

Regular Paper

The Changing Dynamic of Latinx Outdoor Recreation on National and State Public Lands

David Flores
José J. Sánchez

Executive Summary

The Latinx population is the largest growing minority population in the United States and is estimated to comprise 28% of the U.S. population by 2050. This continued growth is no longer due to foreign-born immigration, which accounted for 34% of all Latinx people in 2015, but rather to those born in the U.S., who comprised 66% of all Latinxs that year. Therefore, the current and future Latinx population consists of second-, third-, and fourth-generation Americans who report being fluent in English and Spanish, have higher levels of education, and earn higher incomes. As the Latinx population becomes larger and more complex, their outdoor recreation preferences and perceptions are also changing. Our survey findings reveal three significant ways that this is happening. First, Latinxs are expanding their recreation activities beyond day-use activities to engage in overnight backpacking and camping—activities that enable participants to explore a broader array of forests and natural resources. Second, despite earlier research that found significant gaps in environmental awareness among “Hispanics,” recent polling data and this study show that today’s Latinxs overwhelmingly support protecting public lands. Third, while prior research identified overt racial discrimination as a significant barrier to public land use, our findings show that

David Flores is a research social scientist with the USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fort Collins, CO USA.

José J. Sánchez is a Research Economist with the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station, Riverside, CA USA.

Acknowledgments: The authors would like to thank the USDA Forest Service National Center for Natural Resources Economic Research for generous research funding. We also want to thank John Loomis and Armando González-Cabán for assistance and guidance in survey design and Michelle Haeefe for providing some of the tables

Please send correspondence to david.flores2@usda.gov

the Latinx population feels welcome on federal and state public lands. Staff and other visitors are generally perceived to be friendly, which suggests a shift in a Latinx sense of belonging when visiting national forests and parks. Nonetheless, there continue to be institutional barriers and low visitation rates to public lands amongst racial and ethnic minorities. Future research on Latinx outdoor recreation on public lands could examine how new generations draw meaning from their outdoor experiences and how they are combining traditional cultural traits with more diverse and active outdoor recreation activities.

Keywords

Latinx, outdoor recreation, race, ethnicity, public land

Introduction

In 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that over half of children under age 5 in the United States were racial or ethnic minorities (Cohn, 2016), with the Latinx¹ population comprising the largest minority group in the country (Krogstad, 2017). The continued growth in the Latinx population is no longer due to foreign-born immigration, which accounted for 34% of Latinxs in 2015, but now traces to those born in the U.S., who comprised 66% of all Latinxs in the same year (Flores, 2017). A record number of Latinx people also reported having gone to college, being fluent in English, and speaking Spanish at home (Flores, 2017). As the current and future growth of the Latinx population is significant and becoming more complex, there is a need to better understand how Latinx outdoor recreation on federal and state public lands might be changing. The most recent U.S. Forest Service National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) Program survey results show that 6% of all national forest visitors are from persons of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish descent (USDA Forest Service, 2016). Similarly, the Outdoor Industry Association (2018) found that Hispanics consist of 10% of all outdoor participants. However, previous research on Hispanic outdoor recreation in federal and state public lands focused on first-generation immigrants who were less assimilated to Anglo culture and primarily engaged in day-use activities such as picnicking, swimming, being near water, and recreating in large family groups (Chavez, 2012; Chavez & Olsen, 2009). Meanwhile, constraints on outdoor recreation have been historically found to include a lack of time to participate, being uncomfortable in the outdoors, distances required to travel to recreation sites and natural areas, lack of information, racial discrimination, and perceived similarities between the uniforms of the USDA Forest Service and U.S. Border Patrol (Blahna & Black, 1993; Chavez, 2012; Sharaievska et al., 2010).

¹Latinx” is an inclusive term used to describe all people from Latin American decent and used as a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino or Latina. The authors use the term “Latinx” when referring to the current research. “Hispanic” is a term used by the U.S. Census Bureau to identify people relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries and Latin America. In this article, we use the term “Hispanic” when referring to earlier research that uses the term. “Latino” and/or “Latina” are gender-specific terms used to describe a person of Latin American descent and are used by the organization Latino Outdoors and most survey participants.

In this study we worked with the outdoor organization Latino Outdoors to identify the social, economic, and cultural barriers faced by Latinxs to participate in recreational activities on national and state public lands. The findings from this study show that day-use activities, such as picnicking, remain important to Latinx recreationists; however, the findings also indicate differences in more recent Latinx recreation activity trends on federal and state public lands. For example, cultural practices such as picnicking in large groups with extended family and friends continues to remain popular among Latinxs, but they are also interested in hiking, overnight camping, and backpacking. Moreover, while constraints such as a lack of time for recreation and distance from national parks and forests remain, significant changes include Latinxs' higher education and income levels, and fewer Latinxs reporting discrimination when visiting federal and state public lands. Increasingly, Latinxs report feeling welcome by staff, who are described as “friendly” and “informative.” Nonetheless, according to Flores et al. (2018), there continue to be institutional barriers and low visitation rates to public lands amongst minority groups.

Despite relatively low national rates of Latinx visitation to public lands (Flores et al., 2018), and the perception that racial and ethnic minorities are less interested in underdeveloped nature-based settings (Cordell, Green, & Betz, 2002; Elmendorf et al., 2005; Kellert, 1984; Shinew, Floyd, & Parry, 2004), Latinxs across the United States share a strong sense of responsibility for the protection of public lands and natural, undeveloped environments, according to recent polling data (Sanchez, 2014; Vargas, 2016), research on connectedness to nature (Roberts & Suren, 2010; Taylor, 2018), and the findings from this study. Moreover, Latinx outdoor recreationists are increasingly aware of, and participate in, an array of outdoor recreation activities beyond day-use, are fluent in English and Spanish, and learn about recreation opportunities via social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram. In sum, the dynamics of Latinx outdoor recreation and their perceptions toward public lands are changing and becoming increasingly diverse. At the same time, traditional cultural values and meanings that Latinxs derive from participating in outdoor recreation—such as a strong desire to share their outdoor experiences with family and friends, recreating in large groups, and communicating their experiences in both English and Spanish—remain.

Changes in Latinx outdoor recreation suggest unique opportunities for recreation managers who want to engage Latinx groups through social media and share information about the multiple recreation activities public lands have to offer. The goal of this study is to identify current social, economic, and cultural barriers to outdoor recreation on public lands via a survey to determine shifts in Latinx outdoor recreation patterns. This study provides a glimpse into the changing profile and activity trends of the modern-day Latinx recreationist.

Assimilation and Acculturation

Earlier studies of the Latinx population and their outdoor recreation patterns on federal and state public lands were informed by theories of assimilation and acculturation. According to the “straight-line” assimilation hypothesis, the more time immigrants in the United States spend in the host country, the more socially, culturally, and economically similar they would become to the Anglo population (Park, 1928). However, for non-white immigrants from Latin America and Asia, assimilation appeared to

be “segmented” rather than “linear,” and it varied according to demographics including age, language preferences, and education level (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Early studies of Latinx outdoor recreation used these concepts to reveal group differences in use patterns between Anglos and Mexican-Americans (Floyd & Gramann, 1993), and within-group differences among Mexican-American and Central-American recreationists (Carr & Williams, 1993). Their findings revealed significant differences in attitudes, behaviors, and recreation activities vis-à-vis the outdoors. For example, less assimilated racial and ethnic minorities tended to recreate in larger groups and were more likely to participate in day-use activities compared to more-assimilated minority groups.

However, as Alba and Nee (1997) found, patterns of assimilation and acculturation varied. Multiple “assimilation outcomes” exist, as immigrants navigate their host countries and retain some cultural values while adopting new ones (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004). In other words, depending on their financial resources, family structure, and racial background, immigrants are continuously shifting back and forth between retaining their cultural values and complete assimilation.

Research on Latinx leisure activities has traditionally found that Latinx preferences and participation in outdoor recreation are isolated around day-use activities such as recreating in large groups, relaxing, picnicking, being with family, and playing with children (Chavez, 1993; Cronan, Shinew, & Stodolska, 2008; Gobster, 2002; Stodolska, Shinew, & Li, 2010). Moreover, research has shown that Latinx recreationists tend to engage less frequently in physically active leisure pursuits when compared to other groups (Crespo et al., 2000; Gobster, 2002). However, the findings from this study indicate that, for the modern-day Latinx outdoor recreationist, preferences and participation in outdoor recreation activities are more complex. Culturally distinctive preferences, such as recreating in large groups with family and friends, are combined with non-traditional outdoor activities, such as hiking, overnight backpacking, sight-seeing and birdwatching. Thus, assimilation and acculturation in outdoor recreation activities and patterns are more dynamic, as Latinx recreationists are combining culturally distinctive preferences with more physically demanding activities to explore a broader array of forest resources.

Methods

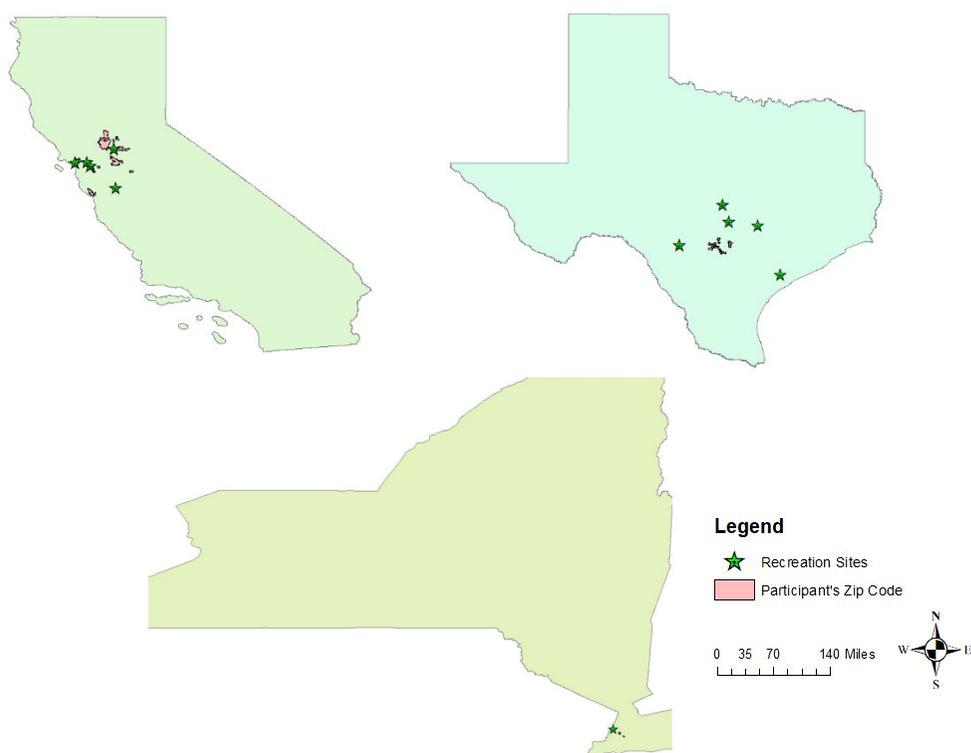
This survey was administered by the nonprofit organization Latino Outdoors to volunteer organizers and participants of recreation outings. The mission of Latino Outdoors is to “inspire, connect, and engage Latino communities in the outdoors and embrace cultura y familia as part of the outdoor narrative, ensuring our history, heritage, and leadership are valued and represented” (Latino Outdoors, 2019 p. 1). Its organizational structure consists of an Executive Director, an Outings Program Manager, six board of directors, and over 50 volunteer organizers across the United States. Volunteer organizers plan, coordinate, and lead outdoor excursions on public lands, with the organizational goal to “provide Latino families with transformational experiences in nature” (Latino Outdoors, 2019, p. 1).

The sample consists of 95 unique respondents who answered both closed- and open-ended survey questions. The survey was administered at recreation outings throughout the United States, including California (48 survey participants; 51%), Tex-

as (22 survey participants; 23%), New York (11 survey participants; 12%), Washington, D.C. (11 survey participants; 12%), and Florida (three survey participants; 3%). Figure 1 offers maps with recreation site locations and survey participants' home zip codes; as seen in the maps, most of the recreation sites are relatively close to participants' homes. Sixty-eight percent of respondents identified themselves as Latino (21% did not answer this question), and one-third of the respondents completed the survey in English. We decided to include the 21% who did not identify as Latino in the analysis because Latino Outdoors targeted families and individuals of Latino descent for the excursions. Therefore, there is high probability that these participants are in fact from Latino descent, even though they do not answer the survey question.

Figure 1

Recreation Sites and Survey Participants Home Zip Code for California, Texas, and New York.



An onsite survey was developed based on previous surveys initially created by Latino Outdoors. These surveys were revised with consultation from researchers at Colorado State University and the USDA Forest Service, with the goal of assessing Latinos' perceptions of the outdoors and outdoor experiences. A pre- and post-survey was administered to participants at the start and end of excursions (see appendix). The post-survey included additional questions on sociodemographics. The survey collected recreational information about the types of outdoor recreation trips they took and the number of activities they engaged in. A section of the survey with open-ended

questions captured their diverse perceptions toward outdoor recreation. Survey participants also answered sociodemographic questions such as education level, household income, and family immigrant generation. They also provided information on how they learned about outdoor events sponsored by Latino Outdoors.

Latino Outdoors provided transportation to the excursions, which consisted of day trips to local recreation sites within a 2-hour driving distance. Latino Outdoors administered the survey (see appendix) to adults who participated in their outdoor excursions beginning in the summer of 2015 and ending in September 2016. Survey responses were completed using paper and pencil. The survey asked respondents both closed and open-ended questions about their experiences visiting a national or state park, forest, or other public lands. If they had not previously visited a national or state forest, park, or public lands, they were asked why. If they had, then they were asked questions about their previous outdoor recreation experiences. Several questions asked respondents what characteristics of national or state parks or forests or public lands were important to them, such as opportunities for recreation or viewing natural scenery, spending time with family, and providing a source of inspiration. Respondents were also asked qualitative open-ended survey questions to assess their sense of responsibility toward protecting public lands, their expectations regarding the outdoors, their most memorable outdoor experiences, and what meanings outdoor experiences had for them.

The authors of this study are fluent in Spanish and English, which facilitated the translation of participant responses from Spanish to English for final reporting. Bilingual Latino Outdoors organization members also checked each translation for consistency. The open-ended qualitative responses were reformatted into Microsoft Word and responses were downloaded into NVivo 10 qualitative data analysis software. NVivo 10 software provides a tool for developing a qualitative database that can be formatted to identify separate cases, attributes, and values for sorting and comparing items across different subgroups in the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). We then conducted issue-focused coding using NVivo 10 across open-ended responses to develop logically connected issues related to respondents' perceptions of being Latinx and recreating on public lands (Weiss, 1994). We searched for issues related to previous studies of Hispanic/Latino/Latinx outdoor recreation, Latino Outdoors program development, and emerging issues that could be compared across cases. Once we identified a patterned set of codes, we sorted codes into coherent thematic categories based on responsibility, expectations, and meanings given to outdoor experiences on public lands. Themes were then integrated in order to summarize the main lines of inquiry and identify variations in responses. The final analysis and reporting include conclusions that emerged from the participants' open-ended responses.

Results

Closed-ended responses include the social and demographic information of survey participants, which can be compared to both general population and Latinx demographics in the United States. Open-ended responses, meanwhile, reveal qualitative perceptions and experiences, including how participants draw meaning from their outdoor experiences and their sense of belonging on federal and state public lands.

People who participated in the outdoor events where surveys were administered ranged from pre-school aged to over 50 years old—though no child under age 18 was administered a survey. Fifty-five percent of the survey respondents were female (although 18% did not answer this question). Survey respondents were also highly educated. Seventy-one percent of respondents had at least a high school degree, and 65% attended at least some college, which is substantially higher than the percentage of the general U.S. population with at least some college (19%, U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In our sample, Table 1 shows the percentage of education level by categories, college degree having the highest number of participants. Moreover, we calculated the average household income by using the midpoint of each range and taking the average. Participants reported an average annual household income of \$71,600 (Table 2), compared to the overall U.S. average annual household income of \$77,866 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) and the U.S. Latino average annual household income of \$45,148 (Krogstad & Flores, 2016).

Table 1

What is the Highest Level of Education You Have Completed?

Less than high school	9%
High school graduate or GED	6%
Some college or technical school	24%
College degree (BA, BS)	32%
Postgraduate (MA, PhD, Law, MD)	9%

Note: 20% of respondents did not answer this question.

Table 2

What is Your Total Household Income Before Taxes and Other Deductions?

Under \$9,999	8%
\$10,000 – \$19,999	2%
\$20,000 – \$29,999	6%
\$30,000 – \$39,999	8%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	12%
\$50,000 - \$59,999	5%
\$60,000 - \$69,999	6%
\$70,000 - \$79,999	8%
\$80,000 - \$89,999	2%
\$90,000 and over	20%

Note: 26% of respondents did not answer this question.

Thirty-seven percent (35 participants) indicated that they were the first generation of their family to live in the U.S., while 25% (24 participants) indicated that at least four generations of their family had lived in this country (Table 3). This is consistent with the overall trend of declining immigration from Latin America to the United States in the last decade and the continued growth of second-, third-, and fourth-generation Latinxs. When asked who they preferred to take on an outdoor trip, most people ranked family or friends highest. The least preferred option, meanwhile, was going on an outdoor outing with “people who I do not know” (Table 4)—a finding that correlates with research on how younger generations in general feel about outdoor recreation (Weiler et al., 2018). The responses also indicated that spending time with family and friends was the most memorable experience during outings.

Table 3

Place a Check Mark Next to the Statement that Best Describes the History of Your Family in the United States

I am the first generation of my family to live in the United States.	37%
My parents were the first generation in our family to live in the United States.	18%
My grandparents were the first generation in our family to live in the United States.	12%
At least four generations of my family have lived in the United States.	25%
Other / I don't know.	0%

Note: 21% did not answer this question (percentages reflect only those who did answer).

Table 4

Rank from 1 to 6, with 1 Being Most Important, Who You Most Prefer Taking Another Outdoor Trip With?

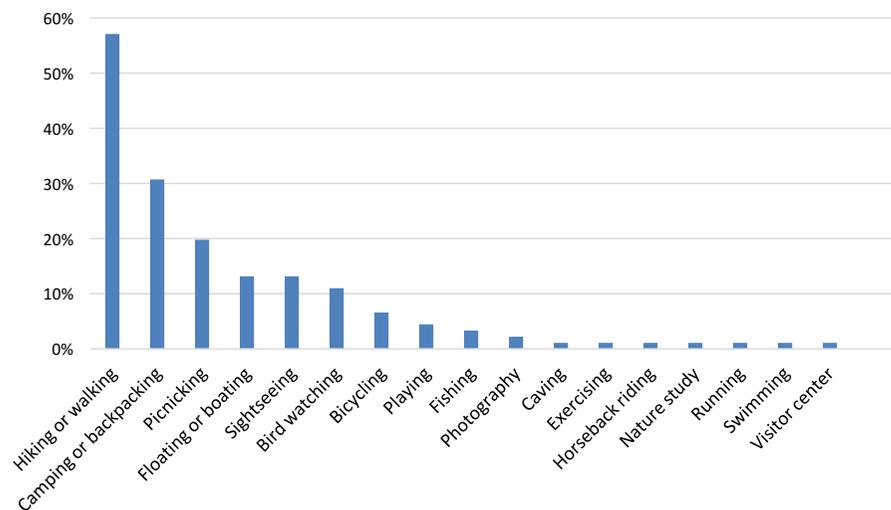
	Average Rank ¹
With family	1.58
With friends	1.96
Latino Outdoors	2.35
Other outdoor group	3.82
On my own	3.74
People who I do not know	4.93

¹ Of the 66 post-trip survey respondents, ten did not respond to the question at all, of the 40 who did respond 15 did not rank all of the options, and/or appear to have treated the question as a rating. These responses were treated as rankings for the average calculation which results in some having “ties.”

The survey also asked respondents about the types of activities they engaged in when visiting public lands. While previous studies have noted a preference for day-use activities such as picnicking and swimming, over half (57%) of respondents indicated that they hiked or walked, while 31% reported having camped and 20% picnicked (Figure 2). Additional activities such as sightseeing, boating, birdwatching, and bicycling were noted.

Figure 2

What Types of Activities Have You Engaged in During Your Visits? (For Example: Bird Watching, Camping, Hiking, Picnicking, Sightseeing, etc.)



Survey participants were asked open-ended qualitative questions related to their sense of responsibility for public lands, expectations for outdoor activities, meanings attributed to the outdoors, and most memorable outdoor experiences. While many respondents stated that time and money were significant barriers, they also reported that the location they recreated in with Latino Outdoors was easy to get to, and people in their community did not realize how close, easily accessible, and beautiful public lands are. Study participants expressed a strong sense of responsibility for public lands and stated that they were taught by their parents to care for the outdoors. They expressed feeling “a symbolic relationship” with the land, an enjoyment of the outdoors “because nature is beautiful,” and a sense of responsibility for “where we go to have fun.”

Respondents ascribed powerful meanings to being in the outdoors, such as developing a sense of connection to nature and stepping away from city life. They expressed that the outdoors provided them with an opportunity to disengage from technology and “enjoy nature and wildlife and be one with the planet that gives us so much.” Participants enjoyed having the opportunity to relax, hike, slowly take in the sounds of birds, breathe fresh air, and generally be at peace. Throughout the survey, respondents cited working long hours as a barrier to recreation, and when they were asked about what being in the outdoors meant to them, being away from regular work routines emerged as a dominant theme. Relatedly, enjoying quality time and reconnecting with family and friends were discussed as important aspects of enjoying time in nature.

Expectations regarding outdoor experiences included spending quality time with family and friends. While respondents expected their experiences to be enjoyable and valued the opportunity to get exercise and stay healthy, they also expected to share their experiences with family members and communities. Participants valued learning about the outdoors, finding out how to get involved, and educating their communities on how to participate in outdoor experiences. For example, one respondent stated that

a major expectation was “for Latino Outdoors to offer experiences to the people in our community so they can enjoy the parks as well as protecting and becoming an advocate for our parks and our rights to recreate on these lands.” Moreover, respondents placed similar importance on learning how to conserve public lands, citing a desire to “learn more about protecting the environment, and how we can protect these areas.”

The most memorable outdoor experiences for participants arose when they were able to participate in outdoor activities with family and friends. While participants discussed the personal exhilaration of swimming, climbing, hiking, and bird-watching, they found sharing the experience with others to be particularly fulfilling and were happy when “everyone had an opportunity to enjoy themselves.” Simply having the experience was one thing, but respondents also described “seeing family members love the experience” as the “most memorable” part. In short, “spending time with family and making memories” was part of enjoying their overall experience of being in the outdoors.

Limitations

The survey was administered by Latino Outdoors outing leaders. Challenges during survey administration included a lack of survey experience; for example, some of the outing leaders forgot to distribute the survey at the beginning or at the conclusion of the outdoor excursions, and others forgot to take the survey instrument with them at all. Other issues occurred due to adverse climate conditions, such as wind blowing away paper surveys or making it difficult for participants to complete the survey. Due to the non-random sampling design and small sample size, the survey results are not representative of the entire U.S. Latinx population. While surveys of outdoor recreation in urban parks do have larger Latinx sample sizes, sample sizes of Latinx recreation on national parks, forests, and other public lands are limited and thus a necessary challenge for conducting research on underrepresented groups not captured in large quantitative systematic surveys. Thus, in order to conduct survey research on the Latinx population and outdoor recreation on public lands, the limitations described are a necessary part of the research process.

A majority of survey participants were recruited and learned about Latino Outdoors excursions through friends (62%) and relatives (21%). While these network relationships are important, they may not include individuals and groups from diverse Latinx communities. However, we believe closed and open-ended survey responses provide several valuable insights into the changing dynamics of Latinx recreation on public lands. Finally, these results should be interpreted carefully. As shown above, the survey respondents are highly educated and have higher than average annual household income, compared to both overall U.S. and Latinx households. Furthermore, about half of the participants had been to the recreation sites before. Additional research should focus on the general Latinx population and individuals who have never visited public lands for outdoor recreation.

Discussion

While Latinx recreationists continue to enjoy day-use activities and picnicking near water, we also learned that the Latinx community is increasingly interested and participating in outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, backpacking, and tubing

(Figure 2). Thus, we find that Latinxs are moving beyond traditional day-use activities to explore the outdoors in more diverse and adventurous ways than reported in previous studies (Chavez, 2012; Chavez & Olsen, 2009). These findings parallel recent upward trends in Latinx assimilation and education across the country (Flores, 2017), along with generational shifts in millennial recreation patterns (Penington-Grey & Blair, 2010). Our research shows that social and cultural factors such as participating in outdoor recreation in large groups with family and friends, and describing their experiences in Spanish, are important to Latinxs' sense of belonging on public lands. For the Latinx community, a meaningful outdoor experience is not isolated to their own individual experience or motivated by self-interest (Weaver, 2015), but is rather based on communal experiences and meanings that fellow participants derive.

Furthermore, participants valued being able to have new experiences even without extensive travel. Most of the outings that Latino Outdoors organizes are within a reasonably close driving distance (within 60 miles from home), but they still afforded participants the opportunity to see the “views from mountain tops,” “natural beauty,” “different types of bugs,” and animals like moose for the first time. These findings suggest that Latinxs are increasingly overcoming barriers such as distance, cost, assimilation, and fear of the outdoors identified in previous studies of how racial and ethnic minority groups recreate on public lands (Chavez, 2012; Elmendorf et al., 2005; Floyd & Nicholas, 2008).

While Latino Outdoors organizers and participants are not representative of the entire Latinx population, being 34 years of age on average, they include community members of the Latinx, generation X (born between 1965–1980), and the “millennial” generation (born between 1981–1996). Meanwhile, most studies on millennials' outdoor recreation patterns do not explain racial, ethnic, or cultural differences in public land use (Weiler et al., 2018). The participants in this study are strongly grounded in the Latinx community and are incredibly social media savvy, which is one reason that they are highly effective at spreading the word about opportunities for recreation on public lands and the importance of recreation for health and conservation. This group of new Latinx recreationists is building the platform for future generations of recreationists from generations Z (born between 1997–2010) and Alpha (born between 2011–2025), which is especially significant because generation Alpha will be the first generation to experience a non-white majority in the United States (Fry & Parker, 2018).

In contrast to Richard Louv's (2008) oft-cited concept of “nature deficit disorder” and the increasing alienation of young people from the outdoors, 85% of the participants in this study reported feeling a strong sense of responsibility toward protecting public lands. In addition to describing their own individual responsibility for taking care of nature and public lands, open-ended responses invoked taking care of the land as a communal responsibility because “it's a world that we all share” and “because in the eye of human encroachment of natural land it's imperative that we leave space for plants and animals to inhabit.” While participants reported limited outdoor recreation opportunities, they also reported having “a strong connection to land” and a “need to preserve common lands” for future generations. These results also provide important context for the finding that Latinx voters nationally tend to be very strong supporters of protecting the environment (Sanchez, 2014; Vargas, 2016). Hence, while polling data identifies immigration and the economy as the most important issues for Latinx voters (Guillen-Woods, 2016; Pantoja, 2018), our findings suggest Latinxs are also pay-

ing close attention to the environment, conserving natural areas, and access to public lands.

In a study of urban proximate day-use recreation sites in southern California, Chavez (1993) found that Hispanics reported acts of discrimination while recreating on national forests. Hispanics also reported interactions with law enforcement being more frequent than interactions with regular staff while recreating, and Hispanics tended to recreate in larger groups compared to Anglos for safety purposes. Similar findings from research on discrimination in recreational areas has received attention for decades (Blahna & Black, 1993; Chavez, 1993; Flood & McAvoy, 2007; Floyd & Gramann, 1995; Sharaievska et al., 2010) and remains a serious concern for national, state, and municipal park managers across the country (Gobster, 2002; Stanfield et al., 2005; Stodolska, 2018). However, study participants indicated that earlier findings of overt discrimination on public lands could be changing. When asked if they felt “welcomed” by other races, only one survey respondent answered “no,” and in open-ended responses, nearly all respondents reported that they felt “welcome” and that park staff and other recreationists were “friendly.” One respondent stated, “If I have any questions about the trails people generally help me,” and those that reported previously participating in outdoor recreation activities stated that they “never had an issue or confrontation.” These findings reveal that the perceived barriers based on overt discrimination found in previous studies may not be as prevalent for younger generations of Latinx recreationists.

Nonetheless, while Latinxs report less overt discrimination while recreating on federal and state public lands, racial and ethnic minority groups remain underrepresented (Flores et al., 2018). As with housing and the economy, people of color remain separate and unequal in many other areas of social life (Massey & Denton, 1993), including outdoor recreation. Systemic racial and ethnic inequality is still structurally produced, but is no longer overt and can seem almost invisible (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Thus, recreation settings continue to be places for the “creation and reinforcement of racist practices in contemporary society” (Floyd, 2007, p. 249). Practices of historical racism, effects of past economic discrimination, as well as housing and educational segregation continue to produce institutional racism and exclusion from recreation opportunities (Blahna & Black, 1993; Roberts & Rodriguez, 2008; Taylor, 2018). Therefore, while in this study fewer Latinxs reported overt acts of discrimination against them while participating in outdoor recreation activities, the structural mechanisms that lead to low minority group visitation rates to federal and state public lands remain relatively stable.

Conclusion

While research on Latinx outdoor recreation in urban areas and city parks has increased over the past twenty years (Tandon et al., 2018), research on federal and state public lands such as national forests and parks has waned. The results from this study show a shift in Latinx use of federal and state public lands. Previous studies from the 1990s and 2000s (Chavez, 1993; Chavez & Olsen, 2009; Floyd & Gramann, 1993) found day-use activities such as picnicking and swimming to be the primary recreational activities and typically focused on first-generation, less assimilated Latinx immigrants. However, the demographics and assimilation processes of the Latinx community are

changing, as the number of first-generation immigrants are decreasing and second-, third-, and fourth-generation U.S.-born Latinxs are increasing (Lopez et al., 2018).

Accordingly, Latinx preferences and perceptions of outdoor recreation on federal and state public lands are changing in three significant ways. First, Latinxs are expanding their recreation activities beyond day-use to engage in activities like overnight backpacking and camping, which enable participants to explore a broader array of forest resources. At the same time, cultural practices such as recreating in large groups with family and friends remain important to their outdoor experiences. Second, despite earlier research finding significant gaps in environmental awareness among racial and ethnic minority groups and millennials (Cordell et al., 2002; Kellert, 1984; O'Dell, 2016; Shinew, Floyd, & Parry, 2004), recent polling data and research shows their overwhelming support for protecting public lands (Sanchez, 2014; Weiler et al., 2018). The findings in this study also show significant support and a strong sense of responsibility for protecting national and state parks for public use. Third, while prior research identified overt racial discrimination as a significant barrier to public land use (Chavez, 1993; Floyd & Gramann, 1995), our findings show that Latinxs now tend to feel welcome on federal and state public lands, and staff and other visitors are generally perceived as friendly, which may increase the Latinx community's sense of belonging when visiting national forests and parks.

While this study's findings reveal shifting processes of assimilation and acculturation, and show that perceptions of overt discrimination may be changing on federal and state public lands, racial and ethnic minority groups remain underrepresented in outdoor recreation. Institutional barriers such as "policies, practices, and procedures [that] favor some ethnic groups over others" lead to institutional racism and less visible forms of exclusion (Haas, 1992, p. 2). While discrimination may not be overt, institutional racism can "develop without any conscious racist intent" or may also be a result of past discrimination (Farley, 1988, p. 10; Haas, 1992). Systemic exclusion and persistent inequalities without overt racial discrimination reproduces a system of "racism without racists" (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). In other words, without using overt racial discrimination, ignoring the historical causes of racial inequality can justify racial and ethnic minority underrepresentation in politics, as well as exclusion from quality housing, higher education, access to health care, professional opportunities—and in this case access to public lands. Instead, these are blamed on individualistic characteristics such as cultural attributes, morality, values, work ethic, or simply lack of interest.

Generation Alpha will be the first minority-majority generation in the United States, and the Latinx population is the largest minority group within this generation. The findings in this study show that Latinx recreationists are breaking away from more traditional recreation patterns and building new recreation opportunities for younger generations, which includes diverse outdoor experiences combined with memorable family experiences. Future research on the growing Latinx population and outdoor recreation could examine how new generations of Latinxs draw meaning from their outdoor experiences, and how they are combining traditional cultural traits with more diverse and active outdoor recreation activities. In addition, within-group differences that consider diverse backgrounds, such as country of origin, age, income, education, and gender identity, will reveal further opportunities for delivering services and gaining political support from a new wave of public land users who hold onto their cultural

identities while at the same time are assimilating and acculturating to U.S. norms of outdoor recreation on public lands.

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