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Report Reveals Diverse Recreation Needs on National Forests

RIVERSIDE, Calif. December 8, 2008—Hispanics often do not visit undeveloped natural areas like national forests because of a lack of information about recreation opportunities, according to a recent Forest Service report.

The report also showed Hispanics think there are few on-site employees of their ethnicity, and few family and friends interested in recreating in these places. In addition, it suggested most Hispanics who do visit national forests do not often participate in multiple-day activities like camping.

Instead, Hispanics prefer developed day-use sites for activities such as picnicking. They also visit these sites in larger family groups than non-Hispanics, tend to stay longer on the day of their visit and prepare foods on site. This suggests day-use sites such as picnic areas with grouped tables and barbecue pits suited for large groups can better serve these visitors, according to the report.

“Hispanics are the largest and fastest-growing ethnic population in California and the nation,” said Deborah Chavez, a Forest Service social scientist at the Pacific Southwest Research Station and one of the report’s editors. “It’s important for recreation managers on national forests to learn their preferences.”

The report showed lack of recreation information as among the top five barriers to national forest visitation reported by Hispanics, as well as African-Americans and Asians. Ethnic media outlets might be an effective way to reach these audiences, according to researchers.

Chavez leads a team of social scientists that examines the recreation needs of increasingly diverse national forest visitors. Forest Service managers asked the team be formed in 1987, after they observed an increase in Hispanics visiting Southern California national forests and noticed different recreation preferences, such as lengthy day use visits.

The team’s focus since then has been applied research so managers can meet the needs of visitors to sites that were often developed for non-Hispanic users. In 2001, it completed a similar report that emphasized visitor use studies from 1989 to 1998.

The current report is entitled, “Recreation Visitor Research: Studies of Diversity.” It can be downloaded for free from the Pacific Southwest Research Station website:

<http://fs.fed.us/psw/publications/gtrs.shtml>

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