

Latinos/Hispanics and Federal Lands in the Interior Columbia River
Basin
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Project

Preface

The following report was prepared by University scientists through cooperative agreement, project science staff, or contractors as part of the ongoing efforts of the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, co-managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. It was prepared for the express purpose of compiling information, reviewing available literature, researching topics related to ecosystems within the Interior Columbia Basin, or exploring relationships among biophysical and economic/social resources.

This report has been reviewed by agency scientists as part of the ongoing ecosystem project. The report may be cited within the primary products produced by the project or it may have served its purposes by furthering our understanding of complex resource issues within the Basin. This report may become the basis for scientific journal articles or technical reports by the USDA Forest Service or USDI Bureau of Land Management. The attached report has not been through all the steps appropriate to final publishing as either a scientific journal article or a technical report.

Visible and invisible, utilitarian and familial, homogeneous and diverse, minority and majority are adjectives which characterise the Latino population of the interior Columbia River Basin and their use of federal public lands. To understand these adjectives, this report will briefly describe the demographic patterns and historical development of this population before analyzing census and field gathered data.

Until the last few years, little published work on Hispanic uses of public lands has appeared except for studies of conflicts over claims to public lands by Spanish land grant holders in New Mexico. Some earlier ethnographic work on Hispanics in the United States looked at human-nature value orientations of "Spanish-Americans" in New Mexico and concluded that this group of people felt subject to nature (Kluckhohn, 1961). Much more recent work in this vein found that Hispanics in Florida had a strong orientation against humans being over nature (Floyd and Noe, 1993). Recent work on migrant labor, whether legal or illegal from Mexico and Central America, or from Texas and California, discuss recreation but do not mention use of public lands other than local parks. These descriptions talk about kids on bicycles, watching television, playing ball sports, family and friends get together on weekends, and drinking (Gamboa, 1990; Monto, 1994; Valle, 1994). Nevertheless, attention being paid to the increasing size of racial and ethnic groups in the United States has brought some studies of recreation preferences of Hispanics, first in urban settings (Hutchinson and Fidel, 1984; McMillen, 1993) and later in New Mexico (Irwin, Gartner and Phelps, 1990). A program at the USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station to investigate Hispanic recreation in the wildland-urban interface has yielded an increasing body of literature (e.g., Simcox and Pfister, 1990; Ewert, Chavez, and Magill, 1993; Carr and Williams, 1993) These studies suggest that the Hispanic population, although increasingly differentiated, tends to recreate in larger groups of family and friends, prefers more developed sites, and tolerates higher densities of people (Baas, Ewert, and Chavez, 1993). They also want pleasing recreational settings of high environmental quality, which may be judged by different standards, that allow them to get away from the hustle and bustle by engaging in low activity recreation (Simcox and Pfister, 1990: 21). Whether reinforcing familial cohesion (Gramann, Floyd, and Saenz, 1993) or providing safety in numbers in a still racially and ethnically divided society (West, 1993), the larger groups still do not bring Hispanics to

public lands in proportion to their numbers in the population (Allison, 1993). As acculturation proceeds, there is evidence that some of the desired benefits of recreation may become more like those of the dominant culture. The values and behaviors of U. S. born Latinos more closely match those of the general population than do those born in Mexico or Central America (Gramann, Floyd, and Saenz, 1993: 72; Pfister, 1993).

In the Northwest, long time influence by Hispanic peoples has been felt (Gamboa, 1993). However, the major influences began in the 1940's with the bracero program that brought thousands of Mexican workers to harvest the wartime crops. Although providing a valuable source of cheap labor, local residents engaged in some prejudicial behavior. The end of the bracero program in the early 1950's brought increasing numbers of Mexican Americans from Texas and California to work in the labor intensive irrigation agriculture of the interior Columbia Basin. Some of these people began to "settle out" in the 1940's and 50's with increasing numbers doing so into the 1970's. In the 1970's the beginnings of the large immigrant Mexican stream were felt, but the 1980's and 90's brought the biggest influx (Padilla, 1994). Consisting of less than 5% of each of the states' population according to the 1990 census, the distribution of the Hispanic population is spotty. Although the 1980 census showed one majority Hispanic community, by 1990 most of the river communities in southern Yakima County, Washington were majority Hispanic. In Oregon and Idaho Hispanics form large minorities in some communities where irrigation agriculture is practiced. Even a community such as Walla Walla and surroundings that shows only a 9 percent Hispanic population in the 1990 census have more permanent settlers now and a large influx during the harvest of onions and asparagus (Valle, 1994). Census numbers for Latinos are low given the large numbers of the undocumented who are less likely to be counted by the census and by undercounting of the poor and ethnic minorities. Since labor consumes so many hours of the day during harvest, the migrant workers 'are not seen by most residents (Caballero, 1994). In contrast to the Mexican American migrant workers who came with their families and later settled out as residents, the immigrant population that is settling in the region now consists of more men than women. These recent migrants settling in nonmetro areas have the lowest levels of income and education of all settled groups (Saenz, 1994). Several consequences to this pattern of more single males are incidental to this study; one though, the intermarriage of Hispanic men with Native American women, has consequences for Yakama Nation lands and ceded

traditional activity rights off reservation lands, some of which are on federal public lands. Special forest products, e.g. huckleberries and boughs, not accessible to non Native Americans, now become available because of rights which the woman tribal enrollee has and, on nonceded lands, because of knowledge transmitted by word of mouth into the Hispanic community by her spouse (Harrison, 1994).

Having been pulled into the interior Columbia River Basin by agricultural work, large numbers of Latinos still depend upon agricultural work for their income. Where crops are more varied and stretch out over a long season, more settled out migrants are found. These areas are splotched across the landscape, but are especially evident in the Yakima Valley. It is in these areas where the most likely users of public lands are found.

METHODS

Traditional survey research does not reach poorer and non English speaking people as well as it does those with higher incomes; nor does census information give a true picture of this set of the U.S. population. Although representing significant percentage of the population of the Interior Columbia Basin, only a tiny fraction of those returning questionnaires from an east side of the Cascades in Washington and Oregon survey were Latino. Language and educational barriers can partially account for the much lower rate of response.

To find out answers to the question of Latino use of public lands, a snowball sampling technique was used. The Washington and Oregon Commissions on Hispanic Affairs were contacted for suggestions of people to be interviewed. In addition, personal contacts of the author were canvassed for candidates to be interviewed. An instructor in Anthropology at Yakima Valley Community College was enlisted to ask his students and students in MECHA (the Mexican American and Chicano student organization) about their use of public lands. From this set of interviewees, additional names were obtained. All persons contacted were willing to discuss the issue even though many claimed not to know much about the subject. Questions both about general characteristics of the Latino population and specific ones about use of public lands were asked in the person's language of choice. Instead of a formal set of questions being asked, the interviews were conducted in a more informal, conversational mode with the author both listening to the interviewees and sharing information with them. The limitation to this form of sampling lies in its nonrepresentitiveness, and its

small size, in this case, 26. On the other hand, the people contacted not only were asked questions about themselves, but about their knowledge of the Hispanic population and its use of public lands; they, in a sense are serving as experts for gathering information. Four field interviews of huckleberry pickers were also conducted.

FINDINGS

The overwhelming impression obtained from interviews is that the Latino population uses public lands for recreation at a rate lower than the general population. One factor which contributes to this underrepresentation is the burden of long work days and weeks; little time remains for recreational activities which are located at some distance away. When the agricultural work season is over in November or December, numbers of people leave the area to visit relatives in places of origin, usually either California, Texas, or Mexico, rather than using what some people would consider the less attractive recreational resources of public lands in the winter. Besides time, cost of travel is a barrier. A third barrier is lack of information. Few Latinos realize the possibilities for recreational use of public lands. Not knowing what facilities are available means that people who may feel threatened by the dominant society are likely not to risk transgressing laws and possible hostility by other users. As anecdotal evidence, one interviewee suggested that camping is too much like the conditions that migrant agricultural workers faced when living in labor camps and traveling from south Texas to the Pacific Northwest.

Those that do use public lands for recreation seem to come from the first and second generation settled out migrants: those whose parents came in the 40's, 50's, and 60's. Most of these children of migrants have entered work other than agriculture or are in school. In small business, working for retail establishments, working in the government and nonprofit sector and in professions, these later generations are the ones who have more time and money available and more knowledge of opportunities. Since many of them have not been introduced to outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, and hunting by their parents, a smaller proportion of them than the non Latino small and medium sized town dwellers are likely to be involved in outdoor recreational activities which take place on federal lands. Nonetheless, some of those interviewed did suggest that they or people they knew are involved in this type of outdoor recreation. Fishing, camping, and hiking and followed by hunting (of those interviewed who engaged in hunting, all were male) were

mentioned most often. Camping, hiking and hunting in that order were mentioned as activities that members of the Latino student organization of Yakima Valley Community College engage in on public lands. The numbers of them engaged in public land recreation seem to be higher than that of the general Hispanic population. If this process of the later generations moving out of agricultural work continues, then more use of public lands for recreational purposes is to be expected, bringing this populations' patterns closer to that of the general population of the area. However, the continued demand for cheap agricultural labor should continue to attract agricultural laborers from southern Mexico and Central American countries.

Public lands, rather than being used heavily by the Latino population for recreation, are utilized by larger numbers who can earn income by employment in forestry related activities. As a hard working labor force, they are being employed by labor contractors to reforest, prune and thin trees for low wages just as they have been employed by farmers for intensive agricultural work. Displacing long time local residents from these jobs has created hostility toward Latino workers as did their earlier entrance to agricultural labor. Some contractors have taken advantage of the undocumented status of Latino workers and have paid them poorly, if at all, and have further undercut other labor (Nicholson, 1994).

A second utilitarian use of the public lands is the gathering of special products: beargrass, huckleberries, boughs, greens, and firewood. As part of a multipronged strategy for earning income, the harvesting of these products in season provides part of the livelihood for some Latinos. Many of these products have seen increasing demand from internal and export markets and substantially increased harvests as a result of the entrance of Latinos and immigrants from Southeast Asia into the organization and harvesting of some of these products. As more of the Latino population spends more time on public lands, the number reached by word of mouth about special products can be expected to multiply. Preliminary investigation seems to be bearing this statement out. For example, one buyer of huckleberries on the east side of the Cascades noted that at least half of the people selling to him between the middle of July and the tenth of August were Latino although the proportion significantly decreased as cultivated fruit crops (pears, apples) became ripe and Hispanics could engage in the more lucrative harvest. Firewood permits issued also indicate an increasing proportion of Hispanic users.

Recommendations

Since lack of information is one issue that public agencies can address, substantially increased efforts at making information available need to be made. Some initial attempts, such as Forest Service employees giving talks to adults and children or leading field trips onto public lands have been made and could serve as models for expanded efforts. However, expanded efforts at education about the opportunities available on public lands as well as proper use of these lands could be made. Outreach efforts through Spanish language media, including the several Spanish language newspapers serving the interior Columbia basin and especially radio, would considerably broaden the audience for public lands and could also provide information about careers in natural resource agencies. Since Latinos know little about Forest Service and BLM lands, the initial attempts already made at reaching out to this population need to be augmented. Research conducted for the Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, mentioned earlier, has suggested that communication between agency personnel and users of public lands be treated as intercultural communication and offers a number of suggestions for how that communication can take place with varied public lands users (Hodgson, Pfister, and Simcox 1989).

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