

Changing Face of Outdoor Recreation



Wildlife Management Institute

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MSCG Project Intent

- Not to replicate or create conservation social scientists in state agencies
- Provide basic information to increase awareness of and about the acquisition and application of conservation social science in agency decision making
- For the purposes of these modules, we'll use the more modern and broader terminology of conservation social sciences rather than human dimensions of wildlife management
- Our use of the term wildlife includes mammals, fish, birds, insects, reptiles, etc.
- WMI deeply appreciates the contributions of Dr. Daniel J. Decker and Dr. Lou Cornicelli to this project

Outdoor Recreation

- Any leisure or recreational activity that takes place in natural environments or outdoor settings

Motivations for Outdoor Recreation

- To have fun
- Enjoy natural scenery
- Physical health, get exercise
- Mental health, lower stress
- Challenge
- Be with family/friends
- Be close to nature
- Get away from day-to-day demands

Outdoor Recreation Participation

55% of US population

Participation rate for Hispanics
Increased from 34% in 2015 to
56% in 2022

61% of LGBTQIA+ participated
In outdoor recreation

35% of seniors participated in
outdoor recreation

Frequency of participation is down

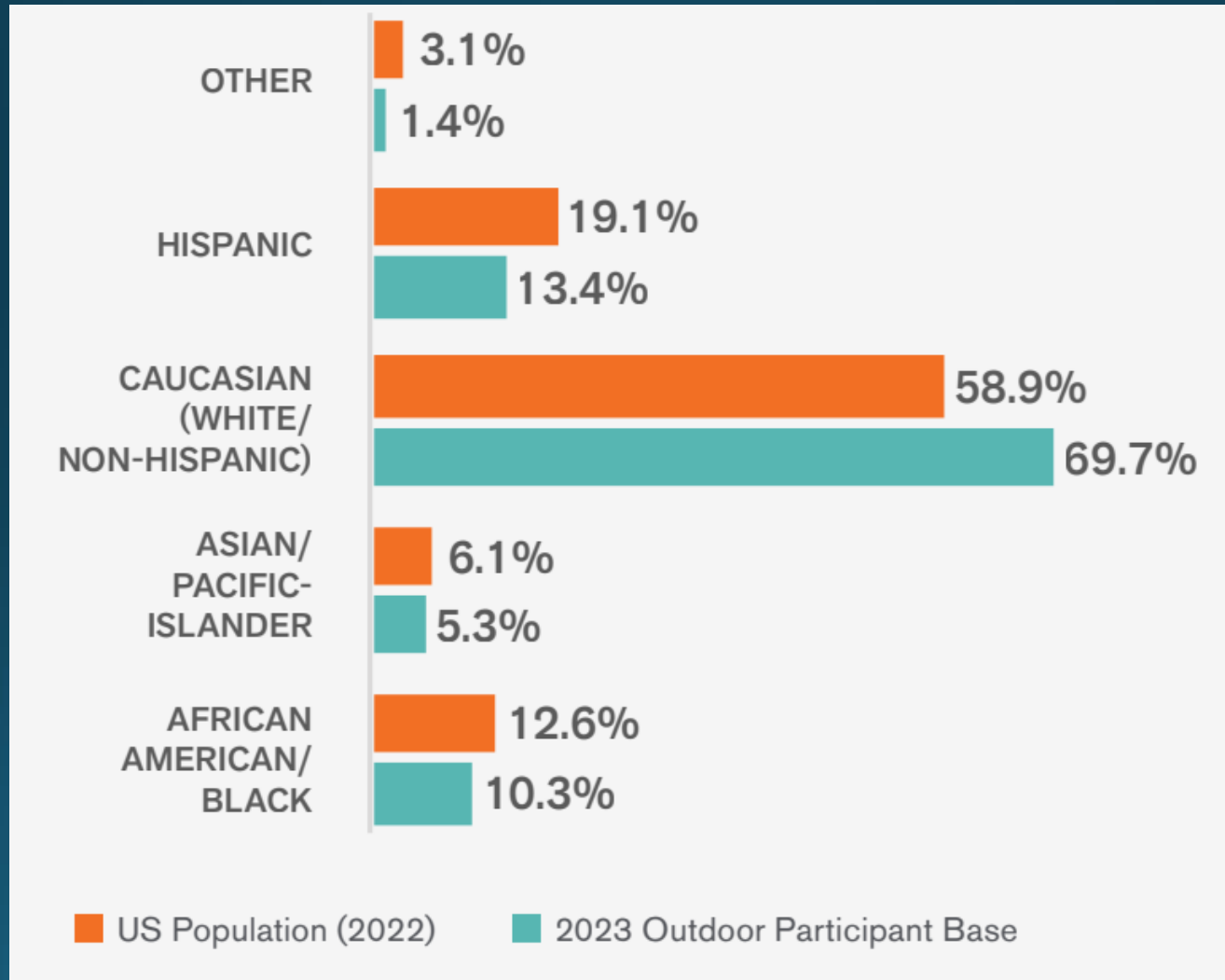
**OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPANT COUNT
AND PARTICIPATION RATE 2007 TO 2022**



Most Popular Outdoor Activities

- Hiking
 - Fishing
 - Running
 - Camping
 - Bicycling
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- 57% participation rate
 - Increase in participation but decline in frequency
 - Casual participants 55% female, increase in seniors

Diversity in Outdoor Recreation Mirrors Growing Diversity in Population



Implications for Agencies

- Acknowledge ongoing shift in outdoor recreation activities
 - Increased population in urban areas
 - Increased time spent on other activities (e.g., organized sports or activities, screen time)
 - Barriers to traditional outdoor recreational activities (e.g., time, access, cost)
- Understand demographic changes and shifts in interests in outdoor recreation
- Diversify programs and services to meet peoples needs, interests and concerns
- Potential policy or regulation change (e.g., E-bike use on public lands)

Implications for Agencies

- Opportunity to partner with other organizations that can provide outdoor recreation activities that agencies can't
- Help inform discretionary agency spending
- Opportunity to engage with casual outdoor enthusiasts about crossover activities (e.g., fishing while on a camping trip)
- Opportunity to engage with casual outdoor enthusiasts about low barrier activities especially in urban settings

Challenges for Agencies

- Traditional agency focus on hunters, anglers and trappers – slow to change
- Funding constraints limits spending on broader outdoor recreation programs and services
- Expectations of existing stakeholders to be focused on them
- Lack recent data on outdoor recreation interests in changing populations
- Staff may lack program/project design skills for desired recreational activities

Challenges for Agencies

- Aging facilities and infrastructure
- Facilities are not disability friendly
- Operating budget not keeping up with growth of use
- Need to better understand multi-cultural preferences
- Need for professionally trained planners/designers
- Need to understand current participants
- Integrating outdoor recreation opportunities across agencies

Pandemic influence

- COVID-19 contributed to increase in bicycling
- 84.8 million Americans went camping in 2023, 5.5 were first time campers
- RV sales dramatically increased during pandemic, economy has dampened sales recently
- 10% growth in snow skiing
- Increased visitation to national parks by 13 million visits

Trends in Outdoor Recreation

- Aging population (but may have more free time, disposable income)
- Change in outdoor recreation preferences
- Increasing active outdoor lifestyle
- Increase in number (because of popn increase, but decrease in frequency)
- Decrease in younger people and families
- Participation of People of Color lags behind Whites
- Participants looking for more urban opportunities

Barriers to Outdoor Recreation

- Lack of awareness of opportunities
- Not interested
- Lack physical fitness to participate
- Don't have time
- Don't have access
- Don't have equipment
- Don't have transportation

Barriers to Outdoor Recreation

- Weather (too hot, too cold), bugs
- Lack skills/ability
- Don't have anyone to go with
- Family responsibilities
- Fear/safety concerns (e.g., crime, animals, getting hurt or lost, behaviors of others)
- Language barriers
- Increased amount of screen time

Resources

- Outdoor Industry Association
- DRYT Camping Report
- National Ski Sports Association
- National Park Service