



# Green Space and Climate Change: Findings from the Rhode Island Voices Panel

## Summary

Survey results reveal substantial geographic inequities in access to green spaces and perceptions of environmental conditions across Rhode Island. Only one-third of respondents perceived the greenery in their neighborhood as very plentiful, with pronounced differences between Core Cities and Non-Core areas. While about half of respondents feel they can easily access natural environments and feel safe in public parks, fewer than 40% believe Rhode Island parks are well cared for. Residents most often called for better access to walking paths, trails, and parks, improved park facilities, and stronger ecosystem protection. Many also recognize climate change impacts, such as increased drought, infrastructure damage, and rising food costs, and report strong emotional responses, including frustration, sadness, and anxiety. Despite these concerns, most Rhode Islanders report taking action to help the environment, with high participation in using reusable bags, recycling, conserving water and energy, and avoiding harmful products, with similar levels of participation across age groups and geographic locations.

## Key Findings

- Overall, only one-third of respondents (34%) perceived the greenery in their neighborhood as very plentiful, with large disparities by geographical location (17% in Core Cities vs. 41% in Non-Core areas).
- Half of all respondents felt that they had easy access to natural environments and felt safe visiting public parks in their community while less than 40% felt that the public parks were well-cared for. Again, there were large disparities by geographical location:
  - Easy access to natural environments (22% Core Cities vs. 62% Non-Core areas)
  - Feel safe visiting public parks (26% Core Cities vs. 54% Non-Core areas)
  - Public parks well-cared for (19% Core Cities vs. 44% Non-Core areas)
- The top three recommendations to create more opportunities to be exposed to green spaces were:
  - Improving access to walking paths, trails, and parks for all users (38%)
  - Expanding and/or improving facilities in parks such as campgrounds, picnic areas, and public bathrooms (35%)
  - Protecting ecosystems (26%)
- More than one-quarter of respondents thought that climate change is affecting Rhode Island through increased drought and lack of rain (26%), breakdown of roads, bridges, and other infrastructure (27%), and higher food costs (25%). These impacts were more frequently endorsed by older respondents compared with younger respondents and by those living in Non-Core Areas with Core cities.

- The most frequently reported emotions in response to news and information about climate change were frustration with the extent of political disagreement (63%), sadness about what is happening to the Earth (59%) and anxiety about the future (54%).
- The most common actions that respondents reported having taken in the past 12 months and/or being willing to take in the next 12 months to save energy or help the environment included:
  - using reusable shopping bags at the grocery store (93%)
  - voluntarily recycling (87%)
  - avoiding products that harm the environment (77%)
  - trying to use less water in the household (73%)
  - reducing household energy use or using alternative energy sources (65%).

Engagement in these actions was similar by age and geographical location.

## Methods

Members of the *Rhode Island Voices* panel were invited to participate in a survey on green space and climate change in Rhode Island on a rolling basis starting August 4, 2025, and ending October 8, 2025. A total of 725 of 1017 panel members completed the survey (71.3% response rate).

The analytic sample of 725 respondents was weighted to align with the demographic distribution of the Rhode Island population using iterative proportional fitting (raking) based on age, gender, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and geographical location, using Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs), with benchmarks derived from the 2019-2023 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year estimates.

In the appendix, we provide basic frequency tabulations: overall, by age (<50 vs. 50+) and geographical location (residence in a core city vs. non-core area). Core cities are those which have the most children living below the federal poverty level (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket). All survey estimates are weighted to be representative of Rhode Island residents aged 18 and older. Additionally, open-ended questions were coded, and we provide the unweighted frequencies for each identified theme.

## Suggested citation:

Rogers, Michelle L. and Melissa A. Clark. Green Space and Climate Change: Findings from the Rhode Island Voices Panel. Providence, RI: Survey, Qualitative, and Applied Data Research Core, Brown University School of Public Health and Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, 2026. <https://rilifeindex.org/rivoices>.

## APPENDIX

### Survey Frequencies Overall, by Age and by Geographical Location

Note: All numbers are percentages unless otherwise noted.

How would you describe the greenery such as trees, grass, and gardens in your community?	Age			Geographical Location	
	Total (N=725)	<50 (N=346)	50+ (N=379)	Core City (N=261)	Non-Core Area (N=464)
Very plentiful	33.9	25.5	42.9	16.5	40.9
Somewhat plentiful	49.2	53.2	44.9	49.2	49.2
Not very plentiful	14.8	18.3	11.1	29.0	9.1
Not plentiful at all	2.1	3.0	1.1	5.3	0.8

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: I have easy access to natural environments such as public parks, gardens, trails, ponds, rivers, or seashores.	Age			Geographical Location	
	Total (N=725)	<50 (N=346)	50+ (N=379)	Core City (N=261)	Non-Core Area (N=464)
Strongly agree	50.4	36.1	65.7	22.1	61.7
Somewhat agree	41.7	53.3	29.4	63.9	32.8
Somewhat disagree	6.0	8.2	3.7	9.1	4.8
Strongly disagree	1.9	2.4	1.2	4.9	0.6

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Public parks are well-cared for in my community.	Age			Geographical Location	
	Total (N=711)	<50 (N=343)	50+ (N=368)	Core City (N=261)	Non-Core Area (N=464)
Strongly agree	36.9	31.3	42.9	19.0	44.1
Somewhat agree	42.9	45.9	39.6	45.3	41.9
Somewhat disagree	12.7	15.3	10.0	20.9	9.4
Strongly disagree	5.1	5.3	4.9	10.5	2.9
No public parks in my community	2.4	^	2.6	^	1.7

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: Public parks are well-cared for in my community.	Age			Geographical Location	
	Total (N=696)	<50 (N=346)	50+ (N=379)	Core City (N=261)	Non-Core Area (N=464)
Strongly agree	46.0	44.1	48.2	25.8	54.2
Somewhat agree	38.1	37.3	39.1	40.4	37.2
Somewhat disagree	8.4	9.1	7.5	17.2	4.8
Strongly disagree	5.0	7.2	2.5	12.3	2.0
No public parks in my community	2.5	^	2.7	^	1.8

## Age

## Geographical Location

If you were to provide recommendations to officials in Rhode Island to create more opportunities to be exposed to green spaces, what would you recommend?

	Total (N=724)	<50 (N=346)	50+ (N=378)	Core City (N=261)	Non-Core Area (N=463)
Improve access to walking paths, trails, and parks for all users, including those with wheelchairs and strollers	38.0	35.0	41.1	35.5	38.9
Expand and/or improve local parks	23.4	25.6	21.0	39.0	17.1
Expand and/or improve facilities in parks such as campgrounds, picnic areas, and public bathrooms	35.3	40.4	30.0	33.7	36.0
Hold more events related to nature	11.0	13.6	8.2	16.4	8.8
Increase trees and plants near my home	10.2	13.1	7.1	15.2	8.1
Preserve wilderness in rural areas by designating parks	21.1	16.3	26.3	13.0	24.4
Protect ecosystems	25.9	24.0	28.0	17.0	29.5
Protect wildlife	17.2	14.4	20.2	11.5	19.5
Other (describe)	6.4	9.3	3.3	6.4	6.4
None of the above	1.1	0.7	^	^	1.4
Address trash/garbage collection*	1.6	2.3	0.9	4.8	^
Avoid building on green spaces*	0.8	^	1.2	^	0.8
More access to beaches*	0.4	^	^	^	^
Add or fix sidewalks*	^	^	^	^	^
Address safety*	^	^	^	^	^
Expand bike paths*	^	^	^	^	^
Have more dog-friendly spaces*	^	^	^	^	^
Have public transportation to green spaces*	^	^	^	^	^

Respondents were instructed to mark their top two recommendations.

^: Less than 5 responses

\*: Coded from "Other" responses. Additional recommendations from 2-4 respondents included: More access to beaches, Add or fix sidewalks, Address safety, Expand bike paths, Have more dog-friendly spaces, and Have public transportation to green spaces.

Do you think climate change is affecting the following things in Rhode Island: (% responding Yes)	Age			Geographical Location	
	Total (N=719)	<50 (N=343)	50+ (N=376)	Core City (N=259)	Non-Core Area (N=460)
Problems with human health	22.3	16.5	28.4	17.9	24.0
More floodings	22.5	20.0	25.1	24.0	21.8
More air pollution	18.6	10.4	27.4	16.4	19.5
More heat waves	15.7	8.1	23.7	12.4	17.0
More droughts and lack of rain	26.4	22.0	31.0	20.6	28.7
Rising sea levels and coastal erosion	20.8	17.7	24.1	20.5	20.9
Breakdown of roads, bridges, and other infrastructure	26.9	19.0	35.3	22.5	29.6
Higher utility costs	21.5	14.9	28.7	19.2	22.5
Higher food costs	25.3	17.5	33.6	16.6	28.7

^: Less than 5 responses

Thinking about news and information on climate change you've come across recently, did it make you feel:	Age			Geographical Location	
	Total (N=721)	<50 (N=346)	50+ (N=379)	Core City (N=261)	Non-Core Area (N=464)
Motivated to do more to address climate change	27.8	29.4	26.1	26.5	28.3
Annoyed that there is so much attention on this issue	7.5	5.0	10.1	5.6	8.2
Confused about all the information out there	23.4	25.0	21.7	30.0	20.8
Sad about what is happening to the Earth	58.9	66.1	51.1	64.5	56.5
Anxious about the future	53.7	62.6	44.1	54.9	53.1
Optimistic we can address climate change	20.4	23.2	17.5	20.3	20.5
Suspicious of the groups and people pushing for action on this issue	19.0	12.9	25.5	11.5	21.9
Frustrated that there's so much political disagreement	62.8	57.3	68.8	53.6	66.5
Some other feeling (describe)	1.9	^	2.9	1.2	2.2
None of the above	1.4	^	1.6	^	1.5
Angry*	0.9	^	0.9	^	1.0
Concerned/sad/disappointed in denialism and/or lack of action*	1.4	^	2.7	^	1.9
Frustrated*	1.0	^	1.0	^	1.2
Anger at federal government specifically*	0.6	^	1.3	^	0.8
Hopeless/paralyzed/powerless*	1.1	1.9	^	3.8	^

^: Less than 5 responses

\*: Coded from "Other" responses

NOTE: Respondents were instructed to select all that apply, although the "None of the above" response option was mutually exclusive. Three additional issues were coded from the "other" response option and included in this list. Worried was another feeling indicated by 2-4 respondents in the "other" response option.

**Total (N=720)**

Most people are willing to do some things but not other things to save energy or help the environment. Which of the following have you done in the past 12 months? Which of the following would you be willing to do in the next 12 months to save energy or help the environment?	Have done in past 12 months	Willing to do in next 12 months	Neither
Voluntarily recycle	79.6	7.0	13.4
Compost organic waste	25.6	25.5	48.9
Use reusable shopping bags at the grocery store instead of plastic or paper bags	83.5	9.4	7.1
Avoid using certain products that harm the environment	55.6	21.4	23.0
Try to use less water in your household	49.6	23.7	26.7
Reduce your household's use of energy or use other sources of energy use such as solar or wind	39.4	25.4	35.2
Walk, bike, or carpool, or take public transportation instead of driving	39.4	13.5	47.1
Eat less meat	34.5	14.5	51.0
Buy an electric/hybrid car	7.1	9.6	83.3
Other (describe)	7.1	6.5	86.4
None of the above	1.3	9.5	89.2

NOTE: Respondents were first asked to indicate items they have done in the past 12 months. They were then asked which of the items not selected they would be willing to do in the next 12 months. Other activities respondents have done in the past 12 months included: Buy less, secondhand, or reuse (n=9), Reduce use of plastic (n=5), Garden/farm (<5), Buy local (<5), Don't have children (<5), and Don't eat meat (<5). Other activities respondents would be willing to do in the next 12 months included: Doing everything I can afford to (n=21); Do same as currently doing (n=10); Garden (n=8); and Reduce use of plastic (<5).

Most people are willing to do some things but not other things to save energy or help the environment. Which of the following have you done in the past 12 months? Which of the following would you be willing to do in the next 12 months to save energy or help the environment?

	Have done in past 12 months	Willing to do in next 12 months	Neither	Have done in past 12 months	Willing to do in next 12 months	Neither
Voluntarily recycle	71.9	9.9	18.1	87.8	3.9	8.3
Compost organic waste	24.1	27.2	48.8	27.3	23.7	49.1
Use reusable shopping bags at the grocery store instead of plastic or paper bags	81.3	11.3	7.5	85.9	7.4	6.7
Avoid using certain products that harm the environment	58.8	19.8	21.4	52.1	23.1	24.8
Try to use less water in your household	45.9	27.8	26.3	53.5	19.2	27.2
Reduce your household's use of energy or use other sources of energy use such as solar or wind	39.3	30.9	29.8	39.6	19.4	41.0
Walk, bike, or carpool, or take public transportation instead of driving	50.8	13.0	36.3	27.3	14.0	58.7
Eat less meat	34.1	17.4	48.5	35.0	11.3	53.6
Buy an electric/hybrid car	4.4	10.5	85.1	9.9	8.8	81.3
Other (describe)	6.7	5.8	87.5	7.6	7.2	85.2
None of the above	^	7.0	92.1	^	12.3	86.1

^: Less than 5 responses

NOTE: Respondents were first asked to indicate items they have done in the past 12 months. They were then asked which of the items not selected they would be willing to do in the next 12 months.

## Core City (N=260)

## Non-Core Area (N=460)

Most people are willing to do some things but not other things to save energy or help the environment. Which of the following have you done in the past 12 months? Which of the following would you be willing to do in the next 12 months to save energy or help the environment?

	Have done in past 12 months	Willing to do in next 12 months	Neither	Have done in past 12 months	Willing to do in next 12 months	Neither
Voluntarily recycle	67.1	15.0	17.9	84.6	3.8	11.6
Compost organic waste	18.1	25.9	56.0	28.7	25.3	46.1
Use reusable shopping bags at the grocery store instead of plastic or paper bags	80.0	11.0	8.9	84.9	8.7	6.4
Avoid using certain products that harm the environment	53.5	16.4	30.0	56.4	23.4	20.2
Try to use less water in your household	47.9	23.2	28.9	50.2	23.9	25.8
Reduce your household's use of energy or use other sources of energy use such as solar or wind	46.7	21.8	31.5	36.5	26.8	36.7
Walk, bike, or carpool, or take public transportation instead of driving	56.9	12.1	31.0	32.3	14.0	53.6
Eat less meat	41.4	17.7	40.9	31.8	13.2	55.0
Buy an electric/hybrid car	4.8	7.7	87.5	8.0	10.4	81.6
Other (describe)	4.6	6.2	89.2	8.1	6.6	85.3
None of the above	^	10.7	88.9	1.6	9.1	89.3

^: Less than 5 responses

NOTE: Respondents were first asked to indicate items they have done in the past 12 months. They were then asked which of the items not selected they would be willing to do in the next 12 months.

What additional comments do you have about green space or the effects of climate change in RI?

<b>Coded responses include:</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Desire for more and more equitable locations for green space/trees	66
Negative about lack of action to address climate issues and/or lack of green space	40
Need more respect for green spaces (e.g., trash, lack of upkeep, noise)	23
Concerns about cuts to/changes to/lack of public transportation	22
Positive about actions that have been taken	16
Concern about coastline, ocean	15
Concerns about associated costs of greener energy/energy conservation	14
Concern about removal of green space/trees due to development	14
Climate denial	10
Need to fix infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, parks)	7
Need corporations/companies to take more responsibility	7
Pessimism about what can be done	<5
Make recycling available in apartments/condominiums/shared housing	<5
Concern about number and/or where solar panels are placed	<5