



Ethnic minority visitor use and non-use of parks and participation in natural resources, environmental activities, and outdoor recreation

QUICK FACTS

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Popular myths & misconceptions

- ◆ People of color are not interested in conservation or environmental issues.
- ◆ Historically, people of color have not been involved in environmental issues, resulting in a dearth of people of color who can serve as role models in conservation education.
- ◆ The issues receiving primary attention in conservation and environmental education curricula have universal appeal.
- ◆ People of color aren't interested in pursuing careers in conservation, environmental education (and related).
- ◆ The needs and interests of people of color are recognized and addressed by those setting the national conservation or environmental education agenda.
- ◆ Natural resource programs are presented in ways that appeal to, and are relevant for, all audiences.

"I was taught early on in my life about the power of nature... And, working the land was the hope of survival... Nowadays, only those of us who maintain our bonds to the land draw spiritual strength from nature..."

*~ bell hooks
author/scholar*

Common constraints across cultures

- ◆ Socialization and exposure (e.g., upbringing and/or current social practices)
- ◆ "Marginalized" nature of racial ethnic minorities (e.g., cost/financial constraints, lack of transportation, access issues)
- ◆ Historical context / perspective of current outdoor natural resources areas based in historical perspectives.
- ◆ Safety issues and fears (e.g., physical, emotional safety, concern about being injured, fear of natural elements, navigation and uncertainty of getting around, other people and "places you dare not go")
- ◆ Lack of people of color visible in marketing and/or promotional materials.
- ◆ Don't feel comfortable or welcome in certain parks, forests, and other outdoor areas.
- ◆ Perceived discrimination / interracial interactions (e.g., potential for others to create a negative effect on visitation or avoiding outdoor areas due to possibility of cultural conflicts or discrimination).
- ◆ Lack of knowledge and/or awareness (e.g., what to do, where to go)
- ◆ "No Time" = more pressing priorities.
- ◆ Few friends travel or recreate in more remote natural areas or wildlands.

(continued)

Strategies for community engagement (sample)

Differences between cultural groups

(Sample constraints that may apply to certain groups but not others, based on upbringing, economic status, level of assimilation/acculturation, language, etc.)

- ♦ Language barriers (e.g., signage, brochures, materials, communication with park staff and other personnel).
- ♦ Desire for more “luxury accommodations”.
- ♦ Perception of being “too crowded”.
- ♦ Perception of not being enough people around (prefer larger crowds).
- ♦ Health issues or physical limitations, general.
- ♦ Concern about not having “proper” outdoor clothing, gear, equipment necessary for activity or overall enjoyment.
- ♦ Lack of discretionary money that might be needed (e.g., entrance fees, specialized clothes, food, travel costs, gear/equip, etc.)
- ♦ Lack of ethnic diversity among workforce (e.g., people of color underrepresented as part of the ranks of public land employees)

Positive connections with nature experienced across cultures (sample)

- ♦ Picnics and family gatherings rate highly across all ethnic groups as reasons for enjoying recreation outdoors.
- ♦ Increased personal health. Recognition that outdoor activities have multiple benefits: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual (e.g., enhanced confidence, physical development, emotional adjustment, social interaction skills, mental acuity, spiritual/religious contact)
- ♦ Strong values towards nature (“nature appreciation”) and belief in conservation and stewardship of the environment.
- ♦ Stress relief, fresh air, natural beauty.

“The outdoors is where people belong. All of the real rhythms that exist in the world are all based in nature... This is America, my native land and these natural resources are part of my heritage and are here for me to enjoy, too...”

~ Bill Gwaltney

National Park Service

- ♦ Examine individual and organizational prejudices, beliefs, and values (e.g., conduct a “diversity assessment”).
- ♦ Actively seek to learn more about other cultures with whom we want to connect.
- ♦ Recognize the diversity of environmental issues facing our audiences; emphasize relevancy to their lives and communities.
- ♦ Gain a broad perspective on issues by collecting input from a variety of sources and community leaders.
- ♦ Ensure a balanced perspective on the values and contributions of ethnic minorities is represented in our organizational cultural, on our staff, relating to our board (if applicable), and within our documents (such as strategic plan) and promotional materials, etc.
- ♦ Utilize opportunities for collaboration with minority businesses and minority serving institutions, broadly.
- ♦ If engaging students, involve parents or guardians, and/or other caregivers. Connect with families (broadly).
- ♦ Cultural pluralism based upon respect for differences should be held as the ideal approach to societal development.
- ♦ A balance of different ethnic groups should be represented in images and/or texts of materials put out by our organization or agency.
- ♦ Establish interface of trusted leader(s) in the community who can be the bridge, the intermediary between our agency and the community.
- ♦ Engage or Improve use of various ethnic media sources in your area (T.V., radio, newspapers, newsletters, etc). Prioritize building relationships with key journalists for local ethnic newspapers and other types of media to ensure coverage of our programs, initiatives, events, etc. to broader audiences.
- ♦ Consider employment opportunities targeting youth/young adults of ethnically diverse backgrounds. Ensure hiring practices and policies are not barriers to recruitment efforts.

More information: <http://online.sfsu.edu/~nroberts>
(Reference list available upon request)