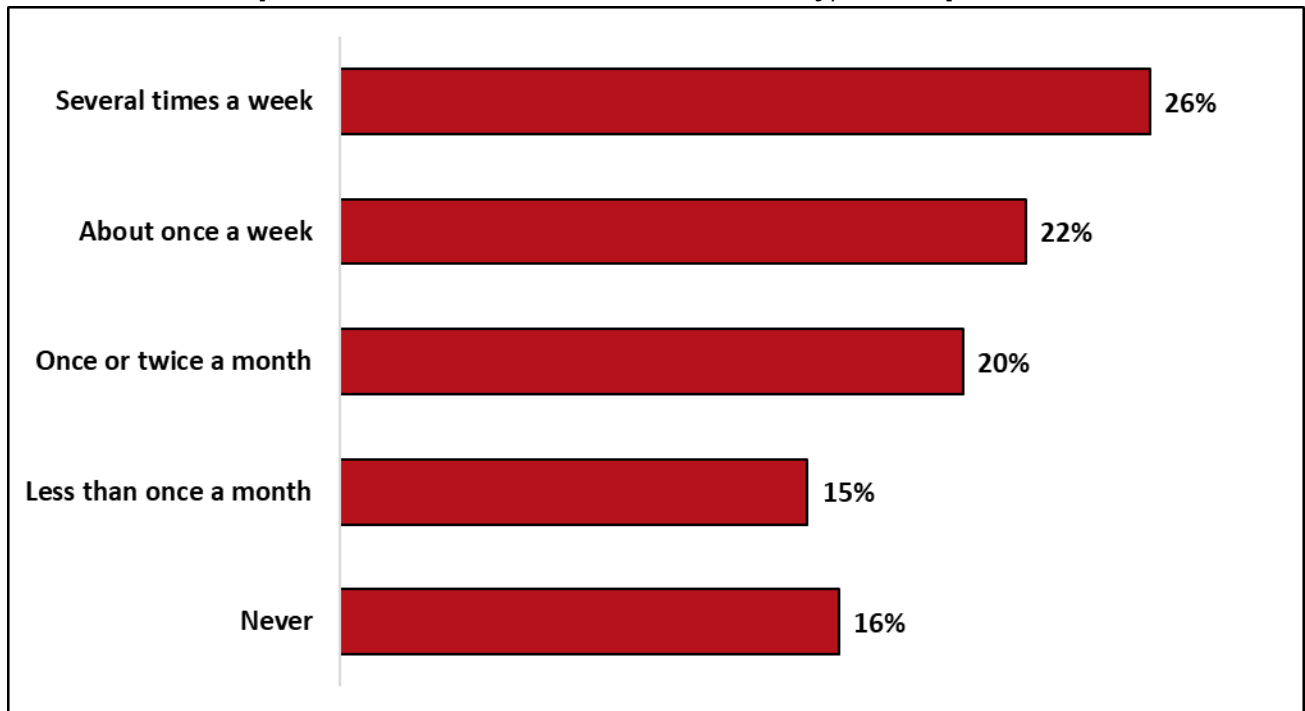


How often do Americans spend free time in nature?

APM Research Lab on behalf of the Water Main
July 15, 2019

Most Americans spend free time in nature at least monthly, but 16 percent never do



Question: "How often do you spend free time in nature? This includes things like going to a park, going for a hike, or going to the beach. This does not include activities like organized sports such as basketball or baseball."

Source: APM Survey (April 30 – May 5, 2019). N = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.6 percentage points. "Don't know" responses are not shown.

Introduction

Getting outdoors to enjoy nature is a pastime enjoyed by millions. But how often are Americans spending recreational time in the great outdoors? And what are some of the barriers keeping people from getting out more? To find out, we asked a nationally representative sample of Americans two questions:

1. How often do you spend free time in nature? This includes things like going to a park, going for a hike, or going to the beach. This does not include activities like organized sports such as basketball or baseball. Would you say: Several times a week; about once a week; once or twice a month; less than once a month; or never?
2. What is the single biggest thing that keeps you from spending more free time in nature?

Responses to the second question were grouped into categories for purposes of analysis.

This survey was done in collaboration with the Water Main, another division of American Public Media, which sponsored this survey. Data collection was conducted by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania.¹

Key findings

Free time spent in nature

- Two-thirds of American adults (68%) spend free time in nature at least once or twice a month, including nearly half (48%) who say they do so at least once a week.
 - Among adults, the groups that most often spend free time in nature are those age 18-34, those with college or graduate degrees, and those in the North Central and Western states. About one-third of each of those groups report spending time in nature “several times a week.”

¹ See the appendix for additional details about the Water Main as well as the methodology used in this survey.

- One in every six American adults reports “never” spending free time in nature. The groups that are most likely to report never spending free time in nature include those age 65 or older, those from lower income households, and African Americans.
 - Those in their traditional retirement years are close to three times as likely as younger adults to avoid—or feel prevented from—spending free time in nature. Of those age 65 or older 32% indicate they never spend time in nature, compared to 12% among those age 18-64.
 - Those from households with annual incomes below \$25,000 are twice as likely as those from households with annual incomes above \$75,000 to never spend time in nature (25% compared to 11%).
 - Non-Hispanic Black adults are twice as likely as non-Hispanic Whites to indicate they never spend free time in nature (28% compared to 13%).

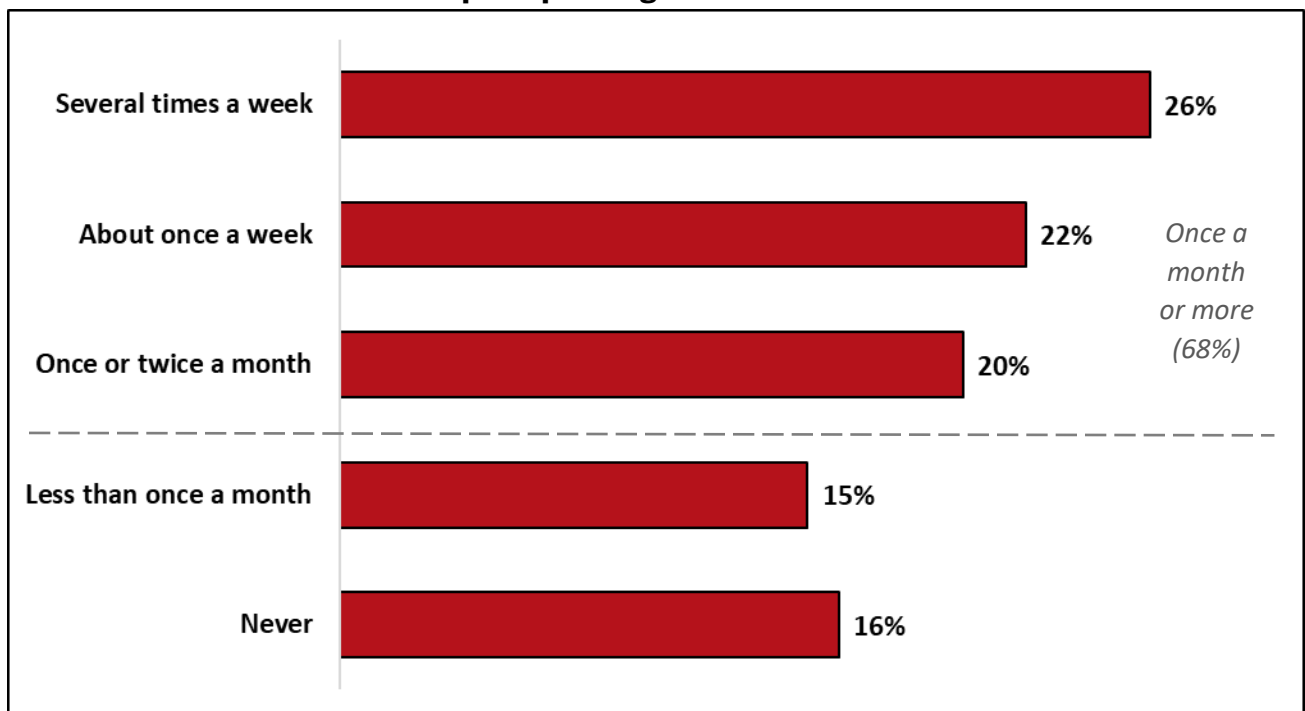
Reasons for not spending more free time in nature

- When asked about “the single biggest thing that keeps you from spending more time in nature” the most common responses had to do with work obligations.
 - Nearly one-third of respondents gave responses similar to the one given by a 43-year-old woman from North Carolina: “Having to work, not much time left to do it.”
 - Work-related reasons are the most common category of responses for all demographic groups we are able to assess in this survey, except for those age 65 or older. These responses are especially common among those age 35-54, parents, and Hispanics.
- Health-related responses are the second most common reason that people give for not spending more time in nature.
 - Respondents indicate a variety of health and disability concerns including difficulty walking, blindness, and heart problems.
 - Health-related issues are the leading barrier to spending more time in nature among those age 65 and older. In addition, this category of responses is especially common among those of all ages from households with annual incomes below \$25,000.
- Other reasons for not spending more time in nature include a general lack of time, school and other obligations, the weather, lack of interest, lack of money, bugs and other hazards, as well as age and logistics.

Time spent in nature

A strong majority of American adults report spending at least some of their free time recreating in nature. In total, two-thirds report spending free time in nature at least once per month, including the one-quarter of all adults who report doing so several times per week. Just over one-fifth indicated they spent time in nature “about once per week,” and only slightly fewer indicate “once or twice a month.” Relatively few Americans, only 16%, indicate that they never spend time in nature.

Two-thirds of American adults report spending free time in nature at least once a month



Question: “How often do you spend free time in nature? This includes things like going to a park, going for a hike, or going to the beach. This does not include activities like organized sports such as basketball or baseball.”

Source: APM Survey (April 30 – May 5, 2019). N = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.6 percentage points. “Don’t know” responses are not shown.

Who spends the most and least time in nature?

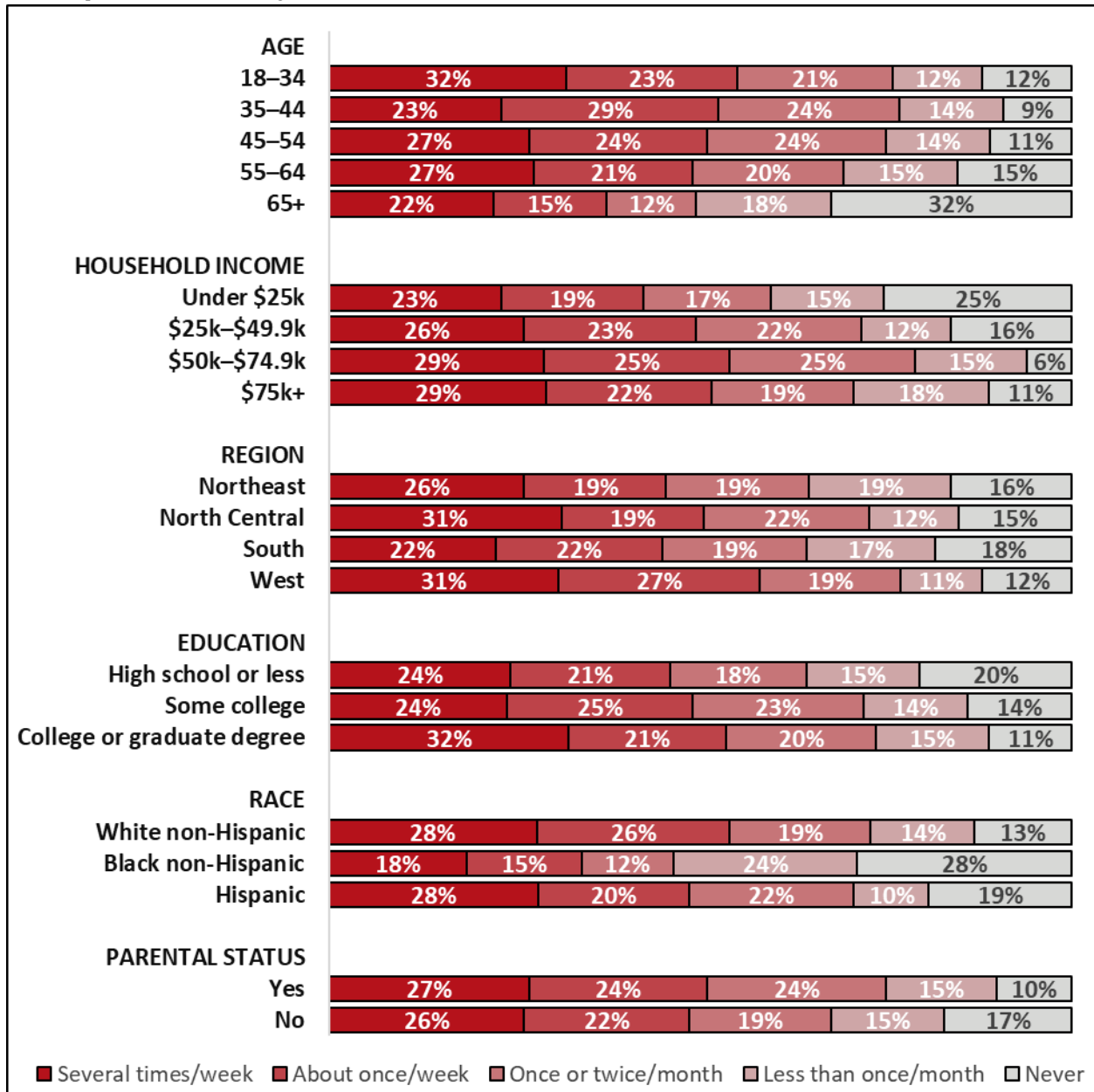
Of the several demographic characteristics that we are able to test for in this survey, age appears to have the strongest relationship with likelihood of spending time in nature. More specifically, nearly one-third of those over age 64 report “never” spending time in nature, compared to 15% or less among younger age categories.

Altogether, those in their traditional retirement years are close to three times as likely as those younger than 65 to avoid—or feel prevented from—spending free time in nature. Similarly, those from households with annual incomes below \$25,000 are twice as likely as those from households with annual incomes above \$75,000 to never spend time in nature (25% compared to 11%), as are non-Hispanic Black adults compared to non-Hispanic Whites (28% and 13%, respectively).

Groups that report most frequently getting out into nature include younger adults and those with a college or graduate degree. In both cases about one-third report spending free time in nature “several times a week,” compared to about one-quarter of other adults. Similarly 31% of those from the North Central and Western states report spending time in nature several times per week, compared with about one-quarter of those from the Northeastern and Southern states.ⁱ

Parental status does not appear strongly linked to spending free time outdoors, with roughly half of parents and non-parents alike recreating in nature once a week or more. Non-parents are somewhat more likely to say they never spend free time outside than are parents (17% compared to 10%). Women and men report spending time outdoors in at the same rate, as do those affiliating with the Republican and Democratic parties.

Time spent in nature by characteristic



Question: “How often do you spend free time in nature? This includes things like going to a park, going for a hike, or going to the beach. This does not include activities like organized sports such as basketball or baseball.”

Note: See end notes for definition of regions. For purposes of this report, “parent” is defined as those with a related child under age 18 in the home.

Source: APM Survey (April 30 – May 5, 2019). N = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.6 percentage points. “Don’t know” responses are not shown.

Factors keeping people from spending more time in nature

We received a variety of answers in response to the open-ended question, “What is the single biggest thing that keeps you from spending more free time in nature?” The most common category of responses had to do with work-related obligations. Thirty-one percent of respondents gave answers like these:

“My job. I work 60 hours a week.” – 28-year-old woman from Maryland.

“I got a lot of work to do so that doesn’t let me spend more time in nature as much as I want to.” – 55-year-old man from Pennsylvania.

“I have a lot of work which does not give me the time to do anything else.” – 43-year-old woman from California

Except for those age 65 and older, work was the most common barrier to spending time outdoors for every demographic group that we were able to assess through this survey, and was especially common among those age 35-54 (cited by 43%), parents with a child under age 18 in the home (cited by 48%), and Hispanics (cited by 53%).

Besides asserting that “nothing” holds them back from spending more free time in nature, the second most common category of reasons given for not spending more time outside had to do with health and disability:

“I’m legally blind and it’s hard to go by myself.” – 72-year-old woman from Oregon.

“My health issues.” – 31-year-old man from Indiana.

“Because I’m in a wheelchair, you know, my disability.” – 47-year-old woman from Connecticut.

Seven percent of respondents indicated that they were too busy with other things or lacked the time:

“Time restriction. Maybe I just don’t plan well enough, I don’t make the effort.” – 55-year-old woman from Tennessee.

“Committed to other things” – 73-year-old man from New York.

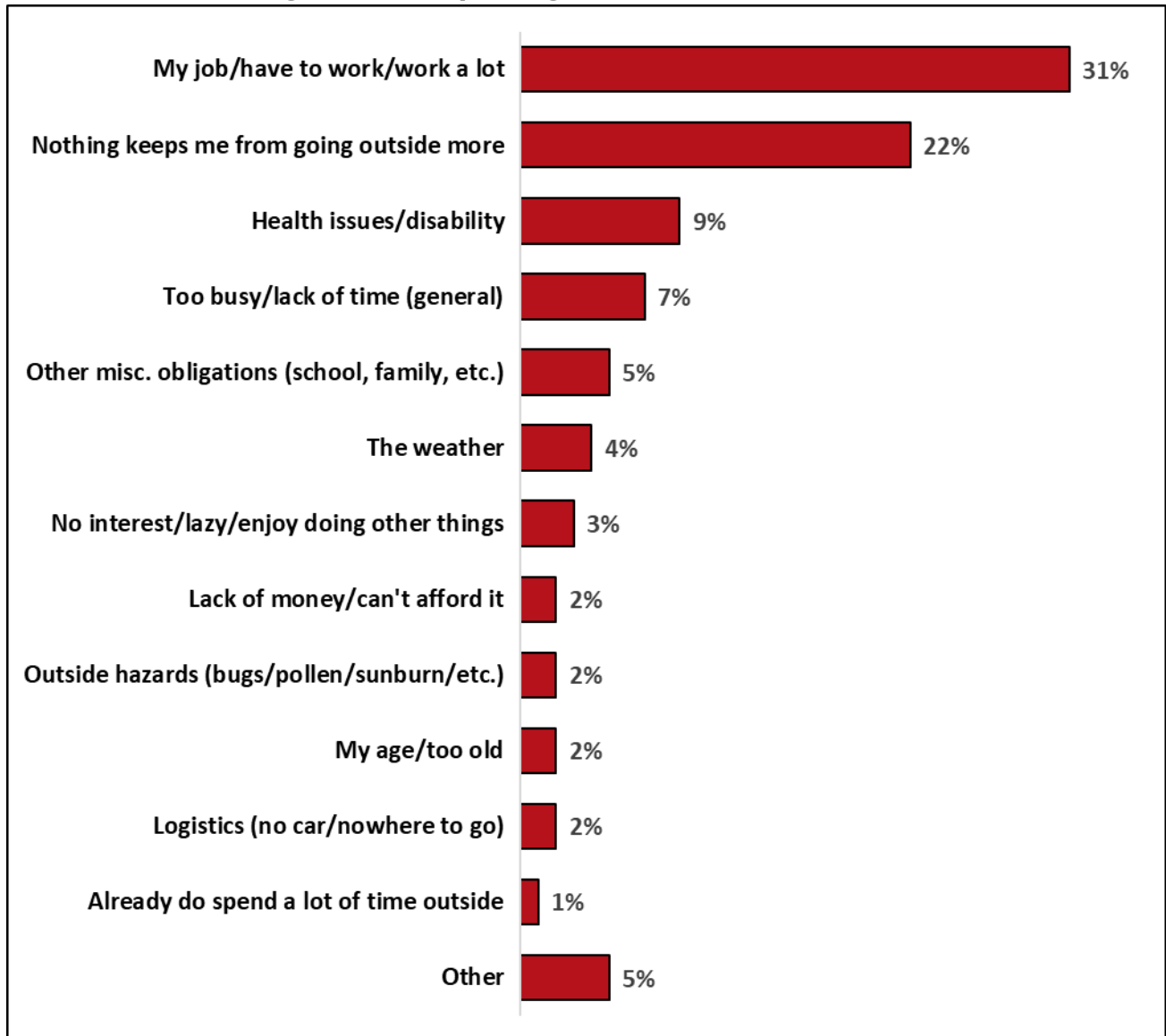
Four percent indicated that the weather holds them back from spending more time outside.

“The horrible heat and humidity in Florida.” – 37-year-old man from Florida.

“I live in Minnesota and climate, weather is the thing that keeps me from spending more free time outside.” – 59-year-old woman from Minnesota.

The remainder of reasons given for not spending more free time in nature ranged from lack of motivation and interest (“I say laziness and I don’t make the time for it”) and lack of money (“Not having the money to go to do those kinds of activities”) to hazards (“ticks,” “mosquitos,” “pollen”) and logistics (“I’m in a city and there’s nothing close by”). None of the answers explicitly noted feeling racially or culturally excluded from spending free time in nature.

Most common reason given for not spending more time in nature: Work



Question: “What is the single biggest thing that keeps you from spending more free time in nature?”
 Source: APM Survey (April 30 – May 5, 2019). N = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.6 percentage points. “Don’t know” responses are not shown.

As noted above, the three groups represented in this survey who are most likely to say that they never spend time outside are those age 65 or older, African Americans, and lower income adults. When asked “What is the single biggest thing that keeps you from spending more free time in nature” by far the largest category of responses for those age 65 or older had to do with health issues and disability. Twenty-five percent of older adults gave answers like:

“My health, I’m using a walker and my husband just recently had heart attack.” – 73-year-old woman from Arkansas.

“Heart condition.” – 67-year-old man from Florida.

“No puedo caminar muy bien. Me canso.” (I cannot walk very well. I get tired.) – 84-year old woman from Florida.

In addition, most of the “I’m too old” responses came from those age 65 or older. Interestingly, however, about the same proportion of older adults said their age held them back as stated they were “too busy” to spend more time in nature (7% and 8%, respectively).

Similar to Americans as a whole, the top two categories of reasons for not spending more time in nature among African Americans are work (22%) and health issues (13%). In addition, 8 percent of African Americans gave responses that fit in to each of the “other obligation,” “other,” and “don’t know” categories.

Work is the leading barrier to spending time in nature for those from households with annual incomes below \$25,000, cited by 27% of that group. Like other groups, “health and disability” was the second most noted reason, although it is mentioned more than twice as often among those making below \$25,000 as it is among those from households making \$25,000 or more (19% compared to 7%). In addition, both logistics (5%) and money (4%) are more common reasons among those from households with annual incomes below \$25,000.

Appendix A: Detailed results

	<i>Number of respondents (weighted)</i>	Several times a week	About once a week	Once or twice a month	Less than once a month	Never
AGE						
18–34	273	32%	23%	21%	12%	12%
35–44	185	23%	29%	24%	14%	9%
45–54	155	27%	24%	24%	14%	11%
55–64	170	27%	21%	20%	15%	15%
65+	205	22%	15%	12%	18%	32%
SEX						
Female	514	25%	22%	19%	15%	17%
Male	486	28%	23%	20%	15%	15%
HOUSEHOLD INCOME						
Under \$25k	203	23%	19%	17%	15%	25%
\$25k–\$49.9k	257	26%	23%	22%	12%	16%
\$50k–\$74.9k	100	29%	25%	25%	15%	6%
\$75k+	267	29%	22%	19%	18%	11%
REGIONⁱ						
Northeast	178	26%	19%	19%	19%	16%
North Central	209	31%	19%	22%	12%	15%
South	375	22%	22%	19%	17%	18%
West	238	31%	27%	19%	11%	12%
EDUCATION						
High school or less	389	24%	21%	18%	15%	20%
Some college	281	24%	25%	23%	14%	14%
College or graduate degree	321	32%	21%	20%	15%	11%
RACE						
White non-Hispanic	621	28%	26%	19%	14%	13%
Black non-Hispanic	114	18%	15%	12%	24%	28%
Hispanic	160	28%	20%	22%	10%	19%
METRO STATUS						
Metro	685	26%	23%	19%	16%	15%
Non-metro	156	23%	22%	19%	16%	16%
PARENTAL STATUS						
Yes (parent of child in the home under age 18)	184	27%	24%	24%	15%	10%
No	816	26%	22%	19%	15%	17%

Question: “How often do you spend free time in nature? This includes things like going to a park, going for a hike, or going to the beach. This does not include activities like organized sports such as basketball or baseball.”

Note: Green shading indicates the percentage is statistically higher than at least one other in its column.

Source: APM Survey (April 30 – May 5, 2019). N = 1,000 U.S. adults age 18 or older; overall margin of error is +/-3.6 percentage points. “Don’t know” and “Refused” responses are not shown (2% or less for every group).

Appendix B: About the Survey

The survey was conducted by SSRS between April 30 – May 5, 2019 on the Omnibus survey platform.

Interviews were conducted by telephone among a sample of 1,000 respondents in English (963) and Spanish (37). Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (360) and cell phone (640, including 416 without a landline phone). The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.62% at the 95% confidence level. All data are weighted to represent a nationally representative target population.

For additional details about the sample and survey methodology, as well as transparency disclosures relevant to the American Association of Public Opinion, the Roper Center, and CNN please see:

<https://www.apmresearchlab.org/nature>

Acknowledgments

This report was authored by Josh Quinn, Research Assistant, and Craig Helmstetter, Managing Partner, both of the APM Research Lab. The original idea was conceived by Amy Skoczlas Cole, Managing Director of the Water Main, who also provided helpful feedback to earlier drafts. Additional feedback was provided by staff of the Water Main, including Lauren Humpert, Daniel Ackerman, and Iyana Esters, as well as Andi Egbert of the APM Research Lab.

END NOTES:

ⁱ **Regions are defined as:**

North Central: Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin. **North East:** Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont. **South:** Alabama, Arkansas, Washington DC, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia. **West:** Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

“Metro” and “Non-Metro” are designated using the Federal Office of Management and Budget’s standard Metropolitan Area definitions (metro status is unknown for some survey respondents).



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About the Water Main

The Water Main builds public will in support of clean, abundant, accessible water. We do this as a hub that brings people together, informs and expands perspectives, catalyzes new thinking and action, and collaborates with stakeholders. By doing this, we will serve more people and strengthen American Public Media's public service.

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