

ENVIRONMENTAL 2025 POLICY TOOLKIT

IMPACTS AND SOLUTIONS FOR LATINO COMMUNITIES

AUTHORS:

MELISSA MORRIS, BRENDA GALLEGOS, JESSICA GODINEZ, VANESSA MUÑOZ, SOFIA BARBOZA, HILDA BERGANZA



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INTRODUCTION

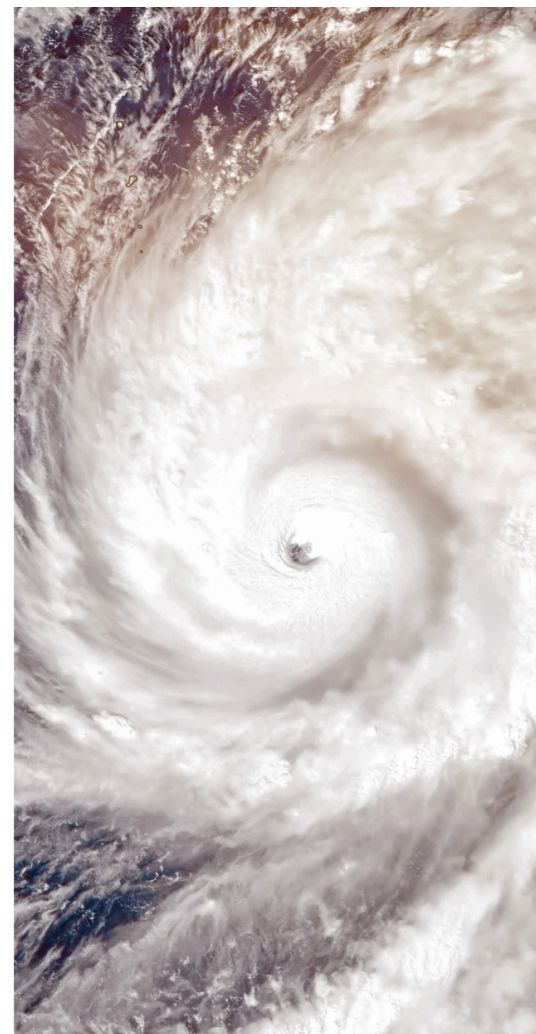
Our environment encompasses all physical, biological, and chemical conditions in living and nonliving things in any given place. As the natural environment changes, communities across the United States deal with **health and economic impacts** from a fast-changing climate directly impacting weather patterns. In particular, the Latino community continues to feel these impacts as **wildfires, droughts, storms** and other severe weather patterns continue to expand and worsen.

This toolkit aims to **highlight** the ways climate change is affecting Latino communities. It explores how rising temperatures and environmental shifts are increasing exposure to polluted air, limiting access to clean water, and impacting overall health. Additionally, it examines the loss of public lands and how reduced access to safe outdoor spaces disproportionately affects our Latino communities. Lastly, it addresses the challenges coastal Latino communities face due to rising ocean temperatures and sea level rise. As the Latino community continues to be impacted, Latinos continue to **stand united** in their commitment to a healthy community, a healthy environment, and a healthy future for their families with a thriving economy for all communities that emphasizes protecting our natural resources.

CLIMATE: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

Climate change is defined as the long-term changes in weather patterns and temperatures. Since the start of the industrial revolution, global temperatures have been rising due to large amounts of heat-trapping gasses in the atmosphere causing a warming of global temperatures altering the climate on our planet. While there are natural sources for greenhouse gases, such as wildfires and volcanic eruptions, the significant amounts of gasses released into the atmosphere come from burning fossil fuels for energy, industrial processes, and agricultural practices.

These changes are causing drastic alterations to the water cycle and weather events such as wildfires, hurricanes, and tornados. **Harmful substances** from human activities, including ozone, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter have increased many health issues across communities. In particular, particulate matter **2.5 (PM2.5)**, a mixture of tiny solids and liquids that live in our air measuring 2.5 micrometers (μm) or less in diameter directly affects communities that live, work and play around power plants, factories, or large transportation systems. High concentrations of PM2.5 are released from exhaust pipes as smoke, dust, and haze, with wildfire smoke also contributing significant amounts.



Exposure to polluted air directly impacts respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular and neurological conditions, pregnancies, and mental health. Respiratory illnesses such as **asthma**₁, lung cancer, acute lower respiratory infections (ALRI), Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) can develop or worsen. Rates of heart attacks, dementia, Alzheimer's **disease**₂ and strokes have risen nationwide due to exposure to particulate matter and stress from extreme weather events. While air pollution impacts everyone, people with heart or lung disease, older adults, babies, and children are more vulnerable. According to Clear the Air, between 1980 and 1994, asthma increased 74% among children ages 5-14. Asthma in Latino children was reported to be two-and-a-half times that of non-Latino white children. In Chicago, a health survey of six communities found that 34% of Puerto Rican children, ages 0–12 had been diagnosed with asthma as compared to 20% of non-Hispanic white children in the same **communities**₃.

Air pollution accounts for approximately seven million deaths globally and between 63,000 and 200,000 deaths annually in the U.S., with premature mortality accounting for 95% of those deaths.

The Latino community is disproportionately affected by climate **change**₄, with 39% of Latinos **living**₅, working and playing within 30 miles of power plants. In partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Hispanic Access launched a 3-year project, **El Aire Que Respiramos (The Air We Breathe)** in 12 Latino communities across the U.S. to address the problem of air pollution, specifically PM_{2.5}. These 12 locations include Blue Island, Illinois; Caldwell, Idaho; Commerce, California; Indio, California; La Mirada, California; San Bernardino, California; San Jacinto, California; Las Vegas, Nevada; Pharr, Texas; El Paso, Texas; and 2 sites in Weslaco, Texas.

Since January 2024₆, these 12 locations have collected data on PM_{2.5} with sensors from PurpleAir to inform their communities, the public, and elected officials on the health impacts of air pollution. Data from the last year show high PM_{2.5} concentrations at Cornerstone Assembly of God in San Bernardino (Figure 1), and Hollywood Church of God in Commerce (Figure 2), California with the average PM_{2.5} levels being at 11 grams per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) in San Bernardino and 11.8 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in Commerce, California. In 2024, the EPA lowered the standards for safe pollution levels for PM_{2.5} to 9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ (statement released by Hispanic Access). These two locations exceed safe PM_{2.5} limit year-round.

Cornerstone Assembly of God

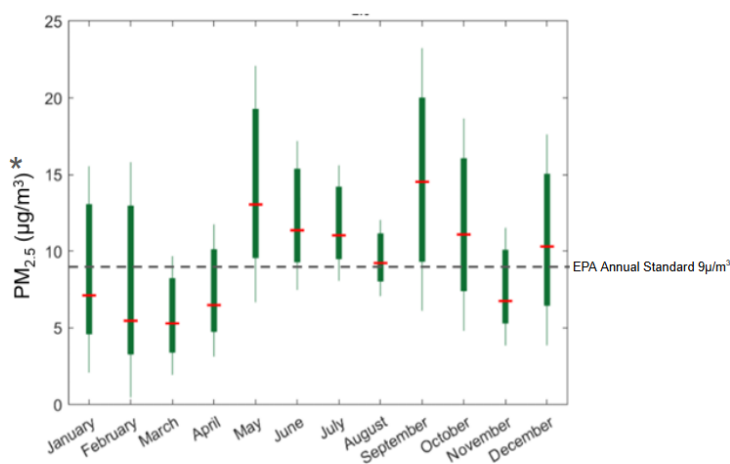


Figure 1: Distribution of PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations for 2024 at Cornerstone Assembly of God in San Bernardino, California compared to EPA Annual Standard of 9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
* EPA correction algorithm applied to PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations.

Hollywood Church of God

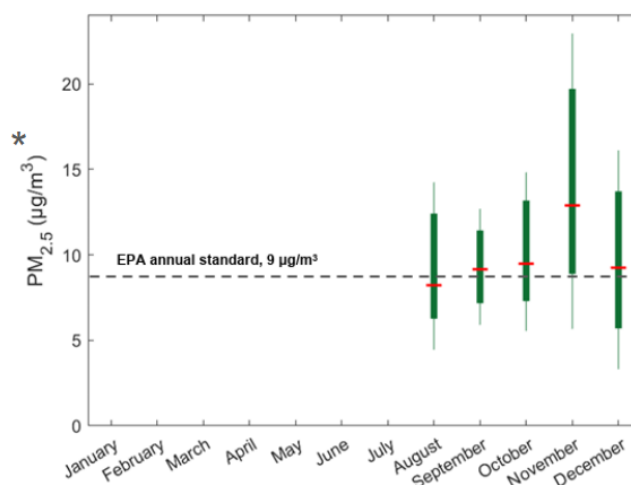


Figure 2: Distribution of PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations from August - December 2024 at Hollywood Church of God in Commerce, California compared to EPA Annual Standard of 9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.
* EPA correction algorithm applied to PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations.

**Note: Due to sensor malfunctions, data was only collected from July to December 2024. These issues have been resolved with PurpleAir's assistance.*

Other locations, such as Rosa de Saron in Caldwell, Idaho ([Figure 3](#)) stayed within safe PM_{2.5} levels during the first half of 2024, but saw spikes of PM_{2.5} in July, October, and December due to wildfire smoke traveling from Oregon.

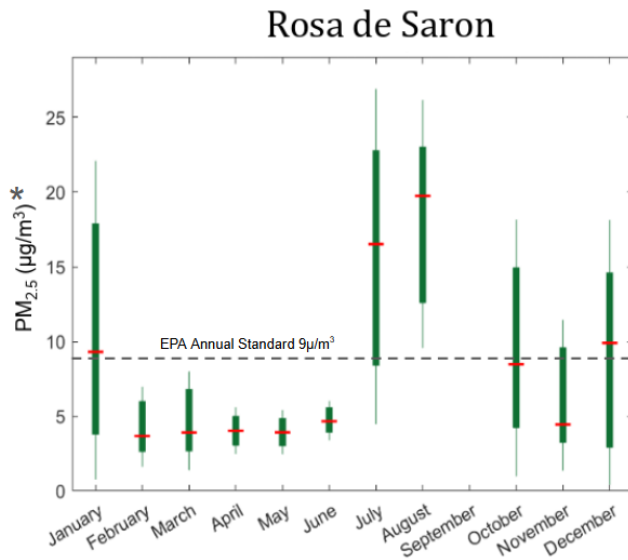


Figure 3: Distribution of PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations for 2024 at Rosa de Saron in Caldwell, Idaho compared to EPA Annual Standard of 9µg/m³.
* EPA correction algorithm applied to PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations.

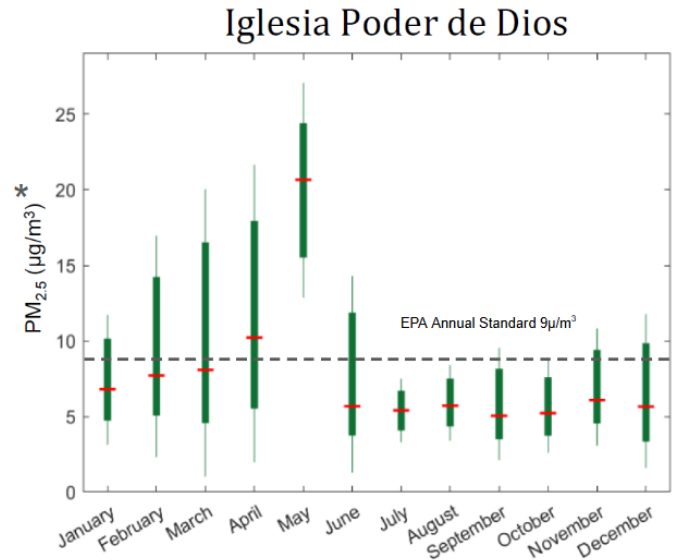


Figure 4: Distribution of PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations for 2024 at Iglesia Poder de Dios in McAllen, Texas compared to EPA Annual Standard of 9µg/m³.
* EPA correction algorithm applied to PurpleAir PM_{2.5} concentrations.

Other locations, such as the Iglesia Poder de Dios in McAllen, Texas ([Figure 4](#)), maintained safe PM_{2.5} levels under the new EPA standard, averaging 8.9µg/m³ in 2024.

The data collected from the 12 locations highlight the need for collaboration with elected officials to enact laws that protect community health. As reported by [Climate Power US](#), Latinos are worried about climate change, and they are willing to take action to protect their environment and loved ones₆. In key districts and in battleground states, Latinos believe that climate solutions should be a priority for the President and Congress. 55% of Latinos consider opposition to climate legislation a voting dealbreaker, and 60% say they would vote for a candidate based on their stance on climate **change**₇.

With continued data collection, elected officials at the local, state, and national level can make informed decisions to:

- Support a transition to renewable energy that includes job creation and economic growth
- Hold polluters accountable for greenhouse gas emissions
- Develop wildfire mitigation strategies

These actions would promote a safer and healthier environment and allow for interstate collaboration where it is most needed.



LANDS AND NATURE: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

As climate change accelerates, our public lands also face transformation. Public lands, spanning 640 million acres—all Indigenous ancestral land—are crucial to preserving our cultural heritage, providing recreation and connection with nature, and supporting local economies, industries, and millions of jobs.

Latinos have long been advocates for conservation in public lands. A survey found that 91% of Latino voters in the West prioritize protecting land, water, and wildlife to ensure future generations can explore and connect with **nature**.⁸ Despite this, Latino communities face barriers to accessing public lands, and their cultural heritage and contributions remain underrepresented.

Access to public lands supports Latino health. Latinos and other communities of color in the U.S. are three times more likely to live in areas that are “nature deprived” with fewer parks, forests, streams, beaches, and other natural places. This “**Nature Gap**” contributes to poor health, higher stress, lower educational outcomes, limited recreation and business opportunities, and greater vulnerability to extreme **weather**.⁹

Additional challenges include:

- Limited access to safe outdoor areas, which exacerbates nature-deficit disorder, limits opportunities for exercise, and may present obstacles to doctor-prescribed outdoor **recreation**.^{10,11}
- Latinos are also 21% more likely than Whites to live in urban heat islands and areas lacking vegetation and dominated by heat-absorbing surfaces.

These urban heat islands can lead to respiratory problems, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, heat stroke, and death.

Public lands are also important for economic and recreational reasons. 70% of Latino voters in the West say public lands, such as national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife areas support state economies. In term of recreation:

- 88% of Latino voters in the West visited national public lands in the previous **year**.¹² Meaning that they are great users of public lands.
- 85% of Latino voters want elected officials to support clean water, clean air, wildlife, and public land protections.



LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

Latino' support for land conservation is strong:

- 84% of Latino voters in the West support setting a national goal of conserving 30% of U.S. land, waters, and ocean by the year 2030 (**known as 30x30**)^{13,14}.
- 86% of Latino voters in the West support creating new national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges, and Tribal protected areas to protect historic sites or areas for outdoor recreation.
- 88% of Latinos believe existing national monument designations for public lands should stay in place and not be removed.
- 79% of Latino voters in the West support conserving areas that connect historically underserved communities with nature and the **outdoors**.¹⁵

Equally important is ensuring the right of Indigenous nations, tribes and communities to maintain their culture and protect their land and resources (indigenous sovereignty).

- 86% 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**.¹⁶



WATERWAYS AND WATERSHEDS: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

The health of Latino communities is closely linked to the health of our waterways, which play a role in Latino livelihoods, culture, history, economic well being, and spirituality. Rivers across the U.S. flow through nearly 640 million acres of public lands. Rivers, lakes, waterways, and watersheds are deeply connected to the stories, traditions of Latinos and provide a place for social activities and community events, fostering a sense of belonging and identity. They are also economic drivers from coast to coast.

Many Latino communities live near water but often face disproportionate risks related to water quality and climate-related disasters. This directly impacts the health and resources available to the Latino community. Protecting waterways ensures the preservation of cultural traditions, economic stability, and the well-being of these communities.

In 2024, Hispanic Access conducted its first Latino public opinion poll on the Mississippi River. The poll revealed the following information:

- 89% of Latino voters believe microplastics are a **threat**₁₇.
- 81% of Latino voters view agricultural runoff as a **threat**₁₈.
- 86% of Latino voters believe PFAS or “forever chemicals” are a **threat**₁₉.
- 93% of Latino voters support funding to prepare and prevent flooding **impacts**₂₀.

Polling on the Colorado River for the last 14 years shows:

- 77% of Latinos in the West see low river water levels as a serious **problem**₂₁.
- 91% of Latinos support nature-based solutions to improve water quality, such as conserving forests and lands along rivers, lakes and streams, rather than solely relying on man-made **infrastructure**₂₂.
- 77% of Latinos support the United States government taking action to ensure the reliability of water supplies that may be threatened by climate **change**₂₃.
- 70% of Latino voters in the West believe pollution of rivers, lakes and streams are a very or extremely serious **issue**₂₄.





OCEAN AND COAST: IMPORTANCE TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

Just as our public lands and freshwater resources face a variety of environmental concerns, both the global ocean and U.S. federal ocean waters are under environmental strain. In 2024, ocean temperatures reached a record high.

This is a critical reminder that the ocean, **which covers 71% of our planet, is constantly absorbing ~90% of all the excess heat generated by fossil fuel emissions.** The absorption of this heat is changing both the temperature and the chemical composition of the sea, leading to increased sea level rise, more intense storms, as well as disruptions to marine food webs impacting livelihoods reliant on seafood.

Ultimately, no matter where on our planet you are, the ocean is a part of all life, given that the ocean generates 50% of the oxygen that we breathe and that it regulates our global climate by transporting heat and energy via its flowing currents. Apart from the excess heat absorption, the ocean is also challenged by plastic pollution, industrial waste, oil spills, habitat destruction, and overfishing.

Half of Latinos in the U.S. live in coastal areas and are exposed to the coastal threats that are increasing in both severity and frequency. According to the EPA, **Latinos in the U.S. are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to experience intense hurricanes, sea level rise, and floods₂₅.**

Latinos have expressed their concern on these issues with national polling showing that:

- 80% would be more likely to vote for candidates who support stronger policies to protect the ocean.
- 88% would support action to prevent plastic pollution.
- 75% agree that mercury in seafood poses a serious health threat to them and their family.
- 72% would support actions banning offshore drilling for oil and natural gas, and instead utilize renewable fuels like solar and wind.
- 91% agree that clean beaches and oceans are essential to the economy and quality of life₂₆.

Every person on Earth should care about the health of our ocean. It is clear that Latinos already do. The Latino community wants to see more policies implemented to safeguard this vital ecosystem, ranging from preventing plastic from entering the ocean to ensuring the ocean is clean from chemicals so that our seafood is healthy to eat, and to reducing pollution and oil leakages by prioritizing renewable ocean energy.



IN SUMMARY

It is **important** to recognize that with a warming climate, the environment is degrading. As affirmed by the **United Nations**,²⁷ all people have the **right to a healthy environment**, including access to clean air, clean water, and healthy soil. We must provide our communities with the necessary resources to be able to live and work in adverse environments so that everyone can survive and thrive.

In the face of these challenges, addressing climate change and nature protection presents a tremendous potential benefit for all communities, including the Latino community. Latino support for climate action is strong. **By engaging leaders at all levels, we can advance sustainable solutions that create well-paid jobs, reduce energy costs, improve our health, and help safeguard the well-being of generations to come.**

ENDNOTES

- ¹ https://lulac.org/programs/health/Latino_Asthma_Outdoor-Air-pollution_english_spanish.pdf
- ² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9420776/>
- ³ <https://lulac.org/assets/pdfs/pollutionreport2.pdf>
- ⁴ <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.abf4491>
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- ⁶ https://climatepower.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2021/10/Climate-Power-final_sn1-1.pdf
- ⁷ https://climatepower.us/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2021/10/Climate-Power-final_sn1-1.pdf
- ⁸ <https://hispanicaccess.org/news-resources/news-releases/item/3430-latinos-show-all-time-high-concern-for-water-and-public-lands-in-15th-annual-conservation-in-the-west-poll>
- ⁹ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2020/07/21/487787/the-nature-gap/>
- ¹⁰ <http://richardlouw.com/blog/what-is-nature-deficit-disorder/>
- ¹¹ <https://hispanicaccess.org/news-resources/research-library/item/893-nuestro-oceano-y-la-costa-latinos-connections-to-the-ocean-and-coast>
- ¹² <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2022.html>
- ¹³ <https://hispanicaccess.org/ccpoll>
- ¹⁴ https://www.bayjournal.com/opinion/forum/latinos-support-land-conservation-goal-for-the-bay-watershed/article_a885710a-7471-11ec-ae1a-df16f671eb66.html
- ¹⁵ <https://hispanicaccess.org/ccpoll>
- ¹⁶ <https://hispanicaccess.org/ccpoll>
- ¹⁷ <https://hispanicaccess.org/mspoll>
- ¹⁸ <https://hispanicaccess.org/mspoll>
- ¹⁹ <https://hispanicaccess.org/mspoll>
- ²⁰ <https://hispanicaccess.org/mspoll>
- ²¹ <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2025.html>
- ²² <https://hispanicaccess.org/ccpoll>
- ²³ <https://hispanicaccess.org/ccpoll>
- ²⁴ <https://hispanicaccess.org/ccpoll>
- ²⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/21/1124024159/why-latino-people-are-on-the-front-lines-of-climate-change>
- ²⁶ <https://azul.org/en/blog/new-national-polling-shows-latinos-motivated-to-elect-pro-ocean-conservation-candidates/>
- ²⁷ <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/UNDP-UNEP-UNHCHR-What-is-the-Right-to-a-Healthy-Environment.pdf>

ABOUT HISPANIC ACCESS FOUNDATION

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

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



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