

Chapter 11: Outdoor Recreation and Nontraditional Users: Results of Focus Group Interviews With Racial and Ethnic Minorities

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Abstract

Resource managers in Oregon State Parks and the Pacific Northwest Region of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (U.S. Forest Service) identified a need to better understand the needs of existing and potential stakeholders who may visit public recreation lands in Oregon. Specifically, this research was designed to understand the perceptions of racial and ethnic minorities in Oregon. A series of focus groups were completed in the state of Oregon to understand ethnic minorities' interests and needs related to outdoor recreation, and how agencies such as Oregon State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, and local park and recreation authorities can better respond to these nontraditional users. This report documents visitor usage perceptions for different outdoor recreation activities in a variety of outdoor recreation settings within the state of Oregon. The focus group interviews were designed to ascertain residents' perceptions about what recreation activities, services, facilities, and experiences are appropriate on various public lands in Oregon.

Keywords: Outdoor recreation, diversity, racial and ethnic minorities.

Introduction

As ethnic and racial groups continue to grow in the United States, it will become important for social service agencies to reexamine how they manage for a diverse population. According to estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau (Census Bureau 2002), Latino and Asian American populations are increasing at a faster rate than the population as a whole, with a majority of these population changes taking place in the Western United States. Outdoor recreation managers will need to consider that ethnic and racial groups may have different outdoor recreation preferences, constraints, and information needs than the traditional outdoor recreation participant.

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Resource managers in the state of Oregon, including the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department and the Pacific Northwest Region (Region 6) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (U.S. Forest Service) continue to see a need to understand all of their users, including ethnic and racial minority groups. A research effort was designed to understand the perceptions of racial and ethnic minorities in Oregon. The study documented preferences and perceptions of different outdoor recreation activities in a variety of outdoor recreation settings. Through the use of focus group interviews, the study was designed to understand residents' perceptions about what recreation activities, services, facilities, and experiences are appropriate at various places on public lands.

Literature Review

The demographics of the United States are changing rapidly, with changes most visible in the Western States. A compilation of studies completed by Chavez (2001) suggested that, over the next 25 years, Latinos will account for one-fifth to one-half of the total U.S. population. Chavez also stated that if Latinos grow at the highest projected rate, they will account for 54 percent of the Nation's growth. Another rapidly growing group is the Asian American population. Since 1980, Asian Americans have grown to 3 percent of the population (Chavez 2001). The growth of the Asian American population has especially increased in the Western States of California, Oregon, and Washington. It is also projected that, within the next 20 years, 49 percent of the Asian American population will live in the Western States (Census Bureau 2002).

Several theories have been proposed to help explain nonparticipation in outdoor recreation by different ethnic and racial groups. According to Johnson et al. (1997), two primary theoretical perspectives emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. The theories were based around race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status (income and education). Opportunity theory or demographic theory emerged in the 1970s and was used to explain specific causes of nonparticipation. According to Johnson et al. (1997: 2) "opportunity theory is distinct from the more general socioeconomic explanation because greater emphasis is placed on human proximity to resources as the specific cause of non-participation." Lack of participation by ethnic and racial groups may be explained by lack of opportunities or resources for populations with lower socioeconomic status (Lindsey and Ogle 1972).

Washburne (1978) was among the first to propose a theoretical framework regarding race and outdoor recreation and approached the problem by offering two alternative hypotheses: ethnicity and marginality (Johnson et al. 1997). The marginality hypothesis suggests that African Americans do not participate in outdoor

recreation because of poverty and other consequences of socioeconomic discrimination. Washburne went on to explain that historically unmet needs like transportation from urban residences contributed to marginality. According to this theory, once the socioeconomic barriers are removed, we will see more equal participation between ethnic and racial groups (Floyd 1998). The ethnicity hypothesis attributes nonparticipation to cultural differences. Washburne (1978) explained that leisure patterns are a reflection of culture, and African Americans may have a historically different relationship with wildlands. Additionally, ethnic and racial groups have unique recreation preferences that may be attributed to value differences based on group norms (Floyd 1998, Johnson et al. 1998).

Recent research on marginality and ethnicity theory attributed minority differences to social structural barriers like discretionary income, transportation, and information (Johnson et al. 1998). Carr and Williams (1993) explained that not all racial and ethnic groups are homogenous. Their study found significant differences in recreation preferences within the Latino ethnic group, specifically differences between Mexicans and Central Americans. In 2004, Winter et al. found similar results. They examined different cultures, income, education, and language. Results indicated that several different recreation patterns existed among Asian Americans. Thus, not all Asian Americans can be categorized together as they are not a homogenous group.

Johnson et al. (1997) examined and reviewed several race and ethnicity theories. In their assessment, no single factor offers a definitive explanation of racial differences in recreation behavior. Lack of definitive findings may be attributed to not having standard definitions of terms and lack of consistency in measures across studies. The authors explain that the inconsistent results could also be due to peculiarities of the specific study areas. Johnson et al. (1997) noted that researchers tend to generalize findings from a specific area to entire racial and ethnic populations and that research should focus on regional or geographic differences.

Tierney et al. (1998) examined the use of undeveloped natural areas by residents in the Los Angeles area. Their results indicated that respondents who were lower income African Americans, younger Latinos with low income, and low income Asian Americans were significantly less likely to visit an undeveloped area. Additionally, Asian American, Latino, and White respondents with similar status, assimilation, and perceived discrimination were equally likely to visit natural areas when compared to African Americans, supporting marginality theory's assertion that differences between ethnic groups are reduced when other factors are taken into consideration.

Tierney et al. (1998) also examined potential constraints to recreation at natural areas. Their results identified information and transportation as constraints; however, ethnic preferences, assimilation, education, and perceived discrimination also affected participation. Shinew and Floyd (2005) explained that more research is needed to understand minorities and the factors that constrain their outdoor recreation participation. Further examination will help broaden understanding of societal issues surrounding minority groups.

Last, Thapa et al. (2001) demonstrated that understanding information needs and search behaviors of ethnic groups is essential to communicating with visitors at natural areas. According to their results, White respondents were more likely to use all available information sources, whereas Latinos and other minority groups were less likely to use technology sources. All groups indicated that they used printed material; however, language was identified as a potential limiting factor.

Methods

In the summer of 2006, a series of focus group interviews were conducted in several cities in Oregon to understand ethnic/racial minorities' interests, participation, and constraints regarding outdoor recreation. The respondents were interviewed in four separate meetings with African American respondents (Portland, Oregon), Asian American respondents (Portland, Oregon), and Latino respondents (Medford and Hermiston, Oregon).

The sample was identified through the use of snowball sampling, relying heavily on the existing contacts and relationships of Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department resource managers. The contacts consisted primarily of local recreation resource managers in the communities noted above. These contact persons were a key link in communicating with the racial and ethnic minorities in each community, as an element of trust between the managers and community groups had already been established. The meetings were held in community buildings (libraries, town meeting halls, etc.) and the duration of each meeting ranged from 2 to 3 hours.

The interviews followed a semistructured focus group protocol. This method was employed with the goal of obtaining as much information from the participants as possible. According to Madriz (2000), focus groups should be used when the interviewer desires a free expression of ideas. The focus group methodology empowers participants by tilting power in their favor, which can reduce the interviewer's influence and allow for more open and honest discussion. A focus group interview guide was used as a loose guide throughout the meetings. The discussion guide addressed five specific research questions:

- What are your current and previous recreation experiences?
- What benefits do you seek from recreation?
- What constraints keep you from recreating more often?
- What media sources would be most effective in getting you to recreate more often?
- What specific amenities (e.g., facilities, services, information) should be changed or improved?

Results

Current and Previous Recreation Experiences

Participants were asked to describe their outdoor recreation experiences and interests, including the types of activities they currently or previously have participated in. Probing questions were asked to understand the setting in which these activities took place and with whom they participated during the activity. The results of the interviews are outlined by segment (Asian American, Latino, and African-American) below and summarized in table 11-1.

Asian Americans—

A theme that emerged throughout the focus group meeting with Asian American participants was recreating with family, especially with children. Many participants explained that they prefer to recreate with their children. They want to experience outdoor recreation with their children rather than sending them to participate in a program by themselves, like the Boy Scouts. Additionally, participants explained that they usually recreate with their extended family, including elders. This has implications for the types of areas they visit and also dictates the types of activities in which they participate. Many Asian American participants indicated that they enjoyed visiting areas with water features, such as the Columbia River Gorge, Crater Lake, and the Willamette River in Portland.

Issues surrounding safety and protection were identified as important to the Asian American group. Participants were not interested in recreating in areas that do not “feel safe.” Nor will they allow their children to go to such areas. Reflections of childhood among participants revealed that they were not allowed to recreate or leave the apartment owing to safety concerns, which may help explain why more Asian Americans do not recreate outdoors. Asian Americans preferred going on shorter hikes and visiting areas where they could be close to people.

Latinos—

Latino participants expressed frustration with visiting areas that do not have enough room for large, extended families. Latinos often enjoy celebrating a child’s

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Table 11-1—Summary of major themes in nontraditional user focus groups

Asian Americans	Latinos	African Americans
Current and previous recreation experiences:		
Improved amenities: overnight facilities and places to eat	Facilities large enough for extended families	Dislike remote locations
Access to facilities	Prefer local areas over traveling distances	Aesthetics
Recreation areas with water features	Information needs	Often stereotyped
Dislike camping in tents	Places for youth	
Enjoy visiting areas with entire family including elders and children		
Safety and protection		
Benefits sought:		
To be in nature and see wildlife	Spend time with family	Solitude
To get away from it all	To get away from it all	Spending time with family and friends
Education	Education	
Constraints:		
Lack of information	Distance to recreation areas	Facilities
Safety concerns	Lack of information	Cleanliness
Culture	Fear of new places	
	Signage	
	Different activity styles	
	Transportation	
Media and recreation opportunities:		
Information in multiple languages	Lack of information	African American organizations
Asian American organizations	Information in multiple languages	More information
Using key informants to build trust	Information sent home with children	
Publicizing benefits	Latino media sources	
	Calendar of events	
	Latino organizations	
Changes in parks and recreation services and facilities:		
Increased signage	Facility improvements	Making health links
Facility improvements	National forests	Free is key
Web site improvements	Parent/youth involvement	

birthday, or having a family party in an outdoor setting. However, the setting or facility does not accommodate the group size. Additionally, many local areas are often busy or full and require a reservation system that Latinos are unaware of. Areas with gazebos or pavilions are also preferred settings. According to many participants, Latinos are likely to have jobs that often require long hours, and are also concerned with the price of gasoline. This prevents them from traveling long distances to recreation areas. They would like to see more local recreation facilities including campgrounds. Members of the Latino community often seek new places to visit; however, they have had problems accessing information from the local chamber of commerce. Participants agreed that members of their community would enjoy going to outdoor areas, but they are often constrained by not knowing what public facilities are available for recreation.

Similar to Asian American respondents, participants explained that children are an important component of the Latino community. They prefer settings that accommodate children by having playgrounds, basketball courts, clean bathrooms, and water to play in. Additionally, parents and members of the community desired open places for their child to play and be free.

African Americans—

Participants in the African American focus group preferred to recreate in locations that were not “off the beaten path.” The participants preferred controlled areas like city parks and facilities that were managed by the city, areas that were close to urban centers, and places that were well maintained with clean amenities. They find comfort in knowing that in case of an emergency, they can leave an area and get help. Aesthetically pleasing areas were important to African Americans; places with a view, water, or green spaces were identified as ideal. Participants like being able to look back at the hike and see the “reward” of climbing a mountain. African Americans discussed how stereotypes often prevent people from recreating in outdoor settings. However, they confirmed that African Americans are interested in outdoor recreation activities and specifically mentioned hiking, picnicking, and viewing nature.

Benefits Sought

Participants were asked to identify what types of benefits they hoped to get from participating in an outdoor recreation activity. Benefits have been defined as voluntarily engaging in recreation behaviors for intrinsic rewards when basic needs like survival, comfort, material needs, and social commitments have already been met (Driver et al. 1991).

Asian Americans—

For the Asian American group, three general benefits were discussed. One of these involved experiencing nature and viewing wildlife. One participant explained that Asian Americans place a high value on animals and they visit areas hoping to see wildlife. Scenery and fresh air are also important benefits. Along with nature, “getting away from it all” was identified by Asian Americans as a major benefit. They enjoy outdoor recreation because they are able to get away from home and spend time with family. Educational opportunities were also identified as a benefit to participating in outdoor recreation. Participants indicated that they look for areas where they can learn something. A nearby Corps of Engineers hydro-power project that provides opportunities for fish viewing was mentioned as an example of the type of educational experience that they look for. This specific area includes interpretive messages and guided interpretive tours.

Latinos—

Participants noted that they often recreate to spend time with family and friends. They enjoy going to places where they can have large parties and socialize with each other. Thus, areas with pavilions and barbeque facilities are ideal settings. Similar to Asian American respondents, they are also interested in going to areas to get away from the stress of everyday life. They like to go to places that are free of pollution and free of cost. Many Latino participants noted that members of their group cannot afford to go to expensive places. Additionally, they want to go to areas that will build memories for their families. Educational programs that help promote self-esteem for youth in the community would be welcomed. Parents want to be able to take their children to a place where they can learn and explore.

African Americans—

African American participants identified solitude and spiritual healing as reasons for participating and benefits that they hope to gain through outdoor recreation. The benefit of self-renewal is also important. Being with family and friends is another important benefit sought by African Americans. They enjoy connecting with family and meeting new people. Children are an important component of family; however, they often preferred to go to places where children are well behaved.

Constraints

Participants were asked about their perceived constraints, or factors that prevent or decrease their participation in outdoor recreation. Since the 1980s, recreation and leisure researchers have examined the reasons why some people do not participate in desired recreation activities.

Asian Americans—

A constraint that was noted for the Asian American group was lack of information or knowledge of where to find information. This included information about where to recreate, safety, and the reservation system for state parks. Asian Americans often will only go to places that they have visited before and know are safe, familiar, and convenient. Historical and cultural differences seem to play a role in the type of activities that Asian Americans have traditionally participated in. Generally, indoor activities are preferred, according to many participants. Additional cultural constraints were concerned with children and education. Although the Asian American group would enjoy more programs devoted to outdoor recreation and survival skills, they are still reluctant to send their children to classes alone. Consistent with earlier thoughts on recreation activities, they explained that they enjoy recreating with their children and do not like to send the child to a class focused on outdoor recreation without parental guidance. Participants explained that, while parents want to participate with their child, they also want programs that are focused on academic enhancement. Instead of an outdoor recreation program, a program that takes children into the woods to learn about archeology is more appealing to the parents.

Latinos—

Transportation is a major constraint to recreation for the Latino community. The respondents explained that many Latinos are already paying a high price to live in the United States and driving to a recreation area takes more money than they can afford. Continual increases in fuel costs have exacerbated this problem and prevented some Latino participants from visiting outdoor recreation areas. Participants also explained that many people within their community do not like to go to remote locations and prefer more front-country settings that are easy to access and close to home.

According to the participants, lack of information is also a major reason for not recreating at outdoor recreation areas. Participants see the benefit of recreating outdoors; however, they do not know where to go or who to contact about recreation opportunities. Additionally, lack of information written in Spanish is seen as a constraint. Along with not being aware of recreation opportunities, there is a fear amongst immigrants of visiting new areas. Latino immigrants seldom go to areas that other people in their community have not previously visited.

There is also uncertainty when actually arriving at the site as to where to go and what the rules are. Although many communities on the local level have moved toward universal or Spanish/English signs, there are still many areas that have not altered their signage. Latinos may not be able to read a sign in English that informs

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them of the recreation fee or that an area may be restricted, which could result in a dangerous situation. Many of the participants explained that Latinos do not recreate in the same fashion as traditional users. They often recreate in large groups and expect to have more amenities, like a place for barbeques and food.

African Americans —

African American participants felt that many recreation areas are not large enough for their outdoor recreation interests. They would like to see more areas with picnic tables and places to barbeque. Also, outdoor recreation areas should include facilities with basketball hoops and restrooms. Other constraints included cleanliness of facilities. Participants would be more inclined to recreate if there were more trash receptacles and cleaner restrooms. According to the participants, unclean and unkempt areas discourage use.

Media and Recreation Opportunities

Participants were asked about how they learned of outdoor recreation opportunities. This included what types of media sources they currently used and what types of media sources could be used to reach more people in their group.

Asian Americans—

According to the participants, having literature and information in multiple Asian languages would help encourage use at outdoor recreation areas. Mandarin Chinese is a language that is understood by many Chinese as well as by many Vietnamese. There was also a suggestion to recruit a more diverse staff in outdoor recreation settings. Participants all agreed that utilizing existing Asian American organizations as a means to inform the community about recreation opportunities would be helpful. This includes using social service agencies, Asian restaurant associations, churches, and schools. One suggestion was to hang fliers and posters in Asian restaurants and stores. The issue of trust within the community is important to acknowledge. Participants suggested that outdoor recreation agencies need to create trust with key informants within the community to pass along the benefits of outdoor recreation. This may be achieved by going to Asian community fairs and using social service agencies.

Participants also suggested publicizing the benefits of recreation to the community. Some benefits that may be appealing to the Asian American community include health, culture, and education.

Latinos—

Lack of information about recreation opportunities was an evident concern throughout the Latino focus group meetings. Participants often felt that they were excluded from receiving information and felt frustrated with not knowing where to look to find outdoor opportunities. Participants agreed that disseminating information in Spanish would be a good way to reach their community. In many Latino families, it is the children who speak or read English and have to translate for the adults. If the child does not find the information interesting, then they will not inform the parent. Using both English and Spanish in information campaigns and literature is ideal.

Participants identified youth as a resource to communicate to adults. Sending information to households through the school system is a potential method of communication. As one participant put it, “children are a way into the household.” Information that is brought home from school is considered important and is more likely to be read by parents or translated to them by the children.

Participants noted that many Latinos watch television, especially Univision (Spanish language channel). Advertising and informing the public through this media would be a useful way to inform the Latino community. Participants suggested making commercials with Latinos as advertisements for outdoor areas. Spanish language newspapers would also be useful avenues for informing the community.

Participants agreed that they would like to see some form of a calendar put together by local, state, and federal agencies listing the different recreation events that are occurring in the area. Along with a calendar, a list of resources with corresponding phone numbers would be a helpful way to find out about potential recreation opportunities.

Utilizing Latino organizations to disseminate information is another potential way to inform the community about recreation opportunities. These organizations can include farm workers associations, local health clinics, community centers, and small businesses.

African Americans—

African American participants felt that more people would visit outdoor recreation areas if local, state, and federal agencies utilized local businesses to inform the public about recreation opportunities. These organizations could include barber/hair shops, restaurants, and public health offices. They also identified the need to have more readily accessible information. The use of local radio stations and African American newspapers (specific to each community) could help inform this segment of the public of outdoor recreation opportunities.

Changes in Parks and Recreation Services and Facilities

Participants were asked if they had noticed any changes in the service or facilities of their parks and forests within their Oregon community. These changes could be either negative or positive. This part of the interview also covered any additional areas that may not have been covered in previous sections. For example, amenities were mentioned several times throughout the focus group interviews. Especially during the Asian American discussion, participants explained that they sought areas with amenities. This included places to eat (restaurants) and indoor overnight facilities. Along with amenities there were concerns over actually accessing these facilities. Repeated concerns were mentioned about online reservation systems and not being able to locate overnight facilities on both the state and federal level.

Asian Americans—

Participants have noticed an increase in signage and interpretive displays in the recreation areas they visit. However, some site-specific improvements are still needed, including repairing poor railings and stairs. They would like to see recreation areas where they can bring the elders in their family.

Accessing information on the Internet is a useful development. Participants who had visited numerous sites had specific comments about the negative and positive elements of recreation resource Web sites. Some were considered more user friendly and resulted in visitations to recreation areas. Other Web sites were hard to navigate, and the respondents said they could not find the information they were looking for.

Latinos—

Participants have recognized improvements in facilities at the community level. They have seen improvements in safety and feel that local parks are much safer than before. They also believe that their tax money is well spent with regard to local parks. But they wondered what the National Forests have to offer. A participant asked the question, “Why go to a national forest? What is there for me and my family? There is just open space.” These are questions that go back to lack of information about opportunities and the need to reach out to the Latino community. Participants discussed the importance of using youth to target adults. Many Latino children assimilate at a quicker rate than their parents. The school system provides opportunities for youth to experience the outdoors. Participants agree that it is harder to get the parent to be part of field trips or programs outside of school. Often Latino parents are most concerned with working and providing for the family.

African Americans—

Participants agreed that, with current issues of obesity and health in America, people are more willing to participate in recreation. If outdoor recreation agencies could make the link between outdoor recreation and health, more people would be willing to go to outdoor facilities.

The African American community would like to see more free recreation opportunities. The group was informed that Oregon State Parks offers a free recreation day at their sites; however, the participants were unaware this existed.

Conclusions

The social context is a very important aspect of recreation among minorities. The family group is especially important. A lot of free time is devoted to family activities, and often involves the extended family spending time together. For example, if the older generation is not interested in going to parks, no one goes to the parks. The younger generation is more likely to participate in outdoor recreation with groups of friends. When families, specifically Asian Americans and Latino-Americans, go to parks, they prefer nearby areas with modern facilities and plenty of space for their extended groups.

Safety is a major concern affecting outdoor recreation participation and includes two elements: personal safety and safety for children. Many minority individuals consider parks dangerous, with the degree of danger varying for different types of parks and outdoor areas. While members of all cultures are concerned for the safety of their children, Asian American parents are especially protective of their children. They often will not allow their children to go to parks, especially if they are places for risky activities, such as skate parks, or far away outdoor areas.

Ethnic minorities have little awareness of the recreation opportunities available to them on public lands. Few understand the differences between the many federal, state, and local areas and managing agencies. Better information is needed to facilitate greater participation by these groups. Efforts such as multilingual materials and reaching out through community groups are necessary to deliver the needed information to the minority populations.

Ethnic minorities are interested in outdoor recreation, but their extent and type of participation are related to the degree of acculturation. For example younger Asian Americans born in the United States have interacted with Whites all of their lives and have been introduced to parks and outdoor recreation, often through the schools. Older generations generally are less interested in outdoor recreation; they have no interest in camping and don't like camping food. They would rather do other things with the family (including community gardening or other outdoor or

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indoor activities). In general, interests in outdoor recreation activities and areas become more similar to the majority population as ethnic minorities become more assimilated within America.

Ethnic minorities are not all alike. There is variation within the three groups studied as well as between them. Like the majority population, minorities in Oregon are split into two groups, rich and poor. These groups have very different interests in outdoor recreation. A common denominator for both groups, however, is support for the children's education. Often, even the poorest will put all that they have to help their kids advance in life through a better education. Minority kids don't usually join groups like Boy or Girl Scouts—their parents do not support it. Minority families might support it more if it were considered more educational.

Summer is the best time to get the minority youth outdoors, as they have several weeks with no school. But most minority parents do not want to send their kids away. They would rather participate with their children, but are unable to owing to work obligations. They might send kids to programs near to home while they are working, especially if they are educational.

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