



## Four Ways Girl Scouts Builds Girl Leaders in the Outdoors

Since 1912, girls have explored and strengthened their outdoor skills and commitment to environmental stewardship through Girl Scouting. Guided by supportive adults and peers, Girl Scouts discover the wonders of nature, experience the thrill of adventure, and challenge themselves and one another to reach new heights. These experiences hone their outdoor and leadership skills, inspire them to take action to protect the environment, and reinforce friendships to last a lifetime.

In other words, **when girls participate in Girl Scouts' outdoor programming, they benefit in important ways:**

### **Outdoor Competence**

Girls learn to engage safely and responsibly in a range of outdoor activities.

### **Outdoor Interest**

Girls develop a love of nature and an interest in the natural world.

### **Outdoor Confidence**

Girls gain confidence in their ability to take on new challenges and learn from and succeed in them.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

Girls come to understand how their behaviors impact the environment and what they can do to protect the natural world.

## Why do these outcomes matter?

The importance of these four outcomes is farther reaching than you might think. Outdoor interest and confidence lay the foundation for a life of outdoor engagement, and spending time in the tranquility of nature has well-established implications for a person's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical health and formation of values. For example, studies show that:

- Exposure to greenspaces restores people's attention and improves cognitive functioning.<sup>1</sup>
- Spending time outdoors reduces people's cortisol, a stress-inducing hormone,<sup>2</sup> and lowers blood pressure.<sup>3</sup>
- Learning new skills in nature increases people's self-confidence.<sup>4</sup>
- Outdoor recreational experiences in early childhood strongly and positively influence people's environmental attitudes,<sup>5</sup> values,<sup>6</sup> and behaviors,<sup>7</sup> with experiences like hiking and camping cultivating a sense of responsibility for nature.<sup>8</sup>

## The Girl Scout Difference

Despite the known benefits of spending quality time outside, youth are becoming increasingly sedentary and disconnected from nature. Long school hours, reduced school recess periods, and the ever-increasing popularity of tech-based leisure activities like video games are all factors—but Girl Scouts' outdoor programming, which spans a girl's childhood and adolescence, offers girls another way. Through our extensive portfolio of Outdoor badges and Leadership Journeys, our Destinations program featuring outdoor adventure and environmental service-based travel, and outdoor camps offered across our 112 Girl Scout councils and by USA Girl Scouts Overseas, Girl Scouts provides girls with unparalleled opportunities to develop the skills, courage, confidence, and appreciation of the natural world that set them up to become the leaders of tomorrow.

The research bears it out. As reported in *More Than S'mores: Successes and Surprises in Girl Scouts' Outdoor Experiences*, girls engage in outdoor activities through Girl Scouts that they wouldn't otherwise have access to, providing them with valuable first-time experiences in, for example, overnight camping and high-adventure pursuits like backpacking and kayaking. The number and variety of activities available through Girl Scouts lets girls

participate in outdoor activities on a regular basis, and they do—even more than non-Girl Scouts who are also highly engaged. This is significant because frequency of participation in outdoor activities is found to positively correlate with the expression of challenge-seeking and problem-solving skills.<sup>9</sup>

It gets even better: the benefits girls gain from their outdoor adventures in Girl Scouts extend into adulthood. As detailed in *From Girl Scout Camp to Real-World Champ! How Girl Scouting in the Great Outdoors Builds Female Leaders*, many camp counselors who attended Girl Scout camps as girls report developing life skills and attributes at camp that continue to help them today, including an appreciation for diversity, the ability to persevere, and a willingness to try new things. Notably, counselors who are Girl Scout camp alums are more likely to attribute these benefits to their camp experience than are present-day counselors who attended non-Girl Scout camps growing up.<sup>10</sup>

For more than a century, Girl Scouts has prepared girls for a lifetime of leadership, including in the great outdoors. We will continue to offer, today and always, high-quality outdoor programming built on exploration and adventure, environmental appreciation, and the unique sisterhood—accessible and beneficial to all girls—that is Girl Scouts.

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