



9 easy ways to spend more time OUTDOORS in 2019



By Ashley M. Long

If you've pledged to focus on your health in the new year, exercising your mind and body in the great outdoors is a great way to meet your goal!

Research shows that participating in nature-based recreational activities, such as birdwatching, photography, hiking, gardening, hunting and fishing, can provide both preventative and therapeutic health benefits. Some examples of these benefits include reduced blood pressure and better respiratory health, decreased stress and anxiety, and improved

mental well-being. People who spend time engaged in outdoor activities also report having a more positive outlook on life and a greater sense of happiness than those who spend a majority of their time indoors.

Nicknamed the Sportsman's Paradise and home to abundant and diverse wildlife, the state of Louisiana provides ample opportunities to enjoy nature across a variety of ecologically and economically important habitats. Here are nine easy ways you can improve your physical, cognitive and emotional well-being by spending more time outdoors during the first few months of the new year:

1

Repurpose your Christmas tree for wildlife. You could relocate your tree outside and decorate it with edible ornaments, such as pine cones smeared with peanut butter and suet, strings of popcorn and cranberries, or slices of apples and oranges. Or add your tree to a brush pile along the edge of your woodland or grassland to provide smaller wildlife with cover. Also, you can sink your tree in water to create new habitat for fish and aquatic invertebrates. If you decide to try the third option, be sure to use cement or concrete as a weight — a wood anchor will float — and put your tree in a location where it will be submerged year-round.



2

Practice your aim at a local Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries wildlife management area (WMA). Several of our state facilities have skeet, trap, archery, pistol and rifle ranges with manual and electric throwers, bag targets set at various distances and 3D targets. Be aware that you must have a self-clearing permit for all activities on WMAs, including the use of any shooting ranges, unless otherwise specified. Locations, range rules and safety zone maps can be found on the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) website at <http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/hunting/shooting-ranges>, and users can download LDWF's new self-clearing permit app for Android and Apple platforms at www.wlf.louisiana.gov/apps to facilitate easy access of all WMAs.



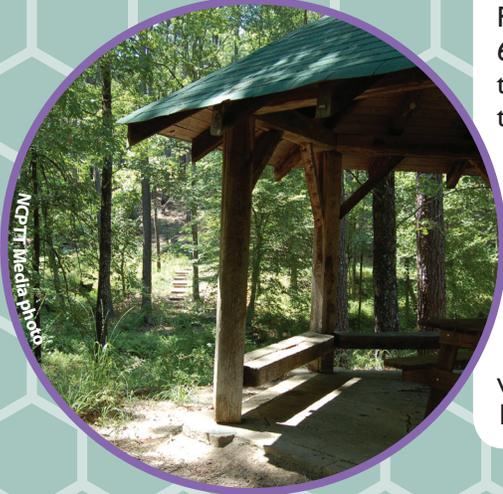
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Participate in the National Audubon Society's Great Backyard Bird Count. During this four-day event, from Feb. 15 through Feb. 18, join thousands of amateur and expert birdwatchers as they count birds and report their observations online. The Great Backyard Bird Count is free and requires as little as 15 minutes of participation at your location of choice. Learn more at <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>.



4

Take a hike in the Kisatchie National Forest. Our state's national forest includes 604,000 acres of public land, miles of multiuse trails and several historic landmarks, including the Fullerton Lake Recreation Complex and Camp Claiborne. Be sure to take along your tree and wildflower guides or download an app for your mobile device to help you identify the beautiful native plants that are found throughout the forest. You can find more information at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/kisatchie>, or you can visit the LSU AgCenter website at <https://www.lsuagcenter.com/> for a list of nature guides to download.



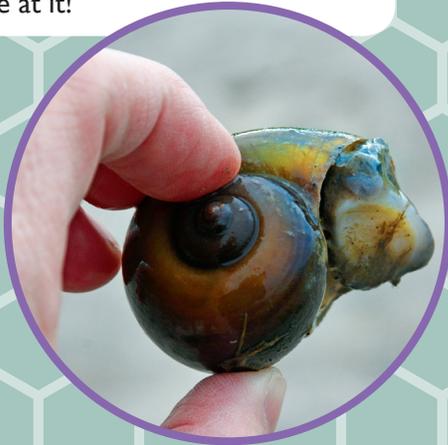
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Grab your fishing pole and head out to your favorite spot. If you are hauling a boat, be sure to check your trailer for rust and weak spots and make sure that your wheels, lights and hitch are working properly. You can find more information on boat trailer maintenance on the LSU AgCenter website by searching for publication No. 2557.



6

Learn how to identify and control for invasive species in the state and then manage for these species on your own property or assist with local efforts. Louisiana is home to a plethora of non-native plants and animals that cause substantial ecological and economic damage to our natural resources each year. Examples include feral pigs, water hyacinth, nutria, cogon grass, Chinese tallow trees and apple snails. Any contribution to removal helps, and regardless of which species you focus on, you will be sure to get plenty of exercise while you're at it!



7

Step out at night to do a little stargazing. If you'd like a guided tour of our night sky, many of our state's universities have observatories with public events, or you can contact your local astronomical society for their monthly viewing schedule. If you prefer to look for stars and planets on your own and you have internet access, check out an interactive night sky map, which will tell you what is visible in the night sky at your location and help you track its movements across the sky. No internet? No problem. Grab a book from your local library and enjoy!



8

Start planning for your warm-season food plots. While most warm-season plantings for deer occur between April and June, early spring is a great time to get a head start examining the natural conditions of your habitat, identifying a good location for your plot, testing and prepping your soil, and deciding which species to plant. While you are out on the land, be sure to record your wildlife observations so that you can identify and track any changes that occur in response to your plantings over time.



9 Practice your photography skills while you are doing any of these activities and share your photos on the LSU Forestry and Wildlife Extension Facebook page. We'd love to see snapshots of your outdoor adventures!



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Pub. 3665 (online only) 1/19

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