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Whose forest, whose values? Planning for Atlanta's "South River Forest"

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ABSTRACT

Atlanta, Georgia's (USA) proposed South River Forest (SRF) is a 3,500-acre area straddling southeast Atlanta and parts of neighboring DeKalb County that would include non-contiguous greenspace and developed land uses. Catalyzed by the 2017 *Atlanta City Design* process, the SRF concept recognizes the ecologically rich, urban forest patches in this predominantly African American part of the metro area. SRF advocates point to the climate and environmental equity benefits of green space conservation for underserved communities and the personal benefits of having wildland-like outdoor recreation areas within the city. To gauge public perceptions of the SRF, promoters conducted the *South River Forest Consensus Building & Stakeholder Engagement* process in 2022, which included an online survey querying respondents' interactions with and personal relationship to the SRF. The findings showed overwhelming support for the preservation effort; however, eighty percent of respondents identified as white and just nine percent as black. This composition contrasts sharply with most SRF neighborhoods, which question whether black ways of being in nature were captured by the engagement process. Our analysis also brings attention to an alternative, black-led vision for the area that was not reflected in the engagement process and the implications of this erasure for recognition justice.

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Introduction

In 2017, the *Atlanta City Design* planning initiative proposed preserving ecologically important greenspaces in metro Atlanta, in anticipation of extensive population growth in coming decades (City of Atlanta Department of City Planning 2017). The Chattahoochee River Park is planned for north Atlanta, and the "South River Forest" (SRF), spanning the borders of southeast Atlanta (in Fulton County) and southwest DeKalb County, has been proposed for the south metro area (Figure 1). Supported by the Georgia

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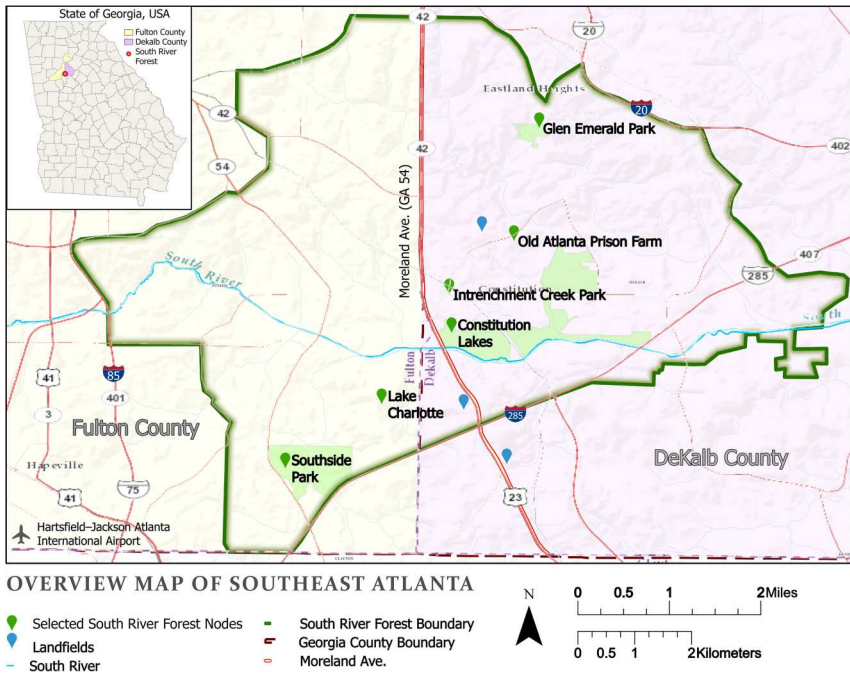


Figure 1. South River Forest boundary spanning Fulton and DeKalb Counties in Georgia, USA.

chapter of The Nature Conservancy and a group formed to operationalize that support – the South River Forest Coalition (SRFC) – the ambitious SRF plan encompasses roughly 3500 acres (1416 ha) of land, with roughly 1415 non-contiguous acres (573 ha) already designated as nature preserves or municipal parks, some with extensive canopy cover. The remaining acreage would include cemeteries, golf courses, extant residential neighborhoods, and industrial operations (the latter would eventually be purchased and reclaimed as greenspaces although it is not clear how those purchases would be funded or when they would occur). Importantly, residential neighborhoods would remain intact, as the project seeks to integrate the built environment with nature in the city. The SRF is not a distinct park or preserve but rather is more of a concept, demarcated by an arbitrary boundary, that would officially acknowledge, link, and preserve non-contiguous greenspaces, neighborhoods, and businesses within that boundary.¹

SRF proponents argue that the network of canopy and undisturbed forest patches in this section of the metro area are ecological rarities, and that preservation of these resources would reinforce Atlanta's longstanding identity as a verdant, large city, while modeling both practical redress of environmental injustices and proactive climate change mitigation. In the past fifty years, this

now predominantly African American part of metro Atlanta has contained a juxtaposed mix of unwanted land uses – illegal dump sites, higher than average concentration of public housing projects, jails, wastewater treatment plants, trucking companies, asphalt plants, and contaminated waterways (Atlanta Regional Commission 2023; Johnson Gaither, Cross, and Dobbs 2022; Thomas-Blate 2021) – alongside relatively large patches of intact canopy cover and large, mature trees on residential lots. In terms of canopy cover and African American populations, the City of Atlanta is atypical because of the relative abundance of trees in majority black neighborhoods on the city's south side (City of Atlanta Department of Planning and Community Development 2018; McDonald et al. 2021; Roberts-Gregory and Hawthorne 2016).

In addition to climate change and environmental justice remediation, SRF advocates are also quick to point to leisure time enjoyment made possible by the canopied greenspaces or nodes in the SRF, as these resources provide *in situ*, immersive forest experiences. Key greenspaces within SRF boundaries are DeKalb County's 136-acre (55.04 ha) Intrenchment Creek Park, the 216-acre (87.4 ha) Lake Charlotte Nature Preserve in Atlanta, and much of the 350-acre (141.6 ha) Old Prison² "Honor Farm", which served as a minimum security jail from about 1920 to 1990 (Atlanta Press Collective, 2021; Wootten 1999). Each of these patches contains extensive, forest-like canopy. An SRF promoter commenting on one SRF node was quoted in a December 2018 *Atlanta Journal Constitution* article: "People sit in traffic for three hours to go up to the North Georgia mountains, and they could just come right here". Also, Hannah Palmer's thoughtful essay on the history of the Lake Charlotte Nature Preserve, makes a similar claim, in this case presupposing that African Americans and whites share a similar wildland esthetic. Because of the SRF designation, Palmer assumes Blacks can now "lose themselves" in ... wilderness in a way that their parents never could. Soon, too, White families like mine that have never ventured into this corner of Atlanta will discover those woods" (Palmer 2021). That being captivated by untamed landscapes is universally desirous goes unquestioned by both commentators.

In 2023, a black reporter who grew up in neighborhoods comprising the proposed SRF assessed black SRF residents' views regarding controversies involving the largest SRF node, the Old Prison Farm (Harris 2023). After several years of deliberation, in June 2023, the City of Atlanta approved funding for a public safety (police and firefighter) training facility (aka "Cop City") to be built on eighty-five of the Prison Farm's roughly 350 acres. The city's approval followed months of oftentimes violent protests involving groups and individuals occupying the Old Prison Farm and Intrenchment Creek woodlands (most of whom were non-local whites, described by one commentator as "transient warriors" [Torpy 2023]).

Protestors oppose the training facility on grounds that the buildout would degrade the area's ecology and further militarize police forces that brutalize Black and Brown communities (Crosbie 2022; Jordan 2022). The reporter concluded that most of those he contacted (childhood friends still living in the area, parents, former teachers) either knew very little about the woods being fought over and the white people occupying these spaces or were indifferent to both.

We suggest that broad based, grassroots, black advocacy for the SRF concept has not been articulated, in part, because SRF promoters have not paid sufficient attention to or have not *recognized* the complicated history that African Americans have with forests and wildland-like settings in the US. Arguably, the black experience of nature and the out-of-doors in the US has been alternately terrifying and redemptive. Consider enslavement; black, conscripted labor in the southern, naval stores industry spanning the antebellum period through the mid-twentieth century; and lynchings and other terror perpetuated against blacks in wildland settings (Johnson and McDaniel 2006; Finney, 2014). Because of these vicarious experiences, some scholars contend that contemporary African Americans have developed a "wildland aversion" (Johnson, Horan, and Pepper 1997). Yet, others argue that blacks have managed to leverage these conditions to find refuge, solace, and, indeed, a distinctive approach to engaging with wild nature (Davis 2019; Glave 2010).

We posit that the unique experiences African Americans have had with land and nature in the US informs black engagement with both remote wilderness areas and wildland-like settings in cities (Finney 2014; Johnson and Bowker 2004; Smith 2008; Taylor 1997). The African American approach to leisure time spent in out of doors, natural areas can be characterized by a collective or communal orientation, preferences for developed leisure activities and recreation settings, and a heightened awareness and concern for safety in the wild (Dungy 2011; Finney 2014; Johnson and Bowker 2004; Johnson, Horan, and Pepper 1997; Kaplan and Talbot 1988; Larson et al. 2014; Lee and Scott 2016; Lee et al. 2023; Washburne 1978; Xiao, Lee, and Larson 2022; Zube and Pitt 1981). We argue that these ways of engaging with nature are crucial for understanding black support for environmental and conservation projects, including the proposed SRF.

To assess community support for the SRF concept, the Nature Conservancy collaborated with the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) to enjoin stakeholders and build consensus for moving the SRF project forward. This was accomplished by (1) surveying the public using an online interface, (2) gleaning information from public meetings, and (3) establishing a steering committee of informed, community representatives and business leaders. This three-pronged tactic was intended to gauge

community perceptions of the SRF very broadly, in both physical and social terms. The inquiry was not limited to questions related to nature engagement although the natural features of the SRF area figured prominently in the ARC's solicitation (Atlanta Regional Commission 2023). We contend that black perspectives of nature and comprehensive, black, lived experiences in the proposed SRF area were not captured sufficiently by the population survey. Responses of relatively few African Americans were included even though communities in and around the proposed SRF area are predominantly African American and have been for decades (Atlanta Regional Commission 2023).

We situate our findings within the black geographies literature, which helps to illustrate the effective erasure of an alternative, *black-led* vision for communities comprising the proposed SRF area. This vision emphasizes economic development, alongside conservation. We suggest that this focus is informed by the factors indicated previously regarding the characteristic ways in which African Americans encounter nature.

Black community activists, representing southwest DeKalb County neighborhoods, mobilized in 2019 with a public relations campaign supporting industrial development within SRF boundaries. This development hinged on a proposed land exchange (or “swap”) of roughly forty acres (16.19 ha) of DeKalb County's Intrenchment Creek Park, (again, a canopied greenspace node included in the proposed SRF area) for fifty-three acres (21.44 ha) of nearby land owned by a private developer and past owner of a movie studio (BlackHall Studios), Ryan Millsap.³

The exchange, approved by the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners in 2020, would allow Blackhall Studios to expand onto the forty acres (Estep, 2020). The deal also included the creation of a county park with developed amenities on the fifty-three acres that the county would receive in exchange for parkland. The park was first dubbed, “The Great Park Connection” (alternatively, “Michelle Obama Park”) by promoters because the acres are contiguous to other SRF greenspaces - Intrenchment Creek Park to the west and the more developed Gresham Park to the east. Promoters say the newly created park space would also connect to existing trails and contain a thirteen-acre meadow; feature an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible playground (described as the largest of its kind in the southeastern US), concert pavilions, a splash water pad, a new trailhead, lights, cameras, and callboxes for security (Estep 2021b). As a part of the land swap, Millsap also pledged \$1.5 million towards the park and removed “thousands” of dumped tires from his fifty-three acres (Raymond 2019).

When the exchange was introduced in 2018, longtime black civic leaders in southwest DeKalb County lauded the idea and encouraged other southwest DeKalb residents to do likewise because of two enticements – (1)

economic revitalization in southwest DeKalb County and south Atlanta (catalyzed by the movie industry expansion) and (2) developed, park amenities (The Great Park Connection 2019). Area blacks see economic revitalization of south DeKalb County as an imperative because of decades of business retraction in south DeKalb and south Atlanta communities (The Great Park Connection 2019). When the full effects of federal laws mandating desegregation of public schools and neighborhoods unfolded in the 1970s, many whites left the south metro area, which rapidly transitioned to majority African American by the late 1970s. Commercial development followed “White Flight”, further concentrating Atlanta’s economic muscle on the city’s north side, in north DeKalb County, and in other metro area counties (Kruse 2005).

The black southwest DeKalb activists are not members of the mostly white SRFC (although leaders have been invited to join). SRFC members view the southwest DeKalb group’s support of the land exchange as antithetical to the SRF concept because the former believe the movie deal would destroy a valuable SRF node – the heavily canopied Intrinishment Creek Park along with a vital tributary (Intrinishment Creek) to the South River (Clerk of Superior Court of DeKalb County Georgia 2021).

The ecologically diverse Intrinishment Creek Park acreage Millsap received had been identified, loosely, as one of many potential “conservation areas” by the *Atlanta City Design* process in 2017 (City of Atlanta Department of City Planning 2017, 260). Around the same time, a local architect and planner, Jay Scott, says he advised Millsap to request the land exchange because it would concentrate industrial traffic associated with the studio expansion away from residential neighborhoods (The Great Park Connection 2019). Not surprisingly, the suggested development of forty acres of canopied parkland has engendered a heated battle between environmentalists/conservationists, Millsap, and DeKalb County. Besides being ecologically damaging, exchange opponents also maintain that the swap establishes a “bad precedent” because the giving away of public land is both illegal and unethical (Estep 2021a). A lawsuit challenging the exchange was brought by the SRFC and the *South River Watershed Alliance*, among others, in 2021 (Clerk of Superior Court of DeKalb County Georgia 2021).

The land exchange promotion by the southwest DeKalb group in 2018/2019 may have had some effect. A local newsmagazine, *Atlanta Curbed*, reporting on one of the first public discussions held at a neighborhood high school about the land exchange noted “... a clear distinction along racial lines: Almost all swap naysayers were white, and supporters black” (Green 2019). Importantly, this public display of acceptance indicated black enthusiasm and embrace of projects bringing economic investment to the SRF area. The strong support displayed for a developed park is also consistent with both theory and empirical findings, discussed

above, describing the distinctive preferences and ways that African Americans engage with outdoor natural areas in their leisure time. Black residents who say they support the land exchange and park stress that their vision is not meant to replace the *Atlanta City Design* SRF concept but feel that it balances nature preservation with growth for their communities.

African Americans in the great outdoors, or just outdoors

Evidence for African Americans' seeming proclivity for collective or communal outdoor leisure and nature experiences may possibly be found in pre-colonial African ontologies. Mowatt (2018) situates contemporary African American understandings and approaches to nature in Ifá⁴ cosmology, which views the universe as a continuity where universal phenomena are mirrored in the microcosm of the everyday world (Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library 2023). Similar to other West African beliefs, Ifá reifies both the concept and practice of community over the individual (Agulanna 2010). Consider also the broader worldviews of the pre-colonial, KiKongo Bantu peoples (from present-day Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Ghana), who brought to the Americas the belief that engaging with the wilds or extracting resources from wilderness was a social process rather than something done singularly (Burnett, Joulie-Kuttner, and wa Kang'ethe 1996; Burnett and Kamuyu wa Kang'ethe 1994).

It is difficult to say to what extent African traditions inform contemporary black American views of nature and environment, including leisure time spent in these places (Frazier 1957; Thompson 1990); but there is evidence that collectivism remains a salient framing for understanding how black Americans approach nature. For instance, Szwed and Abrahams (1977) stressed that traditionally, black leisure took place mostly among groups of friends and associates, rather than in isolation. In a critique of the American wilderness⁵ concept, Smith (2008, 309) references early twentieth-century black intellectuals whose writings provide material for contrasting black conceptualizations of wilderness as a repository for group interactions with the white ideal of individual introspection: "... [B]lack thought is generally less individualistic than other varieties of American liberalism. ... This tradition therefore focuses on the relationship between the wilderness and the *community* [original emphasis], not just the wilderness and the individual". Related, Xiao, Lee, and Larson's (2022) national level, empirical analysis of leisure preferences and constraints to visiting National Park Service lands revealed that African Americans were more likely than whites to say they prefer to travel to visit friends and relatives; while whites were more likely than blacks to travel away from home to visit nature.

We do not argue for a black avoidance or disdain of wild nature. African Americans express strong support for nature and understand its role in reducing environmental, health, and other social disparities (Lee 2024; Mowatt 2018; Osborne Jelks et al. 2018). The emergence of nature-based, outdoor recreation groups like *Outdoor Afro* and *SoulTrak* attests to the growing presence of (especially) urban African Americans intentionally engaging with wildlands, sometimes as a form of resistance (Milligan, McCreary, and Osborne Jelks 2021). However, at their core, groups like *Outdoor Afro* and *SoulTrak* emphasize groups of black people approaching nature collectively. Nature loving *Outdoor Afro* founder Rue Mapp began the non-profit as a platform from which black, shared experiences of nature could be launched because she observed that she was typically the “only” black person at a camping or hiking event (*National Public Radio*, July 12, 2015). In a *Public Lands* (n.d.) interview, Mapp is quoted: “I wanted to create a way for Black people to experience and learn about the outdoors that felt safe.... I spent much of my free time two hours north [of Oakland, CA] at my family’s ranch in Lake County, hiking, exploring creeks, swimming, and more. I often brought my friends with me, and the experience solidified [for me] that nature is best enjoyed in good company”. Along similar lines, Smith’s (2008, 302) “black [wilderness] concept” – which we extend to black framings of wild nature in cities – integrates societal elements into unmanicured spaces. The aim is not to escape entirely the familiar chatter, banter, and human-to-human exchange but to extend these relations into wild, outdoor places. One takes in nature but within the context of human others.⁶

Concerning outdoor leisure settings, decades of empirical studies suggest a black preference for developed milieus over undeveloped or wildland-type areas (Dwyer and Hutchison 1990; Erickson, Johnson, and Kivel 2009; Larson et al. 2014; Lee and Scott 2016; Washburne 1978). Nearly fifty years ago, the 1977 National Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Service survey revealed that African Americans preferred to recreate in urban rather than rural parks; preferred structured facilities over undeveloped land; and preferred indoor over outdoor recreation facilities. Zube and Pitt’s (1981) analysis of landscape preferences for inner-city blacks showed they favored developed over dispersed settings; and Kaplan and Talbot (1988) found that African Americans preferred landscaped settings over natural, unaltered scenes. More recent data from the 2008 and 2009 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment household survey found that ninety percent or more African Americans used developed sites (defined generally as outdoor recreation sites with lighting; amenities for group sports; paved walking trails, and food/souvenir vending) when recreating outdoors; but only about ten percent camped, and less than 15 percent hiked (National Survey on Recreation and the Environment 2008

and 2009). Whites were twice as likely as blacks to say they participated in outdoor activities that take place in backcountry or wildland-type areas (Cordell 2012).

The USDA Forest Service's National Visitor Use Monitoring survey (NVUM) is also indicative of these distinctions. Despite above national average African American population percentages in Alabama (25.9 percent); Georgia (31.6 percent), Mississippi (36.1 percent), and South Carolina (26.5 percent), less than eight percent of recreation visits to national forests in each of these states were made by blacks between 2018 and 2021 (National Visitor Use Monitoring Survey 2022). Since the early 2000s, NVUM data have consistently shown that only about two percent of visits to the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest in Georgia are made by African Americans (Johnson et al. 2007; National Visitor Use Monitoring Survey 2022). This, even though roughly fifty percent of Atlanta's population is black, and both the north Georgia (Chattahoochee) and Piedmont (middle Georgia–Oconee) sections of the forest are less than a two-hour drive from the city. Similar data are reported for the National Park Service and for state parks both in the South and other regions of the country (Davis 2019; Erickson, Johnson, and Kivel 2009; Larson et al. 2014; Xiao, Lee, and Larson 2022).

Findings from a non-academic source accord with the aforementioned research. A 2021 national-level survey conducted by Sports Marketing Surveys USA found that just 7.2 percent of African Americans hiked and only 6.3 percent camped (Outdoor Foundation 2022). These rates compare to 22 and 17.7 percent, respectively for whites. The camping and hiking rates for blacks were also substantially lower than these rates for Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanic/LatinX Americans. African Americans had the highest rate of participation in running, biking, and fishing. The first two activities are not exclusive to, but are more common in developed settings; and fishing figures prominently in black Americans' outdoor leisure. For instance, Davis's (2019, 101) study of rural, African American visitors to South Carolina's Congaree National Forest highlights the centrality of a regionally distinct, black fishing culture, where the demarcation between nature and society is blurred. These self-labelled "outdoors people" described activities like birdwatching and hiking as superfluous to the more necessary task of resource extraction (Davis 2019, 99). As one participant put it, non-consumptive activities are "for the white people to do, not us". In terms of urban blacks and fishing, Roane (2018) stresses the communal nature of fishing for blacks in metropolitan Washington, D.C. African American fishers, he writes, maintain "subject to subject relations wherein fish and other resources from the local environment lubricate reciprocity between humans". In other words, resources harvested or extracted from nature help to facilitate and maintain social relations among relevant others.

The forgoing elaborations on collective responses to the out-of-doors and predilections for developed spaces are tempered by the third consideration, a heightened concern for safety while recreating outdoors. That African Americans tend to engage with nature in group settings and demonstrate a penchant for developed outdoor recreation should not be viewed entirely independently of a history of state-sanctioned, anti-black racism and violence. Studies dating from the 1970s indicate that African Americans feel more angst when traveling through and to recreation areas considered “white” territory (Lee 1972; Meeker 1973; West 1989). Lee (1972) observed that African Americans traveled to regional parks in groups because of the perception of safety in numbers. West (1989) charged that the issue of inter-racial relations in Detroit parks was ignored by leisure researchers despite findings from prior studies indicating that fear of racism and discrimination prohibited minorities from visiting recreation areas outside their neighborhoods.

Grounds for such caution persist. Sections of some roadways near Georgia’s Chattahoochee National Forest are lined with shops displaying and selling confederate flags and other antebellum memorabilia, which may help to explain the lack of black visitation to national forests in this part of the state. Related, a 2019 study of black travel in the US found that black Americans expressed greater concerns for safety when selecting travel destinations in the US, compared to European blacks vacationing in the US (MMGY Global 2024). Also, Xiao, Lee, and Larson’s (2022) analysis found that black Americans were significantly more likely than whites to cite safety concerns as reasons not to visit national parks although the survey did not specify which aspects of safety were problematic.

Elaborating on the safety concern, Lee (2024) and Sene-Harper, Mowatt, and Floyd (2022, 11) argue that the black experience of nature is as much a consequence of American racial politics as it is a distinct expression of African American cultural preferences. According to the latter, culture, apart from the political, is insufficient for illuminating what they describe as “black imaginaries of nature” that while compelling, have also been honed over centuries by compounding oppression. To this point, Taylor (1997) and Johnson and Bowker (2004) traced the origins and rise of mainstream American environmentalism alongside a parallel black struggle for racial, political, and economic justice. Each stage of emergent, mainstream environmentalism was contrasted with the same time periods, that for blacks were filled with systemic cruelties. During the pivotal, early environmental movement (1914–1959) when environmentalism began to be embraced by more white Americans, eight of eleven lynchings of African Americans in Florida during the 1930s occurred in wildland settings (Zan-grando 1980). Johnson and Bowker (2004) and Johnson and McDaniel

(2006) comment on how, during much of the twentieth century, summary executions of black people in woodland areas and black woodland labor camps coalesced to alienate African Americans from the woods. Of this time, Theriault and Mowatt (2020, 20) observe, “the irony is that as the country was moving toward conserving and preserving the natural environment, the “lynching industry” or swaths of their occurrences swept through the United States”. At mid-twentieth century, while white environmentalists were championing and celebrating passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, legislation that epitomized European ideation of the solitary self in nature, African American attention fixated on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which ostensibly, heralded a new era of black integration into America’s *social* spheres.

We did not survey communities in and adjacent to the SRF area to assess their attitudes about being in wildland-type environments, whether rural or urban. Thus, we cannot say with certainty that the blacks championing the land exchange did so because of their unfamiliarity with and discomfort in wild places. However, the consistency of research findings across decades from both site-specific and national-level studies, showing that African Americans spend significantly less time than whites in wildlands, leads us to believe that SRF blacks would have similar attitudes. We have no reason to believe SRF African Americans would be different from blacks nationally. Also compelling are NVUM results from the two Atlanta-proximate national forests indicating very low rates of visits by blacks to these resources near their homes.

Materials and methods

The Nature Conservancy of Georgia partnered with the ARC in 2022 to develop the *South River Forest Consensus Building & Stakeholder Engagement* process aimed at understanding community views of the SRF concept (Atlanta Regional Commission, 2022). Again, this included administering an online survey from May to October 2022 soliciting input on respondents’ relationship to the SRF, hosting two community meetings and tours of key SRF sites, and creating a steering committee to inform the overall process. The online survey was advertised via ARC and SRFC’s websites and social media postings by local news groups, and by word of mouth.

The SRFC website hosting the survey provided a comprehensive description of the SRF concept, which included an overview of the area’s history of unwanted land uses (i.e. landfills, trucking companies, prisons), along with language describing opportunities for greenspace preservation. In addition to questions about people’s relationship to the SRF, the survey also contained opened-ended questions asking about resources, challenges, opportunities,

needed investments, and long-range priorities (Atlanta Regional Commission, [No date](#)).

We analyzed responses to two open-ended questions on the survey. Question 1 contained two parts:

1. What does the “South River Forest” area mean to you?/How would you describe the South River Forest area? and
2. How would you describe your relationship to the South River Forest area today?

We looked for any indications of the three characteristic ways that African Americans engage with nature – which again are: (1) collective expressions of nature participation; (2) preferences for developed settings and or activities; and (3) safety concerns. We also searched for responses that were supportive of or in some way consistent with “The Great Park Connection” idea and movie studio expansion. These expressions would suggest that the vision for the area taken up by the black-led, southwest DeKalb group was reflected in survey responses.

The survey was designed so that all existing responses to these and other open-ended questions were visible to survey takers before they completed the survey. No age minimum was attached to the survey and could be completed by anyone, not just residents living within a certain distance of the proposed SRF boundaries. Respondents were instructed to indicate agreement or not to already populated responses if their response was like text already contributed. Also, respondents had the option of revealing both their first and last names. Responses were visible on the SRFC website until November 2022. We downloaded responses to both questions in early November 2022 after the survey closed. Content validity was achieved by ensuring that the responses scrubbed from the South River Forest website were authentic. To do this, we contacted someone involved with the ARC analysis via email and asked for access to the raw data. That person provided us with a link to the survey, which contained the responses we had already accessed (Atlanta Regional Commission, [No date](#)). No other data were indicated. We also attended both community input meetings in July and September 2022 and attended the post-meeting tours of two SRF nodes, the Glen Emerald Park and Lake Charlotte Nature Preserve, respectively.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis guided our analysis of the survey data. Thematic analysis is a type of data reduction technique like grounded theory although the aim is not to achieve data saturation via a series of iterative data collection cycles. Data are coded and sorted into themes, which can then be linked theoretically. Thematic analysis allows for either deductive or inductive analyses. Although our study is guided by a priori assumptions about black engagement with nature and the out of

doors, we used inductive coding, allowing categories to emerge from the data. This approach was used because the questions asked respondents to comment on their interactions with and feelings and beliefs about the physical, political, and social attributes of the SRF; thus, we expected responses might address any number of topics, not only those related to how people engage with nature.

There were 304 responses submitted for the first question (again, presented in two parts), which were distilled into 299 responses after consolidating responses for five respondents. Respondents did not distinguish responses for the two parts of question one. Each of the 299 responses were read multiple times by the authors to identify codes (single words or phrases) that were sorted into themes and then recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Any given response could receive more than one code, depending on the respondent's elaboration and address of issues. For the first question, the 299 responses were assigned 603 codes. These were sorted into thirteen themes. There were 186 responses for question two, to which 282 codes were assigned, also sorted into thirteen themes. See [Table 1](#).

On another spreadsheet, codes for the respective questions were counted. This was done by assigning a value of one to a given code and placing it in a cell which intersected the related interview (row) and a given theme (column). Again, any question could be parsed into multiple codes. All values for a given theme (column) were then summed. The ratio of the sum of a given theme to the total for all themes was computed and graphed.

Table 1. South river forest survey themes.

Theme	Text describing:
Conservation/preservation	Ecological value of the area's resources
Outdoor recreation/exploration	Leisure time spent in any part of South River Forest or on the South River
Aesthetics	Superlatives describing the area such as "jewel", "gem", "oasis"
Ecosystem function	Ecological value of South River Forest resources
Redress of environmental injustice	Past or present environmental burdens reduced by South River Forest preservation
Reflection/respite	South River Forest evoking positive and calming emotions
Climate resiliency	South River Forest canopy mediating or mitigating a warming climate
Indigenous land restoration	Muscogee Creek Nation or the Creek name for the area "Weelaunee", injustices perpetrated against indigenous inhabitants, and reparations to them
Intrenchment Creek Park/Old Prison Farm controversies	Controversies involving public safety facility ("Cop City") or Intrenchment Creek Park land exchange
Old growth forest	Belief that any part of the South River Forest, in particular the Old Prison Farm or Intrenchment Creek Park, contains old growth forests
Descriptive of South River Forest components	Simple statement of South River Forest resources such as "trees" or "greenspace" without value attached
Polluted waterways	South River pollution or cleanup efforts
Economic development	Desire to see industry and commercial growth

Memos created as a part of the analysis process guided our clarification and elaboration of themes. For instance, notes made on an initial grouping we described as “people outdoors” helped us to break that concept into three themes, i.e. “nature-based recreation”, “reflection/escape”, and “aesthetics” (Birks, Chapman, and Francis 2008). Memos were also recorded after attending the two community meetings and the greenspace tours. We described the event, attendees, and reflected on the content of each meeting.

Per Mackey and Gass (2005, 129), the data were coded by both authors (independent of the other) in two different periods (seven months apart) to ensure reliability. The repeat coding confirmed assignment of the original themes; except that with the redo, for the first question, we combined “old growth” with “conservation” and for both questions, created a separate theme for “reflection/escape”, apart from “nature-based recreation”.

Responses to the two questions mostly reflected what appeared to be deeply held convictions about the SRF and nature and environment more generally. As such, the comments provided apt material for expressions of how respondents engage with and value wild nature in southwest DeKalb County and southeast Atlanta. Responses we accessed were not linked to demographic data, so we had no way of examining responses by race. To help capture a more balanced understanding of the SRF project, both authors also attended weekly SRFC meetings from about January 2022 to May 2022. The second author continued to attend meetings throughout 2023.

Results

The results section contains three analyses. The first compares demographics of the ARC online survey to population estimates for US census block groups intersecting the proposed SRF boundaries. Responses to the ARC survey are then examined, followed by a description of online documents and websites evidencing black support for the land exchange, and movie studio expansion.

Demographics

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics for respondents’ relationship to the SRF, age and race categories, Hispanic ethnicity, and housing status for both the sample and the population. For the sample, residence was split about even between Atlanta and DeKalb County, and close to half of the respondents indicated affiliation either individually or organizationally with a group interested in the SRF. The modal age category for the sample was 30–39 (31 percent). Eighty percent of respondents identified as white (no ethnicity specified), nine percent as African American, one percent as Asian-origin, and eight percent as multiple races. Nine

Table 2. South river forest sample and population.

Relationship to SRF n = 228	Age n = 229		Race ^a n = 225		Hispanic n = 222		Housing status N = 228		Percent Pop.				
	Percent Sample	Percent Sample	Percent Sample	Percent Sample	Percent Sample	Percent Sample	Percent Sample						
I am a resident of the City of Atlanta. ^b	56	18–29	12	15	White	80	13	Yes	9	6	Owner	82	52
I am a resident of DeKalb County.	54	30–39	31	16	Black	9	80	No	89	94	Renter	14	33
I am an individual/organization interested in the future of South River Forest area	46	40–49	15	13	Asian	1	1	Other	2	1	Dependent ^c	2	–
I own a business in DeKalb County.	7	50–59	17	12	Multiple races	8	5				Other	2	–
I own a business in the City of Atlanta.	8	60–69	14	11	Other	1	1						
Other	6	70+	2	11									

^aAmerican Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander were also response options, but no respondents selected those options.
^bA portion of the City of Atlanta is in Dekalb rather than Fulton County. Someone could live in both the city and Dekalb County.
^cNot defined on survey.

percent identified as Hispanic/Latino, and just over eighty percent were homeowners.

To compare to the population, US Census Bureau data for the nine census tracts that overlap or are adjacent to the SRF boundaries indicate that a much lower percent of the population is in the 30–39 age category, only 16 percent (US Census Bureau 2021a; US Census Bureau 2021b). Also, about five times as many persons in the population are aged seventy or over. This part of metro Atlanta is also overwhelmingly African American. Overall, blacks make up about eighty percent of the population across all census tracts and whites just under thirteen percent. Percent African American is at least eighty-six percent in six of the nine census tracts. The area's black/white racial distribution is roughly the inverse of the sample distribution. Also, homeownership for the sample was thirty percentage points higher than that for the population, and percent renter in the sample was less than half the population rate. These comparisons are important to highlight because they show that the sample is younger, much whiter, and likely wealthier than the general population. Higher wealth is assumed by the considerably higher homeownership rate reported by respondents. Total population for the nine census tracts is 32,841 with a population density of 1,882 persons per sq. mile (726.7 persons per sq. km) (US Census Bureau 2021a).

Thematic analysis of survey responses

For the two-part question 1, respondents provided 151 references to conservation/preservation, representing 25 percent of all coded text for that dual question (Figure 2). This was followed by aesthetics (.16), nature-based recreation (.15), ecosystem function (.12), and redress of environmental injustices (.08), reflection/escape (.05), and so on. Protection of and adoration of the area's resources, encapsulated in the first four themes, stood out as paramount, with respondents calling attention to the SRF providing an unprecedented opportunity for retaining ecological diversity, particularly canopy cover, inside of Atlanta's perimeter. The following quotes articulate this point:

"A unique, rare opportunity to preserve a large area of tree canopy for park and play"

"A wonderland to explore wild unmanicured nature right here in the city"

"It means a respite from living in the city and being in nature to restore harmony and balance to myself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It is my chance to be outside of the stress of city life and immersed in the restorative frequencies of nature. I find myself restored and refreshed after spending time in the forest".

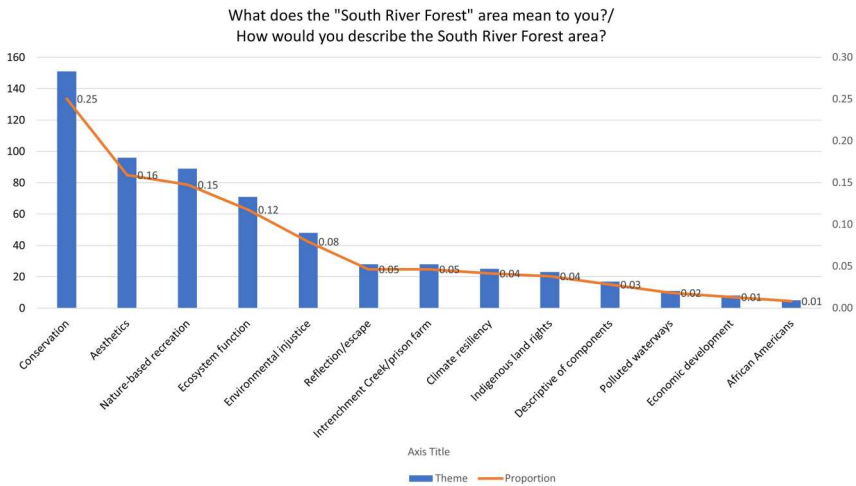


Figure 2. Themes associated with South River Forest meaning and description.

There was also some concern expressed about both historical and contemporary environmental injustices imposed on south Atlanta communities and how the SRF could help to mitigate those. This was expressed as the siting of unwanted land uses in this part of the metro area generally but also indicated explicitly in references to repatriation/rematriation of indigenous land rights:

“It is native land that should be left alone by cops or movie studios or government. Native peoples are the only governing body who should preside here”.

“I put tobacco down on the land regularly and pray for the rematriation of the Weelaunee [Muscogee name for the woodlands containing Intrinchment Creek Park] forest back to Maskoke [Muscogee] stewardship”.

In terms of consistency with African American ways of engaging with nature, eight of 299 responses indicated collective engagement with SRF resources. For instance, there were references to enjoying nature walks with friends and families:

Weelaunee Forest is a treasure to all that visit it. A beautiful forest full of life. It is home to some of the oldest growth trees around Atlanta. It is a refugee for my family. We have spent so many hours there, hiking, playing, learning, teaching our son to be a steward of the land.

Responses to question two were articulated in a similar manner as the first one but reflected more of a personal association with the area, particularly in terms of nature-based, outdoor recreation/exploration (Figure 3). Important here is emphasis on recreation that occurs in undeveloped, as opposed to developed settings. There were numerous mentions of hiking, off-road

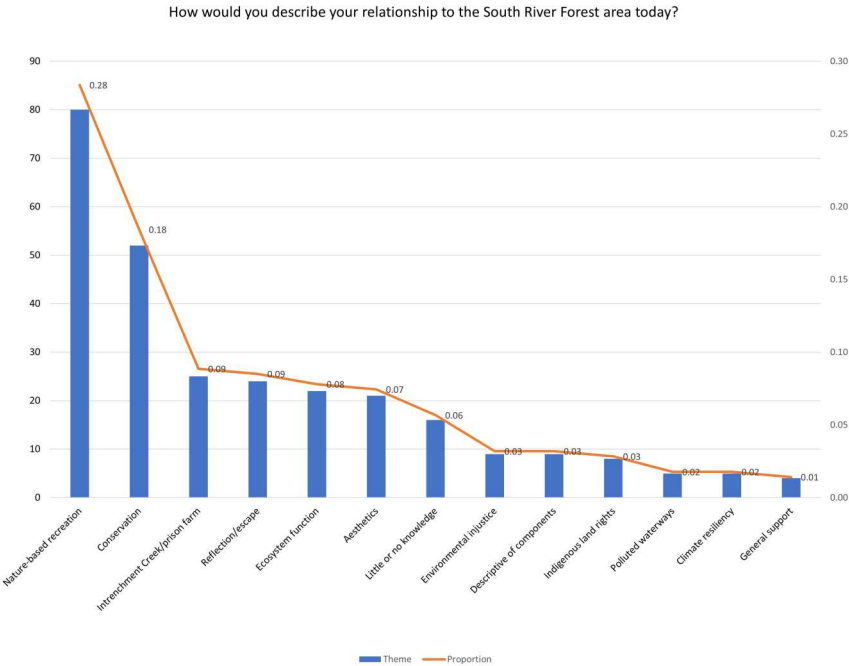


Figure 3. Themes associated with respondents’ relationship to the South River Forest.

biking, nature observation, and reflection. It is also important to note that when respondents described their relationship to the SRF, they referenced both particular greenspaces contained in the proposed boundaries, either by name (e.g. Intrinsincement Creek Park), or they referred to the area generally as the “South River Forest”. The collective rebranding of the area as a “forest” seemed to resonate, as survey takers described (primarily) the place’s physical attributes but also social aspects of place, again referencing what they believed to be both historical and contemporary injustices (Figures 2 and 3).

To understand better respondents’ comments about their current relationship to the SRF, we first provide descriptions of key recreation nodes most often referenced. One of these was the Lake Charlotte Nature Preserve, which is in large part the result of environmental justice activism. Concerned about an encroaching landfill in the early 2000s, black residents in the adjacent South River Gardens neighborhood joined forces with the Conservation Fund and the city to have the property preserved (Green, 2019). Efforts of the South River Gardens community cannot be overemphasized regarding preservation of this resource; however, observations of visitors to Lake Charlotte by the authors revealed few black visitors to the site. Also, one of the organizers of the Lake Charlotte preservation effort

commented to the first author that few neighborhood blacks visit the resource because it is an isolated space where they would not feel comfortable, and many residents who live adjacent to it are older who find the lack of parking spaces and uneven terrain difficult to navigate. This seeming contraction of an instance where blacks mobilized to preserve nearby greenspace but do not visit illustrates black appreciation for wild nature but less so as an immersive experience.

Over one-half of the text analyzed for this question contained references either to wildland recreation, reflection/escape, or aesthetic appreciation as a way in which respondents related to the SRF. This was followed by conservation/preservation (.18), mentions of Intrenchment Creek Park and the Prison Farm (.09), and ecosystem function (.07). Most of those who indicated recreation/exploration said that they visited SRF often. In many cases, respondents did not name a particular node but referenced SRF generally. However, specific references to Intrenchment Creek Park and the Old Prison Farm were made more by respondents to question two than the first two-part question (.09 versus .03). Responses contained wording indicating respondents' passions about the controversies, their desire to see this acreage protected, and its impact on their recreation experience.

As mentioned, environmental activists took up residence in wooded sections of the Old Prison Farm and Intrenchment Creek Park for several years (from about 2021 to early 2024) and have been involved in numerous clashes with local police and implicated in acts of vandalism both in the woods and in nearby neighborhoods (Crosbie 2022; Harris 2023; Defend the Atlanta Forest, No date). Disputes involving the training facility and the land exchange continue to garner extensive media coverage that has only intensified since one of the protesters, Manuel Esteban Paez Teran, a Venezuelan native, was killed when state police attempted to evict occupiers from their encampments in January 2023 (CBS News 2023).

Like the previous question, virtually all comments stressed appreciation for and visits to SRF greenspaces conducive to nature-based, outdoor recreation. However, there was scant mention of economic development in survey responses, and the land exchange (captured in the "Intrenchment Creek Park/Prison Farm" theme) was referenced only derisively, as something wholly undesirable. The following quotes are illustrative of sentiments about the swap:

"I am mortified by both "the swap" and "cop-city" plans, in secret & without the majority of citizens [*sic*] involvement[,] by officials & private investors, to cut out Atlanta's forest lungs which DIRECTLY effect [*sic*] the entire multi-county air quality, flood protection, and water quality".

"... Blackhall Studios was able to illegally acquired [*sic*] a portion of the forest known as Intrenchment Creek Park, which they bulldozed and clear cut before

swapping it in a backdoor deal back to DeKalb County in exchange for a vital, maturing portion of the park. Not a fair trade or a democratic process”.

There were ten references to collective recreation, out of 186 responses to question two. In terms of safety, respondents emphasized that wooded areas made them feel safer; whereas “Cop City” and the police made them feel *less* safe. Just one respondent referenced the environmental activists who occupied Intrenchment Creek Park and the Old Prison Farm, remarking: “I don’t feel safe going by myself. I don’t like that there are folks living there and damaging equipment and vehicles”.

“The Great Park Connection”: centering black-led, environmental activism

ARC survey responses included no mention of The Great Park Connection/ Michelle Obama Park; and again, only language rejecting the land swap. However, we found a Facebook page and other information online describing the southwest DeKalb group’s activism around the land swap and park idea (The Great Park Connection 2019). With the support of BlackHall Studios and the public relations firm, ABOA: A. Brown-Olmstead Associates, LTD, “The Great Park Connection Conservancy” was established in 2019 to incubate the park concept (The Great Park Connection Conservancy 2019).

The Great Park Connection Facebook page shows a flurry of related activity in spring and summer 2019 that includes a video recording of Patricia Culp, head of southwest DeKalb’s Cedar Grove Neighborhood Association, voicing support for Blackhall Studios and The Great Park Connection, along with Ryan Millsap and other business interests aligned with the swap (The Great Park Connection 2019). There are also photos of what appear to be black, pro-swap supporters with information about the exchange at a shopping venue; residents visiting a Blackhall Studios open house in 2019; and photos of community members donning bright green-colored, supportive tee shirts (The Great Park Connection 2019). We also discovered a recording dated June 25, 2019, from the DeKalb County Board of Commissioner’s public input session, where a swap supporter wearing a “Great Park Connection” tee shirt expressed enthusiasm and support for development in southwest DeKalb County (DeKalb County Board of Commissioners 2019). During the same session, Dr. Jackie Echols, head of the South River Forest Watershed Alliance,⁷ registered that group’s opposition to the land exchange. Additional pro-swap statements were submitted by email to the commission on October 13, 2020 (DeKalb County Board of Commissioners 2020).

Both supporters and opponents of the land exchange set up change.org petitions in 2019. There are currently thousands more signatures for the

opposing petition; however, a supporter we talked with believes that many opposing signatures are likely from people living outside southwest DeKalb County or the larger SRF vision area – because of the online platform. We learned from informal conversations with exchange supporters that they believe the paltry online support for the pro-swap position reflects an older southwest DeKalb County population that is less familiar with online interfaces and that the environmentalists who oppose the swap have a much broader and savvier network than those in favor of the exchange.

Conversations with the two swap supporters also revealed that black southwest Dekalb community leaders augmented the online signatures with a face-to-face outreach that gathered at least two thousand signatures in 2019⁸ for a petition in support of the exchange (also referenced by Green, August 15, 2019). Informants say this was achieved by canvassing southwest DeKalb County neighborhoods, holding information sessions at local churches and setting up information booths at a local mall (Figure 4). The online petition, along with the park logo and image are also displayed on The Great Park Connection's Change.org page (Change.org 2019). The petition stresses benefits of the exchange, while also drawing attention to the opposing viewpoint. Bullet points make clear that the new park will be



Figure 4. Southwest DeKalb County community members appearing to provide information about The Great Park Connection and BlackHall Studios land exchange in July 2019.

a developed facility with safety features. Claims are also made about the number of trees in the new park and the economic benefits associated with the park. Taken together, these documents and records lend credibility to a parallel, but unrecognized effort, to define south Atlanta's environmental landscaper by African Americans.

Discussion

Millsap sold BlackHall Studios (renamed ShadowBox) for \$120 million in 2021, but he still owns the forty acres of former county parkland (Mandel, April 28, 2021). The new company will expand operations south of where the existing studio is located on 155 acres (62 ha) of land, away from Intrenchment Creek Park. The company received a \$68 million incentive package from the county that they say will allow them to create 2400 jobs in south DeKalb County. ShadowBox's parent company says it has also partnered with the county's workforce development program, Georgia's film industry, the public school system, and local, technical colleges to train students interested in film careers (Estep, April 24, 2022). Detractors continue to question both the economic and ecological impact of the expansion (Estep, April 24, 2022). Also, in February 2023, City of Atlanta mayor Andre Dickens announced the appointment of the *South River Forest Public Safety Training Center and Community Task Force*, which linked the disputed training center with the conservation aims exemplified by the SRF – a move SRF advocates decried as usurpation. The SRF project appears to have gone mainstream but not in the way envisioned by environmentalists.

There has not been much activity on the Great Park Connection Facebook page since 2019. One informant relayed that The Great Park Connection Conservancy still exists but is currently inactive because of both the pending lawsuit challenging the land exchange and Millsap's exit. This person also shared that black community members who had backed Millsap felt blindsided by the sale and no longer trust him, but they still support The Great Park Connection/Michelle Obama Park. Despite Millsap's exit, the county is moving forward with that project, but park construction has been halted because DeKalb County closed access to both Intrenchment Creek Park and the nearby fifty-three acres following protests of the public safety training facility and the land swap in early 2023. Construction of the public safety training facility has also continued and is expected to be completed by the end of 2024.

We offer no opinion as to the ethics of the land exchange or the potential environmental impact of development on the forty acres. Rather, we argue that black community leaders' support for The Great Park project is consistent with black preferences for greenspace amenities that facilitate social

group interaction and developed recreation activities. While we do not assume that black support for the developed park is unanimous, there is evidence that a vocal collective of SRF residents is willing to sacrifice forty acres of canopy for industrial expansion and an ADA-compliant park with splash pads, lighting, and other security features.

Opponents decry this embrace and charge that the community is being exploited by corporate actors (Green 2019). We would counter that this stance fails to see “justice” in terms other than those which the environmental mainstream deems is applicable. Important in this case study is black agency, the right of African Americans to participate fully in decisions that directly affect communities where they are in the majority, and to support environmental agendas that may not align completely with established environmental priorities. The southwest DeKalb group *chose* to support a proposal that promises the community a park that perhaps aligns more with black, outdoor leisure preferences.

Although attempts were made by the ARC, SRFC, and others to publicize the survey, we maintain that it was not advertised sufficiently in virtual or physical spaces frequented by the black SRF population, i.e. churches, community groups, and other gathering spaces. Also, the online format biased participation in favor of technically competent individuals familiar or comfortable with online inputs. We believe a door-to-door survey would have provided a better black response rate and enabled ARC analysts to distinguish SRF responses from those outside this area. The ARC admits in its final *South River Forest Community Development Action Plan* that “survey responses may not reflect the demographics of adjacent [SRF] communities” (Atlanta Regional Commission 2023). This caveat is an effective admission that the views of relevant African American communities are not reflected in survey. Related, one respondent to the online survey commented:

After attending the “community” meeting tonight, I did not see or hear a genuine opportunity to solicit community support or rejection of the project [SRF]. Was there representation for all of the communities surrounding the South River Forest area? Were they even invited to attend? Were flyers sent out to the residents that would be impacted [by] any changes to the area? Is the planning group working in a vacuum?

While there were many mentions of both economic justice/equity and park provision in the ARC plan, there was no recognition of specific initiatives backed by the southwest DeKalb campaign. This is a glaring omission given the importance of those measures to some proportion of southwest DeKalb’s black residents. Like the survey responses, conspicuously absent from the plan is any mention of The Great Park Connection⁹/Michelle Obama Park. This is problematic because it perpetuates an incomplete narrative about inclusion and resident priorities for the SRF.

We believe that if there were more representation of residents from majority black neighborhoods, in either the DeKalb or City of Atlanta portion of the SRF vision area, the engagement process may have contained statements referencing The Great Park Connection and more explicit accounts of the ways that black Americans engage with nature. For instance, the importance of fishing in the black community was highlighted in the literature review. However, this activity was mentioned rarely in the ARC survey responses although there are opportunities for fishing in the SRF. One of these is Constitution Lakes in DeKalb County. The South River, fed by Intrinchment Creek, is another source although the waterway has been the focus of a decades long fight by environmentalists to draw attention to what it sees as discriminatory applications of the Clean Water Act in south DeKalb County. According to Dr. Jackie Echols, the county has committed to remediating combined sewer overflows (a major source of South River pollution) but only in specific areas, which do not include predominantly African American communities in south DeKalb County (Alcorn 2023). Despite being listed as impaired by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division in 2023, the South River is designated safe for fishing.

Of the 485 responses to both questions, there were just four mentions of fishing. This compares with nearly one-hundred mentions of hiking and off-road biking. Given the centrality of fishing for African Americans along the rural-to-urban continuum, this oversight suggests again, that black ways of being in wildlands and spaces that mimic wildlands were not articulated in the survey. African Americans' historical relationship with nature and wilderness may have been captured by members of the SRF steering committee, but like The Great Park omission, no mention of the topic was reflected in the ARC report.

There was also no solicitation of explicitly black views or ethos about nature in the ARC-hosted community meetings. The first meeting served primarily as a meet-and-greet type gathering, and a focal point of the second was to gauge attendees' understanding of environmental justice and how the SRF could facilitate the same. Even this exercise may not have resonated with the audience because of the technocratic terms used to describe environmental justice. For instance, the moderator asked the audience to rate or respond to the importance of carbon trading or caps to effect environmental justice. One attendee asked the moderator to explain carbon trading, and the moderator had difficulty articulating it in a way that might resonate with non-academic or technically trained audiences. While environmental justice must be a part of SRF deliberations, the nearly singular focus on describing environmental burdens and "justice" is insufficient for effecting the same because as Anguelovski et al. (2020) maintain, justice must include self-reflection and an acknowledgement of privileged viewpoints.

The SRF concept developed by the Atlanta City Design group was brought to south Atlanta as a *fait accompli*, rather than as a proposal amenable to compromise and revision. Certainly, calling attention to the environment and ecology of southeast Atlanta and southwest DeKalb County is laudable. But the rebranding hints at a quasi-colonialism because it originates from its own assumptions about what is good for black people in the places where they predominate. By defaulting to such orthodoxies, mainstream environmentalists and planners fail to recognize more robust and representative conceptions of environmental justice, which go beyond accounting for environmental harms or goods to contending with unconscious bias. More comprehensive conceptualizations of justice must recognize how African Americans engage with nature.

Notes

1. See Map 4 (“Public Greenspaces”) in the Atlanta Regional Commission’s (2023) report, *Explore South River Forest: Co-Investing in SE Atlanta & SW DeKalb County*. The figure includes the full list of relevant green spaces and industrial sites contained in South River Forest boundaries.
2. The City of Atlanta has been criticized harshly for alleged brutalities committed against inmates at the Prison Farm during its operation (Atlanta Press Collective, 2021).
3. According to press reports, the forty acres were gifted to the county by the Trust for Public Land and the Arthur M. Blank Foundation. It is reported that these organizations supported the later exchange after gauging community support.
4. Ifá is a belief system and world view practiced by the Yoruba people of Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, and Togo. Practitioners and adherents also live outside of Africa. This world view predates European colonialism and emphasizes the power of magic rituals, traditional medicines, and veneration of the dead.
5. As defined by the 1964 Wilderness Act, “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (<https://wilderness.net/learn-about-wilderness/key-laws/wilderness-act/default.php>). However, references to wilderness in this paper includes wild areas that do not strictly conform to this definition.
6. A collective approach to nature and wilderness is not unique to African Americans. This world view is also evident in traditional Native, Latin, and Asian American cultures, again with humans integrated into nature, not distinct from the wild (Schultz, Zelezny, and Dalrymple 2000).
7. Dr. Jackie Echols is also one of the few African Americans who is an active member of the South River Forest Coalition.
8. We attempted to locate the petition, apparently filed with the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, to ask whether a petition was filed with that office. The person responding to our request relayed that the Board would not have received a petition. If it existed, it would have been submitted to a different office.

9. Except with reference to the affiliations of two ARC steering committee members who are also team members of the Great Park Connection Conservancy.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available from the Atlanta Regional Commission at <https://publicinput.com/X5142>.

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