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# Sociodemographic Profiles for Outdoor Recreation Visitors

The success of management actions depends on many factors, one of which is the attitudes of forest visitors, and they have been described relative to the management of threatened and endangered species, and wildlands and wilderness fire management in several surveys.

**Visitor Profiles**—Diversity can be manifested in age, gender, race, ethnicity, education, language preferences, or a combination of these and other variables. Knowledge about visitor socio-demographic characteristics is essential for providing services in southern California. The kind of visitation pattern, the choice of activity, the reasons to recreate on National Forests, and the reasons to be involved in forest management decisions may all be linked to visitor profiles. These patterns are further described by Chavez (2001). Findings are:

Race/ethnicity varies by site. In some cases there are more white recreationists at sites than State statistics might suggest; at some sites there are more Hispanic recreationists than State statistics might suggest.

Most recreation visitors are white; most others are Hispanic (Chicano, Latino, Mexican, Central American) and Asian (mostly Korean and Japanese). Very few recreation visitors were African-American.

Ethnic groups tend to recreate in riparian corridors, and in lower canyon areas. Some Korean visitors are also found in a few mountaintop sites (mostly engaged in bracken fern gathering on the San Bernardino National Forest).

A higher percentage of males participate in particular recreation activities such as mountain biking.

A significant number of visitors use Spanish as their primary language (written and oral).

Education levels vary greatly among recreation visitors. A large number have had no college experience, though there are particular activities in which highly educated individuals participate (such as mountain biking and backpacking).

Household incomes vary greatly, though most range between \$20,000 and \$60,000 per year.

Most recreation visitors are US-born; though significant numbers are Mexico-born.

Most recreation visitors are return visitors. Many had been visiting sites for 3 to 11 years, and make multiple visits per year.

***Management Implications***—Chavez (2001) draws the following management implications for the four forests:

Plan for continued use by white, Hispanic and Asian visitors. Based on the projected growth patterns in the State, plan for increased use by Hispanics and Asian groups.

Increased use by particular groups should stimulate consideration of service delivery to these groups. Of particular importance are communications and development preferences (such as providing tables in large group configurations; these are necessary to provide for “family” experiences where “family” may be defined differently for various ethnic groups).

Communications need to be in multiple languages (and perhaps in international symbols). Communications include brochures, signs, interpretation, environmental education, face-to-face conversations, phone communications, etc.

Some groups do not recreate on National Forests for fear of, or due to, discrimination. Keeping all public contact staff informed about the cultural and language preferences of particular groups may alleviate some of this concern.

Cultural sensitivity training is needed for all public contact staff.

Water is one of the most salient features for recreation visitors, and possibly for State residents. It is of particular importance for some visitors groups, and efforts to redirect use should be sensitive to importance of place, reminders of “homeland”, and culturally sensitive meaning attached to these environments.

Ethnic groups will primarily be found in Backdrop and High Use areas.

Many visitors have limited free time, and can be expected at sites on weekend days, particularly Sunday.

## **Quality of Life Values and Attitudes**

**Public Attitude Surveys**—The success of management actions depends on many factors, one of which is the attitudes of forest visitors. Recent studies have described the attitudes of southern California

residents relative to the management of threatened and endangered species, and wildlands and wilderness fire management. (Within this section, references are made to some of these studies listed in the appendix and identified by the abbreviations noted at the end of the section.)

**Attitudes on Threatened and Endangered Species Management**—Respondents were, on average, concerned about threatened and endangered species, and respondents tended to view others as less concerned in general than them. *STMTES, RAMP T & E, CAFT E*

Californians and focus group participants did not view themselves as particularly knowledgeable about threatened and endangered species. *CAFT E, STMTES*

Focus group participants rated the negative impacts of recreation as somewhat more significant than did recreationists. Some of the focus group participants work as volunteers helping to protect forest lands. *STMTES, RAMP T & E*

Attitudes towards threatened and endangered species vary by specific type of species and are complex. Our inquiries addressed species in general, though respondents commented that the type of species would make a difference in their attitudes. *PAWT, STMTES, RAMP T & E, CAFT E*

Specific management strategies were addressed in the 3 studies, as summarized below (for further detail see summary tables in Appendix A): signs in recreation settings was the most approved of management intervention among those presented in three surveys, followed by visits at recreation sites (queried in 2 studies). The least approved of intervention was bans of certain uses. The highest effectiveness ratings were assigned to closures of some campsites/picnic sites and closures of whole campgrounds or picnic areas for a year or longer.

**Attitude on Wildland and Wilderness Fire Management**—Respondents were, on average, concerned about wildland and wilderness fires in the state, and they tended to view others as less concerned in general than themselves. *CAFT E*

Californians did not view themselves as particularly knowledgeable about wildland and wilderness fires. *CAFT E, STMTES*

Attitudes towards fire management are complex. However, a majority agreed with the opinion statement “We probably have to let some fires burn, but must protect residences”, over the alternative statements (“All fires must be extinguished regardless of cost” and “Fires must be allowed to take their natural course when burning in wildland or wilderness areas, even if structures are involved.”) *CAFT E*

Specific management strategies were addressed in the California study; the actions that most respondents approved of were signs, closures of some areas, certain restrictions on uses, and controlled burns. Bans of mechanically based uses were least approved of. The interventions expected to be the most effective were closures of some areas, controlled burns, signs, and certain restrictions on use. Bans

were expected to be the least effective.

## **Management Implications for Public Information and Education**

Southern California is expected to have the greatest population gains overall in the next 15 years, primarily in the Inland Empire. Los Angeles and San Diego counties currently have the highest overall populations in the state. Poverty levels in San Bernardino, Imperial, Riverside, San Diego and Orange counties were greater than twice the national rate during the last decade, and economic diversity is highest in coastal counties. The counties encompassing the four southern California forests have educational attainment levels falling between the greater achievements of the San Francisco Bay area and lower average educational levels found in rural central and southern California counties.

Ethnically and racially diverse, southern California Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander populations will increase and median age will drop, while Euro American and Native American populations are expected to decline as the median age rises. Across all counties, elementary schools served the largest number of students in 1998-99, with the highest average enrollment per school at the high school level. Academic performance among county schools participating in the STAR 9 achievement test varied widely; San Diego County showed the highest average performance across schools. Across regions, southern California has the highest proportion of limited English proficiency (LEP) students, the majority being Spanish-speakers.

Education levels vary greatly among recreation visitors. A large number have no college experience, though there are particular activities in which highly educated individuals participate, such as mountain biking.

## **General Objectives**

Develop and implement bilingual internet web sites that clearly describe Forest land management policies and opportunities.

Develop educational strategies to increase public awareness of “green recreational practices” and behaviors that adversely impact threatened and endangered species.

Develop educational strategies to increase public awareness of various fire management options, and alternatives selected that affect local communities/recreation experiences.

Develop web-based real-time educational programs available to public schools and other educational avenues.

Encourage involvement of all employees in public outreach and education.

Expand experiential learning opportunities such as interns, STEP, and SCEP employees, throughout the

southern California Forests.

Promote cooperative research to monitor and develop mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of Forest educational programs in southern California.

Provide information sources that are accessible to all publics served by using bilingual, audio, Braille, large-print, and other ADA-accessible formats.

Use cooperative agreements and other existing Forest Service instruments to establish a closer partnership with local communities and to establish community educational programs that will be focused on natural resources, sustainability, and forest health.

Available Products

*ATLAS*: “Atlas of Social and Economic Conditions and Change in Southern California” (Raettig, Elmer & Christensen; both electronic and print versions available)

*SCSA*: “Southern California Socioeconomic Assessment: Sociodemographic Conditions, Projections, and Quality of Life Indices” (Struglia, Winter & Meyer; currently in press, available in unpublished final technical report form, peer reviews complete)

*STMTES*: “Social Trust and the Management of Threatened and Endangered Species: An Investigation of Communities of Interest and Place” (Cvetkovich & Winter, currently in press, available in unpublished final technical report form, peer reviews complete)

*RAMP T & E*: “An Exploration of Recreation and Management Preferences Related to Threatened and Endangered Species: Final Report for the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests” (Winter & Knap; in final unpublished technical report form)

*PAWT*: “Public Attitudes Toward Wildlife: An Annotated Bibliography of Research Concerning Wildlife Management, Conservation, and Preservation” (Kelly Finn from University of Massachusetts; in final unpublished technical report form)

*CAFT E*: “Californians Opinions on the Management of Wildland and Wilderness Fires and the Management of Threatened and Endangered Species” (Winter; available soon)

*RPEM*: “The Role of Population Projections in Environmental Management” (Struglia and Winter; available from Environmental Management 2002 issue 1)

