously, TPL conservatively estimated the per-person annual health care cost savings based on work in health care economics, relying on cost differences between physically active and inactive persons. To maintain consistency with the 2017 study, TPL adjusted this value for inflation to 2024 dollars. **For adults between 18 and 65, the annual value per person is \$1,542; for adults over 65, the annual health care cost savings per person is \$3,084.** (Older adults typically incur two or more times the medical care costs of younger adults.<sup>53</sup> TPL estimates that the costs are double to maintain a conservative estimate.)

**In 2024, the estimated avoided health care cost expenditures for Colorado Springs residents who were physically active in parks and on trails was \$73.7 million. Adults aged 18–64 save \$60.9 million per year and adults over 65 save \$12.8 million per year due to physical activity in Colorado Springs parks, trails, open space, and facilities.**

**Table 14. Estimated health benefits of physical activity in Colorado Springs parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities (2024\$)**

Category	Value
<b>Adults 18-64 years of age</b>	
Number of adults (18–64) physically active in parks*	39,510
Average annual healthcare cost difference between active and inactive persons between 18 and 64 years old	\$1,540
Subtotal of health care benefits	\$60,924,000
<b>Adults 65 years of age and older</b>	
Number of adults (65+) physically active in parks*	4,131
Average annual healthcare cost difference between active and inactive persons over 65 years old	\$3,096
Subtotal of health care benefits	\$12,790,000
<b>Total adults physically active in parks in Colorado Springs</b>	<b>43,641</b>
<b>Total annual value of health benefits from parks in Colorado Springs</b>	<b>\$73,714,000</b>

After adjusting the 2017 study results for inflation, **TPL finds that the updated annual health care cost savings are nearly the same, slightly decreasing from \$73.8 million to \$73.7 million in 2024.** Because the per-person cost savings did not change, different patterns in park and trail use offset any potential loss in total annual savings. While there was a 7% decline in the number of adults under 65 using the park system to meet physical activity guidelines, there was a significant increase—52%—for adults over 65 in Colorado Springs who use the parks and trails for exercise. Because older adults have a higher per-person health care cost savings attributed to physical activity, their increase in outdoor physical activity offset the losses in cost savings caused by a decline in adults under 65 using parks and trails for exercise.

## Mental Health Benefits of Parks, Trails, and Open Space

In addition to the benefits of physical activity outdoors, spending time in nature also enhances our mental health and well-being. Access to green spaces can lead to short-term and long-term mental health benefits both for people who spend time in these spaces for recreation and for those who live nearby.

Short-term benefits of spending time in nature include improved mood and self-reported well-being; reduced stress and anxiety; improved self-image and sleep quality; and mental restoration benefits. These are benefits experienced by park and trail users during and shortly after the visit. Longer-term benefits include improved life satisfaction and quality of life; decreased prevalence of mental disorders like depression or anxiety in a population; and reduced severity of individuals' mental illness.<sup>54</sup>

A 2024 study of Coloradans found that mental well-being and relaxation were main motivators to participate in outdoor recreation, with 80% of respondents stating that outdoor recreation is an important part of their personal well-being.<sup>55</sup>

While the dollar value of parks' mental health benefits is difficult to quantify, research continues to find positive associations between visiting parks and trails and improved mental well-being in the short- and long-term.



Ute Valley Park – Ute Valley Park property. © Darcy Kiefel



Panorama Park. © City of Colorado Springs

# Economic Development

Colorado Springs' parks, trails, open space, and facilities provide significant economic development benefits to local residents and the business community. Parks and green space attract and retain residents by increasing the quality of life in Colorado Springs, which in turn benefits the business community by expanding the local customer base and potential workforce.

## 1. Parks contribute to quality of life, helping attract and retain residents

Parks and green space in urban environments like Colorado Springs contribute to quality of health and well-being in several ways.

Research has shown that urban nature reduces environmental stressors (like noise, air pollution, and heat), which in turn has physical and mental health benefits for residents. People have reduced stress levels, improved attention recovery, better social connectivity, and more opportunities for activities in areas with more green space.<sup>56</sup>

Colorado Springs is nationally ranked as one of the best places to live, based on quality of life, affordability, job market, and desirability metrics. *U.S. News and World Report* specifically called out access to outdoor recreation like hiking and mountain biking, city parks, and natural areas as important features driving the city's attractiveness.<sup>57</sup>

## 2. Parks help attract and retain the workforce in Colorado Springs

A consistently high quality of life also benefits employers who rely on the local labor force. The industries that are foundational to Colorado Springs' economy are education, health care, and the military.<sup>58</sup> Access to nature and residents' high quality of life help attract and maintain a local workforce in these key industries, as well as tourism and outdoor recreation directly.

Colorado offers corporations a Job Growth Incentive Tax Credit for locating their headquarters in the state. The incentive began in 2009, and as of 2024 nearly 380 companies have qualified—in part because they hire local talent and pay wages higher than the local median income.<sup>59</sup> The companies that take advantage of the state's program identify available talent, lifestyle amenities, and affordability (compared with competitor cities on the East and West Coasts) as the top reasons for doing so.<sup>60</sup> Access to nature and outdoor recreation supports the case for relocating to Colorado, in turn benefiting Colorado residents with more economic opportunity.

## 3. Parks, trails, and open space facilitate outdoor-recreation-related spending

Outdoor recreation is important to Coloradans, and recreation activity is a significant contributor to the local, regional, and state economy.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife identified the total spending by activity types and region for 2023 (see [Table 11](#)).<sup>61</sup> Residents spent the most on trail and road-based activities in the Front Range, where Colorado Springs is located, as well as statewide. The activities in this group include walking, running/trail running, hiking/backpacking, horseback riding, cycling (on- and off-road), e-biking, off-highway vehicle or 4-wheeling/motorcycling.

To better understand the economic development impacts of outdoor recreation for Colorado Springs specifically, TPL used information from Esri's ArcGIS Business Analyst tool. Business Analyst analyzes data on demographics, consumer spending, participation in various activities, business locations, and more to identify the market potential for different industries, including outdoor recreation activities.<sup>iii</sup>

Business Analyst estimates household expenditures across the U.S., including on outdoor-recreation-related activities and services. **In 2024, residents of Colorado Springs spent \$193 million annually on sporting goods and equipment,** including:

- sports, recreation, and exercise equipment (including winter sports, hunting/fishing, camping gear, and bicycles),
- recreational vehicles and fees (including camp fees, docking fees, and boat and RV payments and rentals),
- bike sharing / e-scooters (new for 2024),
- tickets to parks or museums (new for 2024),
- admission to sporting events (excluding trips), and
- fees for recreational lessons.

In comparing the spending between 2017 and 2024 (keeping the spending categories consistent and adjusting for inflation), TPL found that outdoor-recreation-related expenditures still rose 13.5% since 2017.

Some of the most significant increases in spending by Colorado Springs residents were on renting boats, trailers, campers, and RVs; purchasing bicycles (including e-bikes); and purchasing sports equipment.

**Table 15. Estimated annual spending by Colorado Springs residents on outdoor activities (2024\$)**

Recreation Expenditures	Average Household Spending	Total
Entertainment/Recreation Fees and Admissions		
Tickets to Parks or Museums	\$39.81	\$7,987,000
Admission to Sporting Events, excl. Trips	\$79.34	\$15,918,000
Fees for Participant Sports, excl. Trips	\$137.85	\$27,665,000
Fees for Recreational Lessons	\$179.60	\$36,031,000
Recreational Vehicles/Fees*	\$189.87	\$38,092,000
Sports, Recreation, and Exercise Equipment**	\$335.33	\$67,271,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$192,964,000</b>

\* Includes payments by owners and rental fees

\*\* Includes exercise equipment and gear; bicycles; camping equipment; hunting and fishing equipment; winter, water, and other sports equipment; and rental/repair of the equipment

Colorado Springs also attracts many tourists who participate in outdoor recreation, and the local sporting goods stores serve the needs of both local residents and visitors.

According to Esri's Business Analyst, **there are 97 sports, recreation, and exercise equipment-related businesses in Colorado Springs**, including bicycle retail stores that sell or repair bicycles, parts, and related gear, and retail stores that sell clothing and equipment for activities such as camping, exercise, fishing, golfing, hunting, hockey, horseback

<sup>iii</sup> Additional information on the Business Analyst tool is available at <https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/arcgis-business-analyst/overview>.

riding, skateboarding, skiing, and more. **Together the businesses that support local outdoor recreation generated \$130.3 million in sales in 2023 and employed 1,143 people in Colorado Springs.**

#### 4. Parks, trails, and open spaces support local businesses and create jobs.

Both residents and tourists support local businesses in the outdoor recreation industry, which in turn have ripple effects on the local economy.

In addition to any direct spending needed to participate in an activity (like admissions fees or tickets), outdoor recreation activities in Colorado Springs generate spending in the local economy. For example, hotels and other accommodations benefit from overnight visitors coming to see the parks and trails, and restaurants and retail experience increased pedestrian traffic near outdoor recreation destinations.

In the 2023 study by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, researchers estimated the broader economic contributions of the spending by residents on outdoor recreation.<sup>62</sup> In the Front Range region, where Colorado Springs is located, the \$18.1 billion estimated spending by state residents on outdoor activities in turn creates 132,837 jobs earning \$7.5 billion in labor income. Statewide, residents spending on outdoor activities creates 246,859 jobs with \$13.6 billion in labor income. In total, visitation to parks, trails, and open spaces by Colorado residents produces \$22.2 billion in total output in the Front Range region.

**Table 16. Colorado Residents' Spending and Economic Contributions (2024\$)**

All Outdoor Activities	Region			Statewide
	Western Slope	Front Range	Eastern Plains	
Total Spending	\$10,840,931,418	\$18,088,093,776	\$2,927,966,372	\$31,856,991,566
Per Participant	4,573	5,986	2,863	8,276
Jobs	77,973	132,837	20,163	246,859
Labor Income	\$3,495,906,436	\$7,488,346,830	\$662,244,681	\$13,557,818,667
Value Added (GDP)	\$5,816,401,930	\$12,347,905,982	\$1,166,950,825	\$22,275,681,094
State and Local Taxes	\$1,240,811,136	\$1,891,907,511	\$310,268,553	\$3,587,776,809
Federal Taxes	\$856,554,082	\$1,777,904,458	\$165,980,861	\$3,256,490,770
<b>Total Output</b>	<b>\$10,932,628,669</b>	<b>\$22,223,396,226</b>	<b>\$2,305,778,478</b>	<b>\$40,214,170,122</b>

Source: Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The 2023 economic contribution of outdoor recreation in Colorado. <https://engagecpw.org/21201/widgets/69113/documents/59922> (September 26, 2024).



# Conclusion

This study illustrates that Colorado Springs parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities continue to increase the value they provide to residents, visitors, and local businesses. These recreation amenities and natural spaces provide millions of dollars annually in economic benefits and raise the quality of life for residents.

By providing access to nature and outdoor recreation activities, the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department increases recreational use value for residents, facilitates increased physical activity, and reduces long-term health care costs for people who use the parks and trails. Residents made 22 million visits to parks in 2023, including 87% of adults and 90.6% of children.

Parks in Colorado Springs are also a major tourist destination, nationally recognized for their scenic vistas and exceptional open spaces and trails. Twelve percent of visitors to Colorado stated that spending time in nature was the primary purpose of their visit (a 3% increase since the first study in 2017). Millions of people visit Garden of the Gods and nearby parks each year, spending money on hotels and accommodations, restaurants, entertainment, retail, and more. Investments in parks, trails, and open space are also investments in the region's multibillion-dollar tourist industry.

The parks and open spaces provide environmental benefits, absorbing air pollutants like particulate matter and ozone. Trees and vegetation mitigate climate change effects by absorbing and storing carbon dioxide in parks and in pervious soils. These environmental benefits in turn support human health, especially in vulnerable populations that suffer from chronic respiratory illnesses.

In addition to the recreational and health care benefits, nearby parks and green space benefit homeowners, increasing the value of homes in Colorado Springs by \$1.1 billion. There is an additional \$3.8 million in property tax revenue created each year due to the increased home value.

Understanding the value of the park system is important to ensure that these benefits are fully recognized in policy- and decision-making processes in Colorado Springs. Land use planners, park and recreation professionals, and economic development decision-makers can use the updated results of this analysis to demonstrate how the park system benefits the city's residents, visitors, and business community, and how the economic values continue to increase year over year.

# Appendix

## Survey of Colorado Springs Residents on Use of Parks, Trails, and Facilities

**Colorado Springs, CO**  
**Questionnaire**  
**September 10, 2024**

Please note: Throughout this document, italic text is used to indicate the text to be included in the survey questionnaire, including background and questions. Plain text is used to provide context or information on skip patterns, coding, etc. The final product we expect to receive is an excel document with a row of data for each respondent, with columns for their responses to each question, as well as demographic information.

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm calling to get your thoughts about the park system in the City of Colorado Springs. The survey is being conducted on behalf of Trust for Public Land, which is a national non-profit organization that works with communities across the country to create parks and protect land for people. Trust for Public Land has partnered with the City of Colorado Springs to document the value of parks to the community. By participating you will be helping support higher quality parks. All responses are completely confidential.

For our study, please consider public parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in the City of Colorado Springs ONLY. This includes places like Garden of the Gods, Red Rock Canyon Open Space, the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, John Venezia Park, Memorial Park, Pikes Peak, Palmer Park, North Cheyenne Cañon, and your neighborhood park. It DOES NOT include private clubs or gyms or school properties.

1. **Do you use the public parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities managed by the City of Colorado Springs?**
  1. Yes
  2. No
  99. Don't know/Refused (do not include in results)
  
2. **Do you have any children 18 years or under living at home?**
  1. Yes
  2. No
  99. Refused (do not read)
  
3. **[IF Q2=1] Does your child use the public parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in the City of Colorado Springs?**
  1. Yes
  2. No
  98. Don't Know/Refused (do not read)

**[IF Q1=1 and Q3=1]**, This survey will ask about your use and your child's use of the park system in Colorado Springs. If you have more than one child, please choose one of your children and only answer these questions for the child you have chosen.

**[IF Q1=1 and Q2=2]**, This survey will ask a set of questions about your use of the park system in Colorado Springs. Please answer the questions on behalf of yourself, not another adult in your household.

**[IF Q1=2 and Q2=1]**, This survey will ask about your child's use of the park system in Colorado Springs. If you have more than one child, please choose one of your children and only answer these questions for the child you have chosen.

**[IF (Q1=2 AND Q2=2) OR (Q1=2 AND Q2=1 AND Q3=2) PROCEED TO DEMOGRAPHIC SECTION AND COUNT AS A COMPLETE]**

4. **[IF Q1=1] In the last 12 months, how many times have YOU used public parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in the City of Colorado Springs? [ENTER NUMBER]**
  999. Don't know/refused (do not read)
  
5. **[IF Q3=1] How many times in the last 12 months has YOUR CHILD used public parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities in the City of Colorado Springs? [ENTER NUMBER]**
  999. Don't know/refused (do not read)

**[IF Q4=1 AND Q5=1, terminate]**

6. **[Q1=1] Approximately how much time do you spend during a typical visit to the City's parks, trails, open spaces, and facilities? [ENTER NUMBER]**
  999. Don't know/refused (do not read)

## [SECTION A – ASKED IF Q1=1]

The following series of questions will ask you about YOUR use of public parks and trails in Colorado Springs. Please do NOT include your participation in these activities outside places managed by the City.

### 7. During a typical week's time, on how many days do you [Randomize; keep m) last]:

- a) Relax with friends and family, picnic, or read?
  - b) Explore nature or view birds and wildlife?
  - c) Visit dog parks?
  - d) Visit playgrounds?
  - e) Walk or hike on trails, including dog walking?
  - f) Run or jog on trails?
  - g) Ride a bike on trails?
  - h) Swim in a public indoor pool?
  - i) Visit a spray ground?
  - j) Play sports such as tennis, lacrosse, soccer, or basketball?
  - k) Go ice skating at an indoor rink?
  - l) Take an exercise class, such as yoga, Zumba, or dance?
  - m) Participate in any other types of physical activity or exercise in parks, trails, or facilities not mentioned above?
- |    |                 |     |                          |
|----|-----------------|-----|--------------------------|
| 0. | 0               | 6.  | 5 days                   |
| 1. | Less than 1 day | 7.  | 6 days                   |
| 2. | 1 day           | 8.  | 7 days                   |
| 3. | 2 days          | 98. | Don't know (do not read) |
| 4. | 3 days          | 99. | Refused (do not read)    |
| 5. | 4 days          |     |                          |

In the following series of questions, I'm going to ask about YOUR use of public parks and trails in Colorado Springs. (Please randomize these lists.)

### 8. During the past twelve (12) months, on how many days did you:

- a) Go ice skating outside?
  - b) Go swimming outside?
  - c) Kayak, canoe, or paddleboard?
  - d) Visit a historic or cultural site, such as the Pioneers Museum or Starsmore Discovery Center?
  - e) Go fishing at Pikes Peak or other parks maintained by the city of Colorado Springs?
  - f) Use community centers such as Meadows Community Center?
  - g) Golf at Patty Jewett or Valley Hi?
  - h) Use skateboarding facilities?
  - i) Rock climb?
  - j) Play disc golf?
  - k) Attend concerts, festivals or special events, such as Labor Day Lift Off, Get Outdoors Day, or the Water Lantern Festival?
- 000–365 days [ENTER NUMBER]  
998. Don't know (do not read)  
999. Refused (do not read)

[END SECTION A]

## [SECTION B – ASKED IF Q3=1]

The following series of questions will ask you about YOUR CHILD’S use of public parks and trails in Colorado Springs. Please do NOT include their participation in these activities outside of parks, trails, and facilities maintained by Colorado Springs.

### 9. During a typical week’s time, on how many days does your child using Colorado Springs parks, trails, or facilities to:

[Randomize; keep m) last]

- a) Relax with friends and family, picnic, or read?
  - b) Explore nature or view birds and wildlife?
  - c) Visit dog parks?
  - d) Visit playgrounds?
  - e) Walk or hike on trails, including dog walking?
  - f) Run or jog on trails?
  - g) Ride a bike on trails?
  - h) Swim in a public indoor pool?
  - i) Visit a spray ground?
  - j) Play sports such as tennis, lacrosse, soccer, or basketball?
  - k) Go ice skating at an indoor rink?
  - l) Take an exercise class, such as yoga, Zumba, or dance?
  - m) Participate in any other types of physical activity or exercise in parks, trails, or facilities not mentioned above?
- |    |                 |     |                          |
|----|-----------------|-----|--------------------------|
| 0. | 0               | 6.  | 5 days                   |
| 1. | Less than 1 day | 7.  | 6 days                   |
| 2. | 1 day           | 8.  | 7 days                   |
| 3. | 2 days          | 98. | Don’t know (do not read) |
| 4. | 3 days          | 99. | Refused (do not read)    |
| 5. | 4 days          |     |                          |

In the following series of questions, I’m going to ask about YOUR CHILD’S use of public parks and trails in Colorado Springs. [Randomize]

### 10. During the past twelve (12) months, on how many days did your child:

- a) Go ice skating outside?
  - b) Go swimming outside?
  - c) Kayak, canoe, or paddleboard?
  - d) Visit a historic or cultural site, such as the Pioneers Museum or Starsmore Discovery Center?
  - e) Visit spray grounds?
  - f) Go fishing at Pikes Peak or other parks maintained by the city of Colorado Springs?
  - g) Use community centers such as Meadows Community Center?
  - h) Golf at Patty Jewett or Valley Hi?
  - i) Use skateboarding facilities?
  - j) Rock climb?
  - k) Play disc golf?
  - l) Attend concerts, festivals or special events, such as Labor Day Lift Off, Get Outdoors Day, or the Water Lantern Festival?
- 000–365 days [ENTER NUMBER]  
998. Don’t know (do not read)  
999. Refused (do not read)

[END SECTION B]

## [SECTION C – ASKED IF Q1=Yes]

In addition to learning about how you use parks and trails in Colorado Springs, we are also interested in the relationship between park visits and mental wellbeing. The following series of questions will ask you about your park visits and mental wellbeing in the last two weeks.

**11. Are you comfortable answering 5 brief questions related to your mental wellbeing?**

- a. Yes
- b. No or Refused [END SECTION C]

**12. [IF Q11=Yes] In an average week, how many hours do you spend in parks and facilities and on trails managed by Colorado Springs? [ENTER NUMBER 0–168]**

Please choose one of the following responses for each of the next five statements:

**13. I have felt cheerful in good spirits.**

- a. All of the time
- b. Most of the time
- c. More than half the time
- d. Less than half the time
- e. Some of the time
- f. At no time
- g. Don't know/refused

**14. I have felt calm and relaxed.**

- a. All of the time
- b. Most of the time
- c. More than half the time
- d. Less than half the time
- e. Some of the time
- f. At no time
- g. Don't know/refused

**15. I have felt active and vigorous.**

- a. All of the time
- b. Most of the time
- c. More than half the time
- d. Less than half the time
- e. Some of the time
- f. At no time
- g. Don't know/refused

**16. I woke up feeling fresh and rested.**

- a. All of the time
- b. Most of the time
- c. More than half the time
- d. Less than half the time
- e. Some of the time
- f. At no time
- g. Don't know/refused

**17. My daily life has been filled with things that interest me.**

- a. All of the time
- b. Most of the time
- c. More than half the time
- d. Less than half the time
- e. Some of the time
- f. At no time
- g. Don't know/refused

[END SECTION C]

## [DEMOGRAPHICS]

Finally, I have a just a few questions for statistical purposes.

**D1. In what year were you born?**

1900–1998 [ENTER NUMBER]

9999. Don't know/refused (do not read)

**D2. In what year was your child born?**

2006–2024 [ENTER NUMBER]

9999. Don't know/refused (do not read)

**D3. For statistical purposes only, which of these categories best describes your total household income last year:**

1. Less than \$10,000
2. \$10,000 to less than \$15,000
3. \$15,000 to less than \$25,000
4. \$25,000 to less than \$35,000
5. \$35,000 to less than \$50,000
6. \$50,000 to less than \$75,000
7. \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
8. \$100,000 to less than \$150,000
9. \$150,000 to less than \$200,000
10. \$200,000 or more
98. Don't know (do not read)
99. Refused (do not read)

**D4. What is the last year of schooling that you have completed?**

1. 1st through 11th grade
2. High school graduate
3. Some college/Associates degree
4. Bachelor's Degree/Master's degree/etc.
98. Don't know (do not read)
99. Refused (do not read)

**D5. To what gender identify do you most identify?**

- |               |                        |
|---------------|------------------------|
| 1. Female     | 4. Other               |
| 2. Male       | 99. Don't know/refused |
| 3. Non-Binary |                        |

**D5. And finally, what is your race?**

- |                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. White                     | 5. American Indian or Native American |
| 2. African American or Black | 6. Other                              |
| 3. Hispanic or Latino        | 98. Don't know (do not read)          |
| 4. Asian or Pacific Islander | 99. Refused (do not read)             |

**D6. [SKIP IF D5=3] Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin or descent?**

- |        |                             |
|--------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Yes | 3. Don't know (do not read) |
| 2. No  | 4. Refused (do not read)    |

**That is the last question. Thank you for your time and have a good (morning/day/evening).**

# Endnotes

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