



## **State Park Visitation and Recreation Constraints Among Ethnically Diverse Populations in Georgia**

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### **Abstract:**

State park use patterns are changing as the population of racial/ethnic minorities in the United States continues to rise. Managers are concerned that many potential state park constituents, particularly members of racial/ethnic minority groups, encounter barriers that limit their visitation. By identifying these constraints, managers may be able to adapt services and programs to attract visitors who may be otherwise constrained. To address this management issues, this study examined the recreation constraints and state park visitation patterns across diverse populations in Georgia. Onsite data were collected during the summer of 2010 using intercept surveys in three state parks in northern Georgia. Data collection was conducted in recreation hotspots or areas of high demand (i.e., picnic areas, swimming beaches, and campgrounds) within each park. Brief (five minute) self-administered intercept surveys of state park visitors (N=1338) were conducted according to a randomized sampling schedule at each park. Surveys were available in Spanish and English. The survey instrument included 21 constraint items were included in an attempt to account for intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural, and cultural constraints. Visitors were also asked open-ended questions about what state park managers could do to get more people to visit state parks. An overall response rate of 91.5% was obtained for onsite surveys. Following the onsite data collection, data were collected offsite at eight flea markets located in communities near the three focal parks (N=258). Customers and vendors were asked to complete self-administered intercept surveys (similar to the onsite version) in an attempt to identify the recreational constraints of Georgia residents who may or may not visit state parks. An overall response rate of 73.7% was obtained for offsite surveys. Data from onsite intercept surveys suggested that overall park visitation was not substantially constrained by any factor (mean ratings  $\leq 2.84$ , where 1 = not a constraint, 3 = minor constraint, and 5 = major constraint). The most significant constraints reported by park visitors were lack of time, distance traveled to parks, and lack of money. Mean constraint ratings among park visitors differed by race/ethnicity, especially for Latinos who reported being more constrained by lack of money and distance/transportation issues than other groups [ $F(4,953) = 9.7, p \leq 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.04$ ]. Many visitors suggested that park managers could increase visitation by updating facilities and improving the overall cleanliness of the state parks and decrease park fees. Offsite

survey participants reported being slightly more constrained than onsite visitors (mean ratings < 3.12). Racial/ethnic minorities were more constrained than White participants in the areas of lack of information, distance/transportation issues, and lack of money [ $F(2,209) = 4.7, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.08$ ]. These findings are useful for Georgia state park managers who strive to encourage visitation and inclusion for state park constituents from all backgrounds. While managers cannot control many barriers, they can account for items like lack of information. Hence, these results may provide managers with a better understanding of how to increase park visitation among diverse Georgia residents who encounter outdoor recreation constraints.