

VIII. Conclusions

The challenges of managing wildland-urban areas are particularly relevant in southern California where the forests are unique from most other National Forests because of their proximity to a large urban population. In addition to the large population adjacent to the forests, uniqueness is found in the ethnic and racial diversity of the region (Allen and Turner 1992). Much of California's future population growth is expected to occur as a result of international immigration and the higher fertility rates of newly arrived immigrants compared to those who have longer tenure in this country (Johnson 1999). Seventy-six percent of all immigrants entering the United States during the 1980s went to only six states, and California received four out of every ten immigrants (Fix and others 1994). California provides a virtual laboratory for studying the dynamic relationship between land management agencies and urban populations because of its rapid social change and cultural diversity.

Recent decades have shown an increasing shift in population away from the coastal counties/metropolitan areas of Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area towards the Central Valley and the Inland Empire (Fulton and others 2000, Southern California Association of Governments 1998). The environmental sensitivity of these areas compounds the complexity of managing for growth while protecting endangered species and their habitats (Fulton 1999). The mountains and foothills surrounding these populations are affected by natural disturbances (such as fire and flood), the spread of elements (such as air pollution), and human uses of the land (including draw of resources such as water, development, and recreation) (Stephenson and Calcarone 1999).

California is already unique from the rest of the nation in its demographic diversity, as well as being the most populous state in the nation (Baldassare 2000, Shingawa and Jang 1998). In 1990, California contained some of the largest shares of the nation's African American (along with New York), Asian Pacific American, Native American (second to Oklahoma) and Hispanic American populations (Shingawa and Jang 1998).

The projected increases in population, aging of most ethnic groups, and the projected ethnic and racial composition of the state's population suggest that the assessment area holds special interest from a resource planning perspective. As the nation's population increases and becomes more diverse, lessons from California can provide a helpful view of resource management concerns. For example, recreation use in the four southern California urban-proximate National Forests is described as a "window to the future" for the U.S. Forest Service (USDA Forest Service 2000).

Population projections tell us things about the public in general, which when coupled with recreation trends give us insight into potential impacts on natural resources into the future. Demographic changes will impact both the magnitude and characteristics of outdoor recreation use (Kelly and Warnick 1999, Murdock and others 1991). Rajan and others (1999) predict that recreational opportunities in California will be outpaced by demand in the years to come. With increased growth in the Hispanic and Asian populations, increased visitation by these groups to the National Forests in southern California is expected. There are not only differences in recreational patterns based on race/ethnicity, gender, income, education, and previous experience (Bowker and others 1999) but also differences

based on age (Dwyer 1994). People born at different times are exposed to different values, norms, behaviors, fads, and recreation opportunities (Dwyer 1994). The rising median age of all ethnic groups except Hispanics indicates that nonconsumptive wildlife activities such as photography, bird watching, picnicking, and hiking are expected to increase over the next 50 years, while consumptive wildlife activities such as hunting are projected to decline (Bowker and others 1999). Participation by Whites is expected to drop, but participation by other ethnic groups is expected to increase. The implication is that visitation to more remote wilderness-like sites may slow or even decrease due to variations in interest in remote wilderness activities by groups of color, but visitation to areas closer to urban centers is likely to increase (Ewert and others 1993). These changes will be best addressed through collaboration among providers of recreational opportunities (Rajan and others 1999).

Clearly the projections for southern California have implications for natural resources management beyond recreation-related concerns. As rising land costs make home ownership unaffordable for many young families and senior citizens, people may search for less expensive property on the urban boundary. This property is closer to wildland areas than ever before. Regions that were once remote ranching and farming communities have become a magnet for retirees and others who have sought refuge and beauty on the edge of the wilderness (Murphy 2000). This emerging settlement pattern creates conflict when fire officials have to focus resources on protecting rural residential developments, leaving most other fires to burn (Murphy 2000). Other environmental consequences of home construction on the edge of forest areas are increased amounts of air and water pollution, and a heavier burden placed on roads, sewer systems, and telecommunications. This encroachment upon the wildland-urban interface zone, paired with increased impacts from the population at large, represent challenges to planners concerned with regional, county, city, and natural resource-based issues.

This socioeconomic assessment highlights the changing nature of the population and the need for land management agencies to involve emerging constituencies. Growth in communities of color will make it increasingly important for Federal land managers to solicit public involvement from ethnic groups (Baas 1993). One strategy is to identify community leaders and engage them in open communication on a long-term basis. Identifying and using informal networks of communication is necessary for increasing public involvement of underrepresented groups. In other words, the focus should be shifted from an emphasis on specific programs that require public participation to the development of a management culture that solicits participation consistently over time (Healey 1998).

At a regional level, the currently loose connection between various regional, county, city, and land management agencies is striking (Fulton and others 2000, U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment 1992). The region represented in the socioeconomic assessment for southern California is the most populous region of the State. Additionally, that region contains the State's greatest share of diversity, as well as that of the nation. The dramatic increases in population projected for this region, along with the increased ethnic and racial diversity and changing age structures, represent impending shifts in demands, values, and expectations. All of this will occur within the constraints represented by finite resources, including public lands and resources. The recommended collaboration among recreation service providers (Rajan and others 1999) represents only a selected area of concern within the larger need for collaboration among planning and management forces in the region. A vision for the future should include a connective link between these agencies, in order to allow more integrated planning.

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