



Girl Scouts Soar in the Outdoors

A 2019 Report from the Girl Scout Research Institute





For over 100 years, girls have discovered, explored, and strengthened their outdoor skills and commitment to environmental stewardship through Girl Scouting. Guided by supportive adults and peers, Girl Scouts discover the wonders of nature, experience the thrill of adventure, and challenge themselves and one another to reach new heights! Girl Scouts' [national outdoor programming](#) features a variety of fun, challenging, and experiential activities that empower girls as they develop attitudes, skills, and behaviors essential to effective [leadership in the outdoors](#):

- 1. Outdoor Competence:** Girls engage safely and responsibly in a range of outdoor activities (e.g., practicing [Leave No Trace](#) and knowing what to bring to be prepared in the outdoors).
- 2. Outdoor Confidence:** Girls have confidence in their outdoor abilities and are willing to try new and challenging outdoor activities.

- 3. Outdoor Interest:** Girls have a love of nature and an interest in the natural world.
- 4. Environmental Stewardship:** Girls understand how their behaviors impact the environment and what they can do to protect the natural world.

Across the 2018–19 program year, the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI) conducted a study of 227 troops to assess the role of Girl Scouts in helping them attain the four outdoor leadership outcomes, as well as other ways girls benefit from participating in the Girl Scout national outdoor program. Findings from nearly 1,700 girls and their troop leaders demonstrate that Girl Scouts gets girls outdoors, exposes them to new and challenging experiences, and helps them develop outdoor leadership skills that will enable them to engage responsibly with nature throughout their lives!

Key Finding 1

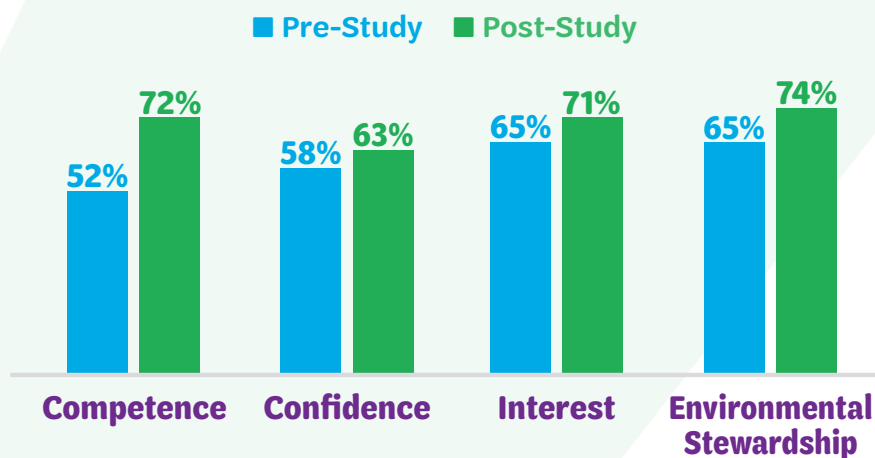
Girl Scouts helps girls become outdoor leaders—particularly the ones who need it most.

Overall, girls entered the study interested in the outdoors, confident in their outdoor abilities, committed to protecting the environment, and with basic competence in outdoor skills. Across all four outcomes, 60% were already strong outdoor leaders (i.e., their outcome score was equal to or greater than 4.0 on a 5-point scale).

By the end of the study, the proportion of girls who exhibited the four outdoor leadership outcomes had increased, with 20% more girls developing outdoor competence! Importantly, Girl Scout outdoor programming helps girls who need it most. Of girls who started the study with room to grow (i.e., their outcome score was less than 4.0), 70% increased their confidence, interest, and environmental stewardship, and 80% increased their competence.



Percentage of girls who developed the outdoor leadership outcomes



A girl is considered to have developed an outcome if her score is equal to or greater than a 4.0 (Max score = 5.0).

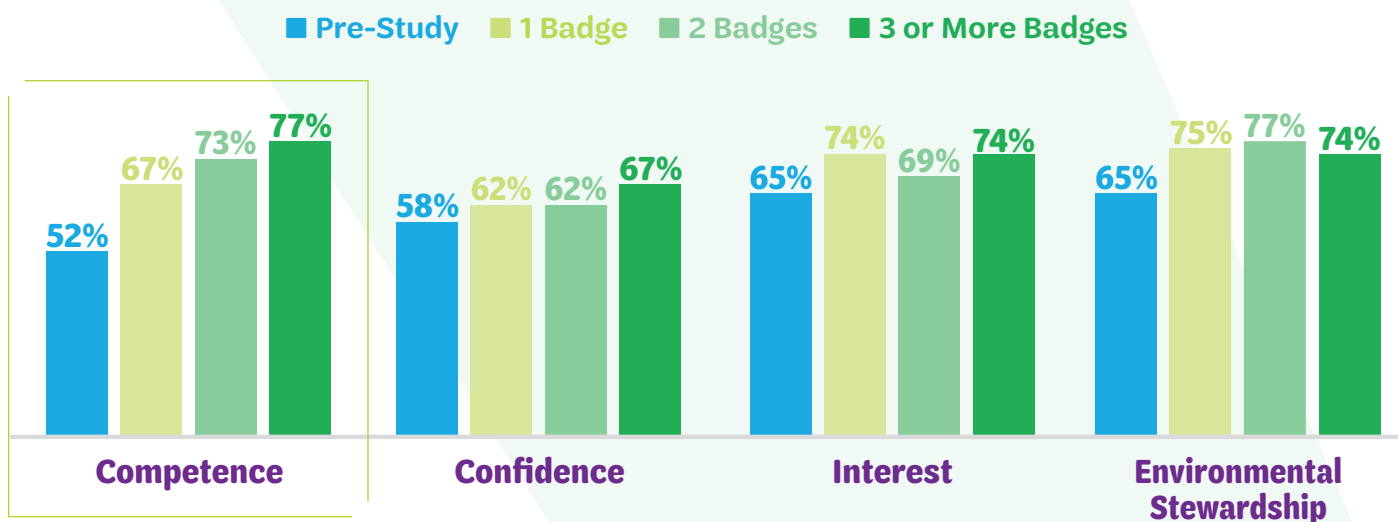
Key Finding 2

Just one Girl Scout badge hones girls' outdoor leadership—and outdoor competence grows more with each badge earned!



Findings show that **just one badge is enough to make a difference!** Across all four outcomes, girls who earned at least one badge increased their outdoor leadership outcomes by the end of the study. While additional badges did not significantly affect girls' confidence, interest, or stewardship, **each additional badge earned did increase girls' outdoor competence.** Given that the outdoor badges focus on skill-building, this finding may illustrate the effectiveness of the Girl Scout outdoor curriculum.

Percentage of girls who developed the leadership outcomes by number of badges earned



A girl is considered to have developed an outcome if her score is equal to or greater than a 4.0 (Max score = 5.0).

Key Finding 3

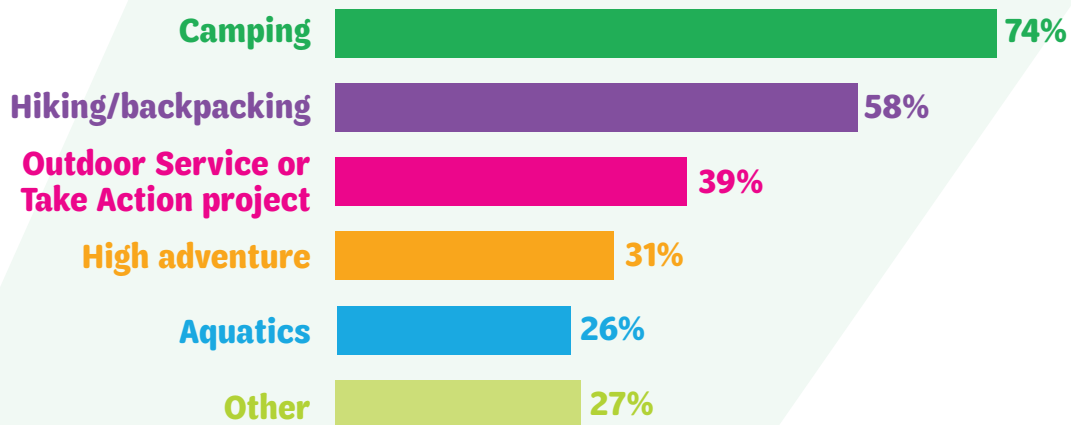
Girl Scouts gets girls outdoors and engages them in a variety of outdoor activities.

In addition to earning badges, **girls can participate in a variety of outdoor activities through Girl Scouts.** Indeed, almost 8 in 10 troops do at least two different outdoor activities per year, and 59% participate in three or more!

While overnight camping and hiking are the most common outdoor activities, troops also did environmental community service or Take Action projects, high-adventure activities (such as ropes courses, zip lines, and rock climbing), or aquatic activities (like swimming, canoeing, and paddleboarding), among others.



Percentage of troops that did activity



Key Finding 4

Girl Scouts provides access to the outdoors, opens the door to new outdoor experiences, and helps girls move out of their comfort zone.



Eight in ten girls say Girl Scouting allows them to do **outdoor activities they have never done before and wouldn't have done otherwise**—suggesting Girl Scouts opens the door to novel outdoor experiences.

These experiences go beyond just providing fun. Girls also say that doing outdoor activities through Girl Scouts helps them learn about the outdoors and nature, teaches them how to take care of the environment, and helps them overcome a fear in the outdoors!

Percentage of girls who agree with statement

I've learned a lot about the outdoors or nature in Girl Scouts.	86%
I've done outdoor activities in Girl Scouts that I had never done before.	84%
Girl Scouts has taught me how to take care of the environment.	83%
I have done outdoor activities through Girl Scouts that I would not have done otherwise.	80%
Doing outdoor activities in Girl Scouts has helped me overcome at least one fear.	68%

Key Finding 5

Doing a Take Action or service project in Girl Scouts teaches girls how to take care of the environment.

In Girl Scouts, girls make the world a better place by identifying a problem in the community and developing and implementing an “action” plan to fix it. Girls who were in troops that conducted a **community service or Take Action project focused on outdoor or environmental conservation** were more likely than girls who did not “take action” to agree that Girl Scouts taught them how to take care of the environment.



Percentage of girls who agree that “Girl Scouts has taught me how to take care of the environment.”

89%
Did Take Action
project



79%
Did not do
Take Action project

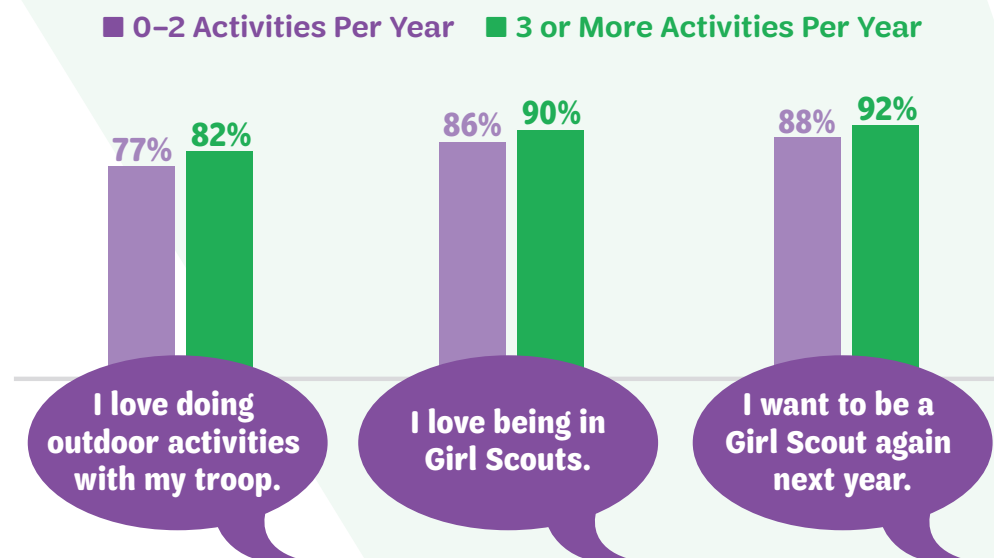
Key Finding 6

The more girls go outdoors with their troops, the happier they are with their Girl Scout experience.



Spending time outdoors is worth the effort—80% of girls say they love doing outdoor activities with their troop! Importantly, **how often girls do outdoor activities matters**. Girls whose troops do three or more outdoor activities a year get more enjoyment out of the outdoor activities they do and are more excited about being a Girl Scout than girls whose troops do two or less outdoor activities a year.

Percentage of girls who agree with statement by number of outdoor activities the troop has done



One thing I learned by earning an outdoor badge this year that I didn't already know is...

Outdoor Competence

"I learned about the sky and how to read star maps."

—Senior, Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago & Northwest Indiana

"Bees are important in nature."

—Brownie, Girl Scouts of Colorado

"How to snowshoe and cook outside in the winter."

—Junior, Girl Scouts of Manitou

"How maple syrup is made from trees and how the Native Americans used it."

—Cadette, Girl Scouts Heart of the Hudson

Outdoor Interest

"Nature can be scary, but it's also really fun."

—Brownie, Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast

"How much fun camping with friends can be."

—Cadette, Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania

"Getting away from everyday life and just enjoying nature is a great stress reliever."

—Senior, Girl Scouts of North East Ohio

"Being outside is lots of fun."

—Daisy, Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles

Outdoor Confidence

"I can do activities I thought I would be afraid of."

—Junior, Girl Scouts of West Central Florida

"I can make a difference as long as I do something."

—Ambassador, Girl Scouts Overseas – Stuttgart

"I am an awesome nature photographer."

—Cadette, Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles

"How brave I am."

—Daisy, Girl Scouts of Colorado

Environmental Stewardship

"There's a lot more to Leave No Trace than not littering."

—Senior, Girl Scouts Nation's Capital

"Always be kind to nature."

—Daisy, Girl Scouts Heart of Central California

"We can keep plants and animals safe by helping keep the environment clean."

—Brownie, Girl Scouts of Maine

"Sustainable living. I never realized how easily people can do it."

—Ambassador, Girl Scouts of Northeast Kansas & Northwest Missouri

"That you can admire and learn from nature without disturbing the animals or environment they live in."

—Senior, Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania

SUMMARY

In Girl Scouts, girls develop their leadership potential by discovering their values, skills, and the world around them; connecting with others in a multicultural environment; and taking action to make a difference in their world. This study shows that when girls participate in Girl Scout outdoor programming, they become more interested in the outdoors, feel more confident of their abilities in the outdoors, are more committed to environmental stewardship, and develop stronger outdoor competence.

Girl Scout [national outdoor badges](#) are an especially important way for girls to explore the outdoors and nature, try new things, and improve their skills. For each additional badge earned, girls became more competent in their outdoor skills. When badges are coupled with other outdoor activities, like hiking, camping, and adventure activities, girls are more satisfied with their Girl Scout experience and more likely to want to return. Finally, the findings show that Girl Scouts provides girls access to new and challenging outdoor experiences, helping them to move outside of their comfort zones and preparing them to be outdoor and nature enthusiasts who take the lead in caring for the environment.



Methodology: This study consisted of online surveys of Girl Scouts and their troop leaders from 227 troops. Troop leaders applied to be part of the study and troops were selected based on outdoor experience, geographic diversity, socioeconomic status, and grade levels. As such, findings may reflect troops that are especially interested in the outdoors. Participating troops completed one, two, or three outdoor badges during the 2018–2019 troop year. Troops could choose from the following badge categories: Naturalist, Environmental Stewardship, Troop Camping, and Art in the Outdoors. Some troops opted to complete other outdoor badges in addition to the badges that were part of the study.

Girl Scout respondents (N=1,690) were 248 Daisies (Kindergarten–1st grade), 401 Brownies (2nd–3rd grade), 288 Juniors (4th–5th grade), 349 Cadettes (6th–8th grade), 315 Seniors (9th–10th grade), and 89 Ambassadors (11th–12th grade), representing 39 Girl Scout councils and Girl Scouts Overseas. Repeated measures analyses were used to assess girls’ development of the outdoor leadership outcomes. Data about badges earned and outdoor activity come from the troop leader survey and were used to examine differences in girl outcomes and sentiment. All comparisons were significant at the $p < .05$ level, unless otherwise noted.

The Girl Scout Research Institute delivers data-driven insights across the Girl Scout Movement and beyond, leading national conversations about girls and their development via groundbreaking original studies.

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