

## BLACK/WHITE OUTDOOR RECREATION

### PREFERENCES AND PARTICIPATION:

#### ILLINOIS STATE PARKS

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Black/white comparisons of outdoor recreation preferences and behavior from a statewide survey identify a significantly greater black orientation to "developed sites" and "social interaction." Strategies are recommended to enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for blacks, and long-term research needs are identified.

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Outdoor recreation planners face major challenges in meeting the needs of "minority groups." Understanding the needs of these diverse groups has been difficult for recreation planners and managers because few minorities are on recreation staffs, and minorities have not always been active in recreation planning and public involvement efforts. The problem is especially complex for those concerned with resources outside urban areas who do not know why there is often limited minority use of the areas or what to do differently to enhance opportunities for minority groups. The limited research to date suggests significant differences in recreation preferences and behavior among some racial and ethnic groups that have implications for how we plan for outdoor recreation sites, but there is a need for additional information to guide recreation plans and programs.

This paper focuses on the outdoor recreation preferences and participation of blacks and whites as expressed in a statewide survey. Limited observations preclude the inclusion of Hispanic, Asian, and other minority groups in the analysis. Our approach is to (1) identify black/white differences in recreation preferences and behavior, (2) explain these differences, and (3) discuss the implications for outdoor recreation planning and research. We believe comparisons with whites can be a starting point for efforts to better serve blacks because outdoor recreation planners are most familiar with the recreation behavior and preferences of whites.

#### The Earlier Study

A previous comparison of the outdoor recreation participation and preferences of black and white Chicago households based on data for 1976 identified a number of similarities and differences (Dwyer and Hutchison 1990). One finding with important implications for planning outdoor recreation sites was a stronger black inclination to select "developed facilities and conveniences" rather than "preserved natural areas" as the more important consideration in developing new recreation areas for people. In addition, when asked whether they view outdoor recreation as an opportunity to "visit or meet new people" or for "getting away from a lot of other people," blacks were more likely than whites to select "meet people." In both instances the black/white differences were statistically significant (.05 level) in simple comparisons as well as when individual and household characteristics were taken into account. Black/white

differences in activity participation also suggested a greater black orientation to "developed sites" and "meeting people."

#### The Present Study

A recent survey (1988) of Illinois adults makes it possible to further explore the recreation orientation of blacks to "developed sites" and "meeting people." The focus of the present effort is on a particular resource -- Illinois State Parks -- and there is a range of responses to support the analysis, as well as additional information on the characteristics of individual respondents, their household, and their location to help interpret responses. This provides for a more focused and stronger analysis than in the earlier study.

The present study is based on data collected for 1987 as part of the Illinois Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning process. The Survey Research Laboratory of the University of Illinois conducted telephone interviews with 1,015 randomly selected adult residents of Illinois for the Illinois Department of Conservation. Information was obtained on participation in 32 outdoor activities, overnight trips taken within and outside Illinois where an important part of the trip was to enjoy the outdoors, usage of parks and other outdoor facilities, satisfaction with state park facilities, and attitudes on methods for funding state parks. Important limitations on the analysis imposed by the data include the small number of black American respondents (125); the individual, household, and locational characteristics that were gathered; the questions that were asked; 32 activities for which participation data were gathered (one, "other outdoor game/sport," was not used because it was too broad to interpret). The limited number of blacks in the sample restricted the spatial breakdowns of residence to Chicago, Chicago suburbs, and the remainder of the state. Social background variables included family income (4 categories), age of the adult respondent (5 categories), gender, number of individuals in the household, and number of adults in the household.

When the recreation preferences and behavior of blacks and whites are compared, there is a fundamental question of whether the differences are due to culture or to other dimensions. The question often asked is "What differences would there be if we were able to base the analysis entirely on interviews with blacks and whites who were similar in all other respects except for race?" Because black and white respondents often differ along a number of dimensions in addition to race, it is often useful to look at black/white differences in a broader context with these other variables accounted for.

Probit and logit models were used to account for other variables (including individual, household, and locational characteristics) in the analysis of black/white differences. The probit model was used when the response involved two choices; the logit model was used when there were more than two choices. The models tell us whether race and each of the social background variables are significantly associated with the response when all variables are accounted for jointly.

Black respondents were more likely than whites to be from Chicago, to be in the lower categories of household income, and to live in households with a large number of individuals but a small number of adults. These differences explain a number of black/white differences in outdoor recreation participation when considered jointly with all other social background characteristics of respondents.

### Main Purpose of the State Park System

When asked to choose between "protect natural resources" and "provide recreation for people" as the main purpose of the Illinois State Park System, blacks were significantly more likely than whites to select "to provide recreation for people" (i.e., 52 percent of blacks, 25 percent of whites)(Table 1). This difference remained significant when all other individual, household, and locational variables were accounted for, with race the only variable out of the set that had a significant association with the choice. These results appear consistent with 1976 survey findings that blacks were significantly more likely than whites to select "developed facilities and conveniences" rather than "preserved natural areas" as more important when developing new recreation areas for people.

Table 1. What should be the main purpose of the Illinois State Park System?

	Percent	
	Black	White
To protect natural resources	38	65
To provide recreation	52	25
Both	6	9
Don't know	3	1

Overall black/white difference significant at .05 level.

### Important Attributes of State Parks

When users were asked about the importance of state park attributes, blacks and whites gave similar responses to 11 of 12 attributes presented to them. However, blacks were significantly more likely than whites to rank "has organized events" as very important (blacks = 63 percent, whites = 10 percent) (Table 2). This difference was also significant with all other variables accounted for, and race was the only variable that had a significant association with responses concerning the importance of this attribute. Organized events can be viewed as having a social or "meet people" dimension, and the greater importance of this attribute for blacks can be interpreted as consistent with the earlier finding that blacks were more likely than whites to view outdoor recreation as an opportunity to "visit or meet new people" rather than for "getting away from a lot of other people."

When all other variables were accounted for, blacks were significantly more likely than whites to indicate that "has camping facilities" was an important attribute of state parks. This result was closely tied to the number of adults in the household, indicating that the lower number of adults in black households may have limited the importance they attached to opportunities for camping at state parks (Table 2).

### Activities Engaged In at State Parks

Blacks were significantly less likely than whites to hike on a state park trail (55 percent of whites, 27 percent of blacks), but significantly more likely than whites to play ball or other games at a state park (73 percent of blacks, 35 percent of whites) (Table 3). The significantly higher black participation in "playing ball or other games" would seem consistent with the "provide recreation" orientation and perhaps a preference for "organized events" by black respondents. With all other variables accounted for, the significantly higher black participation in "playing ball and other games" at state parks remains; but the black/white difference in hiking on trails drops from just above to just below the level of significance, and a significant black/white difference in fishing at state parks emerges. When all variables were considered jointly, fishing at

state parks was more likely among those who live in areas outside Chicago. The concentration of blacks in Chicago apparently tends to suppress their fishing activity at state parks (Table 3).

Table 2. Percent of Illinois State Park users indicating that specified park attributes were very important to them.

	Black	White
Is clean and well maintained	95	97
Is safe	100	91
Has parking facilities	86	80
Special natural features/scenery	81	74
Big enough for variety of uses	77	58
Has a lake or river	73	56
Is not too crowded	59	48
Is close to home	45	44
Has camping facilities	50	29
Has fishing opportunities	36	25
Has organized events	63*	10*
Has hunting opportunities	14	8

\* Black/white difference significant at .05 level.

Table 3. Activities engaged in by adults at Illinois State Parks in the previous 12 months.

	Percent Participating	
	Black	White
Picnic	86	2
Hike on a trail	27*	55*
Photograph the scenery	36	41
Play ball or other games	73*	35*
Birdwatch	23	24
Fish	32	20
Camp overnight	18	18
Horseback ride	9	4
Use overnight facilities	9	4
Hunt	5	2

\* Black/white difference significant at .05 level.

Black/white differences in responses concerning activities engaged in at state parks were generally consistent with participation patterns in the 31 activities (not limited to state parks) included in the analysis. Out of 31 activities, blacks were significantly more likely than whites to participate in 3 -- all of which are outdoor sports (softball/baseball, outdoor basketball, and soccer). These three activities are generally consistent with an orientation to "developed sites," "organized events," and "meeting people." Whites were significantly more likely than blacks to participate in 15 activities, many of which tend to be associated with water, snow or ice, and natural environments. These activities are likely to be associated with a "natural environment," an absence of "organized events," and opportunities for "getting away from people." Controlling for social background variables reduced the number of activities where there was a significant black/white difference from 18 to 10. However, the same overall pattern remains: blacks are more likely than whites to participate in softball/baseball, and whites more likely than blacks to participate in activities oriented to water, snow and ice, and natural environments.

### Choice of State Parks

When respondents were presented with "to enjoy natural surroundings" or "to enjoy outdoor activities made possible by park facilities" as reasons why they use Illinois State Parks, there were no significant black/white differences in the responses, either in a simple comparison or with all social background variables accounted for. Although the lack of a black/white difference in reasons for using state parks appears somewhat inconsistent with the greater orientation of blacks to "provide recreation for people" as the main purpose of the State Park System, ball playing at a State Park, and the interest in "organized events" at state parks, it was entirely consistent with the similar importance attached to a wide range of "developed" and "natural" park attributes by blacks and whites (Table 2).

Blacks were significantly less likely than whites to report that they used a state park or other state-operated recreation areas in Illinois in the previous 12 months (18 percent of blacks, 33 percent of whites). There was, however, no significant difference in the average days of use per year by blacks and whites who used these areas (7 days for blacks and 5 days for whites). When social background variables were accounted for, the black/white difference in percent using state parks or other state-operated recreation areas in Illinois was not significant. Use of these resources tends to be associated with residence outside Chicago and high household incomes.

The responses concerning use of state parks are part of a general pattern of blacks tending to concentrate their outdoor recreation activities in areas close to home such as vacant lots or streets, city or county parks, forest preserves, or school yards in Illinois, rather than in more distant areas or clubs or commercial facilities. In addition, when a wide range of areas was considered, black/white differences tended to be greatest in the likelihood of using an area rather than in the number of days of activity by users (i.e., blacks may be less likely to use a type of facility, but black and white users spend a similar number of days at the facility). There were no significant black/white differences in the average days of use by users of any of the types of areas.

When asked the main reason why they haven't visited an Illinois State Park in the past 12 months, blacks and whites tended to give similar responses to the list of choices presented. There were no significant differences in any of the response categories.

### Discussion

When individual, household, and locational variables were accounted for, significant black/white differences in recreation behavior and preferences remained. These differences include a greater black orientation to "providing recreation for people" rather than "protect natural resources" as the main purpose of the State Park System, a greater black inclination to select "has organized events" and "has camping" as important attributes of an Illinois State Park, a greater probability than whites for engaging in outdoor sports at Illinois State Parks and in general (i.e., regardless of the location), and a greater probability of blacks engaging in fishing at Illinois State Parks.

### Suggestions For Planners

Planners interested in increasing the outdoor recreation opportunities for blacks in Illinois might consider the suggestions presented below which focus on changes in current efforts to better accommodate those needs of blacks that differ from those of whites. These suggestions must not be interpreted as encompassing all that should be done to meet the

needs of blacks (i.e., we must avoid stereotyping blacks by their differences from whites or treating blacks as a homogeneous group). There may be several activities that blacks do not currently engage in and would like to, as well as many kinds of areas that blacks would like to use but currently do not. There are also a great many similarities in outdoor recreation preferences and behavior of blacks and whites, and a number of plans and programs will serve the needs of both groups.

**Sites close to home.** Because of the significant concentration of blacks in Chicago (and other large cities) and possible limitations on their travel (lower incomes, large families, few adults, fear of discrimination); emphasize the creation and upgrading of outdoor recreation sites in and near Chicago and other large cities.

**Facilities for sports.** Since some blacks have a significant orientation to outdoor sports such as softball, baseball, and soccer, provide opportunities for these activities at outdoor recreation areas.

**Special events.** Given the importance that some blacks place on "has special events" at state parks, undertake a program of instituting, expanding, and publicizing such events at state parks and other outdoor recreation areas throughout Illinois, especially near large urban centers such as Chicago.

**Low fees.** Because low incomes and large numbers of individuals in some black households appear to restrict recreation activity, keep fees and charges low at outdoor recreation areas, and look to economical ways of providing equipment and supplies.

**Discrimination.** Other studies have shown that discrimination is a key problem that limits the recreation behavior of some blacks (West 1989). Fear of discriminatory behavior may well contribute to the urban-oriented patterns of recreation behavior by many blacks that is reported here. Promising ways of overcoming this may be to have black personnel working at the recreation facility and to encourage large group outings such as church groups.

**Group programs.** Given that large household sizes and limited number of adults appear to limit the recreation outings of some black households, provide for group outings where mutual support is fostered, and offer guided tours and other programs for children at outdoor recreation areas. These efforts could help overcome some of the barriers to camping at state parks.

**Build on similarities as well.** Black/white similarities in recreation participation and behavior include similar likelihoods of participating in 8 of 10 activities at Illinois State Parks (Table 3), the attachment of similar importance to 11 of 12 attributes of Illinois State Parks (Table 2), similar probabilities of using four of seven types of outdoor recreation resources, similar probability of participating in 18 of 31 activities, and similar days of participation among participants in 23 of 31 activities, as well as similar responses concerning the importance of barriers to use of state parks. Given these and other similarities in black and white outdoor recreation preferences and behavior, many actions would enhance recreation opportunities for both blacks and whites.

### Suggestions for the Longer Term

In the longer term, it is important to look beyond current patterns of behavior, crude measures of preferences, and simple comparisons with whites to learn more about the perceptions,

preferences, and desired outdoor recreation behavior of blacks and other important groups.

Variations within the black population. To avoid stereotyping blacks by their group averages or their differences from whites, explore more fully the wide range of recreation areas used and activities engaged in by blacks. This can follow up on the efforts of Woodard (1988) and Taylor (1991) and must give careful attention to the identification of outdoor recreation from the perspective of blacks. Additional attention should be given to the site preferences of blacks. Variations in recreation behavior and preferences among blacks should be explored, including different ethnic groups within the black race, such as Jamaicans, African Americans, and others. Learn from those who break the stereotypes. If our interest is in making certain that a wide range of opportunities is available to blacks, there may be a great deal to learn from blacks who participate in activities with traditionally low levels of black participation or use remote natural areas where blacks are seldom found. Organizations made up of black participants in some of these activities could be involved in the research. How did black individuals get started in the activity? What barriers did they need to overcome? Where do they get information about opportunities to participate? What do they think might encourage other blacks to participate in the activity? What are their suggestions for planning and management of opportunities for the activity? Is there need for additional information about opportunities? How should that information be disseminated?

Barriers to use of areas. Although blacks and whites gave similar responses to a list of reasons for not using state parks, additional work is needed to explore the barriers to participation in activities or use of areas. A fundamental dimension of the black/white differences in recreation participation is a greater urban orientation of blacks. Blacks tend to live in urban areas, concentrate a substantial amount of their recreation activity in urban areas, engage in the kinds of activities that can be participated in the urban environment, and express preferences for the kinds of developments at state parks that are often associated with an urban environment, such as facilities for recreation and "special events." Part of this orientation appears to be a function of historical developments and relatively low incomes and mobility, but signs of this urban - oriented pattern exist even when those variables are accounted for. West (1989) suggests that fear of discrimination inhibits black recreation participation -- particularly travel, but we lack information about discrimination and other barriers. To what extent is lack of information about opportunities a problem? The concept of barriers may be useful in explaining a number of differences. Black/white differences in the percent participating in individual activities are far more significant than is the case with average number of days of participation in Illinois by participants in particular activities. There was a similar finding with the 1976 data. Similarly, black/white differences in portion of each group using particular facilities are far more significant than the number of days of participation in Illinois by black and white users of particular facilities. There are far greater differences in black/white responses concerning the purpose of the State Park System than in reasons for selecting individual parks by those who use the system. Thus the major differences are whether an individual engages in an activity or uses an area, rather than the annual use by participants. This suggests that perhaps barriers to participation are at work and that those who overcome them have participation patterns much like whites who engage in the same activities or use the same areas.

New approaches to gathering information. Analysis of surveys such as the ones on which this paper is based can serve only as a crude tool for planning. Discussions with the black community and its leaders are critical. One approach that we have a great deal of faith in is focus group discussions, and we have or are currently conducting them with college students, community groups, and church groups.

Additional groups. The research should be expanded to other important "minority groups" such as those with Hispanic or Asian origins. Preliminary research suggests that there are substantial differences in recreation behavior between these groups that have significant implications for the management of outdoor recreation resources. By looking at a wide range of groups, we can better understand and improve the recreation opportunities made available to each.

Market segments. The research might also be expanded beyond ethnic groups to define segments of the population with similar recreation preferences and behaviors that could serve as a basis of recreation programs. These segments might consist of combinations of race, ethnicity, age, gender, income, neighborhood setting, access to a personal automobile, and household composition. The analysis presented here suggests that the joint influence of these variables may be more useful in explaining outdoor recreation participation and behavior than race alone.

## Summary and Conclusions

The results parallel results from an earlier study and identify a significantly greater black orientation to "developed sites" and "social interaction" that persists when individual, household, and locational variables are accounted for. There are significant black/white differences in activities engaged in at state parks as well as elsewhere in Illinois, and in the kinds of areas used. Some of these differences are reduced in significance when individual, household, and locational variables are accounted for, but others persist.

Planning strategies for increasing the use and enjoyment of outdoor recreation areas by blacks might include developing and enhancing areas near Chicago and other large cities with substantial black populations, providing opportunities for outdoor sports as well as fishing and camping, providing special events, keeping fees and charges low, providing for group outings and programs for children, hiring minority staff and making other efforts to reduce discrimination, and improving the overall quality of opportunities provided.

The development of longer term strategies for enhancing the opportunities made available for blacks must be grounded in further research that includes investigation of the wide range of outdoor recreation activities, behaviors, and preferences of blacks; careful analysis of blacks who do participate in activities or use areas where whites have traditionally predominated and determination of what facilitated their entry into that activity or use of that area; a much more detailed analysis of barriers to the use of recreation resources outside of urban areas, including discrimination, as well as means of breaking down those barriers; an extension of the analysis to other minority groups, and a broader approach to identifying market segments for outdoor recreation planning that consider race and other individual, household, and locational variables.

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