

Chapter 6: Diverse Users of Four Urban National Forests: Participation, Preferences, and Perceptions

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Abstract

Diversity at outdoor recreation sites, particularly those near large and diverse urban populations, is occurring across the United States. It is likely that individuals who belong to these changing groups bring a set of values and behaviors to public lands that differ from that of White visitors, and perhaps, land managers. Reported here are findings from studies conducted on four national forests in southern California. We examined the participation, preferences, and perceptions of diverse recreation visitors, focusing on Latinos. Studies like the ones reported here provide land managers insights to better serve this important group. Percentage of Latinos at the areas included in this article ranged from 24 percent (Palomar Mountain on the Cleveland National Forest) to 78 percent (Applewhite on the San Bernardino National Forest).

At all four areas, picnic/barbecues and stream playing were among the activities usually engaged in. Activities usually engaged in at the areas were development dependent (picnicking/barbecuing, camping, and off-highway vehicle riding), natural area dependent (watching wildlife and driving for pleasure), or water dependent (stream play and fishing).

When communicating with diverse groups, managers should consider whether this information is provided before people get to the area or after they arrive. Offsite communications were primarily word of mouth (family and friends) and would be challenging for land managers to tap into. Onsite communications are less problematic and fit the traditional methods available—brochure at the area entrance, signs along the road, and notes on a bulletin board. The desired pertinent information to share with visitors onsite differed by area suggesting managers will need input from their visitors to provide for visitor needs.

Visitors rated several facilities and amenities as important or very important. Trash cans and water faucets were common responses to all the areas studied, but other facilities and amenities were site specific.

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These studies also indicate that Latino and other urban national forest visitors to these areas were bothered by litter along the road and at picnic sites, graffiti on natural and on human-made surfaces, and tree carving. These findings suggest area managers should focus on keeping sites free of litter and graffiti.

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 Latino and other visitors are likely to continue to recreate in these places and will tell others about them.

Keywords: Latinos, outdoor recreation, participation, perceptions, preferences.

Introduction

The social composition of the visitors to many U.S. outdoor recreation areas has been changing. In some states, it is the racial/ethnic makeup that is changing. In other states the changes might be in age, education, income, family composition, or some other variable or set of variables. In California, diversity is manifested in several ways with race and ethnicity being dominant among them. It is likely that individuals who belong to these changing groups bring a set of values and behaviors to public lands that differ from that of “traditional” users, and perhaps, land managers. These changes may be felt the strongest in resource programs dealing with visitor use, such as recreation, cultural resources, and lands (Chavez 2001).

It is important to examine users of urban-proximate outdoor recreation sites 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.

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. The surveys were a replication of the day use surveys conducted on the same national forests in 1992-94 and 2000-01 (Chavez and Mainieri 1995; Chavez et al. 1995a, 1995b, 2002).

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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, snowmobile, 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. All data were collected under the auspices of Office of Management and Budget approvals, as well as study plans filed with the Pacific Southwest Research Station. 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:

- Gain a stronger understanding of recreation visitor characteristics.
- Report visitation patterns.
- Determine onsite activities.
- Determine interpretation, communication, and information patterns.
- Report on the relative importance of site attributes.
- Report visitor perceptions about impacts to day use sites and about their recreation experiences.

In total, 924 respondents were used for this paper. There were 137 from the ANF, 249 from the CNF, 268 from the LPNF, and 270 from the SBF.

Results were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

Results

Sociodemographic Profiles

There are several differences in forest respondents among sites (table 6-1). There were more Latino respondents at the ANF and SBF day use sites, and more White respondents at the CNF and LPNF sites. There were also fewer respondents who

Table 6-1—Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, by forest

	Angeles National Forest	Cleveland National Forest	Los Padres National Forest	San Bernardino National Forest
	<i>----- Percent -----</i>			
Race/ethnicity:				
White	41	71	65	37
Latino	40	21	12	47
Other	19	8	23	16
Gender:				
Male	52	66	55	49
Female	45	34	44	50
English:				
Spoken	63	86	83	52
Read	69	90	88	57
U.S. born	64	82	81	62
Household income:				
Up to \$39,999	40	19	31	54
\$70,000+	22	43	29	17
	<i>----- Mean -----</i>			
Age	37	39	38	35
Education	13	15	15	17

spoke English and read English as their primary language at the ANF and SBF day use sites, fewer U.S.-born respondents at those sites, and lower incomes. The respondents at the CNF and LPNF were somewhat older (on average), and they reported higher years of education attained. There were more male respondents at all the sites except the SBF.

The remainder of the paper examines participation, preferences, and perceptions focusing on areas within each forest where Latinos were found in the greatest numbers: On the ANF, it is the San Gabriel Canyon where 73 percent of the site respondents were Latino; on the CNF, Palomar Mountain had 24 percent Latino respondents; on the LPNF, the area with the most Latino respondents was Santa Ynez (39 percent). The Applewhite Picnic Area had the highest percentage of Latino respondents (78 percent) for the SBF. Group and visit characteristics were similar among these places with most respondents reporting they were recreating in a family group, most had plans to stay 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

Respondents were asked what activities they usually engaged in while on the national forest where they were contacted. Activities that respondents usually engaged in did not differ much by site (table 6-2). 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 and 65 percent of the respondents at the Applewhite Picnic Area said they usually engaged in stream playing when onsite. 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 6-2—Activities respondents usually engaged in while on a forest visit, by area

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

^a ANF = Angeles National Forest, CNF = Cleveland National Forest, LPNF =

Preferences About Communication and Development

Communication—

Respondents were asked how they first learned of the site (response choices included agency, brochures, family, flyers, friends, newspaper, radio, television, other). Most (at least 50 percent within an area) heard about the areas by word of mouth through family members or friends.

Respondents at each area were asked how they would like to receive information related to national forests while onsite. Response categories included brochure at entrance, evening program at information center, notes on bulletin board, radio broadcast, ranger who stops by for a visit, and signs along the road. How these respondents would like to receive information related to national forests while onsite differed little (table 6-3) by area. For example, 65 percent of the respondents at the Applewhite Picnic Area said they would prefer a brochure at the area entrance, 61 percent said signs along the road, and 51 percent said notes on a bulletin board. The top three responses across areas were brochure at entrance, signs along the road, and notes on a bulletin board.

Respondents were asked how they first learned of the site. Most heard about the areas by word of mouth through family members or friends.

Table 6-3—Top three preferences for receiving information while onsite, by area

Area ^a	Information choice	Percentage liked
SBF Applewhite	Brochure at entrance	65
	Signs along the road	61
	Notes on bulletin board	51
ANF San Gabriel Canyon	Brochure at entrance	81
	Signs along the road	66
	Notes on bulletin board	46
LPNF Santa Ynez	Brochure at entrance	68
	Notes on bulletin board	61
	Signs along the road	54
CNF Palomar Mountain	Brochure at entrance	84
	Signs along the road	80
	Notes on bulletin board	52

^a ANF = Angeles National Forest, CNF = Cleveland National Forest, LPNF = Los Padres National Forest, and SBF = San Bernardino National Forest.

Visitors selected several types of information they would like to receive about these areas (table 6-4). The options included best times to visit the area to avoid crowds, camping in the area, cultural and historical features of the area, fishing in the area, hiking in the area, history of the area, hunting in the area, location of day hike trails, locations of overnight trails, picnic/barbecue areas, places similar to this

Table 6-4—Top four preferences for topics of information, by area

Area ^a	Information topic	Percentage
SBF Applewhite	Streamside areas	43
	Things to see and do	40
	Rules and regulations	38
	Rare types of plants and animals	35
ANF San Gabriel Canyon	Best times to avoid crowds	66
	Safety in the area	59
	Picnic/barbecue area	59
	Camping in the area	57
LPNF Santa Ynez	Best times to avoid crowds	71
	Camping in the area	68
	Location of day hike trails	64
	Streamside areas	64
CNF Palomar Mountain	Picnic/barbecue areas	84
	Camping in the area	68
	Streamside areas	68
	Fishing in the area	64

^a ANF = Angeles National Forest, CNF = Cleveland National Forest, LPNF = Los Padres National Forest, and SBF = San Bernardino National Forest.

one, OHV areas, rare types of plants and animals, rules and regulations, safety in the area, shooting areas, similar areas that are not crowded, streamside areas, area surrounding the forest, things to see and do, types of plants and animals in the area, ways to keep the area natural looking, ways to protect the wild area, other. The responses differed by area with respondents at three of the four sites selecting streamside areas and camping in the area. Respondents at two of the four areas selected best times to visit the area to avoid crowds and picnic/barbecue areas.

Development—

Respondents at these 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). Common responses to these areas included trash cans and water faucets (table 6-5 reports percentages for those saying these facilities and amenities were “important” or “very important”). Other responses differed by area with respondents at two of the four areas selecting cooking grills, picnic tables, and parking areas.

Table 6-5—Top four preferences rated as “important” or “very important” for site development and amenities, by area

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

^a ANF = Angeles National Forest, CNF = Cleveland National Forest, LPNF = Los Padres National Forest, and SBF = San Bernardino National Forest.

Perceptions

Respondents were asked their opinions about impacts to the day use sites. The possible impacts were cars parked at “no parking” areas; carving of names, initials, or messages on trees (tree carving); dogs walked off leash; drawings or graffiti on human-made surfaces (graffiti—man-made surfaces); drawings or graffiti on natural surfaces (graffiti—natural surfaces); litter along the road; litter at picnic sites; a lot of people at the site; people drinking alcohol. Items that bothered them “a lot” were litter along the road, litter at picnic sites, and graffiti on natural surfaces (table 6-6).

Finally, the respondents provided their impressions about their recreation experience (table 6-7). 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

Table 6-6—Top three perceptions about human impacts that bother them “a lot,” by area

Area ^a	Human impact	Percentage
SBF Applewhite	Litter along the road	63
	Litter at picnic sites	57
	Graffiti on natural surfaces	55
ANF San Gabriel Canyon	Litter along the road	62
	Graffiti on natural surfaces	59
	Litter at picnic sites	57
LPNF Santa Ynez	Graffiti on man-made surfaces	61
	Graffiti on natural surfaces	57
	Litter along the road	57
CNF Palomar Mountain	Litter along the road	72
	Litter at picnic sites	72
	Tree carving	68

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Table 6-7—Perceptions about the recreation experience, by area

Area ^a	Recreation experience	Percentage ^b
SBF Applewhite	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	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	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	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

^a ANF = Angeles National Forest, CNF = Cleveland National Forest, LPNF = Los Padres National Forest, and SBF = San Bernardino National Forest.

^b Percentage who said each statement was “true” about them.

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.

Discussion

Studies like the ones reported here provide land managers insights to better serve this important group. When communicating with diverse groups, for example, managers should consider whether this information is provided before people get to the area or after they arrive. Offsite communications were primarily word of mouth (family and friends) and would be challenging for land managers to tap into. Onsite communications are less problematic and fit the traditional methods available—brochure at the area entrance, signs along the road, and notes on a bulletin board. The desired pertinent information to share with visitors onsite differed by area suggesting managers will need to have some specific information from their visitors to provide for visitor information desires. Still, there was some consistency with preferences for information about streamside areas and camping in the area.

Visitors rated several 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 desires to all the areas studied, but other desires were site specific.

These studies also indicate that Latino and other urban national forest visitors to these sites were bothered a lot by litter along the road and at picnic sites, and graffiti on natural surfaces. They were also bothered by graffiti on man-made surfaces and tree carving. These findings suggest managers should focus on keeping sites free of litter and graffiti. Another study found the addition of many trash cans cut back considerably on litter (Chavez 2002).

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 Latino (and other) visitors are likely to continue to recreate in these places and will tell others about it, signaling increased use by these respondent groups in the future.

Visitors rated several facilities and amenities as important or very important. This is consistent with other studies reporting a desire by Latinos for development of sites.

Metric Equivalents

When you know:	Multiply by:	To get:
Acres	0.405	Hectares
Miles	1.609	Kilometers

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