

GREEN SPACE: CLIMATE, HEALTH & EQUITY

Green space is typically thought of as neighborhood parks, open spaces, trails, and play grounds, but also can include backyards and even undeveloped areas such as river banks and ditches. In urban environments, green space has become increasingly important, both for its ecosystem services and for social benefits. However, equitable access and pressures for development are systemic challenges.

In the face of climate change and a growing urban population, green spaces provide a natural, low-cost solution to several urban problems. The plant matter and permeable surfaces of green space help decrease greenhouse gas emissions, noise, the severity of high-water storm events and urban heat. Overall, the social and psychological impact of green space has also been shown to generally improve quality of life. A growing body of research now links green space to a reduction in stress, better social integration, increased physical activity, and increased perception of health.

Albuquerque is considered one of the best cities in the U.S. for access to nature with approximately 23% of its total land area dedicated to green space, with the national mean at 15%. With the Sandia Mountains to the east, Petroglyph National Monument to the west and the central Rio Grande State Park, citizens can literally see the results of early cultural and political conservationists. To date, Albuquerque boasts 400 miles of bike trails and paths and nearly 300 city owned and operated parks. Further, 87% of residents live within a 10 minute walk to a park – compared the national average is 55%. A number of different governmental entities manage additional green spaces within the city limits, including Bernalillo County, New Mexico State Parks, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service, all working together to manage the rich tapestry of green space in and around the city.

While Albuquerque is exceptional in its quantity and ecological quality of green space, more work needs to be done for equitable access -- a key concern highlighted in both the Climate Survey and in recent policy conversations. A recent report by the Wilderness Society (WS) addresses the disparity in green space distribution and access in Albuquerque. The report provides several recommendations including: continue Neighborhood Park Activate program, conduct a public awareness campaign to increase public knowledge of access and involvement with parks, encourage park development, and increase public transportation to parks. Finally, WS advocates for CABQ and BernCo to continually work with members from BIOC, LGBTQIA+, and disability/limited mobility communities to re-imagine how parks serve the people to ensure parks are safe, accessible and welcoming to everyone.

Sources* and Recommended Reading:

- [Report: Albuquerque park access lacking for vulnerable communities, but expanded transit could help](#), The Wilderness Society, 2020.
- [COVID-19 is Changing the way Some Planners Think About How to Design and Develop Cities](#), WBEZ, October 23, 2020.
- [Video: History of Albuquerque Open Space](#), City of Albuquerque Parks and Recreation Open Space
- [Albuquerque Back Yard Refuge webpage](#), Friends of Valle De Oro, n.d.
- Optional: [Next Stop: Equitable Access A Transit to Parks Analysis](#), Wilderness Society, 2020

*Full source list easily available upon request.