

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue baseball cap with the text "YOU ARE WASTED" on it, is looking upwards towards a tree. She is wearing a blue jacket. Her right arm is raised, and she is holding a branch of the tree. A pink bracelet is visible on her right wrist. The background is a lush green field with many trees.

# ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY TOOLKIT 2023

IMPACTS AND SOLUTIONS FOR LATINO COMMUNITIES

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# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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**Shanna Edberg**  
Director of Conservation

Thank you for reading the 2023 edition of Hispanic Access Foundation’s Environmental Policy Toolkit: Impacts and Solutions for Latino Communities!

In November, I had the opportunity to go to [COP27, the annual United Nations conference where climate policy is debated by every country in the world](#), for the first time. There, we released the report [10 Ways Access to Nature Can Bolster Biodiversity, Communities, and Climate](#) – and learned how much more remains to be done to create a climate-safe world. Not only do we still need to [implement deep cuts to our greenhouse gas emissions and protect nature in a just and equitable manner](#), we also need to claim space in the environmental movement as leaders on the frontlines. I hope this **Environmental Policy Toolkit 2023: Impacts and Solutions for Latino Communities** will be a resource for Latino and allied leaders across the country to do just that.

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.

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 health, 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 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 Edberg*

# READ ME: HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

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## WHO IS IT FOR, AND WHY?

This toolkit was created to show the importance of environmental policy to Latinos across the U.S., from the states to the territories. In an environmental movement that has historically been White-dominated, the priorities and concerns of communities of color have frequently been eschewed. Hispanic Access Foundation created the first version of this toolkit in 2019, to change that narrative and bring Latino viewpoints and priorities to the forefront of environmental policy. As time goes on, it only becomes clearer that each of us has a stake in this moment of converging climate, nature, and public health emergencies — and frontline communities most of all.

We intend the information and recommendations in this toolkit to be used in many ways.

- **Media:** Journalists may wish to use this data for written articles or TV and radio reporting – a crucial component of changing the narrative.
- **Advocacy:** Advocates from Latino and allied communities can use this information to form fact sheets, sign-on letters, public comments, and other written documents that help make the case for equitable environmental or intersectional policy. Advocates have also used this toolkit to craft speeches, presentations, and testimonies.
- **Education:** This toolkit can be used as an educational resource to teach policymakers and others the impacts their policies have on our communities.
- **Motivation for solutions:** Our policy recommendations can show the way forward to a more equitable society at every level of government.

**Last but not least, this toolkit can be used to mobilize and build community.** Both the data and the testimony from our network of leaders across the country have told us that Latinos feel the climate crisis and challenges to environmental health in many ways – from their children suffering from asthma, to wildfire evacuations, to worries about drought, extreme temperatures, and flooded streets. Yet, it can be affirming for our communities to learn that they are not alone, and that a change in policy can mean a better life for their families. We want to bring this information to our communities in order to galvanize Latino leadership and mobilize Latinos nationally.

All in all, we want to be a resource for you.

## WHAT'S INSIDE: FORMAT AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This toolkit is divided into chapters based on four foundational pillars: 1) Protecting and Restoring Healthy Lands, Waterways, and Ocean; 2) Addressing the Climate Crisis, including policies for mitigation and adaptation; 3) Environmental Justice & Health, including sections on mental health and how environmental protection policies can mitigate the severity of the pandemic and health crises to come; and 4) Latino Heritage at Risk.

At the end of each chapter is a set of recommendations to achieve Hispanic Access Foundation's overall goals for that pillar, which flow from the results in the toolkit. As general principles, Hispanic Access Foundation supports policies that:

- Enhance equity, justice, and a healthy environment for all;
- Provide durable conservation or climate gains;
- Bring geographic diversity to environmental investments, including urban areas and areas prioritized by Latino, Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color; and
- Expand the diversity of conservation leadership and workforce.

However, it is important to note these policies are not the end-all, be-all of just environmental policy; they may contain flaws and require additional action to ensure equitable implementation. Hispanic Access Foundation recommends these policy measures as incremental steps toward a just, sustainable, and healthy environment for all.

## WHAT'S NEW IN 2023

Hispanic Access has worked to make this toolkit more readable than ever. We have added sections to the introduction to explain who this toolkit is for, what it says, and why, for new and returning readers. Each chapter also opens with a description of that chapter's content, to point you toward where you need to go.

We have also added new content that has emerged as community priorities since last year's edition. We have incorporated new data from the "2022 U.S. Latinos and the Ocean Poll" by Azul with new survey responses on fisheries, plastics, and marine protected areas, and the 2023 Conservation in the West poll from Colorado College's State of the Rockies program with new responses on the Colorado River and Tribal sovereignty.

We've added all-new sections on eco-anxiety and mental health, Latino heritage in danger of being lost to climate change, climate justice, and climate solutions. We also incorporated new policy recommendations that flow based on the findings in each new section. We are excited for you to explore!



# PILLAR #1: PROTECTING AND RESTORING HEALTHY LANDS, WATERWAYS, AND OCEAN

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS PILLAR

Pillar #1 has three sections:

- Lands and Nature
- Waterways and Watersheds, and
- Ocean and Coast.

Within each, you will find how the status of our lands, waters, and ocean - whether they are clean and healthy, or polluted and degraded - impact Latino communities:

- Latino health,
- Latino recreation,
- Latino jobs and economy, and
- Latino public opinion, including polls and surveys showing Latino viewpoints and priorities for conservation policies.

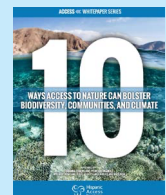
The pillar concludes with a series of policy recommendations based on these findings.

## ISSUE OVERVIEW

All communities should have [equitable access to nearby green and blue spaces](#), the ability to reach them, and features that honor and welcome diverse languages, inclusive histories, and uses of parklands and waters. 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.

These issues are of personal importance to Latinos. When surveyed, 89% of U.S. Latinos said they believe in protecting the environment as a means of protecting their communities, and 86% believe the government has a responsibility to preserve

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TO LEARN MORE:



[10 Ways Access to Nature Can Bolster Biodiversity, Communities, and Climate](#)



[How To Fix Americans' Diminishing Access to the Coasts](#)



[National Monuments Are a Missing Piece in President Biden's Equitable Conservation Agenda](#)



[The Nature Gap: Confronting Racial and Economic Disparities in the Destruction and Protection of Nature in America](#)



the ocean and public lands for the enjoyment of future generations. What's more, Spanish-speaking households are more likely than English-speaking households to say that environmental issues are very important to them.<sup>1</sup>

# LANDS AND NATURE: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

Our public lands are a key component of our country's identity, and they weave a narrative of the diverse and complex history of our nation. Our 640 million acres of public lands, 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. When surveyed, 97% of Latino voters in the West believe it is important to conserve land, water, and wildlife habitat to provide opportunities for children to explore and learn about nature.<sup>2</sup> However, our access to public lands, the equal representation of our cultural heritage, and our workforce contributions are not always acknowledged or represented. Given historical inequities, nature deprivation in communities of color, and the theft of lands belonging to Indigenous communities, nature protection and restoration efforts should be prioritized in communities of color, particularly in urban areas and those historically marginalized and on the frontlines of environmental injustice.



In addition, how public lands are managed is critical to the health of our communities and our planet. These lands purify the water we drink, create the oxygen we breathe, and sequester the carbon we need to mitigate climate impacts and protect the species that pollinate our food and support our lives and livelihoods. These combined ecosystem services generate \$125 trillion in economic activity, globally. However, lands and the habitats they support are rapidly disappearing, and if we want to protect all the benefits they provide, we must invest in and conserve at least 30% of the U.S. by 2030 to help solve our nature and climate crises.

## WHY PUBLIC LANDS ARE IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

### LATINO HEALTH

- Latinos have the highest prevalence of adult physical inactivity (32%), followed by Black (30%), Indigenous (29%) and White (23%).<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>4</sup>

- Reduced access to safe outdoor areas contributes to nature-deficit disorder, limits opportunities for exercise and may present obstacles to doctor-prescribed outdoor recreation.<sup>5 6</sup>
- 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.<sup>7</sup>

## LATINO RECREATION

- 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.<sup>8</sup> Latino participation in outdoor recreation is growing, and new outdoor participants are more likely to be non-White.<sup>9</sup> The future of public lands and public health thus depends on engaging and welcoming our diverse youth.
- Latinos are great users of public lands — 88% of Latino voters in the West visited national public lands in the prior year.<sup>10</sup>
- Asked about what policymakers should place more emphasis on in upcoming decisions around public lands, 74% of Latino Western voters pointed to conservation efforts and recreational usage, prioritizing that over energy production.<sup>11</sup>
- 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.<sup>12</sup>

## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- Lack of racially-diverse representation is common across the U.S. conservation workforce. 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. Latino employees also are underrepresented, making up 5.6% of the Park Service’s general workforce despite accounting for 18.5% of the population.<sup>13</sup>
- 70% of Latino voters in the West 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 the risk of wildfires, and natural resource protection on national public lands by providing jobs and training to unemployed people.<sup>14</sup>

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- Support for land conservation:
  - 79% 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).<sup>15 16</sup>

- 89% 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.
- 87% of Latino voters in the West support presidents continuing to use their ability to protect existing public lands as national monuments.<sup>17</sup>
- Oil and gas development on public lands:
  - 75% of Latino voters in the Chesapeake region agree that we should strictly limit where and how new oil and gas development takes place on public lands.<sup>18</sup>
  - 90% 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.
  - 88% support requiring oil and gas companies, rather than federal and state governments, to pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs.<sup>19</sup>
- Closing the Nature Gap:
  - 87% 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.<sup>20 21</sup>
  - 79% of Latino voters in the West believe it is important to conserve land, water, and wildlife habitat to conserve natural areas that connect lower income or communities of color which have historically lacked access to the outdoors.<sup>22</sup>
- Indigenous sovereignty:
  - 88% of Latino voters in the West support ensuring that Native American Tribes have greater input into decisions made about areas within national public lands that contain sites sacred to or culturally important to their Tribes.<sup>23</sup>





# WATERWAYS AND WATERSHEDS: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

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 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 priceless resources—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.<sup>24</sup> But pollution from urban and agricultural areas continues to pose a threat to water quality - more than half of the nation's streams have ecosystems in poor condition.<sup>25</sup>

Healthy waterways are urgently 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: DRINKING WATER

- 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.
- 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.<sup>26</sup>
- Water systems that primarily serve low-income communities, renters, and Latino or non-white residents have higher levels of nitrate and arsenic compared to White communities.<sup>27</sup>
- Double the amount of Latino children as White children have lead in their blood at unsafe levels.
- Latinos are more likely to live near Superfund sites with contaminated drinking water. Approximately 29% of Latinos live within three miles of a Superfund site in the US.<sup>28</sup>
- A survey of Black, Latino, and low-income Texans found that 61% do not think their water is safe to drink.<sup>29</sup>
- 840,000 mostly low-income Latinos live in colonias (unincorporated communities lacking basic infrastructure and services such as electricity and paved roads) along the U.S.-Mexico border, and more than 134,000 of those are not served by public water systems, waste treatment facilities or both, creating



serious risk of water-borne illnesses and water insecurity.<sup>30</sup>

## LATINO HEALTH: WATERWAYS

- 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.<sup>31</sup>
- 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.<sup>32</sup>
- 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.<sup>33</sup>

## LATINO RECREATION

- 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 Latino children have few to no swimming skills.<sup>34</sup>

## 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.<sup>35 36</sup>
- Lakes provide fertile soil and water perfect for agricultural production. 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.<sup>37</sup>
- 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.<sup>38</sup>

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- The Colorado River:
  - 84% of Latino voters in the West believe the Colorado River is in need of urgent action.
  - 83% believe the Colorado River is critical to the state's economy.<sup>39</sup>
- River conservation:
  - 84% of Latino voters in the West believe it is important to conserve land, water, and wildlife habitat to protect sources of drinking water.
  - 73% think that low levels of water in rivers are a very or extremely serious issue.<sup>40</sup>
  - 93% support restoring Clean Water Act protections for smaller streams and seasonal wetlands.<sup>41</sup>
  - 89% of Latino voters in Idaho support improving the migration of salmon so that there are abundant populations.
- Drinking water:
  - 94% of Latino voters in the West support investing in water infrastructure to reduce leaks and waste.
  - 86% support increasing the use of recycled water for homes and businesses.<sup>42</sup>
  - 91% believe that it's very important for the president and Congress to take steps to protect drinking water from contamination.
  - 91% support increasing federal funding to extend running water and sanitation services to rural areas and Tribal communities that currently lack access.<sup>43</sup>





# OCEAN AND COAST: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

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 A HEALTHY OCEAN IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

### LATINO HEALTH

- 49% of Latinos lived in coastal shoreline counties in 2010.<sup>44</sup>
- Coastal hazards:
  - Latinos are 47% more likely to live in high-impact coastal flooding areas, particularly in the Southeast- Atlantic region.<sup>45</sup>
  - The health impacts of sea level rise are disproportionately felt by Black and Latino 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.<sup>46</sup>
  - 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.



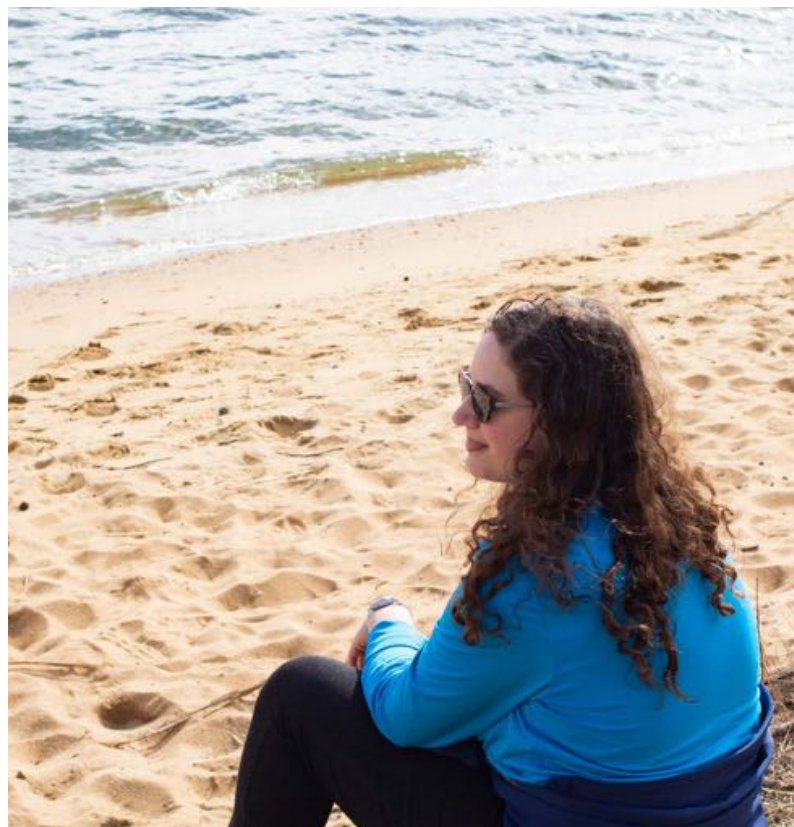
- The ongoing loss of estuarine wetlands contributes to Latinos' increased susceptibility to coastal hazards, including sea level rise and storms.
- Fisheries:
  - Climate change poses an increasing threat to subsistence fishers, many of whom are immigrants, people of color, and/or low-income: causing 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.<sup>47</sup>
  - 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.
  - Latino children have higher levels of mercury in their bodies compared to White children.<sup>48</sup>

## LATINO RECREATION

- 4.4 million Latinos participate in fishing, averaging more outings per year than the general fishing population.<sup>49</sup> 17% of Latinos participate in fishing, and 12% in boating.<sup>50</sup>
- 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.<sup>51</sup>
- 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.<sup>52</sup>

## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- Latinos are 50% more likely to live in areas with the highest estimated increases in traffic delays due to coastal flooding.<sup>53</sup>
- 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.
- Nationwide, the leisure and hospitality industry is 24% Latino. Nearly one-third of workers in the U.S. construction industry are 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.<sup>55</sup>



## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- Protected areas:
  - 85% of U.S. Latinos agree the government should implement the strongest possible protections for ocean areas, even if it is costly.<sup>56</sup>
  - 79% 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).<sup>57</sup>  
58
  - 89% of Latino voters in the Chesapeake region support the creation of new marine sanctuaries to protect ocean waters and wildlife.
- Offshore oil and gas drilling:
  - 78% of U.S. Latinos say they would support actions to ban offshore drilling for oil and natural gas, and replace them with renewable fuels like solar and wind.
- Plastic pollution:
  - 86% of U.S. Latinos agree that plastic pollution poses a health risk.
  - 80% supported the ban of single use plastics.
  - 92% supported doing more to prevent plastic pollution.<sup>59</sup>
- Fishing:
  - 74% of U.S. Latinos support stricter regulation of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities.<sup>60</sup>
- Ocean health:
  - Relative to other demographics, Latinos are most likely to find the ocean very important for their emotional well-being.<sup>61</sup>
  - Latinos are 73% in agreement that the health of the oceans is essential to human survival.
  - 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.



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROTECTING AND RESTORING HEALTHY LANDS, WATERWAYS, AND OCEAN

- Move toward protecting 30% of U.S. lands, waters, and ocean by 2030 (and 50% by 2050):
  - [Center equitable access, Indigenous sovereignty and disinvested community needs in nature preservation and restoration.](#)
  - Integrate Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous sovereignty, and co-stewardship models into nature management and decision-making.
  - Green urban, rural, and suburban areas with green infrastructure, street trees, landscaping for biodiversity, and other myriad ways of integrating nature into neighborhoods.
  - Invest in park creation, ongoing maintenance, and restoration of degraded lands and waters, by expanding urban and wildlife refuges, National Monuments, and other protected public lands, waters, and ocean designations.
  - Protect and restore rivers and watersheds, removing dams and culverts.
  - Increase protected areas in the ocean and on the coast, improve public access, and ensure geographic representation of marine sanctuaries throughout the U.S.
  - Preserve pollinators and increase food access with urban gardens, food forests, and beekeeping; on farms, implement regenerative agriculture and pest management practices.
- Addressing the [Nature Gap](#):
  - Increase public access and recreational opportunities at beaches, parks, and waterways, including public transit, bicycle and walking access.
  - Bring resources to parks and nature areas that serve communities of color, ensuring accessibility for the disabled.
  - Ensure parks meet the needs of local communities in terms of language, programming, and accessibility, using community consultation and engagement.
  - Monuments and names of public spaces should not project White supremacy, oppression, or intimidation.
- Nature protection as a climate solution:
  - Phase out oil and gas development on public lands and waters, restore degraded areas, plug old wells, and ensure a just transition for workers and communities from fossil fuels to renewable energy.
- Clean drinking water:
  - Invest in programs that provide clean and efficient water infrastructure to all communities.
  - Remediate toxic Superfund and brownfield sites.
- Center priorities and concentrate resources where they are needed most - in environmental justice, low-income, immigrant, and communities of color.





# PILLAR #2: ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE CRISIS

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS PILLAR

The first section, Climate Justice, explores how many of the activities contributing to climate change also cause significant environmental and health harms in Latino communities. The section also shows that climate change is an issue affecting social and human rights, disproportionately impacting communities that have historically contributed the least to global warming.

In the second section of Pillar #2, Climate Impacts, you will learn about how global warming is worsening natural disasters and extreme weather that impacts Latino communities’:

- Health,
- Economic opportunity, and
- Public opinion.

Natural disasters explored in this section are:

- Wildfires,
- Extreme heat,
- Drought, and
- Storms and flooding.

Pillar #2 continues with a section on Climate Solutions, which explains the importance of a series of climate solutions, including:

- Renewable energy,
- Healthy agriculture practices,
- Energy efficiency,
- Public transit,
- Nature protection and restoration,
- Pollution reduction, and
- Green buildings.

The pillar concludes with a series of policy recommendations based on these findings.

CHECK OUT THE RESOURCES CREATED BY  
HISPANIC ACCESS FOUNDATION  
TO LEARN MORE:



[Latino Climate Council Climate Justice Fact Sheet](#)



[Wildfire Management Toolkit and I am Cheo film](#)



[Methane's Impact on Latinos fact sheet and "El aire que respiramos" film series](#)

# ISSUE OVERVIEW

## THE PROBLEM

Human activities cause climate change primarily by burning fossil fuels for energy. When burned, fossil fuels like coal, gas, and oil release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide acts like a blanket surrounding the Earth, keeping more heat trapped within and causing global warming. Global warming is changing our climate, upending the water cycle, and making summers longer and winters shorter.

Climate change is increasing the scale and intensity of wildfires, heat waves, drought, storms, and more extreme weather. In addition to climate pollution, burning fossil fuels releases toxins that contaminate the air.<sup>62</sup> This air pollution can cause lung damage, heart damage, cancer, infant mortality, developmental problems, immune damage, mental health challenges, greater susceptibility to respiratory infections like COVID-19, and lung diseases such as asthma, emphysema, and bronchitis.

The U.S. Latino community is disproportionately affected by both the causes and effects of climate change.<sup>63</sup> **This is reflected in the fact that 96% of U.S. Latinos say environmental issues like pollution and global warming are personally important to them.**<sup>64</sup> The U.S. Latino community is on the frontlines, facing stronger effects of climate change because of where Latino people live and work. Most Latinos live in the three U.S. 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.

Latino communities are also more likely to live and work in areas with poor air quality than Whites in the U.S. A large number of Latino workers are employed by industries that are more directly impacted by and exposed to poor air quality and climate change impacts, such as agriculture, construction, and manufacturing. Workers in these industries are more likely to work in extreme weather conditions, such as extreme heat and poor air quality due to wildfire smoke.



## THE SOLUTION

Climate solutions may include:

- **Climate change mitigation:** reducing climate pollutants, including those from oil, gas, coal, waste, and agriculture while promoting a just transition<sup>65</sup> to a climate-friendly economy, and
- **Climate change adaptation:** increasing a community's resilience to climate hazards and natural disasters worsened by global warming. These actions enable communities to prepare, withstand, and bounce back from the heightened risks we face in a warmer world.

**At Hispanic Access Foundation, we believe that efforts to address the climate crisis must be large-scale and cross-cutting, with an urgent need for investment in communities experiencing environmental injustices.**



# CLIMATE JUSTICE

## THE PROBLEM

Climate justice is a call to address how Latino and other systematically excluded communities are disproportionately harmed by climate change disrupting lives and *cultura*.<sup>66</sup> Climate justice describes how extreme weather events that are the result of climate change have most severely harmed marginalized communities,<sup>67</sup> including Latino communities, when they are the least responsible for causing climate change.<sup>68</sup> It is also a call to uphold fundamental rights to clean air, water, food, and healthy ecosystems.<sup>69</sup>

Many of the activities that cause climate change, like burning coal, oil, and gas, also bring air pollution into surrounding communities,<sup>70</sup> communities that tend to be composed of groups systematically excluded and marginalized, such as Latino, Black, Indigenous, and low-income communities.

Latinos know climate crisis is already here:

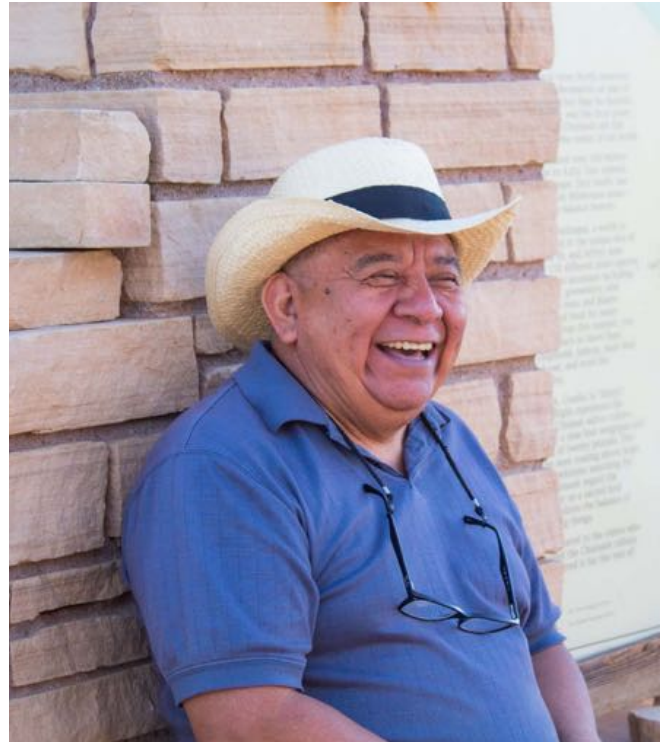
- 71% of Latinos say climate change is affecting their local community.<sup>71</sup>
- Two-thirds of Latinos say they have personally felt the impacts of climate change.<sup>72</sup>

## LATINO HEALTH

- Latino exposure to pollution from oil and gas facilities:
  - 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.<sup>73</sup>
  - Latino and other marginalized neighborhoods where residents were long denied home loans have twice as many oil and gas wells as mostly White neighborhoods.<sup>74</sup>
  - More than 1.81 million Latinos live within a half mile of existing oil and gas facilities and the number is growing every year. As a result, many Latino communities face an elevated risk of cancer due to air toxics emissions from oil and gas development.<sup>75</sup>
  - More than 1.78 million Latinos live in areas where toxic air pollution from oil and gas facilities is so high that the cancer risk due to this industry alone exceeds EPA's level of concern.<sup>76</sup>
  - Nearly 10 million Latinos live in counties that received failing grades for air pollution.<sup>77</sup> This pollution can cause heart and lung problems, adverse pregnancy outcomes, and increases in cancer.<sup>78</sup>
  - Children exposed to air pollution are more likely to have lower inhibition skills and poor academic skills, including spelling, reading comprehension, and math.<sup>79</sup>



- Latino respiratory health is harmed by fossil fuel use:
  - Compared with White people, Black and Latino Americans live with more smog and fine particulate matter from cars, trucks, buses, coal plants, and other nearby industrial sources in areas that were redlined.<sup>80</sup>
  - Latinos and other communities of color are disproportionately exposed to fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) pollution. This type of pollution is the largest environmental cause of human mortality.<sup>81</sup>
  - Latinos are 165% more likely to live in counties with unhealthy levels of particulate matter pollution.<sup>82</sup>
  - 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.<sup>83</sup>
  - Over 56 million Latinos live in the 15 worst urban areas for ground-level ozone pollution.<sup>84</sup>
  - Air pollution from agriculture kills almost 18,000 Americans per year. 80% of farmworkers are Latino.<sup>85</sup>



## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- Latinos are 43% more likely to live in areas that will see the most reduction in work hours because of extreme temperatures.<sup>86</sup>
- 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% Latino.<sup>87</sup> There is a large potential for solar growth in the Latino market and a need for Latinos in the clean energy industry.
- 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.

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- Compared to other groups, Latinos are more worried about the climate crisis, more willing to take action, and more likely to 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.<sup>88</sup>

- 60% of Latinos would vote for a candidate for public office because of their position on global warming.<sup>89</sup>
- Latino support for a transition from coal, oil, and gas to renewable energy:
  - Latino voters are widely supportive of the clean energy transition and see it as an economic positive; amid the energy crisis, most Latino voters blame oil and gas companies for high gas prices and want to see these companies held accountable.<sup>90</sup>
  - 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.<sup>91</sup>
  - 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.<sup>92</sup>
- Latino support for clean air:
  - 85% of Latinos believe it is extremely or very important to reduce smog and air pollution.<sup>93</sup>
  - 85% of Latino voters in the West are concerned about ozone and smoke worsening air quality.<sup>94</sup>







# CLIMATE IMPACTS

This section explores how four hazards worsened by climate change - wildfires, extreme heat, drought, and storms - impact Latinos. All the following natural disasters and extreme weather events demonstrate a need for improved disaster preparedness and response policies in Latino communities.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

- Latinos lack access to governmental aid:
  - 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.<sup>95</sup>
  - Approximately 11 million undocumented Latino immigrants are not eligible for disaster aid.<sup>96</sup>
- 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 agencies, emergency responders, or service providers.
  - Discrimination and racial profiling lead 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 the 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.
  - Socioeconomic factors, such as access to transportation, adequate and affordable housing, income, and eligibility for insurance or government services.<sup>97,98</sup>



- Recommendations for overcoming these barriers can be found in the [Emergency Manager's Tool Kit: Meeting the Needs of Latino Communities](#).

## JOBS AND INCOME

- The damage caused by climate disasters is exacerbating wealth inequality. On average, for areas with at least \$10 billion in damages, Latinos lose \$29,000.<sup>100</sup>
- Latinos have the lowest rate of health insurance, hindering their ability to access care when afflicted by illnesses and injuries caused by climate impacts such as heat, smoke, or mold from flooding. In addition, there are often language or cost barriers preventing access.
  - 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.<sup>101</sup>
  - Latinos also have less access to sick days.

## DISPLACEMENT

- Natural disasters increase displacement. For example, in 2017, Hurricane Maria resulted in 4% of U.S. residents living in Puerto Rico to move to the mainland U.S.<sup>102</sup>
- The climate crisis could drive massive human displacement in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is estimated that by 2050, the number of people displaced from Central America to the U.S. could reach 30 million, mainly due to food insecurity caused by the climate crisis.<sup>103</sup>
- Two out of the five countries most affected by climate change in the 21st century are in Latin America.<sup>104</sup>





# WILDFIRES: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

Climate change is leading to higher temperatures, drier and more arid conditions,<sup>105</sup> and record-setting heat waves.<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup> In 2022, over 66,000 wildfires burned over 7.5 million acres.<sup>108</sup>

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. Latino communities are more vulnerable to experiencing 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

- Latinos are twice as likely to be affected by wildfires than others in the U.S.<sup>109</sup>
- Housing conditions drive health vulnerability:
  - Wildfire potential correlates with places with high Latino populations, in part because of the affordable housing crisis - homes are cheaper in wildfire-prone areas.
  - Low-income Latino communities are not only exposed to higher temperatures and wildfire risk but also to worse air quality due to smoke.
- Lack of financial security is a driver of health vulnerability:
  - Latinos have the highest uninsured rates in the United States - 52% of Latinos do not have private insurance coverage.<sup>110</sup> 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%.<sup>111</sup> 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.
- Limited mobility is a driver of health vulnerability:
  - 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.<sup>112</sup>
  - 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

- Latinos make up the highest percentage of natural resource laborers. These high rates of outdoor employment lead to higher risks by Latino workers of being exposed to unhealthy levels of smoke and air pollution during and after a wildfire.

## 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.<sup>113</sup>
- 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 reduce the amount of fuel for fires safely.<sup>114</sup>







## EXTREME HEAT: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

Extreme summer heat is increasing, and climate projections indicate that these events will become even more frequent and intense.<sup>115</sup> Over the coming decades, every region of the U.S. is expected to experience higher temperatures and more frequent and intense heat waves. This extreme heat poses serious health risks, especially for the very young and elderly, construction and agricultural workers, and those living in the core of urban areas.

For many Latino workers, 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 inadequate 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.

**When it comes to housing, historically redlined areas experience temperatures up to 12.8 degrees higher than non-redlined neighborhoods.** These higher temperatures, largely due to having more concrete and fewer green spaces, increase health risks from extreme heat and put historically disadvantaged communities among the most harmed by global warming.<sup>116</sup> Households living in warmer neighborhoods also experience higher energy bills during summertime. Today, historically redlined areas are mainly populated with Latino residents.<sup>117</sup>

It is critical that we provide Latino workers with the necessary resources not just to survive, but to prosper in these adverse environments, while also limiting climate change to mitigate this ever-increasing risk.

### LATINO HEALTH

- 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. During these heat waves, deaths increase due to [heatstroke](#) and other related conditions.<sup>118</sup>
- Latinos are three times more likely to die from heat exposure on the job than non-Latinos.<sup>119</sup>
- Housing conditions drive health vulnerability:
  - 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.
  - 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.<sup>120</sup>

- Temperatures in communities of color and low-income communities can be up to 7 degrees warmer in summer than in White and higher-income neighborhoods. Extreme heat has been linked to various consequences for humans, from premature births, to lower test scores, decreases in productivity, and increased risk of heatstroke among children and the elderly.<sup>121</sup>
- Energy equity:
  - 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.<sup>122</sup>
  - About 30% of Latino households do not have air-conditioning appliances.<sup>123</sup>

## LATINO JOBS & ECONOMY

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.<sup>124</sup>
- Even without climate change, farmworkers are 20 times more likely to die from heat-related causes than other workers. In the last few years, farmworkers across the U.S. have been working in record heat waves, including during days with triple-digit temperatures. These conditions have led to more frequent sickness and death.<sup>125</sup>

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 76% of Latino voters in the West are concerned about extreme heat.<sup>126</sup>







# EXTREME HEAT: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

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.<sup>127</sup> Drought has affected more people around the world in the past four decades than any other type of natural disaster.<sup>128</sup>

In the United States, drought is the second-most costly form of natural disaster behind hurricanes. In low-income communities, drought can create conditions of water insecurity and higher food prices. 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.<sup>129</sup>
- A record number of water wells in California have gone dry as climate change amplifies heat and





drought in the parched state. California residents reported having nearly 1,500 dry wells in 2022. The number of dry wells marks a sharp increase from just a few years ago. Fewer than 100 dry wells were reported annually from 2018 through 2020.<sup>130</sup>

- 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 the impacts of drought.
- 88% of Latinos believe that funding cuts to water quality protection are a serious problem.<sup>131</sup>
- 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 are a very serious problem.
- 81% 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.<sup>132</sup>





## STORMS AND FLOODING: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

Flooding happens during heavy rains, when rivers overflow, when ocean waves come onshore, when large quantities of snow melt too fast, or when dams or levees break. Flood water can impact the quality and safety of our water and food supply, and expose families to hazards they may not be aware of. Similar to wildfires, the U.S. has seen an increase in extreme precipitation, intensifying and increasing the frequency of existing flood events.<sup>133</sup>

Many regions are becoming more prone to flood disasters due to intense rainfall events, quick drainage of stormwater runoff, urbanization, a rapidly growing population, and sea level rise caused by climate change. Latinos and other communities of color experience greater social vulnerability during floods, and their homes are more likely to be in areas at high risk of flooding.<sup>134</sup> 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

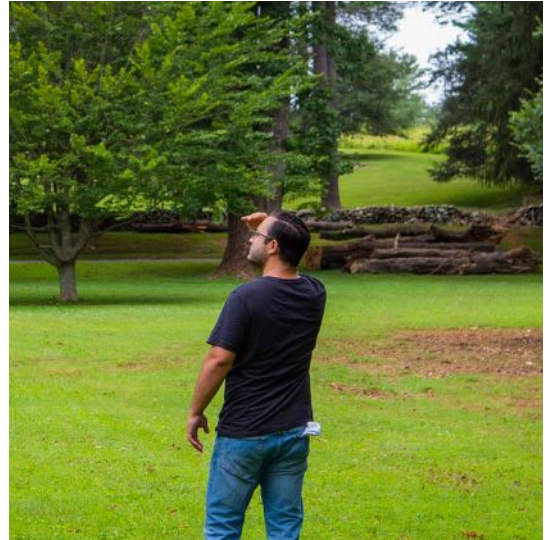
- Even without the amplifying effects of climate change, heavy rain and flooding present myriad dangers to human health, including injury, drowning, exposure to toxic materials, and lung and skin infections. Among the health impacts of flooding are mold contamination and respiratory issues to waterborne illnesses.<sup>135 136</sup>
  - 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.
- Housing conditions drive health vulnerability:
  - 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.

- In Miami, for example, Black and Latino populations are more likely to live in areas exposed to inland flood risks.<sup>137</sup>
- 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.<sup>138</sup>
- Access to services:
  - After an area floods, communities of color are disproportionately affected due to lack of access to basic services like drinking water and electricity.<sup>139</sup>
  - 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.<sup>140</sup>
  - Latino immigrants exhibit lower levels of self-protection and hazard knowledge, and higher perceptions of risk, which reflects their heightened vulnerability.<sup>141</sup>
- During Hurricane Harvey, Latino neighborhoods experienced disproportionately higher effects of flooding attributed to climate change.<sup>142</sup> Climate change-attributed impacts were particularly felt in Latino neighborhoods.<sup>143</sup>



## LATINO JOBS & ECONOMY

- 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.
- 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 value could be lost to daily tidal flooding without action by 2040.<sup>144</sup>
- 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.<sup>145</sup> Miami-Dade County contains 26% of all U.S. homes at risk from rising seas.<sup>146</sup>

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 62% of Latino voters in the West are concerned about intense storms and floods.<sup>147</sup>
- 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 their 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.<sup>148</sup>
- 88% of Latinos affected by Hurricane Harvey favor new building codes forcing owners to raise their homes in flood-prone areas.





# CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is the number one source of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.<sup>149</sup> It's also the second highest expense category for U.S. households, after housing.<sup>150</sup> These costs disproportionately burden lower-income households, rural communities, communities of color, the disabled, and the elderly.<sup>151 152 153</sup> While the average American household spends almost 20% of its total income on transportation expenses, lower-income households face an average burden as high as 30% of their income.<sup>154</sup>

## ZONING POLICIES AND TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The economic and environmental burdens of transportation are exacerbated by transportation planning practices that have placed a disproportionate focus on accommodating privately-owned vehicles, making it difficult to get around by other means.<sup>155</sup> Car-centric planning generates more emissions of deadly air and climate pollutants, further unbalancing the burden faced by historically underserved communities that are saddled with a higher-than-average share of the dangerous health impacts of pollution and the negative impacts of climate change.<sup>156</sup>

Transportation infrastructure planning has also been used as a mechanism to intentionally underserve communities of color. Redlining practices have forced Black and Brown residents into segregated neighborhoods, while highway projects have been deliberately built through Black communities to spare wealthier, largely White, communities, creating de facto segregated suburbs and unhealthy air pollution concentration levels for underserved households.

<sup>157 158</sup>

As a result, Black and Brown neighborhoods also tend to have more high-speed roads, freight traffic, poor visibility, heavy traffic volume, and a lack of infrastructure for walking and cycling.<sup>159</sup> Not surprisingly, people of color are overrepresented in the percentage of pedestrian deaths and, therefore, more likely to die while walking.<sup>160</sup>

For members of the Latino community, living in areas where using a car is the only viable way to get around can present additional challenges. For instance, immigration status might cause ineligibility to obtain a driver's license.<sup>161</sup>

Fortunately, affordable, equitable, convenient, and clean transportation is within our reach. Policies embracing a wide variety of transportation modes – such as walking, cycling, buses, trains, light rails, and more – and creating dense, walkable, transit-oriented communities can improve all residents' health, quality of life, transportation costs, and better serve communities of color and lower-income communities.



## ELECTRIC VEHICLES - A SOLUTION FOR EQUITY?

**Transportation accounts for 37.5% of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions, and passenger cars account for 40.5% of that total.**

Electrifying the transportation sector – while ensuring that our electricity sources come from renewable energy – is necessary to eliminate the transportation sector’s climate pollution.

Yet, there is debate on the extent to which cars can be replaced on a one-to-one basis with electric vehicles, and whether electric cars are an equitable solution that would serve Latino communities.

Latinos are less likely to have access to a car, and Latino workers commute by public transit more often than their White counterparts.<sup>162</sup> So even if electric vehicle prices drop to more competitive levels, uptake will be low among those who do not have access to a private vehicle of any sort. In addition, electric vehicles are deeply resource intensive, requiring the destructive and thirsty expansion of mining. The manufacturing of electric vehicle batteries is also a carbon and water intensive process. Lastly, the rate at which Americans consume and then discard their vehicles also leads to exorbitant waste – itself a source of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>163</sup>

A more equitable solution for climate-friendly transportation would be to expand public transit and transit-oriented, walkable neighborhoods, while electrifying school buses, trucks, and other heavy-duty vehicles. Latinos are disproportionately exposed to pollution from trucks, buses, ports, and freight transport, so prioritizing these heavy-duty emissions sources would help our families and children breathe cleaner air.<sup>164</sup>



## TRANSPORTATION

Tackling both the climate and the affordable housing crises are two of the most important policy priorities for many communities across the U.S. The good news is that solutions for these two important crises can be achieved together. Equitable housing policies can reduce energy expenditures and increase housing affordability. In turn, homes with less energy waste are also more climate-friendly and can help improve health levels for members of the household.<sup>165</sup>

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimated that homeowners could save \$200 to \$400 per year on their energy bills by making energy efficiency improvements, such as sealing air leaks and upgrading air conditioning equipment. Making all U.S. homes as energy efficient as the median U.S. home would significantly reduce the energy burden (the portion of a household's income spent on home-energy costs) among African-American households, Latino households, and renters.<sup>167,168</sup>

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

Renewable energy is energy derived from natural sources constantly replenished at a higher rate than consumed, such as the sun and wind. It can generate electricity with no associated impacts on outdoor or indoor air quality, which is of great importance when considering that Americans on average spend 90% of their time indoors.<sup>169</sup> Inversely, a growing body of scientific evidence has shown fossil fuel-powered appliances like gas stoves produce dangerous levels of air pollutants inside the home. This type of pollution increases and aggravates asthma in children, which Latinos suffer from disproportionately.<sup>170,171</sup> Additionally, solar and wind energy requires little water to operate, thus preventing the pollution of water resources and allowing more water supply to be allocated for other uses.

Solar energy is the most abundant of all renewable energy resources, and solar panels are now one of the cheapest forms to generate electricity. Solar energy technologies can deliver heat, cooling, lighting, electricity, and fuels for various applications. Distributed energy resources - such as on-site solar, batteries, and microgrids - can decrease the chance of wildfires, power outages, and boost overall climate resilience.

Nevertheless, while demand for solar energy in the U.S. has grown by 23 times between 2008 and 2016 and installation continues to become more affordable with falling prices, these energy solutions often remain out of reach for low and middle-income households.<sup>172</sup>

Members of historically economically disadvantaged communities can face unique obstacles to solar energy, including a higher proportion of renter households, low credit scores, insufficient tax liability to take advantage of



federal tax credits, and limitations imposed by federal housing assistance programs.<sup>173</sup>

Even so, with carefully crafted policies, solar photovoltaic systems for low and middle-income households can ease energy costs, while improving health by diminishing exposure to pollutants, raising property value, and providing jobs to underserved communities.<sup>174</sup> One successful example can be found in Washington D.C, where the municipality-sponsored Solar for All program offers residential solar installation (for single-family homes) or community solar facility subscriptions (for homeowners with ineligible rooftops, renters, and multifamily building residents) free to District households receiving government income assistance or earn 80% or less of the area's median income.<sup>175</sup>

In terms of jobs, **Latinos hold a higher percentage of jobs in renewable energy than fossil fuel energy sectors.** Latino workers represent nearly 17% of the clean energy workforce, some 30% more than Latino participation in the fossil-fuel workforce.<sup>176</sup>

## FOOD AND WASTE

People of color are the most severely impacted by hunger, poor food access, diet-related illness, and other problems with the food system, even as agriculture and food distribution are a significant source of climate pollution. For those who care about a climate-friendly food system, promoting food justice is imperative.

Accessibility, availability, and affordability determines a person's ability to choose high-quality healthy foods. For people with lower incomes, cost remains one of the biggest barriers to shopping for and preparing foods that are part of a healthy diet.<sup>177</sup>

Fostering the production and consumption of decentralized and locally grown food, with more plant-based and fewer animal-based products, needs to be a part of the solution. From a climate perspective, locally-grown food contributes to:

- Reducing the long distance that food travels from farm to fork, which results in less climate pollution.
- Reducing the need for processing, packaging, and refrigerating food to preserve it over long distances and extended periods on grocery stores' shelves.
- Reducing the need to clear new land and harm ecosystems to convert them into new farms.

The way we grow the majority of our food, fiber, and fuel is damaging ecosystems at an alarming rate through loss of topsoil, loss of biodiversity, desertification, habitat destruction, and air and water pollution. It is also a large contributor to climate change.<sup>178</sup>

Improved forms of agriculture, such as agroforestry and other regenerative agriculture strategies, look to not only stop damaging our ecosystem, but actually improve it, all while continuing to produce our food, fiber, and fuels. These techniques improve soil and climate health by moving carbon dioxide from our atmosphere back into our soil. By supporting nature's natural processes, it creates a positive feedback loop across the ecosystem and has the potential of being a key tool for improving our climate resiliency and reducing climate pollution.<sup>179</sup>

Food consumption habits also contribute to climate change and other social and environmental injustices. For example, one-third of all food in the United States goes uneaten.<sup>180</sup> Preventing food waste is one of the easiest and most powerful actions for reducing climate change and conserving natural resources. Programs that divert food from landfills can help hungry families by donating excess food, and composting food scraps reduces methane pollution from landfills while enriching the soil and improving climate health.<sup>181</sup>

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLIMATE ACTION

## ENERGY:

- Phase out the use of coal, oil, and gas and transition U.S. energy sources to 100% renewable energy, e.g. solar and wind, while implementing a [just transition](#) for communities dependent on fossil fuel jobs.
- Protect consumers from pollution from gas stoves and heating appliances powered by fossil fuels.<sup>182</sup>

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS:

- Integrate the needs of low-income, immigrant, and communities of color into [disaster preparedness and response](#);
- Invest in [green spaces](#), [wildfire prevention](#), and [heat safety standards](#), including protections for populations [who face the greatest risks](#) during extreme weather events.
- [Redirect flood preparedness funds](#), implement [stronger flood regulations](#), and [improve FEMA's tools](#) to measure flood impacts.
- Integrate Indigenous knowledge, including prescribed fire, into local land management practices, and invest in climate-smart reforestation.
- Provide a stipend for households to purchase emergency toolkits and provide ongoing education.

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE:

- Invest in green infrastructure, urban forestry, and community gardens.
- Protect, restore, and create new [natural areas that will provide resilience](#) to flooding and sea-level rise, such as wetlands, floodplains, and urban green spaces.

## HOUSING:

- Invest in dense, affordable housing located near public transportation, energy efficiency retrofitting, and green buildings, including in disinvested communities and multifamily housing.

## FOOD:

- Promote composting, local and seasonal food, and retool food systems to eliminate food waste.
- Promote the adoption of climate-smart and regenerative agriculture techniques.

## TRANSPORTATION:

- Prioritize public transportation, walking, and bicycling infrastructure, while transitioning heavy vehicles to electric buses and trucks.
- Transition to zero-emissions ports and freight systems.

## WASTE:

- Phase out [single-use plastics](#) and promote zero-waste, circular economies.
- Center priorities and concentrate resources where they are needed most - in environmental justice, low-income, immigrant, and communities of color.





# PILLAR #3: ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & LATINO HEALTH

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## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS PILLAR

In the first section of this pillar, Eco-Anxiety and Climate Grief, you will find an overview of how climate change, pollution, and environmental degradation are injuring the mental health of Latino families, particularly youth. In the second section of this pillar, Conservation, Climate and COVID in Latino Communities, you will learn how the ongoing pandemic is tied to climate change and conservation, how it is disproportionately harming Latino health, and how reducing pollution and protecting nature can improve disease outcomes - be it for COVID or the next pandemic we will face.

The pillar concludes with a series of policy recommendations based on these findings.

## ISSUE OVERVIEW

In the U.S., 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. For example, Black and Latino communities experience 56% and 63% higher pollution than they generate, respectively, while White communities experience 17% less pollution than they generate.<sup>183</sup>

These environmental justice communities often face multiple injustices simultaneously, the impacts of which are compounded by high rates of poverty, unemployment, and disenfranchisement. This creates vulnerabilities in both the mental and physical health of our communities, reflected in a high burden of mental health problems and the toll of the pandemic.

To improve public health and equity, we must alleviate these unfair burdens and build upon the environmental ethic in Latino and other communities of color for a more just, verdant, and sustainable society.



# ECO-ANXIETY AND CLIMATE GRIEF: YOUTH AND ADULT MENTAL HEALTH

As the climate continues to change, stress about its implications continue to mount, especially among young people who will see the worst climate impacts long after older generations have passed. This stress is known as climate anxiety, or more broadly as eco-anxiety. [Eco-anxiety](#) is defined as extreme worry about climate change, ecosystem collapse, and human-caused harm to the environment, particularly among children and young adults.<sup>184</sup>

Climate change endangers youth and adult mental health in a variety of ways:

- Climate change worsens mental health in Latinos and increases the risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, attachment disorders, and substance use disorders.<sup>185</sup>
- After a natural disaster, up to 54% of adults and 45% of children suffer depression. After Hurricane Katrina, 49% of the survivors developed an anxiety or mood disorder, and 1 in 6 survivors developed PTSD. Drought has also caused suicide rates to double.<sup>186</sup>
- Climate change is projected to increase the spread of infectious diseases, chronic diseases like asthma, nutritional deficiencies, and injuries that result from extreme weather and natural disasters. As a result, this can lead to chronic stress.<sup>187</sup>

Climate change is also causing “climate grief.” This feeling of loss can come from a drastic change in a place that is important to you (for example, if your town is devastated by wildfires), the loss of loved ones in a natural disaster, or a more general feeling of mourning for the way ecosystems and lives are changing. You may feel the sadness from a loss of human life, plant life, animal life, or the loss of identities, cultures, and lifestyles. You may even mourn the loss of features of the landscape – for example, the loss of a view of the Milky Way, as light pollution increasingly blocks out the night sky. You may mourn these changes after they have already happened, or in anticipation of them happening.<sup>188</sup>

Youth are particularly in danger of adverse mental health effects caused by climate change:

- Children may be harmed by climate trauma as early as the womb. If parents experience extreme weather and natural disasters while pregnant, the fetus will face developmental harm, higher vulnerability to disease, and obstetric complications, which are risk factors for psychiatric disorders.<sup>189</sup>
- Babies and toddlers are more susceptible to infectious disease, environmental toxins, heat exposure and dehydration, all of which are projected to increase due to climate change. These impacts can delay children’s developmental milestones and increase their mental health vulnerability.<sup>190</sup>



- As they age from childhood into adolescence, children’s exposure to extreme weather and climate change is linked to increased risk of PTSD, anxiety, depression, poor sleep, disrupted learning, phobias, attachment disorders, substance use disorders, and lower graduation rates.<sup>191-192</sup>
- A global study of youth in both rich and poor countries found that over half feared for their family’s security as a result of climate change, and climate anxiety was affecting their ability to sleep, study, eat or play.<sup>193</sup>

**With the Latino population being more severely impacted by climate disasters and demographic change increasing the diversity of U.S. youth, this puts Latino youth in a position to be disproportionately-and increasingly-harmed by the troubling mental health implications of climate change.<sup>194-195</sup>**

Many Latinos also face mental health risks related to their status as immigrants, relatives of immigrants, or relatives of residents in climate-vulnerable countries. For example, frequent contact with family members in high-risk countries in Latin America and the Caribbean can drive high levels of climate concern for Latinos.<sup>196</sup>

As climate change becomes an increasing driver of displacement, a phenomenon known as “climate migration,” other mental health risks emerge. These include trauma from the climate disasters prompting the need to migrate, the risk of experiencing violence and trauma during the process of migration, grief caused by the loss of connection to home and community, and social marginalization and lack of support in a new setting.<sup>197-199</sup>

For resources to support youth with eco-anxiety, refer to the [Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology](#).





# CONSERVATION, CLIMATE AND COVID 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 the spillover of infections from animals to people.<sup>200</sup> 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 have 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.<sup>201</sup>

We must use the pandemic recovery 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.<sup>202</sup> Immigrants, college students, and disabled adults were also less likely to receive stimulus checks and pandemic aid.<sup>203</sup>
  - Health crises compound with the climate crisis to create a dire situation for Latino households. One such area is energy insecurity. 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.<sup>204</sup>
  - In addition, climate-fueled disasters like wildfires and mudslides threaten Latino homes and compound the public health danger.<sup>205</sup>





- Latinos are disproportionately likely to be working in jobs and living in conditions that continue to expose them to the coronavirus. Even in areas with high vaccination rates, transmission and health risks remain high for Latinos.<sup>206</sup> From 2020-2022, the highest weekly cases and deaths were within the Latino population.<sup>207</sup>
- 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. Air pollution also causes the disease to be more severe. **Studies have established a direct link between exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality.**<sup>208</sup>
- 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.<sup>209</sup>
  - 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.<sup>210</sup>
- 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.**<sup>211</sup>
- During a time of social distancing and increased safety of gathering outdoors when clean, fresh air is most wanted and needed, nature remained out of reach for too many, especially communities of color, low-income communities, and families with children.<sup>212</sup>
  - While many neighborhoods implemented “Open Streets” and other programs to increase open outdoor spaces early in the pandemic, they disproportionately excluded lower-income neighborhoods.<sup>213</sup>

**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.**





# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & HEALTH

## ADDRESSING HISTORIC AND CONTINUING WRONGS:

- Invest in healthcare, education, and clean water infrastructure in rural, Tribal, low-income, and communities of color.
- Implement a just recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, ensuring fair labor practices and collective bargaining rights that encompasses protection for working families, immigrants' rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and disability rights.
- Restrict emissions of air, water, and soil pollutants.

## MENTAL HEALTH:

- Expand climate education to prepare children and families for the future, and instruct them in actions they and their families can take to address the climate risks they face.
- Expand climate mitigation and adaptation projects that benefit mental health.
- Incorporate mental health into disaster preparedness and response efforts.
- Collaborate with communities to identify and overcome the barriers to accessing mental health treatment.
- Fund community-wide vulnerability assessments.
- Resource schools and trusted institutions to help children and families cope with the mental health effects of climate disasters.

**Center priorities and concentrate resources where they are needed most - in environmental justice, low-income, immigrant, and communities of color.**





# PILLAR #4: LATINO HERITAGE AT RISK

## WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS PILLAR

This pillar discusses the connections between Latino communities, history, well-being, and climate change. It answers the question of what heritage is, why it matters, and how it is affected by climate change – and how, in turn, heritage protection can be a climate solution.

Heritage managers, interpreters, and advocates can use this section to advocate for the creation of more programs focused on Latino heritage, develop outreach, and edit site management plans and disaster risk management plans for their heritage sites.

## ISSUE OVERVIEW

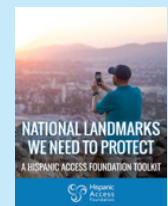
Latino communities in the United States have a wide range of backgrounds, including many distinct cultures, nations of origin, migratory patterns, ages, and genders. However, less than 8% of the nation’s officially recognized landmarks are primarily Native American, Latino, Black, or Asian American, highlighting the importance of preserving diverse heritages in a society that is becoming more and more diverse.<sup>214</sup>

Latinos in the United States are facing challenges to their health, safety, food security, livelihoods, and cultural legacy as a result of the severity of climate change’s consequences. The impacts of climate change on heritage, and consequently on the mental health, traditional knowledge, and identity of US Latinos, are, nevertheless, often ignored.

Many communities are cut off from public lands and waters. A history of colonization, land theft and centuries of racial injustice has created land, water, and coastal 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.<sup>215</sup>

In addition, 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.<sup>216</sup>

CHECK OUT THE RESOURCES CREATED BY  
HISPANIC ACCESS FOUNDATION  
TO LEARN MORE:



[National Landmarks We Need to Protect](#)



[Place, Story and Culture: An Inclusive Approach to Protecting Latino Heritage Sites](#)



[Nuestro Océano y la Costa: Latino Connections to the Ocean and Coast](#)





## WHAT IS HERITAGE?

Heritage is a broad concept and includes shared legacies from the natural environment, the creations of humans and the creations and interactions of humans and nature. It encompasses built, terrestrial, freshwater, marine environments, landscapes and seascapes, biodiversity, geodiversity, collections, cultural practices, knowledge, living experiences, and more.

Heritage can be anything that has value to our communities. When we consider responding to climate change or preparing for an emergency or a disaster, heritage is always at the end of the list of priorities. However, heritage is an incredible resource for communities to respond to and recover from disasters. It can become a space for local communities to gather and share resources or can become a shelter or evacuation zone. They are spaces for traditional knowledge and sharing important cultural practices.

Erosion, sea level rise, intense wildfires, looting, conflict and other hazards are putting at risk tangible and intangible heritage that are important for Latino identity and community building. The destruction of heritage sites due to climate change is already impacting communities globally through the displacement of people, loss of knowledge, traditions, and more.

You will notice that we discuss heritage throughout this section, but we do not classify heritage into distinct “natural” and “cultural” categories. The natural world and human works are the two sources from which we inherit collective legacies. These inheritances are mixed everywhere; no component of nature is unaffected by human activity, and no artifact is unaffected by the environment.

Better ways to safeguard natural and cultural heritage may be implemented when we integrate both categories of heritage. We also acknowledge the existence of movable, immovable, tangible and intangible heritage (oral traditions, dance, music, food, etc.) and take these into account when we discuss heritage.

**Latino heritage-in all of its manifestations-is under threat from climate change.**

## WHY DOES HERITAGE MATTER?

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 one community or culture, to the United States. For example, 20.3 million Latinos identify as multiracial.<sup>237</sup>

Too often, our stories and contributions to this nation are left unrepresented in the narrative that our public lands and designated historical sites portray. Thus, the protection of existing monuments and historical sites, such as the 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 the designation of the [Castner Range National Monument in El Paso, TX](#), to [Avi Kwa Ame in NV](#).

Heritage can help us connect with our roots and shared histories and in turn, develop personal and local identities, especially in a diasporic setting. Thus, we must take measures to protect the past so that it can benefit Latino communities in the future.

Extreme weather brought on by climate change disproportionately affects U.S. Latinos and occurs in locations significant to Latino populations and history. The danger of losing places significant to our communities causes feelings of loss and the world slipping away, a form of climate grief (see Pillar #3). Also, conserving our legacy shows that we are a diverse and flexible mosaic of cultures, histories, and stories rather than a monolith.



## THE PUBLIC BENEFITS OF HERITAGE

- **Builds Community Pride:** Heritage places are tangible links to the past. They honor the wisdom and accomplishments of people who came before us and reflect the events that created our communities. Each community’s unique history is written in its landscape, buildings and streets. As a result, heritage landmarks serve as memories of a shared history that help define the character of our cities, towns, and rural areas as well as build our sense of identity.
- **Enhances Quality of Life:** The livability and quality of life of our communities are significantly influenced by our structures, landscape and other human-made surroundings. Historic neighborhoods that have been maintained provide a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere. For locals and visitors alike, their distinct personality, human scale, and familiarity create a strong attachment to a place.
- **Strengthens Communities:** Heritage sites foster a sense of shared history and strengthen a sense of community among locals. Heritage conservation assists in preserving enduring social relationships and community networks by reviving older neighborhoods. After a disaster happens, heritage sites can also serve as locations for rehabilitation and disaster relief.
- **Promotes Social Sustainability:** Heritage preservation promotes participation in civic affairs and supports lifelong learning. Building resilient, socially sustainable communities depends on giving individuals the tools they need to advance their skills and capacities and become active citizens. Heritage sites serve as instructional tools that aid in understanding and appreciating culture, history, technology, art, and architecture. Participation in cultural activities and membership in heritage groups fosters interest in local concerns and encourages engagement in local decision-making processes.

- **Supports Mental Health:** There are certain ways to use heritage to get past a painful past. In terms of disasters, heritage sites frequently serve as recreational areas that, in times of emergency, are crucial for assisting people in regaining a feeling of normalcy and in re-establishing contact with a damaged landscape. In addition, research has suggested that people who suffer from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and other psychological disorders who practice archaeology as a hobby feel that it has a significantly positive and lasting effect on their health and well-being.

## CLIMATE CHANGE'S IMPACT ON LATINO CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Climate change must influence changes in the ways that heritage management is practiced. Heritage conservation and climate responses must take into consideration the need to document, safeguard and mitigate the impacts that increasing natural hazards like wildfires, hurricanes, coastal erosion and sea level rise may have on a historical, cultural or archaeological site and on people's lives.

For example, coastal erosion is more severe under climate change. 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.](#)

Climate change is also affecting heritage site infrastructure. Individual precipitation events, for example, will become more intense, causing erosion and soil destabilization, putting historic sites and structures at risk. Furthermore, wood will distort and the ground around structures will erode, making them less stable.

It takes careful consideration and level-headed discussion between competing stakeholders to strike a balance between the requirements of society and the preservation and management of heritage:

- Communities are already being uprooted and relocated due to sea level rise, wildfires, and harsh weather conditions on every continent. Families are frequently compelled to leave behind culturally significant locations, landscapes, customs, and histories as they struggle with the physical, mental, and spiritual health issues of dislocation and search for new homes on safer ground.
- Climate policies often do not make any investment in heritage, and it's dangerous that there are no necessary cultural resources available to help climate change migrants.
- Latino-relevant sites are few to nonexistent in active US efforts that catalog cultural assets at risk from climate change.





## PROTECTING HERITAGE CAN BE A CLIMATE SOLUTION

Diverse heritage informs decision-makers and policymakers in achieving climate change actions. In addition, it can convey traditional knowledge that builds resilience for change to come and leads us to a more sustainable future.

One of the most notable advantages of having diverse heritage sites protected and preserved is that it serves as a valuable resource for learning about historical, societal, economic, and environmental changes and advances. Heritage sites can offer opportunities to develop climate change resilience, and historical knowledge can provide guidelines for adjusting to a changing environment.

Indigenous knowledge, often known as **Traditional Ecological Knowledge**, is especially valuable.

Protecting heritage sites often includes protecting nature - a climate solution that sequesters greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>218</sup>

It takes thoughtful consideration and balanced discussion among different stakeholders to strike a balance between the requirements of society and the preservation and management of heritage.<sup>219</sup>



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### PROTECTING LANDS, WATERS, AND OCEAN:

- Protect areas [important to the historical and cultural heritage of Latino](#), Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, and recount their stories in their words.
- Protect and honor the ancestral lands of Indigenous and Tribal nations in the manner of their choosing, using Tribal co-stewardship arrangements.

### MIGRATION AND CLIMATE-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES:

- Provide funds for the recording, support, and physical housing of heritage at every stage of the migration process in order to facilitate resilient migration for communities in the United States who are affected by climate change.
- Incorporate mechanisms (e.g. grants) to document heritage lost to climate change.
- Ensure that newly arrived refugees from the effects of climate change have access to places where they can practice and share their traditions.

### LAWS AND LEGISLATION FOR HERITAGE:<sup>220</sup>

- Pass a comprehensive cultural heritage law that updates the current haphazard legal system and includes both natural and cultural heritage assets.
- Develop a comprehensive national database of cultural heritage.
- Create risk assessments, modeling software and maps that identify cultural heritage vulnerable to climate disasters.
- Involve the public in heritage protection, for example by inviting Latino communities to nominate sites for archaeological surveys, documentation and preservation.

### PRIORITY SETTING:

- To address the imminent loss of archaeological sites along the coast and in low-lying areas, legislation should broaden data collection efforts and protect the data that is already available.
- Add historical and archaeological sites that are significant to communities of color to inventories of cultural, historical and archaeological sites and overall heritage legislation in the U.S..
- Concentrate resources where they are needed most—in environmental justice, low-income, immigrant, and communities of color.



# CONCLUSION

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All people have the right to a healthy environment, including clean air, water, and soil; nearby, accessible nature; resilience to natural disasters; preservation of their heritage; 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. 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.

With a warming climate and degradation of nature comes an increasing frequency of extreme events. We must provide our communities with 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 the well-being of generations to come.

[Recent surveys](#) show that Latinos are environmentalists at heart, and are eager for their decision-makers to take climate and conservation action.

¡Vamos adelante!



# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> <https://azul.org/en/blog/national-poll-finds-u-s-latino-voters-overwhelmingly-support-policies-to-protect-the-ocean-and-act-on-plastic-pollution/>
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2022.html>
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/data/inactivity-prevalence-maps/index.html>
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# ABOUT HISPANIC ACCESS FOUNDATION

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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](http://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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