



2020

Un Año Outdoors?



## MISSION

We inspire, connect, and engage Latino communities in the outdoors and embrace *cultura y familia* as part of the outdoor narrative, ensuring our history, heritage, and leadership are valued and represented.

## VISION

A world where all Latino communities enjoy nature as a safe, inclusive, and welcoming place—a world where the outdoors is a place to share and celebrate stories, knowledge, and culture, while growing leadership and an active community of Latino outdoor users, mentors, and stewards.

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This year, the outdoors made everything bearable. I enjoyed every single hike and will never take a walk, bike ride, or hike for granted.

— Alejandra S., #TogetherApart Pledge signee



## About Us

Through our three programs, *Vamos, Yo Cuento*, and *Crecemos* Outdoors, Latino Outdoors (LO) inspires outdoor engagement, tells our stories of connection to the outdoors, and fosters outdoor leadership.

Unable to locate Latino-led conservation organizations, Founder José González became motivated to create Latino Outdoors. In 2013, LO began as a blog and online networking platform for members of Latinx communities interested in outdoor recreation, environmental education, and conservation.

Together, José and the new members of the network began to grow the community, and in the process, built the foundation for LO as an organization. Since 2014, LO has been providing outdoor experiences, along with the accompanying health and wellness benefits, to

families and individuals of all ages and identities, growing from a California-based organization to a national movement powered by volunteer leaders.

Although Latino Outdoors provides for a focused conversation on the Latinx experience, we are not limited to it. As José has [expressed](#), LO is a space for intra-community affirmation of Latinx outdoor leadership and connection, while also serving as a platform “for the inter-community relationship building that is vital to the growth and development of present and future constituencies that experience and protect our public lands.”

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## 2019 Recap: A Growing *Comunidad*

In [2019](#), Latino Outdoors flourished thanks to the organizational investments in team development and leadership training of 2018. We further developed existing tools and resources and created new ones. Thirty new individuals found their way to LO, helping us expand our national network of volunteers/leaders to more than 90 in approximately 20 locations around the country. These leaders delivered more than 190 outings benefiting over 3,300 participants, a 65% increase over what was accomplished in 2018. Youth and children accounted for more than one of every four attendees. Nearly 80% of 2019 outings included participants attending together with members of their family and over 60% attracted participants who were new to the activity. We continued to make leadership development a top priority and approached that work intentionally. It was a year of community growth and cultural affirmation.

Photograph by Verónica Miranda, Volunteer, LO SF Bay Area





## Vamos Outdoors

Our first outing of 2020 took place promptly on January 1st. Without realizing it at the time, we held our last (public) outing of the year just two and a half months later. In a year marked by many challenges, uncertainty certainly was on the list. For some time, we remained optimistic about being able to resume in-person group activities at some point during the year. However, that optimism eventually gave way to pragmatism, and we accepted that our outdoor engagement efforts would take a very different form in 2020.

The cancellation of our in-person programming in 2020 was met with sadness and a sense of loss as LO volunteers/leaders were asked to let go of efforts they were fully immersed in. In the months leading up to the outbreak of COVID-19, our New York City leaders had rallied together to breathe new life into their region. LO Colorado had multiple outings planned in March alone. LO Portland, San Diego, and San Antonio were knee-deep in various stages of advanced outdoor programming. Then and now, we honor the time

and energy that LO leaders dedicate to providing quality programming to our communities.

Although replicating 2019's number of outings and participants proved unachievable, we found success in other ways. LO's outdoor engagement leaders were motivated to push their boundaries and step into new ways of leading and engaging. Virtually overnight, they were called upon to become onscreen personalities, video editors, and of course, Zoom experts. When all was said and done, our volunteers/leaders delivered nearly 40 virtual nature tours, outdoor best practices tutorials, and #TogetherApart activities in 2020. #TogetherApart, by the way, is LO's socially-distanced and geographically-dispersed outdoor engagement initiative. Through it, we encourage Latino Outdoors community members everywhere to take part in outdoor recreation activities and share their experience with us through words and images that can inspire others to spend time outdoors as well. In all, our virtual and socially-distanced activities resulted in more than 12,000 views and signups.



Photograph by Matthew Falcon, Volunteer, LO Sacramento



Despite the pivot in delivery of *Vamos* Outdoors programming away from in-person group activities, uncertainty lingered. Even when it became clear that group outings would not be possible for the rest of 2020, it remained unclear whether encouraging people to go outdoors on their own was okay or not. Depending on how flat the curve was during the year, the answer was either yes, no, or maybe. Enter Recreate Responsibly, a coalition of nearly 1,000 nonprofits, businesses, agencies,

and influential voices, “developing and sharing [best practices](#) to protect each other and our natural landscapes.” Recreate Responsibly arose in May in response to the surge in park and open space visitation that took place as people sought respite from sheltering-in-place. Latino Outdoors worked closely with other early coalition partners, including Outdoor Alliance and REI, to ensure that the Recreate Responsibly guidelines reflected the need to build an inclusive outdoor community.

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Jaylin Molina, who is majoring in forestry and volunteers with LO in northern California, guided us on a [virtual tour of a redwood forest](#). She had viewers smiling with her warmth, good humor, and knowledge of banana slugs, salmon berries, and more. Of the experience, Jaylin shared, *“It was something out of my comfort zone and something I didn’t know I needed.”*

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Photograph by Samantha Mariscal





In January, we shared [a message](#) alluding to enormous challenges ahead and suggesting that at least part of the solution lies in leaning into our connection with the outdoors. Our words turned out to be much more prescient than expected, with the outdoors serving as a salve for many people during a difficult year.

The importance of the outdoors in people's lives took center stage in 2020, and that was reflected in our storytelling and sharing during the year.

In March, during the first few days of sheltering in place, over 50 members of our online community shared how parks had positively touched their lives.

In July, we co-hosted a [photo contest](#) with Hispanic Access Foundation in celebration of the 7th annual Latino Conservation Week. We encouraged participants to submit images that redefine what it means to be "outdoorsy", capture the Latinx identity and conservation

at their intersection, and highlight the richness of Latinx people, history, and heritage. *La comunidad* [responded](#) with over 90 submissions.

Through 16 *Yo Cuento* email briefs this year, we focused on getting out the vote, holding space for representation, and [combating anti-Blackness](#).

Before evolving into a national network of outdoor engagement leaders, Latino Outdoors began as a blog authored by its Founder, José González. The blog lives on today on [latinooutdoors.org](#), including 30 posts in 2020, consisting primarily of stories shared by the LO community around healing, transformation, connection and (un)learning. With each new story comes a more complete narrative of the relationship between people and the natural world. They have the power to help us understand, overcome, and to learn from one another. We have so much gratitude for *la comunidad* for trusting us with their stories.

Photograph by Janett Hernández, LCW Photo Contest Participant







“The Shackleton Glacier region, Antarctica is one of the least human-modified locations on Earth. As scientists, we study the chemistry and biology preserved in soils. As environmental stewards, we utilize conservation principles to protect soil biodiversity. Antarctica reminds us that we live on this planet together and we must work together, bringing different perspectives, backgrounds and cultures, to maintain and understand polar environments, which are crucial to our existence. These systems are so striking that they stop us in our tracks. The land on which I have based my MS and PhD education for the last 4+ years at the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, specifically the Shawnee, Miami, Wyandot and Delaware Nations. I honor and respect the diverse Indigenous peoples connected to this territory in Ohio. The Shackleton Glacier region, Antarctica (pictured) is similarly a site of meeting and exchange. Antarctica belongs to no nation. Instead, scientists from around the world unite to study and understand this unique environment.”  
Melisa Díaz, photo contest participant

Photograph by Melisa Díaz, LCW Photo Contest Participant

In 2020, we also captured the story of LO on video in *Yo Cuento*, our first [short film](#) produced entirely in-house, which was accompanied by the relaunch of LO’s YouTube [channel](#).

We ended the year by [pledging](#) to help build an inclusive outdoors and just society, and we asked the community to make that promise together with us.

With the prolonged suspension of *Vamos*

Outdoors’ in-person programming, our efforts were largely diverted to *Yo Cuento* Outdoors. This all led to notable growth in LO’s online audience. By the end of 2020, our Facebook followers surpassed 15,000. LO’s Instagram grew to nearly 37,000, up from 21,000 in 2019, and LO’s Twitter grew beyond 12,000 followers. Combined, the Latino Outdoors community on these social media channels is 64,000 strong, a 50% increase compared to December 2019.



# Creemos Outdoors

In 2020, LO's commitment to the growth and development of our volunteers and staff became a recognized program: *Creemos Outdoors*.

We welcomed new board and community members, staff, and volunteers.

Fifty new leaders joined Latino Outdoors' national volunteer network in 2020, which now includes over 120 members and covers new locations such as Salt Lake City, Chicago, and Springfield, MA. The personal stories they have shared on LO's [Our People](#) page help expand the collective narrative of how we connect to the outdoors.

We partnered with community leaders to engage in important conversations for the growth of our volunteers, staff, and extended community members, including discussions on intersectional environmentalism and the heritage of Latinx and Hispanic peoples in the Southwest.

Part of our commitment to fostering Latinx outdoor leadership includes the sharing of jobs, fellowships, internships,

and other opportunities that help emerging professionals thrive while inspiring youth to see themselves in leadership positions. As part of this, we launched the new [Jobs+](#) resource on [latinooutdoors.org](#) to make this even more accessible to the public.

The year also shone a light on the deep-rooted racism and social inequality that exists in our country. While Latino Outdoors is led by people of color, we recognize that we are not immune to the influence and conditioning that come from living in

a society with entrenched and insidious systems of oppression. Thus, we understand that we also have some (un)learning to do. As a start, we provided anti-oppression workshops to LO leaders, taking a deeper dive into what racism and anti-racism are. Moving beyond public-facing statements and allyship towards anti-oppressive ways of operating as an organization and community is work that LO continues to progress through. As our nation took the biggest stand of our lifetime for Black Lives Matter, Latino Outdoors also looked inward to consider how we too can cross new thresholds towards a more just society.

*Latino Outdoors also looked inward to consider how we too can cross new thresholds*

Photograph by Verónica Miranda, Volunteer, LO SF Bay Area

## New Growth.

Latino Outdoors to volunteers:  
What has been one LO lowlight and one LO highlight of 2020?

Jonny González, Salt Lake City:  
Beginning our chapter during a pandemic.  
Beginning our chapter during a pandemic!



## Volunteer Spotlight

Time is our most valuable resource, and we owe a debt of gratitude to all our volunteer leaders for investing theirs in Latino Outdoors.



Bianca García, LO's Colorado Program Coordinator, is one such volunteer. In March, she organized and led our last outing of 2020 before the Great Pause. However, Bianca did not pause there. She also served on the hiring committee for the Operations Associate position we filled in April, interviewed Park Ranger Lucero Torres as part of our programming for Latino Conservation Week in July, and led our campaign for National Public Lands Day in September. These are just some of Bianca's contributions as a volunteer with Latino Outdoors during the year. *¡Mil gracias, Bianca! Your leadership is exemplary and your service to the community verdaderamente inspira.*



Photograph by Janelle Paciencia, Volunteer, LO Colorado

# Mil Gracias • Many Thanks

We want to thank everyone who supported and collaborated with LO in 2020. We are grateful for the ways in which the year's adversity strengthened our foundation and the community that is Latino Outdoors. These challenges led us to a rediscovery of our voice and a renewed commitment to speaking up for diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels. This would not have been possible without the support of our volunteers, partners, funders, and extended *comunidad*.

**In all, LO collaborated with [over 90 organizations and groups](#) during the year, including the following:**

Basecamp Strategies  
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council  
Bracken Cave Preserve  
Brookside Gardens, Montgomery Parks  
California State Parks, Natural Resources Division  
California State Parks Foundation  
Camber Outdoors  
Center for Interdisciplinary Environmental Justice  
*Centro del Pueblo* (Humboldt County)  
Colorado Park and Wildlife  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Environment Maryland  
Environmental Protection Information Center  
Forest Preserve Foundation  
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy  
Hispanic Access Foundation  
Humboldt State University Center Activities  
Hydro Flask  
Intersectional Environmentalist  
Inwood Hill Park Conservancy  
Kelson Foundation  
LA Nature for All  
Latino Health Initiative  
Los Padres ForestWatch  
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
Mosaic  
National Audubon Society  
National Environmental Education Foundation  
National Park Trust

National Parks Conservation Association  
Northcoast Regional Land Trust  
Outdoor Alliance for Kids  
Outdoor Outreach  
Outdoors Empowered Network  
Patagonia  
Point Reyes National Seashore Association  
Priority Strategies  
Recreate Responsibly Coalition  
REI  
Resources Legacy Fund  
San Antonio Parks & Recreation  
San Antonio River Authority  
San Diego National Wildlife Refuge Complex  
San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory  
San Francisco Foundation  
Save the Redwoods League  
Sierra Club  
Texas Land Conservancy  
Texas Parks & Wildlife  
The Chris and Melody Malachowsky Family Foundation  
The North Face  
Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve  
Washington Trails Association  
Western Conservation Foundation  
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
Winnebago Industries Foundation  
Yosemite National Park  
Youth Outside





We also want to express our gratitude to [Community Initiatives](#), which serves as fiscal sponsor to Latino Outdoors. Community Initiatives did a stellar job of adapting its supportive services and guidance to the circumstances of 2020, much to the benefit of Latino Outdoors and all of its other fiscally sponsored projects.

And a special thank you to...the Outdoors.

Thank you, Outdoors.

Spending time together with you while having to be apart from others, made a difference.

Thank you for showing us the little things we'd never noticed before.

Thank you for helping us feel alive.

Thank you for the learning opportunities, especially for kids, who are doing their best to figure out a whole new way of "going to school."

Thank you for the space, especially now that we need it the most.

Thank you for being a place where we can choose to be our best selves.

Thank you for the welcome reminder that despite the difficulties, the sky is still there and the sun will continue to rise each morning.

Thank you for inspiring us to see a future in which we're all much closer together than further apart.



# Looking Ahead

With lingering uncertainty accompanying us into 2021, looking ahead is even more of a challenge than in previous annual transitions. What we can say is that 2020 has reinforced for us an important lesson: To achieve sustainability, we need balance. This is true of any sort of endeavor, whether organizational, economic, political, cultural, or just generally, in society. When that balance is thrown off, it becomes necessary to divert much of our attention and resources towards a course correction.

In 2020, LO's balance was thrown off when we suddenly couldn't *Vamos* Outdoors anymore with our community. So our attention and resources were diverted to *Yo Cuento* and *Creemos*, as well as towards developing a more nuanced *Vamos* Outdoors program. The result, we believe, is a more balanced and robust Latino Outdoors heading into 2021.

This is not unlike the growth and development of a tree, which shifts and diverts its energy depending on the circumstances and the environment. Sometimes it focuses its energy on deepening its roots. Other times, it prioritizes growing its branches and leaves. And there are times when producing fruit takes precedence. It all matters, but sometimes a particular need must be addressed most urgently if the entire tree is to remain alive and well.

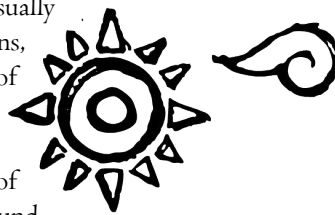
#BlackLivesMatter



Photograph by Raul Velasco, LCW Photo Contest Winner



A group of people, the ones whose voices are usually heard and all the others too, the in-betweens, sit together, on Native land, sharing stories of connection to the outdoors and each other. Dawn draws nearer to them as their words slowly rise into the night sky, like the cloud of smoke from the campfire they are gathered around.



[latinooutdoors.org](http://latinooutdoors.org)