

## Connecting with Nature to Enhance Personal and Community Well Being



# About me

Cheryl Baker - IT professional for the past 25 years. Currently working for Duke Energy. I serve my community by offering opportunities for Black people to connect with one another and nature as a 5th year volunteer leader for Outdoor Afro in the Charlotte, NC network. I'm a Certified Level 1 Kayak Instructor and enjoy chasing waterfalls. I'm the proud mother of 2 amazing young adults Cherise and Christopher.







## Backgrounder

Outdoor Afro is where Black people and nature meet. Founded by Rue Mapp in 2009, Outdoor Afro is the nation's leading organization that celebrates and inspires Black connections and leadership in nature.

We have more than 100 leaders in 56 cities and connect 40,000+ people to nature annually. Each volunteer leader creates and guides monthly trips and fosters collaborations to strengthen connections with the outdoors. We reconnect Black people with nature through recreational activities including hiking, birding, fishing, kayaking, gardening, and more – in a similar style, you would do if you were taking family members out. We harness the value of connecting people and connecting people to nature, in the same conversation.

Outdoor Afro works to disrupt the false perception that Black People do not have a relationship with nature. Each year we have annual training for all of our volunteer leaders to attend. All leaders are required to attend. There are training modules and ongoing education covering everything from risk management to policy to storytelling interpretation. Our initiative for this year is providing the opportunity for every Black person in our sphere of influence to learn how to swim with a swimmership. Outdoor Afro shifts the visual representation of who can connect with the Outdoors by taking photos and sharing them with our online community. We encourage participants to do the same.

Anyone who supports our mission is welcome to attend our events. You don't have to have an afro, to be part of Outdoor Afro.



# OUR IMPACT



## Connecting Black People

01.

### Volunteers

Our dedicated, highly trained team of leaders is the core of Outdoor Afro.

03.

### Social Impact

Join us online to engage with uplifting stories.

02.

### Coast to Coast

You'll find events from Cali to Maine

04.

### In the News

We are regularly featured sharing stories of Black folks in nature.

# Connecting with Nature to Enhance Personal and Community Wellbeing

1. How connecting with nature promotes emotional and physical wellbeing for the individual.
1. Benefits of spending time in nature
1. Doing our part to help all people have access to nature.
1. Understand our responsibility to create opportunities and programs that bring our communities together.
1. Recap
1. How to connect with Outdoor Afro

## Connecting with nature promotes mental and physical wellbeing for the individual.

Yanira [Facebook Link https://www.facebook.com/groups/1705831066352634/search/?q=Refuge](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1705831066352634/search/?q=Refuge)

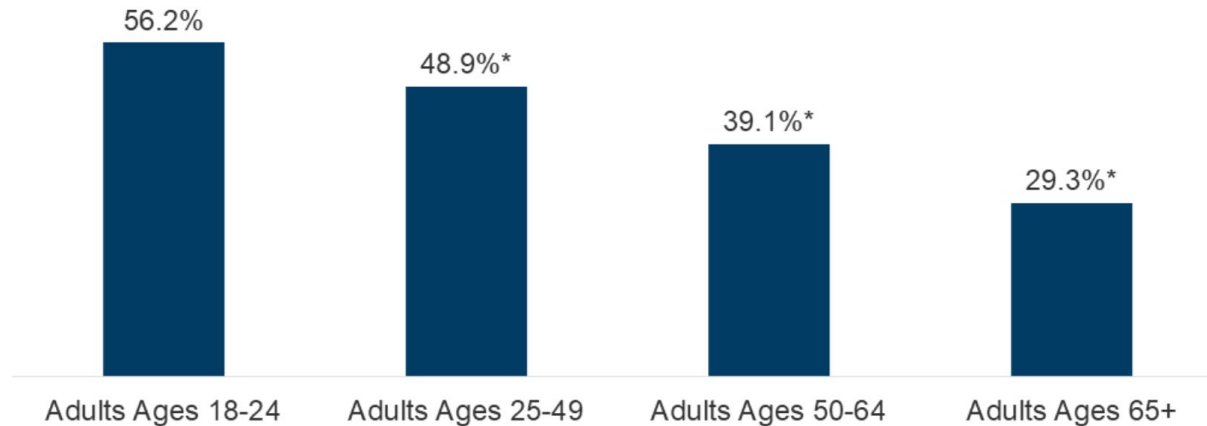
Over the last year the country as a whole has experienced the following

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Depression
- Isolation
- Grief
  - In the summer of 2019 before the pandemic a study by Amerispeak and WebMED found 57% of Americans are grieving the loss of someone close.
  - The percentage has significantly increased since the pandemic.



# Adults with symptoms of anxiety and/or depression

Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety and/or Depressive Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Age



NOTES: \*Indicates a statistically significant difference between adults ages 18-24. Data shown includes adults, ages 18+, with symptoms of anxiety and/or depressive disorder that generally occur more than half the days or nearly every day. Data shown is for December 9 – 21, 2020.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2020.



**Depressed:** If you're feeling blue, try going outside to green, natural spaces. A stroll in the woods has been shown to help combat depression, and even just the view of the forest from a hospital room helps patients who are feeling down.<sup>2</sup> **Head for the hills** if you need a boost to your mood.

**Stressed:** Nature presents scenes that gently capture your attention instead of suddenly snatching it, calming your nerves instead of frazzling them.<sup>3</sup>

**Anxious:** You probably know that exercise is good for your state of mind. But did you know that working out in nature helps to reduce anxiety. Instead of going to an indoor gym<sup>5</sup> Consider hitting some trails to get the best mental bang for your buck.  
d to negative rumination.<sup>6</sup>

**Fatigued:** Are you constantly multitasking at work as you switch between customers and phone calls, or click from spreadsheets to presentations? Even at home, you might face a combination of kids, chores and devices vying for your attention. Your prefrontal cortex can only take so much distraction before it needs a recharge. Luckily, time in nature has been shown to restore mental abilities like short term memory

**Self-Involved:** If you dwell on your problems and just can't stop, a walk through a meadow might put the brakes on the thought train circling through your head. Research shows that a 90-minute walk in nature lowers activity in the part of the brain linkeand processing 3D images based on drawings.<sup>7</sup>

**Uninspired:** Changing the scenery is a great way to get the creative juices flowing, and nature offers stimuli that you won't find while staring at a screen. In one example, spending four days in nature improved problem-solving skills by 50%. If you haven't found a way to tackle that next big project at work, or an obstacle that's impeding your personal goals, try noodling on it in the great outdoors.<sup>7</sup>

**Antisocial:** Time in nature can help with your personal relationships, too. Natural beauty results in more prosocial behaviors, like generosity and empathy.<sup>8</sup>

1

### **Social Well-Being**

Effective interpersonal communication, stronger bonds, deeper emotional attachment, empathy, less conflict and aggression at home.

2

### **Physical Well-Being**

Improves cardiac functions, reduces hypertension, balances hormonal regulation., improves respiratory functioning, enhances eyesight.

3

### **Psychological Well-Being**

Emotional regulation, increased attention, positive thinking, improved stress management, resilience, mood upliftment.

4

### **Spiritual Well-Being**

Deeper sense of self, more gratitude, Self-enhancement, increased insight towards the positive and negative aspects of life.

**Human-Nature  
Connection**

A person with a backpack is walking away on a path through a dense, green forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a bright, glowing effect in the upper center of the image. The path is covered with fallen leaves.

***Nature is the  
greatest place to heal  
and recharge.***

*EnlighteningQuotes.com*

*EnlighteningQuotes.com*

# Combating Social Isolation with Nature

The mission of Outdoor Afro is to celebrate and inspire Black connections and leadership in nature.

During the pandemic many experienced social isolation due to stay at home orders, massive shut downs and grief.

However, outside was still open and waiting to engage with us.

Simply being outside seeing birds, squirrels, the rustle of trees the wind blowing against your skin reminded us that we are not alone.

Life was still happening around us that was oblivious to COVID-19



## Hector H. Henry II Greenway



1/4 Mile Markers

## Wildlife Habitat

Wetlands and floodplains provide habitat for many types of wildlife. These areas provide a source of food, water, cover and places to raise young. These areas are among the most biologically productive natural ecosystems in the world. Wetlands also serve as seasonal residence and nursery habitat for many fishes and invertebrates. It's estimated that one-half of all North American bird species nest or feed in wetlands.



Beaver



Muskrat



Mallard



Great Blue Heron



Spotted Turtle



Leopard Frog



Dragonfly



Cottontail



Red Eft



# Hiking to heal

Healing Hikes offers an opportunity for Black Americans to gather in nature with the intention of healing in community. They are just one offering on Outdoor Afro's long docket of outdoor experiences. Trained guides throughout the country lead groups of various sizes on hikes, kayaking trips, birding expeditions, and just about every other outdoor activity imaginable. Along the way, they provide information about the history and biology of the areas being explored and hold space for all attendees, making sure nobody is left behind.



# Healing Hikes



**Jason George**

October 20, 2020 · 



## Healing hike with Outdoor Afro

I dedicated this hike in remembrance to Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old unarmed African-American woman who was wrongfully and fatally shot in her Louisville, Kentucky apartment on March 13, 2020. Our mental health is directly correlated to our physical health. As we hiked to heal, we thought about the women we love and who have been most impactful in our lives (deceased or still living) and shared it with each other. The obvious choice for me was my mother Ruthie B. Swann

## Fostering Diversity and Inclusion in Nature

The outdoors should be accessible for everyone.

In the US, communities of color are **three times** more likely than white communities to live in nature-deprived areas, while **70%** of low-income communities have less access to nature than the rest of the country.

We all should have access to nature close to home

People with disabilities and those without cars, groups that face the greatest barriers to accessing greenspace and the health benefits that it provides.

This means that many people are being left out of experiencing the benefits of public lands.



People with varying physical abilities and underserved populations usually don't have the same access to nature experiences and environmental education, as the general public. Physical limitations, finances, fear, and anxiety contribute to this. Access Nature believes that ALL people should be able to access these benefits.

When designing green spaces consider all people:

- People who need mobility assistance - cane, walker, wheel chair
- Visually impaired

# Feeling Safe in Nature

As an Outdoor Afro Volunteer Leader I've learned many people simply desire sharing experiences in community. There's comfort and safety in community. But for a variety of reasons many groups do not feel welcomed and/or safe when recreating in nature.

**So what are some of the obstacles preventing safety when recreating in nature?**

**Historic discrimination being a large underlying factor.**

- The incident of a white woman lodging a false complaint with police against Black birder Christian Cooper in Central Park revealed one of the many barriers Black individuals face when trying to enjoy nature.
- Black Americans make up roughly 13 percent of the U.S. population yet comprise only about 1 percent of visitors to public lands. This is due to concerns about physical safety—a painful legacy of “Whites Only” public spaces fueled by slavery, Jim Crow and racial violence—and other barriers. This lack of inclusivity can fuel the common misconception that Black individuals do not enjoy the outdoors or simply don't belong in green spaces.

# Creating Connections through Cultural Respect

Include more on-site information in public spaces about the influence and impact that Black people have had in those areas.

- Rose Hill Plantation
- Uptown Charlotte Urban Hike
- **Black Paddle**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msVsKwNqels>

## Rose Hill Plantation Tour in Union County South Carolina

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1705831066352634/search/?q=rose%20hill>  
!

Fostering connections in nature through history of the land

-Rose Hill Plantation event

- Rangers shared knowledge of historic site
- Acknowledge the life and contributions of the enslaved people with respect and honor
- Enslaved burial site

# Brooklyn Community in Charlotte



Cheryl Baker

Admin · September 20, 2020 · 🌍

I had such an amazing time with the Outdoor Afro Charlotte network during our Uptown Urban Hike event on Saturday 9/19. We wore our masks and socially distanced but that did not stop the flow of [#blackjoy](#) and [#blacklove](#) between us as we meandered throughout the Queen City visiting historic black sites and landmarks.

An extra special treat was meeting Kevin Douglas of [#thebrooklyncollective](#) who gave us a tour of the beautiful 100 year old Grace AME Church built by William W. Smith <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000291>

Grace AME is one of two remaining buildings of the historic Brooklyn which in it's heyday was a thriving black business center and neighborhood established at the turn of the 20th century.

Thank you so much to everyone who came [#outdoorafro](#)

The Brooklyn neighborhood served as the center of Charlotte's African American community from the 1800s until it was razed as part of the urban renewal programs of the 1960s and 1970s. Located in this area of Charlotte, it was home to many families, businesses, schools and churches.

The photographic images within these mosaics serve as reminders of a once thriving community.

These mosaics were created by Metro School students and were made possible through funding from the Allen Tate Company and ArtsTeach.





A photograph showing several hands of different skin tones (light, medium, and dark brown) reaching towards the center of the frame. The hands are arranged in a circular pattern, with fingers slightly curled as if about to clasp or support each other. The background is a plain, light color. The word "Partnership" is centered over the image in a black, sans-serif font.

Partnership

**Through partnerships we create opportunities and programs that bring our communities together to realize we are connected to nature and each other.**

- Provide opportunities for institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and other stakeholders to build relationships with one another to discover common values and shared priorities.
- Cultivate innovative and targeted messaging around connections and relationships between people and natural spaces by working with Black-led organizations. Doing so advances inclusivity and builds new narratives that are more representative about how people can engage and connect with outdoor spaces.
- Provide community members with the tools and resources necessary to organize and collectively work together to move forward community projects and initiatives, including opportunities to convene and support collaboration among communities and Black-led organizations across the public and private sector.

# Partnership In Action

## Carolina Thread Trail and Outdoor Afro



**Cheryl Baker**

January 21, 2019 · 🌐



Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve -Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

This past Sunday, Outdoor Afro-Charlotte partnered with the Carolina Thread Trail for our MLK Day of Service.

We served our community by picking up debris along the bank of Stewart Creek and around Seversville park. The creek and park are part of the Irwin-Stewart Creek Greenway in Historic West End, home to some of Charlotte's oldest African American neighborhoods.

Thank you to all who came out and volunteered, I truly appreciate it.

A special thanks to Vanessa and Emma Rose of [Carolina Thread Trail](#) for organizing this event. We left feeling connect to each other and the Stewart creek area













Cheryl Baker

August 27 · 🐾



I love spending time with my Outdoor Afro Charlotte family. Last Saturday 15 of us paddle the Catawba River. It was a beautiful day on the water.

We partnered with Raul and Sharon of the Carolina Thread Trail and Riverside Marina Paddle and Row for providing kayaking equipment.

Thanks to everyone who came out.

[#outdoorafro](#)



# Charlotte Mecklenburg Parks and Recreation

## Birding, Mothing and Archery



**Cheryl Baker**

Admin

· October 3, 2020 · 🌳



It was a lovely morning at Clarks Creek Nature Preserve with the Outdoor Afro-Charlotte bird nerds 🥰 Matthew Morgan did a fantastic job introducing us to the world of birding. He instructed us in setting up our binoculars, informed us about the Merlin app and field guides. Then we started out listening and looking for birds. I remember the Redbellied woodpecker male and female, but Matthew said we saw about 20 different bird species today.

Super big thanks Matthew for sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm with us.

Thanks to everyone who came out today. We'll do this event again.

[#outdoorafro](#)



## All Voices Matter

NC State's College of Natural Resources, researchers firmly believe that the outdoors can become more inclusive once the narrative changes, from emphasizing achievements of people of color in outdoor recreation to having more diverse leadership in outdoor recreation agencies, organizations and advisory boards.

Participation to serve as a board member of organizations who promote outdoor recreation policies on access, stewardship and conservation.

# Outdoor Afro Policy

## Policy Priorities

Outdoor Afro supports and promotes environmental, educational, and health policies that:

1

**Connect Black  
People to Nature**

2

**Amplify Contributions of  
Black People in Nature**

3

**Protect and Enhance Our  
Lands, Wildlife, and  
Waterways**

### Federal Level

Executive Order (EO) on  
Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home  
and Abroad

EO On Advancing Racial Equity and  
Support for Underserved Communities  
Through the Federal Government

Land and Water Conservation Fund



# LET'S CONNECT



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# How to Connect with Outdoor Afro

Charlotte Network Volunteer Leaders

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Donate: <https://outdoorafro.com/giving-donate/>

