

**DIVERSIFYING ACCESS TO AND SUPPORT FOR THE FORESTS**  
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**Center for Law in the Public Interest**  
**Policy Brief**



**OVERVIEW.** The Center for Law in the Public Interest is working to diversify access to and support the national forests. Angeles, San Bernardino, Cleveland, and Los Padres National Forests are four of the most urban-influenced forests in the United States, serving an increasingly diverse population of over 20 million people who live within an hour’s drive of the four forests in Southern California.<sup>2</sup> The Forest Service recognizes that the “ethnic diversity of the population has increased,” and that “[m]anagers are . . . challenged to effectively communicate with diverse populations of people in order to understand the ways they would like to use the forests.”<sup>3</sup> Yet between 77% and 83% of visitors to the Angeles, Cleveland, and Los Padres National Forests are non-Hispanic White in a region that is disproportionately people of color and in a state in which Whites are in the minority. Fully 93% of visitors to wilderness areas in Los Padres are non-Hispanic Whites.<sup>4</sup> Only 1 percent of visitors to the Angeles National Forest are African-Americans.<sup>5</sup> On behalf of a diverse alliance of conservation, social justice, and community-based organizations, the Center is urging the Forest Service to implement management plans that will ensure the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of the forests, enhance human health and the environment, promote economic vitality for all communities, and engage full and fair public participation to determine the future of our forests.<sup>6</sup>



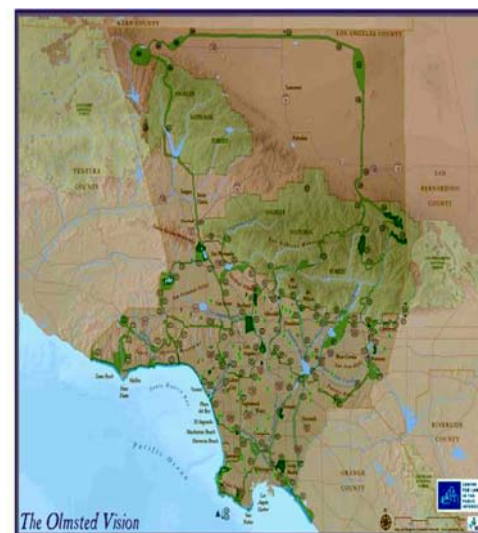
Children in the San Bernardino National Forest (image courtesy NFS).

**OUR VISION: DIVERSIFYING ACCESS TO AND SUPPORT FOR THE FORESTS.** We are guided by a collective vision for a comprehensive and coherent web of parks, forests, beaches, school yards, and transit that serves the diverse needs of diverse users, reflects the cultural landscape, and promotes human health. Our vision is inspired in part by the classic 1930 report *Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region* by Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew & Associates. The Olmsted report envisioned a comprehensive and coherent network of green space and transportation—including the Angeles and San Bernardino National Forests—to promote the social, economic and environmental vitality of Los Angeles and the health of its people. The forests are part of our vision for meeting the diverse green space needs for all the people of Southern California. Los Angeles is park poor, and there are unfair disparities in access to parks, forests, and other green space based on race, ethnicity, income, access to a car, and other factors. It is necessary to bring green space to the people, and take people to the forests and other natural lands.<sup>7</sup>

**Angeles National Forest Visitors<sup>5</sup>**

Race/Ethnicity	% of Visitors
Non-Hispanic White	79%
Latino	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%
American Indian	1%
Black	1%
Other	1%

Communities of color and low-income communities have been among the biggest supporters of bonds for green space, clean air, and clean water in the past several years. California’s recent Prop 40, for example – the largest resource bond in



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<sup>2</sup>Draft Land Management Plan Part I: Southern California National Forests Vision (“Draft Plan”) at Vision-3.  
<sup>3</sup>*Id.* at 4, 5.

<sup>4</sup>Draft Environmental Impact Statement (“DEIS”) at 3-267. Hispanics are 40% of the population in the five county Southern California region of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Ventura, Riverside, and Orange Counties; non-Hispanic Whites are 39%, Asians 10%, and African-Americans 6%. Source: Greeninfo Network, 2000 census data.

<sup>5</sup>Race/Ethnicity of Visitors to the Angeles National Forest (2000 Survey). Source: U.S. Forest Service (available at [www.losangelesalmanac.com/topics/Parks/pa07.htm](http://www.losangelesalmanac.com/topics/Parks/pa07.htm)).

<sup>6</sup>Robert García and Erica S. Flores, Public Comments to the National Forest Service regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Management Plans for the Four Forests in Southern California, August 11, 2004. Specific recommendations appear at pages 33-35.

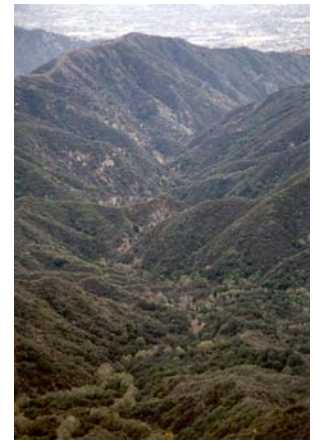
<sup>7</sup>Robert García et al., *Anatomy of the Urban Park Movement: Equal Justice, Democracy and Livability in Los Angeles*, chapter in Robert Bullard’s book on Environmental Justice to be published by the Sierra Club (forthcoming 2005); Robert García et al., *Equal Access to California’s Beaches*, Proceedings of the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (Summit II) (2002), [www.ejrc.cau.edu/summit2/Beach.pdf](http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/summit2/Beach.pdf).

United States history, with \$2.6 billion for parks, clean water and clean air – passed in March 2002 with the overwhelming support of diverse communities. Prop 40 passed with the support of 77% of black, 74% of Latino, 60% of Asian and 56% of non-Hispanic White voters. Support from voters with an annual family income below \$20,000 and with a high school diploma or less was the highest among any income or education levels.<sup>8</sup> Sixty-four percent of Californians say poorer communities have less than their fair share of parks and recreation. A majority (58%) agree that compared to wealthier neighborhoods, lower-income and minority neighborhoods bear more than their fair share of the environmental burdens of toxic waste and polluting facilities.<sup>9</sup>

**WHY FORESTS MATTER.** Robert Marshall, a seminal figure in forest management, wrote in *The People's Forests*: “We see that the forests play an important part in promoting human happiness. Our problem then is to find how we may manage our forests so as to realize their highest potentialities for the well-being of mankind.”<sup>10</sup> Forests provide a place for fun and recreation in ways that go hand in hand with other values at stake. The United Nations recognizes the right to play as a fundamental human right.<sup>11</sup> Forests are one of the most precious natural resources in Southern California, providing 29% of our green space and providing ecological benefits including wildlife habitat, clean water, and clean air.<sup>12</sup> The forests contribute billions of dollars to local, state, and national economies. All communities must receive their fair share of these economic benefits, including contracts for small business and local jobs for local workers.<sup>13</sup> Diverse employees and volunteers can help the Forest Service involve women and people of color. Community involvement, recruitment, hiring, and retention, coupled with education programs aimed at young people who may one day work for the Forest Service, are critical to forest management. The struggle for forests and open space can bring people together to create the kind of community where they want to live and raise children. Cultural and heritage resources in the forests reflect the diversity of cultures of the state, including native people, Spanish and Mexican California, African-Americans, and Asians. Social justice and stewardship of the earth have motivated spiritual leaders including Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Rigoberta Menchú and Cardinal Roger Mahony to actively support parks and green space in California.<sup>14</sup> Kenyan environmental and social justice activist Wangari Muta Maathai received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 Peace for her work on planting trees and human rights.

## IMPLEMENTING THE VISION AND VALUES.

*Recreation and Diversity.* Recreation is the predominant use of the forests in Southern California.<sup>16</sup> The Forest Service acknowledges one of its central challenges is the need “to continue to offer a variety of opportunities, experiences, uses and forest access to an expanding and increasingly diverse population, while continuing to provide resource protection.”<sup>17</sup> People from different racial and ethnic groups use parks and wilderness areas differently, constructing meaning for



Buffalo Soldiers were among the first park rangers in Yosemite.<sup>15</sup>



Sespe Creek in Los Padres National Forest.

<sup>8</sup> *L.A Times* state-wide exit poll, March 7, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Baldasare, Public Policy Institute of California Statewide Survey: Special Survey on Californians and the Environment at vi (June 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Marshall, *The People's Forest* 79 (1933, reissued 2003). See generally *id.* at 23, 57-78, 82, 171-88, 219.

<sup>11</sup> Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Proclaimed by General Assembly Resolution 1386 (XIV) of 20 November 1959, Principle 7; United Nations' Convention on the Right of the Child, General Assembly Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989, Article 31.

<sup>12</sup> See DEIS at 3-194.

<sup>13</sup> James K. Boyce & Barry G. Shelley, eds., *Natural Assets: Democratizing Environmental Ownership* 1, 207-60 (2003).

<sup>14</sup> Robert García et al., *Dreams of Fields: Soccer, Community and Equal Justice* (CLIFI 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See Ranger Shelton Johnson's moving website at [shadowsoldier.wilderness.net](http://shadowsoldier.wilderness.net).

<sup>16</sup> DEIS at 3-58.

<sup>17</sup> DEIS at 1-7.

natural areas based on their own values, cultures, histories and traditions.<sup>18</sup> For example, socializing, family togetherness, food preparation, and active recreation are common recreation patterns of Latinos in National Forests.<sup>19</sup> Non-Hispanic Whites tend to value parks and open areas for passive landscaping and natural elements. Non-Hispanic Whites disproportionately engage in “reclusive, self-oriented uses.”<sup>20</sup> The forests belong to all the people and it is important for all communities to understand the benefits of the forests and good stewardship of land.

*Human Health.* The human health implications of physical activity in the forests are profound.<sup>21</sup> Forests provide people a place to be active. In California, 27% of children are overweight and 40% are unfit. Only 24% of the state’s fifth, seventh, and ninth graders met minimal physical fitness standards in 2003. In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), just 17% of fifth graders, 16% of seventh graders, and less than 11% of ninth graders met the minimum fitness standards in the 2002-03 school year.<sup>22</sup> Over 91% of LAUSD students are students of color. The assembly districts with the highest proportion of overweight children also have the highest concentration of people of color.<sup>23</sup> The benefits of open space extend beyond physical health. Green space is linked to improved mental health. For example, symptoms of children with attention deficit disorder are relieved by contact with nature.<sup>24</sup>

*Community Programs.* In the early 1990s, the Forest Service established the Greenlink program with the mission to create stronger links between recreation, environmental, and urban forestry activities and key communities in Los Angeles. Even though Greenlink effectively served the Forest Service’s conservation education, recreation, and natural resource goals, the Forest Service eliminated funding for the program by 2001. The California Department of Parks and Recreation developed FamCamp to allow inner city families, who lack equipment and expertise, to participate in great outdoor experiences, and this community program can serve as a model for the Forest Service. Adequate funding for community programs should be built into existing Forest Service budgets.

*Transit to Trails.* From 1893 to 1938, the Mount Lowe Railway provided public transportation Los Angeles to the heights of the Angeles National Forest. This rail line was constructed and funded by Professor T. S. C. Lowe, for whom the mountain was named. It was his dream of building a railway into the scenic, mountainous terrain of the San Gabriels to attract people from all over the country, and the Angeles National Forest became a premier tourist destination. Today, according to a 2004 study conducted by University of Southern California students, there is virtually no good way to reach the four Southern California forests using public transportation.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Northern California has an extensive transit to

<b>Physically Fit Students in L.A.</b>	
17%	Fifth Graders
16%	Seventh Graders
<11%	Ninth Graders
<b>California’s Children</b>	
Children Unfit	40%
Children Overweight	27%



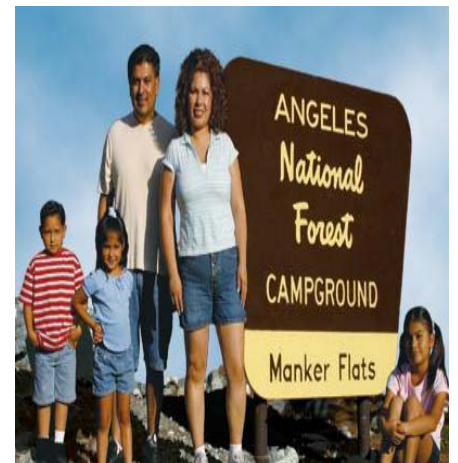
<sup>18</sup> Alison H. Deming & Lauret E. Savoy, *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity and the Natural World* (2002).  
<sup>19</sup> See Deborah J. Chavez, “Mexican-American Outdoor Recreation: Home Community & Natural Environment,” presented at Hawaii International Conference on Social Sciences (June 2003); Deborah J. Chavez, “Adaptive Management in Outdoor Recreation: Serving Hispanics in Southern California,” *Western Journal of Applied Forestry*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (July 2002). See also Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, “Urban Form and Social Context: Cultural Differentiation in the Uses of Urban Parks,” 14 *Journal of Planning and Education and Research* (1995) at 100-01.  
<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 95.  
<sup>21</sup> Robert García et al., *Healthy Children, Healthy Communities: Parks, Schools, and Sustainable Regional Planning*, in Symposium on Urban Equity, 31 *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 101 (2004).  
<sup>22</sup> Press Release, CA Dept. of Educ., *State Schools Chief O’Connell Announces California Kids’ 2002 Physical Fitness Results*, (Jan. 28, 2003).  
<sup>23</sup> California Center for Public Health Advocacy, *An Epidemic: Overweight and Unfit Children in California Assembly Districts*, 5 (Dec. 2002), available at [www.gisplanning.net/publichealth/help.asp](http://www.gisplanning.net/publichealth/help.asp).  
<sup>24</sup> A. Faber Taylor et al., “Coping with ADD: The surprise connection to green play settings,” *Environment & Behavior* 33, 54-77 (2001).  
<sup>25</sup> Ron Frescas, Chris Martin, and Christine Steenken, “Public Transportation to Local National Forests” (Univ. of Southern California, April 2004) (forthcoming at [www.clipi.com](http://www.clipi.com)). See generally Robert García and Thomas A. Rubin, *Cross Road Blues: Transportation Justice and the MTA Consent Decree*, chapter in book *Running on Empty* edited by Prof. Karen Lucas (2004).

trails program to maximize access to the wilderness for all communities. People of color and low-income communities disproportionately lack access to a car to reach the forests. The Forest Service must address the need for transportation alternatives to the forests in partnership with other agencies.

*Adventure Pass.* Adventure Pass fees were implemented as a way for heavily used forests, such as the four in Southern California, to fund services and upkeep. The Adventure Pass is inefficient, ineffective, arbitrary, capricious, and discriminatory. There is no information about how much it costs to administer the program compared to how much revenue is generated for forest programs. There are no audits of how the money is actually used. The Adventure Pass program has a disparate impact on the working families and diverse users. The Forest Service must examine and improve Adventure Pass to serve the community.

**THE PEOPLE’S FORESTS.** The Center for Law in the Public Interest is working to shape Forest Service management plans to: (1) Increase access to the National Forests for all communities; (2) Expand opportunities for low-impact recreation like family outings, hiking and fishing; (3) Address the impact of the forests on the health of our communities; (4) Create stronger links between recreation, environmental, and forestry activities in key communities; (5) Diversify small business, employment, and volunteer opportunities involving the forests; (6) Eliminate excessive development in the forests, keep roadless areas road free, and protect habitat and wildlife; (7) Ensure equitable funding for land acquisition, facilities, programs, and operations; (8) Provide public transportation to reach the forests; (9) Implement a forest entry system that is fair to working families; and (10) Create an Advisory Committee with diverse representatives to address environmental justice and environmental quality. The Center supports management alternatives that provide stronger protection for habitat, reasonable wilderness designation, wild and scenic river protections, and closure of unnecessary roads, while meeting the needs of diverse users. The Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council have adopted our comments, and we have adopted theirs.<sup>26</sup>

In 1933 Robert Marshall wrote, “The time has come when we must discard the unsocial view that our woods are the lumbermen’s and substitute the broader ideal that every acre of woodland in the country is rightly a part of the people’s forests.”<sup>27</sup> Seventy years later, we are looking forward to implementing the vision for the people’s forests.



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<sup>26</sup> We support Alternatives 3 and 6 in the DEIS.

<sup>27</sup> Marshall, *supra*, at 219. See generally Robert García et al., *We Shall Be Moved: Community Activism as a Tool for Reversing the Rollback*, chapter in book edited by Denise C. Morgan et al., *Awakening from the Dream: Pursuing Civil Rights in a Conservative Era* (forthcoming 2005).