

ASSESSMENT #1: RESEARCH ESSAY

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BMOE5001: Discovering Outdoor Lifestyles

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Basic Acknowledgement format of AI tool use

I acknowledge the use of MyBib My first project – MyBib on March 11, 2026 to create my reference list.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of ChatGPT ChatGPT on March 1-11 for assistance in helping with my research paper.

I used the prompt(s):

1. “I need help finding peer reviewed articles which look at NBI and how they are actually effective”
2. “I need help finding articles that show the effects of strategic use of the outdoors for Psychological Wellbeing (positive affect, flourishing) and for Social & Connectedness Factors”
3. “Can u help me with my structure for my research essay on using NBIs over just recreational use the outdoors for mental health”

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) on March 1-11 2026 to check my work for punctuation, grammar, spelling mistakes and some sentence structure changes

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There is so much evolving evidence around the use of the outdoors and spending time in nature and how it positively contributes to mental health. Spending time outdoors as Lackey et al., (2019) highlights, plays a huge role in our lives and supports the idea that being in nature brings benefits. While recreational nature experiences, such as walks in a park or hiking offer general health benefits, Nature-Based Interventions (NBIs) provide a more structured and guided approach. These can include forest bathing, wilderness therapy, and gardening, which are backed up by evidence that will be discussed throughout this paper. With that being said, in this paper, I will go through multiple articles, critically examining evidence to identify if the strategic use of NBI is more or less effective than simply relying on people to recreationally connect with nature in terms of mental health benefits, while reflecting on my personal experience with the outdoors.

Throughout the articles read, the rise of interest in the idea of using NBIs for mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, was a common theme. Several studies showed that NBIs reduced anxiety and depression and that forest therapies and wilderness therapies conducted between four and eight weeks “reduced depressive mood, anxiety symptoms, negative affect, and enhanced positive affect” (Coventry et al., 2021). Within the same article written by Coventry et al., (2021), it was found that gardening that lasted for more than 12 weeks led to reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression and provided an overall positive effect in people with either long-term health problems or severe mental illness. In comparison to NBIs, people that used the outdoors recreationally and went on a “90-minute nature walk showed reductions in self-reported rumination” (Bratman, 2015). Furthermore, individuals who reported more than 120 minutes of exposure to nature had consistently higher levels of well-being compared to those with zero exposure (White et al., 2019). Similarly, Lackey et al., (2019) examined the effects of nature-based recreation on anxiety and stress, and the majority reported

reduced anxiety and stress levels after time spent in nature. However, people who struggle with depression may lack the motivation to do daily tasks, like simply getting out of bed, making it difficult to independently and willingly go outside. Structured nature-based interventions can provide the support that people may need to get outdoors and ensure they get the benefits to help with their mental health challenges through guided and structured sessions.

Many NBIs are done in group settings, which can promote social interaction and feelings of connectedness. Furthermore, there is the approach of social prescribing, which is the practice of supporting those with mental health issues engaging in nature-based interventions (University of Sheffield., 2024). Also, according to the University of Sheffield (2024) report on Green Social Prescribing, a total of 8339 people with mental health issues took part in nature-based interventions at seven different Green Social Prescribing Projects called Test and Learn across England. In the study, there was a broad range of people who attended, including children under the age of 18, an ethnic majority population, and people from socially and economically deprived areas. They noted that after taking part in the project, people's overall well-being had improved, with signs of their happiness rising and anxiety dropping, aligning them with the national average. Also, their levels of life satisfaction and overall feeling of joy improved significantly (University of Sheffield., 2024). The social and psychological benefits associated with being outdoors and connecting with the natural environment may also be explained through the Biophilia Hypothesis, which suggests that humans possess an inherent tendency to connect with nature (Rogers, 2026). Evidently, having a NBI structured opportunity to be outdoors can strengthen your connection to the wilderness and outdoors. In comparison, an article by Jennings and Bamkole (2019) shows that urban green spaces can encourage social interaction between people, which can help build social and community connections. Jennings and Bamkole (2019)

explain that these green spaces and the participation in recreational use can provide a place for people to meet, creating social interactions that can build social cohesion, and improve their overall sense of belonging. Lastly, recreational nature can help social connection, yet it is often done alone, where there is no structured interaction with others, meaning there is less consistent social support when compared to NBIs.

In this essay, both nature based interventions and recreational use of the outdoors were discussed, with articles pointing out the benefits of each. With that being said, NBIs are the better option overall for mental health. We see that nature based interventions are becoming more widely integrated and used within our healthcare systems, and for good reasons too. In an article written by Bloomfield, D. (2017), there is a program that is titled ‘A Dose of Nature’ that shows what a NBI looks like in a real-world application. It talks about a free program that was developed and used for patients who are referred from clinical settings into community-based outdoor groups, although some groups also included self-referred participants. Furthermore, eight different nature-based interventions were run in Bristol, Exeter, and locations throughout Cornwall, and all in the South-West of the UK from the Spring of 2015 to the Autumn of 2016. The interventions ran for 12 weeks, and involved small groups of participants (typically four to ten), and were 2–3 hours long. They used quantitative data and questionnaires before and after each intervention. These interventions were based in woodland areas, some in coastal zones, some in areas of countryside dominated by agriculture, and others in green spaces in and around urban settlements (Bloodfield, 2017). To allow variety, some groups focused on walking, or even silent meditative elements. Bloomfield (2017) noted multiple considerable improvements in mental well-being, in which patients have described improvements in mood and reductions in anxiety. After the 12 weeks of the interventions and the 64 patients referred, there were

numerous impacts, which resulted in 48 of these patients completing the full 10-12 week programme, a 69% increase in self-reported well-being, using the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (Bloomfield., 2017). Furthermore, Bloomfield (2017), stated there were two new self-organised support groups, as well as four patients who signed up for further training and/or volunteering activities.

Despite the benefits of NBIs, there are many barriers and limitations to conducting and participating in NBIs. These can be psychological, psychosocial and physical which reduce its accessibility to some individuals. It was noted that joining an NBI was a daunting experience, as meeting people was considered to be one of the greatest challenges of participating in NBIs (Burell et al., 2025). Following this, in the same article written by Burell et al., (2025), that people with mental health issues may lack motivation to attend such interventions. Meaning those with anxiety or depression may struggle when participating in these NBIs. In terms of a physical barrier, Jonasson et al., (2007), noted that mobility needs impacted their participation and perception when looking at gardening and the ability to conduct it over a long period of time. Furthermore, the use of recreational nature is often low-cost, and can be flexible, as it is done in your own time. However, there are still a lot of limitations that people face when it comes to going outside. Both NBIs and the use of recreational nature share certain limitations, such as socioeconomic status, location of where you live, your occupation, or having a disability. Poor proximity from an individual's home or their workplace is often noted as a key reason for not incorporating frequent visits to the outdoors in people's days (Boyd et al., 2018). Some places are inaccessible to people who have physical disabilities, perhaps don't own a car or live where they cannot access nature easily (Mental Health Foundation., 2021). Continuing, the Mental Health Foundation (2021) suggested that a lack of time, from spending too much time at work or

studying, as well as, a lack of company, with not having people with whom to spend time in nature with, were barriers for some people. In addition, “a lack of access to nature has crucial implications for physical and mental health” (Horton, 2026). Also, Horton, (2026), stated that recent studies show that living near natural green spaces reduces anxiety and depression by about 20%. This means that not everyone can access and easily benefit from recreational exposure.

From my personal experiences, I have only participated in nature based interventions in one way, and that is through some gardening with my mother. Through gardening, it not only taught me to appreciate and take care of something, but it brought more joy than I thought it would. It is peaceful in a sense where I am participating in an activity with my mother and connecting with nature. However, I much prefer engaging in recreational use of nature. This is because I am surrounded by nature and am able to feel free and away from everything that causes me stress and anxiety in life. Though my stress and anxiety is not clinically diagnosed, it can still affect my day to day life. Whether it is from the stress of juggling multiple jobs, taking five classes at a time, or dealing with my family of eight, stress and anxiety finds a way into my life. To cope with this, I use the outdoors to strategically help with my anxiety, with hiking being what brings me the most peace. Hiking is a nature based activity that I thoroughly enjoy whether it is in the summer or even in the winter. I find that my mood is always positive and high, and I feel more motivation while also finding a sense of joy in the accomplishment of doing something hard. Whether I am hiking alone or with others, it truly just makes me not worry about the to-do list sitting on my desk with a thousand things, allowing me to focus on the only goal of getting to the top of the mountain.

In conclusion, throughout this research paper, I discussed that spending time in nature plays a huge role within our lives, in particular looking at how spending time strategically in the outdoors can positively improve our mental health. When discussing nature based interventions, the evidence that I critically examined in my paper does show that NBIs are the better option for those struggling with mental health issues. Nature based interventions offer a more structured and guided approach to engage with the outdoors. These interventions can positively impact mental health issues such as depression, anxiety or the sense of belonging. On the other hand, the use of recreational nature can also bring positive benefits. Where this is not structured, there is still evidence that shows how the use of recreational nature can benefit your mental health. Looking into the limitations of both NBIs and recreational use of nature, a reoccurring theme that was highlighted was access to these in which shines the importance of considering these barriers. These can include your socioeconomic status, location of where you live, your occupation and transportation. Ultimately, in the end, using both nature base interventions and recreational use of the outdoors should be incorporated within everyone's daily life to overall maximize mental health benefits.

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