

# Saving Summer



## Hiking and Camping

Whether you enjoy a day hike at your local park, or a backcountry trip through Shenandoah National Park, hiking and camping in America's public lands are, for many, a quintessential summer activity. However, a changing climate is affecting when and how we recreate on these public lands.

## Dangerous Heat

Summers in the United States are becoming hotter and longer. Heat waves are now more frequent, intense, and prolonged, increasing the risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke for hikers and campers.

In 2023 and 2024, multiple national parks across the Southwest issued extreme heat warnings as temperatures exceeded 100°F for days at a time. Park officials in the Grand Canyon and Death Valley urged visitors to avoid daytime hiking due to life-threatening temperatures. This heat also creeps into the evenings, making it harder for the body to recover after long days outdoors.

Wildlife suffers from rising temperatures too. Animals that rely on cool habitats and healthy seasonal conditions are being pushed out of their ranges or forced to change migration and feeding patterns. Drought and heat can dry out forests, reduce streamflow, and damage alpine habitats. Wildlife species adapted to cooler environments — including pika, trout, moose, and some migratory birds — are losing habitat as temperatures rise.

## Expanding Tick Season

Warmer winters and longer summers are allowing ticks, and the diseases they carry, to survive longer and spread into new regions across the United States.

Areas that historically experienced fewer tick-borne illnesses - including Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted fever, and alpha-gal syndrome - are at risk of seeing more cases, as climate conditions become more favorable for ticks and the animals that carry them, including deer and rodents.



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### Far-reaching Wildfires

We are now experiencing wildfires outside of the normal season and in places not typically known for wildfires. Hotter temperatures and worsening drought, coupled with decades of harmful fire suppression policy, are fueling larger and more destructive wildfires across the United States. Existing challenges such as fuel buildup, invasive species, loss of open space, and unmanaged recreation further increase fire risk. While these fires take an immense toll on the immediate communities and wildlife they ravage, their impacts are far reaching.

As we saw during the record-breaking Canadian wildfires of 2023, smoke and fine particles traveled thousands of miles, blanketing much of the northeastern and midwestern United States in an orange haze. Even communities far from the fires experienced unhealthy air quality, making it difficult to breathe and forcing many people indoors. National parks and recreation areas once known for clean mountain air are increasingly experiencing these smoky skies and poor air quality. Smoke pollution can make hiking and camping unsafe, especially for children, older adults, and people with asthma or other respiratory conditions.

Nearly 9 million acres burned throughout the U.S. in 2024, forcing campground and trail closures in many parks and recreation areas. Unnaturally severe wildfires further damage ecosystems by destroying forests, nesting grounds, food sources, and migration corridors. Ash and debris from fires can pollute rivers and streams, harming fish and other aquatic species. Poor air quality can stress animals, disrupt migration patterns, and force species to relocate from already shrinking habitats. Heat waves, drought, wildfire, and smoke pollution are becoming increasingly interconnected in a warming climate.

### Save Our Summers

The choices we make today will determine whether future generations inherit the same summer we know or a season fundamentally transformed by a warming world.

We must by reduce pollution, conserve habitats, expand clean energy, and practice responsible recreation.

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