

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Opinions of Latino Outdoor Recreation Visitors at Four Urban National Forests

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It is important to evaluate use of urban-proximate outdoor recreation sites by diverse groups and obtain visitor viewpoints about those sites. Of particular importance are day-use sites, which receive a large amount of use but little research emphasis. Managers of urban-proximate day-use sites can better manage with detailed specific information about participation patterns, site preferences, and visitor perceptions. Results are offered from visitor contact surveys conducted at day-use sites on four urban national forests in Southern California between 2001 and 2004, with a focus on areas where Latinos recreate. These data indicate many similarities among the Latino visitors to specific sites in four Southern California forests. There were commonalities in participation in outdoor recreation activities, the relative importance of site attributes, and perceptions reported about their recreation experiences. The results suggest that management decisions about serving these groups consider the range of activity options identified, that there is a consistent desire for facilities and amenities, and that the Latino visitors are likely to continue to recreate in these places and will tell others about it, probably leading to increased use by these respondent groups in the future.

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It is important to evaluate use of urban-proximate outdoor recreation sites by diverse groups and obtain visitor viewpoints about those sites. Of particular importance are day-use sites, which receive a large amount of use but little research emphasis. *Day-use sites* are those in which people visit for some portion of a day but do not stay overnight. Some day-use sites are developed (such as picnic

areas), whereas others are general recreation or dispersed use sites where few amenities are offered. More than half of recreation visits to national forests are day trips (Outdoor Industry Foundation, 2006).

Managers of urban-proximate day-use sites can better manage with detailed information about participation patterns, site preferences, and visitor perceptions. This article reports participation, preference, and perception results from day-use visitor contact surveys conducted on four urban national forests in Southern California between 2001 and 2004, with a focus on areas where Latinos recreate.

Literature Review

Nature-based outdoor recreation has many values for members of the American public. It serves as a place to make social connections, as well as human and nature connections. In outdoor recreation settings, families and friends can gather to have fun, celebrate important occasions, or just relax and take time out (Landy, 2008). This immense value is part of the “glue” of a healthy society (Landy, 2008). Another value of outdoor recreation is the contribution made to the United States (US) economy. More than three of every four Americans participate in active outdoor recreation each year. As Americans spend money, create jobs, and support local communities, the recreation economy contributes more than \$730 billion annually to the US economy, supports more than six million jobs across the US, and generates \$88 billion in annual state and national tax revenue (Outdoor Industry Foundation, 2006). In addition, outdoor recreation is a valuable tool in health, education, national unity, and family cohesiveness (Partners Outdoors, 2008). The US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS), provides the land base for much of

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the nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences the American publics enjoy.

The ethnic and racial profile of the US is undergoing a major shift such that in the decades ahead, racially and ethnically diverse people will constitute a majority of the population (Shinew et al., 2006). For example, the number of Latinos in the US more than doubled between 1980 and 2000, accounting for 40% of the growth in the country's population during that period (Saenz, 2004). The social composition of the visitors to many US outdoor recreation areas has also been changing. In some states, it is the racial/ethnic makeup that is changing at outdoor recreation sites. In other states, the changes might be in age, education, income, family composition, or some other variable or set of variables. In California, diversity is manifested in several ways, with race and ethnicity being dominant among them. Individuals who belong to these changing groups likely bring to public lands a set of values and behaviors that differ from that of "traditional" users and, perhaps, land managers. These social milieu changes may be felt the strongest in resource programs dealing with visitor use, such as recreation, cultural resources, and lands (Chavez, 2001). Understanding visitor demographics and values is critical to managing outdoor recreation sites.

Several researchers have identified values from natural area recreation visits to include social cohesion, improved mental health, improved physical health, stress relief, and psychological well-being (Gobster, 2005; Manning and More, 2002; Williams, 2006). The values to be gained from visits to natural areas may nowhere be as important as for urban residents, whose lives are so busy that little time remains for such visits. In a study of urban residents, Tierney, Dahl, and Chavez (1998) found that constraints to the use of natural areas included time commitments and financial situations, as well as perceptions that nearby areas are too crowded or that few friends or family members recreate in natural areas.

The benefits of visits to natural areas may be disproportionately accrued by visitors who are White and more affluent (Gobster, 2002; Loukaitou-Sideris and Stieglitz 2002; West, 1989; Wolch, Wilson, and Fehrenbach, 2005). Because of the distribution gap, some researchers are beginning to examine differential use of natural areas from a social justice or environmental justice paradigm (Byrne, Wolch, and Zhang, 2009).

Several researchers have found that people of color exhibit different participation patterns and have different motiva-

tions to visit natural areas (Baas, Ewert, and Chavez, 1993; Chavez, 2001; Chavez, Winter, and Absher, 2008; Sasidharan, Willits, and Godbey, 2005). There is also a propensity for people of color to visit urban-proximate outdoor recreation sites for day-long visits because these sites are near their urban residences (Chavez, 2001; Chavez et al., 2008).

Urban National Forests (UNFs), which are forests located within 50 miles of a population center of greater than one million people (Dwyer and Chavez, 2005), demonstrate unique management challenges and opportunities (Arnerberger and Brandenburg, 2007; Hartley, 1986). They also have great potential to educate the public and create supportive constituencies (Gangloff, 2003).

In 1995, the USFS identified 14 UNFs located in eight states. In 2005, they identified an additional ten UNFs. Hartley (1986) defined several characteristics of UNFs, including intense levels of use, significant amounts of day-use, year-round accessibility, complex communication issues, emergence of new recreation activities, safety concerns, and competition for open space.

Urban-Proximate National Forest Descriptions

The 656,000-acre Angeles National Forest (ANF), which is situated primarily in Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties, offers year-round recreation opportunities for camping, hiking, swimming, boating, picnicking, mountain biking, equestrian riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, and sightseeing. The ANF is one of the forests used most in the National Forest System and is proximate to millions of diverse Southern Californians.

The San Bernardino National Forest (SBNF) covers about 820,000 acres within San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Of this area, about 162,000 acres are in private, county, state, and other federal agency ownership. The SBNF offers year-round recreation opportunities for camping, hiking, swimming, boating, picnicking, mountain biking, equestrian riding, OHV use, and sightseeing. This is one of the highest-use forests in the National Forest System and is proximate to millions of diverse Southern Californians.

The Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) is situated primarily in Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties, which consist of diverse populations. The LPNF is characterized by a Mediterranean climate, with

cool winters and hot, dry summers, and has more than 1.7 million acres on the Coast and Transverse ranges, providing a variety of terrain, vegetation, and recreation settings, including ocean beaches, forest, chaparral, and desert. Recreation opportunities include camping, picnicking, hiking, boating, trail riding, and observation sites. The LPNF, one of the most heavily used national forests in the state, ranked fifth in 1995 for recreation visitor days, with five million recreation visitor days.

The Cleveland National Forest (CNF) includes three distinct mountain ranges adjoining the urbanized lowlands of Orange, Riverside, and San Diego counties. Los Angeles County is within an hour's drive of the northern part of the forest. At more than 420,000 acres, the CNF encompasses much of the Santa Ana, Palomar, and Laguna mountains. Elevations range from 400 to 6,140 feet. Chaparral is the most abundant vegetation type, covering about 88% of forestlands. The forest's recreation opportunities include picnicking, camping, hiking, swimming, boating, mountain biking, equestrian riding, OHV use, and sightseeing.

Methods

All four studies reported here (of the ANF, CNF, LPNF, and SBNF) are based on results from day-use studies at those forests. The same research methodology was implemented at each study site on each forest. Level of development at sites is site specific. For example, picnic areas typically have picnic tables, trash cans, water faucets, and parking, whereas off-road staging areas might have trash cans, water faucets, and parking, and overview areas along roadways may have parking.

The principal investigator and the managers of those national forests identified the day-use sites, each of which had an equal chance of being included in the study. Only randomly selected sites were sampled. After selection, each site was replaced into the sampling pool so that a site might be selected multiple times. The sampling frame for the national forest was dependent upon the number of sites for that forest. For example, the ANF had 12 designated day-use sites, so each of the 12 sites would have an equal chance of being selected for study. The number of sites on the other three national forests in Southern California differed.

All dates during high-use periods (summer months; namely July, August, and September) were available for inclusion in each study. Sampling dates were chosen based on typical

participation patterns; for example, managers on the SBNF estimated weekend to weekday use to be 80% and 20%, respectively. Thus, 80% of the data collection took place on weekends and 20% on weekdays. The weekend dates were randomly selected from all weekend days in the sampling frame, and the weekday dates were randomly selected from all weekdays in the sampling frame (a process similar to site selection except for nonreplacement into sampling pool because of a limited number of teams available for data collection). The on-site sampling occurred between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Survey instruments were available in English and Spanish, and team members were bilingual. All visitors (age 18 or over) on site were asked for their voluntary participation in the survey. Visitors were assured confidentiality of their responses. Response rates differed by site: SBNF = 56% (2001); CNF = 64% (2002); LPNF = 57% (2002); and ANF = 74% (2004).

The primary objectives of each day-use study were the following: (a) Report participation in outdoor recreation activities. Questions in this section included experience use history, such as number of visits per year, and number of years of visitation. (b) Report the relative importance of site attributes. We asked respondents about the importance of having cooking grills, fire pits/rings, group facilities, law enforcement and patrols, parking areas, restricted use levels, telephones, trash cans, and water faucets. (c) Report visitor perceptions about their recreation experiences. Questions in this section asked whether particular statements were true. The statements included "Being at this site reminds me of childhood recreation experiences," "I plan to tell at least one other person about my trip here," and "I want to return here again."

Results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, 2006).

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Respondents

We found significant differences in racial and ethnic group use across the forests. For example, there were more Latino respondents at the ANF (50%) and SBNF (54%) day-use sites, and more White respondents at the CNF (71%) and LPNF (65%) sites. There were also fewer respondents who spoke English and read English as their primary language

at the ANF (spoke 63%, read 69%) and SBNF (spoke 52%, read 57%) day-use sites.

We also found that Latinos tend to recreate at particular locations and are not found across various forest sites. To focus on Latino respondents, and make more reasonable comparisons, we selected specific areas within each forest where Latinos were found in the greatest numbers. On the ANF that is the San Gabriel Canyon ($n = 82$), 73% of the site respondents were Latino. The Palomar Mountain ($n = 25$) on the CNF had 44% Latino respondents. On the LPNF, the area with the most Latino respondents was Santa Ynez (39%) ($n = 28$). The Applewhite Picnic Area ($n = 80$) had the highest percentage of Latino respondents (95%) for the SBNF.

Respondent characteristics were similar across sites, with average age of around 37, almost equal percentages of male and female respondents, average education levels of around 14 years of education, and household income at low levels (less than \$40,000), except for the CNF respondents, who had higher income levels. Group and visit characteristics were similar among these places, with most respondents reporting they were recreating in a family group, most had plans to stay at the site for more than 4 hours (except CNF, where most reported planned visits of 1–3 hours), and most were on repeat visits to the areas.

To focus on Latinos, we then selected Latino respondents only for inclusion for this report. This reduces the sample size at each site but allows us to focus the results and discussion around the Latino visitors. Sample sizes then are as follows:

SBNF, Applewhite, $n = 76$

ANF, San Gabriel Canyon, $n = 60$

LPNF, Santa Ynez, $n = 13$

CNF, Palomar Mountain, $n = 11$

Participation in Outdoor Recreation Activities

Respondents were asked what activities they usually engaged in while at the national forest where they were contacted. The respondents could report more than one activity as “usual.” Activities that respondents usually engaged in did not differ much by these sites frequented by Latinos (Table 1). At all four areas, Latino respondents reported picnic/barbecues as the activity usually engaged in, while at two of the sites they also identified stream play as a usual activity. For example, 45% of the respondents at the Ap-

Table 1. Activities Latino respondents engaged in while on a forest visit, by area

Area	Activity	Percentage
SBNF	Applewhite ($n = 76$)	Picnic/barbecue 45 Stream play 24
	San Gabriel Canyon ($n = 60$)	Picnic/barbecue 40 Stream play 15
LPNF	Santa Ynez ($n = 13$)	Picnic/barbecue 31 Camp 15
	Palomar Mountain ($n = 11$)	Picnic/barbecue 73 Nature study 9

ANF, Angeles National Forest; CNF, Cleveland National Forest; LPNF, Los Padres National Forest; SBNF, San Bernardino National Forest.

plewhite Picnic Area said they usually engaged in picnicking/barbecuing when on site, which was similar for the respondents at the San Gabriel Canyon (40%) and Santa Ynez (31%). The percentage was even higher at Palomar Mountain (73%). Stream play was a usual activity at two sites: Applewhite (24%) and San Gabriel Canyon (15%). At the other two areas, respondents said camping (Santa Ynez, 15%) and nature study (Palomar Mountain, 9%) were activities in which they usually engaged. Rounding out the list of usual activities were day hiking, fishing, OHV riding, watching wildlife, and driving for pleasure. Some of these activities are development dependent (picnicking/barbecuing, camping, and OHV riding), natural area dependent (watching wildlife and driving for pleasure), or water dependent (stream play and fishing).

Preferences about Site Attributes

Latino respondents at the forest areas were asked the importance of having particular facilities and amenities on site (cooking grills, fire pits/rings, group facilities, law enforcement and patrols, parking areas, restricted use levels, telephones, trash cans, water faucets, other). Of the respondents at each site, 45% or more rated each of the items as important or very important (Table 2). Common responses to these areas included water faucets (with 55%–79% reporting these as important or very important), trash cans (with 45%–83% reporting these as important or very important), and telephones (with 45%–68% reporting these as important or very important). Other responses indicated that important or very important site attributes were cooking grills, parking areas, picnic tables, and law enforcement and patrols. (Note that the Forest Service provides law enforcement patrols at these and other sites.)

Table 2. Top four preferences Latino respondents rated as “important” or “very important” for site development and amenities, by area

Area		Amenity	Percentage
SBNF	Applewhite (n = 76)	Trash cans	83
		Cooking grills	80
		Picnic tables	79
		Water faucets	79
ANF	San Gabriel Canyon (n = 60)	Telephones	68
		Trash cans	65
		Parking areas	63
		Water faucets	62
LPNF	Santa Ynez (n = 13)	Parking areas	69
		Law enforcement and patrols	69
		Telephones	62
		Water faucets	62
CNF	Palomar Mountain (n = 11)	Cooking grills	64
		Water faucets	55
		Trash cans	45
		Telephones	45

ANF, Angeles National Forest; CNF, Cleveland National Forest; LPNF, Los Padres National Forest; SBNF, San Bernardino National Forest.

Perceptions about Recreation Experiences

The Latino respondents provided their impressions about their recreation experience (Table 3). They were asked whether these statements were true (or false) about them: “Being at this site reminds me of childhood recreation experiences” (reminder of childhood), “I plan to tell at least one other person about my trip here” (tell others about trip), “I want to return here again,” “I was disappointed with some aspects of this site,” “My experience was not as good as I had hoped,” “The employees were helpful,” “The site was safe and secure,” “This is a great recreation experience,” and “This trip was well worth the money I spent to take it” (well worth the money). A large percentage of respondents at all four areas said the following were true about them: “I want to return here,” “It was well worth the money spent,” and “It is a great recreation experience.” At three of the four areas, the respondents also said they would tell others about their trip.

Discussion

In 1995, the USFS identified 14 UNFs located in eight states. In 2005, they identified an additional ten UNFs. Management of these sites may differ from the management of

Table 3. Perceptions of Latino respondents about their recreation experience, by area

Area		Recreation experience	Percentage
SBNF	Applewhite (n = 76)	I want to return here again	79
		Well worth the money	75
		Tell others about trip	71
		It’s a great recreation experience	70
ANF	San Gabriel Canyon (n = 60)	I want to return here again	87
		Tell others about trip	82
		Well worth the money	72
		It’s a great recreation experience	67
LPNF	Santa Ynez (n = 13)	Tell others about trip	77
		I want to return here again	77
		Well worth the money	69
		It’s a great recreation experience	62
CNF	Palomar Mountain (n = 11)	The site was safe and secure	91
		Well worth the money	91
		I want to return here again	82
		It’s a great recreation experience	82

ANF, Angeles National Forest; CNF, Cleveland National Forest; LPNF, Los Padres National Forest; SBNF, San Bernardino National Forest. *Percentage* is the percentage who said each statement was “true” about them.

other forests (Hartley, 1986), including significant amounts of day use and visitation by diverse populations. Studies like those reported here provide land managers insights to better serve Latino visitors to some outdoor recreation at urban-proximate day-use sites.

The findings reported here indicate many similarities among Latino visitors to specific sites on four UNFs in Southern California. There were commonalities in participation in outdoor recreation activities, the relative importance of site attributes, and perceptions reported about their recreation experiences. For example, there was a focus on picnic/barbecue activities but also a breadth of activities in which the respondents typically engaged. Other studies support these findings that indicate Latinos recreate at sites where picnic/barbecue opportunities exist and especially when water access also exists (Baas et al., 1993; Chavez, 2001; Chavez et al., 2008; Sasidharan et al., 2005). Some of these activities are development dependent (picnicking/barbecuing, camping, and OHV riding), whereas others were natural

area dependent (watching wildlife and driving for pleasure) or water dependent (stream play and fishing). This suggests that management decisions about serving these groups consider the range of activity options identified.

It is noteworthy that not all Latino respondents indicated “picnic/barbecue” as the usual activity even though they were often at sites managed for just that use. This may indicate that the activity focus for Latinos lies elsewhere (perhaps “family gatherings” would be the usual activity if that were offered in the response choice set on the questionnaire), and they may not consider the picnic/barbecue itself to be the focal point of the outing.

Large percentages of Latino visitors rated most facilities and amenities as important or very important. This is consistent with other studies reporting a desire by Latinos for development of sites (Chavez, 2001, 2002; Chavez et al., 2008). Water faucets, trash cans, and telephones were commonly considered important by the Latino respondents at the areas studied. Additional important site attributes included a longer list of items: cooking grills, parking areas, picnic tables, and coverage by law enforcement. These findings suggest a consistent desire for facilities and amenities.

Latino visitors at all four of these UNF areas said they wanted to return to the area, thought the trip was well worth the money, and said they had a great recreation experience. These results confirm research by Gobster (2008), Manning and More (2002), and Williams (2006) on values received from visits to natural areas. These data suggest that the Latino visitors are likely to continue to recreate in these places and will tell others about it, suggesting future increased use by this respondent group.

Limitations

Use by Latino groups is not consistent across forests because Latinos tend to recreate near one another at specific sites. Therefore we reduced the original data set to include only those sites (reducing sample size) where we located large percentages of Latinos, and further reduced our data set to include only the Latino respondents at those places. Also, there was not consistent use by Latinos across forests, with two forests being used more by Latinos than were the other two forests. We are not sure what the impact is of that, but there were still consistencies across forests.

Our data also treat all Latinos as one group. We do not mean to infer that all Latinos are of one mind. We are

simply looking for commonalities to report. It would require much larger data sets to look for within-group differences by age, gender, education, etc.

Future Work

We have collected data from 1991 to 2008 by using the same instruments and methodologies across time. We are working on synthesizing that data to better represent day use across time. We found consistency with existing literature for these Latino recreation groups in Southern California, but recognize that much more work needs to be accomplished on this topic. For example, Latinos from other locations within the US may be quite different from those in Southern California, and those assumptions need to be tested. Also, there is great diversity across America in race and ethnicity, and much more work needs to address those other groups.

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