

2021

# *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.

**Find yourself outside with Latino Outdoors.**



“The outdoors, even just outside our front door, is a liminal space. I believe it’s in liminal spaces that we grow, heal, and thrive. A solo backpacking trip or a family walk around the block both provide that space to reflect, listen, feel, and heal.”

—Jaron Latona, Latino Outdoors Volunteer, Sacramento



## About Us

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**L**atino Outdoors (LO) is a Latinx-led organization dedicated to building an inclusive and equitably accessible outdoor community. We support a national network of leaders in outdoor recreation, conservation and environmental education. We work to expand and amplify the Latinx experience in the outdoors, serving as a platform for sharing oft-overlooked cultural connections and narratives that will bolster the collective outdoor movement. Latino Outdoors is a space for the community to be present, share our voices, and showcase how an ethic of conservation and roots in nature have been ingrained in *la cultura Latina* for generations.

Founder, José González, created Latino Outdoors in 2013 as a blog and online networking platform for members of Latinx communities interested in conservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental education. A year later, we began going on outings with families and individuals, while continuing to

celebrate the multi-faceted Latinx outdoor identity. Since then, LO has grown from a California-based organization to a [national community](#), now present in 27 locations throughout the country. We are part of the nexus between the movements for social justice, conservation and the environment, and equitable access to the outdoors.



Photo by Verónica Miranda, LO Volunteer, San Francisco

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## 2020 Recap:

### *Un Antes y Un Después*

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2020 challenged Latino Outdoors to navigate the space between what was and what could be. Just as the pandemic began to stop everyone in our tracks, we added staff to bolster operations and help us pivot our programming. Unable to physically gather in community, we throttled up our storytelling and communications program, *Yo Cuento Outdoors*. [The year](#) pushed us out of our comfort zone and in front of the camera to connect with our communities virtually. We produced our first [short film](#) and recognized our leadership development initiatives as a core LO program. We looked in the mirror and acknowledged that we can be even more intentional in our efforts to help build a more racially just society. As 2020 drew to a close, a more resilient and robust Latino Outdoors emerged to meet 2021.



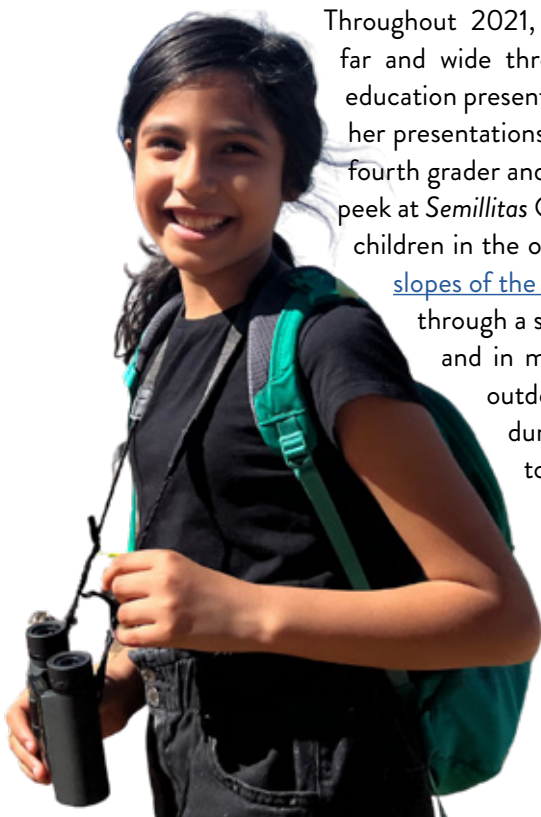
**THE PROGRAMMATIC PILLARS** of Latino Outdoors are: outdoor experiences, outdoor narratives, and outdoor leadership. Our three flagship programs complement each other; the success of one elevates the other two. *Vamos Outdoors* fosters outdoor engagement, which leads to personal stories of connection to the outdoors. Those stories are amplified through *Yo Cuento Outdoors*, reaching greater audiences and inspiring new and renewed outdoor engagement. In turn, *Vamos* program participants and *Yo Cuento* audience members often become inspired to join LO's volunteer network, where they have the opportunity to grow and evolve as leaders in the outdoors through *Creemos Outdoors* while contributing to efforts under *Vamos* and *Yo Cuento Outdoors*.



LEFT TO RIGHT  
Photo by Albert Arévalo, Volunteer, District of Columbia  
Photo by Matthew Falcon, LO Volunteer, Sacramento  
Photo by Modesta McGrath-Martinez, LO Volunteer, Colorado

## VAMOS OUTDOORS

We carried forward 2020's strategies for inspiring outdoor connections from a distance into 2021 and added the safe resumption of in-person group activities. The result was a new, multi-faceted approach to LO's outdoor engagement efforts.



Throughout 2021, we continued to connect virtually with *comunidad* far and wide through dozens of online nature tours, environmental education presentations, and outdoor recreation tips and tutorials. With her presentations on the signs of spring and native plants of California, fourth grader and LO's youngest volunteer, Eva García, gave us a sneak peek at *Semillitas Outdoors*, a new Latino Outdoors initiative celebrating children in the outdoors coming in 2022. Along a trail near the [lower slopes of the Sierra Nevada](#), in conversation about [amazing spiders](#), through a series of bilingual [outdoor skills-building](#) presentations, and in many more ways, LO leaders made sure to keep the outdoors top of mind for our community members, even during the year's stretches that kept us from trekking together in person.





LO leaders also encouraged families and individuals to explore the outdoors together as a community despite being distanced apart. Our [#TogetherApart](#) outing series in 2021 featured family bike riding, outdoor scavenger hunting, reading outdoors, and [bioblitzing](#) in support of community science.

Behind the scenes, we prepared for the resumption of group outings. This work was guided by the safety guidelines and protocols developed in late 2020 by our Director of Programs & Operations together with a committee of Latino Outdoors volunteers representing different parts of the country. Just in time for the transition to spring, LO's volunteers in Albuquerque led off the year's in-person activities with an early March hike in the Three Sisters area of Petroglyph National Monument. Soon, volunteers in other locations followed suit, leveraging the healing power of nature to support their own wellbeing and that of our community members. When all was said and done, over 100 LO leaders had donated their time and energy in support of at least one of the more than 115 outings in 2021. Whether it was birding, camping, fishing, [gravel riding](#), hiking, or another way of [opting to be outside](#), over 1,600 participants joined Latino Outdoors in person this year to connect with nature and each other.



Photo by Matthew Falcon, LO Volunteer, Sacramento



## YO CUENTO OUTDOORS

We took a multi-generational storytelling approach with Yo Cuento in 2021 and focused on sharing the *cuentos* of those who helped find the path, who paved the path, and who will journey on it to places beyond our wildest dreams. With the challenges of 2020 following us into 2021, the importance of the outdoors for our health and wellness remained center stage as a theme when we communicated with our community. Healing in the outdoors, not just maintaining wellness, was a defining message of 2021.

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Photo by Maritza Oropeza, LO Volunteer, Portland

### Mapping Migraciones

Latino Outdoors partnered with Audubon California and National Audubon Society for [Mapping Migraciones](#), a year-long online initiative celebrating *Latinidad*, migration, and the stories that connect us across the Americas. We collaborated on six speaker panels during the year, focusing on topics like *Birding Without Borders*, [Indigenous Perspectives on Migration](#), [Displacement, and the Sacredness of Place](#), and *Mujeres in Conservation*. Each panel featured a LO leader sharing their story. Mapping Migraciones reached over 121,000 people, had over 3,000 engagements, and honored natural and cultural identities that are both [from here and from there](#).



We expanded *Yo Cuento*'s reach by highlighting and producing content showcasing intergenerational Latinx connections to the outdoors and conservation movement. We kicked off the year by partnering with Peninsula Open Space Trust for a [conversation](#) in January with civil rights activist Dolores Huerta and playwright Luis Valdez, moderated by LO Founder, José González. In April, [Cycle of Ancestry](#) premiered. LO co-sponsored the award-winning short film, which features a 1,500-mile bikepacking journey to Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula as the backdrop for exploring the importance of learning and honoring our cultural heritage. During the 8th annual Latino Conservation Week in July, we facilitated [Yo Cuento: A Word from our Elders](#),

a panel featuring Santiago Maestas and Jorge Garcia, co-founders of the Center for Social Sustainable Systems, and Margarita Flores, an immigrant, mother, and eldest of 14 siblings whose faith drives her work as a pastor and community activist. As summer became fall, we celebrated Latinx Heritage Month by hosting *Conversando Outdoors: Monumentos*, a series of live online conversations between LO leaders and Latinx National Park Service superintendents and managers ranging generationally from a nine year old Gen Zer to Baby Boomers. These intergenerational connections spotlight a conservation *cultura* that is deeply rooted in our *comunidad*.

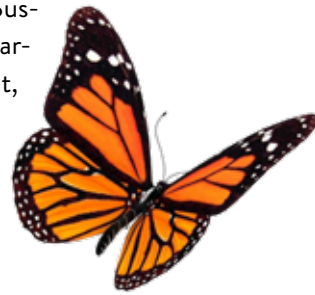


Photo by Matthew Falcon, LO Volunteer, Sacramento



The blog that gave rise to Latino Outdoors in 2013 lives on today at [latinooutdoors.org](http://latinooutdoors.org). It is a growing collection of stories around healing, transformation, connection, advocacy, and equity in the outdoors. Each new story shared by a member of the LO community helps paint a more complete picture of the relationship

between people and the world outside. We are grateful to *la comunidad* for trusting us with their stories, which have the power to help us understand, overcome, and learn from one another. During 2021, community members shared 27 new stories, including Gabe Gómez, who [recounted](#) a transformative trip to Ecuador with his partner:

“ In the following days, we climbed Rumiñawi and even spent the night in José F. Ribas Refuge on the side of Cotopaxi. I couldn't be more proud of Christina or more grateful that she was able to connect with the lands of her people. Her story is one that I will always carry with me – she is the reason why I fight for representation in the outdoors. We are peoples of the land – of the sea – of the mountains and beaches. The outdoors is our right, our very breath, our heartbeat. We are all children of Mother Nature, and thus we long to connect with her. That's what our single hike did for Christina – she reconnected with another part of her identity, with another piece of her soul.”



Photo by Gabe Gómez, Yo Cuento Participant



## Advocacy

In 2021, we also embraced the power of our storytelling to advocate for the outdoors. [Yo Cuento: Nurturing Grassroots Advocacy for Conservation](#), our follow-up documentary to our 2020 short film, was produced entirely in-house. It features public lands advocates and elected officials underscoring the importance of voices from local communities speaking up in support of public lands. The legislative context for the film is the PUBLIC Lands Act (Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in California Lands Act), which is currently congressional bill S.1459. We further used our voices to help advocate for new public lands in California, Colorado, and Utah, public beach access on California's Santa Barbara and Malibu coasts, racial equity in the policies and practices of the Department of the Interior, federal funding for increasing outdoor recreation opportunities in park-poor urban areas and improving public transit between underserved communities and trails and open spaces, the establishment of a Chesapeake National Recreation Area, and the creation of an outdoor equity fund in Colorado, among others.



Photo by Eric Arce, Participant, Salt Lake City

Like the first flowers of spring, our in-person programming returned in March, and we saw an explosion of enthusiasm and interest in our stories and how we promote equity and inclusion in the outdoors. Stories on leaders like Erynn Castellanos, from LO Montana, who was featured in the [Flathead Beacon](#) and [CBS News coverage](#) on LO San Antonio connecting families to the outdoors are just a couple examples of Yo Cuento's communications ripple. In addition to dozens of instances of earned media coverage, Yo Cuento programming in 2021 included over 33 videos, 19 online panels and conversations, including the Outdoor F.U.T.U.R.E. panel with LO Albuquerque's Laura Flores, a documentary (and one currently in post-production), a storytelling space for LO volunteers during our monthly First Friday Campfire online meetups, and over 50 new stories of LO leaders' outdoor connections on [Our People](#) page.

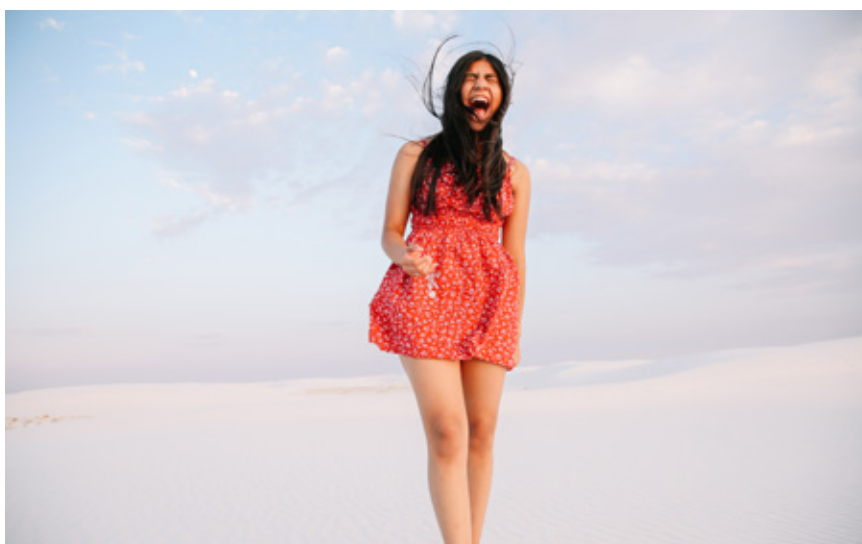
Photo by Matthew Falcon, Volunteer, Sacramento





Through 18 Yo Cuento email musings this year, we amplified important [videos](#), panels, and presentations that invite us to build a more inclusive outdoor community. These story-centered email briefs also provided us with an opportunity to share the *cuentos* being told in-person during our outings, using [images](#) and words from LO outings leaders.

Photo by Vanessa Velazquez, LCW Photo Contest Participant



We welcomed many new members to our online community in 2021. As the year drew to a close, our audience across LO's major national social media and communications platforms had grown beyond 77,000, a 16% increase from a year earlier.



Photo by Antonio Varela, LCW Photo Contest Participant

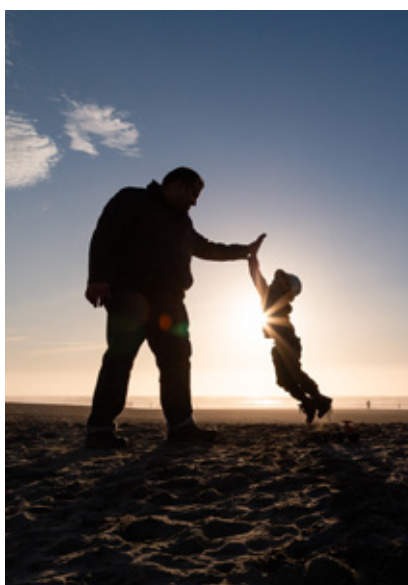


Photo by Monika Aldarondo, LCW Photo Contest Participant

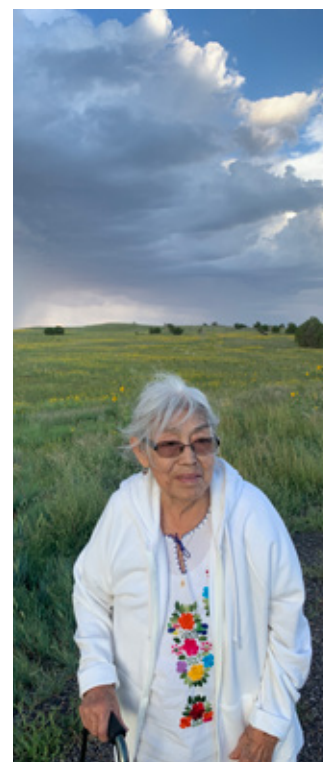


Photo by Andy Galván, Yo Cuento Participant



## CRECEMOS OUTDOORS

Continuous learning is a core value of Latino Outdoors. Growing and evolving individually and collectively inspires our staff and volunteers to embrace challenges and develop new ways of doing things.

Early in the year, we endeavored to bolster organizational capacity and program management systems in order to effectively handle and sustainably absorb anticipated growth.

We expanded into new parts of the country and grew a core support staff for the benefit of LO's volunteers, outing participants, and the outdoor equity movement. We invested in a new full-time manager for our Yo Cuento Outdoors Program. We hired a new Operations & Programs Associate and our first ever Development Manager, which increased our operational and fund development capacity. Along with growing our national staff, we expanded the Bay Area Regional Coordinator from a half-time to full-time position.

Approximately 55 new leaders found their way to Latino Outdoors in 2021 (the most ever in any single year), including 14 to represent new teams in Las Vegas, Missoula, California's North Coast, and Phoenix. We also welcomed three new members to our Advisory Board, which is now ten leaders strong and boasts representation from the Northeast, Mid Atlantic, Southwest, and West Coast. Each Board member brings a wealth of expertise and experience (both lived and professional) that will be invaluable in helping to guide LO forward.

During the year, we supported more than 100 LO leaders with learning opportunities. This included sponsorship with wilderness first aid certification, training on LO's outings process, a Leave No Trace workshop, peer-to-peer primers on public lands advocacy and outdoor photography, LO ambassadorship experiences that doubled as opportunities to hone speaking and presentation skills, and more.



Photo by Victoria Rodríguez, LO Volunteer, Los Angeles

We complemented these in-house learning opportunities with the more than 1,400 postings in 2021 to our [Jobs+ Opportunity Board](#) on [latinooutdoors.org](#), which serves as a publicly available clearinghouse for work, internship, scholarship, and other such opportunities in the outdoor and environmental fields.



Photo by Verónica Miranda, Volunteer, San Francisco

After a hiatus in 2020, we were able to hold our 2021 LO Leadership Camp Out in-person. A total of 49 Latino Outdoors leaders gathered on the traditional homelands of the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation to enjoy a weekend at Howland Hill Outdoor School within Redwood National and State Parks. Attendees represented a [cross section](#) of LO staff, board members, founder, and volunteers from 15 of LO's 27 program locations. Well over half were attending their first LO Leadership Campout and most were also experiencing the magic and majesty of the coastal redwood ecosystem for the first time.



## Volunteer Spotlight

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Josie Gutierrez began volunteering with Latino Outdoors in 2015 as an Ambassador in the San Antonio region. In 2017 she stepped into the role of Program Coordinator and has grown the region's team of volunteers from 1 to over 11. Her positive, energetic, and ready to serve personality is infectious. She was the first volunteer to join the outing restart committee and hers was one of the first regions to resume in person activities. And resume they did. In this abridged year, Josie and her team managed to lead four family campouts (along with several more outings and events) complete with s'more celebrations and swimming in the creek; introducing 14 Tejano families to camping. Her approach is to not only introduce Latinx families to camping, but also to provide them with the know-how and gear to take home so that they can continue to recreate independently. To date, Josie has provided leadership on nearly 90 outings and events, serving over 1,700 participants. ¡Mil gracias, Josie!



## *Mil Gracias* | Many Thanks

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The gratitude we feel for our funders, partners, and other collaborators is difficult to capture in words. Each year's efforts are possible thanks to the many organizations that enthusiastically roll up their sleeves together with LO to support and work towards an inclusive and equitably accessible outdoors.

LO collaborated with over [180](#) community partners and groups during the year, including the following:

- Audubon California
- Battle Born Batteries/Dragonfly Energy
- C & S Wholesale Grocers
- California Department of Parks and Recreation (California State Parks)
- California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild)
- City of Holyoke
- City of San Antonio
- Colorado Parks and Wildlife
- Columbia Sportswear
- Community Initiatives
- Continental Divide Trail Coalition
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Feminist Bird Club
- Fresno Building Healthy Communities
- Get Outdoors Nevada
- GreenLatinos
- Hispanic Access Foundation
- Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO)
- Kampgrounds of America (KOA)
- Kelson Foundation
- Kestrel Land Trust
- La Clínica del Pueblo, Centro Empoderate
- MANA, Albuquerque
- Mendocino Land Trust
- Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
- Montgomery Parks
- National Audubon Society
- National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS)
- National Park Foundation
- National Park Service
- National Parks Conservation Association
- National Recreation Foundation
- New Mexico Economic Development Department, Outdoor Equity Fund
- Nuestra Tierra
- Nuestras Raíces
- Oregon Metro
- Osprey Packs
- Outdoor Afro
- Outdoor Asian Colorado
- Parks California
- Patagonia
- Pisces Foundation
- REI Co-op
- REI Cooperative Action Fund
- Resources Legacy Fund
- Rex Foundation
- San Francisco Foundation
- Sierra Club
- Sequoia Riverlands Trust
- Texas Outdoor Family
- The Joseph & Vera Long Foundation
- The North Face
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Western Conservation Foundation
- William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Yerba Buena Fund
- Yosemite Conservancy
- Yosemite National Park




## Gracias Outdoors

**G**racias to the Pacific Ocean, the coastal redwoods, the Cascade, Sierra Nevada, Rocky, Wasatch, and Appalachian mountain ranges. *Gracias* to the deserts of the southwest and the hill country of Texas. *Gracias* Potomac and Hudson rivers. Thank you to the land that provides us with the space to recreate, to heal, and to gather in community.



Photo by Laura Flores, Volunteer, Albuquerque



## Looking Ahead

*“Aunque los pasos se volvieron lentos y la energía se convierte en fatiga, queda siempre por dentro el instinto primitivo: la fuerza de voluntad.”*

Years ago, a tired hiker came upon the words above. The [sign on the trail](#) served as inspiration to keep going, one step at a time, toward a magnificent view and realization.

As 2021 comes to a close, we find ourselves in a familiar space: one of fatigue, uncertainty, and trepidation. We were here one year ago. Despite that, we made it to another milestone. Along the way, we held fast to the [hope](#) that *si no sanas hoy, sanarás mañana*. And just one year later, we are still ourselves, yet so much more. We will do it again in 2022, leaning into our unwavering desire to grow and learn in *comunidad*.

We will continue to go outdoors, tell our stories about the outdoors, and grow in the outdoors. We will help plant *semillitas* in the outdoors and nurture their *liderazgo*. These new leaders will relieve us when we grow tired, taking up the front of the echelon like migrating birds, as we continue our journey together from the *aquí* to the *allá*.

The space we are all moving through is ever-liminal. There is always a before behind us and an after ahead of us. We are in a continuous state of learning and evolution, and when we move through this space together, unabashedly celebrating and uplifting our diverse identities, we soar.

That tired, years-ago hiker was not alone. There were others on that trail and together they pressed forward. And the realization was this: together will always be better.

#SanaSanaOutdoors

Photo by Victoria Rodríguez, Volunteer, Los Angeles







Latino Outdoors provides for a focused conversation on the Latinx experience without being limited to it. Our community's voices are varied while remaining united in celebrating diversity and declaring it a core tenet of Latino Outdoors.

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