

## 5 Ways to Take Your Love of the Outdoors to the Next Level

by Melissa Hellman

### 1. Fix the Trails

Most trails are maintained by volunteers and always need extra hands to clear debris and restore the paths. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy offers volunteer opportunities, while the Pacific Crest Trail also needs volunteer crews to keep more than 2,500 miles passable throughout the year. Information about trail maintenance projects can be found at local parks or by visiting the National Park Service website.

### 2. Count Animals

Helping scientists count animals and preserve other park resources is an easy way to merge a love for the outdoors with science. Park naturalists and conservationists depend on citizens, usually without scientific training, to help keep tabs on the health of the parks. Glacier National Park offers opportunities to count mountain goats, pikas, and butterflies. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park needs volunteers to monitor plant blooming and collect other data on flora and fauna.

### 3. Restore History

Passport in Time is a program sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service that connects volunteers with archaeologists and historians to work on public land projects. Volunteers can help with rock art restoration, archaeological excavations, and artifact curation. Projects can last anywhere from two days to several weeks and sometimes involve backcountry camping. Some activities are also kid-friendly, encouraging entire families to join.

### 4. Take Your Activism Outside

Similar to last year's Standing Rock "water protector" encampments, protest camps are in need of donations and organizers this summer. The Little Creek Camp near Williamsburg, Iowa, located on 14 acres of private land, was founded by Indigenous Iowa. The camp now focuses on Dakota Access pipeline resistance and fosters indigenous ideology to promote sustainability. In Washington state, the Backbone Campaign offers weeklong summer camps for training in nonviolent direct action, including "kayaktivism." At the "Localize This!" camps on Vashon Island, participants join up with other citizen activists and movement organizers to learn how to "take action before everything we value or hold as sacred is extracted, exploited, and extinguished."

### 5. Ditch the Car

Want to protest oil and gas leasing on public lands and fossil fuel infrastructure crisscrossing sensitive ecosystems? Try a park that doesn't require a car. Some are in urban settings that are easily accessible. The Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, for example, is 157,000 acres and the largest urban national park in the world. And parts of the park are accessible by bus from Los Angeles. Public transportation also works for national parks in faraway places. Yosemite can be reached from San Francisco entirely by public transit: Take a bus or light rail train to Richmond, transfer to an Amtrak train heading to Merced, then take the YARTS (Yosemite Area Regional Transit System) bus to Yosemite.