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CONTACT :

Sarah Melbostad

smelbostad@fionahuttonassoc.com

818-760-2121

New Research from UCLA and California State Parks Foundation Illustrates Clear Need to Leverage State Parks as a Statewide Public Health Solution

Unique Findings Demonstrate Why Equal Access to Parks Should be a Right for All Californians

Sacramento, CA – Research [<https://www.ioes.ucla.edu/project/youthoutdoors/>] released today from the UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability and California State Parks Foundation provides critical data and new information detailing opportunities for California to leverage its state parks as a public health solution. The research also illustrates the need to increase access to parks and green space for underserved communities and youth who live within arm's reach of open space, but do not have the tools or pathways to experience the health and wellness benefits they provide.

The report contributes to the mounting research designating parks as a space for health and wellness while also providing a first-of-its-kind demographical analysis of Californians living near a state park. **With findings showing that more than half of Californians under 18 and 60 percent of the state's severely disadvantaged households live within close range of a state park, it is clear that our parks are a tremendous and potentially underutilized resource to promote youth health across the state.**

"California's 280 state parks are an incredible natural resource, but the reality is too many Californians are not afforded the opportunity to experience them. At a time where physical and mental health concerns are on the rise in our state, especially for our youth and disadvantaged communities, increasing access to state parks and realizing the health benefits of green space is our top priority," said **Rachel Norton, Executive Director, California State Parks Foundation**. "Findings in this report confirm now is the time for us to invest in programming that prioritizes equal access to state parks for all."

The report found that parks represent a wealth of health opportunities with 57 percent of all Californians living within a visitorshed of a state park – a natural collection area for visitors defined by the distance that people regularly walk, bike or drive for social or recreational purposes – including:

- 54 percent of the state's youth population
- 3 million disadvantaged households
- 60 percent of the state's severely disadvantaged households
- 1 million youth living below the poverty line

The full visitorshed data can be viewed using an interactive map at www.ioes.ucla.edu/youthoutdoors.

"This visitorshed data is incredibly valuable as together we look for solutions to address the growing health concerns, especially amongst California's most vulnerable populations," said **Jon Christensen, Adjunct Assistant Professor at UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability**. "We now know definitely that parks have

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the power to be a cost-effective, preventative prescription for the more than 1 million impoverished youth living within the visitorshed of a state park.”

From this research, California now has the tools to build parks programs that activate the extensive network of communities and underserved populations living near our open spaces.

“We have an opportunity before us to engage in programs and push policies that will increase outdoor experiences, especially for our youth, and we are dedicated to using the new tools from this research to propel this vision,” said **Holly Martinez, Director of Programs and Advocacy, California State Parks Foundation**. “Creating new pathways to California’s state parks will help those within arm’s reach of open space begin to experience the proven health and wellness benefits they provide so we can build a healthier, stronger state now and for generations to come.”

UCLA’s research cites the following in its report:

- Findings show open access to places for physical activity and time outdoors, like parks, can help control weight, strengthen bones and muscle, reduce risk of cardiovascular disease and low weight births, and improve mental health and mood.
- Survey data of more than 80,000 households showed that Californians living near a green space experienced significantly lower levels of distress, regardless of socioeconomic status.
- A study of California children showed that living within 500 meters of a park was associated with gaining significantly less body mass by age 18, making them less likely to develop health problems down the line.
- A comprehensive survey found that 57 percent of all Californians live within close range of a state park, and the percent is even higher in disadvantaged communities.
- An extra \$10 spent per capita on parks and recreation was associated with eight more hours per week of vigorous exercise for young women.

Read the full report here: <https://www.ioes.ucla.edu/project/youthoutdoors/>

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About California State Parks Foundation

[California State Parks Foundation](https://www.calparks.org) is an independent, member-supported nonprofit that mobilizes a diverse network of Californians to be active champions for our state parks. At California State Parks Foundation, we believe that all Californians are essential to sustaining our state parks. Every day, we inform and inspire current and future generations of park champions, enabling them to be the passionate advocates our state parks need. Because when we build a movement of park supporters, we ensure the long-term sustainability of our incredible state park treasures. Learn more at www.calparks.org, or find California State Parks Foundation on [Facebook](#), or [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) (@calparks).

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