

RESEARCH BRIEFS



FACTORS LIMITING MINORITY PARTICIPATION IN INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMMING: A CASE STUDY

Sandra Rideout
Graduate Assistant
The Arthur Temple College of Forestry
Stephen F. Austin State University
Box 6109, SFA Station
Nacogdoches, TX 75962
409-468-3301
409-468-2489 fax
sandrar29@excite.com

Michael H. Legg, Ph.D.
Minton Professor of Forest Recreation
The Arthur Temple College of Forestry
Stephen F. Austin State University
Nacogdoches, TX

INTRODUCTION

Assessing the needs, desires, and perceived barriers of ethnic and racial minority populations has been a challenge to the interpretive community since 1962, when the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC) reported recreational use of wildland areas to be primarily a white phenomenon. This project involved separate focus groups of children and adults within African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic populations, as well as the adult American Indian population, in Fort Worth, Texas. Focus groups were chosen because some minority populations are reluctant to participate in surveys, and focus groups allow in-depth discussion of cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. Objectives were to assess outdoor activity preferences, interpretive programming preferences, and perceived barriers to participation at the Fort Worth Nature Center. Outdoor activity preferences were studied to ascertain the most effective ways to deliver the center's programs to different audiences. All groups were informed that the focus groups were being conducted for the Fort Worth Nature Center.

Note: Accepted December 1999.

METHODOLOGY

Seven adult groups and six children's groups were asked questions concerning preferred outdoor recreation activities, interpretive programs, and barriers to participating in wildland-related activities. Discussions were recorded on audiocassette and transcribed verbatim. Participant comments were then categorized, and each category was rated for importance in a group-to-group validation process. Ordinal validation is essential to reduce researcher bias and ensure a high level of objectivity in focus group data collection.

For the group-to-group validation, each category received three separate ratings. The first rating was the number of focus groups (#G) by age and ethnic subgroup in which a category arose. For the second rating, the proportion of group members in thirds (#P) who participated in discussion of that category was rated 1 to 3. The third rating was the level of energy or enthusiasm (e/e) with which a category was discussed, scaled 1 (low) to 3 (high). Scores were totaled (#G + #P + e/e = Total Score), and the categories were ranked in importance by score.

YOUTH RESULTS

The types of outdoor activities most important for all three subgroups of youth were "athletics/sports/games." African Americans added "dancing/listening to music." Additional important types of outdoor activities for Caucasian youth were "horseback riding," "swimming/watersports," "bike riding," and "hiking/backpacking," whereas Hispanic youth added "partying" and "dancing/listening to music" as important activity types.

"Wildlife" was the most important interpretive program topic for all three youth subgroups. Hispanic youth were equally interested in "athletics" programs.

Barriers to visiting the nature center for African American youth were dominated by fears of natural elements. "Fear of snakes/snakebites" was the most important barrier for them. Nine separate fears were discussed by the African American youth, including snakes, wildlife other than snakes, spiders and insects, allergic reactions to something, water and canoe trips, getting lost in the woods, inappropriate fear (e.g., tigers), and general, unspecified fear. After fear of snakes, concern that the nature center would be "boring/unappealing" also scored high for African American youth.

For Caucasian youth, "too far/lack of transportation" was the highest scoring barrier. "Mosquitoes" and concern that the nature center would be "boring/unappealing" were also important. "Lack of awareness/knowledge of the nature center" was the most important barrier for Hispanic youth. "Too far/lack of transportation" also scored high with Hispanic youth.

ADULT RESULTS

The highest scoring outdoor activity types discussed by African American adults were "sports/athletics" and "boating." Several African American adults reported enjoying "nothing" or just "hangin'/chillin'" outdoors.

"Walking/hiking," "camping," and "canoeing" were the most important outdoor activities for American Indian adults. "Sports/athletics" and "walking/hiking"

scored highest for Caucasian adults, whereas "playing with children" and "walking/hiking" received highest validation scores for Hispanic adults.

Activities that traditionally take place in wildland areas—such as camping, hiking, visiting parks, picnicking, viewing scenery, and whitewater rafting—were discussed more often and scored higher with Caucasian and American Indian adults than with African American and Hispanic adults.

Programs that could be delivered to their neighborhood, such as "outreach" and "neighborhood clean-up/restoration," scored highest for African Americans.

American Indian adults were more energetic in discussion of programs than other subgroups. "History/geography unique to the area," "night programs," "American Indian culture/history," "wildlife," "children's programs," "climbing wall/ropes course/rappelling," and "canoeing" were the most important interpretive program topics to American Indians.

"Wildlife" was the highest scoring program topic for Caucasian adults, whereas Hispanics scored "children's programs" and "plant life" highest.

There was a marked difference in program interests between African American adults and Hispanic adults in gardening and plant communities. Hispanic groups discussed a desire for these programs in great detail, but they were omitted in African American focus groups.

For African American adults, the most important barrier to visiting the nature center was "fear of discrimination/police harassment" in surrounding rural communities. This is evidently not specific to the Fort Worth Nature Center. In the Wallace and Witter (1990) focus-group study of black adults in St. Louis, Missouri, fear of racial intimidation was expressed as a reason for their lack of interest in wildland-related recreation. Survey participants expressed fears of random violence as well as the belief that it was not safe for them to visit wildland parks and nature centers because they were not in the majority there.

"Crowds of people" was the only important barrier for American Indians. For Caucasian and Hispanic adults, the most important barrier was "lack of awareness/knowledge" of the nature center.

CONCLUSIONS

This study illustrates that outdoor recreation and interpretive programming needs differ among various ethnic and racial groups. It provides insights into the spectrum of opportunities that a culturally diverse public might desire from an outdoor facility. Concerns about natural elements and racial discrimination may be overwhelming barriers to many African Americans. More research is necessary to determine causes of these concerns and how to counteract them. Facility managers should consider outreach programs for minority neighborhoods and personal invitations to the minority public to allow them to feel welcome and comfortable in an unfamiliar setting.

In future years, the U. S. population will contain larger minority components. Interpreters need to ask themselves what potential cultural or ethnic boundaries exist, perceived or real, that prevent programs from being equally accessible and desirable. Do existing programs and personnel foster intercultural boundary maintenance, or do they encourage diversity?

REFERENCE

- Wallace, V. K., & Witter, D. J. (1990). Urban nature centers: What do our constituents want and how can we give it to them? In D. L. Kulhavy and M. H. Legg (Eds.), *"What's Past Is Prologue": Our Legacy, Our Future* (pp. 384-388). Proceedings of the National Interpreters Workshop. Nacogdoches, TX: Center for Applied Studies, School of Forestry, Stephen F. Austin State University.

ENVIRONMENTAL ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE, AND BEHAVIORS OF MISSOURI 6TH- AND 12TH-GRADE STUDENTS

Janice Schnake Greene^a

Brian Roddiger^a

Li'anne Drysdale^a

Ginger Gray^{a,b}

Colleen Merrigan^{a,c}

Dan Witter^b

^aDepartment of Biology
Southwest Missouri State University
Springfield, MO 65804

^bMissouri Department of Conservation
P.O. Box 180
Jefferson City, MO 65102

^cCherokee Middle School
420 E. Plainview Rd.
Springfield, MO 65810

INTRODUCTION

Conservation agencies and environmental organizations have developed a wide variety of educational programs and materials for students, formal and nonformal educators, and the general public. To determine whether the time and effort in preparing and training for programs and in preparing and distributing materials are worthwhile, and to know whether the materials have had the desired effect on knowledge and attitudes, it is necessary to conduct various evaluations. Many believe that if environmental education is supposed to increase general knowledge about the environment and to encourage people to participate in more pro-environmental behaviors, then assessment of knowledge and attitudes is crucial to the identification of effective materials and techniques.