

## RESEARCH BRIEFS



# A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION WITH ANGLO AND HISPANIC WILDERNESS VISITORS

*Julia Dawn Parker, Ph.D.*  
*School of Forest Resources*  
*University of Arkansas*  
*Monticello, AR*

*Patricia L. Winter, Ph.D.*  
*USDA Forest Service*  
*Riverside, CA*

Educating, interpreting for, and communicating with wilderness visitors is necessary to promote appropriate low-impact wilderness recreation. The Angeles National Forest is located northeast of Los Angeles and is surrounded by a large and ethnically diverse population that provided a potentially ethnically diverse sample of wilderness visitors for the purpose of this study. This study assessed the types of visitors coming to the Cucamonga, San Gabriel, and Sheep Mountain Wildernesses on the Angeles National Forest and provided a basis for understanding their behavior, attitudes, and needs regarding their wilderness experience.

Data collection occurred at six heavily used trailheads within the three wildernesses. On-site observation and on-site minisurveys followed by mail surveys were employed to collect information. On-site minisurveys collected limited information regarding the visitors and provided a place for willing participants to provide their address for the mail survey.

One hundred forty-one visitors returned a mail survey. Of these, 50 had visited the Cucamonga Wilderness, 69 had visited the Sheep Mountain Wilderness, and 22 had visited the San Gabriel Wilderness. Most respondents were Anglos (73%), though 12% were Hispanic, 9% were Asian, 3% were African American, and 4% chose multiple categories or "other." Both the on-site observations and the mailed survey reflect higher levels of ethnic diversity than found on other wildernesses but lower levels of ethnic diversity than the southern California population in general (Cole, Watson, & Roggenbuck, 1995; Chavez & Parker, 1995; Winter, 1996).

Education levels of visitors were higher than the general public; this is consistent with other wilderness user studies (Cole et al., 1995). Education level did not differ significantly by ethnic group.

Only 25% of respondents had contact with the Forest Service prior to or during their visit to the wilderness. Twelve percent of Hispanic respondents and 24%

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of Anglo respondents reported contacting the Forest Service, most stopping at a ranger station (15%) or a visitor center (10%). Very few respondents contacted the Forest Service prior to visiting (4%). Friends and family were the most frequently reported source of information by both Hispanic and Anglo respondents, followed by maps and trail signs for Anglos and road signs and trail signs for Hispanics.

Both Hispanic and Anglo respondents expressed greatest interest in receiving information from printed material that they could take with them, such as maps (Hispanics 71%, Anglos 74%) and brochures (Hispanics 82%, Anglos 85%). Respondents also expressed an interest in receiving information from trail signs (Hispanics 41%, Anglos 50%) and road signs (Hispanics 41%, Anglos 30%). One-third of respondents desired personal contact with the Forest Service. Hispanics and Anglos differed slightly in their favored information media ( $\chi^2 p=.05$ , respectively). Hispanics preferred television (29%) and radio (18%) slightly more than Anglos (11% and 3%).

Respondents reported interest in a variety of topics associated with wilderness. The most frequently selected topics by Hispanics included plants and animals, trails and landscape, tips on wilderness travel, and rules and regulations. Anglos most frequently selected trails and landscape, similar places, and plants and animals.

This research represents a case study of a unique, heavily used national forest. Information from this limited study can be used to build an understanding of wilderness visitation and to develop larger and more general studies of ethnicity and communication about wilderness in the future.

## REFERENCES

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