

Diverse Users of Four Urban National Forests: Participation, Preferences, and Perceptions

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Introduction

In natural areas, families and friends can come together to have fun, celebrate important occasions or just relax and take time out. This immense social value is part of the 'glue' of a healthy society (Landy 2008). Several researchers have identified values from natural area visits to include social cohesion, improved mental health, improved physical health, stress relief, and psychological well-being (Gobster 2005, Manning & More 2002, Williams 2006).

The values to be gained from natural area visits may nowhere be as important as for urban residents, whose lives are so busy that little time remains for natural area visits. In a study of urban residents, Tierney and colleagues (1998) found several constraints to use of natural areas. These included time commitments, financial situations, as well as perceptions that nearby areas are too crowded or that few friends or family members recreate in natural areas.

The benefits of natural area visits may be disproportionately accrued by visitors who are White and more affluent (Gobster 2002; Loukaitou-Sideris & Stieglitz 2002; West 1989; Wolch, Wilson & Fehrenback 2005). Because of the distribution gap, some researchers are beginning to examine differential use of natural areas from a social justice or environmental justice paradigm (Byrne, Wolch & Zhang 2009).

Several researchers have found that people of color exhibit different participation patterns and have different motivations to visit natural areas (Baas, Ewert & Chavez 1993; Chavez 2001; Chavez, Winter & Absher 2008; Sasidharan, Willits & Godbey 2005). There is also a propensity for people of color to visit urban-proximate outdoor recreation sites for day-long visits as these sites are nearby their residences (Chavez 2001; Chavez, Winter & Absher 2008).

It is important to evaluate use of urban-proximate outdoor recreation sites by diverse groups and obtain visitor points of view about those sites. Of particular importance are day use sites, which receive a large amount of use but little research emphasis. Day use sites are those in which people visit for some portion of a day but they do not stay overnight. Managers of urban-proximate day use sites can better manage with detailed information about participation patterns, site preferences, and visitor perceptions. These urban sites have

several distinguishing characteristics (Hartley 1986) including significant amounts of day use and visitation by diverse populations.

The following reports participation, preference, and perception results from day use visitor contact surveys conducted on four urban national forests in southern California between 2001 and 2004 with a focus on areas where Latinos recreate.

Urban-Proximate National Forest Descriptions

The Angeles National Forest (ANF) is situated primarily in Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties. The ANF is more than 656,000 acres in size. The ANF offers year-round opportunities for camping, hiking, swimming, boating, picnicking, and sightseeing. Over 800 miles of forest trails lead hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) riders across rugged backcountry, along high, scenic ridges, and through shady, tree-lined canyons. During the winter, visitors can ski at one of the five ski areas or cross country ski, snow camp, hike, snow-mobile, or just play in the snow.

The San Bernardino National Forest (SBF) covers about 820,000 acres within San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Of this area, about 162,000 acres are in private, county, state and other federal agency ownership. The forest lies within 2 hours driving distance of more than 16 million residents of southern California. The SBF is one of the most heavily-used in the Nation

and was ranked 12th in recreation use among national forests in 1995, with 6.3 million visitor days (it was ranked third in California). Developed recreation sites on the SBF frequently exceed their design capacity during weekends of high season use (includes summer and winter). General forest recreation accounted for 4.5 million visitor days in 1982 and has increased since then. It is important to examine use of recreation sites and get visitor points of view about those sites.

The Los Padres National Forest (LPNF) is situated primarily in Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura Counties. Populations in these counties are extremely diverse. The LPNF is characterized by a mediterranean climate, with cool winters and hot, dry summers, and has more than 1.7 million acres on the Coast and Transverse Ranges, providing a variety of terrain, vegetation, and recreation settings including ocean beaches, forest, chaparral, and desert. The LPNF was one of the most heavily used in the state and ranked fifth in 1995 for recreation visitor days, with 5.0 million recreation visitor days. About 30 percent of the recreation use in the forest is in developed sites. These include public facilities such as campgrounds, picnic grounds, and observation sites. General forest recreation opportunities include undeveloped areas and roads and trails. About 70 percent of recreation use occurs in general forest areas.

The Cleveland National Forest (CNF) includes three distinct mountain ranges adjoining the urbanized lowlands of Orange, Riverside, and San Diego Counties. Los Angeles County is within an hour's drive of the northern part of the forest. More than 420,000 acres in size, the CNF encompasses much of the Santa Ana, Palomar, and Laguna Mountains. Elevations range from 400 to 6,140 feet. Chaparral is the most abundant vegetation type, covering about 88 percent of forest lands. The forest's developed recreation facilities can accommodate about 4,200 persons at one time. These facilities include 5 picnic areas, 16 family campgrounds, 7 group campgrounds, and 2 information stations. The forest has experienced great demand for general forest or non-facility-based recreation opportunities, particularly for hiking and horseback riding.

Methods

All four studies reported here (ANF, CNF, LPNF, and SBF) are based on results from day use studies at those sites. The instrument used for the four studies reported here closely followed the questions first asked of day use visitors in 1992. The survey instruments were available to participants in English and Spanish, and were collected by bilingual research teams. All visitors (age 18 or over) onsite were asked for their voluntary participation in the survey. Visitors were assured confidentiality of their responses.

Dates of data collection were randomly selected throughout the summer months 2001 through 2004. Day use sites within the planning places were also randomly selected from a list provided by each forest of developed picnic areas, general day use areas, and trailhead sites.

The primary objectives of each day use study were to:

- Report participation in outdoor recreation activities.
- Report on the relative importance of site attributes.
- Report visitor perceptions about their recreation experiences.

Results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

We found significant differences in racial and ethnic group use across the forests. For example, there were more Latino respondents at the ANF (40%) and SBF (47%) day use sites, and more White respondents at the CNF (71%) and LPNF (65%) sites. There were also fewer respondents who spoke English and read English as their primary language at the ANF (spoke 63%, read 69%) and SBF (spoke 52%, read 57%) day use sites.

We also found that Latinos tend to recreate at particular locations and are not found across various forest sites. In order to focus on Latino respondents, and make more reasonable comparisons, we have selected areas within each forest

where Latinos were found in the greatest numbers. On the ANF that is the San Gabriel Canyon (n=82) where 73 percent of the site respondents were Latino. Palomar Mountain (n=25) on the CNF had 24 percent Latino respondents. On the LPNF the area with the most Latino respondents was Santa Ynez (39 percent) (n=28). The Applewhite Picnic Area (n=80) had the highest percentage of Latino respondents (78 percent) for the SBF. Group and visit characteristics were similar between these places with most respondents reporting they were recreating in a family group, most had plans to stay at the site for more than 4 hours (except CNF where most reported planned visits of 1 to 3 hours), and most were on repeat visits to the areas.

Participation in Outdoor Recreation Activities

Respondents were asked what activities they usually engaged in while on the national forest where they were contacted. The respondents could report more than one activity as "usual." Activities that respondents usually engaged in did not differ much by these sites frequented by Latinos (table 1). At all four areas, respondents reported picnic/barbecues and stream playing to be among the activities usually engaged in. For example, 66 percent of the respondents at the Applewhite Picnic Area said they usually engaged in picnicking/barbecuing when onsite which was similar for the respondents at the San Gabriel Canyon (60%), Santa Ynez (61%). The percentage was even higher at Palomar Mountain (96%). Similarly, stream play was a "usual" activity across the sites, ranging from 35 percent to 79

percent reporting this as a usual activity. At three areas, respondents said watching wildlife, driving for pleasure, and camping were activities in which they usually engaged. Day hiking, fishing, and OHV riding rounded out the list. Some of these activities are development dependent (picnicking/barbecuing, camping, and OHV riding), natural area dependent (watching wildlife and driving for pleasure), or water dependent (stream play and fishing).

Table 1. Activities engaged in while on a forest visit, by area.

Area	Activity	Percentage
SBF Applewhite (n=80)	Picnic/barbecue (BBQ)	66
	Stream play	65
	Day hike	48
	Wildlife viewing	38
	Drive for pleasure	36
ANF San Gabriel Canyon (n=82)	Picnic/BBQ	60
	Camp	42
	Drive for pleasure	40
	Stream play	35
	OHV ¹ riding	20
LPNF Santa Ynez (n=28)	Stream play	79
	Camp	64
	Picnic/BBQ	61
	Wildlife viewing	50
	Fishing	32
	Drive for pleasure	32
CNF Palomar Mountain N=25)	Picnic/BBQs	96
	Fishing	52
	Day hiking	48
	Stream play	48
	Camp	44
	Wildlife viewing	44

Note: ANF = Angeles National Forest; CNF = Cleveland National Forest; LPNF = Los Padres National Forest; SBF = San Bernardino National Forest; OHV = Off-highway vehicle.

Preferences about Site Attributes

Respondents at the forest areas were asked the importance of having particular facilities and amenities onsite (cooking grills, fire pits/rings, group facilities, law enforcement and patrols, parking areas, restricted use levels, telephones, trash cans, water faucets, other). Fifty percent or more of the respondents at each site rated each of the items as important or very important (table 2). Common responses to these areas included trash cans (with percentages ranging from 56% to 84% reporting these as important or very important) and water faucets (with percentages ranging from 54% to 80% reporting these as important or very important). Other responses differed by site contacted with respondents at two of the four areas selecting cooking grills (Applewhite Picnic Area and Palomar Mountain), picnic tables (Applewhite Picnic Area and Palomar Mountain), and parking areas (San Gabriel Canyon and Santa Ynez). The respondents at Santa Ynez reported that law enforcement and patrols of the area were important.

Table 2. Top four preferences rated as “important” or “very important” for site development and amenities, by area.

Area	Amenity	Percentage
SBF Applewhite (n=80)	Trash cans	84
	Water faucets	80
	Cooking grills	80
	Picnic tables	79
ANF San Gabriel Canyon (n=82)	Trash cans	67
	Telephones	65
	Water faucets	61
	Parking areas	61
LPNF Santa Ynez (n=28)	Trash cans	57
	Parking areas	54
	Water faucets	54
	Law enforcement and patrols	50
CNF Palomar Mountain (n=25)	Cooking grills	60
	Water faucets	60
	Trash cans	56
	Picnic tables	52

Note: ANF = Angeles National Forest; CNF = Cleveland National Forest; LPNF = Los Padres National Forest; SBF = San Bernardino National Forest.

Perceptions about the Recreation Experiences

The respondents provided their impressions about their recreation experience (table 3). They were asked if these statements were true (or false) about them: “Being at this site reminds me of childhood recreation experiences” (reminder of childhood), “I plan to tell at least one other person about my trip here” (tell others about trip), “I want to return here again,” “I was disappointed with some aspects of this site,” “My experience was not as good as I had hoped,” “The employees were helpful,” “The site was safe and secure,” “This is a great recreation

experience,” “This trip was well worth the money I spent to take it” (well worth the money). A large percentage of respondents (70 percent or more) at all four areas said the following were true about them: “I want to return there again,” “It was well worth the money expended,” and “It was a great recreation experience.” At three of the four areas, the respondents also said they would tell others about their trip.

Table 3. Perceptions about the recreation experience, by area.

Area		Recreation experience	Percentage
SBF	Applewhite (n=80)	I want to return here again	79
		Well worth the money	74
		Tell others about trip	71
		It's a great recreation experience	70
ANF	San Gabriel Canyon (n=82)	I want to return here again	85
		Tell others about trip	82
		Well worth the money	71
		It's a great recreation experience	70
LPNF	Santa Ynez (n=28)	Tell others about trip	82
		I want to return here again	79
		It's a great recreation experience	71
		Well worth the money	71
CNF	Palomar Mountain (n=25)	I want to return here again	88
		The site was safe and secure	88
		Well worth the money	84
		It's a great recreation experience	80

Note: ANF = Angeles National Forest, CNF = Cleveland National Forest, LPNF = Los Padres National Forest, and SBF = San Bernardino National Forest. “Percentage” is the percentage who said each statement was “true” about them.

Discussion

In 1995, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, identified 14 Urban National Forests located in 8 U.S. states. In 2005, they identified an additional 10 Urban National Forests. Management of these sites may differ from the management of other forests (Hartley 1986) including significant amounts of day use and visitation by diverse populations. Studies like the ones reported here provide land managers insights to better serve Latino visitors to outdoor recreation at urban-proximate day use sites.

The findings reported here indicate many similarities among Latino visitors to four Urban National Forests in southern California. There were commonalities in participation in outdoor recreation activities, the relative importance of site attributes, and in perceptions reported about their recreation experiences. For example, there was a breadth of activities in which the respondents typically engaged. Some of these activities are development dependent (picnicking/barbecuing, camping, and OHV riding), others were natural area dependent (watching wildlife and driving for pleasure) or water dependent (stream play and fishing). This suggests that management decisions about serving these groups consider the range of activity options identified.

Visitors rated most facilities and amenities as important or very important. This is consistent with other studies reporting a desire by Latinos for development of sites (Chavez 2002). Trash cans and water faucets were common responses to

all the areas studied, whereas other responses were site specific. These findings suggest a consistent desire for facilities and amenities.

Visitors at all four of these urban national forest areas said they wanted to return to the area again, thought it was well worth the money expended to take the trip, and said they had a great recreation experience. These data suggest that the Latino and other visitors are likely to continue to recreate in these places and will tell others about it, suggesting increased use by these respondent groups in the future.

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