

BARRIERS TO A BACKYARD NATIONAL PARK: CASE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES IN COLUMBIA, SC

Yen Le
University of Idaho

Nancy C. Holmes
University of Idaho

We present an exploratory study of the recreational behaviors, preferences, and opinions of African Americans in the Columbia, South Carolina area and identify potential barriers to visiting Congaree National Park. Focus groups with African American residents of the Columbia South Carolina area revealed that inadequate information, detachment from nature, economic issues, and perceived racial discrimination were among the potential obstacles preventing African Americans in the Columbia area from visiting Congaree National Park. These issues contribute to the most challenging issue to address, that of misconceptions about the park. Lack of information and detachment from nature create the perception that the park is an undesirable, unsafe, and unwelcoming place to visit. The park's protected status fosters an image of a wilderness where desired facilities are not available. Focus group participants suggested that direct personal contact through programs such as community ambassadors or park ranger visits to classrooms would be among the effective channels to connect with the local communities.