



2022 CONSERVATION POLICY TOOLKIT

**A GUIDE TO LAND, WATER AND CLIMATE ISSUES
& THE IMPACT ON LATINO COMMUNITIES**



Hispanic
Access
Foundation

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



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Thank you for reading the 2022 edition of Hispanic Access Foundation’s Conservation Policy Toolkit. As we enter the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, I am continually reminded of the importance of our health and the health of our families and communities. Latinos and other communities of color continue to sicken and die disproportionately from the virus’s spread, in addition to suffering first, last, and worst from the climate-fueled natural disasters that increase in severity every year.

These injustices are intimately connected to the local, national, and global need for conservation and action on climate change. Latino communities across the United States are experiencing disproportionate health and economic impacts of poor air quality, extreme heat and aridification, wildfires, drought, storms and other severe effects of the climate crisis, in addition to the alarming loss of nature throughout the country. With our nation’s shifting demographics and Latinos on track to becoming 30% of the U.S. population by 2050, Latinos will continue to experience these severe consequences of a warming planet at a disproportionate rate.

The Latino community’s overwhelming support for climate action can show our leaders the way forward in ensuring a just transition to an economy that protects our climate, homes, health, and jobs. And with scientists urging policymakers to protect at least 30% of U.S. lands and ocean by 2030 to address the biodiversity and climate crises, the strong pro-conservation stance of Latino voters can be pivotal in protecting far more lands, waters, and ocean over the next decade. With the involvement of the Latino community in environmental policy, we can ensure that every child in the United States has the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of nature and clean air near their home.

Each section of this toolkit covers the health, economic, public opinion, and cultural implications of the policies that protect our public lands, waters, ocean, and climate. We have continued to build a new section on the COVID-19 public health pandemic, and how conservation and climate protection policies can mitigate the severity of the current pandemic and help prepare for future health crises.

The environment unifies the Latino electorate. Latinos want their decision-makers to take bold action to power up our economy and by doing so combat the multidimensional challenges our country is facing – from climate to COVID-19, these crises are deeply interconnected. Regardless of partisan differences, Latino voters support legislation that makes real and lasting climate progress, and they want the president and Congress to expand and enforce environmental protections. Data and polling shows, Latino voters want to help rebuild our economy by investing in clean energy jobs and green infrastructure, and they overwhelmingly support legislation that ensures clean water and healthy air.

Hispanic Access Foundation is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and our staff is based in communities throughout the U.S. We have developed extensive, trust-based community networks across the country in order to develop Latino leaders and bring underrepresented voices to the table. We hope to be a resource for you moving forward.

Shanna

CONSERVATION, CLIMATE & COVID-19 IN LATINO COMMUNITIES

Many of the root causes of climate change also increase the risk of pandemics. Deforestation, which occurs mostly for agricultural or livestock expansion, is the largest cause of habitat loss worldwide. Loss of habitat forces animals to migrate and contact other animals and people, sharing germs. Large livestock farms can also serve as a source for spillover of infections from animals to people.¹ In addition, changes to temperature and rainfall patterns caused by global warming increase the spread of pathogens and disease vectors. Ending deforestation, vastly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees would therefore help limit the increasing risk of infectious disease.

In addition, the production of oil and natural gas contaminates the air, water, and soil near oil and gas development facilities. Air pollution helps the coronavirus spread and makes those who breathe it sicker from COVID-19, meaning that oil and gas development increases COVID-19 risk for those who live nearby. Those nearby, contaminated communities are more likely to be made up of people of color, who even before COVID-19 were at additional risk of health problems caused by local pollution and systemic racism. Therefore, even without taking into account the impact that oil and gas has on climate change, fossil fuel production is disproportionately killing people of color who live in these environmental justice communities—and this racist threat to public health is accelerated during a respiratory pandemic like COVID-19.²

We must use the pandemic as an opportunity to build lasting change toward a healthier future for all. Conservation is intimately linked to public health, from pollution reduction to stormwater management to the disease-spreading effects of climate change. If targeted with an eye for justice, conservation policies can have dramatic effects toward reversing inequities that cause Latinos to be disproportionately burdened by COVID-19, respiratory diseases, and other severe and chronic conditions.

- Latinos have been left behind in the pandemic: sickening and dying at higher rates, suffering from higher unemployment rates and worse economic outcomes, inability to work from home, healthcare disparities, and more.³ Immigrants, college students, and disabled adults were also less likely to receive stimulus checks and pandemic aid.⁴
 - Health crises compound with the climate crisis to create a dire situation for Latino households. One such area is in energy insecurity (see Climate Impacts: Extreme Heat below). In the spring and summer of 2020, during the first 2 COVID waves, over 27% of Latinos at or below 200% of the federal poverty line could not pay their energy bills, and 30% did not receive a stimulus check.⁵
 - In addition, climate-fueled disasters like wildfires and mudslides threaten Latino homes and compound the public health danger.⁶ (See Disaster Preparedness section below).
- Latinos are disproportionately likely to be working in jobs and living in conditions that expose them to the coronavirus. Even in areas with high vaccination rates, transmission and health risks remain high for Latinos.⁷ **As of January 2022, the highest weekly cases and deaths have been within the Hispanic/Latino population.**⁸

- The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads more quickly in areas with more air pollution, which are disproportionately inhabited by Latinos and other communities of color. **Studies have established a direct link between exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality.**
- Because they are more likely to live in polluted areas without sufficient vegetation and spaces to get outdoors, people of color and low income communities are more susceptible to developing immunocompromising illnesses such as asthma—a risk factor for COVID-19.⁹
 - Even during the brief shutdowns in 2020, when air pollution decreased in most urban areas, the pollutant nitrogen dioxide remained disproportionately higher in marginalized areas, likely due to continued industrial pollution and heavy-duty trucking.¹⁰
- The coronavirus pandemic has also exposed an uneven and inequitable distribution of nearby outdoor spaces for recreation, respite, and enjoyment. Particularly in communities of color and low-income communities, families have too few safe, close-to-home parks and coastlines where they are able to get outside. **A lack of community green space is correlated with higher COVID-19 rates in communities of color.**¹¹
- At this time of social distancing and increased safety of gathering outdoors, when clean, fresh air is most wanted and needed, nature is out of reach for too many, especially communities of color, low-income communities, and families with children.¹²
 - While many neighborhoods implemented “Open Streets” and other programs to increase open outdoor spaces early in the pandemic, they disproportionately excluded lower-income neighborhoods.¹³

THEREFORE, CLEAN AIR AND ACCESS TO NATURE FOR ALL IS NOT ONLY A MUST FOR CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE ACTION, BUT EQUALLY NECESSARY FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENDING THE PANDEMIC.





LANDS & NATURE

Public lands are a key component of our identity, and they weave a narrative of the diverse and complex history of our nation. These places, all of which are Indigenous ancestral lands, preserve our shared cultural heritage, provide places to recreate and connect with nature, spend time with family and our communities, and significantly contribute to industries, local economies, and millions of jobs and employment opportunities. Latinos have been an integral part of this shared history. However, our access to public lands, the equal representation of our cultural heritage, and our workforce contributions are not always acknowledged or represented.

All communities should have equitable access to nearby green space, the ability to reach it, and features that honor and welcome diverse languages, inclusive histories, and uses of parkland. Natural areas and natural resources should be managed inclusively and locally, reflecting the communities they serve, with co-stewardship by Indigenous and tribal nations. Given historical inequities, nature deprivation of communities of color, and the theft of lands belonging to Indigenous communities, the priority of nature protection and restoration efforts should be in communities of color, particularly in urban areas and those historically marginalized and on the frontlines of environmental injustice.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

LATINO HEALTH

- The U.S. Latino/Hispanic population is 18.4% and is forecast to rise more than 30% by 2060.²⁴
- Latinos have the highest prevalence of adult physical inactivity (32%), followed by non-Hispanic Black (30%), non-Hispanic Indigenous (29%) and non-Hispanic white (23%).²⁵
- Latinos and other communities of color in the US are three times as likely to live somewhere that is “nature deprived” than white communities. This means there are far fewer parks, forests, streams, beaches, and other natural places near Black, Latino, and Asian communities. This “Nature Gap” has left a legacy of poorer health and COVID-19 severity, higher stress levels, worse educational outcomes, lack of recreation and business opportunities and greater vulnerability to extreme heat and flooding in these nature-deprived neighborhoods.²⁶

- Latinos are 21% more likely than whites to live in urban heat islands, or areas dominated by asphalt and concrete where parks, shade-providing trees, and other vegetation are lacking. Urban heat islands can produce breathing difficulties, exhaustion, heat cramps, heat stroke and even death.
- Areas within a 10-minute walk of a park can be as much as six degrees cooler than surrounding parkless areas. However, parks in majority non-white neighborhoods are half as large and serve nearly five times more people than parks in majority white neighborhoods. Also, parks serving majority low-income households are, on average, four times smaller and serve nearly four times more people than parks that serve majority high-income households.¹⁷

LATINO CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORY

- The U.S. Latino identity is composed of many narratives; there is not one dominant story that can completely tell the history and the contributions of Latinos, nor any particular community or culture, to the United States. For example, 20.3 million Hispanic Americans identify as multiracial.¹⁸
- Too often our stories and contributions to this nation are not represented in the narrative that our public lands and designated historical sites portray. Thus, the protection of existing monuments and historical sites, such as Cesar E. Chavez National Monument in California and Casa Amadeo in New York, and the creation of new parks and monuments are an opportunity to expand our nation's narrative to be inclusive of the histories and contributions of diverse Latino communities throughout the United States.
- Since 1906, when Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act into law and granted the executive office the authority to establish national monuments, 17 presidents – nine Republicans and eight Democrats – have used the law to protect our natural and cultural heritage. Opportunities to protect the heritage and open spaces treasured by people of color abound, from designation of the Castner Range National Monument in El Paso, TX, to Avi Kwa Ame in NV.



LATINO RECREATION

- Demographics are changing: The Latino population is the largest-growing minority population in the United States and is estimated to comprise 28% of the U.S. population by 2050.¹⁹ Latino participation in outdoor recreation is growing, and new outdoor participants are more likely to be nonwhite.²⁰ The future of public lands and public health thus depends on engaging and welcoming our diverse youth.
- As the Latino population becomes larger and more complex, their outdoor recreation preferences and perceptions are also changing. When asked which types of outdoor recreation they participate in regularly, Latino voters said that 75% participate in hiking, running or walking, 44% said camping, 39% said picnicking, 32% said bird watching/viewing wildlife, 21% said mountain/trail biking, 26% said off-road riding/snowmobile, and 26% said boating/rafting/kayaking.
- Latinos are great users of public lands — 88% of Latino voters in the West have visited national public lands

in the past year.²¹

- Asked about what policymakers should place more emphasis on in upcoming decisions around public lands, 73% of Latino Western voters pointed to conservation efforts and recreational usage, prioritizing that over energy production.

LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- 70% of Latinos see public lands, such as national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife areas as helping the economies in these states.
- 92% support addressing the backlog of infrastructure repairs, reducing risk of wildfires, and natural resource protection on national public lands such as National Parks by providing jobs and training to unemployed people.²²
- The outdoor recreation economy generated \$887 billion in consumer spending and 7.6 million jobs in 2019.²³
- 79% of National Park Service employees are white, and 62% of all employees are male. Black employees comprise almost 7% of the NPS's permanent full-time workforce, significantly less than the 13.4% of Black people in the national population. Hispanic and Latino employees also are underrepresented, making up 5.6% of the Park Service general workforce despite accounting for 18.5% of the population.²⁴ Lack of racially-diverse representation is common across the U.S. conservation workforce.

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 87% of Latino voters in the West, and 89% in the Chesapeake region, support setting a national goal of conserving 30% of U.S. land, waters, and ocean by the year 2030 (known as 30x30).^{25 26}
- 84% of Latino voters in the West, and 89% in the Chesapeake, agree that we should create new national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges and tribal protected areas to protect historic sites or areas for outdoor recreation.²⁷
- 75% of Latino voters in the West and Chesapeake region agree that we should strictly limit where and how new oil and gas development takes place on public lands.^{28 29}
 - 93% of Latino voters in the West support requiring oil and gas companies to use updated equipment and technology to prevent leaks of methane gas and other pollution into the air; 86% support requiring oil and gas companies, rather than federal and state governments, to pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs; and 68% support increasing the fees that oil and gas companies pay to have the opportunity to drill on national public lands.
- 82% of Latino voters in the West, and 90% in the Chesapeake, support directing funding to ensure adequate access to parks and natural areas for lower-income people and communities of color that have disproportionately lacked them.^{30 31}





RIVERS & WATERSHEDS

The health of Latino communities is intimately tied to the health of our waterways, which also play a role in Latino livelihoods, culture, history, and spirituality. Rivers flow through nearly 640 million acres of public lands in the US. Our public lands and waters are deeply connected to our stories, provide a place for families and friends to connect and relax, offer ample opportunities to create memories with loved ones, and are economic drivers from coast to coast.

Our rivers and streams are a priceless resource—they provide drinking water for a growing population, irrigation for crops, habitat for aquatic life, and countless recreational opportunities. In addition, water recreation has mental health benefits and relieves stress. But pollution from urban and agricultural areas continues to pose a threat to water quality. Since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, federal, state, and local governments have invested billions of dollars in reducing the amount of pollution entering streams and rivers. Yet more than half of the nation's streams have ecosystems in poor condition.³³

The urgency to protect our rivers and watersheds is imperative. Healthy waterways are needed to ensure clean water access for all, access to freshwater recreation for traditionally underserved communities, and resilience to droughts and flooding, which Latino communities are particularly vulnerable to.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

LATINO HEALTH

- Communities across the country – primarily low-income and communities of color – struggle to afford their water, or are faced with concerns over contamination from toxins, like lead and PFAS. What's more, drinking water violations are more likely to occur in places where residents are people of color.³⁴
- Living rivers and healthy watersheds provide profound benefits to nearby cities. They provide water supplies, filter out water and air pollutants, build coastlines by moving sand to ocean beaches, provide critical habitat, sequester carbon and other greenhouse gasses, regulate floodwaters, and create cooling oases for relaxation and recreation.³⁵

- Challenges to drinking water vary across U.S. communities and include threats from aging infrastructure, ongoing pollution, climate change, mismanagement, dysfunctional regulatory frameworks, inadequate safeguards, and a shortage of funding to address these problems.
- Agricultural, extractive industry and urban runoff – from construction, pet waste and septic systems - contribute to the nutrient and contaminant loading of rivers and streams, as do microplastics.³⁶
- Agricultural workers sacrifice their health on the job while contributing to the nutrient and chemical loading of air, rivers and streams. Latinos, who represent most U.S. agricultural workers, are among those who experience routine exposure to pesticides. Only 57% of crop workers report receiving instruction in pesticide best practices.³⁷
- 15 million people in the U.S. experienced a water shutoff in 2016. Cities with higher rates of poverty and unemployment had the highest number of homes with water shutoffs.³⁸
- Safe access to water is a matter of life or death for Black and Latino children, who are more likely to drown due to a lack of access to swimming lessons and clean, safe water to learn to swim. 64% of African-American and 45% of Hispanic/Latino children have few to no swimming skills.³⁹

LATINO CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORY

- Many communities are cut off from public lands and waters. A history of colonization, land theft, and centuries of racial injustice has created river landscapes that exclude Indigenous, Black and Latino people, disconnecting them from places and resources vital to their identities, culture, and survival. Those barriers also manifest themselves in the way the media is less likely to portray outdoor recreationists as people of color.⁴⁰
- As a result of generations of discrimination, Black, Indigenous and Latino communities are often located in floodplains, drained wetlands, or adjacent to sewage outfalls, where they are disproportionately impacted by pollution and flooding.⁴¹

LATINO RECREATION

- Water plays an important role in participants' preferences on where to recreate because of the activities enabled by water access.
- Latino non-visitation of recreation sites largely results from a lack of money, time, knowledge, language accessibility, and fear. Latinos often conceive of recreation as a place to gather with others in groups, which affects their decision-making on where and how to recreate.⁴²



LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- The Colorado River is the lifeblood of the Southwest, where one-third of the nation's Latinos live and work. Its water sustains over 40 million people in seven states, irrigating 5.5 million acres of farmland, generating 4 billion kilowatt-hours annually and driving a \$1.4 trillion economy, but over-allocation and drought have placed significant stress on water supplies and river health.^{43,44}
- Lakes provide fertile soil and water perfect for agricultural production. There are 2.5 - 3 million farmworkers in the United States, 80% of whom are Latino.
- The Great Lakes region is known for its bountiful and diverse agricultural production which provides ideal conditions for corn, soybeans and hay crops, as well as 15% of the country's dairy products. Between the production of crops and livestock, the region produces \$14.5 billion in annual agricultural sales.⁴⁵
- The Everglades supplies freshwater to 9 million Floridians and fuels South Dade's \$1.5 billion agriculture and horticulture industry. But the watershed is facing drought, toxic algae blooms, and wildlife die-offs threatening tourism, outdoor recreation, businesses and human health.⁴⁶

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 93% of Latino voters in the West support restoring Clean Water Act protections for smaller streams and seasonal wetlands.⁴⁷
- 91% believe that it's very important for the president and Congress to take steps to protect drinking water from contamination.
- 89% of Latino voters in Idaho support improving migration of salmon so that there are abundant populations.
- 91% of Latino voters in the West support increasing federal funding to extend running water and sanitation services to rural areas and tribal communities who currently lack access.⁴⁸
- 66% think that low levels of water in rivers is a very serious issue.





OCEAN & COAST

The ocean is a part of Latino lives. It is a source of food, jobs, medicine, spirituality, family memories, and the very air we breathe. Its coral reefs protect us from storms, as do the adjacent wetlands that filter our waters. There isn't a facet of our lives that isn't touched by the ocean.

Coastal communities are ever more susceptible to the results of pollution and climate change: sea level rise, dead zones, flooding, and coastal disasters. These same communities are experiencing significant growth in Latino populations, many of which are among the most vulnerable to coastal threats increasing in severity and frequency.

Latinos and other communities, traditionally underserved, should have equitable access to a clean and safe ocean and coast for recreation, livelihoods, and culture. Wetland, coastal, reef, and underwater ecosystems should be protected and restored to improve coastal resilience to sea level rise, floods, and other effects of climate change. The ocean should be pollution- and plastic-free, as well as free of the threats of offshore drilling and mining that harm local communities and the global climate alike.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

LATINO HEALTH

- 49% of Latinos lived in coastal shoreline counties in 2010.⁴⁹
- The health impacts of sea level rise are disproportionately felt by Black and Hispanic communities and those who are un- or under-insured, unemployed, or residing in substandard housing. Sea level rise increases the risk for drowning, injury, indoor mold outbreak, respiratory illnesses, housing instability, disruptions to infrastructure, adverse pregnancy outcomes, mental health impacts, and disease transmission.⁵⁰
- Latinos are 47% more likely to live in high-impact coastal flooding areas, particularly in the Southeast-Atlantic region.⁵¹
- Beach and fishery advisories and closures—or a lack thereof—disproportionately impacts Latinos. Latinos are among the most susceptible to health issues following visits to polluted beaches remaining open for recreation. Latino anglers and consumers, including subsistence fishers, are less likely to be aware of

fishery advisories.

- Climate change poses an increasing threat to subsistence fishers, many of whom are immigrants, people of color, and/or low-income: causing damage to docks, shorelines, and vegetation; changing migratory patterns and loss of wildlife from damaged habitats, increasing temperatures, and ocean acidification; storms that damage or wash out access points to fishers; and increasing pollution.⁵²
- Reduced access to safe outdoor areas contributes to nature-deficit disorder, limits opportunities for exercise and may present obstacles to doctor-prescribed outdoor recreation.^{53 54}
- Systemic and environmental racism have caused poverty, economic instability, health challenges, and reduced access to social and political resources among many Latinos. This lack of resources puts coastal Latinos into an “elevated coastal hazard risk category” with increased vulnerability to the consequences of climate change.
- The ongoing loss of estuarine wetlands contributes to Latinos’ increased susceptibility to coastal hazards, including sea level rise and storms.

LATINO CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORY

- Coastal sites throughout the U.S. safeguard and honor Latino heritage. Contemporary Latino culture also thrives at other sites, existing and emergent, fostering strong coastal communities and connection to place.
 - These sites include San Diego’s Friendship Park, Cumberland Island in Georgia, Chicago’s Paseo Boricua, Miami’s Jose Marti Riverfront Park, Padre Island National Seashore in Texas, Assateague Island in Maryland, San Juan Island in Washington, Monterey Bay in California, and many more.

LATINO RECREATION

- 4.4 million Latinos participate in fishing, averaging more outings per year than the general fishing population.⁵⁵ 17% of Latinos participate in fishing, and 12% in boating.⁵⁶
- The Californian Latino beachgoer is typically a millennial parent with children visiting the beach as part of a large group. Their beach-going concerns are related to parking costs, overnight accommodations and the lack of public transportation options enabling their trips to the beach. ⁵⁷
- In Oregon, half of the Latino population participates in coastal activities.
- Latino or Spanish-speaking people are enthusiastic visitors to parks in the Chesapeake Bay, and at some sites they comprise a significant proportion or majority of park users. At Maryland’s Sandy Point State Park, for example, a 2015 survey showed that 80% of users identified as Spanish-speaking but only 3% were aware of the facility’s nature programs.⁵⁸

LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- More data on the role Latinos play in the marine economy is needed, but it’s reasonable to infer the role is significant. The states with the largest Latino populations—California and Texas—are also the states with the greatest contributions to the U.S. ocean and coastal economy.⁵⁹ Three of the top five largest states with Latinos—California, Florida and New York—are among the five largest contributors to ocean-based tourism and recreation.
- More than 18 million people in the U.S. visit estuary and coastal waters each year for recreation and tourism. Ocean-based tourism and recreation alone, contributes approximately \$124 billion in GDP and 2.4 million jobs.

- Nationwide, the leisure and hospitality industry is 24% Hispanic and/or Latino. Nearly one third of workers in the U.S. construction industry are Hispanic and/or Latino; as marine construction is concentrated in California, Florida and Texas, Latinos are taking a large part in this ocean and Great Lakes economic sector.⁶⁰
- Latinos are 50% more likely to live in areas with the highest estimated increases in traffic delays due to coastal flooding.⁶¹

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 83% of Latino voters in the West, and 89% in the Chesapeake region, support setting a national goal of conserving 30% of U.S. land, inland waters, and ocean by the year 2030 (known as 30x30).^{62, 63}
- 89% of Latino voters in the Chesapeake region support the creation of new marine sanctuaries to protect ocean waters and wildlife.
- Relative to other demographics, Latinos are most likely to find the ocean very important for their emotional well-being.⁶⁴
- In California, Latinos are more likely than other adults to see plastics and marine debris as a big problem along their local coast, and view urban development as a big problem for wildlife habitats and endangered species.
- 62% of Latinos in California are in favor of wind and wave energy projects off the coast.





CLIMATE CRISIS

The climate crisis cuts across all sectors of society, from the pollution generated by oil and gas usage to the natural disasters that are intensified by a warming planet. Efforts to address it must be similarly large-scale and cross-cutting, with an urgent need for investment in communities experiencing environmental injustices. The two overlapping streams of climate action are 1) mitigation of fossil fuel emissions, including oil, gas, and coal restrictions and a just transition to a clean energy economy,⁶⁵ and 2) resilience to climate hazards and natural disasters, enabling communities to prepare, withstand, and bounce back from the heightened risks we face in a warmer world. Climate solutions can cover one or both of these streams and could encompass renewable energy development, healthy agriculture practices, energy efficiency, public transit, nature protection and restoration, pollution reduction, green buildings, and much more.

WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

LATINO HEALTH

- Air pollution from fossil fuel emissions increases asthma risk and severity. Latinos are twice as likely to go to the emergency room for asthma, and Latino children are twice as likely to die from asthma as white children. Over 3.6 million Latinos suffer from asthma.⁶⁶
- Latinos and other communities of color are disproportionately exposed to fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) pollution. This type of pollution is the largest environmental cause of human mortality.⁶⁷ Over 56 million Latinos live in the 15 worst urban areas for ground-level ozone pollution.⁶⁸
- Air pollution from agriculture kills almost 18,000 Americans per year. 80% of farmworkers are Latino.⁶⁹
- Communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately located near fracking wells that contaminate the local area with toxic pollutants, leading to heart defects, infant mortality, and childhood cancer.⁷⁰
- Latinos have the lowest rate of health insurance, hindering their ability to access care when afflicted by illnesses and injuries caused by climate impacts. Immigrants of all statuses are less likely to be offered employer-sponsored health insurance, and undocumented immigrants are not able to use public insurance like Medicare and Medicaid.⁷¹ In addition, there are often language or affordability barriers preventing access.

- Most Latinos live in the three states experiencing the most serious effects related to climate change: historic droughts and wildfires in California, record-breaking heat and power outages in Texas, and increased sea level rise and flooding in Florida.
- Climate change worsens mental health in Latinos and increases risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, attachment disorders, and substance use.⁷²

LATINO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

- 71% of Latinos say climate change is affecting their local community.⁷³
- Latino and Black communities receive disproportionately less aid following natural disasters than white communities, and are the hardest hit in terms of property and income losses.⁷⁴
 - 11 million undocumented Hispanic and/or Latino immigrants are not eligible for disaster aid.⁷⁵
- Latino communities face many barriers when dealing with disasters, many of which are caused by government agencies' failure to consider diverse languages, housing and transportation situations, access to information technology, and other needs. The barriers include:
 - Lack of inclusion in disaster planning, e.g. the lack of planning for socially and/or geographically isolated communities and unstable housing situations
 - Lack of access to clear, multilingual information on disaster preparedness and response, such as emergency alerts and signage, and lack of culturally competent service providers
 - Lack of understanding of the ways information disseminates, and the role of trusted information sources, in Latino and Spanish-speaking communities
 - Failure to inform immigrants of their right to disaster aid
 - Failure to address fears of deportation and distrust of government
 - Discrimination and racial profiling leading to exclusion of individuals from shelters and aid and inquiries about immigration status
 - Lack of transportation assistance, especially for migrant workers
 - Unclear process for responding to loss of documents
 - Failure to acknowledge structural inequities and different social structures in diverse, rural communities
 - Lack of coordination between different government agencies and tiers in disaster response^{76 77}
 - Recommendations for overcoming these barriers can be found in the [Emergency Manager's Tool Kit: Meeting the Needs of Latino Communities](#).



LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- 81% of Latino voters in the West said it's very important for the U.S. to help jumpstart the economy by prioritizing clean energy jobs in wind and solar.
- 84% believe it's very important to help jumpstart the economy by investing in green infrastructure.⁷⁸
- Latinos are more likely to work in the industries that are deeply affected by climate change, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction.
- Many Latinos depend on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods. Extreme weather hampers farm productivity and can mean lost jobs and incomes for many Latino farmers and farmworkers in the United States.
- Black and Latino neighborhoods have disproportionately few rooftop solar installations compared to white neighborhoods, even controlling for income and home ownership. In addition, among senior executives at solar companies, only 2% are Black and 6% Hispanic.⁷⁹ There is large potential for solar growth in the Latino market and a need for Latinos in the clean energy industry.

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- Compared to other groups, Latinos are more worried about the climate crisis, more willing to take action and more likely to say they will vote for a candidate because of their stance on climate change.
- **Almost 90% of Latino voters in key districts and battleground states say climate change should be a priority for the President and current Congress, and 55% agree that opposition to climate legislation is a dealbreaker for them at the voting booth.**⁸⁰
- 87% of Latinos support legislation creating jobs in the renewable energy sector, and 86% support a legislative package that provides tax incentives to make clean energy sources available at lower costs.⁸¹
- 83% of Latino voters support gradually transitioning to 100% of our energy being produced from clean, renewable sources like solar and wind over the next ten to fifteen years.⁸²
- 60% of Latinos would vote for a candidate for public office because of their position on global warming.⁸³
- Two-thirds of Latinos say they have personally felt the impacts of climate change.⁸⁴
- 85% of Latino voters in the West are concerned about ozone and smoke worsening air quality.⁸⁵

LATINO EDUCATION

- Children exposed to air pollution are more likely to have lower inhibition skills and poor academic skills, including spelling, reading comprehension, and math.⁸⁶ Latinos and other communities of color are disproportionately exposed to air pollution.





CLIMATE IMPACTS:

WILDFIRES

Our nation's greenhouse gas emissions and resulting climate change are leading to higher temperatures, record-setting heat waves, and drier and more arid conditions in the West. These conditions, matched with underfunded forest management, outdated land use practices, and more people living in fire-prone areas have led to catastrophic wildfires that affect more people. Almost 59,000 wildfires burned over 7 million acres in 2021, and more than 10.3 million acres burned in 2020.⁸⁷

These conditions have severe consequences on public health and access to services, job security, and economic productivity. Latino communities are more vulnerable to experiencing these wildfire impacts, and Latino voters are not only aware of these impacts, but are ready for Congress to take action to address climate change, provide more funding for forest management, and ensure communities have access to the services they need to respond to wildfires.

LATINO HEALTH

- Wildfire potential correlates with places with high Latino populations, in part because of the affordable housing crisis - homes are cheaper in wildfire-prone areas. Latinos are twice as likely to be affected by wildfires than others in the U.S.⁸⁸ Socioeconomic vulnerabilities and lack of resources turn hazards into disasters and drastically reduce the ability for these communities to prepare and recover from wildfires.
- Latinos have the highest uninsured rates in the United States - 52% of Latinos do not have private insurance coverage.⁸⁹ This means Latinos are less likely to have access to healthcare services to prevent and treat health threats caused by wildfires and smoke.
- The poverty rate among Latinos in 2020 was 17.0%, compared to the national poverty rate of 11.4%.⁹⁰ This means that 1 in 6 Latinos do not have the economic resources to prepare, adapt, or cope with health issues associated with wildfires and poor air quality.
- Low-income Latino communities are not only exposed to higher temperatures and wildfire risk, but also worse air quality due to smoke.
- 12% of Latinos do not have access to a car, almost double the percentage of their white counterparts, and 27% of Latinos use public transit on a daily or weekly basis.⁹¹ Latinos are more likely than any other group to live in a multigenerational household with young and/or aging family members who can't drive

themselves to school, work, healthcare and other services. This limits their ability to prepare and respond to wildfires.

LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- The effects of wildfires range from access to emergency response, disaster relief, and physical and mental health services to job security, economic productivity, land use planning and affordable housing.
- Latinos make up the highest percentage of natural resource laborers. These high rates of outdoor employment leads to higher risks by Latino workers of being exposed to unhealthy levels of smoke and air pollution during and after a wildfire.
- Certain factors create additional barriers and challenges for Latino communities before, during, and after a wildfire. These may include distrust of government agencies, emergency responders or service providers; language and cultural barriers; access to information and alerts; or socioeconomic factors, such as access to transportation, adequate and affordable housing, income, and eligibility for insurance or government services.

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 69% of Latino voters in the West agree that wildfires are more of a problem than ten years ago.
- 84% of Latino voters are concerned about more frequent and severe wildfires.⁹²
- 80% of Latino voters support updating zoning and building codes for new homes and development near forests or other fire-prone areas so homes are farther from or can better withstand fires.
- 91% of Latino voters agree with increasing the use of controlled burns to safely reduce the amount of fuel for fires.⁹³





CLIMATE IMPACTS:

EXTREME HEAT

Higher temperatures and heat waves are leading to a disproportionate impact on Latino laborers. For many Latinos, staying indoors during high-heat days is not an option. Hazardous conditions are routine for farmworkers and include pesticide exposure, heat stress, lack of shade and adequate clean drinking water. Regardless of 100°F or higher temperatures, unhealthy air quality, and lack of proper protection, many farmworkers continue to work in these hazardous conditions to support their families.

The frequency of extreme heat days is increasing as the climate warms. It is critical that we provide Latino workers with the necessary resources to not just survive, but prosper in these adverse environments, while also limiting climate change to mitigate this increasing risk.

LATINO HEALTH

- Latinos are three times more likely to die from heat on the job than non-Latinos.⁹⁴
- Latinos are 21% more likely than whites to live in urban heat islands, or areas dominated by asphalt and concrete where parks, shade-providing trees, and other vegetation are lacking.
- Increased daytime temperatures, reduced nighttime cooling, and higher air pollution levels associated with urban heat islands can harm human health by causing respiratory difficulties, heat cramps and exhaustion, non-fatal heat stroke, and heat-related mortality. In Los Angeles on a hot summer day, the neighborhoods with the highest percentage of Latino residents were 6.7 degrees hotter on average than neighborhoods with the fewest Latinos.⁹⁵
- Temperatures in communities of color and communities with higher rates of poverty can be up to 4 degrees Celsius, or 7 degrees Fahrenheit warmer in summer than white and higher-income neighborhoods. Extreme heat has been linked to a range of consequences for humans, from premature births, to lower test scores, decreases in productivity and increased risk of heatstroke among children and the elderly.⁹⁶
- About 30% of Hispanic households do not have air-conditioning.⁹⁷
- Over 40% of Latino households are energy insecure—they cannot afford the energy required to heat and cool their homes, refrigerate food and medicine, or they must make the tough decision between paying their electric bill or paying for food, medical care, and other basic necessities. In the spring and summer of 2020, during the first 2 COVID waves, over 27% of Latinos at or below 200% of the federal poverty line could not pay their energy bills.⁹⁸

- In Oregon, a 2013 survey found that 28% of farmworkers, most of whom were Latino, reported two or more symptoms of heat-related illness. In 2010, a study of 170 farm camps in North Carolina found that migrant workers, 95% Mexican, routinely experienced dangerous heat conditions in their housing.⁹⁹

LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- Latinos have less access to sick days and health insurance, which leaves them less able to manage health conditions that are exacerbated by heat.
- Workers in agriculture, construction, utilities, and manufacturing, who are disproportionately Latino, are more vulnerable to heat waves and higher temperatures, leading to lost productivity, increased healthcare costs, and economic strain. Latinos are 43% more likely to live in areas that are projected to have reduced working hours due to extreme temperatures.¹⁰⁰
- 17% of Latinos are natural resource laborers (agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting), compared to 10% of whites. Higher temperatures and heat waves will thus disproportionately impact Latino laborers.

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 76% of Latino voters in the West are concerned about extreme heat.¹⁰¹





CLIMATE IMPACTS:

DROUGHT

Drought affects more people globally than any other natural disaster. Known as the “creeping disaster”, droughts can come unexpectedly and have a long lasting impact that can build over time. Droughts leave a trail of destruction as dangerous and deadly as any other extreme weather event.¹⁰² In fact, drought has affected more people around the world in the past four decades than any other type of natural disaster.

In low-income communities, drought can create conditions of water insecurity and higher food prices. If the drought is severe enough, it is capable of bringing a country to the brink of collapse. In the United States, drought is the second-most costly form of natural disaster behind hurricanes. Drought can also lead to regionally specific problems. In California, for example, a large number of native fish populations that depend on the San Francisco Bay–Delta Estuary—from the bellwether delta smelt to the iconic Chinook salmon—have suffered near-total destruction due to reduced river flows during the recent historic drought. These dry spells take a major toll on the economy and agricultural production, which many Latinos are dependent on for work.

LATINO HEALTH

- Drought conditions have troubling consequences on public health and access to services, job security, and economic productivity, which affect Latino communities disproportionately.
- In the Southwest, agriculture accounts for 79% of water withdrawals. Across the Colorado River Basin, 43% of agricultural water use is sourced from the Colorado River.
- Between 2000 and 2014, annual Colorado River flows averaged 19% below the 1906–1999 average, the worst 15-year drought on record. Approximately one-third of the flow loss is due to high temperatures now common in the basin, as a result of climate change.



LATINO JOBS & ECONOMY

- Dry spells take a major toll on the economy. In California alone, addressing the contamination and water shortages caused by drought could take \$10.25 billion over the next five years.¹⁰³ At least 2,600 wells have gone dry in California since 2014. Rural farmworker communities in the Central Valley, mainly Latino, have struggled to find alternative sources of clean water for daily use. Many are forced to spend huge proportions of their income on bottled water for drinking and bathing.
- There are 2.5 - 3 million farmworkers in the United States — whose livelihoods depend on agricultural production, water availability, and workable temperatures — 80% of whom are Latino.

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 82% of Latino voters see climate change as a threat to water supply — more than any other demographic group.
- 96% agree that we should dedicate funding to modernizing older water infrastructure and restoring natural areas that help communities protect sources of drinking water and withstand impacts of drought.
- 88% of Latinos believe that funding cuts to water quality protection are a serious problem.¹⁰⁴
- 87% of Latino voters in the West are concerned about droughts and reduced snowpack.
- 62% believe that inadequate water supplies are a very serious problem, and 66% believe that low levels of water in rivers is a very serious problem.
- 81% of Latino voters in the West prefer policymakers to focus on water conservation, recycling, and reduction of use rather than diverting water from rivers in less populated areas.
- 91% support increasing federal funding to extend running water and sanitation services to rural areas and tribal communities that currently lack access.¹⁰⁵





CLIMATE IMPACTS:

STORMS & FLOODING

Due to intense rainfall events, quick drainage of stormwater runoff, urbanization, a rapidly growing population, and sea level rise caused by climate change, many regions are becoming more prone to flood disasters. Research demonstrates Latinos and other communities of color experience greater social vulnerability during floods. Yet most flood and emergency management plans take a colorblind approach that does not factor in how communities of color experience disasters differently, often leaving Latinos behind.

LATINO HEALTH

- The legacies of segregation and racism, gentrification, class inequalities, citizenship status, and language barriers that Latino communities continue to experience create greater risk and vulnerability to flood events.¹⁰⁶ In Miami, for example, Black and Hispanic populations are more likely to live in areas exposed to inland flood risks.¹⁰⁷
- Even without the amplifying effects of climate change, heavy rain and flooding present myriad dangers to human health, including injury, drowning, exposure to toxic materials, and lung and skin infections. After the 2006 flooding disaster in El Paso County, Texas, that damaged or destroyed 1,500 homes, scientists found that physical problems such as coughing, headaches, and eye irritation were 149% more likely among Latinos than among non-Latinos.
- Many Latino communities are located in high-risk floodplains, and sea level rise is boosting the risk of coastal flooding.
- The nature-deprived areas where many Latino communities live are covered with impervious surfaces that do not let water get absorbed into the



soil. Thus the water is stagnant and begins to accumulate, creating more extreme flooding events.

- Because property values are an important factor in building adaptation measures like flood walls, low-income neighborhoods are less likely to be physically protected from stormwater and residents may be forced to evacuate more often.¹⁰⁸
- Latino immigrants exhibit lower levels of self-protection and hazard knowledge, and higher perceptions of risk, which reflects their heightened vulnerability.¹⁰⁹

LATINO JOBS & ECONOMY

- The economic costs of sea level rise will pose a significant budgeting challenge for all levels of government and impose particular hardship on low-income and disenfranchised communities near coastlines. In Miami, for example, more than \$3 billion of property could be lost to daily tidal flooding without action by 2040.¹¹⁰
- Southern Florida—home to 2.7 million Latinos—could experience some of the highest impacts from rising seas and hurricane-driven flooding in the U.S. Communities including Miami, Hialeah, Fort Lauderdale and St. Petersburg could see floodwaters rushing higher and farther into their streets with climate change.¹¹¹ Miami-Dade County contains 26% of all U.S. homes at risk from rising seas.¹¹²
- Inundated roads and public disruptions in transport and emergency services, damaged infrastructure and reduced property values, as well as compromised water quality, are endured by Latinos with limited capacity to resolve their situation through mitigation, adaptation or relocation.
- Millions of Latinos are undocumented immigrants and not eligible for disaster aid.

LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 62% of Latino voters in the West are concerned about intense storms and floods.¹¹³
- Latinos are worried about climate change because they are more likely to hold an egalitarian worldview. Latinos fear climate change will worsen inequality, a concern often born out of personal experience. After flooding from Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, for instance, the federal government left the island to languish, allowing many survivors to slip into poverty.¹¹⁴
- 88% of Latinos affected by Hurricane Harvey favor new building codes forcing owners to raise their homes in flood-prone areas.
- 58% of Latinos affected by Hurricane Harvey would like authorities to use state and federal money for buyback programs in areas that flood frequently.





CONCLUSION: EQUITY & JUSTICE

All people have the right to a healthy environment, including clean air, water, and soil; nearby, accessible nature; resilience to natural disasters; and a stable climate. To achieve this, policies and investments must be made to uplift marginalized communities, address exclusion and discrimination, and correct historic injustices, while also addressing pollution, nature loss, and the climate crisis. Environmental justice cannot be achieved without social justice, and the connections between sectors must be recognized if systemic racism is to be addressed in conservation and the outdoors.

In the U.S., many Black, Indigenous, Latino and other communities of color face environmental racism. Disproportionate exposure to toxins and pollution, and a disproportionate lack of access to nature, occur in areas primarily inhabited by communities of color, including areas with large Latino and/or Hispanic populations. These communities often face multiple environmental injustices simultaneously, the impacts of which are compounded by high rates of poverty, unemployment, and disenfranchisement. Yet, recent surveys show that Latinos are environmentalists at heart, and are eager for their decision-makers to take climate and conservation action.

With a warming climate comes an increasing frequency of extreme events. We must provide our communities the necessary resources to be able to live and work in these adverse environments so that everyone can not just survive, but thrive. It is only through environmental equity and justice for everyone—including Latino communities—that we will be able to overcome the climate emergency.

In the face of these challenges, addressing climate change and nature protection presents a tremendous potential benefit for Latinos. Latino support for climate action and willingness to engage local, state, and federal leaders can help accelerate the transition away from dirty and dangerous fossil fuels and toward clean energy solutions for the 21st century. These solutions—like wind and solar energy, public transportation, nature protection and restoration, and increased energy efficiency—will create well-paid jobs, cut energy bills, improve our health, and help safeguard well-being for generations to come.

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ABOUT HISPANIC ACCESS FOUNDATION

Hispanic Access Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that connects Latinos with partners and opportunities improving lives and creating an equitable society. Our vision is that all Hispanics throughout the U.S. enjoy good physical health, a healthy natural environment, a quality education, economic success and civic engagement in their communities with the sum improving the future of America. For more information, visit www.hispanicaccess.org.

Hispanic Access Foundation was actively involved in elevating the Latino community's voice around the Browns Canyon, San Gabriel Mountains, Boulder-White Clouds, Sand to Snow, Mojave Trails, and Castle Mountains National Monument efforts. Additionally, Hispanic Access Foundation has launched the initiatives Por la Creación Faith-based Alliance, which unites Latino faith leaders around the protection of God's creation and creating tomorrow's environmental stewards, and Latino Conservation Week, which includes more than 150 conservation and outdoor-related events across the country.



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