



David Scott*

URBAN PARKS: Responding to Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition

The long-term well-being of Texas' natural resources is dependent on making them important and relevant to a broad range of citizens. As Texas' population changes, it is crucial to understand the extent to which different ethnic and racial groups use parks and participate in outdoor recreation, as well as the constraints to their doing so.

Hispanic and Asian minorities are among the fastest growing population groups in Texas. According to the U.S. census, between 1990 and 2000 the number of Hispanics in Texas increased 45 percent and the number of

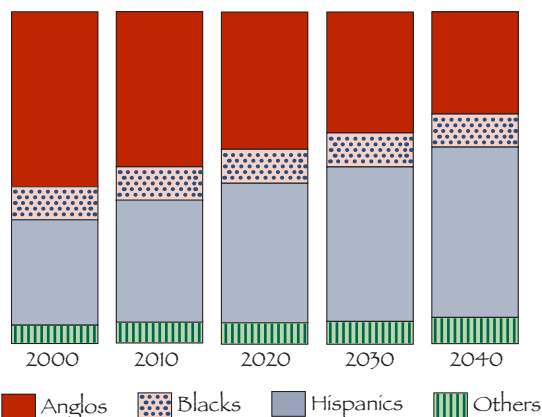
Asians and other minorities increased a staggering 89 percent. During the same period, the number of Anglos in Texas increased only 10 percent.

Demographers predict that this trend will continue. By the year 2040, Anglos are expected to comprise just 33 percent of the state's population, while Hispanics are expected to comprise more than 50 percent (Murdock).

These demographic trends have major implications for park and recreation agencies. Hispanics and other ethnic minorities visit state and national parks and national forests at a rate far lower than Anglos. They also are far less likely than Anglos to participate in wildlife activities such as fishing, hunting and wildlife watching, or in camping and other outdoor recreation (Floyd, Lee et al.). There are several factors that help explain this.

- Many members of minority groups regard some outdoor recreational activities as culturally irrelevant and have no interest in them.
- Members of ethnic and racial minorities are more likely than Whites to have low levels of education and income. Thus, they may lack the financial resources to travel and to purchase recreational equipment.

Projected ethnic/racial composition of Texas' population.



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- Studies have shown that members of minority groups too often experience harassment and discrimination in public places. The fear of harassment may cause some members of minority groups to avoid using parks and outdoor recreational areas away from home.

These barriers to participation are aggravated by the fact that park and recreation agencies often have few minority employees. Consequently, park managers, planners and rangers may lack the skills to effectively relate to minority visitors. Without a multicultural staff, recreation and natural resource agencies are not likely to see the viewpoints of minority groups (Allison, Scott).

These problems are easiest to address at the local level. City and county park and recreation agencies are in the



best position to reach out to underserved groups by making sure parks are accessible, by creating culturally appropriate programs, and by making sure minority visitors feel welcome and safe.

For further information

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