



Latinos And Public Lands In California

Management of leisure resources in California would be incomplete without consideration of the fastest growing ethnic group—Latinos. There are approximately 12 million Latinos in California (about one-third of California's population; Bear Facts, 2004), and this is expected to grow to 21 million Latinos by the year 2025 (about 40% of California's population).

About 77 percent of Latinos in California are from or have immediate family ties to Mexico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Some studies indicate that people from Mexico prefer to be called "Mexicans" or "Mexicanos," and some prefer "Chicanos" (Chavez, 2000). A less favorable term is "Hispanic." This is a term coined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (Comas-Diaz, 2001). Though the terms "race" and "ethnicity" are sometimes used interchangeably to describe Latinos, they are not the same. Latino is an ethnicity. Latino people may come from various racial groups (e.g., Caucasian, African American).

It is important to note that even if a group of people prefer to call themselves "Latino" or "Mexican" that there is variability within the group. In other words, though it is easiest to generalize to all "Latinos," it does not always work. Not all "Mexicans" are alike, and there may be more variability if the Latinos are from Central America, South America or other places.

Examples of variability come from U.S. Census Bureau (2000) data: (1) About 26 percent of California's population speak Spanish. Of these, about 12 percent also speak English "very well." (2) There is wide variation in household income levels. For example, about seven percent of Latinos earn less than \$10,000 annually, while one percent earn between \$150,000 and \$199,999 annually. Median household income was \$36,600. (3) About 28 percent of the state's Latinos have had some college experience.

While generalizations are not always accurate they can help managers make better decisions about serving particular visitor groups, such as Latinos. Previous studies of Latinos visiting public lands, such as National Forests or deserts in California, indicate the following generalizations may be useful for planning:

- I. Motivations** to participate in outdoor recreation include rest, relaxation, fun, and being close to water (Chavez, 1992; Chavez, 2001). Another study found that Latino Los Angeles County residents had preferences for viewing scenery and escaping daily life (Tierney, Dahl, & Chavez, 1998). In a limited in-depth interview study of Mexican visitors to National Forests it was found that these visitors brought family members to outdoor recreation sites because those sites reminded them of their homeland, and they wanted to share that experience (Chavez, 2003).

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2. **Preferences** at sites included the desire for shaded areas, and preferences for development at sites (Chavez, 2002a). Developments included flush toilets, larger-sized picnic tables, barbecue grills, water faucets, and the like.

3. **Studies of Activities** at sites may be less generalizable because many of the studies focused on picnic areas, thus, picnicking was important. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that "picnicking" for Latinos may be different than for other visitor groups (Carr & Chavez, 1993). Picnicking may be an all-day activity for Latinos, literally beginning as soon as a site opens and finishing when the site closes. Multiple meals may be cooked throughout the day, and many foods are made from scratch on-site. Some Latinos don't know where to go for leisure pursuits or what to do at recreation sites (Tierney, et al., 1998).

4. **Group characteristics** studies indicate a strong family orientation that includes multiple generations and extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.). In several studies, average group size was 15 for Latino groups, but some groups are smaller and some can be rather large (100 or more)(Chavez, 2001). The perception by Latinos may be that 100 people does not necessarily constitute a large group, nor would they necessarily believe a site with 100 people is crowded. This may not match the perceptions of the people managing these same sites.

5. **Barriers** to participation in outdoor recreation include feeling unwelcome, feeling discriminated against (either in route to a site or once they arrive), and not being able to find people who are similar either visiting the site or working at the site (Tierney, et al., 1998). A limited in-depth study found that local city parks are thought to be unsafe (Chavez, 2003), resulting in visitation at more distant places (such as forests).

Managers have many tools at their disposal. These are typically categorized

as indirect (these indirectly impact visitors and include maps, brochures, signs, etc.), collaboration or bridge building (partner with constituent groups to make decisions), resource hardening (protect landscape from physical deterioration), and direct visitor management (have direct impact on visitors, such as law enforcement, closures of sites, etc.). Unless legislation directs otherwise, managers should always opt for the least restrictive tools first (in other words, don't go directly to closures). I suggest using the "I Triad"—invite, include, involve (Chavez, 2000). Inviting Latinos means to learn more about the perceptions of your visitors. You are inviting their opinions and educating yourself. Include means to bring Latinos into the decision-making process. This educates your agency. Finally, involve Latinos. This means to hire Latinos into the ranks of your employees and put them on your Board of Directors. Each "I" is important and necessary. To these I would add another "I"—innovate. You may need to think

outside the box to be truly inclusive with Latino groups.

Following are some specific actions you could take to serving Latinos on public lands:

1. Communication.

- Make sure the literature you use includes Latinos. If your brochures do not have Latinos, then you should consider adding them.
- Provide communications in Spanish, using "back translation" techniques, or "International Symbols". A back translation (Marin & Marin, 1991) is achieved through the use of professional translators (not someone in the office who knows some Spanish). To do this, write what you want translated in English. Hire one translator to write the text into Spanish. Hire another translator to take the Spanish version and write it in English, and then you compare the two English versions. This may be costly, but worthwhile. International Symbols are signs that convey messages

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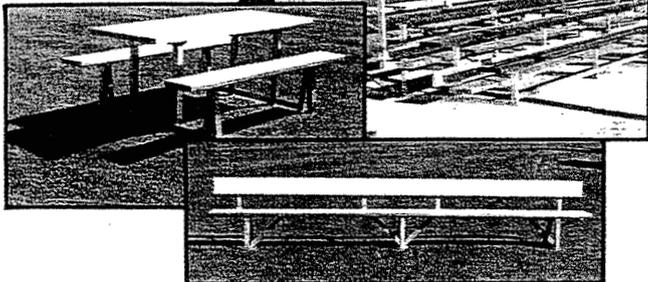


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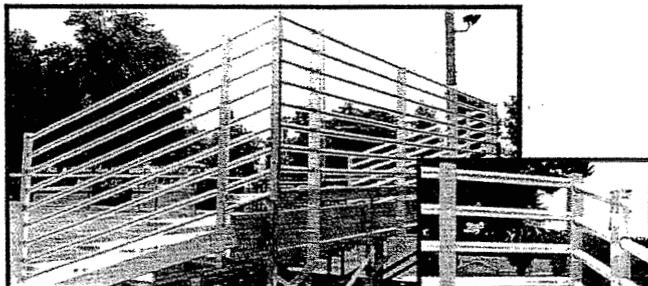


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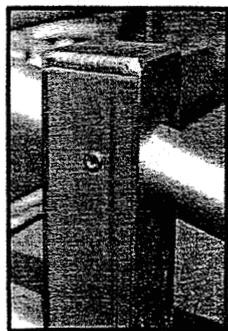
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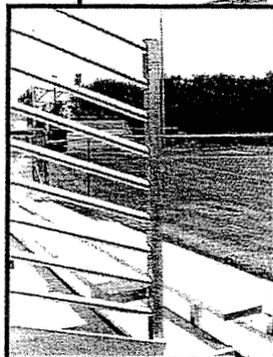


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without words. Note though that not all International Symbols convey the messages we intend (Chavez, 2002b).

- Seek alternative communication methods for Latinos, as they may prefer interpersonal or face-to-face communications. Examples of these include using ECO-Teams (Absher, Winter, & James, 1997) to deliver messages to site visitors (young people who are taught environmental messages and deliver them directly to Latino visitors), and an Information Van which takes messages directly to sites where Latinos are visiting rather than expecting Latinos to use other information sources, such as kiosks or information desks (the van drivers are bilingual and all the information is available in Spanish).
- Give full information on signs. Tell Latinos what you expect and why. And you may need to tell them where to go—such as where to acquire a fire permit.
- Try not to use negative wording.
- Try not to use jargon—you may think you know what something means but other cultural groups may not interpret these the same way.

2. Employment and Development

- Be sensitive to Latino groups and realize that training will be needed for all constituent contact employees, including seasonal employees and volunteers. Training should include data about the visitor group, development preferences of the visitors, communication preferences and the like.
- Some sites may require renovation or equipment upgrades to better meet the needs of Latino groups. This might include removal of small tables for larger ones and placing some tables in close proximity to others to serve larger groups.

It is important to seek out information about the Latinos recreating in your area (a local university may be a source to gather data), carefully consider content and delivery of communications, be collaborative in decisions about serving Latinos, and focus on serving the needs identified by your visitors. Finally, be mindful that while serving Latinos on public lands, you are providing for more than recreation experiences, you are providing for personal growth and family bonding.



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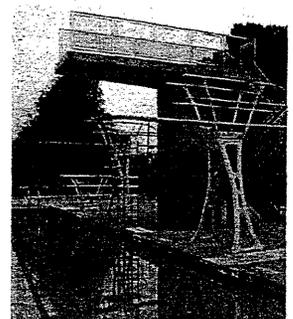
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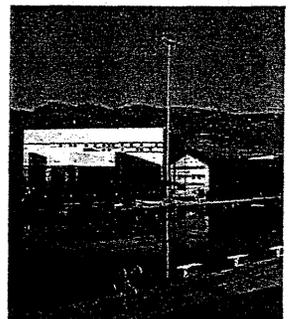
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