

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SPORTS & OUTDOOR INDUSTRY

## America Outdoors: Consumers Are Flocking to These 5 Activities

Consumers are looking for activities to help them stay occupied and healthy as COVID-19 necessitates social distancing. As a result, a number of outdoor categories have experienced explosive growth, our Retail Tracking Service data shows.

Typically, June is a critical selling month for the outdoor industry. In this article, we explore five outdoor activities consumers have flocked to and analyze how June 2020 dollar sales stacked up to last year.

### 1. Cycling

**Shortly after stay-at-home advisories were announced in the U.S., the cycling industry gained momentum from new cyclists.**

Many consumers sought family-based activities to keep everyone's health in check. Dollar sales of bicycles continued to accelerate in June 2020. Sales were up 63% compared to the same time last year. While cycling growth in the early months of the COVID-19 crisis was largely generated from sales of family-friendly bikes, June's growth came from higher-end bicycles typically purchased by enthusiasts, including road bikes and full suspension mountain bikes.

Sports industry analyst [Dirk Sorenson](#) attributes the shift toward higher-end bikes to inventory shortages in more family-friendly categories, as well as cyclists who are now more willing to invest in the activity for the long haul.

**+63%** - Dollar sales of bicycles increased 63% in June 2020 versus the same time last year.

**\$697M**- Bicycle sales reached \$697M in June 2020.

### 2. Paddle Sports

**The paddle sport category (kayaks, paddleboards, rafts, and canoes) faced declines prior to COVID-19.**

Additionally, as bulky, expensive products, traditional paddle sport products have historically presented a challenge to retailers from an inventory management standpoint. More recently, however, existing inventory quickly converted into sales, as consumers sought activities that would keep them active and socially distant. Sales of paddle sport products increased 56% in June 2020 versus the prior year.

Inflatable versions of kayaks and paddleboards gained popularity as consumers found they were easier to store and less expensive. In June 2017, inflatables represented 19% of paddleboard unit sales and 9% of recreational kayak unit sales. In June 2020, those figures stood at 66% and 26%, respectively.

The combined effect of inflatables increasing in popularity and heightened demand for outdoor activity has created a perfect storm that has both increased paddle sport sales and transformed the types of products that comprise the category. With higher turnover in the short term, many retailers will need to reset their inventories, monitoring industry trends to ensure they stock products that will be both popular and profitable in the future.

**+56%** - Dollar sales of paddle sports increased 56% in June 2020 versus the same time last year.

**\$172M** - Paddle sport sales reached \$172M in June 2020.

### **3. Golf - After several turbulent years, the golf equipment market enjoyed single digit growth in 2018 and 2019.**

As consumers looked for activities that could be done while social distancing, many in the golf industry hoped the sport would appeal to first-time golfers and younger enthusiasts looking to get outdoors, The Washington Post reported.

In June, golf equipment sales were up 51%. Sports Senior Industry Advisor Matt Powell attributed this to new players of the sport and pent-up demand upon golf course reopenings. If this momentum continues, it could be a strong opportunity for the industry to engage with new customer segments, he added.

**+51%** - Dollar sales of golf equipment increased 51% in June 2020 versus the same time last year.

**\$661M** - Golf equipment sales reached \$661M in June 2020.

#### **4. Camping**

**Backyard adventure is a driving force behind the camping industry's recent surge in performance.**

Sales increased 31% in June 2020 as consumers looking for a respite from home life pitched tents in their yards or at local destinations. As a broad swath of consumers sought out safe activities during the stay-at-home period, sales were less likely to be driven by those looking for epic moments and more likely to be driven by those seeking quality family time outdoors.

Recreational tents grew almost two times as fast as backpacking tents, which tend to be favored by serious adventurers. An emphasis on pinnacle consumers (those who are more experienced) can help brands and retailers establish their authenticity, but it will be increasingly critical for these companies to focus their messaging on appealing to beginners, as well. As a potential segment for outdoor equipment sales, these new campers with more basic needs are critical to generating growth both in the short term and the long run.

If camping continues to gain traction, the family recreation space can be a major boon to the industry, given that affordable and accessible activities may be increasingly coveted by a wide range of consumers as they seek value amidst economic tumult.

**+31%** - Dollar sales of camping equipment increased 31% in June 2020 versus the same time last year.

**\$605M** - Camping equipment sales reached \$605M in June 2020.

#### **5. Bird-watching and Nature Sightings**

**Consumers have been creative in the activities they've undertaken while in the crisis period.**

The New York Times recently published an article discussing the rise of bird-watching as consumers connected with nature while stuck at home. Unique bird species can be found even in large cities, which contributes to bird-watching's appeal to a wide range of consumers. To aid in their sightings, many purchased binoculars, which saw a 22% sales increase in June 2020.

Beyond bird-watching, binoculars have a wide range of uses, from stargazing to nature walks. This period may encourage those used to a more hectic lifestyle to slow down and pay attention to the natural beauty that has always surrounded them.

**+22%** - Dollar sales of binoculars increased 22% in June 2020 versus the same time last year.

**\$16M**- Binocular sales reached \$16M in June 2020.

#### **DATA-DRIVEN GROWTH**

*The NPD Group offers data, industry expertise, and prescriptive analytics to help you grow your business in a changing world. With offices in 30 cities across the Americas, Europe, and Asia-Pacific, we help you measure, predict, and improve performance across all channels.*