

## Impact through Action, Influence and Involvement— Ethnic Minority Recreation: Where to from Here? (Session Summary)

**Edwin Gómez**, Old Dominion University, Department of Exercise Science, Sport, Physical Education, and Recreation, 140 HPE Building, Norfolk, Virginia 23529; egomez@odu.edu

**Nina S. Roberts**, Colorado State University, Department of Natural Resources, Recreation, and Tourism; and National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive, Suite 250, Fort Collins, Colorado 80525; nina.roberts@colostate.edu

**Deborah J. Chavez**, Pacific Southwest Research Station, U.S. Department of Agriculture–Forest Service, 4955 Canyon Crest Drive, Riverside, California 92507; dchavez@fs.fed.us

### Introduction

This paper documents the outcome of a panel discussion session that addressed the theme reflected in the title. Five professionals and scholars were part of this panel, including a senior-level executive from the Student Conservation Association, research social scientist from the Forest Service, professor from Old Dominion University, interpretive ranger/outreach specialist from Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and education/outreach specialist from the National Park Service Washington Office.

The purpose of the presentation and discussion was to provide a format for dialogue among natural resource professionals and academicians on outreach strategies, programs, and research involving diverse communities. Within this format, questions were presented to initiate dialogue, and an extremely valuable interaction proceeded thereafter. This paper highlights some of the discussions. Although not all of the questions initially developed were addressed (due to the ensuing discussion), the presentation and subsequent discussion centered on the following questions:

- What paradigm changes are required to ensure that land management agencies are more inclusive regarding decisions impacting the lives of people of color? What do these changes demand from us personally?
- If we think we understand how natural resources and outdoor recreation are viewed through the filters of urban youth, how can we best connect with them in planning for the future?
- What do managers of our public lands need to consider when they want to engage diverse communities?
- What are the different roles of parks, protected areas, and cultural sites in promoting relevancy of these areas to diverse

users?

- What are some of the best practices your agency uses in meeting the recreational needs, and program desires of people of ethnically diverse cultures?

### Paradigm Changes

This discussion started by defining *paradigm* and *paradigm shift*. In general, a paradigm is a mental model that reflects commonly held beliefs among a group of people (e.g., park managers). A paradigm shift is a change in thinking that is driven by agents of change. Some of the changes that were discussed were personal, systemic, and institutional in nature. From a personal standpoint, we as resource management and related professionals have to take the extra steps necessary to “connect” with the diverse population we will undeniably encounter.

These extra steps should include a proactive stance (personal), continued research on diverse groups (personal and institutional), and guidance and support from management (institutional and systemic). We need to continually educate ourselves with respect to understanding and accommodating the needs and desires of our diverse constituent base. This means risk-taking. We must reach out to all our constituents, not just a select and priv-

ileged few.

A member of the audience brought up the point of challenging the level of “sincerity” on the part of the federal land agencies. He questioned whether or not the agencies are sincere in their efforts towards truly embracing diversity and conducting outreach. He suggested that perhaps decision-makers, especially those with funding allocations, need to include some form of “grading” or evaluation component for diversity outreach efforts (e.g., make it a fund-based initiative). Additionally, it was suggested that community outreach requirements be imposed on new initiatives.

Use of the “I Triad” (invite, include, and involve) was also recommended by one of the scholars on the panel. Park managers, for instance, should *invite* people of color to use their services, perhaps through brochures. People of color should also be *included* in meaningful ways. For example, they could be liaisons to community leaders (key informants), or help in the translation and administration of surveys. *Involvement* of people of color needs to be more prominent and deliberate. In addition to hiring people of color into front-line and management/decision-making positions, involve them as board members.

An example of a successful outreach project is the use of a “Forest Information Van.” This program discovered the kind of information that Latinos were interested in; learned that Latinos do not use traditional communication outlets, such as visitor centers; and subsequently brought a van directly to the visitor at the outdoor recreation sites where they were gathered. Additionally, bilingual employees and volunteers handled the operations and functions of the van.

### Connecting with Youth

Connecting with youth from multicultural backgrounds was brought up as another critical issue. Today’s youth will be tomorrow’s voters. It is important not only to educate these youths, but also to prepare them to be our supporters and promoters of conservation, balanced with recreational use, as they will be the future voters as well as leaders for the protection of park resources—yes, “for

future generations.”

One panelist noted that we need to create an element of partnership, and that this relationship needs to be an *equal* partnership. Too often we say, “Come join us, come play our game” and we explain rules as we go along versus creating the “game” together. Examples of programs that have served youth well and can serve as models, according to the audience and panelists, are FamCamp, the California Environmental Program, Hawkins Park, and ECO-Teams. The key to engaging youth is not only about experiential learning, but giving them the skills to protect resources, and helping them become informed advocates for the future.

### Consideration of Diverse Communities

In general, when engaging diverse communities, managers of public lands need to consider “staying the course,” understanding diversity within groups, embracing change, and valuing new opinions and multiple perspectives. An example of *staying the course* was provided by Hawkins Park in South Central Los Angeles (Compton). The park was named after a pioneering black educator and congressman, Augustus F. Hawkins. The Santa Monica Mountain Conservancy is the regional agency that built and operates the 8.5-acre park. Hawkins Park is a miniature Santa Monica Mountains replica. The conservancy has made a commitment to educate the young people from inner-city neighborhoods, and then take them to visit the actual park.

Understanding diversity within groups is another essential ingredient. As managers of public lands, we must understand that there are differences within the broad categories used as labels for these various ethnic/racial group members. This has both research and practical implications. From both a research and practical perspective, language varies in groups within these broad categories. For example, Salvadoran Spanish is different from Mexican Spanish, which is different from the Caribbean Spanish. This example is similar to the differences between English spoken in the United States and that spoken in Great

Britain. Even within the same ethnic group there are differences (e.g., Vietnamese from the north speak a different dialect than those from the south of the country, and the Chinese speak Mandarin or Cantonese, among other dialects). Differences in language usage are critical to know when asking survey questions, or for signage. From a practical perspective, use of the actual resource will vary among groups. As such, adaptive management will be needed for reconstructing areas for high-quality use depending on local recreational preferences and participation patterns.

The “face” of America is changing; this is no secret. Therefore, we must be much more pluralistic in our approach, and our management practices must change to reflect this change. Embracing change is important, and there should be action-oriented strategies from both within an organization (managers) and outside of the organization (policy leaders in the community) to hold park agencies accountable for the inclusion of diversity in their management plans.

As our country becomes more diversified, managers and interpretive specialists of public land agencies should value and incorporate opinions and histories of those who are coming to visit these special places. The audience at the session during this conference participated in much debate on this issue—especially as it relates to ethical issues of presenting a “balanced” approach to the reporting of history. The majority of the interpretation of history in our parks is from a white perspective, and does not represent the contributions of other ethnic groups which may have played a decisive role in the history of any given park (e.g., Civil War parks and national battlefields).

One audience member from Alaska also noted the lack of dialogue between national park managers and Alaska natives. She commented on the need for the Park Service to be more inclusive and shared the significance and benefits of having a more balanced representation of the Alaska native ethnic groups and their culture at the table. Related to this was the general distrust that still exists between Alaskan native peoples and whites.

Native people of Alaska represent one segment of indigenous populations that continue to lack trust in land agencies, indicating a continued need for enhancing community relations.

In short, the consensus among the group at this session was that we must do a better job of incorporating stories other than those of the dominant society into our interpretation and education efforts; not doing so was viewed as “unethical.” We often tell the story in the context of what we think is appropriate, but often find that there are stories that are not told because of “sensitivity” issues and fear of offending someone or some group of people. As such, we need to recognize the roles others play within a structure—if we miss that, we may be missing the real story.

### Our Role in Promoting Relevancy to Diverse Users

A suggestion was made that our role in promoting relevancy of protected areas could be stated from a self-centered perspective. In other words, we need to include these groups in certain decision-making processes to survive! The following were stated as concerns that resource managers and educators need to consider:

- Strengthen the mentorship program;
- Address perceived discrimination;
- Address barriers that the public reports (time commitments, financial issues, built accommodations, information, etc.);
- Take an inclusive stance (managers and frontline);
- Market to differences;
- Make interpretation multi-faceted;
- Vary the message, and message delivery, by racial/ethnic group;
- Become more accountable for diversity; and
- Instill a sense of ownership (which is difficult, as there are few people of color employed in our ranks).

### Best Practices

The discussion on best practices began by noting that diversity training does not go far

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enough, and the training may be inadequate without accountability and efficient follow-through. Besides making our employees more culturally sensitive, we need to make them more culturally *competent*. One of the panel members stated that it should start with the “understanding of the others.” We must understand the values that other cultures place on cultural, natural, and human resources and landscapes, and acknowledge that these values may not necessarily conform to mainstream values. The key is to find a bridge between the multiple values. As was stated, “We cannot be everything to everyone, but we can strive to be most things to most everyone.”

If our constituency base is changing, then perhaps land management and interpretive plans also need to change to reflect current and future needs of all citizens. The concept of *wording* was also seen as an issue. How we word our program descriptions has a cultural connotation that may be inappropriate, such as “hoods in the woods.” The prescription: build cultural competency among our staff and cultivate diverse users into partnerships.

The following is a summary of suggestions for best practices:

- Willing to try adaptive management;

- Willing to have evaluation work completed;
- Willing to “stick” with programs, and see them through;
- Willing to ask questions and seek help;
- Use the data when developing management plans; and
- Allow for self-determination of the users.

### Conclusion

The discussions and dialogue were very lively and informative. The format was very conducive to allowing professional, research, and academic input. As the title indicates: where to from here? The discussion that occurred in this forum is merely another step in the recipe for success. Resource managers and educators must continue discussing the impact and influence that ethnic minority populations will indisputably have on public lands, and progress from discussion to action and accountability. Multiple examples were given of success stories that abound within public land agencies. We must all learn from these pioneering efforts and continue to strive to invite, include, and involve current and potential users of what will be a more diverse tomorrow.

