



Engaging the Hispanic Community on Public Lands

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Executive Summary

This report examines the use of public lands by the Hispanic community in Montrose, CO. Specifically; this report explores various potential strategies for successfully engaging the Hispanic community with public lands through partnerships in the community. Through analysis of interview data (19 interviews with 20 participants) conducted with local Land Managers (11), Representatives of the Hispanic Community (5) and City Officials (4) this report offers three key recommendations for engaging the local Hispanic community with the public lands surrounding Montrose, CO.

This report and the questions it seeks to answer comes at a time when demographics are rapidly shifting and the needs and concerns of a changing constituency are coming into the public sphere, specifically public lands management. The United States is going through a major demographic shift and current estimates show that the Hispanic population is projected to account for 30% of the population by 2050 (US Census 2012). According to research done on the issue, “...demographic change will affect how parks are visited, ...valued...and who votes on behalf of parks.” (Taylor, 2011). Currently, visitors to public lands are a homogeneous group, and this could potentially pose a problem to land managers seeking to make their lands more relevant to a diversifying cultural landscape. Based on a 2013 study of participation in outdoor recreation, 70% of outdoor participants are Caucasian in comparison to 7% Hispanic. (Outdoor Industry Foundation, 2013). If land management agencies wish to remain relevant and continue supporting the publics’ access, enjoyment and protection of public lands, new strategies will need to be explored and implemented.

This report offers three key recommendations for potential strategies that would assist in engaging the local Hispanic population with public lands. These strategies incorporate many aspects of current models, both local and national, take into account local demographics and are rooted in both the interview data collected and prior academic research. These recommendations are listed in order of estimated time, human resources and financial commitment needed to implement.

In that order, they are:

1. Focus on city parks as gateways to public lands
 - a. This model utilizes the Hispanic community's familiarity with local parks and the recreational opportunities they offer and builds upon them in an effort to "springboard" to public lands nearby.
2. Create a multi-agency public lands liaison to community
 - a. By creating a multi-agency public lands liaison position with the intent purpose of meaningfully connecting to the local community, land management agencies can engage Hispanic community more intimately, and thus more successfully.
3. Establish a partnership between local land management agencies and the local university, Colorado Mesa University (CMU) Montrose, with the goals of:
 - a. Supporting local Hispanic youth to attend and complete a 4 year college degree;
 - b. Building leadership and community engagement skills in Hispanic youth;
 - c. Engaging Hispanic youth in public lands management through targeted course loads, academic majors and summer internship opportunities with local public land agencies;
 - d. Connecting college graduates with career opportunities in local land management; and
 - e. Building a recruitment stream of local, college-educated Hispanic youth for future job placement in public land agencies.

At this stage these strategies are intended to serve as a foundation for further engagement of the Hispanic community in Montrose and have the potential to inform and inspire future strategies in other areas. More research is necessary to determine financial and logistical feasibility of enacting these proposed strategies.

This research project and subsequent report are not intended to serve as transferable solutions for all underrepresented communities and public lands. Instead, this report should serve as a small case study of a specific community (Hispanic community) in a particularly unique geographic region (Rural SW Colorado). The recommendations presented in this report are unique to the particular demographics of this community and the needs of local land managers.

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