



CHAPTER **2**
*Virginia's Outdoors
Demand Survey*



Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, Arlington | Cameron Davidson/Virginia Tourism Corp.

Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) conducts an outdoor recreation survey every five years. The University of Virginia Center for Survey Research (Weldon Cooper) conducted the survey for the 2018 Virginia Outdoors Plan (VOP). The Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey (VODS) is used to measure attitudes about outdoor recreation resources as well as participation in, and demand for, a variety of recreational activities.

Recreation providers use results of the survey to guide strategic planning of facilities. Some localities use the VODS results to prepare their own detailed outdoor recreation survey. Smaller, less populous localities use the data for comprehensive master planning and local park-planning projects.

The 2017 VODS obtained information on more than 100 activities. The number of activities surveyed doubled from those surveyed in 2011. Fourteen-thousand Virginians were contacted by mail and asked to participate in the survey. Of those contacted, 3,252 Virginians responded. Appendix B includes charts of activities 1) by participation for each region and 2) statewide by urban and rural parts of the state. Figure 2.1 shows the top 10 outdoor recreation activities based on participation reported in the 2017 VODS.

As part of the 2017 VODS, a non-probability “crowd-sourced” version of the survey was also made available to the general public. DCR solicited participation in the crowd-sourced survey by social media and contacts with interest groups. Unless otherwise noted, results in this report pertain only to the probability-based VODS.

Figure 2.1 Top 10 Outdoor Recreation Activities by Participation

statewide activity	% households
Visiting natural areas	71
Driving for pleasure	67
Walking for pleasure	67
Visiting parks (local, state & national)	56
Swimming/outdoor pool	48
Sunbathing/relaxing on a beach	47
Viewing the water	38
Swimming/beach/lake river (open water)	37
Visiting historic areas	35
Freshwater fishing	34

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey



Photo: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

The 2017 VODS and national recreation data from the Outdoor Industry Association’s Outdoor Recreation Participation 2017 Topline Report establish a baseline for analyzing trends in outdoor recreation. The recreation trends identified in this chapter, along with the projects and initiatives identified throughout the VOP, help Virginia’s public and private sectors meet land conservation and outdoor recreation needs.

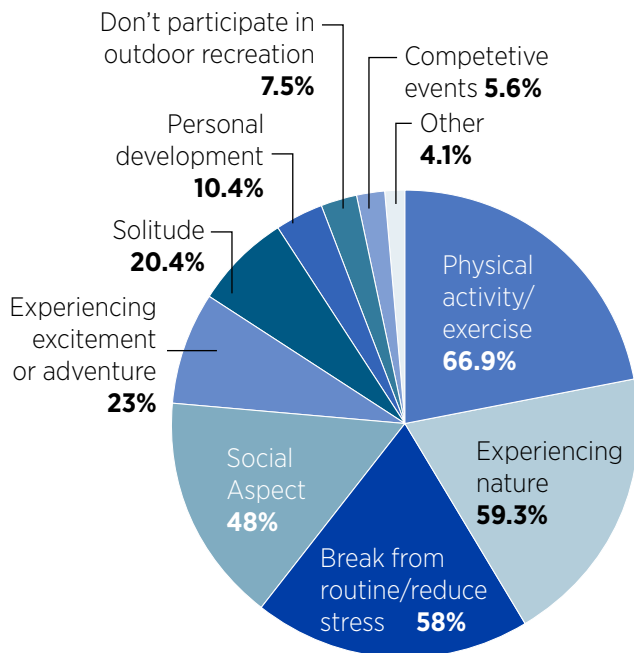
The Importance of Access to Outdoor Recreation

The 2017 VODS shows an increase across the state in the importance of outdoor recreation access. Younger respondents ranked the importance of access higher than those 65 and older. Seventy percent of Virginians consider it very important to have access to outdoor recreation. This is an increase of 15 percent since the 2011 survey.

Reasons for Participation in Outdoor Recreation

Physical activity and exercise are top reasons for Virginians to participate in outdoor recreation. Only 7.5 percent said they do not participate in any outdoor recreation. Figure 2.2 shows the reasons Virginians participate in outdoor recreation.

Figure 2.2 Main Reasons for Participation in Outdoor Recreation

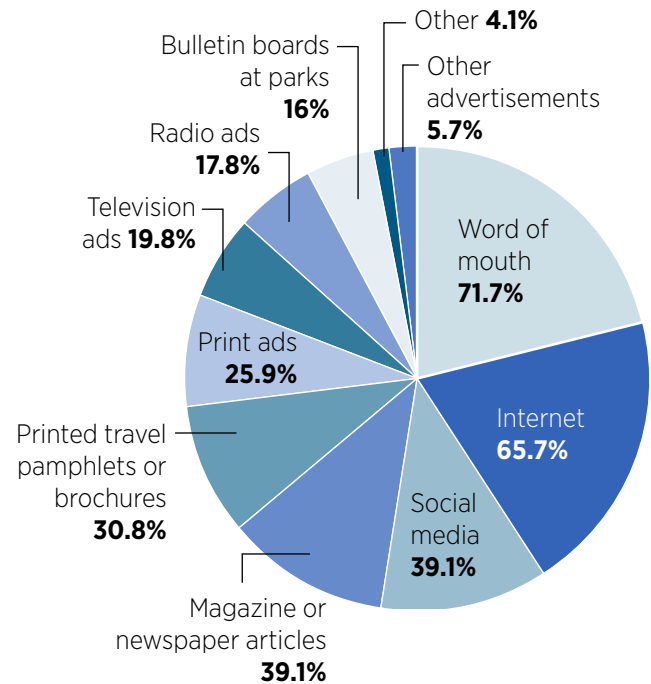


Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Sources of Information About Recreation Opportunities

Almost three-quarters of respondents (71.7 percent) said they hear about recreation opportunities by word of mouth. Over half of respondents (65.7 percent) use the Internet to seek out outdoor recreation. Urban respondents were more likely to rely on the Internet for information. The use of newspapers and magazines for finding out about outdoor recreation dropped from 46 percent in 2011 to 40 percent in 2017. Households with children were more likely to use the Internet and social media compared to households without children. Older respondents were most likely to rely on printed sources and advertising, while respondents of Hispanic descent were less likely to use printed media.

Figure 2.3 Sources of Outdoor Recreation Information and Opportunities



Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Trending Outdoor Recreation Activities

Over a three-year period, the Outdoor Foundation tracked activities with positive growth trends. Figure 2.4 compares the Virginia participation rates with the anticipated change for each trending activity.

Figure 2.4 Top Outdoor Activities for Growth

	Virginia 2017 VODS (percent participation)	Outdoor Foundation - US average change +
Hiking	21%	7%
Challenge events	19%	8%
Mountain biking	6%	13%
Stand up paddling	6%	18%
Cross country skiing	2%	13%
Sailboarding	1%	10%

Source: 2017 Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report, Outdoor Foundation and 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Virginia Outdoor Recreation Trends Over 15 Years

For the past 15 years, walking for pleasure, driving for pleasure, water access/swimming and visiting parks and natural areas have remained in the top five outdoor recreation activities.

Figure 2.5 Comparison of Top Five Activities for Virginia Households

top outdoor recreation activities			
	2006	2011	2017
1	Walking for pleasure	Walking for pleasure	Visiting natural areas
2	Visiting historic sites	Visiting historic sites or areas	Walking for pleasure and Driving for pleasure
3	Driving for pleasure	Visiting parks (local, state or national)	Visiting parks
4	Water access and swimming	Visiting natural areas, preserves or refuges	Water access and swimming
5	Visiting natural areas and parks	Swimming in a pool	

Sources: 2006, 2011 and 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Surveys

The 2017 VODS also polled the public’s perceived need for outdoor recreation. The data received from this question is a good barometer to measure if recreation trends are changing but not reflected by outdoor recreation participation trends, possibly due to lack of access to more recently popularized activities. The perception of needs gives service providers an opportunity

to improve access and provide facilities and access to meet the immediate public demand for outdoor recreation. Statewide and in most regions, natural areas, parks, trails and water access rank as the most needed activities. Figure 2.6 shows the perceived need for recreation in both rural and urban areas.

Both urban and rural residents think natural areas, followed by parks, are the most needed outdoor recreation. Over 35 percent of those answering the survey agree that urban and rural areas need more trails, water access and historic areas.

Figure 2.6 Statewide Most Needed Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

	statewide %	rural	urban
Natural areas	54	55	53
Parks	49	48	51
Trails	43	42	46
Water trails	43	46	39
Historic areas	39	38	40
Scenic drives (driving for pleasure)	29	31	26
Playing fields, sports and golf facilities	22	19	25

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

The 2017 VODS indicates participation in top activities by category. The following charts summarize categories of activities.

Figure 2.7 Top 3 Organized Outdoor Sports by Participation

statewide activity	% households
Basketball	15
18-hole golf	14
Soccer	11

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Figure 2.8 Top 3 Water-Related Outdoor Recreation By Participation

statewide activity	% households
Swimming in an outdoor pool	48
Sunbathing and relaxing on the beach	47
Viewing the water	38

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Figure 2.9 Top 3 Wheeled Activities By Participation

statewide activity	% households
Paved or gravel bicycle trails	11
Driving and ATV or UTV off-road	6
Driving 4-wheel off-road	6

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Figure 2.10 Equestrian Activities by Participation

statewide activity	% households
Equestrian activities	7
Equestrian events	5
Horseback riding on trails	4

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Figure 2.11 Top 3 Destination Activities By Participation

statewide activity	% households
Outdoor festivals	34
Visiting working farms	31
Music festivals	28

Source: 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

Crowd-Sourced Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey

The crowd-sourced survey was identical to the juried VODS. The crowd-sourced survey was posted for a period of eight weeks on the DCR website. The survey was available to anyone with the link. The crowd-sourced survey should not be generalized to the full population of Virginia. It provides useful information about the activities and desires of outdoor recreation and land conservation advocates. Reports on the crowd-sourced survey are included in Appendix 2A.



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