

Activity settings—In general, the activity setting category (e.g., developed, winter, water, dispersed) had little influence on a respondent’s perceived constraints. Overall, regardless of setting, the most prevalent constraints to participants were: “not enough time because of my job,” “inadequate transportation,” “safety problems,” “physically limiting condition,” “outdoor pests,” “can’t understand the language,” and “feel afraid of a forest.” The least mentioned constraints were “poorly maintained areas” and “crowded activity areas.” Overall, results supported the hypotheses that minorities, women, rural residents, lower income people, and less educated people had higher probabilities of feeling constrained in their participation. Contrary to expectations, results also indicated that immigrants perceived fewer constraints, except for language, than people born in the United States.

Discussion

Public lands, natural resources, and recreational facilities are there, in part, for the enjoyment, benefit, and recreational participation of all. However, this research has shown that some segments of our society feel more constrained than others from participating in outdoor recreation. Past images of our parks have featured a particular genre of signage, pictures, displays, facilities, programs, services offered, management personnel, and languages spoken. These past images may play a large role in how people today perceive their freedom or feeling of welcome to use those parks. This historic context might partly explain why immigrants, who are often new to this country, perceive fewer constraints to outdoor recreation.

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Deborah Chavez

Latinos and Outdoor Recreation

by Deborah J. Chavez¹⁰

The research reported here includes a number of studies conducted in southern California. It was aimed at better understanding the recreation needs and desires of Latino populations. Generally, the findings indicate that Latinos have many of the same recreation needs as other groups, such as places to recreate and reasonable accommodations. But it also indicates they have some unique preferences.

The ethnic and racial profile of the United States is undergoing a major shift. In the decades ahead, people of color will constitute a majority of the population (Shinew and others 2006). Over the last 100 years, few racial or ethnic groups have had as great an impact on the demography of the United States as Latinos (Saenz 2004). Note that “Hispanic” is a term developed by the U.S. Census Bureau, while “Latino” is the term used for this paper, unless referring to Census data. Latinos are measured by the U.S. Census as having Hispanic origins (including Mexican, Central and South American, Puerto Rican, or Cuban heritages). Latinos may be White, African American, or of other races.

The number of Latinos in the United States more than doubled between 1980 and 2000, accounting for 40 percent of the growth in the country’s population during that period (Saenz 2004). While in 1900 there were approximately 500,000 Latinos in the United States, today there are more than 35 million. In 2000, people of Mexican origin were the largest Hispanic group in the United States, followed by Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American,

¹⁰Deborah J. Chavez, Supervisory Research Social Scientist, Pacific Southwest Research Station, U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Riverside, CA.

South American, and other origins (U.S. Department of Commerce 2004). The same Census data indicated that the median age of Hispanics to be 26 years, that 75 percent of Hispanics spoke a language other than English at home, and that 81 percent resided in family households. It is important to note that there are vast within-group differences and the use of “Latino” in this document is not meant to ignore those differences.

When it comes to outdoor recreation sites, there are many influences from Latinos. Several studies have indicated that Latino groups may have different use patterns and expectations about recreation areas, different constraints for participation, and different site development preferences than other groups. Development or changes at resource sites to suit Latino visitors can also serve other groups to those places. For example, Chavez (2002) found that Korean American visitors began frequenting an area developed for use by Latinos.

The information provided in this article is based on one qualitative study (Chavez 2003) and 17 quantitative research projects over a 15-year period conducted mostly in southern California. Owing to this emphasis on southern California, the applicability of these studies in other regions may be limited. Some of this research was previously reported in Chavez (2001) and in Chavez and Olson (2009).

Data collection from Latinos can differ from other groups. For our studies, bilingual field teams collected data from recreation visitors at day use sites on summer weekends. Field team members approached a group of visitors, spent some time getting acquainted, then described the purpose of the study and requested their participation. Often field team members became members of the “family” and shared food or non-alcoholic beverages with the visitors before data collection could take place. We have found that Latinos value outdoor recreation opportunities and appreciate efforts to serve their needs. Most are quite willing to share their opinions about site management once connections between the interviewers and visitors have been made.

Use Patterns and Expectations about Outdoor Recreation Areas

There are three consistent results across the studies related to Latino use patterns and Latino expectations about outdoor recreation areas:

- (1) Due to cultural and social factors, Latinos may use recreational sites for different reasons than Whites. Many

Latinos have reported they have one day off from work per week, and as a result are primarily day-use visitors (Chavez 2003). In addition, some Latinos feel that local city parks are unsafe, and thus prefer to visit more distant recreation sites, such as national parks and forests (Chavez 2003). These findings may differ from the usual reasons to go to natural resource sites (e.g., get away from it all).

- (2) For Latinos, there is a strong emphasis on spending time with family (Chavez 2001, 2003; Chavez and Olson 2009). Often, “family” for Latinos includes the nuclear family (e.g., father, mother, and children) and extended family members (e.g., aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc.). This can result in larger sized groups at outdoor recreation sites. Our studies indicate that the average size of a Latino group is 8 to 15, but that it can number > 100 (Chavez 2001; Chavez and Olson 2009). A survey of Mexican-Americans at national forests sites in southern California showed that they consider leisure activity important and think it contributes to family bonding (Chavez 2003). The Latino visitors responding to this survey placed particular importance on recreational activities in natural areas, citing a sense of place that helps them feel safe. Several also said that these natural places remind them of their homeland and represent an opportunity to pass on their love of the land to their children. In addition, we have found evidence of repeat use of sites over time by Latino families and plans to return multiple times per year (Chavez 2001, Chavez and Olson 2009).

- (3) Latinos approach “picnicking” differently from other groups. Rather than an opportunity to have a prepared meal, for Latinos, picnicking is often an all-day activity. They may cook several meals onsite, often from scratch. They spend 6 to 10 hours with other family members, often using much of that time to play with children. Consequently, there is little turnover at some sites. We have found that although we may be conducting studies at picnic areas, Latinos might indicate their primary activity is “family gathering” instead of “picnicking” (Chavez and Olson 2009).

Constraints to Participation

There are two consistent results across our studies related to constraints to outdoor recreation participation by Latinos:

- (1) Research on Latino visitors to southern California national forest day use areas indicated a large percentage of Spanish speakers and Spanish readers (Chavez 2001). The same studies found a preference for getting

information about these areas by word of mouth, particularly from family and friends. It was found that once on site, visitors preferred to receive information through a brochure at the site entrance, signs along the road, and notes on bulletin boards. Preferred was information that is site-specific. For example, at one open space (or dispersed use area), preferences were for information on streamside areas, things to see and do, rules and regulations, and rare types of plants and animals. At a picnic site, the preferences were for the best times to visit the area to avoid crowds, safety in the area, picnic/barbecue area, and camping in the area.

(2) In a study of Los Angeles County residents (Tierney and others 1998), we learned that some of the constraints most strongly experienced by Latinos who found time to recreate in outdoor areas (such as forests) included being uncomfortable in the outdoors, finding travel and recreation in natural areas too much trouble, and being discriminated against while traveling to or when recreating in natural areas. Respondents also reported that they encountered too few Latino employees at the national forest. The perception of discrimination has a powerful effect on people. In one study at two outdoor recreation areas in southern California, we found that Latinos perceived much more discrimination than other racial and ethnic groups (Chavez 1993). Among all respondents, about 13 percent believed they had been victims of discrimination, whereas 32 percent of Latinos felt they had been discriminated against.

Site Development

There is one consistent result across the studies related to site development. These studies indicated a general preference for development of sites, even those managed as dispersed use sites (Chavez 2001, 2003; Chavez and Olson 2009). Specific site preferences for amenities and facilities were also found (Chavez 2001; Chavez and Olson 2009). For example, at one site the strongest preferences expressed by Latinos were for trash cans, water faucets, cooking grills, picnic tables, and restrooms (Chavez 2002). This was a function of the site being a picnic area. At another site, which is managed for dispersed or open space use, the preferences were for trash cans, telephones, water faucets, and parking areas (Chavez 2001).

Conclusions

Meeting the needs of our changing population likely will require changes in recreation management on national forests and other lands. Latinos have many of the same

recreation needs as other groups, such as needing places to recreate and reasonable accommodations. But Latinos also have some unique preferences. Understanding changing use patterns is a critical challenge for managers as they work to keep recreation sites appealing and useful to the Latino populations of the United States.

The findings reported here from studies conducted in southern California over 15 years suggest how managers in southern California might go about serving the needs and desires of Latino populations. Many Latino respondents reported they have one day off from work per week, thus they are primarily day-use visitors (Chavez 2003). This knowledge is critical in determining when use will be heaviest and what sites may require concentration of resources. Managers also should consider the strong desire for family time and family bonding when Latinos are recreating outdoors and might offer programming to suit that desire. It is also important to consider what constitutes “family” for Latinos, which often means larger groups on site.

Communication is a key to serving Latinos at outdoor recreation sites. Translating materials into Spanish is suggested, and even better would be to provide materials that have been back-translated (where a message is translated to Spanish and then translated back to English by a second translator). This way, the two English statements can be compared (Marin and Marin 1991) and are culturally correct and appropriate. It appears that traditional use of brochures at the site entrance, signs along the road, and notes on bulletin boards are acceptable. Alternate communication strategies, such as onsite bilingual hosts and interpretations, also can be helpful. When considering the types of information to provide, managers will need to survey their visitors.

Meeting the development needs of Latino visitors may require renovation or equipment upgrades, such as installing larger picnic tables, placing groups of tables together, and providing several trash receptacles to accommodate larger visitor groups. In places where people are visiting, but where there are no picnic tables, trash cans could be placed closer to areas where Latinos reported they most commonly recreate, such as near streambeds. Some consideration should be made for the longer period Latinos tend to stay at sites, perhaps by having services/facilities that fit their preferences (such as group play areas that could be used for volleyball or soccer, drinking water, and toilets).

The level of development depends on visitor desires and upon the management goals of an area. For example, picnic areas can be highly developed since they serve a

particular need, but managers will probably exercise more caution for development of dispersed sites. At dispersed sites, managers might want to consider providing portable restrooms and trash dumpsters.

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Participation Differences by Region

Results from comparison of percentages of participants with percentages of population across the seven activity groups and among regions of the country are shown in table 5.9. The data source is the NSRE. Each activity group is listed in turn in column one. Regions are listed one after the other for each activity group in column two. Regions and inclusive States include:

North: Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin

South: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

Rocky Mountains: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming

Pacific Coast: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington

The regional distribution of population (column 4) and observations about regional differences are shown in table 5.9. Each of the seven activity groups is covered. An asterisk in the Activity Group column of this table indicates the chi-square goodness of fit statistic, which tests independence of the observed proportions in the four regions from the proportions in the nation, as a whole. The asterisks in the RPA Region column are binomial tests of significance between the region participation rate (“Percent participating”) and the participation rate for all people ages 16 and older. This signifies that the participation rate for the region for the activity group listed is significantly different from that of the nation as a whole.

Visiting recreation and historic sites—Generally, regional differences are modest with participation in activities at recreation and historic sites slightly greater in the North Region and slightly lower in the South.

Viewing and photographing nature—Participation in this activity group also shows modest regional differences. Participation rates are a few percentage points higher in the two western regions and a few points lower in the South.

Backcountry activities—The participation rate in backcountry activities is substantially higher in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast Regions than the nation overall, and especially higher than in the South.

Motorized activities—Participation in motorized activities is higher in the Rocky Mountain Region than in any other of the three regions. The Rocky Mountains is the only region more than a few percentage points different from the national participation rate.

Hunting and fishing—Participation in hunting and fishing activities is highest in the South and Rocky Mountain Regions, which are both higher than the national rate, and lowest in the Pacific Coast Region.

Non-motorized boating activities—Participation in non-motor boating is disproportionately higher in the North and Pacific Coast Regions, but lower in the South.

Snow skiing and boarding—Participation in snow skiing is highest in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast Regions, is next highest in the North, and by far is the lowest in the South. All but the South are above the national rate.

Across the seven activity groups, one apparent determining factor of participation rate is availability of sites and areas for outdoor activities. Activities requiring large natural areas are much more abundant in the western regions. Areas with snowfall sufficient for skiing occur in the western mountains and in the northern states. Hunting and fishing occur in all regions, but they are very much traditional activities for the forests and waters of the South and thus have relatively high participation rates in that region. Generally, all regions have their own species of birds, wildlife and trees to support viewing and photographing activities.