

Racial/Ethnic Minority Focus Group Interviews: Oregon SCORP

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Resource managers in the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) and Region 6, USDA National Forest, identified a need to better understand the needs of existing and potential stakeholders who may visit public recreation lands in Oregon. Specifically, this research effort was designed to understand the perceptions of racial/ethnic minorities in Oregon.

This report documents visitor usage perceptions for different outdoor recreation activities in a variety of outdoor recreation settings within the state of Oregon. The focus group interviews were designed to ascertain residents' perceptions about what recreation activities, services, facilities and experiences are appropriate at various lands on public lands Oregon.

The research was conducted in a cooperative manner that complimented the ongoing National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) study within the state of Oregon, as well as other previous and ongoing research efforts. As part of a larger cooperative agreement between West Virginia University, Penn State, Oregon State University, and Region 6, the research team has been conducting recreation research in the state of Oregon since 2000.

Oregon Focus Groups

A series of focus groups were completed in the state of Oregon to understand ethnic minorities' interests and needs related to outdoor recreation, and how agencies such as the OPRD, US Forest Service, and local park and recreation authorities can better respond to these non-traditional users.

Current and Previous Recreation Experiences

Participants were asked to describe their outdoor recreation experiences and interests, including the types of activities they currently or previously have participated in. Probing questions were asked to understand the setting in which these activities took place and with whom they participated during the activity.

Asian-Americans

- Improved amenities: overnight facilities and places to eat
- Access to facilities
- Recreation areas with water features
- Dislike camping in tents
- Enjoy visiting areas with entire family including elders and children
- Safety and protection

Amenities were mentioned several times throughout the focus group interviews. Especially during the Asian-American discussion, participants explained that they sought areas with amenities. This included places to eat (restaurants) and indoor overnight facilities. Along with amenities there were concerns over actually accessing these facilities. Repeated concerns were mentioned about online reservation systems and not being able to locate overnight facilities on both the state and federal level.

Participants indicated that they enjoyed visiting areas with water features. This included places like the Columbia River Gorge, Crater Lake, and the Willamette River in Portland.

A theme that emerged throughout the focus group meeting was recreating with family, especially with children. Participants explained that they prefer to recreate with their children. They want to experience outdoor recreation with their children and not send them to participate in a program by themselves, like the boy scouts. Additionally, participants explained that they usually recreate with their extended family including elders. This has implications for the types of areas they visit and also dictates the types of activities they participate in.

Issues surrounding safety and protection were identified as important to the Asian-American group. Participants preferred to recreate in areas that “feel” safe. This was achieved by going on shorter hikes and being close to areas with people. Reflections of childhoods from participants explained that they were not allowed to recreate or leave the apartment due to safety concerns, which may be why more Asians do not recreate outdoors.

Hispanic/Latino-Americans

- Facilities large enough for extended families
- Prefer local areas over traveling distances
- Information needs
- Places for youth

Participants discussed frustration with visiting areas that do not have enough room for large, extended families. Often Hispanic/Latinos enjoy celebrating a children’s birthday, or having a family party in an outdoor setting. However, the setting or facility does not accommodate the group size. Additionally, many local areas are often busy or full and require a reservation system that Hispanics/Latinos are unaware of. Areas with gazebos or pavilions are also preferred settings.

According to the participants, Hispanic/Latinos are dependent upon their jobs, which often require long hours and are also concerned with the price of gasoline. This prevents them from traveling long distances to recreation areas. They would like to see more local recreation facilities including campgrounds.

The Hispanic/Latino community looks for new places to visit; however they have had problems accessing information from the local chamber of commerce. Participants agreed that their community would enjoy going to outdoor areas, but they are often constrained by not knowing where to go.

Participants explained that children are an important component of the Hispanic/Latino community. They prefer settings that accommodate children. Additionally, they were not as interested in educational programs, but rather desired places for the child to play and be free.

African-Americans

- Dislike remote locations
- Aesthetics
- Often stereo-typed

Participants in the African-American focus group preferred to recreate in locations that were not off the beaten path. They preferred controlled areas that were close to urban areas and places that were well maintained with clean amenities. They find comfort in knowing that, in case of an emergency; they can leave an area and get help.

Aesthetically pleasing areas were important features for African-Americans as well. Places with a view, water or green spaces were identified as ideal. Participants like being able to look back at the hike and see the “reward” of climbing a mountain.

African-Americans discussed how stereotypes often prevent people from recreating in outdoor settings. They explained that their own group stereotypes themselves along with other media sources. They confirmed that, yes; African-Americans are interested in outdoor recreation.

Benefits Sought

Participants were asked to identify what types of benefits they hope to get from recreating in an outdoor activity.

Asian-Americans

- To be in nature and see wildlife
- To get away from it all
- Education

For the Asian-American group, three general benefits were sought. One of these involved experiencing nature and viewing animals. A participant explained that Asians place a high value on animals and they visit areas in hopes to see wildlife. Scenery and fresh air were also important benefits.

Along with nature, Asian-Americans identified “getting away from it all” as a major benefit. They enjoyed outdoor recreation because they were able to get away from home and spend time with family.

Educational opportunities were also identified as a benefit to participating in outdoor recreation. Participants indicated that they looked for areas where they could learn something. The Bonneville Dam was mentioned as an example of the type of educational experience that they looked for.

Hispanic/Latino-Americans

- Spend time with family
- To get away from it all
- Education

Participants identified that they often recreate to spend time with family and friends. They enjoy going to places where they can have big parties and socialize with each other. Areas that have pavilions and barbeque areas are ideal settings.

They are also interested in going to areas to get away from the stress of everyday life. They like to go to places that are free of pollution and free of cost. Many Hispanic/Latinos cannot afford to go to expensive places. Additionally, they want to go to areas that will build memories for their families.

Educational programs that help promote self-esteem for youth in the community would be welcomed. Parents want to be able to take their children to a place where they can learn and explore.

African-Americans

- Solitude
- Spending time with family and friends

Participants identified that solitude and spiritual healing were reasons for participating and benefits that they hope to gain through outdoor recreation. The benefit of self-renewal was also important.

Being with family and friends was an important benefit that African-Americans sought. They enjoyed connecting with family and meeting new people. Children are an important component of family; however they often preferred to go to places where children were well behaved.

Constraints

Participants were asked about their perceived constraints, or factors that prevent or decrease their participation in outdoor recreation.

Asian-Americans

- Lack of information
- Safety concerns
- Culture

A constraint that was noted for the Asian-American group was lack of information. This included information about where to recreate, safety and the reservation system for state parks. Asian-Americans often will only go to places that they have visited before and know are safe, familiar and convenient. They were also concerned that, when they do want to visit an area or stay overnight, the reservation system for Oregon State Parks was not adequate.

In general, there is a lack of understanding about the benefits of outdoor recreation among the Asian-Americans. Culture plays a role in the type of activities that Asian-Americans have traditionally participated in. Generally, indoor activities are preferred. Additionally, participants

explain that darker skin is associated with peasants and the working class, which prevents many Asian-Americans from recreating outdoors.

Additional cultural constraints were concerned with children and education. Although the Asian-American group would enjoy more programs devoted to outdoor recreation and survival skills, they are still reluctant to send their children to classes alone. They explain that they enjoy recreating with their children and do not like to send just the child to a class focused on outdoor recreation. Participants explained that while parents want to participate with their child, they also want programs that are focused on academic enhancement. Instead of an outdoor recreation program, a program that takes children into the woods to learn about archeology is more appealing to the parents.

Hispanic/Latino-Americans

- Distance to recreation areas
- Lack of information
- Fear of new places
- Signage
- Different activity styles
- Transportation

Distance is a factor that prevents Hispanic/Latino participants from visiting outdoor recreation areas. Many cannot afford to travel long distances due to gasoline prices. Participants explained that people within their community also do not like to go to remote locations and prefer more front country settings.

According to the participants, lack of information is a major reason for not recreating at outdoor recreation areas. Either they do not know where to go or they cannot find information about recreation sites. Participants see the benefit of recreating outdoors; however they do not know where to go or who to contact about opportunities.

Along with not being aware of recreation opportunities, there is a fear amongst immigrants of new areas. Often Hispanic/Latino immigrants do not go to areas that other people in their community have not visited. There is also uncertainty when actually arriving at the site of where to go and what the rules are.

Although many communities on the local level have moved toward universal or Spanish/English signs, there are still many areas that have not altered their signage. Many Hispanic/Latinos may not be able to read a sign in English that informs them of the recreation fee or that an area may be restricted, which could result in a dangerous situation.

Many of the participants explained that Hispanic/Latinos do not recreate in the same fashion as traditional users. They often recreate in large groups and expect to have more amenities, like a place for barbeques and food.

Transportation is a major constraint to recreation for the Hispanic/Latino community. Often many people are already paying a high price to live in the United States and driving to a recreation area takes more money than they can afford.

African-Americans

- Facilities
- Cleanliness

Participants felt that many recreation areas are not large enough for their outdoor recreation interests. They would like to see more areas with picnic tables and places to barbeque. Also, outdoor recreation areas should include facilities with basketball hoops and bathrooms.

Other constraints included cleanliness of facilities. Participants would be more inclined to recreate if there were more trash receptacles and cleaner restrooms. According to the participants, dirty areas are considered a turnoff.

Media and Recreation Opportunities

Participants were asked about how they learned of outdoor recreation opportunities. This included what types of media sources they currently used and what types of media sources could be used to reach more people in their group.

Asian-Americans

- Information in multiple languages
- Asian organizations
- Using key informants to build trust
- Publicizing benefits

According to the participants, having literature and information in multiple Asian languages would help encourage use at outdoor recreation areas. Mandarin Chinese is a language that is understood by many Chinese along with Vietnamese. There was also a suggestion to recruit a more diverse staff in outdoor recreation settings.

Participants all agreed that utilizing existing Asian-American organizations as a media to inform the community about recreation opportunities would be helpful. This includes using social service agencies, Asian restaurant associations, churches and schools. One suggestion was to hang fliers and posters in Asian restaurants and stores.

The issue of trust within the community is important to acknowledge. Participants suggested that outdoor recreation agencies need to create trust with key informants within the community to pass along the benefits of outdoor recreation. This may be achieved by going to Asian community fairs and using social service agencies.

Participants also suggested publicizing the benefits of recreation to the community. Some benefits that may be appealing to the Asian-American community include health, culture and education.

Hispanic/Latino-Americans

- Lack of information
- Information in multiple languages
- Information sent home with children
- Using Hispanic/Latino media sources
- Calendar of events
- Hispanic/Latino organizations

The theme of not knowing or receiving information about recreation opportunities was evident throughout the Hispanic/Latino focus group meetings. Participants were concerned with how local, state and federal agencies inform their community about outdoor recreation. Participants often felt that they were “left out” of receiving information and felt frustrated with not knowing where to look to find outdoor opportunities.

Participants agreed that disseminating information in Spanish would be a good way to reach their community. In many Hispanic/Latino families, it is the children who speak or read English and have to translate for the adult. If the child does not find the information interesting, then they will not inform the parent. Using both English and Spanish in information campaigns and literature is ideal.

Participants identified youth as a resource to communicate to adults. Sending information to households through the school system is a potential method of communication. As one participant put it, “children are a way into the household.” Information that is brought home from school is considered important and is more likely to be read by parents or translated to them by the children.

Participants identified that many Hispanic/Latinos watch television, especially Univision (Hispanic channel). Advertising and informing the public through this media would be a useful way to inform the Hispanic/Latino community. Participants suggested making commercials with Hispanic/Latinos as advertisements for outdoor areas. There are also all Spanish newspapers that would be useful sources for informing the community, including the paper *La Conexión*.

Participants agreed that they would like to see some form of a calendar put together by local, state and federal agencies listing the different recreation events that are occurring in the area. Along with a calendar, a list of resources with corresponding phone numbers would be a helpful way to find out about potential recreation opportunities.

Utilizing Hispanic/Latino organizations to disseminate information is another potential way to inform the community about recreation opportunities. These organizations can include farm workers associations, local health clinics, community centers and small businesses.

African-Americans

- African-American organizations
- More information

African-American participants were hopeful that more people would visit outdoor recreation areas if local, state and federal agencies utilized local businesses to inform the public about recreation opportunities. These organizations could include barber/hair shops, restaurants and public health offices.

They also identified the need to have more readily accessible information. The use of local radio stations and African-American newspapers like the Scanner and Observer (Portland) could help inform this segment of the public of outdoor recreation opportunities.

Specific Information about Parks

Participants were asked if they had noticed any changes in the service or facilities of their parks and forests within their Oregon community. These changes could be either negative or positive. This section also covers any additional areas that may not have been covered in previous sections.

Asian-Americans

- Increased signage
- Facility improvements
- Website improvements

Participants have noticed an increase in signage and interpretive displays in the recreation areas they visit. However, some site specific improvements are still needed, including repairing poor railings and stairs. They would like to see recreation areas where they can bring the elders in their family.

Accessing information on the internet is useful. Participants have visited both the Oregon State Parks and US Forest Service websites. The state parks website was considered more user friendly and resulted in visitations to Oregon State Parks. The participants were less impressed with the US Forest Service website, claiming it was hard to navigate and they could never find the information they were looking for.

Hispanic/Latino-Americans

- Facility improvements
- National Forests
- Parent/youth involvement

Participants have recognized improvements in facilities on the local level. They have seen improvements in safety and feel that local parks are much safer than before. They also believe that their tax money is well spent with regards to local parks.

Participants discussed National Forests and what they have to offer. A participant asked the question, “Why go to a national forest? What is there for me and my family? There is just open space.” These are questions that go back to lack of information about opportunities and the need to reach out to the Hispanic/Latino community.

Participants discussed the importance of using youth to target adults. Many Hispanic/Latino children assimilate at a quicker rate than their parents. The school system provides opportunities for youth to experience the outdoors. Participants agree that it is harder to get the parent to be part of field trips or programs outside of school. Often Hispanic/Latino parents are most concerned with working and providing for the family.

African-Americans

- Making health links
- Free is key

Participants agreed that, with current issues of obesity and health in America, people are more willing to participate in recreation. If outdoor recreation agencies could make the link between outdoor recreation and health, more people would be willing to go to outdoor facilities.

The African-American community would like to see more free recreation opportunities. The group was informed that Oregon State Parks offers a free recreation day at their sites; however the participants were unaware this existed.

Conclusions

The social context is a very important aspect of recreation among minorities. The family group is especially important. A lot of free time is devoted to family activities, and often involves the extended family spending time together. For example, if the older generation is not interested in going to parks, no one goes to the parks. The younger generation is more likely to participate in outdoor recreation with groups of friends. When families go to parks, they prefer nearby areas with modern facilities and plenty of space for their extended groups.

Safety is a major concern affecting outdoor recreation participation and includes two elements: personal safety and safety for children. Many minority individuals consider parks dangerous, with the degree of danger varying for different types of parks and outdoor areas. While members of all cultures are concerned for the safety of their children, Asian parents are especially protective of their children. They often will not allow their children to go to parks, especially if they are places for risky activities, such as skate parks, or far away outdoor areas.

Ethnic minorities have little awareness of the recreation opportunities available to them on public lands. Few understand the differences between the many federal, state, and local areas and managing agencies. Better information is needed to facilitate greater participation by these groups. Efforts such as multi-lingual materials and reaching out through community groups are necessary to deliver the needed information to the minority populations.

Ethnic minorities are interested in outdoor recreation, but their extent and type of participation are related to the degree of acculturation. For example younger Asian-Americans born here have interacted with Caucasians all of their lives and have been introduced to parks and outdoor recreation, often through the schools. Older generations generally are less interested in outdoor recreation; they have no interest in camping and don't like camping food. They would rather do other things with the family (including community gardening or other outdoor or indoor activities). In general, interests in outdoor recreation activities and areas become more similar to the majority population as ethnic minorities become more assimilated within America.

Ethnic minorities are not all alike. There is variation within the three groups studied as well as between them. Like the majority population, minorities in Oregon are split into two groups, rich and poor. These groups have very different interests in outdoor recreation. A common denominator for both groups, however, is support for the children's education. Often, even the poorest will put all that they have to help their kids advance in life through a better education. Minority kids don't usually join groups like boy or girl scouts – their parents do not support it. They might support it more if it were considered more educational.

Summer is the best time to get the minority youth outdoors, as they have 11 weeks with no school. But most minority parents do not want to send their kids away. They would rather participate with their children, but are unable to due to work obligations. They might send kids to close to home programs while they are working, especially if they were educational.