

Negotiating Constraints to Recreation in Everglades National Park Among Underserved South Florida Residents

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Everglades National Park (EVER) is located within fifty miles of Miami, Florida. Miami-Dade County is home to approximately 2.7 million people with 71.6 percent of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino. Despite proximity to this diverse urban area, the demographics of EVER's visitors largely do not represent the surrounding community. Conceptual frameworks of constraints can facilitate understanding of low park visitation among traditionally underserved communities; however, they have been criticized for being relatively superficial due to their predominantly quantitative modeling approaches. Through semistructured interviews with underserved residents of South Florida, this research sought to understand constraints and constraint negotiation to visiting EVER. Participants identified several individual, interpersonal, contextual, and systemic constraints to recreating in EVER. Additionally, participants identified a variety of ways to negotiate these constraints through collective and individual strategies. Implications of this research further our understanding of the role of place, constraints, and negotiation in wilderness and U.S. national park visitation among traditionally underserved communities. This research informs EVER park managers on how to better serve the surrounding South Florida community through identification of detailed, place-based constraints and ways the park could engage in collective negotiation strategies to address them. *Key Words:* constraints negotiation, leisure constraints, wilderness.

Despite increasing diversity in the U.S. population (especially with regard to race and ethnicity), the majority of visitors to wildland parks and protected areas do not reflect the U.S. public (e.g., Flores et al. 2018; Sánchez et al. 2020). For instance, non-Hispanic White people comprise about 60 percent of the U.S. population, but they account for about 95 percent of national park visitors (Vaske and Lyon 2014). To better understand the continued lack of diversity in visitors of public lands, scholars have examined constraints (e.g., Shores, Scott, and Floyd 2007; Floyd and Stodolska 2014; Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo 2020; Rushing, D'Antonio, and Needham 2022), preferences (e.g., Chavez and Olson 2009; Whiting et al. 2017; Izenstark, Crossman, and Middaugh 2022), motivations (Tierney, Dahl, and Chavez 2001;

Whiting et al. 2017; Izenstark, Crossman, and Middaugh 2022), and recreation behaviors (e.g., Fernandez, Shinew, and Stodolska 2015; Xiao, Lee, and Larson 2022; Lu et al. 2023) of various demographic groups. Constraints to recreation are social, economic, physical, and personal factors that affect leisure preferences, limit participation, and reduce enjoyment or satisfaction with recreation experience (Jackson 2005). Research has found those identifying as Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) feel more constrained and visit public lands less than non-Hispanic White people (e.g., Stodolska, Shinew, and Li 2010; Ghimire et al. 2014; Xiao, Lee, and Larson 2022).

To better understand low visitation among underserved communities,¹ such as those identifying as BIPOC, the National Park Service (NPS) has

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sponsored several studies and undertaken several efforts based on this research to support relevance, diversity, and inclusion (RDI) across the park system from urban to wildland contexts (Stanfield-McCown et al. 2012; Lee, Casper, and Floyd 2019; Schultz et al. 2019). For example, the NPS stood up an Office of Relevance, Diversity, and Inclusion “to champion for an organizational culture that is increasingly inclusive and participatory” and to work collaboratively with stakeholders (NPS 2021, paragraph 1). Although it is relative and unique for each person, *relevance*, in the context of the NPS, centers on meaningful connections between the NPS and the public (Perry et al. 2024). The NPS Urban Agenda, enacted in 2016, was guided by the principle of relevance and sought to learn about and expand connections with urban communities through collaboration “to support healthy cities and urban populations” (NPS Stewardship Institute 2015; Perry et al. 2024, 2). Recently, with the help of partners, the NPS has been able to provide a diversity of programs to engage underserved communities such as a native plant and food sustainability education program at North Cascades National Park that brings together community groups and neighboring tribes; school bus transportation to bring underserved youth to Mount Rainier National Park; and expanded adaptive ranger-led programs for people with disabilities and their families in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Great Smoky Mountains National Park 2023; Washington’s National Park Fund 2025). Although there have been great strides toward supporting RDI in national parks, there has been little research in recent years to evaluate the efficacy of these programs and whether or not they help increase park relevance and reduce constraints to visitation faced by underserved communities.

In particular, there has been little research specifically examining constraints to recreation in U.S. federally designated wilderness (as reviewed by Thomas et al. 2022). Of the existing research, the most salient constraining factors for wilderness visitors were discomfort and safety concerns in wilderness settings, cultural expectations, high cost for participation, and lack of time and access (Thomas et al. 2022). These constraints have been attributed to low income, lack of childhood exposure, and historic and cultural narratives (Thomas et al. 2022). Much of this research specifically focused on

traditionally underserved communities in the outdoors. Research on how underserved communities negotiate their constraints and participate in wilderness recreation is lacking, however. We address this research gap by conducting a place-based qualitative study on proximate underserved residents’ constraints (and related negotiation) to visiting Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness (MSD) in Everglades National Park (EVER).

Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness

MSD is the largest unit (1.3 million acres, 86 percent of EVER) within the National Wilderness Preservation System in the eastern part of the country (NPS 2021). MSD in EVER serves as an appropriate location to understand constraints and constraint negotiation to participation in national park wilderness recreation because of its proximity (within fifty miles) of Miami, a diverse urban area. Miami-Dade County has approximately 2.7 million people with 71.6 percent of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino (Miami Matters 2023), which does not reflect the demographics of EVER and MSD visitors, who are 92.0 percent White and 90.4 percent non-Hispanic/Latino (Armatas et al. 2024; Mudford et al. 2024).

Leisure Constraints on Park Visitation

Research in the United States has found that traditionally underserved communities such as low-income, people of color, and people with disabilities are more constrained than White, wealthier, able-bodied people (Green et al. 2007; Shores, Scott, and Floyd 2007; Metcalf, Burns, and Graefe 2013), especially by factors relating to race and ethnicity and ability (Walker and Virden 2005; Xiao et al. 2017; Rushing et al. 2019; Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo 2020; Rushing, D’Antonio, and Needham 2022). Further, previous research has found that as identities and other demographic factors such as income, education, race, age, gender, and ability intersect, constraints are compounded (Shores, Scott, and Floyd 2007).

Constraints research, to date, has been criticized for being relatively superficial due to its predominantly quantitative conceptual modeling approaches (Samdahl 2005). Researchers responded to the call for more depth through qualitative approaches (e.g.,

Henderson and Bialeschki 1993; Erickson, Johnson, and Kivel 2009; Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo 2020), and have identified new models of constraints such as Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo's (2020) ecological model. This model adopts a social-ecological layering approach to categorize interrelated and mutually dependent constraint dimensions. These dimensions are *individual* (related to a person's control; e.g., ability to afford cost of entry or gear, language barrier), *interpersonal* (related to others; e.g., lack of family or peer support), *context* (related to the immediate environment; e.g., characteristics and availability of recreation programs), and *system* (related to the broader environment in which the individual is immersed; e.g., societal attitudes and beliefs, systemic ableism and racism; Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo 2020).

Early research presented constraints as insurmountable obstacles to participation or enjoyment in leisure (Crawford and Godbey 1987). Yet, constraints are regularly overcome, or negotiated, through individual and collective action and do not always predict nonparticipation (Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey 1991; Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey 1993; Godbey, Crawford, and Shen 2010). The responsibility of negotiation, however, has often been placed on the individual participant rather than professionals (e.g., park managers) or collective society. Previous research has identified individual motivation to participate in the leisure activity and desired experience as key drivers of negotiation behaviors (Loucks-Atkinson and Mannell 2007; White 2008). To both respond to calls for more qualitative constraints research and to help EVER managers understand local constraints and ways the park could help address them, we asked the following research questions:

1. What constrains underserved South Florida residents' visitation to MSD?
2. How do underserved South Florida residents negotiate these constraints?
3. What could EVER do to help reduce these constraints?

Methods

We conducted twenty-three in-depth semistructured interviews from March to August 2022 using a hermeneutic approach for interviewing and data

analysis to explore and interpret how interviewees construct meaning and understand their lived experiences (Patterson and Williams 2002). We obtained our sample using a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling methods to include a range of perspectives and to ensure representation from a variety of underserved communities living in South Florida (Parker, Scott, and Geddes 2019). We identified outdoor affinity organizations² in South Florida to recruit participants who might have had a previous relationship with the park or an interest in visiting; interviewees were then asked to suggest other groups or individuals who belonged to a local underserved population. Therefore, interviewees had a range of experience and familiarity with EVER. Recruitment was conducted via e-mail request or through social media direct messages. All interviews were conducted in English via Zoom and averaged 45.5 minutes in length. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used in place of participant names for confidentiality purposes. Groups successfully recruited through sampling included a disability nonprofit, a veterans' group, a women's hiking club, an LGBTQ+ outdoor group, and several BIPOC leadership and advocacy organizations. Participation in this research was not compensated or incentivized. Table 1 shares participants' pseudonyms and demographic information. Due to significant time and recruiting constraints, we were unsuccessful in our attempts to interview members of South Florida Native American tribes.

A semistructured interview guide was used to provide comparable results across participants, allow for unique insights, and encourage freedom of response (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Questions centered around constraints and negotiation to visiting MSD and EVER, as well as participant perceptions of park efforts and recommendations for future management. It should be noted that although questions focused on wilderness visitation, respondents often did not distinguish between federally designated wilderness and wildlands more generally.

We systematically organized and coded the data using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program (Lumivero 2020). Guided by the "hermeneutic circle," we read each transcript multiple times to identify major emergent elements (idiographic analysis; Patterson and Williams 2002). Next, overarching themes across transcripts were identified, coded, and assigned into categories (nomothetic analysis;

Table 1. Participant pseudonyms and demographic information

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Race and/or ethnicity	Identified as having a disability
Ami	35	Woman	African American	—
Cameron	24	Man	African American	—
Gabe	36	Man	African American	—
Sarah	30	Woman	African American	—
Jon	29	Man	Asian	Yes
Audrey	29	Woman	Latine	—
Dayton	23	Man	Latine	—
Davy	29	Man	Latine	—
Jamie	22	Woman	Latine	—
Naima	29	Woman	Latine	—
Sally	27	Woman	Latine	—
Shannon	30	Woman	Latine	—
Steve	31	Man	Latine	Yes
Valerie	34	Woman	Latine	—
Alana	72	Woman	White, non-Hispanic	—
Brittany	65	Woman	White, non-Hispanic	—
Gwen	—	Woman	White, non-Hispanic	Yes
Danny	42	Man	Multiethnic	—
Jasmina	32	Woman	Multiethnic	—
Manny	30	Man	Multiethnic	—
Thomas	38	Man	Multiethnic	—
Natasha	—	—	—	—
Daniel	—	—	—	—

Patterson and Williams 2002). Multiple authors reviewed transcripts for thematic development and to ensure intercoder reliability (Bartley and Brooks 2023). The hermeneutic paradigm assumes that researchers draw on their prior and continually evolving knowledge when interpreting participants' lived experiences (Gadamer 1989). Thus, it is important to acknowledge that all members of the research team identify as White members of higher education and land management institutions, which likely colors our interpretation of the information participants shared. Further, we acknowledge that interviewing participants with different identities and access to social privilege might have influenced how participants were recruited, how they perceived the research, and what they were willing to share with us.

Results

Results are organized by first highlighting participants' constraints to visiting EVER, then ways in which they negotiate these constraints individually, and finally their suggestions for ways in which

constraints could be negotiated collectively through both affinity organizations and EVER park efforts. Figure 1 puts these findings together in a conceptual model.

Constraints

Constraints fell into five broad themes: lack of park relevance, issues of access, environmental discomfort, fear and safety concerns, and evaluating opportunity costs that transcend individual, interpersonal, contextual, and systemic dimensions (Table 2).

Lack of Relevance. *Lack of Visible Representation in the Outdoors.* Several participants, particularly from the Latin and African-American community, identified that they did not feel represented in the larger outdoor recreation community or as a visitor to EVER. Participants discussed that not seeing models of people that looked like them in outdoor media, other park visitors, and park staff made participants feel like national parks like EVER were not for them. This systemic constraint is a reflection of hegemonies of Whiteness in recreation and conservation.

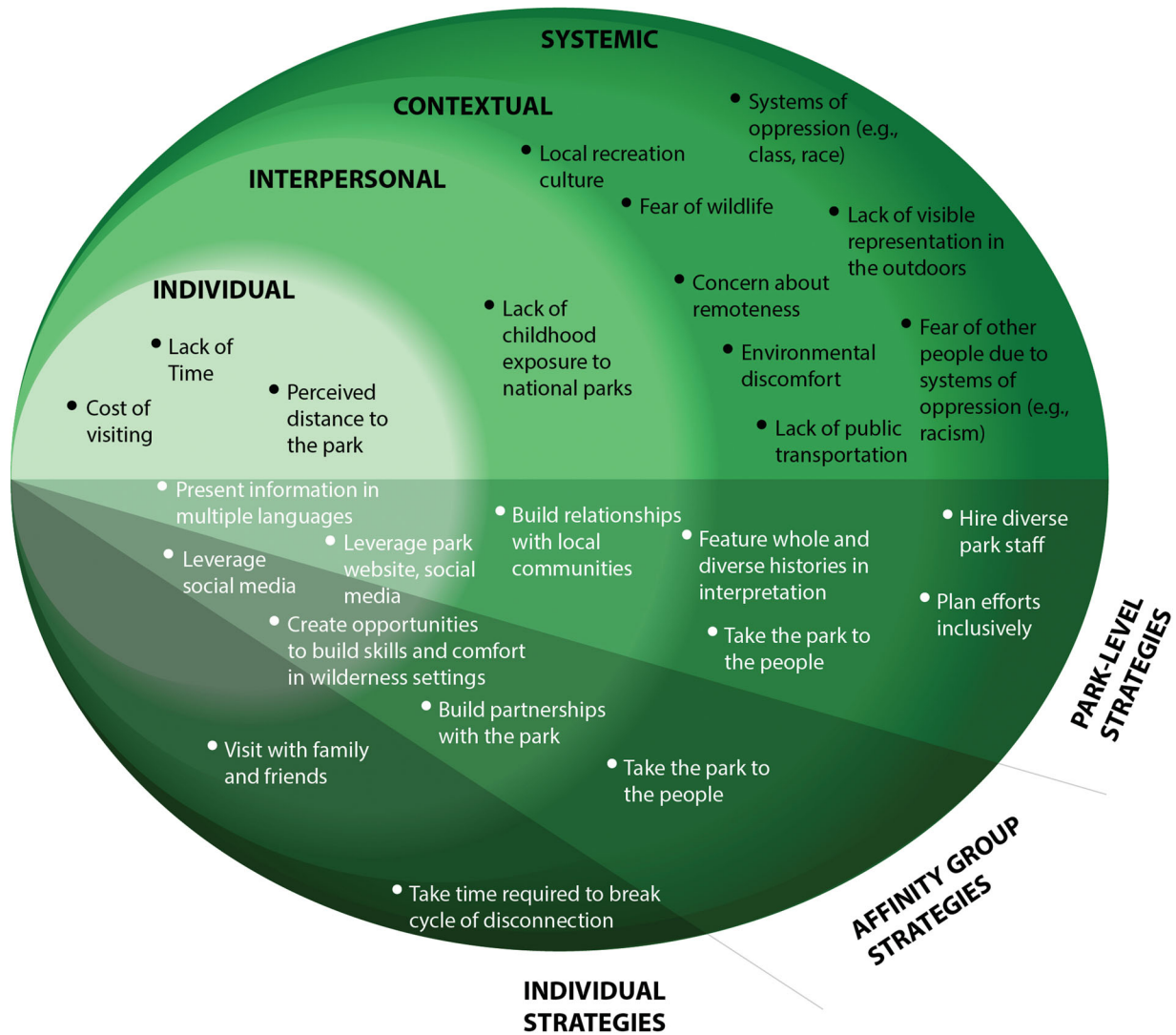


Figure 1. An ecological model of constraints and negotiation for underserved South Florida residents. This conceptual model is adapted from Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo (2020). Like Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo (2020), our model is organized by constraint factors (i.e., individual, interpersonal, contextual, and systemic); the blurred colors between symbolize the interconnectedness among the constraint factors. The top half of the model depicts constraints to visiting Everglades National Park and the bottom half depicts negotiation strategies for each constraint factor as identified by interview participants. Park-level and affinity group negotiation strategies represent collective negotiation strategies.

Local Recreation Culture. Many participants discussed how cultural differences in South Florida affect how the local community perceives the opportunities available at EVER. Participants describe Miami as having a less nature-based recreation culture, especially for people of color who tend to have more blue-collar jobs. This contextual constraint contributes to lack of childhood exposure to national parks like EVER (an interpersonal constraint due to inability to visit as a family) and is related to issues

of access such as cost and lack of time (individual constraints) and systems of inequity such as broader race and class relationships.

Lack of Childhood Exposure to National Parks. Despite living in South Florida, many participants did not visit EVER or places like it growing up. As a result, many participants were not aware of or interested in the opportunities available there as adults. This interpersonal constraint (due to inability to visit as a family) is related to individual,

Table 2. Constraints to recreating in Everglades National Park (EVER)

Theme	First-order code	Representative quotations	Constraints dimension
Lack of relevance	Lack of visible representation in the outdoors	“There’s often not enough representation of ... people who look like us, that [go] to the Everglades for recreation.” (Sarah) “[I wish I saw] more people of color out there ... I didn’t feel included.” (Ami)	Systemic
	Local recreation culture	“[Miami’s] outdoor recreation culture is totally different than a lot of places in the United States.” (Jasmina) “We’ve often been conditioned in the culture to think that getting outside and being in nature is a White thing.” (Sarah) “A lot of Latino and Black and people of color communities are blue collar workers. So why are they going to want to spend their free time outdoors? It’s not the ideal of relaxation.” (Shannon)	Contextual
	Lack of childhood exposure to national parks	“You’re only interested in what has been to some degree exposed to you ... if you’re not exposed to it in school, your parents aren’t taking you out there, then it’s just not even on your radar ... people aren’t necessarily enjoying these spaces as families.” (Valerie) “Until the age of 23, I never set foot in Everglades National Park ... it wasn’t something that we were thinking about, talking about.” (Davy)	Interpersonal
Issues of access	Cost of visiting	“My parents didn’t have a boat growing up. We didn’t really have money to go camping ... it was an additional expense that my parents were most likely not willing to take ... there were other things that took priority for us.” (Davy) “I need my caregiver with me, and that’s going to cost me a lot of money ... I have to pay that out of pocket ... [the] vast majority of people with a disability are not going to have that option.” (Jon)	Individual
	Lack of time	“The majority of BIPOC people ... especially in Miami-Dade County, are working two jobs ... if it wasn’t for my high school mentor ... I would have never built such a strong rapport with the Everglades, because my mom wouldn’t have had the time.” (Danny) “I’ve wanted to take my parents to the Everglades ... for years now. And every time I offer, they’re too busy working. So that also speaks to the socioeconomic status of South Florida right now.” (Dayton)	
	Perceived distance to the park	“[EVER feels like] a faraway place, that it’s more difficult to get to ... I think a lot of people are exhausted by the traffic in Miami-Dade County ... the thought of going all the way to the Everglades is not appealing.” (Davy)	Individual
	Lack of public transportation	“It’s not just Miami ... how can all these counties each create a public transportation system that is accessible and affordable? ... Not everyone has a reliable car.” (Shannon)	Contextual

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Theme	First-order code	Representative quotations	Constraints dimension
Environmental discomfort		“[EVER’s] climate makes it really difficult to want to get there because it’s muggy, it’s hot ... generally, it’s just not very comfortable.” (Audrey) “Everything is covered in water ... there’s no trails, there’s no campsites, there’s no backpacking ... you just got to slog through it.” (Jamie)	Contextual
Fear and safety concerns	Other people	“[I carry a weapon] especially in wilderness areas ... [out of] a healthy respect for the fact that there are people that are super racist and will not think twice of shooting somebody that looks like me and has my color.” (Danny)	Systemic
	Remoteness	“There’s no cell service. So, there’s no way to get help.” (Brittany)	Contextual
	Wildlife	“They’re these large dinosaur-like looking reptiles ... I think people underestimate the degree to which wildlife impacts people’s desire to visit.” (Davy)	Contextual
Evaluating opportunity costs for recreating in EVER		“It’s not that expensive if you value the natural system already. I could pay the same admission fee and get into Zoo Miami ... if I am somebody who’s not into that wilderness experience, that feels a lot safer and seems like a better way to invest my money.” (Sally) “And again, when it comes to free time. You have Saturday and Sunday, how does someone really want to spend it? Like cold fronts, wind, mosquitoes and horseflies suck.” (Shannon)	

contextual, and systemic constraint dimensions including issues of access, Miami recreation culture, and systemic issues such as broader race and class relationships.

Issues of Access. *Cost of Visiting.* Participants explained how the costs associated with visiting typically outweighed the benefits, especially for people with disabilities who might have greater costs associated with accessibility than able-bodied people. This individual constraint reflects systems of inequity such as broader race and class relationships.

Lack of Time. Several participants shared that BIPOC people in South Florida often need to work multiple jobs to sustain themselves, and as a result, have little time to visit EVER. Like cost of visiting, this individual constraint reflects systemic issues related to race and class relationship—particularly needing to work multiple jobs or in exhausting manual labor positions.

Perceived Distance to the Park and Transportation. Some participants discussed EVER feeling “far away” and hard to get to, which is challenging especially for those already constrained by limited free time. Additionally, traffic and lack of public transportation were identified as related contextual constraints relevant to the Miami-Dade geographical context.

Environmental Discomfort. Most participants identified elements of EVER’s physical environment, such as the heat, humidity, the wetland environment, and number of mosquitos, as being significant contextual constraints to visiting the park. Participants identify that these qualities make EVER an uncomfortable place to visit.

Fear and Safety Concerns. Fear and safety concerns are distinct from discomfort. Participants shared that other people, remoteness, and the wildlife (e.g., alligators, crocodiles, and snakes) in MSD can make EVER a frightening place to visit. Participants who brought up safety concerns related to others notably discussed being vigilant about

others' racism and biases. Constraints related to fear of others are therefore systemic—rooted in systems of oppression like racism. Constraints related to remoteness and wildlife, however, are more contextual due to the environment of the Everglades and the wildlife therein (e.g., alligators, crocodiles).

Evaluating Opportunity Costs for Recreating in EVER. Participants reflected that socioeconomic conditions for underserved communities in South Florida constrained their available time and money that could be dedicated to leisure. As a result, when given a choice about what to do in their free time, people must weigh the opportunities in EVER against the costs of visiting. These results indicate that individual, contextual, and systemic constraints related to issues of access, discomfort due to environmental factors, and fear and safety concerns often outweigh the opportunities, which underserved communities tend to know little about.

Constraint Negotiation

All participants were asked to discuss ways in which they navigate their constraints to recreating in EVER and to identify ways in which the park could help reduce barriers to visiting for underserved South Florida residents. As a result, participants identified both individual and collective negotiation strategies they engage in and think would be helpful for EVER to adopt (Table 2).

Breaking the Cycle Will Take Time. Despite identifying several negotiation strategies that they use and that the park could implement (Table 3), several participants reflected that a “cultural shift” is needed to address many of the constraints to visiting EVER as well as communities' relationship to the environment and outdoor recreation in general. This theme shows that it will take “generations” for individuals to negotiate systemic constraints.

Increasing Exposure to EVER. Participants identified increasing exposure to EVER, and to wilderness recreation in general, as key for negotiating some of the constraints to visiting. Increased exposure through visiting with family and friends and guided trips help get people out recreating in EVER. With increased exposure, awareness of park resources made some participants feel safer while recreating and more culturally connected to EVER.

Visiting with Friends and Family. Many participants discussed the importance of having friends and family who are familiar with the park to introduce them to EVER and encourage them to visit. Participants reflected that socializing while in EVER also builds connection to the place and relationship with nature more broadly. This strategy is an example of individual action—instigated on their own—that addresses interpersonal constraints related to family recreation and lack of childhood exposure.

Developing Opportunities to Build Skills and Comfort in Wilderness Settings. Some participants discussed the importance of having intermediary spaces or events that might make them feel more comfortable and prepared to physically visit EVER. These could include the availability of other outdoor spaces like the environment of EVER but requiring less commitment or organized events at EVER that attract communities interested in other activities besides wilderness recreation.

Having a guide or an organization to facilitate visitation to EVER and introduce wilderness recreation was emphasized by many participants as being critical to overcoming constraints such as issues of access, fear, and safety concerns. Some participants discussed the important role of affinity organizations (e.g., Outdoor Afro) in providing support and offering facilitated activities particularly for underserved communities to feel safe recreating in new spaces in community. As such, this strategy is collective—through affinity groups—and addresses individual and some systemic constraints (e.g., representation in the outdoors, fear).

Relationship Building with Local Communities. Partnering with local organizations and affinity groups was identified as a way that EVER could help reduce the constraints certain groups experience and encourage visitation. Participants emphasized that by partnering with groups (e.g., affinity groups or other local organizations) that are trusted by local communities, the park could better uplift culturally relevant ways of interacting with the park. Many participants emphasized the importance for EVER managers to build and sustain reciprocal relationships within underserved communities. Partnerships are a collective strategy that requires affinity group (or other organization) and park collaboration to help negotiate multiple dimensions of constraints.

Table 3. Constraints negotiation to increase diverse recreation and representation in Everglades National Park (EVER)

Theme	First-order code	Representative quotations	Associated constraints dimension	Individual versus collective strategy
Breaking the cycle will take time		"It'll take generations, honestly, to get to where I think we want to be" because it will involve "parents that got inspired and broke out of that norm, passing that down to their children. And that starts to break that cycle." (Jasmina)	Systemic	Individual
Increasing exposure to EVER	Visiting with friends and family	"Until I met [my husband], I didn't have much interest in going [to EVER]. I didn't know what it was all about. And once I went there like, holy cow, this place is awesome." (Brittany) "I took my mom, my niece, my nephew and my cousin, and they enjoyed it. They're like, 'we want to go back.' ... I was able to invite people out and come hang out and just walk around ... this is how that bond gets mended and created." (Cameron)	Interpersonal	Individual
	Developing opportunities to build skills and comfort in wilderness settings	"I think it's [important] having access to opportunities to recreate in nature, in places that feel safe but still look somewhat like the park. ... There's places like Wakodahatchee Wetlands and the Green Cay Wetlands that are engineered water treatment wetlands that you can go to and they have a boardwalk ... they make that kind of wilderness ... experience more accessible." (Sally) "[It's important to find] these mediation points where you might not be jumping into a slough slog your first time, but you came up for an artist workshop and you learned about the park in a way that you didn't think originally." (Cameron)	Individual	Collective (affinity group strategy)
Relationship building with local communities		"I think really coordinating more closely with groups that are more trusted in communities [would help encourage more underrepresented people to come to the park]. I've seen the park try to do this already with varying degrees of success. They had an event ... at an art gallery opening in the park ... in conjunction with Afro Outdoors with a local African-American community group ... those kind of events are more geared toward celebrating these different cultures ... and begin in a safe space." (Sally) "It's one thing as the Everglades to bring [partner/affinity groups] in. But how do you retain that relationship? It's very important ... no one wants to feel like a grant deliverable. We want to feel that we can contribute to your effort to promote the park ... and feel welcomed as a visitor at the same time." (Sarah)	Interpersonal	Collective (park-level strategy)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued).

Theme	First-order code	Representative quotations	Associated constraints dimension	Individual versus collective strategy
Increasing park outreach for better awareness of park resources	Leveraging the park Web site and social media	“Social media is very helpful, especially for our generation, in terms of helping people discover new places to go ... , what sort of events are taking place, what sort of knowledge can be shared ... [EVER’s social media] is just not as present as what you see is happening in [Miami].” (Manny) “There’s so much storytelling to be told about these spaces from that more cultural standpoint ... there is a way to leverage it through social media.” (Cameron)	Individual	Collective (affinity group and park level strategy)
	Take the park to the people	“If you really want to reach underserved populations ... take the park to the people first. You’re going to find them in school. You might find them at a family fest somewhere. ... I would find churches, I would find youth groups.” (Alana) “Participating in any kind of networking type events here in Miami ... would be of benefit. ... [EVER] could link with other organizations that might be interested in taking people down to the park ... park managers and rangers coming up to those types of events would greatly incentivize people [to EVER].” (Valerie)	Contextual	Collective (park-level and affinity strategy)
Increase inclusive interpretation	Offerings in multiple languages	“The second you get to speak to somebody that knows your language in a place you’re not familiar with, it’s just natural to feel more safe and then you’ll definitely want to come back again” (Dayton) “Have hearing interpreter stations ... listening stations and that kind of thing are really helpful ... what a cool thing if you’re blind and you go and right away you learn, ‘Oh, look they’ve got some adaptive tools I can bring along.’” (Gwen)	Individual	Collective (park-level strategy)
	Feature whole and diverse histories	“Why aren’t we acknowledging this other side of the history or things that have gone on in the park? ... I think there is a better way to convey this other side.” (Cameron) “A lot of [interpretation in the park] focuses on biodiversity and natural history, but there’s not a lot of inclusion in terms of the Miccosukee and the other tribes ... I feel like that’s such a shame because there’s so much cool archeology ... it would be amazing to ... tell the public a lot more about that kind of relationship that they have with the land.” (Jamie)	Individual	Collective (park-level strategy)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued).

Theme	First-order code	Representative quotations	Associated constraints dimension	Individual versus collective strategy
Inclusive employment and planning efforts	Hire diverse park staff	"It takes a group of people ... to [say], 'that's enough.' ... I am willing to hire people of color here in this space ... we must do these things in order to see these people [in the park]." (Ami) "I'm a big proponent of parks, national parks, hiring marginalized populations ... when I see myself there, I feel a little more comfortable." (Jasmina)	System	Collective (park-level strategy)
	Inclusive planning	"I would really love to have more of a voice to make sure that places are more accessible and welcoming and not just for people in wheelchairs, people with other disabilities." (Gwen) "It's about infrastructure more than anything ... whether it's the boat ramps or fishing accessibility or the trails ... there's nothing that I can think about that can't be made accessible ... with a little bit of planning." (Jon)	System	Collective (park-level strategy)

Increasing Park Outreach for Better Awareness of Park Resources. *Leveraging the Park Web Site and Social Media.* In addition to increasing exposure, the park and affinity organizations can play a critical role in negotiating constraints by disseminating information about the park of opportunities available there. This is particularly important for people with disabilities to plan their trip and activities. Leveraging the park website and social media is a collective strategy by the park to help negotiate individual constraints like issues of access.

Take the Park to the People. Having a presence outside of the park and within the local community was noted by numerous participants as being integral to increasing exposure of EVER to underserved groups. A few participants suggested that EVER should offer ways to visit and learn virtually and have a presence at popular places and events in urban centers around the park that "feel safe," to educate people about the park and encourage them to come visit. Numerous study participants mentioned the success of EVER's partnership with Zoo Miami as being a great example of this, and other participants suggested that EVER could partner with art museums and community centers in South

Florida. These efforts are collective strategies implemented by the park to negotiate contextual constraints.

Increase Inclusive Interpretation. *Offerings in Multiple Languages and Modes.* According to participants, effective interpretative programming and materials developed by EVER staff are essential to increase underserved communities' interest in the park's unique landscape. Bilingual interpretation was mentioned by many participants as being critical in reaching underserved populations speaking different languages, particularly South Florida's large Spanish-speaking Latin and Creole-speaking Haitian populations. Additionally, participants with disabilities advocated for more adaptive devices like listening stations to facilitate inclusive learning for all visitors. This collective strategy helps negotiate individual constraints.

Feature Whole and Diverse Histories. Several African-American participants wanted the park to convey more about the history of EVER and its historical connections with certain underserved communities such as Indigenous peoples and Maroons—historic settlements of free or escaped African slaves

who found refuge within the park. These participants reflected on how learning more about communities that they could relate to increased their interest in the park and its relevance to their lives. This collective strategy helps to negotiate individual constraints.

Including Communities through Employment and Planning Efforts. *Diverse Employment.* Many participants stressed the importance of EVER hiring park employees that are representative of the diverse local community, reflecting that seeing BIPOC EVER staff made them feel more welcome in the park. Several participants highlighted internships and hiring partnerships through affinity organizations like Hispanic Access Foundation as a potential solution. This collective strategy helps to negotiate systemic and some interpersonal constraints.

Inclusion in Planning Efforts. The three participants with disabilities universally stressed the importance of being involved in park planning to make facilities and activities in the park more accessible, providing adaptive devices, and welcoming service animals. This collective strategy addresses systemic constraints and individual constraints like issues of access.

Discussion

This research explored constraints and constraint negotiation to recreating in EVER and MSD wilderness among underserved South Florida residents. Respondents rarely distinguished between EVER and the MSD wilderness; thus, our discussion focuses more broadly on constraints and constraint negotiation to national parks like EVER and wildlands more broadly.

The findings of this research both align with and add to previous research at the intersection of diversity, equity, and inclusion for wildland recreation. Constraints cited by underserved South Florida residents reflect constraints of similar communities across diverse recreation contexts such as lack of visible representation in the outdoors (e.g., Finney 2014); lack of childhood exposure (e.g., Roberts and Rodriguez 2008; Erickson, Johnson, and Kivel 2009); issues of access like distance to park, cost, and lack of time (e.g., Rushing et al. 2019; Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo 2020); and fear of others (e.g., Johnson et al. 2004; Lee et al. 2023).

Although many of the constraints mentioned are prevalent across geographical contexts, participants did reflect on constraints unique to South Florida such as local environmental factors and recreation culture. Like Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo (2020), participants of this study described constraints as interrelated and transcending constraint dimensions. For example, the lack of childhood exposure to EVER (an interpersonal constraint) is likely related to the culture of outdoor recreation in Miami (a contextual constraint) and issues of access, which could be considered individual constraints resulting from systemic issues like racism and class.

Previous negotiation research has been criticized for largely focusing on individual negotiation strategies when “collective action is often needed to change the [social] structures that generate constraints” (Samdahl 2005, as cited in Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo 2020, 537). It should be noted that systemic issues constraining wildland recreation (e.g., class, multigenerational separation from nature, and cultural narratives tied to “outdoor recreation”) are difficult to dismantle. Thus, interview participants mostly identified negotiating their constraints collectively through visiting with affinity groups and other community organizations. Given the call to explore collective negotiation processes to navigate more systemic issues (Henderson 1997; Samdahl 2005), we asked participants to identify collective negotiation strategies that EVER could implement. Participants outlined several examples of how collective strategies by park managers and affinity groups could help underserved communities negotiate constraints. For example, hiring diverse park staff helps break systems of oppression and exclusion in employment and could also address interpersonal constraints related to lack of representation among staff. Further, like constraints, negotiation strategies transcend dimensions. For example, “taking the park to the people” (Table 3, Figure 1) was coded as a contextual negotiation strategy because it reduces environmental discomfort, fear, lack of time, and transportation-related constraints, but it also addresses systemic issues underpinning these constraints tied to dominant narratives surrounding recreation, class, redlining, and other forms of discrimination (e.g., Scott 2013; Finney 2014; Gosálvez 2020). Because these systemic issues are interrelated and embedded across scales, individual, interpersonal, and contextual negotiation strategies

also chip away at systemic constraints. Future research is needed to better understand how systemic constraints could be dismantled through individual, interpersonal, and contextual constraint negotiation.

In addition to advancing a place-based understanding of how underserved South Florida residents navigate constraints to visiting EVER, this research adds to the work of Stodolska, Shinew, and Camarillo (2020) by applying the ecological model of constraints to a wilderness context and by integrating individual and collective negotiation strategies in the model. We have integrated findings regarding place-based constraints and negotiation strategies and scale (i.e., individual vs. collective) within an adapted constraints model (Figure 1).

Findings in this article highlight opportunities to address constraints through collective negotiation by EVER and affinity organizations. Participants repeatedly discussed the role of affinity organizations as bridges between underserved communities and EVER wilderness. By supporting and partnering with affinity organizations, EVER could be more present in adjacent communities, cocreate communications with diverse partners, provide a broader context by including intersectional environmental connections, and help affinity organizations meet relevant goals. Efforts such as these could help EVER and MSD Wilderness be more welcoming and relevant among underserved communities (Ronald et al. 2023; Perry et al. 2024), while also supporting underserved communities on their own terms—moving away from White centrism and saviorism within this context (Lee 2024). As a largely understudied topic, future research should focus on affinity organizations and how public land managers can create meaningful partnerships to negotiate constraints and create more relevant and inclusive experiences and spaces. Additionally, evaluation of current NPS efforts to increase RDI would be a valuable future research contribution to understand how partnership efforts contribute to ongoing efforts. Although an array of underrepresented populations were included, the study was unable to compare across groups, providing another area for further research.

Two key themes emerged from our research about the process of constraint negotiation or lack thereof that have not been highlighted in previous literature. First, participants often find that the potential benefits of visiting EVER do not outweigh the constraints. Second, the multigenerational disconnection

from the park will take time to become a full cultural shift and break the cycle of disconnection for underserved groups. If these constraints are to be negotiated, increased park outreach, partnerships, and inclusive interpretation are vitally important for underserved South Florida communities to feel welcome and understand the opportunities and potential benefits of time spent in wilderness areas like MSD.

Limitations

Given time constraints in producing this research to align with national park planning efforts, we were unable to interview members of the Miccosukee Tribe or the Seminole Tribe of South Florida. Numerous attempts were made to connect with the tribes through official NPS channels, but they were understandably busy engaging with other requests. This could be attributed, in part, to the incompatibility that often exists between Indigenous worldviews and Western academic research methodologies, and the research team's inability to develop the long-term trust and relationships needed to collaborate on this research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research employed a qualitative approach to understand place-based constraints and negotiation strategies of underserved South Florida residents for wildland recreation in EVER. Participants identified several individual, interpersonal, contextual, and systemic constraints along with individual and collective (through affinity group and park efforts) strategies for negotiating those constraints. This research both contributes to the literature around advancing RDI in wilderness and wildland recreation and serves to inform EVER managers about the primary constraints local residents face and how they believe the park could help address these issues.

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s). The findings and conclusions in this publication are those of the authors and should not be construed to represent any official U.S. Department of Agriculture or U.S. Government determination or policy.

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Notes

1. For the purpose of this research, we used Executive Order 13985 Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government to guide the definition of “underserved communities,” which includes “Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality” (EO 13985, Sec. 2.). Executive Order 13985 was rescinded on January 20, 2025 by Executive Order 14148 (Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions).
2. See Fox Rushing, Thomsen, and Kim (2025) for a definition of affinity organizations.

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