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**SINGLE-USE PLASTIC ITEMS MAKE UP THE MAJORITY OF WASTE FOUND ACROSS
U.S. NATIONAL PARKS FOR THE SECOND YEAR**
*Results from Plastic-Free Parks TrashBlitz Underscore Urgent Need to Address
Single-Use Plastic in National Parks*

SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA (January 31, 2024) — The 5 Gyres Institute published findings from Plastic-Free Parks TrashBlitz, an annual community science project that tracks waste trends in U.S. national parks. According to data submitted by volunteers, plastic is the most prevalent material polluting national parks and federal lands for the second year in a row.

Single-use plastic items made up the bulk of waste found, with food wrappers, cigarette butts, wipes, bottles and bottle caps, film, and bags included in the top 10 identifiable items. Notably, plastic fragments made up 25% of the entire study, exhibiting plastics' tendency to break up into smaller and smaller pieces once in the environment.

The top brands identified primarily represent tobacco and food & beverage companies, including Marlboro, Camel, Gatorade, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Starbucks, and Budweiser. For the first time, this year's report also tracked brands to their respective parent corporations, finding Philip Morris International as the top corporate polluter in the study.

Project partners mobilized volunteers across the country to participate at national parks and federal lands like urban parks, forests, and monuments managed by the National Park Service. From April through November, hundreds of volunteers participated in 199 data collection and clean-up hauls across the country, inputting more than 8,000 pieces of trash into the TrashBlitz research platform. TrashBlitz volunteers also sampled data at Yosemite Facelift, an annual cleanup event in Yosemite National Park during which 1,476 volunteers collected 10,432 pounds of trash.

The data from Plastic-Free Parks TrashBlitz underscores an urgent need to address single-use plastic in national parks. In addition to passing legislation like the *Reducing Waste in National Parks Act*¹, which would ban several of the top items found, parks can take steps like increasing access to refill stations and implementing reusable foodware for on-site dining.

The report also recommends expanding TrashBlitz audits across the National Parks Service next year to better track trends. This year's audit had plastic making up 66% of material recorded, compared to last year's 81%², but with limited data, it's unclear if this represents a trend across all parks. Notably, many park units have taken steps to reduce single-use plastic in the past year, like Yosemite Hospitality's removal of single-use plastic bottles³.

The full report from Plastic-Free Parks TrashBlitz can be found at 5gyres.org/PlasticFreeParks.

Nonprofit and brand partners supporting Plastic-Free Parks TrashBlitz include 5 Gyres, Accenture, Active San Gabriel Valley, Adventure Scientists, Azulita Project, Bee's Wrap, Break Free From Plastic, BYOBottle, Center for Environmental Health, ChicoBag & To-Go Ware, Culture of Cleanliness, Epson America, Inc., Grove Collaborative, Habits of Waste, Heal the Bay, Heirs To Our Ocean, Inland Ocean Coalition, Klean Kanteen, Last Plastic Straw, LIDSOFF.org, Liquid Death, Mission:Clean Beaches, Moore Institute, No Trace Trails, Oceana, Parks Project, Pepperdine University, Plaine Products, Plastic Free Future, Plastic Pollution Coalition, Preserve, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, Ray Brown's Talkin' Birds radio show, Save Our Shores, Sea Save Foundation, Shark Stewards, Student PIRGs, Sway, The Bay Foundation, The Last Beach Cleanup, Toad&Co, Upstream, and Yosemite Climbing Association.

Quotes from Partners:

“Our national parks and federal lands are the last bastion of preserved wilderness in our country. TrashBlitz data serves as a proverbial canary in the mine of plastic pollution and a barometer to ascertain a baseline understanding of waste trends in national parks. The trash data analyzed serves as an irrefutable reflection of how we urgently need to protect our communities, lands, and waterways from the threat of plastic pollution – which is inextricably linked to the climate crisis and impacts public health. We urgently need cross-sector leadership to support the Park Service in its work of phasing out single-use plastics in parks, policymakers

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5533>

² <https://5gyres.org/s/Plastic-Free-Parks-TrashBlitz-Report-2022.pdf>

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<https://www.aramark.com/newsroom/news/2023/december/-yosemite-hospitality-announces-significant-reduction-of-single-#>

to pass the *Reducing Waste in National Parks Act*, and preemptive corporate change to mitigate the onslaught of single-use plastic pollution.”

– Alison Waliszewski, Director of Programs and Policy, The 5 Gyres Institute

“Cleanup data is absolutely crucial and is a vital aspect of Surfrider's influential beach cleanup program. Through beach cleanups and similar events, not only are we cleaning up and connecting with our most beloved places while building community, we're also able to use the vast amount of data collected to advocate for the policy changes needed to eliminate single-use plastic pollution.”

– Miho Ligare, Plastic Pollution Policy Manager, Surfrider Foundation

“The TrashBlitz results are in: plastic is still polluting our national parks. Each year, millions of people visit treasured public lands for their natural beauty, history, and culture, and plastic mars that experience, fouling the landscape and harming wildlife. The National Parks Service must swiftly phase out single-use plastics in our parks and move to refill and reuse systems to keep these special places filled with nature instead of plastic.”

– Christy Leavitt, Plastics Campaign Director, Oceana

“The Yosemite Climbing Association has been hosting stewardship events for the past 20 years and in 2023, Yosemite Facelift became the first Zero-Waste Event in the park. We have collected and weighed over 1 million pounds of trash from Yosemite National Park, collecting data is essential for continuing our work and spreading awareness of stewardship and preservation of the land that we recreate on.”

– Karin Tarpinian, Events & Partnerships Senior Manager, Yosemite Climbing Association

“As a former river guide, current kayak and hiking enthusiast, and plastic pollution activist, I have witnessed firsthand the impacts that single-use plastics have on our environment and in our National Parks throughout the years. It has become increasingly clear that single-use plastics do not belong anywhere, but especially not in our natural places and spaces. The valuable data gathered from the Plastic-Free Parks Trash Blitz shows how important it is to support the U.S. Department of the Interior mandate in their efforts to phase out single-use plastics on all public lands including National Parks and urge policy makers to pass the [*Reducing Waste in National Parks Act*](#).”

– Jackie Nuñez, Founder of The Last Plastic Straw and Advocacy & Engagement Manager at Plastic Pollution Coalition

“This report underlines how pervasive plastic pollution is. Plastics are ubiquitous even in spaces dedicated to safeguarding unimpaired natural and cultural resources. 82% of Americans support

ending the sale and distribution of single-use plastics in national parks and lands. Empowering community scientists around the country to continue to track data is paramount, in parallel we must take bold action to support the Parks Service in preventing single-use plastics at the source and in advancing reuse and refill systems.”

– Tom Ford, Chief Executive Officer, The Bay Foundation

"As a climber and a scientist, I am excited to reveal the results of our extensive analysis of the trash in national parks and federal lands. This will allow us to better understand how to prevent trash from getting into the environment and teach us personally how to be better rock climber stewards and how we can respectfully recreate in these special landscapes.”

– Dr. Win Cowger, Research Director, Moore Institute of Plastic Research

“Adventure Scientists was founded on the idea that outdoor enthusiasts have the power to affect long term, positive change for the places they love. Over the last 12 years we have engaged volunteers to collect data from over 20,000 different locations across the world. We are thrilled to mobilize our passionate network of volunteers to participate in the Plastic-Free Parks initiative.”

– Alisa Futritski, Senior Manager, Volunteer Recruitment and Community Organizing, Adventure Scientists

“Death To Plastic.”

– Lance Blair, Senior Benefits & Employee Engagement Manager, Liquid Death

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About The 5 Gyres Institute

The 5 Gyres Institute (5 Gyres) is a leader in the global movement against plastic pollution with more than 10 years of expertise in scientific research, engagement, and education. With the original goal of answering a few key scientific questions about ocean plastics, co-founders Marcus Eriksen and Anna Cummins led 19 research expeditions in all five subtropical gyres, as well as many of the world’s lakes and rivers. 5 Gyres continues to lead with scientific research to drive upstream solutions through education, advocacy, and community building. Learn more at 5gyres.org and [@5gyres](https://twitter.com/5gyres).

About TrashBlitz

TrashBlitz is a data collection platform and community-focused research project created by The 5 Gyres Institute. The community-based project is designed to engage local stakeholders in measuring plastic pollution and other trash across various cities - from shorelines to riverbeds

to urban neighborhoods - and utilizing data to generate relevant action plans. TrashBlitz provides robust research protocols, a web-based platform that identifies problem products and brands, and a network to bring diverse stakeholders together to co-create solutions to stop plastic pollution at the source.