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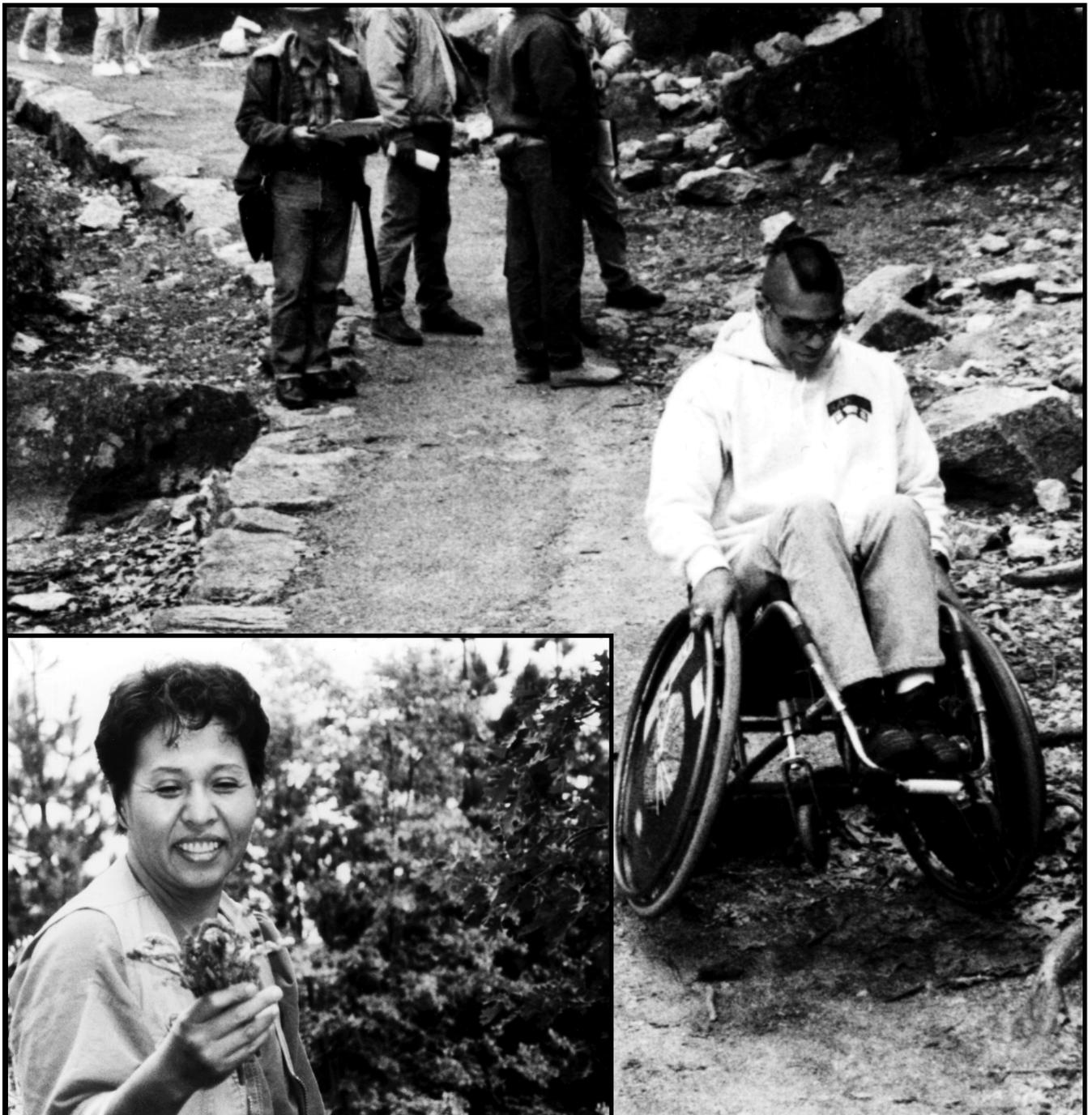
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Cultural Diversity of Los Angeles County Residents Using Undeveloped Natural Areas

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Abstract

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A model of ethnic participation at undeveloped natural areas was developed and tested. The proposed model included the constructs of socio-economic status, perceived discrimination, assimilation, and ethnicity. Undeveloped natural areas were defined as being located outside of cities and primarily natural in composition. A telephone survey of a stratified random sample of Los Angeles County residents resulted in 894 interviews. The results demonstrate the multi-dimensional and complex nature of outdoor recreation participation. Despite close proximity and low entrance fees compared to commercial recreation facilities, the majority of residents did not spend even a half day at a National Forest or Park, or other undeveloped natural areas. These data suggest that public wildland agencies must be proactive by creating new programs and expanding existing intervention projects, or they risk not being able to show that publicly funded natural resources are used by most Americans.

Retrieval Terms: barrier, ethnicity, motivation, parks, recreation, tourism

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In Brief

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The overall purpose of the study was to determine differences in barriers and motivations to actual recreational use of undeveloped natural areas, such as National Forests, by ethnically diverse urban residents. Information for the study came from a telephone survey of a stratified quota sample of Los Angeles County residents in which data were gathered from both *users* and *non-users* of undeveloped natural areas. A total of 894 interviews were completed. Data were collected from four broad ethnic groups: 20.0 percent African-American respondents, including U.S. (97.8 percent) and non-U.S. (2.2 percent) citizens; 16.2 percent Asian respondents, including Asian and Asian-Americans (U.S.=31.0 percent, non-U.S.=69.0 percent); 30.9 percent Latino respondents of Latin descent, including U.S. (47.4 percent) and non-U.S. (52.6 percent) citizens; and 30.5 percent white respondents, including Europeans and European-Americans (U.S.=89.7 percent, non-U.S.=10.3 percent). Respondents tended to be young—49.0 percent were 18-34 years old; moderately educated—62.1 percent had at least some college or more; and of low to moderate income—64.9 percent were from households earning less than \$50,000. More than 52 percent of Latino respondents and 69 percent of Asian respondents were not born in the U.S.

About 1 in 3 survey respondents *did not take any leisure trip* between May 1 and August 31, 1994, suggesting a significant number of residents had substantial barriers to travel. About 4 out of 10 residents of Los Angeles County took a trip in which they *visited an undeveloped natural area*. Another 1 in 3 respondents took a leisure trip but *did not visit an undeveloped natural area*. This means that less than half of Los Angeles County residents visited a National Forest, State park, or open space preserve outside of a city during the height of the travel season for even 1-hour excursions.

When using unadjusted survey data, visitation to wildland areas varied significantly by ethnic group, with 44 percent of white respondents visiting natural areas during the study period, 34 percent of Asian respondents, 27 percent of Latino respondents, and 21 percent of African-American respondents. This natural area visitation pattern was found, through further analysis, to be influenced by significant differences in household income, education level, and other factors.

By using unadjusted data, several sub-groups were identified within Los Angeles County that were significantly less likely to visit undeveloped natural areas (less than 25 percent visited). These subgroups might warrant special efforts or programs by wildland management agencies to encourage participation: African-Americans in general, but especially females and those with lower education level; younger Latinos and those who are not U.S. citizens and have lower income and education levels; and Asians with low income. Subgroups with the highest levels of visitation to undeveloped natural areas (more than 45 percent visited) were white in general, especially young adults, males, and those with high income levels; Asian citizens in general and those with high income; and Latinos with high education and income levels.

Another objective of the research was to develop and test a model of visitation to undeveloped natural areas, incorporating the variables of socio-economic status, ethnicity, assimilation into American society, and perceived discrimination. Logistic regression results suggested it was an accurate predictive model, and all four proposed model constructs showed statistical or substantive significance.

Model results showed that after statistically adjusting for the effects of model variables as a group, respondents significantly less likely to visit an undeveloped natural area were those with low levels of socio-economic status, low levels of assimilation, who had moderate to high perceived discrimination, and who were of African-American ethnicity. There were no significant differences between

Asian, white, and Latino respondents in their probability of visiting an undeveloped natural area if intervening variables remained constant. In other words, Asian, white, and Latino respondents of similar status, assimilation and perceived discrimination are equally likely to visit wildlands, compared to African-American respondents who are less likely.

Another finding from model testing was the importance of perceived discrimination in undeveloped natural area visitation. All "minority" ethnic groups were more likely to express the belief that discrimination was an issue, compared to their white respondent counterparts. In addition, model results showed that perceived discrimination was a significant predictor of visitation even after controlling for respondent income and education. The results are unique because they invalidate the commonly held assumption that discrimination is an urban park issue that does not impact rural recreation areas. Analysis of barriers to participation suggests that discrimination is perceived to occur within undeveloped natural areas, not just en route to them. Further research is needed to ascertain more precisely the types, sources, and locations of discriminatory behavior.

The survey also asked respondents to agree/disagree with 17 statements describing barriers that may have affected their travel during the spring and summer 1994. The importance of each barrier was broken down into three types of travelers: respondents who did not take a leisure trip away from home, persons who traveled but did not visit a natural area, and respondents who visited a natural area. The constraint was asked to each of the three groups in a somewhat unique context. For example, the constraint *not safe* was phrased as "Travel and vacation areas are not safe" and asked to persons who did not take any trip. To respondents who took a trip but not to an undeveloped natural area, the question was phrased as "Undeveloped natural areas are not safe." Finally, persons who visited a natural area were asked "Undeveloped natural areas are not safe and this limited my stay or activities in them." The most constraining barriers for all three groups were *lack of free time, few friends travel or recreate in (natural) area, nearby destinations were too crowded, their financial situation, and don't know where to go/what to do.*

Findings clearly demonstrate the multi-dimensional and complex nature of outdoor recreation participation. Even though undeveloped natural areas, such as the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests, are within 60 miles of any Los Angeles County resident, and there is little or no cost for entrance fees to undeveloped natural areas (daily per car entrance charges at fee sites on National Forest normally are under \$10), not all residents or ethnic groups visited these public lands in equal numbers. Model results showed that the decision to visit an undeveloped natural area is more than just a transportation and income issue. Ethnic group preferences, assimilation, resident education, and perceived discrimination all influenced participation in outdoor recreation within undeveloped natural areas.

To encourage visitation by those residents of Los Angeles County that have very low participation rates, intervention strategies can be developed by wildland management agencies. A promising strategy is providing leadership and resources for organizing clubs, special programs or school outings for urban youths, or developing family programs that encourage friends and family members to recreate together. Some persons do not come from families that have historically visited natural areas; thus, there is a need to provide encouragement to get started and pass on the benefits of wildland recreation.

In summary, substantially less than half of Los Angeles County respondents visited an undeveloped natural area during the summer 1994. Despite the close proximity and low entrance fees, compared to commercial recreation facilities, the vast majority of residents did not spend even a half day at a National Forest or Park, wildlife refuge, open space preserve, or other undeveloped natural areas located outside a city. These data suggest that public agencies that manage wildland resources must be proactive by creating new programs and expanding existing intervention projects that encourage visitation and communicate to residents about the opportunities and benefits of outdoor recreation in undeveloped natural areas. Otherwise, data will show that publicly-funded natural resources are not used by most residents.

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