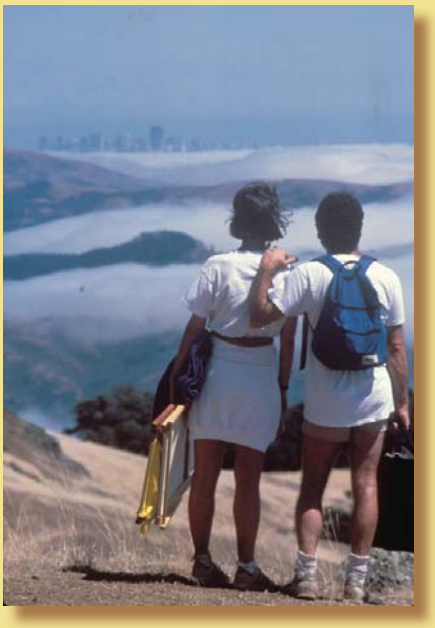

# SUMMARY FINDINGS
# Survey on Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California 2007

State of California
Natural Resources
Agency

*An Element of the California Outdoor Recreation Planning Program*

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Printed in Sacramento, California

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## Acknowledgements

Researchers from the Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration Program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo and the University of Utah completed data analyses and interpretation, presentation of the findings, and the report writing for the *Complete Findings*. The above contributors and Devine Tarbell and Associates, Inc. developed the 2008 surveys.

On-going consultation took place with representatives of the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

Diagnostics Plus, Inc., a marketing research firm, administered the surveys.

The survey procedures followed a modified Dillman approach to data collection (Dillman, 2000).

## Authority and Financing for this study

The 2007 *Survey on Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California* is an element of the California Outdoor Recreation Planning Program (CORP), formulated under the provisions of Chapter 5099.2 of the California Public Resources Code. CORP provides policy guidance and demographic and recreation trend analysis to all levels of public recreation providers throughout the state. It is the basis for the Open Project Selection Process (OPSP), the priority rating system that is updated every five years by California State Parks' Office of Grants and Local Services to select projects to be funded by the national Land and Water Conservation Fund.

The preparation of this study was financed in part through a planning grant from the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, under the provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (Public Law 88-578, as amended). California Department of Parks and Recreation, the California State University Agriculture Research Initiative and a United States Department of Agriculture McIntire-Stennis grant also provided funding for this project.

***www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA***

# How this survey helps local recreation providers

This Public Opinions and Attitudes survey gives local recreation providers a statistically valid sample of what Californians think about outdoor recreation and how active they say they are at parks. This survey analyzes data in four demographics: adults, youth, Hispanics, and by geographic regions. Trends and preferences identified here assist local recreation providers in analyzing how to meet residents' needs. Results also guide the selection process for the next five years of Land and Water Conservation Fund projects, which is a national grant fund dispensed annually to local agencies by California State Parks. This survey measured:

- Outdoor recreation activities that Californians are currently engaged in.
- Outdoor recreation activities that they'd like to do more.
- Californians' opinions and attitudes regarding recreation facilities, programs, services and policies, including:
  - The importance of providing particular facilities and services;
  - Preferences and priorities for management decisions regarding outdoor recreation facilities, programs, operations, and policies;
  - How frequently Californians participate in specific activities as well as their interest in participating in these activities more often; and
  - The perceived importance of potential benefits associated with participation in outdoor recreation activities.
- Californians' physical activity in parks, including:
  - Current levels of physical activity in parks; and
  - Perceived constraints that discourage this activity in parks.
- Preferences for potential management decisions that could help California park providers reduce and adapt to climate change and global warming.
- Californian's willingness to pay for their favorite activities.
- Changes in responses compared to prior surveys.

The survey was conducted by telephone, by mail and online. It was changed substantially from prior years to increase response rates and provide a contemporary view of outdoor recreation in California. For more information about how this survey was conducted and how it varied from past surveys, see the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*.

## Inside


How this survey helps local recreation providers 1

Adult Opinions and Attitudes 2

Youth Opinions and Attitudes 4

Hispanic Opinions and Attitudes 6

Regional Differences 7

Recommendations 8


For detailed results and analysis, see the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*

# Adult Opinions and Attitudes

**More on Methods**
Great care was taken to obtain random samples of Californians with confidence intervals of five percent or less. The survey was administered to residents of California using a random sample of telephone numbers within the state. Following participation in the telephone survey, each interviewee was asked to complete a second survey via mail or online. A $1 bill was provided as an incentive to complete the mail back survey. As an additional incentive, once the completed survey was received, participants were entered into a drawing to win one of three California State Parks getaway packages.

## Methodology

### Survey

This was a telephone survey of almost 2,800 respondents and a mail/online survey of over 1,200 respondents. The telephone survey focused on physical activity in parks. The mail survey added components on leisure constraints, climate change, and measures of expressed demand for recreation activities. Major findings are outlined below. For detailed tables, charts, analysis, and survey instruments, see the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*.

## Findings

### What Adults Did

- More than two-thirds spent the same or more time in outdoor recreation activities compared to five years ago.
- The majority participated in moderate (41%) to light (36%) levels of physical activity during park visits. Seventy percent of respondents spent over 30 minutes being physically active in parks.
- Most participated in walking for fitness or pleasure (74%). Other popular activities included picnicking in picnic areas; driving for pleasure, sightseeing, driving through natural scenery; beach activities; and visiting outdoor nature museums, zoos, gardens or arboretums.
- Most (77%) Californians had been physically active in the past month. Eighty-seven percent reported participating in moderate physical activity and 52% reported participating in vigorous physical activity for at least 10 minutes at a time.
- Park companions under the age of 18 most frequently participated in playing (73%), sports (37%), walking (22%), and eating/picnicking (21%).
- Respondents on average went to parks with five other companions over the age of 18, but most commonly visited with only two. Overall, companions were primarily family (56%) or both family and friends (31%).
- More than half used community buildings (64%), open space to play (59%), picnic tables (58%), and unpaved multipurpose trails (53%) during their last park visit.
- Most (74%) had visited a park within the last month.
- The majority (68%) spent 5 minutes or less driving (30%) or walking (38%) to recreation areas.

## What Adults Think

- The majority (87%) of Californians agree that recreation programs improve people's health.
- Californians think it is worth it to pay higher fees to participate in activities that require the use of equipment, skills, or fuel such as camping, hunting, fishing, target shooting, horseback riding, sailing, and off-highway vehicle use.
- Adults think that public outdoor recreation areas, facilities, and services currently available are at least satisfactory. Most (72%) think the overall conditions are the same or better as they were five years ago.
- There is a growing acceptance for private businesses providing certain services and activities in parks. Most agree that private businesses could provide services such as recreation equipment rental (75%), selling ready-to-eat food and beverages (73%), sponsoring special events (73%), providing general maintenance of facilities and grounds (58%), operation of campgrounds or lodging facilities (56%), and operation of marinas and boat launching facilities (51%). Most do not favor privatization of law enforcement (only 43% approved) or privatization of the total operation and management of areas (only 28% approved).
- Many adults think that gang activity (64%), alcohol and drug use (56%), and poor maintenance (49%) are the most limiting constraints for participating in activities at parks.

## What Adults Want

- The majority (82%) want fees that are collected at each park, wildlife and recreation area to be spent on that area. They also want the rules and regulations in parks and outdoor recreation areas to be enforced (84%).
- The most important park facilities and services are play areas for young children; wilderness areas where no vehicles or development are allowed; environmental and outdoor education programs; multi-use turf areas for field sports; picnic sites for large groups; trails for multiple; non-motorized activities; and hard surface trails.
- When enjoying the outdoors, adults most importantly want to have fun; be with family and friends; relax; and view scenic beauty.
- Walking for fitness or pleasure; camping in developed sites; bicycling on paved surfaces; and day hiking on trails are the four top activities that Californians would like to participate in more often.

## What Adults Want: Protect the Environment

- The majority agreed that reducing climate-changing gases; anticipating the effects of climate change; and educating the public about climate change are management actions that park agencies can take to help reduce and adapt to climate change and global warming.
- More than two-thirds of Californians want more emphasis on cleaning up pollution of the ocean, lakes, rivers and streams in park and recreation areas; maintaining park and recreation areas; protecting natural resources; protecting historic resources; and remodeling and improving existing park facilities.

# Youth Opinions and Attitudes

**Youth respondent demographics**
Youth socio-demographics measured included gender, age, household ethnicity, and residence. Fifty-three percent of the youth respondents were male and 47% female. Respondent ages were well distributed with about 17% in each age category of 13, 14, 15, and 16. The majority came from households of White ethnicity (39%). However, Asians (25%) and Hispanics (20%) were also well represented. Nearly 31% resided in Los Angeles County. Details can be found online in Table 66 in the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA.*

## Methodology

### Focus Groups

California State Parks last surveyed youth in 2002 but did not generate very many useful responses. The 2008 youth focus groups were used to develop a more accessible and expanded youth survey. Focus groups were conducted prior to implementation of the mail/online survey.

The youth in the focus groups were participants in programs at community recreation centers. They were divided into groups based on age (10-13 and 14-17) and were assumed to be residents of the geographic regions where the centers were located. A total of 72 California youth participated in the focus groups. Boys and girls were equally represented. Most were Hispanic, Caucasian, or African American. Other populations represented were Asian, Native American, and multiracial. Key findings of the focus groups can be found in Appendix C of the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*.

### Survey

The mail survey of almost 400 respondents addressed youth-relevant issues. Questions were generated in part from the focus groups. The survey was aimed at ages 12-17 and measured activities, constraints, reasons for a favorite activity, and participation in the ten activities highlighted in the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights. For detailed tables, charts, analysis, and survey instruments, see the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*.

## Findings

### What Youth Did

- Youth participated in their favorite activities primarily with friends (86%) and immediate family members (57%). Just over one-third (35%) of youth participated in their favorite activity by themselves.
- Walking on streets/sidewalks/paths/trails in their community; swimming in a pool; jogging or running; and playing in a park were the outdoor recreation activities with the largest percentage of youth participation.
- Before the age of 14, at least 80% of youth had participated in these six of the ten activities from the California Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights (COBR):

- Playing in the water
- Playing in a safe place
- Hiking/biking/riding on a trail
- Exploring nature outdoors
- Visiting a California historic site/museum
- Learning to swim

**What Youth Think**

- The most common reasons given for why youth participate in the ten COBR activities are to be with family or friends, it is fun or enjoyable, and that it is part of an organized or educational trip.
- More than half of the youth respondents find it difficult to participate in outdoor activities because sometimes they are too busy (91%), they would rather be on the internet (68%), and it is too hot or cold outside (68%); or their friends don't want to do the outdoor activities that they wanted to do (57%).

**What Youth Want**

- To increase their participation in outdoor activities, most commonly youth want more recreation areas closer to their home, areas for activities that are just for kids their age, and recreation equipment.
- The activities California youth want to do more often include horseback riding; sledding, ice-skating, and snow play; snowboarding; swimming in a pool; and using jet skis or wave runners.
- Youth want to do their favorite activities because they are fun or enjoyable (84%) and allow them to do something with their friends and family (68%). The most common favorite outdoor activities of youth are swimming, soccer, and basketball.
- Youth want to participate in activities at recreation areas or parks both in and outside of their neighborhood, but within their town or city.

# Hispanic Opinions and Attitudes

## Methodology

**Survey**

The survey used the data collected as described in the Adult Opinions and Attitudes section (page 2). Major findings are outlined below. For detailed tables, charts, and analysis, see the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*.

## Findings

**What Hispanic Adults Did**

- Hispanics spent more days than non-Hispanics visiting highly developed parks and recreation areas, and fewer days visiting natural and undeveloped areas.
- More Hispanics (66%) than non-Hispanics (52%) visited parks with just family.
- Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanics to use:
  - Swimming pools
  - Picnic tables
  - Amusement areas
  - Playgrounds
  - Tennis or basketball courts
  - Organized sports fields
  - Open spaces to play
  - Skate parks
- Hispanics were less likely than non-Hispanics to use beach or water recreation areas, scenic observation/wildlife viewing areas, and unpaved multipurpose trails.

**What Hispanic Adults Think**

- Significantly more Hispanics than non-Hispanics think that government agencies should place more emphasis on protecting historic resources.
  - Hispanics strongly agreed with enforcing rules and regulations and think that fees generated in parks should be spent in those parks.
  - Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanics to strongly agree that open space lands were needed where they live.

**What Hispanic Adults Want**

- The most important facilities and services to Hispanics were play activity areas for tots and young children; multi-use turf areas for field sports such as softball, baseball, soccer, and/or football; and areas and facilities for environmental and outdoor education programs.

# Regional Differences

## Methodology

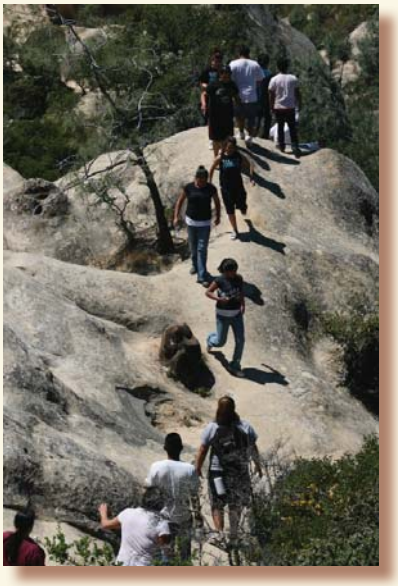
**Survey**

The survey used the data collected as described in the Adult Opinions and Attitudes section (page 2). Major findings are outlined below. For detailed tables, charts, and analysis, see the *Complete Findings* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*.

## Findings

**Regional Activities**

- The Central Valley had the lowest percentage (9%) of respondents visiting a park alone, while Los Angeles (17%) had almost double that percentage, and Northern California had almost triple that percentage (24%) of solo park visitors.
- Northern California respondents spent the most time per day on average participating in vigorous activity (83.6 mins), compared to Southern Californians, who spent the least time (71.9 mins).
- Respondents from the Central Valley skate boarded much more on average (61.4 days) than did San Franciscans (23.6 days).



**Regional Thoughts**

- Respondents from all five regions perceived gang activity to be the factor most limiting their physical activity at parks. Alcohol and drug use in a park ranked as the second most limiting factor.
- More than twice the percentage of respondents in the Los Angeles region (21%) than in the Northern California region (10%) felt that parks not having the facilities they liked to use was the factor that limited their level of physical activity at parks a lot.

**Regional Wants**

- A substantially larger percentage of Central Valley respondents (67%) agreed that recreation areas for camping or overnight use are needed compared to the other four regions (49% to 56%).
- Northern California had the greatest percentage of respondents (58%) who felt that private firms within park and recreational areas should provide operation and maintenance of campgrounds or other lodging facilities compared to all other regions.
- All regions strongly agree that the highest priority for park agencies' efforts to help reduce and adapt to climate change is to reduce their emissions of climate-changing gases. All regions agree that the worst thing to do is nothing.

# Recommendations

**Care for and maintain existing parks.** Californians think that it is important for recreation providers to give more emphasis to the maintenance and care of parks. This includes law enforcement efforts, pollution control, and overall facility maintenance.

**Maintain a diversity of parks.** Californians visit a diverse range of parks, from natural areas to cultural attractions, and developed parks to remote wilderness areas. Care should be given to maintaining this diversity.

**Provide local, easily accessible parks.** Recreation providers should continue to ensure the accessibility of local parks for all citizens in California. Local parks encourage increased use by local community members.

**Make parks accessible for physical activity.** A large majority of Californians are physically active. Provide increased access and safe and accessible venues for physical activity in parks and recreation areas.

**Make parks safe.** Most Californians are generally pleased with existing facilities. But significant numbers of recreationists worry about safety issues such as gang activity, alcohol, and drugs, as well as poor facilities maintenance. Seek ways to provide a safe environment and maintain existing facilities. Help meet the demands of outdoor recreationists by providing safe access to trails and other facilities.

**Support private businesses in the recreation industry.** Californians think it is appropriate for private businesses to provide rental equipment, food services, sponsorship of events, and general maintenance and operations at parks. Most Californians believe the job of law enforcement and management of areas should remain with the public park and recreation agencies.

**Clean up pollution and preserve resources.** Californians are concerned about the environment and our resources. More than two-thirds of respondents feel that recreation and park providers should increase their focus on cleaning up pollution in the oceans, rivers, and lakes in park and recreation areas and on protecting historic resources.

**Go green.** Address climate change by reducing greenhouse gases, educating visitors, and managing parks to mitigate impacts. Californians agree that doing nothing is not an option. Park and recreation providers can play a proactive role in education about and mitigating the impacts of global climate change.

**Provide local activities for youth.** Youth participate in activities in and around their neighborhoods or in their community. Prioritize providing safe, local recreation activities for all youth.

**Provide easy access to parks for youth.** Youth continue to enjoy opportunities for walking, bicycling, and swimming at safe recreation venues. Prioritize providing easy access to safe, local opportunities for popular youth activities.

**Increase access to snow and water sports for youth.** Youth showed an increased desire to have greater access to snow play activities such as sledding, ice skating, and snow boarding; and water sports such as swimming in a pool and motorized water sports. Maintain opportunities for winter and water activities for youth from both urban and rural environments.

**Promote programs on fishing, celebrating cultural heritage, camping, and playing on a team.** Youth are participating in six of the ten activities identified by the Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights. Encourage programs that promote all ten activities, but especially on those where participation is low: fishing, celebrating heritage, camping overnight, and playing on a team.

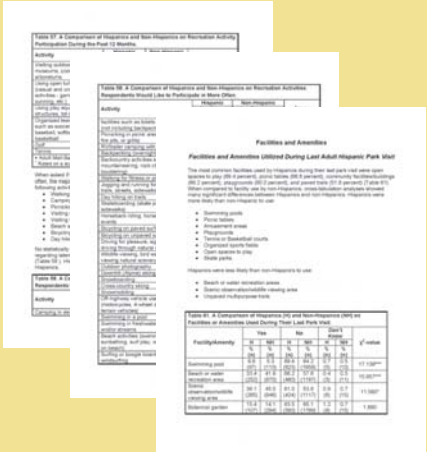
**Provide youth activities that are close to home and provide equipment for the activities.** Youth report that they are often "too busy" to participate in outdoor activities. Address this by providing accessible activities close to home without long travel times. Create safe environments for the activity and provide the equipment necessary to participate.

# Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California 2007

## Find over 150 tables of statistically valid data online

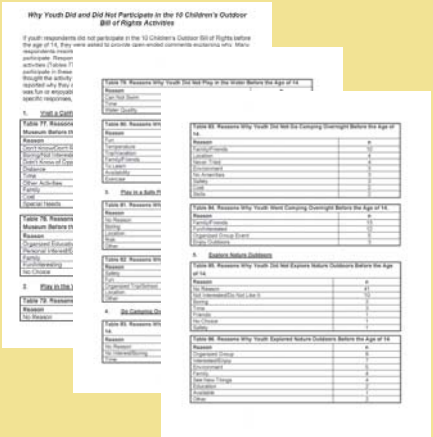
Tables, charts, analysis, and the survey instruments are in the *Complete Findings for the Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California 2007* at *www.parks.ca.gov/planning_SPOA*. This detailed data and analysis for each of the four demographics (adult, youth, hispanic, and regions) includes:

- Socio-demographics
- Outdoor recreation behavior
- Frequency of outdoor recreation area visitation
- Distances traveled to park and recreation areas
- Visitor group characteristics
- Level of physical activity and time spent in outdoor recreation
- Time spent in outdoor recreation
- Time spent in physical activity
- Activities of Californians
- Activity participation and latent demand for Californians
- Activity types for companions under 18 years of age
- Facilities and amenities
- Facilities and amenities utilized during last park visit
- Outdoor recreation facilities and services
- Attitudes and beliefs regarding outdoor recreation
- Opinions on state and federal agency emphasis
- Opinions on outdoor recreation in California
- Respondent preferences for privatization of recreation areas
- Opinions on park agencies' role in addressing climate change
- Types of recreation areas visited



Additional information for the youth survey includes:

- Characteristics of youth respondents' favorite outdoor activities
- Youths' favorite outdoor activities
- Youths' favorite activity location
- Participation in the 10 Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights activities
- Why youth did and did not participate in the 10 Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights activities
- Constraints to youth participation in outdoor recreation
- Summary of youth respondents



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