Climbing in Community:

Exploring the Potential of Outdoor Affinity Groups for Black, Indigenous and People of Color

by

Kiana Ringuette

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Thesis Committee:

Kristin Yarris, Chair

Yvonne Braun, Member

Sarah Wald, Member

University of Oregon

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Kiana Ringuette
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This thesis explores the ways in which outdoor affinity groups work to further diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in outdoor recreation for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Through a mix-methods approach of semi-structured interviews and survey data grounded in leisure studies, this study examines the local recreational context of Eugene and the work of the affinity group Eugene Climbers of Color, illuminating both the impact of affinity groups for BIPOC individuals as well the broader potential of affinity groups in the landscape of outdoor recreation. Results indicate that affinity groups can benefit BIPOC communities through providing community, knowledge-sharing, access and resources, and a sense of belonging. Affinity groups may also address one of the key challenges faced by public and nonprofit organizations: developing sustained engagement with marginalized communities. However, these organizations should focus on investing time and resources into trust-based relationships over transactional connections. In a federal political climate featuring large-scale regression of DEI initiatives, affinity groups feature resiliency and adaptation as they rely upon local community networks to function. Supporting these groups can offer a key avenue through which to further diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in outdoor recreation for BIPOC communities.

DEDICATION

To the people who continue to resist, find joy and build community in the face of oppression.

Thank you for continuing to connect, uplift and inspire.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The following land acknowledgement was developed through collaboration by federally recognized tribes and the University of Oregon, and recognition of the homelands of the Kalapuya people applies at large to the geographic area that is present day Eugene.

> The University of Oregon is located on Kalapuya Ilihi, the traditional indigenous homeland of the Kalapuya people. Following treaties between 1851 and 1855, Kalapuya people were dispossessed of their indigenous homeland by the United States government and forcibly removed to the Coast Reservation in Western Oregon. Today, descendants are citizens of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians of Oregon, and continue to make important contributions in their communities, at UO, and across the land we now refer to as Oregon.
>
> We express our respect for all federally recognized tribal nations of Oregon. This includes the Burns Paiute Tribe; the Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians; the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon; the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon; the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation; the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; the Coquille Indian Tribe; the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians; and the Klamath Tribes. We also express our respect for all other displaced Indigenous peoples who call Oregon home.

(University of Oregon, 2023)

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INTRODUCTION

Recreating outdoors may present as an unquestionable ability to much of the American public; spending time in nature is, after all, considered to most, free, and here in the Pacific Northwest, a formative part of the region's identity. With picturesque vistas and snowcapped mountains, opportunities to enjoy the physical and mental benefits of the outdoors seem abundant. Yet these outdoor spaces also host a long racial history of dispossession and discrimination, as well as resistance and community. Disparities in accessing nature are abundant, ranging from limited nature in residential areas to discrimination and violence in outdoor spaces, often following the lines of race and its intersection with class in the United States (Rowland-Shea et al, 2020). In addition to inequitable access to the plethora of mental, physical and emotional benefits enjoyed by those who spend time outdoors, the construction of white outdoors through racialized histories, policies, behaviors and identities presents another stratified dimension of power through which Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and other marginalized communities navigate. This thesis explores the ways in which the outdoors has been historically defined as a white domain, the dimensions of race, gender and sexuality in these spaces, as well as efforts to address and resist these hegemonic forces of white supremacy, hypermasculinity, and heteronormativity in the outdoors. This work centers on exploration into the potential of outdoor affinity groups to impact diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging for BIPOC communities in nature. While the term "affinity group" has been commonly utilized in the workplace setting for referring to identity-based employee groups, in this thesis it refers to groups comprised of members with shared identities in categories such as race, gender and sexuality that offer opportunities for outdoor recreation. Specifically, this project engages with a

group that is formed by and serves Black, Indigenous and People of Color interested in recreational indoor and outdoor climbing.

Little research thus far has delved into the impact of these outdoor affinity groups, which have in recent times grown rapidly in number and popularity. Moreover, the current political climate under the second Trump administration emphasizes the potential of community-led groups to create spaces of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in times when governmental institutions fall short, or work against such initiatives. With a context informed by the historic and present racial dynamics in Eugene, Oregon, this research utilizes participant perspectives in the affinity group Eugene Climbers of Color and local organizations to outline nascent benefits and considerations for these types of community led organizations both to individuals as well as within the broader landscape of outdoor recreation.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The White Outdoors

White supremacy, the multi-scale system that hinges upon the belief of the superiority of the white race, posits whites at the head of a racial hierarchy that exploits, endangers and erases communities of color to maintain its dominance. This system has created evolving racial inequities in the United States from the nation's inception. Rather than simply manifesting as the existence of hate groups espousing such ideologies, white supremacy operates through varied aspects of society in "which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (Ansley, 1989, p. 1024).

White supremacy also affects communities of color in distinct ways. Smith (2016) identifies three pillars of white supremacy that highlight both the logics that create unique oppressions as well as their connections to one another. These three pillars are Slavery/Capitalism, which encapsulates anti-Black racism and the logic of slavery, creating a racial hierarchy of the commodification of workers with Black communities at the bottom, Genocide/Capitalism, the continued erasure of Indigenous peoples that positions non-Indigenous peoples with a righteous claim to land and culture, and Orientalism/War, which casts the West in a superior status to the "Orient" (here used to encompass regions beyond Asia alone) and immigrants of color as foreign threats to the United States. Smith finds that victimization and complicity are not mutually exclusive in this context, as the allure and possibility of people of color participating in other pillars is a strategy through which the system maintains its power.

Here communities of color, in their work toward an equitable future, must not contribute to the continued oppression of others—solidarity becomes paramount.

As with other dimensions of life, white supremacy has seeped into outdoor recreation in a myriad of ways. From histories of dispossession to select narrations of land, memories of violence in the outdoors, conceptions of wilderness, to presentations of the identities that belong in the outdoors and in what ways they should recreate, all impact how Black, Indigenous and People of Color navigate and experience the outdoors.

Understanding contemporary racial dynamics in the outdoors requires tracing discourses and policies to the inception of the settler state, which validated widespread dispossession of land and displacement of Indigenous peoples through its unrelenting enamoration with Manifest Destiny and validation from *terra nullius*. As settlers drove on toward the Western region of the present-day United States, they created a national identity birthed in their battle against the frontier "wilderness"-- a social construct that has continually evolved yet remained ever present in the American mind. As William Cronon notes, the wilderness understood centuries ago was a place that inspired terror and desolation, and yet evolved to become an escape for the elite and then a national treasure. The "wilderness" balanced the romanticists' sublime rendition of spectacular natural beauty and awe against the rugged, primitive frontier to be conquered by white men. Indeed, the creation of the national parks, perhaps the most emblematic representation of the American outdoors, provided the dual service of preserving majestic vistas and a semblance of the disappearing frontier. The national parks establishment was indispensable to the identity of the United States, as "to protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation's most sacred myth of origin" (Cronon,1996, p.13).

Yet perhaps most critical to consider is the fact the wilderness, with all the values and ideals thrust upon it, existed only through the removal of Indigenous peoples who had inhabited and cared for the land since time immemorial. The national parks, which presented scenic as well as capital value to American society, were places steeped in remembrance, spirituality and life for Indigenous peoples. Here in Oregon, Crater Lake, the state's only national park, was an area integral to the lifeways of multiple Indigenous communities, and the lake itself was a deeply sacred place for visitation by select community members.(Louter, 2002, p. 8-10). And yet to this day, a perusal of the Crater Lake National Park's website yields a plethora of facts about the area and visitation resources—and scant information about Indigenous communities and the process of removal that enabled the park's establishment. The site's "History and Culture" page presents two paragraphs on "Native Americans" --alongside a comparable length of text about gold prospectors and William Steel, who was so inspired by the lake that he sought its designation as a park (National Park Service, 2024). This stark example illustrates the ways in which white society has framed public lands and is replicated across various scales, as a place of enjoyment and exploration, eclipsing its fraught history.

This dynamic is widespread and codified. One of the most significant guiding conservation documents in the US is the 1964 Wilderness Act, which established hundreds of wilderness areas to be managed federally. The document denotes "a wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (United States Government, 1964, p. 1517). These texts continue to institutionalize a perspective, epistemology and history of the outdoors that perpetuates white supremacy and Indigenous erasure. Moreover, evidence of racial hierarchies are displayed

unrelentingly in the overlap of prominent authors of the conservation movement with proponents of eugenics. Gifford Pinchot, for example, a key figure within the American environmental movement and whose legacy includes over a million acres of national forest in Washington State bearing his name, wrote in his report in the 1909 National Conservation Commission the imperative need for conservation to include natural resources, as well as the racial stock of the country (Mowatt, 2021, p.161). Pinchot, twice a delegate to the International Eugenics Congress and party to the American Eugenics Society's advisory council, was the first individual to head the U.S. Forest Service and is widely studied as the face of the utilitarian conservation movement. His foil in the environmental realm, John Muir, promoted preservation of natural spaces and founded the Sierra Club. Muir was concerned far more with the plight of wildlife and landscapes than other human beings, as his writings encoded demeaning and dismissive accounts of Indigenous peoples. Other less well-known figures in the field produced even more racist legacies; conservationist Madison Grant wrote a book imbued with white supremacy called "The Passing of Great Race," a work lauded by his contemporary Theodore Roosevelt-- and praised deeply by Adolf Hitler (Purdy, 2015). Racism is ingrained in how the land is framed through policy and presentation, as well as through how individuals continue to perceive themselves and others in outdoor spaces.

To this point, Derek Christopher Martin offers the concept of a racialized leisure identity, with outdoor leisure identity manifesting expectations of the kind of individual that does and should participate in recreation. This identity has presented notably as tough, healthy and white, with decades of media images fortifying this image and the idea of a white outdoor space (Martin, 2004). It is not difficult to trace this identity to beliefs about nature espoused by prominent historical figures in the environmental movement, such as Theodore Roosevelt and

Henry David Thoreau. Here rugged frontier enthusiasts and higher truth-seeking transcendentalists may take the forefront, shaping the perception of recreational activities and the values that motivate them. While media representation may be changing to show more diversity in outdoor identities, and communities have on their own accord resisted and defied these broader expectations, studies such as these demonstrate how the outdoors have been both intentionally been constructed as white spaces and may be accepted and internalized as such. Moreover, nonwhite, and especially Black recreation participants may have to contend with white entitlement over these public spaces, as white individuals may judge behavior that does not conform to their own standards and have protested changes to national parks for increased diversity and inclusivity (Scott and Lee, 2018).

Often a focal point of attention in recreation, National Parks have provided statistics on visitor usage that display clear inequities in demographics and may be indicative of larger trends. Reports on visitation from 2000, 2008-2009 and 2019 display underrepresentation in National Parks for Black and Hispanic populations, in addition to an overrepresentation of non-Hispanic white visitors (National Park Service, 2019). This trend extends to other public lands as well; between 2016 and 2020, 95.2% of visitors to national forests and 94.4% of visitors to wilderness areas identified as white (USDA Forest Service, 2020). A 2001 multiple hierarchy stratification study found that within the layers of race/ethnicity, sex, age and social class, the most likely groups of individuals to participate in outdoor recreation were white men and then white women who were under the age of 65, had college degrees and made over $20,000 a year. The least likely to participate in outdoor recreation were nonwhite women and then men over 65 who made less than $20,000 and did not have a college degree (Lee et al, 2001). Race/ethnicity,

gender, age and socioeconomic status may all have an impact on recreational participation, informed by long histories of inequities and societal biases.

Racialized Experiences in the Outdoors

While white experiences have in many ways taken the form of settler colonialism, frontier identity, escape, and elitism, communities of other races and ethnicities have markedly distinct experiences in the outdoors. In addition to the staggering loss of land and life endured by Indigenous communities at the hands of the settler state, Mexican American communities were also dispossessed of large swathes of territory as the United States acquired the land from Mexico in the present South-Western region of the country (Correia, 2009). Many communities of color have racialized history with the land in the United States and have provided critical labor fundamental to the formation of the state. Thousands of Chinese laborers provided an instrumental role in the construction of the U.S.'s transcontinental railroad, only to be struck by waves of anti-Chinese sentiment and legislation (Chiu and Kirk, 2014). Black, Latinx[1] and Indigenous laborers worked in agriculture across different time periods and regions of the country (Raibmon, 2006) (Campbell, 2002) (Perez, 2020). Following the white elitism that depended on racial subjugation to maintain power and capital, racist policies and behaviors often dictated the movements and accepted behaviors of communities of color, in addition to the places that they settled. Stemming from these deep histories, white supremacy continues to affect experiences with land and influence safe and equitable access to the outdoors.

[1] [1] Latinx is used in place of Latino or Latino/a as an inclusive identity term to refer to individuals of all genders, as the latter two terms have been criticized as centering a gender binary and gendered hierarchy, respectively (Vidal-Ortiz and Martínez, 2018).

A prominent aspect of this racial dynamic is the experience of Black communities, who have contended with centuries of continued exploitation, violence and discrimination in the outdoors. Carolyn Finney denotes the stark difference between initial settler experiences in the outdoors, struggling against a foreign land but making their own way, with that of Black communities forced into labor through chattel slavery to create profit and livelihood for others (2014, p. 35). While slavery created spaces of control and violence outdoors, many Black communities had a complex relationship with nature; in addition to danger, it offered refuge for those escaping enslavement, seclusion for planning and resistance. These communities often brought knowledge and spiritual traditions from their homelands that informed their connection to nature, and the survival of communities such as the Maroons during these times depended on deep knowledge and understanding of the outdoors (Sene-Harper et al, 2022). Moreover, during slavery and the Jim Crow era, bays and waterways provided additional sustenance and later economic opportunity in the punishing political and societal environment (Sene-Harper et al, 2022) (Roane, 2018).

For many Black communities, the outdoors simultaneously provided spaces of protection and opportunity, as well as violence and discrimination—in some ways, this dynamic has persisted to the present day. Prominent stories include that of Christian Cooper, a Black man who was birding in Central Park in 2020. He was confronted by a white woman who subsequently called the police under the pretense that Cooper was threatening her life; this media story spurred other Black naturalists to share their experiences of discrimination outdoors, including facing accusations of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or casing houses for later robberies (Levenson, 2020). Other cases further evidence the threat to Black individuals in the outdoors, as in the same year, Ahmaud Arbery, a Black man in his 20s, was shot and killed

while running outside by three white men in Georgia. Collective memory, which extends beyond one's own experience to draw from that of one's community, informs actions and ideas; the stories of violence, including lynchings, wrought upon the Black community may continue to affect individuals' thoughts and behaviors in the outdoors (Finney 2019). It is within contexts such as these that racial disparities in outdoor recreation participation must be understood.

Gender and Other Identities in the Outdoors

Race, ethnicity and class are far from the sole identities adversely affected by the hegemonic power structures present in outdoor recreation; gender, sexuality, ability and body size are all aspects that have faced marginalization in these spaces. With race/ethnicity comprising the focal point of this essay, understanding how other identities are impacted is critical to both gaining knowledge and context for intersectional experiences as well as building solidarity.

Attention to gendered experiences has gained attention in recent years. In addition to the mental and physical advantages stemming from outdoor recreation participation, scholars have also found it may be a source of empowerment, as wilderness participation for women may lead to other social changes in their personal lives (Pohl et al, 2017). However, women face many gendered challenges in the outdoors; in urban outdoor settings, vulnerability, fear of violence and objectification—all barriers related to the presence and behavior of other individuals, may impact women's experiences (Wesely and Gardner, 2004). In addition to fear, some women have expressed how expectations of age-related behaviors in society and skills such as navigation may impact their participation (McAnirlin and Maddox, 2022).

Behavioral gender expectations, representation and norms may also play a role in how women and other gender identities experience the outdoors. Building off Martin's study on

racialized leisure identities expressed through media images, other studies focusing on gender representation in recreation magazines found men to be featured most often and photographed engaging in higher risk activities. In a 2018 study of three outdoor magazines, Frazer and Anderson on average found men represented over 68% of the time, women represented above 31% of the time, and Trans and Nonbinary individuals just .33%. Another study on gender roles in magazine images identified common gendered themes of portrayal: women often posed with merchandise and did not demonstrate active engagement in nature, women were shown as followers to male companions or accessing "easy to use" gear to function independently, wilderness was shown as an refuge from gendered responsibilities and home life, and women who did not fit the mold of expected behavior were cast as outliers and ascribed feminizing descriptors. Additionally, women were often not by themselves in these portrayals (McNeil et al, 2012). While these representations may not be exact reflections of how women operate or view themselves in the outdoors, they do demonstrate gendered expectations for behavior, in contrast to the rugged, lone white man so naturalized in outdoor settings.

Scholars have gone on to examine other aspects of oppression and resistance within these white, heteronormative frames. Stanley's examination of social media accounts reviews experiences through gender, race, queer identity as well as body size, noting the fatphobia that can present in outdoor interactions as well as through messaging in public lands (2019). Studies have also begun to employ an intersectional lens to these issues, examining multiple nexuses including that of neurodivergence and queer identities (Loy-Ashe, 2023), fat bodies and queer identities (Potvin and Niblett, 2023) and race and gender (Fleming and Turner, 2023).

Disability presents another related and pronounced dimension to this construct, as it has been an identity ostracized from mainstream recreation. Scholar Sarah Jacquette Ray (2009)

critically engages with the wilderness ideal body of the elite, fit young white male whose engagement in the high risk and physically demanding activities simultaneously renders invisible disabled bodies while relying on the possibility disability to create risk itself. Ray identifies disability as a social construct, for "ability is relative to phase of life and to society's structural expectations and physical designs" (p.275); exclusion of disability threatens the inclusion of a diverse range of identities, which may intersect with disability at various points in life. Ray also notes the environmental value of a slower pace of life, which may enable individuals to appreciate and deepen awareness of nature. In addition to environmental considerations, this approach may highlight various, less typical forms of recreating that do not rely on fast-paced, strenuous activity. Continued scholarship is critical to understanding the nuance and complexities of diverse individuals navigating these outdoor spaces.

Leisure Studies

In light of these disparities, the field of leisure studies has continued to examine the dynamics of underrepresentation for marginalized communities in outdoor recreation and evolve in approach and theory. Two fundamental theories in the field focus on marginalization and subculture for explaining these racial disparities, which developed from Washburne's 1978 study examining low participation rates for Black Americans in the field. The marginalization theory proposed that differences in participation were a function of socioeconomic discrepancies from long-running societal injustices, while the subculture hypothesis, also known as ethnicity hypothesis, pointed to cultural and value differences between groups as drivers of leisure preferences. However, both theories have since been critiqued by prominent scholars including Floyd, who have outlined the weaknesses and inefficacies of the approaches. For example, marginality theory does not provide clear throughlines of explanation between how the specific

manifestations of marginality actually affect recreational choices. In this case, the theory assumes Black communities are a homogenous group without engaging the substantial diversity of socioeconomic class, and the explanation itself follows class-based constraints rather than racial differences. On the other hand, the subculture hypothesis lacks the nuance and specificity to capture the evolving and complex role of ethnicity, while also failing to account for intragroup variance. Moreover, both theories hold a white view of recreational behavior as the standard against which other leisure behaviors are compared, which further normalizes and reifies the space as white. Discrimination has also emerged as an explanatory approach to recreational behaviors of nonwhite participants, but requires further scholarship (Floyd, 1998, p. 5-7).

Beyond the socioeconomic limitations and cultural preferences that may guide participation in outdoor recreation, a third theory focuses on actual and perceived discrimination in spaces as a barrier (Sharaievska, Stodolska,, Shinew and, Kim, 2010), (Stodolska and Walker, 2007), (West, 1989). Racial barriers to outdoor recreation may include encounters with racism in parks and recreation areas both from recreationists and staff, fear of racism occurring in these spaces, and the impact of historical racism (Blahna and Black, 1993). As the United States contends with its long history and current dynamic of race relations, experiences with discrimination as well as apprehension over the possibility of it happening may play a major role in the behaviors of BIPOC individuals.

While these theories began important conversations regarding the racial nature of disparate participation, scholars have since brought forth new considerations and approaches to the field. Kivel et al pursues the need for contextualizing experiences within the larger structures of power that shape them, including an interrogation of whiteness in the space rather than its acceptance as the norm. The authors hold that identities, including race and gender, are social

constructs that fluctuate in meaning and relation depending on their contexts; research must be grounded in their respective socio-cultural environments and understanding the experience participants require approaches that account for their intersectional identities. Thus, collective memory work and Critical Race Ethnographies to engage with the issues in contextually informed manners (Kivel et al, 2009). Thoughtful engagement is also needed with discourses that uphold hegemonic power structures of race, gender, class, sexuality and ability and feed oppression and privilege (Kivel 2000).

Intersectionality provides a key framework with which to engage questions of equity and inclusion, as it embraces the rich and complex identities of individuals. Intersectionality, as outlined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights the importance of understanding complex identities at multiple axes. Her 1989 work "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" illustrated the ways in which hiring discrimination faced by Black women was rendered invisible by single axis analyses of race and gender; because Black men and white women were hired, the unique prejudice against Black women was dismissed. Crenshaw's work underscores the critical need to create space with which to engage the specific experiences and challenges individuals may encounter due to their intersectional identities. Such considerations through into sharp relief the dangers of treating racial groups as monoliths, as experiences are both impacted by factors such as gender, ability, socioeconomic status, queerness as well as the socio-cultural contexts in which they occur. Scholars continue to introduce nuance, grounding and critical engagement to the field.

Contemporary Attention to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

With these long-standing barriers, attention to inequities and white domination in outdoor recreation has extended beyond academia to affect policy, commerce and the retail industry, as

well as nonprofit and local organizations working in the field. Many of these initiatives have been categorized as DEI or Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in nature.

The Avarna group, a BIPOC and women led organization that offers resources, trainings and other services to institutions to create fairness, justice and belonging, provides some definitions for DEI concepts that frame this study. Avarna identities diversity and equity as the following: "**Diversity** is the range of individual experiences, perspectives, and identities that collectively enrich our society, our communities, and our organizations… **Equity** is ensuring everyone has a fair chance by providing equal access to opportunities and resources" (2025, p.2-3). The group notes that inclusion and belonging are often used in equivalent ways; however, this study does differentiate the two terms. **Inclusivity** in this context centers on the representation and integration of the needs and perspectives of different identities, while **Belonging** encompasses a feeling of welcome and acceptance. Some organizations also include the concepts of Justice (DEIJ) or Accessibility (DEIA) or a combination of these terms. For the purposes of this study, the framework of DEIB will be utilized to incorporate the emphasize the impact of "belonging," critically important in white dominated areas, as it pertains to communities that have also been ostracized from the outdoors by societal forces.

A 2023 report from the National Parks and Recreation Association (NPRA) marks forward momentum with regard to DEI in recreation, with an 8% increase in formal DEI programs for parks and recreation organizations between 2021 and 2023; nearly a quarter more of agency leaders predict the creation of such programs in the near future. While many may hail these initiatives as much needed progress, steps toward inclusivity at times bring with them unintended reinforcement of class hierarchies or inherent limitations. Moreover, shifts in policy have changed drastically between presidential administrations, revealing an inherent

vulnerability in reliance on governmental momentum–that may have resounding effects beyond government programs themselves. Still, certain shifts may provide potential for leveraging change. An interesting beginning point centers on the concept of outdoor recreation itself. With so many societal values and identity expectations imbued in outdoor recreation, deconstructing the definition of outdoor recreation presents a worthwhile challenge.

From a public lands management perspective, some scholars have pushed for a redefinition of recreation from leisure activities to a more holistic and encompassing understanding of human connection to land. A 2020 USDA report outlines this proposal, noting how public land usage extends far beyond the limited scope of conventional activities to include cultural and spiritual traditions, health and wellness activities, economic opportunities and stewardship acts. Changes to this institutional perspective could mark moving beyond moral and instrumental values to including eudemonic values centered on the propriety of relationships with nature, such as those that may be reflected in Indigenous connections to the outdoors (Blahna et al, 2020). These institutional discussions may signal work toward more inclusive views of recreation beyond those historically given value by Transcendentalist and Frontierist thought. Transcendentalism found connection with nature to reveal higher moral and spiritual truths, while Frontierism contended that the American settlers' experience with the "wilds" was the foundational element in recouping their individualism and establishing democratic conventions (Taylor, 2016, p.25-26). These early environmental ideologies were debated within an exclusive, white niche of society, and effectively ignored the rich and complex perspectives and relationships of people of color had with the environment. Thus, springs forth potential for public land management policies that can better serve a diverse public audience, rather than those who have been traditionally engaged.

Diversity initiatives have also been issued by other branches of the government, including the executive. President Barack Obama's 2017 Memorandum "Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Our National Parks, National Forests and Other Public Lands and Waters" committed to seeking a diverse federal workforce, outreach to marginalized communities and increasing access to recreational opportunities for these groups (The White House, 2017). The Memorandum mirrored the administration's work in creating new national monuments that celebrated diverse leaders and communities in American history, including the César A. Chávez National Monument, the Stonewall National Monument, the Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument and the Honouliuli National Monument (NPS, 2017). Additionally, started in 2011 and relaunched in 2022 by the Biden-Harris administration, the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation (FICOR) includes goals such as increasing equitable access to outdoor recreation and nature in collaboration with other governmental entities, nonprofits and tribal organizations (White House, 2022).

While such initiatives mark much needed focus on equity work in public land and recreation access, the suspension of the council due to presidential administration changes highlights the vulnerability in relying on governmental work to enact sustainable change. Perhaps nothing illustrates this issue more pointedly than the slew of executive orders rolled out by the second Trump administration in early 2025. In January 2025, Trump effectively ended all DEI programs within the federal government, including trainings, hiring practices, policies and affirmative actions. The actions also affected contractors and grants, with the administration claiming that such initiatives were discriminatory (The White House, 2025). While the full consequences of these executive orders still reverberate in the domestic sphere, such swift

derailment of equity work on the federal level further cements the danger in relying solely on federal change for progress

Attention on equity and inclusion is further echoed in other aspects of the outdoor recreation field. Outdoor retail giants such as REI and The North Face have launched equity initiatives and collaborated with BIPOC organizations on exclusive collections. REI's Path Ahead Ventures focuses on offering resources including funding and network connections for outdoor apparel company founders who identify as BIPOC (REI Co-op). Through The North Face's Explore Fund, created in 2020, the company has provided funding and support to groups such as Black Girls Trekkin, Disabled Hikers and Native Women Running (The North Face). Similarly, REI partnered with Outdoor Afro, a nonprofit focused on Black leadership in the outdoors and connection to nature, to create a collection of outdoor clothes and accessories. The North Face worked with Hike Clerb, a nonprofit serving Black, Indigenous Women of Color (BIWOC) in the outdoors, on a comparable set of apparel.

While these giant retail offerings may mark a shift toward a multicultural space, they concurrently may continue to contribute to problematic iterations of outdoor identity and proper ways to engage with nature. In her analysis of the American Latino Expedition (ALEX), a program created in partnership with companies including REI and Aramark under the National Parks Foundation American Latino Heritage Fund (ALHF), Sarah Wald explains that while such projects may hold some commendable aspects, such as increased representation for Latinxs in outdoor spaces and as establishment of the group as part of the nation's future, a commercial path toward "inclusivity" can concurrently uphold settler colonialism and further entrench socioeconomic definitions of who belongs in the outdoors (2019). While problematic in this light, collaborations with retailers may also bolster attention to and provide funding for these

smaller organizations that serve BIPOC communities and increase representation through offering inclusive gear. Additionally, the influence of government policy may also wield an impact with regard to DEI initiatives. Following Trump's termination of DEI programs, many high-grossing corporations such as Amazon, McDonalds, Google and Target have followed suit. Target, for instance, has ended DEI goals that encompassed hiring a more diverse workforce and seeking more suppliers identifying as BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and other marginalized backgrounds (Associated Press, 2025). While as of early February of 2025, no outdoor retailers have denounced DEI as have other of their commercial counterparts, such swift unraveling of equity programs highlight the susceptibility of private initiatives to follow broader governmental changes. While some companies have remained steadfast in their values, the recent overhaul has demonstrated that the commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion may be tenuous, disingenuous, or expendable.

With such volatility in the governmental and commercial spheres regarding diversity and inclusion, grassroots projects present unique and necessary avenues through which to continue the journey toward equity. With historic and ongoing barriers to outdoor recreation, actions and changes that specifically engage with and create opportunities for marginalized groups are critical to work toward equal access to recreational activities.

Culture of Climbing

Climbing is one of the more challenging activities to access in the field of outdoor recreation. The sport requires skill, knowledge of technique, and specialized gear; indoor climbing gyms require membership or payment to enter and additional charges for renting shoes and chalk. As with other activities, climbers of color have been underrepresented (Gagnon et al, 2016). A 2019 study found that of indoor climbing gym users in Canada and the United States,

82% identified as white, 12% as Asian, 6% as Latino, 2% as American Indian/Native American, 1% as Black, 1% as Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 2% as other/self-described (Carter, 2020).

Personal stories and individual perspectives, published on blogs and news articles, are helpful in illustrating some of the specific dynamics at play in the climbing world. Mitsu Iwasaki, the Japanese American CEO of American Alpine Club, expressed the continued impact of racism in his short piece "The Climbing Community Has Been the Source of My Deepest Pain." He details how he is treated differently when climbing with white climbers versus BIPOC partners, where when climbing with the latter group he was assumed to be less skilled and knowledgeable about the sport by outsiders. The most profound hurt endured by Iwasaki is his need to code switch when climbing with white partners, changing the way he speaks and holds himself to ensure he is heard. As he pointedly notes, "inclusion should not require assimilation." Others highlight the various aspects of climbing and its community that remain problematic or exclusionary. Anaheed Saatchi critiques the popular climbing documentaries *Free Solo* and *Dawn Wall*, which feature the impressive climbing feats of white men. These films do not engage with the levels of privilege prevalent in these men and fail to acknowledge the barriers that they do not face–thus presenting an experience far removed from the lived realities of many marginalized communities (2019). Melissa Utomo shared her experience of interacting with REI about its route finder app, Mountain Project, that lacked a reporting mechanism for violent or racist names bestowed by users. She offered a proposal backed by multiple groups, but felt the outdoor giant largely disregarded her initiative and requested her unpaid labor through inviting her to join their diversity coalition. REI later implemented a fix to the app akin to Utomo's suggestion following the social upheaval of 2020, although the company did not credit her and representatives refuted claims of using her intellectual property (Weinberger, 2020). These

anecdotes, all published within the last six years, begin to outline a complex image of climbing through which inequities are continued, but challenged. These stories additionally highlight the frustrations of working with and relying upon companies and other actors in the field.

A 2023 study focused on the ways in which privilege and marginalization impacted attitudes regarding social justice and inclusion for climbers within the United States, finding that individuals with more privilege tended to be less concerned with the two principles. BIPOC respondents, women and nonbinary, and queer participants all displayed more concern over the issues of climbing on Native land and lack of inclusivity in the sport than their white, male and straight counterparts. The researchers identified higher levels of representation of marginalized identities as a path through which to increase inclusion, while noting the difficulty in achieving that goal. This research echoes other calls for increased diversity, it also highlights the need for the burden of responsibility to be undertaken by members and organizations of the dominant group rather than marginalized communities (Flynn et al, 2023).

Additionally, while not the focus of this thesis, understanding the dynamics of climbing in outdoor recreation through the lens of equity and inclusion obligates consideration of the controversies that have arisen due to conflict in land usage. The Devils Tower National Monument presents a prime example of the ways in which a lack of inclusive and equitable perspectives in the sport can harm historically marginalized communities. For multiple tribal communities, the Devil's Tower, the name of which is a controversy in itself, represents a sacred site present in over 23 creation stories and plays a significant role in cultural and religious traditions. The monument is also prized by the climbing community for its columnal formation, allowing recreationists to practice a method known as "crack climbing." Conflicts arising from clashes in the usage, and accompanying expectations of behavior and impacts, led to the creation

of a voluntary climbing ban during the month of June, during which sacred ceremonies take place at the site. The voluntary nature of this ban hinges upon the understanding and respect from climbers of Indigenous cultures and peoples rather than enforced restrictions; despite consequent failed attempts to remove the ban, it has largely proved effective in reducing the number of climbers during the month of June (Dustin et al, 2002). Interestingly, a 2002 article notes there was an 85% reduction in climbers in June due to the ban, while a 2024 article by Access Fund listed the reduction in climbers as 75%. While various factors may account for the discrepancies in numbers, an increase in numbers of climbers not abiding by the ban is troubling. While this situation also calls attention to greater issues, such as returning land to Indigenous communities, interactions at the Devils Tower National Monument reflect the need for further inclusivity in the field for communities beyond that of the climbers.

While access to climbing often focuses upon questions of who is able to participate, questions of propriety of the sport in landscapes must also be considered and center Indigenous perspectives. While inclusion for marginalized communities remains a critical area to address, it does not necessarily intertwine with Indigenous rights. Joseph Whitson notes the connection between Indigenous people and public lands require "challenging outdoor recreation from a foundation of Indigenous values, addressing explicitly political issues like how to practice treaty guaranteed rights on public lands—like the rights to hunt, fish, and make a living off the land—how to secure management over land and natural resources throughout present and past homelands, and how to maintain sovereignty over their culture and history" (p,314). In recalling the three pillars of white supremacy identified by Smith[2], other communities of color have the responsibility to stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities, advocating in support of their

[2] Smith's (2016) three pillars include Slavery/Capitalism, Genocide/Capitalism and Orientalism/War, which contain logics oppressing Black ,Indigenous and identities such as Latinx, Asian, and Arab, respectively

rights and respecting their sacred sites. This support, of course, constitutes a piece of the puzzle of dismantling white supremacy in the outdoors, and does not detract from the duty of white people and institutions to exact change.

The Rise of Affinity Groups

As heteronormative white domination in outdoor spaces has endured, it has also constantly been met with resistance from the communities it seeks to marginalize. One such way is through the creation of outdoor affinity groups. Affinity groups are collectives of individuals brought together by a shared characteristic of identity such as race, gender or sexuality. Affinity groups or caucuses have been used in other professional settings such as k-12 and medical education, allowing participants to build camaraderie and connections, reflect on racialized experiences and internalized racism, heal in community, and develop policies to engage and dismantle inequities—in spaces protected from the aggressions, judgment and emotional burden often experienced in white dominant spaces (Lewis et al, 2023-4) (Pour-Koshid, 2018). In the context of outdoor recreation, this study will identify outdoor affinity groups as collectives of individuals who share an aspect of identity and are presented as such, are founded or led by members with the shared characteristic, offer regular events and programming to participants, and recruit and maintain members of the public within the identity group. Affinity groups may or may not be formalized as 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organizations, but these parameters allow groups to be distinguished from social, friend or familial groups that may share identity characteristics. Additionally, there are other affinity groups that exist on online platforms that share stories and resources for members of the identity group, but do not host in-person events. While these

groups contribute significant and laudable work to goals of equity and inclusion that also merit further scholarship, their virtual activities lay outside the scope of this study.

On the West Coast of the US, the past two decades have borne witness to the creation of a range of outdoor affinity groups revolving around both singular and intersectional identities. Some groups such as Outdoor Asian, established in 2017, and Latino Outdoors, created in 2013, focus on serving a specific racial group and can provide culturally and/or linguistically informed engagement and activities. Other organizations, such as the Seattle born Climbers of Color group, focus more broadly on BIPOC identification as the affinity characteristic. Still others such as Hike Clerb, established in Los Angeles in 2017, and the Trail Mixed Collective, create intersectional spaces for women of color. Trail Mixed Collective notes that "having these dedicated spaces helps build a place where there is belonging, no judgment, and unique experiences that allow us to build trust… These are places to heal and grow for previously discriminated against groups, to develop and ultimately impact interracial dialogue" (Trail Mixed Collective). While these separate spaces may seem counterintuitive to inclusivity and diversity, they may offer a host of benefits for their participants.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the work of Latino Outdoors, founded by José González in 2013, which works to connect the Latinx culture and community with the outdoors and larger discourses of the environment, national identity and belonging. As of 2018, the organization included 180 volunteers in addition to two employees, who are paid in full time positions. Latino Outdoors utilizes an expansive social media network to share stories, build community and disseminate information across the nation. Additionally, family outings connect Latinx communities to public lands through culturally attuned programming and help establish belonging in these spaces. Key in this dynamic is the structure of activities with familial groups,

in direct contrast to the individualist outdoor leisure identity espoused by white society, and the use of storytelling to foster connection to the outdoors and within the group (Flores and Kuhn, 2018). Latino Outdoors demonstrates how this affinity organization can build belonging and connection in outdoor spaces for specific cultural groups, resisting and defying hegemonic expectations for recreating in nature.

Hike Clerb, founded by Evelyn Escobar, is self-described as "a BIWOC-led outdoor collective and 501c3 reimagining an equitable and inclusive outdoors" that serves BIPOC women and Trans and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) people (Hike Clerb). The organization focuses on three program pillars: Moving Through Nature, Healing Through Nature and Restoration through Nature. These components include free or affordable recreational events, mental, physical and spiritual healing through nature and stewardship opportunities. Events offered have included art and nature walks, natural dye workshops, hiking and journaling, and hiking and somatic touch therapy lessons, as well as more conventional recreation activities such as biking, kayaking and trail running (Hike Clerb). This work can reflect both engagement in nontraditional recreational activities as well as representation in conventional activities from which non-white people have often been excluded.

These affinity groups provide valuable spaces for BIPOC individuals to explore the outdoors and learn skills in community and warrant further exploration in scholarship. The rapid creation and spread of these groups may signal a new and impactful approach to increasing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for BIPOC communities, who historically have and continue to face marginalization in the outdoor spaces. Their work presents many significant questions to explore. What benefits are these organizations providing for BIPOC groups, both at the individual level and within the larger context of public lands and outdoor spaces? How do

these groups navigate and work with institutions in these spaces, and to what consequence? Exploring the local dynamics of outdoor recreation and the institutions within them are critical for grounding the work and impact of affinity groups. These themes will be investigated through this thesis project.

Guiding research questions:

1. In what ways do community-led affinity groups impact the experiences of BIPOC participants in outdoor recreation in a white dominated population?
2. What is the current landscape of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the Eugene-Springfield area? Can affinity groups address related current gaps or challenges in local outdoor recreation at the institutional level?

CHAPTER 2: PLACE

History of Racial Relations in Oregon and Eugene

The present-day City of Eugene, named after a white settler considered the city's founder, is situated in the homelands of the Kalapuya, who have inhabited and lived with the land since time immemorial. The city is located in the Willamette Valley in Western Oregon, a state rife with a racist history of white supremacy. From the dispossession of land from Indigenous communities to policies of racial exclusion rooted in the state constitution, the state has long contended with this controversial legacy. Now known as an overall progressive state, despite clear political differences from region to region, Oregon, and the cities within it, continue to navigate the terrain of racial dynamics.

An overview of Oregon's racial history begins with the treatment of the land's original inhabitants, who lost both community members and land to settlers. Settlers brought both diseases and violence, and on-the-ground impacts were seconded by political moves on a larger scale. Government policies, such as the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, offered hundreds of acres to white settlers as well as mixed-race Indigenous individuals. This Act both dispossessed Indigenous communities of land, legitimized the actions of settlers who made claims to land in the Willamette Valley, and enticed more settlers to Oregon under the premise of "free" land. During the five years of the Act's validity, settlers claimed roughly 2.5 million acres of land in the state (Oregon Historical Society). The United States government forced Indigenous peoples in Oregon off their land into two reservations; the 1856 removal of communities from the temporary reservation of Table Rock to Grand Ronde became known as the Oregon Trail of Tears, a harsh and cruel journey that for some Indigenous individuals, resulted in death

(Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde). In addition to the loss of land, the loss of community members impacted the wealth of familial and cultural history maintained through oral traditions (Merrill and Hajda, 2007, p. 124). Kalapuyans today exist as the descendants of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Indigenous communities have continued to resist, create and live on today. No study of the area should discuss racial dynamics without establishing that Eugene is Kalapuya land.

The state's blatant embrace of white supremacy did not end with the continued oppression and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Black communities also faced violence and persecution in Oregon, through both racist actions and laws that legitimized this enmity. In the 1844, "Burnett's Lash Law" sought to banish free Black individuals from the territory under the threat of lashing. Although the consequence was lessened and the law eventually rescinded the next year, subsequent laws prevented Black individuals from entering Oregon if they had not already been residing there, and Oregon's exclusion clause codified making contracts, possessing property or residing in the state for as forbidden Black individuals. While these laws have been long extinguished, racist language endured in the state constitution into the 2000s, and the legacy of these laws reflect in the demographic makeup of the state (Nokes 2024).Additionally, many towns in Oregon were known as "Sundown Towns," areas of the state where non-white people, particularly Black individuals, were excluded through threats from living in or traveling through–groups that, according to town residents, had better not be present in the town past sundown.

Policies and legislation also targeted other non-white racial groups, including Chinese immigrants and Native Hawaiians. Laws forced the afore-mentioned groups, in addition to mixed-race Black individuals, to pay five dollars each year with the consequence of working in

public service should they fail to pay. Until 1951, interracial marriage was illegal in the state (Calhoon, 2006). Anti-Chinese sentiment and violence also marked a dark chapter in Oregon's history, with the burning of buildings in Chinatown in Portland and the deaths of 34 Chinese miners at the hands of white men in Wallowa County. These types of events preceded xenophobic legislation on the national scale, with the Chinese Exclusion Acts that barred Chinese immigrants from entering the United States. Chinese immigrants already in the state during the Exclusion period of 1885-1940 faced widespread discrimination in education, housing, employment and other aspects of society (Lee, 2023).

The racial attitudes imbued in legislation were mirrored in hate groups in the state. The Klu Klux Klan was notoriously active in Oregon in the 1920s, and their activities included parading through the streets of Eugene with hundreds of members and burning a cross on Skinner's Butte. Within the state, Klan members won local and state elections, promoting xenophobic and nationalist policies (Toy, 2022). In Eugene, Klu Klux Klan #3 included University of Oregon faculty, public officials and other important individuals in the city. While the organization waned in prominence after its height in the 20s, this transition did not equate to a dissolution of ideologies or erasure of racial enmity–troubling events continued well into the latter half of the century. A Klan initiation was witnessed in the late 1960s (with the evidence disappearing from a locked desk overnight) and in the 1980s, bomb threats were delivered to events at the Hult Center associated with the Black community (Calhoon, 2006).

The racial history of the state, and the city of Eugene itself, provides important context to understanding the racial dynamics of the present, both in terms of current demographics and well as attitudes and institutions that have undergirded society.

Current Local Dynamics

Eugene today has a population of nearly 178,000 people, approximately the same population size as the state's capital, Salem. Eugene is situated adjacent to the city of Springfield, separated by the Willamette River; together, the cities comprise the Eugene-Springfield Metropolitan Statistical Area, second in size only to Portland in Oregon. With a population of a little over 60,000 people, Springfield is much smaller than its neighbor and lacks the presence of a large university; thus, Eugene may operate as the hub of attention and recognition. Nonetheless, because of Springfield's proximity to Eugene, the dynamics and work of recreational organizations that operate in the city are also included in contextualizing this study.

Population demographics reveal that both cities are predominantly white. About three-quarters of Eugene's population identify as non-Hispanic or Latino white per the census, with a higher percentage of white (non-Hispanic or Latino) residents than both the state's largest city, Portland, and the United States on average. In Eugene, Hispanic/Latino residents comprise the second largest demographic group at 11.4% of the population, followed by people of two or more races (10.5%), Asian residents (3.9%), Black residents (1.8%), American Indian or Alaska Native residents (0.8%) and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander residents (0.4%). While Springfield has a nearly identical percentage of white residents, the neighboring city has notably fewer Black and Asian residents, and more American Indian or Alaska Native and Hispanic or Latino residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Eugene is known as a liberal city, with national election voting results in Lane County supporting democratic candidates including Kamala Harris in the 2024 election. However, surrounding counties, such as Linn County to the north and Douglas County to the south voted

overwhelmingly for Trump in the same year (Politico, 2024). While Eugene may be a progressive stronghold, surrounding rural areas overtaken by the city's voting population may be less aligned with liberal values. While the racist rhetoric stemming from Trump and white nationalists is easy to identify, liberal voting patterns do not automatically translate to an absence of racism. A more nuanced racial ideology continues to feed into societal structures, take on less overt forms of racist language or perspectives or, and lead some white populations to presume racism is now irrelevant or obsolete (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 37-39).

Moreover, the city's 2022 report of hate crimes reveal that race and ethnicity continue to be leading motivations, and that Black individuals disproportionately endure these acts of enmity compared to other racial groups. While Black residents comprise just under 2% of Eugene's population, Black individuals were the target of over 64% of the 14 race motivated hate crimes committed that year. Race and ethnicity overall represented 64% of all 28 hate crimes in 2022, with gender and sexual orientation identified as motivating the remaining crimes. Between 2017-2022, hate crimes varied in motivation and included other protected identities such as disability/mental health, religion and housing status, yet race and ethnicity consistently remained prominent reasons throughout the period. The report also notes that over half of all hate incidents, which are associated with a protected identity but do not constitute a crime, may not be reported due to reasons ranging from a perceived lack of importance or inability to help the victim to jurisdictional limitations (City of Eugene, 2023). Racial prejudice remains present and problematic in the area.

Within the examination of these racial dynamics that have evolved and endured since white settlers arrived on this land, equally important is consideration and understanding of the important work that has been done and continues to be carried out in diversity, equity, inclusion

and belonging. This passage does not claim a present landscape that is fraught with unescapable racial strife and danger, but rather to trace the racialized history of the area that undergirds the present and bring to light some of the enduring dynamics that impact the experience of BIPOC communities in Eugene today. Later discussion will delve into the important work of organizations in creating more equitable and inclusive outdoor spaces through a series of semi-structured interviews and survey reports.

Affinity Groups in Oregon

Within this racial context, affinity groups and organizations have arisen to serve and engage with BIPOC communities, while other already established organizations have begun to offer BIPOC specific events. People of Color Outdoors (POCO), or PDX People of Color Outdoors was founded by a Pamela Slaughter in Portland in 2017. Slaughter's own experiences with racism in the outdoors with her family highlighted a dire need for safety and community in nature, as she shared a terrifying and formative anecdote of being surrounded by a group of "racist skinheads" while out on a trail with her children. The group now offers over 60 events annually to BIPOC participants and white parents with BIPOC children, enabling them to build community, normalize BIPOC individuals in outdoor spaces, learn new skills and activities, and exploring and connecting with natural areas (PDX People of Color Outdoors). Wild Diversity, also based in the area, is a nonprofit that serves BIPOC and LGTQS2+ communities in the outdoors. Founder Mercy M'fon notes that participants face homophobia, racism, transphobia and prejudice constantly, but experiencing the outdoors often includes the additional layer of being separated from support systems. The organization offers scholarships, a sliding scale for payment and gear rental opportunities to help increase access to outdoor activities (Burris, 2024).

However, as of May 2025, the organization's website is no longer accessible, and it is unclear if the group is still functioning or in existence.

These affinity groups are not limited to the highly populated Portland area; Vámonos Outside, based in the city of Bend in Central Oregon, serves Latine/a/o/x and BIPOC communities and aims at "providing equitable access to outdoor spaces and programs, offering green sector employment opportunities to youth, and ingraining Latino culture within the Central Oregon outdoor narrative." Opportunities include out-of-school affinity programming for youth, a summer camp for BIPOC girls and non-binary youth, BIPOC climb nights and other activity specific events. Since 2019, the organization has facilitated over 1300 participant days outside (Vámonos Outside).

The growing attention to affinity spaces has also extended beyond organizations themselves, as some established organizations have begun to host affinity events in addition to standard programming. The Bird Alliance of Oregon, formerly the Portland Audubon Society, has offered opportunities such as a BIPOC Forest Bathing Walk. The Bird Alliance of Oregon notes that the affinity walks "are vital for creating safe, nurturing spaces where participants can connect with nature and each other without the pressures of navigating dominant culture" (Bird Alliance of Oregon, 2025). While the acknowledgement of this longstanding organization of the need for affinity spaces is commendable, it is necessary to simultaneously recognize that the substantial cost of such events, which is $25 or $35 for organization members of non-members respectively, may continue to pose barriers to access for marginalized communities.

Outdoor Recreation in and around Eugene

Eugene has a strong affiliation with outdoor recreation and provides many opportunities for its visitors and residents to engage in it; Eugene is officially known as "a great city for art and the outdoors." Famously, the city is the birthplace of the athletic giant Nike, known originally as Blue Ribbon Sports. One of the company's co-founders, a track coach from the University of Oregon named William Bowerman, was also credited for bringing the idea of jogging to the United States (Lathan, 2023). The city itself offers a multitude of trails for jogging, hiking, biking and running, including the 12-mile Ridgeline trail system that links many natural areas in the south side of the city and includes the picturesque summit of Spencer Butte. There are at least three commercial climbing gyms in the city, in addition to outdoor climbing areas in and near the Eugene-Springfield area. Eugene is also well-positioned in proximity to other recreation attractions and opportunities. From the city, residents can access the coast by driving or catching a bus west for about one and a half hours to the City of Florence on the Pacific Coast. Heading east from Eugene, people can access a wealth of trails and other amenities in the Willamette National Forest, Deschutes National Forest, and Smith Rock State Park within three hours of driving. In the winter, the Hoodoo and Willamette Pass ski areas in the Willamette National Forest offer venues for winter sport participants.

Beyond individual pursuit of recreational opportunities, government agencies in the area work to provide amenities and programming to their communities. The City of Eugene Parks and Open Spaces Department and the Willamalane Park and Recreational District serve the metropolitan communities of Eugene and Springfield. The City of Eugene offers extensive recreation services to the community, including adaptive recreation services, adult and senior services, camps and a River House Outdoor Center offering a range of activities. The city also

creates a seasonal recreation guide for the community and includes a Park and Open Space Department that oversees the system of parks within Eugene. The Willamalane Park and Recreation District, hence referred to as Willamalane, is a special tax district that operates under the direction of a board of directors rather than within the City of Springfield. Notably, this allows the organization more flexibility and autonomy as compared to the city's management by elected officials. Willamalane manages various indoor and outdoor recreational facilities in addition to providing recreational opportunities and trips for all ages and abilities. Seasonally, the organization publishes a recreation guide in both English and Spanish advertising upcoming classes, workshops, lectures, trips and services, that includes logistics, details and pricing.

Just outside of town to the east, the Howard Buford Recreation Area is host to a variety of trails, riverside viewpoints, and most famously, the 1, 518 ft summit of Mt. Pisgah. Within the Recreation Area, visitors can hike, ride horses, explore the range of natural habitats and enjoy the river. The park was established in the 1970s and named after a retired community planner (Banta, 2022); Kalapuya names for the area are not accessible through publications on the HBRA. Visitors to the area can choose from a variety of trails to explore, from meandering trails providing scenic overlooks and pathways down to the Willamette River to heart-pumping inclines leading to the summit of Mt. Pisgah. On a clear day, one is greeted at the summit with expansive views of the landscape and distant snowy peaks. Due to the efforts of organizations and volunteers battling the encroachment of invasive species such as Himalayan Blackberry and Scotch Broom, visitors to the HBRA can experience native ecosystems of prairies and oak savannahs.

Although the land is officially held by Lane County Parks, smaller organizations hold lease areas and manage their respective areas in collaboration with the agency. The Friends of

Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah (Friends) and the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum operates in the area with separate but complementary purposes: where the Friends focuses on stewardship and compatible recreation, the Arboretum provides educational opportunities for visitors to better understand the land. Additionally, the Lane County Sheriff's Mounted Posse, a group of volunteer equestrians that supports the sheriff's department and search and rescue operations, maintains an outdoor arena for events and training (Lane County, 2016).

The Mt. Pisgah Arboretum is a prominent nonprofit in the area, a 209 acre nature education park known for its diverse array of programming and bi-annual festivals: the fall Mushroom Festival and spring Wildflower Festival. The organization believes that engaging with the natural world will inspire people to protect and steward it for the future. The Arboretum offers guided nature walks, workshops for a facilitated experience, as well as interpretive exhibits on wetlands, incense-cedar, oak woodlands and oak savanna for visitors to learn at their individual pace. The organization also coordinates work parties in which the community may participate and also maintains a venue space that can be reserved for large events. Within the lease area, the Arboretum also cares for seven miles of trails.

The Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah have a more biocentric role as an organization in the HBRA. While the Arboretum focuses on fomenting human connection to nature through education and Lane County Parks responds to the perspectives of the public, the Friends in many ways promotes the needs of the ecosystem. The organization centers its work on stewardship and compatible recreation in the area, managing almost 30 miles of trails within a 2000 acre area and running a native plant nursery. While Friends may not have the same level of direct contact with visitors as the Arboretum, the organization also encourages human connection to nature by caring for the routes through which people explore and enjoy the land.

Additionally, Friends coordinates work parties for the public to contribute to stewardship projects, shares monthly newsletters, and attends outreach events to maintain connections to the community.

Previous academic research projects have delved into the barriers and solutions to equitable park access within this area. Taylor Bowden, a University of Oregon Landscape Architecture Masters Student, utilized a variety of methods including interviews and focus groups to detail the cultural barriers Black, Latinx and Indigenous folx navigate in the outdoors and subsequently developed a toolkit with which to engage them. The HBRA and Mt. Pisgah provided the case study for the student's master's thesis, and the project yielded five main barriers for the Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities in the area: racism, safety, exclusion, poor accommodation and staff representation. Within these categories, Bowden also identified more specific barriers; within exclusion, for example, were elitism, colonial legacy and erasure, and within the poor accommodations category were lack of dedicated BIPOC spaces, use and formatting of translations, access to land for cultural practices and programming options. Under racism, specifics included microaggressions, violence, white fragility and "Karens," a term used to describe an identity of an older white person who feels threatened by or reacts disproportionately to Black or Brown folx. Bowden's interviews outline experiences through which participants endured racialized experiences in these local outdoor areas, with some participants recalling an experience in the HBRA during which an older white woman with connections to the park interrupted a BIPOC nature walk and caused a scene in her questioning their presence in the area. The encounter had a prominent impact on the feeling of being welcome in the park, and resulted in some participants expressing they would not return to the area. Within the category of safety, sub-barriers included inexperience in outdoor recreation,

police bias, and insufficient emergency support. Under staff representation, the aspects of lack of staff diversity, inequity, questions of allyship and tokenism emerged.

In response to these experiential and institutional barriers identified, Bowden created a toolkit of 34 action items distilled from focus group discussions for use by park managers and the community at large. These actions were classified as community, educational or administrative in nature, and included suggestions such as building a community longhouse, providing BIPOC outdoor education courses, implementing a BIPOC hotline for discrimination reporting and offering a volunteer stipend for BIPOC work on the park's board. Bowden also suggest offering BIPOC space in parks for events pertaining to community and culture, using meet-ups to facilitate BIPOC networking and relationship building, inviting outdoor gear shops to support BIPOC communities through donations, scholarships and gear raffles, and providing standing events or classes in the park for BIPOC and allies (with BIPOC leadership). Some of these community action items may be met through affinity group work, as they provide spaces for connection and can provide conduits for gear acquisition.

Affinity Groups and the Eugene Climbers of Color

In Eugene, there are at least three affinity groups providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, although only one specifically focuses on BIPOC communities. Dirt Maidens and the WTFNB Bike Collective both engage femme, women, trans and non-binary individuals in biking opportunities, with Dirt Maidens also offering a trail stewardship component and select BIPOC specific activities. Eugene Climbers of Color, which comprise the focus of this study, is a BIPOC climbing group operating within the city that provides indoor and outdoor climbing opportunities to those who identify as BIPOC.

Eugene Climbers of Climber (ECOC) is a collective of community members dedicated to making climbing more accessible for BIPOC participants. The concept was born out of the interest and passion of a few BIPOC climbers, who met with one of the founders of the Corvallis Climbers of Color group to begin the Eugene-based collective. The planning team, which coordinates events and creates partnerships with local businesses, currently consists of about seven members. This core group of BIPOC climbers has changed over the collective's lifetime as people have left the area or had changes in personal capacity, but has continued to offer consistent activities and grow over the past year. Eugene Climbers of Color remains a community-led initiative fueled by the commitment and care of its planning team, and does not have a 501(c)3 nonprofit status.

Membership is flexible and free for participants; participants can sign up for emailed communications, but the group does not have a roster of individuals officially registered as "members." Information is disseminated through the mailing list, Instagram posts and whatsapp group; participants are encouraged to register for events such as the climb nights, but attendance is not restricted by their doing so or not. The group has an online linktree with links to the mailing list, whatsapp group, BIPOC climb night information and waiver forms to participate for both gyms. The linktree also includes a feedback google form for participants that seeks input on the way in which the respondent heard about the climb nights, opinions on the date and time for the climb night, suggestions for improvement, and other comments. The final inclusion for the linktree is a link to resources for climbers, which includes pages of articles and suggestions for BIPOC climbers, organizers, and allies.

Before the official formation of Eugene Climbers of Color in early 2024, a dedicated community member worked to begin a monthly BIPOC Climb Night at Elevation Bouldering

Gym. This monthly opportunity provided a free indoor climbing opportunity for self-identified BIPOC participants, which includes usage of the gym's climbing walls as well as free rentals of climbing shoes. BIPOC climb nights begin with a group introduction through which participants gather and meet one another, which generally include sharing names, pronouns and answering an icebreaker question. The introduction is followed by instruction on basic technique and safe falling practices for individuals new to climbing or who want to refresh their knowledge. Participants are then able to practice their climbing anywhere in the gym, and can choose whether to attempt routes individually or in the presence of other BIPOC climbers. While the gym remains open to anyone, these free affinity climb nights provide an opportunity for BIPOC climbers to connect and learn from one another within the gym. After the climbing session, the group generally holds an open invitation for participants to get dinner together at a local restaurant to further provide space to interact and bond. At the time of the interviews in the fall 2024, climb nights averaged 20-30 participants each, but a social media post in the spring of 2025 noted that over 70 people attended the March climb night. ECOC also offers outdoor climbing activities at locations such as the Columns and Eagles Rest. The group has also maintained a relationship with the Corvallis Climbers of Color, sharing each other's events and on occasion offering carpool opportunities to attend climb nights in the neighboring city. Additionally, Eugene Climbers of Color hosts yearly anniversary events to celebrate the climb nights, during which participants can eat dinner in community, climb, network with tabling organizations and win prizes from local businesses. Anniversary events can have over 100 attendees.

Participants receive additional benefits apart from the climbing opportunity of the monthly event. Elevation Bouldering Gym offers first time BIPOC climbers at the gym a one

month free membership; adult (non-student) memberships generally cost $80 a month when purchased directly. Eugene Climbers of Color has recently started an additional partnership with the Circuit Bouldering Gym in downtown Eugene; similar to the climb night at Elevation, participants can climb and use rental gear free of cost during the monthly meet-up. The two climb nights are spaced out so participants can attend an event roughly every two weeks. Circuit climb nights also offer raffle prizes to BIPOC participants, including membership to the gym.

Additionally, the Eugene Gear Collective operates during the BIPOC climb night at Elevation. The collective distributes gear donations to individuals in need, specifically prioritizing BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and disabled communities. Outdoor gear including outerwear, bike accessories, snow sport equipment and shoes for recreational activities are all accepted, while nonfunctional gear and used safety equipment are not. The collective generally has a table with available gear set up during the climb nights, enabling BIPOC climbers to select gear at no cost as needed. While the Eugene Gear Collective and ECOC are separate entities, some members in the organizing roles of both groups overlap.

Eugene Climbers of Color, a community-born and led group of BIPOC individuals, serving and strengthening their community, provide the nexus of this study in outdoor recreation. This study will examine both the benefits for BIPOC individuals participating in the group, as well as the potential for affinity groups such as ECOC to respond to current gaps in the organizational dynamics of local outdoor recreation. Understanding the personal impact of these groups retains tandem importance with exploring the possibility for groups to induce change on a larger scale.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach enables the researcher to gain more general data on the DEI landscape through survey data as well as the nuances and complexities yielded by interviews. Methods are utilized to respond to the research questions in the following ways:

Research Question 1: In what ways do community-led affinity groups impact the experiences of BIPOC participants in outdoor recreation in a white dominated population?

a. Semi-structured interviews with affinity group participants and organizers on experiences in outdoor recreation, benefits of affinity group participation, and challenges or drawbacks to the group.

Research Question 2: What is the current landscape of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the Eugene-Springfield area? Can affinity groups address related current gaps or challenges in local outdoor recreation at the institutional level?

b. Semi-structured interviews with outdoor organizations on current dynamics, strategies and challenges with engaging marginalized communities locally
c. Survey data gathered by the researcher on demographic information, interest in affinity groups, and barriers to participation in the HBRA
d. Levy survey data gathered by Lane County Parks through their equity survey on barriers to access in Lane County Parks, including individuals who hold marginalized identities

While research aims evolved after the development of the survey and thus rendered some of the questions less relevant to the central research questions, the data gathered still adds

valuable insight to the overall dynamics of outdoor recreation in a rural park and provided an opportunity for reciprocity with supporting organizations. Semi-structured interviews with affinity group participants create a framework for outlining the main benefits for individuals while also allowing the participants to unpack their rich experiences and perspectives surrounding outdoor recreation and the affinity group itself. Interviews with organization staff contribute knowledge on the structures and institutions undergirding outdoor spaces and recreation locally, combining with survey data and affinity group experiences to develop a more complete understanding of how affinity groups may present an intervention in the field of leisure studies. Results of the levy survey conducted by Lane County provide additional data for comparison and supplementation on the barriers to access within the county park system. All recruitment and data collection methods are approved by the University of Oregon's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as Study 00001440.

Surveys: Howard Buford Recreation Area

Although rock climbing opportunities are not available in the Howard Buford Recreation Area, examination of equity and inclusion challenges and strategies provide information critical to examining the potential for affinity groups or events to increase the efficacy of these initiatives. As the most visited park in Lane County with over half a million visitors annually (Banta, 2022), the HBRA provides an important recreational site in the local area.

Surveys were developed in collaboration with staff from Friends of Buford Park and Mt Pisgah. Certain questions such as one relating to visitor understanding of management dynamics of the area were requested by Friends, and the organization noted that all the data gathered would be useful in informing their work. The researcher and staff created an anonymous 14 question survey, comprising two front and back pages, to capture visitor demographic information,

recreational preferences and ongoing barriers (Appendix A). Demographic information questions include age, household income and number of members within the household; age and income categories are presented as ranges from which participants could choose in order to better protect participant privacy and enhance comfortability in responding. Additional questions aim at screening for residency in Lane County, as well as self-identification of gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and ability. Gender choices are presented as man, woman, nonbinary, gender non-conforming, genderfluid and other to maximize inclusivity and sexuality was framed as identification as LGBTQIAS2+. Race/ethnicity categories include white, Asian, Black, Indigenous (Turtle Island/North America), Kānaka Maoli/Pacific Islander, Latino/a/x or other, and participants are asked to select all options that applied to their identity. While the U.S. census does not present Latino/a/x identity as a race, the survey sought to frame questions about identity as they are used colloquially. These demographic identifiers allows the study to take an intersectional approach to understanding the barriers, motivations and preferences of different user groups in outdoor recreation, as well as proclivity to participation in affinity groups.

Questions surrounding outdoor recreation both seek to reveal barriers along the lines of intersectional identity as well as various motivations and preferences to provide contextual framing for affinity group analysis, supplement data on the DEI landscape locally and support organizational work in engaging and providing services for diverse communities. Similarly, a question regarding visitor knowledge about managing organizations was included to support organizations' connections to visitors. At the time of survey dissemination, affinity groups did not comprise the focus of the study, and for that reason only one question relating to the groups was included in the survey. Participants are asked if they would be more likely to participate in activities as part of a group, and if so, would they be more likely to participate if other group

members shared an aspect of their identity such as gender or race/ethnicity. This question helps to provide initial evaluation of the potential of affinity groups to increase participation for different identities.

The original research plan included administering field surveys to individuals visiting the Howard Buford Recreation Area at points of high traffic, including parking lots and trailheads in the area that offer distinct recreation opportunities. However, the researcher did not receive a response with regard to approval to her Special Use Permit (SUP) application for field research to the county parks. Limited surveys were administered in the Friends of Buford Park and Mt Pisgah lease area by the researcher, as the organization gave select permission to the PI to carry out the research activity, resulting in the completion of 14 physical surveys. The researcher engaged visitors on trails within the lease area, identifying herself, the study purpose and gaining verbal consent from adult participants. Due to the light flow of visitors in the area and overall inefficiency of recruiting participants, this approach was not continued.

However, both the Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah and the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum organizations provided monumental support in disseminating an electronic version of the survey to participants through their newsletters and electronic communications. The PI created a Qualtrics version of the survey that participants could access through supplied links in electronic messages, with an introductory page providing eligibility and consent screening for survey takers. The electronic distribution of the survey resulted in an additional 62 responses, with 57 valid responses with recorded answers. Additionally, Lane County Parks also provided the researcher with results from the organization's equity survey on visitor demographics and barriers that provided a complement to the researcher's own survey research.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Affinity Group Participants and Leaders

The PI conducted a total of seven semi-structured interviews with adult BIPOC participants self-identified as active participants or organizing members of affinity groups, with each interview lasting between 60-90 minutes[3]. Recruitment methods included asking potential participants about their interest in the study at ECOC BIPOC climb night; interested individuals had their contact information recorded by the PI, who subsequently reached out with additional information about the research and the informed consent form. Participants were also recruited through the PI's social network in Eugene and through the snowball method. Because the project parameters did not initially select one affinity group to focus on, one participant did not identify as an active participant of the Eugene Climbers of Color (ECOC), but rather a BIPOC participant in a Female, Trans, Femme and Nonbinary outdoor recreation group. ECOC was selected as the primary group for research due to the PI's social connections with some of its members, the group's consistency in recreational activity offerings, and its purpose as a BIPOC serving group. At the time of this study, ECOC is the only BIPOC outdoor recreation affinity group in Eugene known to the researcher. Interviews were conducted either in-person or via Zoom depending on participant preference and availability, and all interviews were recorded to allow the researcher to fully engage in the conversation.

A 2022 study found that individuals of nonwhite racial/ethnic backgrounds were less likely to participate in outdoor climbing than their white counterparts, but both BIPOC and white climbers who exclusively climb indoors share similar levels of intention to climb outdoors. The study also highlighted the connection between higher frequencies of climbing in indoor gyms

[3] One additional interview was conducted at the beginning of the study with a BIPOC participant was part of a WTNBF affinity group, but was not included as the focus shifted to ECOC

with intentions to climb outside, and notes that indoor climbing can provide a more accessible option for BIPOC communities as it has lower barriers to entry and may carry the same level of racialization as outdoor spaces (Carter and Allured, 2022).

The seven interviewees from ECOC were a mix of planning team members and participants of the group; while initially these participants were separated into two different categories with distinct question sets, the high percentage of organizers within the total participants lead to a shift to encompass all interviewees about their experiences in outdoor recreation and the affinity group. The interview participants comprised a range of identities, although the majority were in their 20s-30s with only one participant 50 years of age. The participant pool included four women, two men (one individual identified as gender nonconforming in addition to a man) and two nonbinary individuals. Racial demographics for participants included Latinx/white, Latinx/Indigenous, Asian, Asian/Latinx, and Asian/white. Three participants identified as queer, and two participants identified as having a physical or mental disability. While the interview questions initially included two questions related to socioeconomic status, the question was removed to ease the comfortability of the conversation; factors related to financial status were able to be highlighted organically through subsequent questions.

Questions for the semi-structured interviews were divided into three parts: demographic information, perspectives and relationship with outdoor recreation, and experiences with the affinity group (Appendix B). The interview prompts enabled the PI to gain an understanding of how each participant conceptualized outdoor recreation, their preferences and motivations for participating in recreational activities as well as their intersectional experiences in the outdoors; intersectional questions were designed with insight from Windsong's work on developing

intersectional qualitative studies (2018). Participant experiences with affinity groups explored the nature of the individual's involvement in the group, benefits and drawbacks of the group, as well as the factors of consideration for participating in events organized by various organizations. ECOC leaders were also asked specific questions about the formation of the group, future developments and collaborations with other organizations; objective information-based questions were not repeated from leader to leader. Participants were interviewed either in-person at an agreed upon location or via Zoom, with both options being recorded to allow a more organic and comfortable flow of conversation.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Urban and Rural Lands Organizations

The PI interviewed three professionals within the HBRA to provide additional background and insight into the racial and equity dynamics in rural outdoor settings. Interviewees included staff from the Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah, the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum, and Lane County Parks. Engaging all three organizations illustrated the various roles, limitations and resources each group contributed to the area. Questions to these participants included organizational perspectives on visitor demographics, challenges and improvements in engaging marginalized communities, and experiences with affinity groups and events.

The PI also interviewed one DEI professional working in outdoor recreation in an urban setting in Lane County, with the specific organization for which the individual worked kept confidential. The PI requested interviews from staff at the City of Eugene Parks and Open Space Department but did not receive a response. The interview took place in January 2024 just prior to the inauguration of President Trump; the PI included questions exploring the potential ramifications of the new administration's professed opposition to DEI policies and funding as

well as adaptability to these changes. Other questions explored current initiatives, challenges and areas for growth in engaging BIPOC communities in outdoor recreation, as well as any experiences working with affinity groups or hosting affinity events.

Interviewing both organizations that worked in more rural, or "wild" settings as well as within city limits enabled a unique comparison of the various needs and strategies employed to create more inclusive environments and amenities. Incorporating perspectives on both public lands and urban settings additionally provides crucial context and information for assessing the role of affinity groups who may host activities in both settings; ECOC offers both indoor bouldering nights at gyms within town as well as outdoor opportunities within and outside of city limits.

Data Analysis

Survey data was mainly collected through the electronic platform Qualtrics; data was exported from the software as an excel spreadsheet. The researcher screened the responses and removed any unanswered submissions, which were logged by Qualtrics as blank responses. The 14 responses from physical surveys were input in Qualtrics by the researcher for more efficient analysis, for a total of 71 survey responses. Responses were coded by participants' identity of race/ethnicity, gender and LGBTQIAS2+ identification to examine answers relating to affinity group inclination and barriers to participation. Other data, including recreational preferences and visitation rates will be analyzed and shared with HBRA organization partners in a separate report. Given the stark difference in demographic response rates for physical surveys and electronic surveys, the divergence was also included in the overall analysis.

Interview data was transcribed by the recording software, and the PI analyzed the data through identifying and coding themes. Due to the small sizes of each interview group, the PI

was able to manually examine the transcripts to discover key points of information, which were color coded according to each participant and grouped under larger categories of analysis. For example, anecdotes and opinions regarding main benefits for affinity groups were grouped based on the type of advantage provided, such as resources, knowledge or skills, or social and community building aspects and further developed from that point. Analyzing the data manually also enabled the PI to identify relevant points specific to individuals and identities that build out a richer and more whole rendering of the function of these affinity groups. Interviews with outdoor and recreational organizations were likewise examined by the PI to find general patterns, strategies and areas of improvement. Doing so allowed the PI to incorporate the nuances of responses in accordance with the mission and capacity of each organization, which ranged from smaller nonprofits to county level public institutions.

Researcher Positionality

I identify as a fourth-generation mixed-race woman of color from a middle-class socioeconomic background and am not part of the LGBTQIAS2+ or differently abled communities. I have lived in Oregon for a cumulative eight years, with nearly two years in the city of Eugene. I have worked professionally with Latinx communities and prior to the research project, I developed a program component for a nonprofit focused on connecting Latinx female and non-binary youth to the outdoors. Having both witnessed and experienced a sense of alienation from the outdoors, whether through expectations of identity, fitness or activity, I have long been drawn to understanding and centering the ways in which people of color choose to interact with and enjoy the outdoors. Identifying and presenting as a woman of color enabled me to connect with participants on the grounds of shared identity characteristics and experiences,

key to generating productive and honest conversations about race and the outdoors in participants' lives.

One of the greatest joys of living in Eugene has been joining the ECOC climb nights. While I do not consider myself to be a skilled or experienced climber, I found myself drawn to these spaces, connecting and then reconnecting with community members and slowly engaging more with the sport. Here I saw people of color meet, laugh, learn, and take on challenges together in ways that were not reiterated in many spaces in Eugene. I'm privileged to work with my friends and peers in this study and share insight into the culture and community they have cultivated for us all.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Survey Results

Lane County Parks Levy Survey

Lane County Parks Levy, projected to raise $31.5 million dollars between 2023 and 2028, aims to enhance and preserve parks within the county's jurisdiction. The funds will enable the county to work on a number of projects including improved amenities and accessibility, water access, habitat restoration, security, education, and trails. Lane County Parks outlines a commitment to DEI in its engagement with this project, noting that the inclusion of these principles is critical to ensuring the parks can be enjoyed by all (Lane County). To that end, the county conducted an equity survey to gather data on barriers to participation, paying special attention to community members with lived experiences such as being over 65 years of age, identifying as a member of a systematically marginalized community due to gender/sexual orientation, race/ethnicity and/or living in a rural area. Within these demographic groups, participants were able to identify as experiencing various barriers, including financial, cultural, cognitive (or caregiving for someone identifying as such) and/or physical challenges to accessing the parks. Beyond demonstrating the community input that may impact the levy's usage, the survey also provides key information on park usage demographics and challenges faced by various marginalized groups in this rural setting.

The survey received 417 responses, with just over 54% of respondents identifying as having at least one of the lived experiences mentioned previously. However, only about 8% of participants identified as belonging to a marginalized group based on their race/ethnicity, with the other three categories of lived experience identities far more represented. By comparison,

almost half of all survey respondents did not identify as having one of the outlined lived experiences[4]. Respondents identifying as having a marginalized identity due to race/ethnicity has the highest percentage of selecting barriers, with 50% of respondents selecting one or more barriers to accessing Lane County Parks; the percentage of respondents of all other marginalized identities that selected one or more access barriers remained under 40%. Of the cultural barriers identified, members of the race/ethnicity lived experiences group selected bilingual materials and diverse staff as the highest ranked; diverse staff was the highest ranked barrier across all identity categories combined. Interestingly, while safe and inclusive space messaging ranked as the third highest barrier for the race/ethnicity group, all other identity groups scored it higher; the over 65 years of age, gender/sexual orientation and respondents with no lived experience related to a marginalized identity each ranked safe space messaging as the most important barrier. The fourth ranked barrier, cultural programming, was ranked higher by race/ethnicity group respondents than by other identities (although the gender/sexual orientation group ranked it just slightly less) and nearly on par with safe space messaging. When averaged across all identities, the three highest ranked cultural barriers included the three most important barriers selected by race/ethnicity group with slight differences in placement. However, when scores were averaged across all groups, cultural programming dropped in significance.

The levy survey results also included comments by survey respondents, which provide interesting qualitative information along with larger statistics. While comments disparaging attempts at building more inclusive parks were few, they did highlight some current attitudes by

[4] While the levy survey received 417 responses in total, a summation of all the responses of lived experience identities resulted in an n of 534. This discrepancy is likely due to respondents given the choice to select multiple identity categories; those with intersectional marginalized identities may be represented more than once. Percentages in this study are thus calculated based on the 417 respondents, as identity percentages listed by the county are based off of the 534 responses.

community members visiting these places. Comments, largely provided in the "other" section of ranked barriers, ranged from sentiments such as "[Lane County Parks is] trying to create a problem where there is none" to more forceful statements of "multiculturalism sucks." Both of these comments were from respondents who identified as being over 65 years old and living in a rural area. Other responses aligned more with fostering inclusivity, with two suggesting the county work with organizations to offer relevant programming to help increase diversity; one respondent identified as belonging to a marginalized identity based on gender or sexual orientation and the other did not identify as having any lived experience. These select responses demonstrate both spectrums of attitudes toward cultural inclusion.

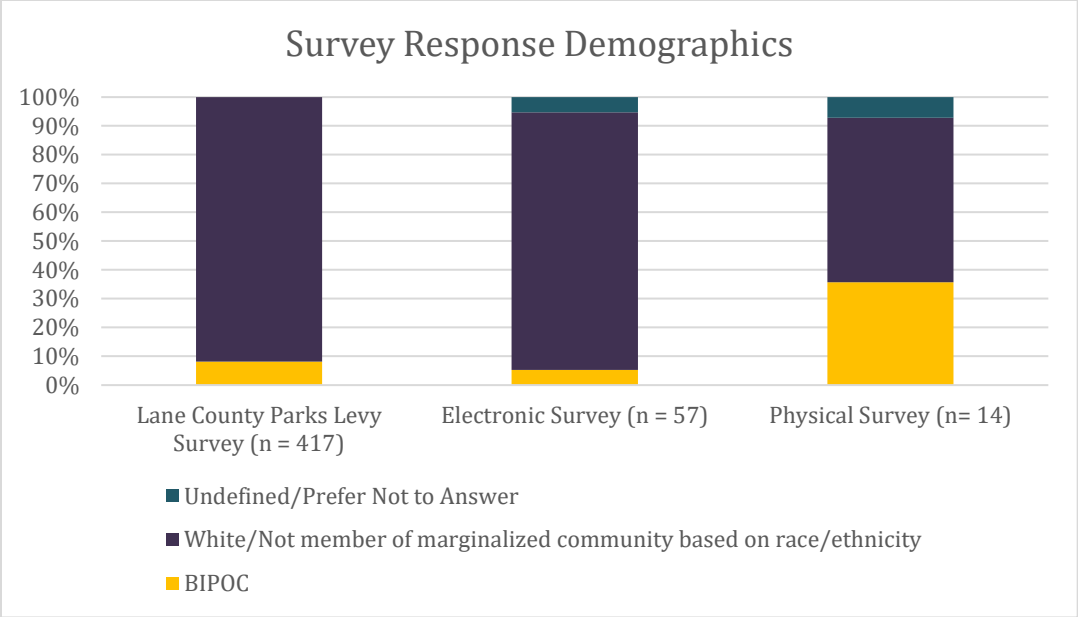
Additionally, one comment from an individual over 65 years old pointedly disagreed with the intersectional approach of the survey, stating that doing so was insulting and that they were a capable individual that did not require help. This respondent did not have any other lived experiences listed, which raises interesting questions about the layers of privilege experienced by members and how tools meant to engage a wide diversity of community are interpreted on a personal level. These responses, although rare, represent clear pushback against DEI efforts.

Survey on Outdoor Recreation

In comparison to the levy survey, the survey conducted as part of this study was much smaller in scale due to restrictions in the recruitment area and much of the information will be best utilized by organizations working in local outdoor recreation. The PI compiled data and shared a report of the results with Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah, the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum and Lane County Parks. The survey received 57 completed responses through dissemination by the Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah and the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum, and

an additional 14 surveys were collected in person by the PI. Eight out of 71 participants (11.3%) identified as BIPOC, while 59 (83.1%), 3 participants (4.2%) preferred not to share their race/ethnicity and one participant remained undefined; this participant marked "other" for race/ethnicity and self-described as "white with minority native blood." As the participant's response did not clearly define the individual as BIPOC nor white, the participant's racial identity is listed as undefined for analysis. It should be noted that while other participants may have marked various non-white or multiple race/ethnicity categories, and this study categorizes them as BIPOC, these individuals may not necessarily self-identify as BIPOC. While the sample size is too limited to draw conclusions, the survey did reveal interesting trends in results and methodology for further investigation.

One of the most striking aspects of the survey results was the difference in demographic composition between the group that was surveyed in person by the PI in comparison to the group who engaged with the survey online. Five out of the 14 participants surveyed in person identified as BIPOC, identifying as a race/ethnicity other than white. The BIPOC participants comprised 35.7% of the total respondents for the physical survey, as compared to just 5.2% of the respondents for the virtual survey. By comparison, in the levy survey distributed by Lane County Parks, BIPOC respondents (respondents who identified as part of a group marginalized due to race/ethnicity) comprised 8.2% of total participants. The results of these three methods are demonstrated with the charts below.



The differences in response rates may be due to a number of contributing factors, including the coincidence of time of day and area in which the survey was administered. Moreover, the small number of physical surveys collected restrains it from being a definitive indicator of difference. Nonetheless, the contrast in BIPOC engagement denote the possibility for in-person surveys to increase response rates, although such an approach requires an far more labor input as opposed to electronic methods. The researcher's identity and presentation as a woman of color may have also had a potential influence on the engagement with BIPOC participants, and it may have impacted comfortability or willingness to participate. Moreover, engagement of the demographic in the HBRA itself may point to solid visitation rates by BIPOC visitors.

Among BIPOC respondents, the most reported barrier to spending more time in the HBRA was time, with six of the eight BIPOC participants reporting it as a factor. Other barriers for the demographic included transportation (one participant) as well as safety and lack of programming or structured activities (one participant). In response to the question regarding

whether individuals would be more inclined to participate in activities as part of a group with a shared identity characteristic, BIPOC participants were much more likely than their white counterparts to answer affirmatively. Four of the eight BIPOC respondents (50%) responded that they would be more inclined, and the two respondents who identified as BIPOC and LGBTQIAS2+ both responded in the affirmative as well. Of the white identifying respondents, four participants (6.8%) said they would be more inclined, and one responded as "maybe." Of these four positive responses, two of the participants identified as LGBTQIAS2+. Despite the small sample size, findings seem to indicate that BIPOC individuals in Eugene may be more inclined to participate in affinity groups or events than their white counterparts, and identification with the queer community may also have an impact on inclination. Some white respondents also provided commentary on their response of "no." Some individuals expressed that shared identity was not a priority, noting that "interests are more important than identity" or the "shared aspect is not important." Another participant actively sought diverse groups, noting they are "more interesting." These comments provide some clarification on the range of attitudes of non-BIPOC participants on the function of affinity groups in contrast to the experiences of BIPOC folks explored later through interview analysis.

Rural DEI Work in Outdoor Recreation

The Howard Buford Recreation Area illustrates an example of more rural land management dynamics in the greater Eugene area, with a multitude of trails, river access and scenic viewpoints about a fifteen-minute drive from town. The area is formally managed by Lane County Parks, although organizations such as the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum, the Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah, and the Sheriff's Mounted Posse have lease areas that they maintain. Power

transmission lines also run through the HBRA; the Bonneville Power Administration also impacts decision-making dynamics. Interviews with the Arboretum, Friends and Lane County Parks yielded important insights on recreational dynamics, as the organizations work either directly or help to maintain recreational opportunities for visitors to the HBRA. Decision-making with these organizations generally follows a consensus-based model, and stakeholder meetings are held for discussion of proposals affecting the area.

To evaluate the needs and opinions of various user groups with regard to decisions for projects such as new restrooms or trails, Lane County Parks will hold public meetings for feedback. These meetings are advertised through press releases or social media posts, and the county works with other community organizations such as the NAACP and Eugene Adaptive Recreation to spread the information to a wide range of constituents. Proposals and alternatives will be shared for public feedback, and the projects will move forward if they garner public support. Concerns that arise through feedback are addressed and allayed as much as possible. Recreation usage for different parts of the park is also balanced with the needs of different user groups and ecological factors. For example, equestrian usage may be limited to certain trails so as not to impact the access of individuals using mobility aids. Policies limiting activities such as unsanctioned fires help to protect lives of people and wildlife from accidents.

Current Barriers and Initiatives

Two major types of barriers identified by the county parks for access to the park include physical and financial barriers. Physical access to spaces presents both an area of focus as well as one of substantial progress. Engineers and landscape architects are consulted for projects such as bathrooms to ensure universal accessibility, and some parks with beach access have mobi-mats,

which create a stable surface that wheelchair users may traverse. Working with the disabled community has enabled the county park system to create trails with universal accessibility, allowing wheelchair users to access them. Additionally, at county park locations such as the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum, David's Chair all terrain electric wheelchairs are available for use by individuals with mobility limitations. The Arboretum recently completed a grant that allowed them to enhance trail loop segments to be more accessible and allow for no fee reservations for the David Chair wheelchair use. The organization also has partnerships with relevant organizations such as Eugene Adaptive Recreation and the Wednesday Wheelers, and accessibility work has also yielded improvements such as two ADA compliant parking spaces for the venue. The prominent financial challenge present in park visitation identified by Lane County Parks is the parking fee, which costs five dollars for a daily pass and $40 for the annual pass. The county parks is currently in conversation with the Department of Health and Human Services to increase accessibility in this regard for individuals and families with lower incomes, exploring the possibility of lowering financial barriers to food stamp program users.

Through the interview with staff, it is clear that Lane County Parks is also aware of the factor of belonging in conversations surrounding underrepresentation in park spaces. Rather than explicit exclusion, the lack of welcome in these areas may play into visitation decisions; the staff member recognized that feelings of discomfort that may arise from being in spaces as when identifying differently than the white population majority in the county and organization staff is a major challenge the county faces. Exclusion was not necessarily reflected in survey data, but the comment section revealed references to what would make visitors feel more welcome. The emergence of this information may point toward the value of more qualitative methods of collecting information to capture the nuance and complex perspectives of constituents. While the

county does not have specific data for demographic visitation rates, the equity survey offers key knowledge from which Lane County Parks can begin discussion. Lane County Parks prioritizes engaging the financial and physical barriers and implementing solutions in the present and seeks to dedicate more time to reaching out to underrepresented communities and ensuring that solutions developed will deliver results. The country has the goal of hiring an equity coordinator that will enable the organization to work on these social and cultural aspects.

Similarly, the Arboretum also recognizes safety, representation and belonging as an area for improvement. The organization has historically been composed of a majority white and middle to upper class population stemming from South Eugene which may impact the public's perception of the organization. In order to increase the sense of welcome, the organization has employed certain strategies such as partnering with organizations for closed group nature tours. In the past, nature tours open to all were attracting a specific demographic. Now the Arboretum has worked with affinity-based groups to provide tours just for that community to foster a greater sense of safety and belonging.

The Arboretum has maintained and continues to develop other partnerships with diverse organizations in the community. During the summer, the organization hosts students from the migrant education program. The students receive a stipend and training to guide bilingual nature walks, and the Arboretum hosts a celebration for all of the families at the end of the season. As of 2024, the Arboretum concluded its third year of the program, and it has become established as part of the organization's general operations. Additionally, the organization has begun developing a relationship with Plaza de Nuestra Comunidad, a Latinx and immigrant serving nonprofit that resulted from the unification of Centro Latino Americano, Downtown Languages and Huerto de la Familia. The two groups are in the initial stage of relationship building in

learning how to best serve their mutual interests, and the Arboretum has hosted several of their partner's events. At the bi-annual festivals, the Arboretum also works to include multicultural performances; the Ballet Folklórico Colibrí, for example, has performed at these events and dancers often have their families in attendance.

Additionally, the organization has recruited an individual from the NAACP to join their DEI committee and has contacted the African American Association of Eugene and Lane County via an involved board member about the possibility of coordinating guided nature tours. Other collaborations with diverse groups include the Transwild Forest Frolic event in partnership with Transponder and Cascadia Wildlands, which welcomed individuals from queer, transgender, BIPOC and other marginalized backgrounds to the arboretum for a variety of workshops and activities. At the time of the interview, the Arboretum was in the process of submitting a grant proposal for a part-time tribal environmental educator and expressed a desire to become more involved with the Upper Willamette Stewardship network. The stewardship network has a dedicated tribal liaison, which may aid in funneling the number of requests of the many local stewardship organizations and thus reduce the volume of these inquiries to tribes. At this time, the Arboretum did not have relationships with organizations working with the Asian or Pacific Islander communities.

The Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah detailed the challenge of recruiting and retaining diverse members of staff, the inclusion of whom are important both from a lens of equity and inclusion as well as the ability to provide key insight and perspective on the work of the organization. A lack of diverse staff also restricts the organization's ability to offer affinity events, as they do not have some of the represented identity and cultural competency able to lead these activities. At the time of the interview, the organization staff included one BIPOC and a

few LGBTQIAS2+ employees. While the organization is working to implement best practices for hiring, the reality of relatively low pay for jobs in the field can be a difficult obstacle to overcome and one tied deeply to socioeconomic privilege. Funding can also be a limitation in reaching out to diverse communities, for grant proposals centered on conservation and habitat management work may not lend themselves easily to justifications of relationship building not tied directly to ecological outcomes. Friends's collaborations with underserved communities include supporting programs for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness through service learning and partnering the student transition programs for youth who are not pursuing college immediately after high school. Additionally, the organization has worked with Indigenous partners through the traditional ecological inquiry program in the Long Tom Watershed Council as well as an Indigenous basket weaver who accesses traditional plants in the HBRA.

In addition to the challenges of access within the park, Friends also notes the prominent barrier of physically getting to the HBRA as well due to its location. For many, the park is generally accessible by car; biking requires the will and ability to traverse about three and half miles of winding road without bike infrastructure, after taking public transportation to the nearest bus stop at Lane Community College. Thus physical access, stemming in large part from socioeconomic factors, continues to play a role in hampering visitation.

Friends's commitment to decolonization is reflected in their participation in the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network and the internal work the organization has done in committing to trainings for staff. Three staff members participated in an intensive decolonization, and other employees have participated in trainings with the Indigenous owned Live Oak Consulting. Work in the Upper Willamette Stewardship Network produced a framework for organizations to operationalize and further their commitment to decolonization, the Tribal Forum and

Decolonization Forum Commitments. The steps and values embedded enable organizations to integrate decolonization work into practices and policies. Friends also noted how the nature of the organization allowed them to quickly adopt practices and stances not often possible by larger governmental entities and emphasized the value of the tribal liaison in reducing the burden on tribal communities. While highlighting the need to center Indigenous voices and perspectives, Friends can also provide support in advocating for priorities of these communities to governmental bodies through translating them into operational concepts and terms.

Some of Lane County Parks's current equity projects and aims do align with priorities highlighted in previous research in the area, although the organization has reiterated utilizing the equity survey data as a basis for priorities and decision-making. For example, the organization noted the need for more diverse representation in staff, which Taylor Bowden had highlighted in their earlier study, but faces the challenge of how to recruit and hire diverse employees. Lane County Parks are also in the early stages of engagement with Indigenous communities and working toward a land acknowledgement. The process of collaboration is slow and deliberate, with Lane County Parks wanting to ensure that resources are available for the work to be done and a process for engagement outlined before action is taken. The organization is open to possibilities for activities such as foraging rights but reiterates the importance of centering the voices of tribal members to identify needs in this area. Lane County Parks is also aware of the constant demand on tribes for land acknowledgement statements and approval on developments, and notes that land acknowledgements should go beyond recognizing Indigenous land was taken and work toward some form of reparations or healing–content that should be decided by the tribes rather than the park system or general public.

Challenges to Inclusion and Future Work

While these initiatives remain important, reliance on the equity survey data raises questions about the demographics who have responded to the survey and to what extent the voices of marginalized communities are reflected in the results. With only 8.2% of survey respondents identifying as members of a marginalized group due to race or ethnicity, the barriers identified through the survey may not be entirely representative of the needs and perspectives of BIPOC communities. Lane County Parks recognizes and seeks connections with these communities, but faces challenges in how to engage with them and has not made a large concerted effort to do so specifically. The organization would need to open discussion with communities to identify barriers and subsequently develop a plan to implement and evaluate strategies. Investing the time and effort to create efficient and deliberate solutions with a marked impact is a priority for Lane County Parks. The county parks highlighted the issue of performative gestures in working with marginalized communities, and emphasized the intent to build long lasting, sustainable relationships–while understanding that trust takes time to build. While averse to the idea of one-off events that are not followed up by continued work and partnership, Lane County Parks agrees with the need for BIPOC events in the parks. The organization recognizes it is in the beginning information gathering stage of this process.

While Lane County Parks balances many competing priorities with a limited amount of resources, the organization is open to engaging different options for collaboration and support of BIPOC communities. A specific avenue through which the county parks may be able to offer assistance is through an umbrella 501(c)3, a project that would be undertaken by the yet to be hired communication and volunteer coordinator. For groups having difficulties in achieving

nonprofit status on their own, they could join as part of the umbrella to access information needed to attain status and possibly funding.

The Mt. Pisgah Arboretum has identified seven strategic goals for the five years to come, with one of them being to strengthen engagement with diverse communities. Relevant outcomes include Arboretum initiatives being engaged with and reflecting BIPOC communities, in addition to recurring engagement with organizations representing these communities. Outreach to affinity organizations presents as one of the avenues through which the organization may work toward these goals. The organization also aims to strengthen DEIB work through trainings for staff and increasing accessibility through expanding the David's Chair program or starting "buddy walks" for wheelchair users to meet up and spend time on the trails together.

Friends also notes the power of collaboration as avenues for connecting with diverse populations. Even if the partnership is not directly with a group that serves a specific identity, larger organizations with relationships to these communities can bridge gaps in this regard. Friends also expressed their aversion to partnering with any organizations with exclusionary practices, wielding their power in the partnerships that do happen as well as those that do not.

Urban DEI Work in Outdoor Recreation

The City of Eugene, City of Springfield and Willamalane are all public entities that work in the urban Eugene-Springfield area. While Willamalane is a special tax district overseen by a board, the two cities respond to their respective constituencies. The City of Eugene is an overall progressive institution, with a comprehensive onboarding training for staff. The City of Springfield, by contrast, does not have a DEI department and prominent figures active in the city do not support DEI initiatives. Marginalized communities may feel more comfortable in general in voicing concerns to the City of Eugene due to the distinct modes of operations between the

two cities. It should be noted that as Willamalane Parks and Recreation District and the City of Springfield are two separate entities both serving the population of Springfield, they have different relationships with the community. Willamalane does have a strategic plan for DEI work that has been approved by its board.

The dynamics of urban settings outlined through this interview provide key complements to the rural organizations that contend with much larger swaths of land and sparser concentrations of people. As urban organizations experience far greater face to face interactions with the general public and serve large numbers of the population, the ways in which these organizations may engage with affinity groups and events may take distinct forms.

Challenges

The staff member interviewed about urban DEI dynamics preferred not to reveal the name of the agency they worked for; the group discussed in this section will be referred to as an urban park and recreation organization and is based within Lane County. Current challenges in DEI discussed include both internal barriers related to staff as well as external limitations in outreach to specific communities. The organization has hundreds of employees that work in various capacities, many of which involve interacting with members of the community. One of the challenges is ensuring the way in which staff engage with the public is consistent, which can be especially difficult considering the varying levels of experience with interactions these employees may have and the nature of seasonal hiring and turnover. The public may involve staff with complaints regarding issues of inclusion such as people of differing gender expressions using locker rooms or bathrooms, a vein of complaint that may grow more prominent under the new Trump administration. Employees are tasked with approaching these concerns in ways that

align with the organization's anti-oppression statement. Additionally, some employees who have worked in agencies and institutions for decades may be more resistant to change, citing a long tenure of doing things a certain way and viewing DEI practices and initiatives as additional work.

Other limitations reveal themselves in the reality of safety and welcome for participants. Groups looking to use agency centers for affinity group meetings, such as for the queer elderly population, may not be able to use it as a safe space due to the other visitors present. While the request marks progress in interest and trust, the situation demonstrates that the ability for such activities to take place is a future goal rather than a present reality.

Moreover, while the organization has had great success in connecting with certain marginalized communities, there are a plethora of organizations serving the Latinx community in the Eugene-Springfield area, and the Indigenous community is well connected. However, it can be more challenging to engage groups without this organized presence, the agency has noted in the interview that it finds the Black community to be more dispersed, and they rely on more individual connections than broader community relationships.

Strategies

One of the successful strategies the urban organization has employed in connecting with diverse communities is differentiating the form of outreach to each community. The interviewee noted that conventional methods of recruitment of committees or councils, such as posting advertisements and applications online, were likely to yield a limited demographic of respondents. Thus, the organization has applied new approaches such as that of engaging with the Indigenous community. The organization hired an Indigenous consultant, who had contacts in the community and discussed different methodologies with the agency, leading to the hosting

of community-led listening sessions. These sessions opened with a blessing from an elder, and each table was headed by an elder who facilitated discussion on developed questions with little additional input from agency staff. The organization provided food, childcare and financial compensation from those who attended, and with the information from the listening sessions and a few key interviews, the consultant formalized findings into a report to be shared with the agency. One desire expressed by the community was a place to gather, and through a collaborative effort, the organization was able to offer seasonal potlucks with no charge for the space within one of the agency centers. A key aspect in this activity series was ensuring it was not transactional in nature with contribution of knowledge or insight required to compensate for the usage of space; the focus remained on relationship building, spending time together, and creating trust over time. Through these series of potlucks, the interest in getting more involved with the organization through an advisory committee emerged organically, rather than it being a premise of the entire operation. The organization's work was also joined by other local agencies interested in establishing relationships with Indigenous groups to prevent any replication of questions and labor on these communities. One of the elders who was hired to help build relationships between the agency and community also helped to draft an appropriate land acknowledgement that is used at events and meetings. While the Indigenous consultant worked through a limited time contract, the relationships built with the community has enabled the organization to continue the partnership and work on other collaborative projects. This dynamic highlights the importance of investing time into building trust with BIPOC communities and working to meet their needs without expecting immediate actions in return, a key element that can guide engaging with affinity groups.

Other collaborations, such as that with the Latinx community, require the agency to take a more flexible approach to how event ideas are developed and implemented that may not align perfectly with systems-based timelines and procedures. Having a basis of trust allows for communicating of wants and needs to be possible and addressed by the organization and can result in successful events with high turnout rates and first-time visitors to agency facilities. While not necessarily high revenue generating activities, these types of events are instrumental in creating a sense of welcoming and belonging in these spaces. The organization has also hosted recurring events for groups and has supported the communities by providing Spanish Language registration assistance. Working with these groups has also provided valuable feedback for systematic changes; for example, the fact that the only signage in Spanish in parks was regarding prohibited activities, which prompted a change from the organization. Conversely, the organization is able to share their processes and any hard limitations for timelines so groups can successfully plan and share events. The organization also offers an incentive for bilingual employees to help recruit staff with diverse backgrounds that can provide services to more community members.

Relationship building represents the cornerstone in DEI work beyond connecting with marginalized communities; the concept is key both internally and externally. Creating change also requires engaging with individuals who may be resistant to DEI practices or lack understanding as to why they are necessary. The interviewee expressed that highlighting the various experiences that have shaped their lives and identities can be a point of relevancy to themes of intersectionality beyond the concepts of race and gender identity. Additionally, communicating with other groups across the state through entities such as the Oregon Park and Recreation Association provides avenues to learn other strategies and work that have been

successful in DEI aims. These examples demonstrate both the importance of developing relationships with communities of color to identify and address barriers, as well as the concurrent need for organizations to improve internal processes such as pay differentials and educate on DEI initiatives to individuals who feel alienated by them.

The urban organization has successfully coordinated affinity events in the form of pride swims for the LGBTQIAS2+ community. These swims are open to individuals who identify as part of that community as well as invited allies, and the event takes place before or after regular operating hours for the pool. Lifeguards volunteer their time with no shortage of interest and restrooms and lockers are changed to be free of gender labels with additional privacy spaces. The organization is at times able to provide transportation via a shuttle service, and while participants are asked to pay the standard entry fee, the inability of an individual to pay is absorbed by the organization. The agency aims to make the event free of cost in the future. Advertisement is strategically limited for safety reasons, and a park ranger remains present in the area. The first affinity event had an attendance of 12, while the most recent had about 50 attendees. The organization has yet to offer many BIPOC affinity events; while some collaborations have been discussed, none apart from space rentals have come to fruition.

Toward the Future

One of the most prominent questions for public organizations as they pivot toward the future is the ways in which their work in diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging may be affected by decisions of the federal administration. Community members have expressed concern over certain marginalized demographics that may be especially vulnerable in this new presidential term, and governmental organizations may be limited in the actions they can take in overt support of these communities. However, as agencies that serve *all* of their constituents,

these organizations may need to be creative in developing initiatives that ensure the full representation and engagement of their populations.

One of the future goals for the organization is inviting cultural groups or programming to use agency spaces. Bringing these communities in will introduce them to the space and may assist in establishing feelings of safety belonging. At the same time, the presence of these groups will work toward the normalization of diverse populations in these locations. However, challenges exist with the priority of space usage, with organization activities and long-term rental partners having precedence for space reservations.

The Need for Affinity Groups

Affinity Group Participant Demographics

Seven affinity group participants were interviewed for this study, encompassing a range of intersectional and complex identities. All ECOC affinity groups interviewees identified as BIPOC, a requisite for joining the group, and included three women, two men and two nonbinary individuals. Three participants held multiple marginalized identities along within the categories of race, gender and sexuality, and the interviewees ranged from being fourth generation or longer in the United States to immigrating to the country themselves. Five of these interviewed individuals had roles as part of the planning team within ECOC, meaning they actively take part in coordinating activities and collaborating with businesses.

Participant Challenges in Outdoor Recreation

Barriers to outdoor recreation that both impacted participants at various points of their lives and may keep them from attempting new activities in the present cover a wide range of

reasons. Financial limitations, including gear, transportation and other associated costs, feelings of being unwelcome, expectations of recreational participation tied to identity, knowledge, and safety.

Financial barriers manifested in a variety of ways for participants. Transportation to trailheads or access fees impacted some individuals, and activities that required specialized gear presented a barrier. These activities include water sports such as kayaking, bikepacking, skiing and climbing. In addition, some participants felt there was a pressure to not only own gear, but to have the "latest and greatest" version, with social media feeding into the status of certain kinds of equipment and even clothing outfits in the outdoors.

Images of gear and clothing are also tied to the identity expected in these recreational settings. For one participant who did not experience feelings of being unwelcome in the outdoors, messaging from outdoor marketing that has continually centered on certain body types in the outdoors has made her question her own participation in activities. Another recalled how her childhood impacted her ideas of for whom the outdoors was, with gendered programming such as the Girl Scouts lacking the inclusion outdoor skills and reinforcing that those activities were for straight, white men. Another noted the difficulty in participating when the other people sharing the space tend to be tall, skinny, white men. Additionally, participants had to navigate cultural expectations from their own families and communities, with certain activities being designated as things "white people" do.

Safety presents another barrier for participants to overcome in outdoor recreation. Two participants used humor that underscored real threats to safety, with one woman mentioning she would avoid going backpacking on her own to keep from being murdered. Another individual discussed choosing the bear from the viral "man or bear" question circulating on social media

recently. The question generally asked women if they would prefer running into a man or a bear in the woods, with many women choosing the bear. The individual interviewed identified as BIPOC, queer and non-binary, and shared how they would feel responsible if they had a fatal incident due to a wild animal or fall in the outdoors, citing a lack of preparedness or taking care of themself properly. Conversely, threat from a man may come from how he perceives this individual as a queer person of color; he is the source and reason for harm. The participant expressed they were "terrified of the man, not terrified of the bear." Safety for this individual also manifested in their considerations for amenities both in outdoor parks and indoor gyms, as they paid attention to whether there were single stall bathrooms or gendered open stall spaces. Other considerations of safety participants took the form of more general geographic locations, with another participant noting how they avoided certain areas in Oregon due to the way they are treated and had been warned by family not to go east in the state.

Participants shared experiences that touched upon all three leisure studies theories of marginalization, subculture and discrimination, albeit in nuanced and changing ways. Financial barriers stem from marginalization theory, with participants seeming particularly impacted regarding certain specialized activities or specifically due to transportation. This effect is amplified by expectations of brand name or cutting-edge gear, clearly highlighting the deep roots of capitalist interests in the field. Additionally, participants susceptibility to the impacts of socioeconomic marginalization may change through their lifetime, as at least one participant noted the financial constraints they experienced as a young person became less of an issue as they gained employment as an adult. Subculture theory presented most clearly in one participant's experience, as he was told by his family they certain activities were for "white people," yet it is a perspective that cannot be easily extricated from the influence of leisure

identity and the media in addition to racial histories. Discrimination was also present in the considerations of interviewees, as some participants reflected on the potential for threatening interactions while in the outdoors. The participants who highlighted discrimination have intersectional identities along the veins of gender and sexuality, pointing to potential heightened vulnerabilities for these individuals. The diversity of experiences of participants further reflect the intricacies of barriers to outdoor recreation for BIPOC communities, as barriers are not static and nor universally applied. Approaches that seek to address barriers through one singular dimension thus risk overlooking individuals.

White Spaces and BIPOC Spaces

Participants noted that there was a distinct difference in being in white dominated spaces as opposed to BIPOC spaces, with experiences ranging from experiencing microaggressions, being the only person of color, expectations of less connection, and a lack of trust and comfortability. The anecdotes and experiences shared by participants outlined the ways in which behavior is modified and different considerations arise in white dominated spaces, underscored by the sense of feeling out of place. One participant shared how she had to code-switch in the different spaces and couldn't really express her sense of humor for fear it could potentially upset someone. Another mentioned how she worried about her own capabilities in these spaces, and whether she would be left behind or not invited on future excursions if she was not able to physically keep up. Above all, participants were acutely aware of instances when they were the only person of color in a space.

BIPOC spaces offered a sense of familiarity and comfortability. Participants shared the ease with which they could connect with other BIPOC folks through shared experiences, cultural values and struggles. BIPOC people could relate to familial conversations about being in the

outdoors; they could bond over parental concerns for their safety in ways that white friends often could not relate, as activities such as camping were not normalized in the same manner. Discussing food, or lack of boundaries with family members presented avenues through which individuals in BIPOC spaces could connect. While not a major barrier to participation, one interviewee shared that there was a difference in expectation of connection; the activity at hand may be one of the few points of relatability as connecting through personal identity might not happen.

These differences persisted in spaces where other identities were shared, including sexuality and gender. While shared queer identity remained an important connection, other differences even apart from race can impact the space. A participant shared that in queer spaces, many of the white other attendees in the local area come from middle or affluent backgrounds, adding difficulties in finding shared experiences. Another noted that while sharing queer identity provided sufficient commonality to not feel out of place, other cultural factors continue to affect the expectations they may have. Individualism as compared to a more collectivist mindset can affect the experience through the assumption of whether or not sharing resources such as snacks or water during outdoor excursions would be at play. Additionally, one participant shared how some other individuals in queer spaces made ignorant remarks in an attempt to connect with the participant's ethnic background. Spaces for women, trans, nonbinary and femme identities can also differ from BIPOC spaces. Participants who have been active in both BIPOC and gender-based affinity groups expressed their enjoyment in engaging in both, though they found the dynamics of the groups to be quite different. BIPOC spaces continue to be more impactful, offering a different type of empowerment and ease of connection. One interviewee noted how BIPOC spaces are slower paced, focusing on learning together and sharing resources, while the

gendered space could at times focus more on the activity and individual desire to experience it in a particular way. These stories do not negate the need and power of queer and women, nonbinary, trans and femme spaces, events and groups, but rather highlight the need for all of these distinct groups to serve the community.

However, not all experiences in affinity spaces are inherently positive. One participant shared her experience in a non-recreational race-based affinity space led by a person of color, who despite having professional expertise in leading these types of groups, attempted to regulate the behavior of group participants, prohibiting the use of certain types of humor. Moreover, the participant found his views to be sexist and racial perspectives outdated. Another queer participant shared that a vein of homophobia at times presents in Latinx spaces, which can affect their experiences within them. Additionally, context may play a role in the inclination toward BIPOC spaces above that of other identities, as one queer participant shared that in other places, particularly those with conservative brown folks, she might feel more drawn to queer affinity spaces. While representation by members of the affinity identity is critical, it may not guarantee that the spaces are safe, inclusive and equitable.

Moreover, participants with multiple marginalized identities expressed the desire for intersectional affinity spaces, many of which would take the form of female/trans/nonbinary/femme and BIPOC or queer and BIPOC spaces. Intersectional spaces can encompass experiences that may not resonate in single identity spaces. For example, ECOC opens introductions in the group with names and pronouns, but one nonbinary participant did note that while everyone was respectful, they did have to remind others of their correct pronouns. Another nonbinary, queer participant found queer and BIPOC "goldilocks" groups, where participants could understand the issues and experiences of being in both communities.

> I think part of the benefits of like, affinity group is that you don't have to explain yourself. So in a perfect world, I could be in a queer BIPOC group where I don't have to like explain … and kind of give as much defense to like, cultural background or my queer identity. My trans identity… it is nice to just exist.
>
> –Affinity Group Participant

These intersectional spaces may present a path forward to creating additional safety and belonging, although doing so may require the pooling of time and labor of an even smaller demographic of the area.

Benefits

The Eugene Climbers of Color affinity group offers a range of intertwining benefits to participants, ranging from overarching to individualized experiences. The interviews revealed four major themes in this area: community, skills and knowledge, resources and access, and the sense of belonging and safety. While participants enjoyed the activity centric opportunities that ECOC events provided, the social and relational aspects emerged as prominent themes for participants. Participants expressed that being a member of an affinity group made them more likely to participate in a recreational activity.

Community was outlined as a major benefit across all interviews, with participants finding joy and contentment in the ability to meet new people of color and develop friendships in the space. The affinity group by definition brings together participants of shared nonwhite identity, which provides a unique opportunity within a city in which white identity is predominant. This aspect can be complemented by the activity of climbing itself; one participant expressed the enjoyment of not just meeting interesting people but being able to do so while

participating in an activity that had been gatekept from people of their identity. While all participants voiced their appreciation in building relationships, nuances in their individual experiences within the community umbrella highlights how these spaces can provide supportive and enriching connections for a diverse array of participants. Moreover, having recurring climbing nights twice every month builds a sense of consistency and continued interactions for community members.

Individualized benefits enjoyed by participants traced their unique experiences and needs. For example, one participant was raised in a culture different from that of his heritage, and the affinity space invited the opportunity for him to learn about his racial heritage through sharing the space with individuals of that identity. Another participant noted that he was able to communicate in a more complex manner in Spanish due to a shared background and understanding that went beyond linguistic ability. This participant, who had children, found it beneficial to join a space in which his children could be surrounded by community members of diverse cultural backgrounds, which can be difficult to find in Eugene.

Knowledge sharing also emerged from interviews, with participants both sharing knowledge and learning skills within the group. Several ECOC organizers had climbing experience and skills prior to their involvement in the group and utilize their skills to support other participants in their climbing journeys. Some skills-based knowledge may be very technical and related to climbing gear or techniques, which may be applied more to outdoor climbing or other events involving necessitating equipment beyond shoes. For bouldering at climb nights, which generally requires only the use of climbing shoes and talks, organizers offer a brief introduction to climbing. As participants disperse to practice their skills, the community aspect of the event allows individuals to give advice or share “betas” which details the process of

completing a certain climbing route. One participant remarked that having a similar background and being able to discuss their experience climbing enabled others to know how to support him and suggest different approaches.

Access and resources are benefits that ECOC provides to participants through free activities and borrowed or gifted gear. Free entry to the climbing gyms, in addition to shoe and chalk rentals, enable participants of all socioeconomic classes to join in the activity. At Elevation bouldering gym, monthly memberships range from $70 to $95 a month for members and day passes range from $17 to $19, with the fee depending on whether the individual is a student and if the monthly membership is standalone or ongoing. Rental costs for shoes are five dollars, chalk usage is three dollars, and climbers can rent both for $6 (Elevation, 2025). For an individual without any gear interested in climbing, a single day of activity could cost $25, a potentially significant barrier for those interested in climbing. Circuit Bouldering Gym offers the same rate for gear rentals, with day passes and monthly memberships even higher in price than Elevation (The Circuit Bouldering Gym).

While many of the interviewed participants were active members at Elevation climbing gym prior to joining ECOC, one participant shared that the free access, in addition to the BIPOC focus of the climb night, had a profound impact on their decision to participate. For outdoor climbing events and indoor skill clinics, participants completed a form detailing the gear they owned in addition to gear they would need but did not have access to, and ECOC organizers provided the needed equipment. Additionally, the Eugene Gear Collective that operates during the BIPOC climb night at Elevation distributes gear donations to individuals in need, specifically prioritizing BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ and disabled communities. Other resource-sharing arose from the participants attending activities, with one interviewee who did not own a car noting that ride

sharing opened up opportunities. Access can also be mental in nature, in having the confidence or motivation to attempt new activities.

> Affinity space or groups in the outdoors I think are really good for like getting like overcoming initial barriers and getting people outside… It can be intimidating…. outdoor recreation feels like you have to know all these things or have all this equipment to be able to go outside and have a good time. …if you don't know somebody or you don't have equipment or the time to like, do all this research., It can feel like well, I'm not gonna have a good time… why should I go? And just like, having a group of people that you already have something in common with or like shared experiences … can get over that first bump.
>
> –Affinity group member

Belonging represents perhaps the most ambiguous benefit to these groups, yet it is also one that undergirds many participant experiences. Apart from building community and connections as referenced previously, participants expressed a sense of ease and comfortability within these affinity spaces. One participant who is neurodivergent shared that climb nights were one of the few places where she did not have to "mask," or change her behavior to align with the expectations of neurotypical people. For another, taking up space as a collective boosted confidence, helping to bridge the gap of a sense of welcome and feeling as though it was a space for everyone. One participant, who grew up in Oregon, expressed that they never felt the sense of othering in these spaces that was present in their childhood and that forced them to be a smaller, more acceptable version of themself. Another noted that they did not often see people like themself, and so these spaces provided a unique place in which community members looked like them; they remarked, "It's just really nice to be able to see yourself reflected in who's actually there, who's actually taking up space." Overall, participants find these affinity groups to be places in which they can act and exist as themselves, among others who understand their experiences, despite the diversity that still courses through the group.

Limitations and Challenges for Affinity Groups

Despite the myriad benefits that affinity groups may offer, there remain challenges and limitations that groups may encounter. These challenges may take the form of burnout for organizers, restrictions due to the lack of nonprofit status, maintaining the affinity space, pitfalls of groups without appropriate design, and lack of representation for certain demographics.

The main challenge for the affinity group identified by multiple members of the planning team is the potential for burnout by these core members. The group remains informal insofar as it relies on the passion and time of willing individuals, and these members are not monetarily compensated for their contributions. These planning team members also work and balance personal lives with the responsibilities for organizing events, communicating with partners, and hosting the activities themselves. The fluid nature of the group presents many advantages, as people can step in and step back as needed, and the collective is not restrained in any capacity by a board or funding requirements. However, reliance on a few individuals' capacity may present difficulties in expanding opportunities, and if changes in the personal lives of a significant amount of the planning team reduce the time these individuals are able to contribute, the future of the group remains unclear.

One of the planning team members expressed the aim for participants in the group to use the ECOC events as entryways to building confidence and connections that can spur self-led experiences. While climb nights provide important spaces for participants to learn about climbing in a safe and supportive atmosphere, participants could also build confidence to climb or recreate on their own or with friends made at the event. Taking up space should not simply rest on the shoulders of a few community members, and one of the goals is to empower participants to do so themselves. The interviewee referred to the members coordinating the

events as part of the planning team rather than leadership to avoid hierarchical structures, emphasizing the community aspect of the group.

The less formalized structure of the group and its lack of 501(c)3 status may also affect the ability for the Eugene Climbers of Color to access certain resources. While eventually successful, the planning team members outlined difficulties in asking for donations from a large outdoor retailer due to their less formal status. The group succeeded in securing the donations due to a personal connection with someone at the company. While the relationships ECOC members have with businesses and community members in Eugene have enabled the group to provide raffle prizes, this situation highlights an issue in accessing resources on a larger scale either through partnerships or grants. Potential projects such as securing gear for participants to borrow or use from events may be limited in this capacity, especially considering that the specialized climbing equipment would need to be provided in various sizes in accordance with group needs. Additionally, ECOC does not have any legal waivers of liability for activities apart from those required at the climbing gyms, which remains an important consideration as the opportunities continue to expand.

Beyond the status of the group, the maintenance and sometimes very existence of these affinity spaces can present another challenge in white dominated spaces. One interviewee spoke about the general attitudes present in Eugene, a kind of "wokeness" that denied the need for these types of groups and spaces on the premise that diversity is welcomed. This type of displeasure may be apparent especially when gyms or spaces are closed off to people who do not share the affinity identity. Moreover, having these separate spaces may cause tension in interpersonal relationships; one participant mentioned the discomfort they felt when inviting BIPOC individuals to activities when white friends were present, as they were excluded, and the

consideration of not being able to bring a white friend or "safety person" to an event as a newcomer. This dynamic can play an interesting role in spaces such as the bouldering gyms that generally are not closed off to other climbers during BIPOC climb nights, and evokes questions of the definitions of the affinity space itself. When stricter boundaries around space are in effect, enforcing them can present another complex issue. Not all BIPOC individuals may present as such, and so it may become difficult to ensure that all participants present are indeed Black, Indigenous or People of Color. Non-BIPOC individuals may still be able to enter these spaces, and it becomes incumbent on them to recognize and respect that the event is not for them.

An additional consideration in the realm of exclusion revolves around the consideration of climbing as the activity of focus for the group. An interviewee described the complexities of the situation as a sort of "siloing" as the group may not be able to engage with BIPOC individuals looking to connect with the outdoors but not interested in climbing. The question of whether activity limitations restrict the community served remain but do so in tandem with the reality of organizer capacity. Even offering activities within the realm of climbing, such as a multi-day climbing trip, provokes new considerations around the skills needed for camping and how those needs may be met.

Finally, with limited capacity and a focus on coordinating events for participants, affinity groups with the broader reach of BIPOC identity may have difficulties in ensuring that all demographics within the group are present. With outreach taking the form of virtual posts and emails as well as word of mouth, it can be challenging to engage with groups outside of the established network. During the time of the interview, planning members have noted there are fewer Black and Indigenous climbers compared to other racial groups. These two groups, along with Pacific Islanders, are also among the smallest demographic groups in Eugene at large. One

individual pointed out the lack of Black representation on an Instagram post from the group, asking where the "B" in BIPOC was–despite there being Black participants present. There may be a number of reasons for representation of these groups to be low, including the recent formation of Eugene Climbers or Color. With the rapid growth in participant numbers for climb nights in recent months, there may also be increased representation at events.

Representation of other identities, especially within organizing positions, can also affect how the group is able to serve the entirety of its community. One organizer noted how they have not hosted a climber with a disability that would fundamentally change the technique needed to participate, and so relevant accommodations and strategies have yet to be explored. Another organizer, who has children, shared that families bringing children to the space may leave parents who do not wish to participate unengaged during the sessions. Providing an alternative activity that still enables them to connect with other community members and be present in the area can address some of these concerns. As the group continues to grow and evolve, incorporating more wide-ranging perspectives and needs can enable ECOC to extend its reach and engagement.

Affinity Group Form, Function and Future

With its community-based formation and sourcing of support, the Eugene Climbers of Color does not currently access grants for funding and support. Rather, the group utilizes the strong social network of its members to develop key collaborations. With gyms offering free access and rental gear, local businesses providing various donations, the Eugene Gear Collective and members sharing other resources as needed, the Eugene Climbers of Color has built a solid system of connections for its participants with deep roots in the community at large. Nonetheless,

further collaborations may have the potential to further its reach or expansion, and the question of becoming a nonprofit continues to loom large.

Potential future collaborations and support can take a variety of forms to address the group's needs. ECOC welcomes all manner of support from various businesses, whether it aligns more technically with the group's work in providing gear, or takes the form of a restaurant or food truck providing food for an event. Funding could aid the group in establishing an array of loaner gear, or enable organizing members to get certified in certain skills, in turn building trust and confidence in facilitating and offering more climbing opportunities. Acknowledging supporting organizations at events in return can help with exposure within the community.

The group would also appreciate organizations that specialize in recreational climbing offering events for participants and sharing gear and knowledge. Other avenues of support include opening resources or facilities to ECOC climbers, while keeping in consideration how the form of this access may align with the reality of participants' lives. For example, offering a climbing space for use during standard working hours may not be an efficient way to increase community access. While many organizers expressed an openness for collaboration with public institutions, another had a more reserved perspective, opining that institutions should take the role of an ally, and "step back and uplift," funneling financial resources and let the group continue to spearhead these community spaces.

Creating collaborative opportunities can be challenging due to the organizers' capacity limits, with one organizer noting that having organizations reach out to ECOC or partnerships developing organically may be needed for them to take place. Having a personal connection or contact within a partner organization has been a major influence in realizing the partnership. Some collaborations with public entities had been discussed in the early days of the group's

formation but never came to fruition. The longer processes and timelines government agencies at times require for event planning can be a heavy burden, particularly for a group who had still been developing. ECOC is open to revisiting and exploring new connections and collaborations, but remains tasked with navigating the amount of financial support an organization may be able to provide and what financial responsibility may be potentially asked of participants. The group has worked with the University of Oregon in the past, tabling at the No Man's Land Film Festival for women and queer folks, and co-organized an outdoor climb at the Columns for students. Continued discussions have begun to examine the possibility of opening university resources and facilities for some potential community learning and use.

The debate over whether or not to become an official nonprofit remains a point of discussion and consideration for the group. There is a fine balance to be navigated between the resources that could be accessed through this formalization, both through potential grant funding as well as more partnerships–ECOC had previously had a large outdoor company decline to donate due to their lack of nonprofit status, although a community connection eventually made it possible. Capacity of organizers again plays a critical role in this deliberation. If the group were to pursue this formalization, who would take on the task of enacting the process and the accompanying work? Moreover, one organizer shared her hesitancy in transitioning from a purely community-based organization: "I think there's always kind of an interest because once you're a 501(c)(3). You get more support right from like the system, right? What is the line of …if we step more into the system than we already are, will we lose our goals at the end of the day? Yeah, and like, you know, our goal is to create Community, is to empower like BIPOC people to get outside, take up space." Other options for the group may include exploring the idea of joining an access fund, which may open opportunities for legal or funding support. Yet there

may be inherent value in a collective that sources its support directly from the community in which it is born, without the limitations and requirements that stem from a formalized nonprofit structure. There is a fluidity and flexibility imbued in ECOC that enables it to follow an organic, dynamic path and gives an opportunity to the wider community to demonstrate its values through supporting it.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The DEIB Landscape

Within the rural recreational landscape of the Howard Buford Recreation Area, three of the major organizations working on creating access to the outdoors have complementary and collaborative roles. Lane County Parks, the Mt. Pisgah Arboretum and the Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah work in tandem through programming, maintenance and improvements to the area. While each organization demonstrates commitment and progress toward DEIB goals, limited resources and lack of relationships with marginalized groups remain important factors in their ability to carry out these responsibilities. Moreover, funding and outcomes influence the processes and speed with which changes can take place, with the more agile nonprofits able to pivot relatively quickly in comparison to the governmental body of Lane County Parks. Urban recreational organizations likewise face their own set of challenges and successes and overall have much more routine engagement with their constituent population through the wide variety of services offered. While rural and urban organizations working in DEIB in outdoor recreation take distinct forms with their own limitations and capacity, they do share a prominent commonality: the desire for more sustained relationships with marginalized communities.

Lane County Parks has expressed a need for data as the basis of decision-making, coupled with long term, sustained relationships that can provide input to the work of the organization. The organization takes a paced and deliberate approach to DEIB, ensuring to the maximum extent possible the actions taken by the organization will yield return on investment, have measurable outcomes and be mutually beneficial. This approach may not align with successful strategies employed by the urban recreational organization, which prioritized relationship and trust building without attaching expectations of reciprocated contribution. For

matters regarding equity and inclusion, rural organizations can employ the methods of hiring members of diverse communities for consultation and outreach, with the critical benefit of having their perspective inform the mechanisms through which feedback may be collected. While survey methods can be useful in collecting information from large groups of people in an area, marginalized voices may not be fully represented in the data–these are voices that have been historically overlooked and may have eroded trust in public institutions. Targeted outreach is necessary to ensure these perspectives are represented and heard. Survey data that was collected indicates that BIPOC participants may face more barriers than other identity groups, demonstrating that strategies aimed specifically at ameliorating barriers for BIPOC communities are necessary.

Interestingly, it is unclear to the extent of which previous UO research that specifically engaged with Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities has influenced decision-making in the area. While some progress has aligned with action items developed by focus groups from these communities, not leveraging or integrating these findings clearly into strategies and plans may result in the duplication of labor by diverse communities. However, many of these action items may also represent longer term projects that require a dedicated staff position to begin and continual input from communities to develop, which has been a goal of the organization.

The relationships that partner organizations have with marginalized communities may present an avenue through which to begin to establish trust and the basis for more sustained relationships. For example, the Arboretum's recurring partnership with the migrant education program and Plaza de Nuestra Comunidad can open doors for gaining perspective from the Latinx community. However, organizations must strike a nuanced balance with supporting these groups without the pressure of contribution, particularly as some of these connections are in the

early stages of development. These budding relationships may instead offer an opportunity for partner organizations to demonstrate their commitment to DEIB and enable further involvement to develop in accordance with the desire and comfortability of these diverse communities. Where feedback and insight is needed in the immediacy, the contributions of marginalized individuals should be fully valued with financial compensation.

The need to build relationships with diverse communities may be a gap that outdoor affinity groups can fill. Groups such as the Eugene Climbers of Color bring together BIPOC individuals of a variety of backgrounds that have demonstrated interest in outdoor recreation, in many ways making the collective an adept fit for addressing this limitation. Connections to ECOC could open doors to a diverse array of communities of color, given that the group is not limited to a specific race, ethnicity or culture. If desired by the affinity group, collaborations or partnered affinity events could relieve some of the pressure of larger organizations not having the represented identities to lead an affinity event by uplifting the presence and leadership of ECOC; this benefit does not supplant the need for the hiring of more diverse staff, but can enable the groups to host these events and learn how to engage with these communities in the interim. As more BIPOC individuals use the spaces these agencies and organizations maintain, normalizing and showing the presence of these communities may begin to build trust and confidence to visit for individuals in and out of the affinity group network.

Conversely, the larger organizations may be able to provide resources to the affinity group, enabling them to expand or maintain opportunities for their community. Organizations that work in more urban areas may be able to provide access to facilities or equipment at reduced or no cost to the group, and if they have staff with specialized skills in climbing techniques, they may be able to host clinics for participants or help train leadership. More rural operating

organizations may not be able to offer this same type of support, and hosting climbing events may be dependent on natural formations in the area. The two most common rock-climbing areas near Eugene that emerged from interviews were the Columns at Skinner Butte, managed by the City of Eugene, and Eagles Rest in the Willamette National Forest, overseen by the U.S. Forest Service. However, Lane County Parks may be able to provide support through an umbrella 501(c)(3) should ECOC eventually decide to pursue the path to becoming a nonprofit. Additionally, if ECOC evolves to encompass other recreational activities or a similar development emerges, there may be more opportunities to collaborate on outdoor activities. Other kinds of support, such as donations of gear and equipment, may be difficult for organizations to justify in budgets without a reportable result.

Moreover, organizations and agencies may have to adjust their approaches to DEIB initiatives and spending under the federal administration. While the state of Oregon remains overall progressive in politics, federal funding for projects and grants related to diversity, equity and inclusion may be nonexistent. Nonetheless, organizations with limitations on spending may be able to pursue smaller strategies of offering spaces, parking or facility use for free for BIPOC groups.

The most significant factor at play, however, is the question of whether and in what ways affinity groups want to partner with institutions and organizations. Interview responses denote interest, caution and the reality of limited capacity. Organizations interested in exploring partnerships with the affinity group can take on the burden of outreach, and work to support the group's needs; this approach may include shelving the organization's own wants from the relationship. Taking into consideration the fact that ECOC organizers contribute their time outside of their professions to offer these opportunities, agencies may need to be flexible in their

processes and expectations to pave the way for a successful partnership–whatever form that may take.

Impact of Affinity Groups

The community led Eugene Climbers of Color offer a host of benefits that may address key challenges outlined by both participant experiences as well as the outdoor recreation literature at large. Theories of marginalization, subculture and discrimination are each in some way engaged by the work of the affinity group. ECOC engages barriers that lower income individuals may face through providing free access to climbing opportunities indoors and outdoors in addition to gear for use. Finding community and others of various cultural identities may help bridge the gap of cultural expectations of behaviors or strict leisure identities, and climbing in community can instill a sense of safety and belonging in spaces that may have seemed inaccessible before. Individuals that participate in ECOC come from a diverse array of backgrounds, with members holding identities across various intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Groups such as the Eugene Climbers of Color demonstrate the impact these groups can have in a community where the affinity identity is not of the dominant race; with the growing attendance of these affinity events, ECOC reveals the need and interest in these spaces. These affinity spaces can create community for those searching and open the opportunity for BIPOC communities to connect and exist as their most comfortable selves.

> "We are showing these organizations now, like, we are here and we want spaces and opportunities like this. And we are creating it for ourselves and you should not forget us because…we're here." –Affinity group member

The form of affinity group that ECOC embodies does not rely on institutional support for its success–yet this does not remove the burden of responsibility for change from wider society.

As BIPOC individuals continue to experience a range of racialized interactions in public spaces, institutions must continue the work of dismantling white supremacy in outdoor spaces.

Maintaining the Space

By having a more generalized BIPOC space through self-identification, rather than focusing on one culture or race, participants were able to interact and connect with different cultures and heritages within the shared space. For participants that may be exploring new aspects of their racial identity or curious about other cultures, these affinity spaces can provide ample opportunity for learning and connection. However, racial self-identification can present complex dynamics that participants must navigate. For example, it remains unclear how individuals who may be of nonwhite heritage but present as white may experience or feel included in these spaces. Conversely, understanding that presenting and identifying as a certain race or ethnicity may misalign presents the challenge of maintaining the affinity space.

Participants who may feel inclined to join the space despite not being BIPOC are limited only by the organization's request and expectation with regard to identity. Yet, setting stricter standards for identity or proposing a type of vetting may affect the more organic and community feel of the group. Some interviewee experiences and opinions expressed in surveys point toward a lack of understanding of the need for these spaces, and a critique that may be levered at affinity groups is that of exclusivity and further division in a society rife with political and ideological polarization. In such times, could affinity groups further keep people of diverse identities from opportunities to connect? Yet in these same times, people of color have continued to contend with microaggressions, feelings of unwelcome and the threat of violence in predominantly white spaces. Affinity groups and spaces offer refuge from these pressures, where BIPOC individuals can learn in community, access resources and develop feelings of belonging in the outdoors—

aspects crucial to enjoying outdoor recreation. Affinity groups do not seek to be the only avenue through which BIPOC individuals recreate but incubate confidence and skills that can propel a long tenure in enjoying the outdoors both in these BIPOC spaces and beyond them.

Outreach and information capturing the importance of affinity groups may address some of these concerns. Flyers, electronic media posts or other informational documents advertising affinity groups or events can outline some of these key benefits upon which non affinity individuals can reflect. Other affinity groups such as the women of color focused Trail Mixed Collective, offer a "Frequently Asked Questions" page that explicitly engages the idea of exclusion. The site likens the outdoor affinity group to that of a new moms or PTSD recovery group for shared experiences and varying levels of privilege and explains how these affinity identities specifically focus on healing and trust building for groups that have been historically marginalized (Trail Mixed Collective). ECOC could follow a similar approach in engaging non affinity individuals, but it is critical to note that doing so continues to place the burden of responsibility on marginalized communities. Taking on this task could instead be a role taken by other supporting organizations, such as the climbing gyms or other community partners.

Additionally, affinity events hosted at bouldering gyms provoke questions about the definition of affinity spaces. Currently, both Elevation and Circuit bouldering gyms maintain an open space, allowing both ECOC and climbers not participating in the group to utilize the facility. While such a strategy may relieve some of the financial and social pressure from the gyms, the strictly BIPOC spaces are limited to the group introduction at the beginning of the climb nights and the post-climb meal out at a local restaurant. The actual climbing takes place in a mixed racial space; while there is a strong BIPOC presence, there may also be interactions with non-affinity group members. While ECOC events are targeted toward BIPOC participants, there

is no published guidance on inviting allies or social connections outside the affinity identity. These individuals would be subject to the standard access and gear rental payments, but could share in the climbing experience. While these mixed spaces still address the financial barriers some BIPOC participants may experience, it remains unclear how these dynamics may impact the sense of community and belonging. Perhaps a large BIPOC presence is sufficient to offset these effects, as a few participants noted that it is the factor of white *dominated* spaces that affects them the most. Nonetheless, mixed spaces throw into sharp relief the delicate balance and complexities of affinity events in open spaces. Further research is warranted to explore how these types of spaces and interactions may impact the experience of affinity group participants.

Other Collaborations and Considerations

Collaborations provide integral support for community-led affinity groups, particularly those that are not able to access outside funding and require specialized equipment or amenities for participation. For ECOC, bouldering gyms within the city offer facilities more easily accessible than outdoor areas that may require transportation to access or depend on weather conditions for use. Moreover, these larger companies have increased stock of gear in a range of sizes that may be a limiting factor for the affinity groups creating opportunities on their own, and the free rental gear lent to BIPOC climbers can address socio economic barriers for participants. Other collaborations from small businesses in the community, some of which have provided donations for raffle prizes, further demonstrate how community connections and support can fortify the group's work. However, this dynamic raises important questions surrounding the context within which affinity groups function. ECOC has built relationships with these community businesses, often through personal connections members had with staff. Is this model

replicable in other towns and cities? Is this system of support a hallmark of these groups, or a rare factor that enabled ECOC's success?

In addition, collaborations that work with current participant numbers may need to evolve as the group gains attention in the area. Elevation and Circuit bouldering gyms have enabled BIPOC participants to climb and use gear for free in the current model; with continued success and growing attendance rates, however, the businesses may seek alternative ways to host the affinity group. Large gatherings at monthly climb nights may utilize greater portions of the gym or limit the gear available to other non-affinity climbers. While hosting these climb nights may offer tangible benefits to the gym, such as introducing new climbers to the sport and establishing the gym as a safe and welcoming space, companies may weigh these advantages against the strain of hosting large numbers of participants free of charge at the climb nights. As noted previously, keeping the gyms open to all climbers during these affinity events may mitigate some of the financial impacts but may also affect the integrity of the affinity space. A possible remedy may be to offer closed events occasionally throughout the year, such as once per quarter, to preserve the event's intention. Should climb nights continue to grow in attendance, ECOC may explore the option of hosting a morning and evening set of events on a given day in which participants can choose the timeframe that best suits them. This approach may distribute attendee numbers more evenly to relieve pressure on space and gear usage, although it may come at the cost of losing the tight-knit community aspect in which all BIPOC participants may connect.

Additionally, while collaborations remain a powerful source of support for affinity groups, they produce reputational risks as well. The outdoor retailer REI has long been portrayed as a progressive option in the outdoor space, with its status as a co-op and it's "Opt Outside" policy of shutting down on Black Friday. They recently collaborated with the affinity group

Outdoor Afro to co-produce a line of clothing sold by the retailer. Yet in the past few years, controversies surrounding the company's treatment of its employees have raised questions about the values of REI. In response to employees unionizing and negotiating a collective bargaining agreement, REI has been accused of unfair labor practices and stalling negotiations (Selyukh, 2023)[5]. Collaborations with companies such as REI raise the possibility of impacting the affinity group's reputation and affecting its relationship with the community; moreover, accounts such as that of Melissa Utomo's experience with technical fixes to the company's route-finding app may erode trust in between BIPOC communities and REI (Weinberger, 2020). Portrayed values may misalign, as it may be problematic to promote equity and inclusivity while in partnership with a company who allegedly does not treat its workers in an appropriate manner. Yet, not pursuing these collaborations or donations cuts off a valuable resource for affinity groups who may have limited access to other funding or avenues through which to procure gear.

There are no current partnerships between Eugene Climbers of Color and governmental agencies working in recreation and thus the question of what form such collaborations and support may take remains. Local partnerships with businesses have allowed the collective to utilize social networks in meeting needs; the bureaucratic processes of government agencies may raise challenges in developing partnerships with ECOC's limited capacity. However, organizations such as the urban agency discussed earlier have demonstrated flexibility and understanding in working with BIPOC communities, waiving select nonessential procedures to enable the success of Latinx events in organization spaces. Such adaptable approaches will be instrumental in enabling collaborations and avenues to support to occur, as they account for the

[5] In early May 2025, a high turnout election resulted in REI Co-op members' votes rejecting corporate candidates for company's board, a victory for the REI union (Sanford, 2025) and may signal a turning point for the company

reality of the collective's limitations and indicate goodwill and intentionality on the part of the organization.

Finally, further examination of how affinity groups in the outdoors interact with issues surrounding land back and Indigenous rights is critical in engaging white supremacy in outdoor recreation; inclusion and representation are one dimension of the multifaceted system. Some scholars have begun the work. In her work examining the *Yo Cuento* blogs of the affinity organization Latino Outdoors, Wald (2024) suggests a few ways in the which the organization can further disrupt settler colonialism and stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities, including uploading posts that expressly recognize the relationships between tribes and land and highlighting Indigenous perspectives. While ECOC does not have the same online presence nor staffing capacity as Latino Outdoors, the climbing collective can still engage in accessible approaches such as giving a land acknowledgement at the start of events and reposting social media posts from Indigenous creators. As ECOC produces invaluable work to foster diversity in the outdoors, embracing the movements of Indigenous communities strengthens the impact in confronting white supremacy in the field.

CONCLUSIONS

Limitations and Further Research

One of the most prominent limitations of this study was the connection between the activities of the affinity group and *outdoor* recreation, as the majority of the ECOC events centered on indoor rock climbing. While certain aspects of the group may be applicable to a more outdoor focused setting, having a semi-controlled environment and the support of the business may impact the benefits the group is able to offer. Moreover, bouldering and rock climbing are technical recreation activities that may have a higher barrier to entry as compared to other types of recreation, so the benefits of the climbing affinity group may differ compared to other activities.

The societal context in which this study took place remains an important factor. Eugene is a white, progressive city within an overall white, progressive state, and the same considerations may not apply in other regions or states across the U.S. In areas where racism is more overt and normalized, there may be even greater need for these affinity groups; at the same time these groups may face more challenges if they are unable to rely on community support and collaboration. Nonetheless, affinity groups have arisen across the United States and continue to serve communities in various socio-cultural contexts, and the function of these groups within their respective spaces merit further research. The majority of the research took place before the 2025 Trump administration began its rollback of DEI policies and practices, and further investigation may explore how affinity groups operate in this evolving landscape.

The study was also limited by the participant size and demographics, as the majority of the affinity group participants were young and able-bodied. The perspective of the older participant, who was also a parent, demonstrates the need to include a broader range of ages to

understand the needs of individuals who may have more limitations due to age and priorities regarding inclusion of youth. Additionally, certain races and ethnicities were not represented in the interviewee demographics, including Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and Black identities, as so the unique experience of these communities could not be included in the study. Moreover, it is worthwhile to note that the majority of participants also had leadership positions within the group, which may affect how the benefits and experience of participation are portrayed. Affinity groups with a non-profit status may experience distinct advantages and disadvantages compared to community sustained collectives, particularly in terms of funding in politically volatile times.

As one of the first studies explore the function of affinity groups in the outdoor recreation space, further research is warranted to examine how different affinity group types, whether based on specific activities, intersectional identities, more specific racial identities, formalized organizations or area of operation can develop to serve marginalized communities.

Conclusion

Leisure scholars have long focused on the many barriers facing underrepresented BIPOC communities in outdoor recreation, highlighting the ways in which a racialized history has led to many of the disparities of the current climate. Outdoor affinity groups demonstrate the power and resolve of marginalized communities to gather support and create opportunities for themselves; they provide an invaluable impact in increasing accessibility to outdoor recreation by addressing both physical and social barriers to activities. These grassroots groups actively confront hegemonic constructions of a white outdoors, as they open opportunities for BIPOC individuals of diverse backgrounds to participate and develop a sense of belonging in these spaces. Community-fueled iterations of these groups that do not rely on grants may be especially resilient and crucial in political atmospheres that seek to actively deconstruct DEI initiatives, as

they utilize local resources and connections to function. This strength, however, brings with it inherent vulnerabilities, as these affinity groups thus depend on the time and energy of their organizing members and the commitment of bouldering gyms and other small businesses to provide amenities and donations for events. Thus far, local businesses have not changed their support of the affinity group--despite many larger corporations realigning their priorities with the federal government to dismiss DEI considerations. Nonetheless, diversifying sources of support may be a much-needed safety net of resources, and partnerships with agencies and nonprofits may open an avenue to do so.

Public and nonprofit organizations have clearly displayed a need and interest in developing sustained relationships with BIPOC communities to inform their work and serve the breadth of the community. Affinity groups present an opportunity to bridge this challenge, as they have constructed a diverse network of BIPOC individuals actively engaging in outdoor recreation. However, public and nonprofit organizations should exercise care and consideration in exploring the potential of partnership; they must prioritize the slow process of building trust and relationships over shorter term deliverables or transactions. While organizations may face pressures to produce measurable results in response to investing time and resources, long-term relationship building is necessary given the lengthy history of marginalization of these groups. Support may take the form of monetary assistance, donations of gear, access to networks and institutional resources, or the use of facilities free of cost; these contributions will likely be unique to the capacity and resources of the organization. Establishing trust and supporting affinity groups through financial or material resources may aid organizations in their larger goals of diversifying the outdoors in more diffused ways. As BIPOC individuals develop their skills and comfortability in outdoor recreation, representation of these communities may increase

overall. Additionally, the support of these organizations to affinity groups may increase the likelihood of participants attending events, starting dialogue about experiences, responding to surveys or considering employment, as an organization's values can be demonstrated through this relationship. While organizations can take on the role of outreach to relieve some of the burden of labor from affinity groups with limited capacity and may offer to partner on hosting affinity events, they should continue to prioritize the affinity group's agency and needs. Through the lens of equity, organizational resources dedicated to bolstering opportunities for marginalized communities is well spent in the work toward a more diverse and inclusive outdoors.

Moreover, support of affinity groups must be undertaken with other concerted efforts to increase diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in the outdoors. Strategies to address barriers in outdoor recreation may be strengthened by relationships with affinity groups and communities of color, but public organizations must also commit to driving change. From creating inclusive organizational cultures and transforming internal processes to the external work of advocating for DEIB projects to partners and community members, organizations should continue additional strategies to foster diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging in their work.

Affinity groups present a unique, grassroots intervention to increase access for BIPOC communities in outdoor recreation, a movement that warrants support by organizations working to increase diversity in the outdoors and the community at large. These collectives represent power and resistance to structures that have worked to exclude them. Eugene Climbers of Color demonstrates that within the continual work to be done to make the outdoors more diverse, equitable, inclusive and a space where all belong, affinity groups can provide a pivotal step toward that future.

APPENDIX A

Recreation Field Survey

Topic: Diversity and Inclusion in Outdoor Recreation
Partnering Organization: Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah

Researcher: Kiana Ringuette, University of Oregon Global Studies MA Program
Email: kringuet@uoregon.edu
Phone: 503-703-1658

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may skip any questions or stop the survey at any time. Your answers will be transcribed and stored in an encrypted folder and your names will not be recorded. There is a low risk of a data breach occurring and this recorded information becoming exposed to outside entities. Results from this survey may be published in an MA thesis without identifying information. No compensation will be provided for your participation.

For more information about the Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah and volunteer opportunities, please visit: https://bufordpark.org

Area Usage and Recreational Preference Information:

1. How often on average do you visit the Howard Buford Recreation Area? Please choose the most relevant answer.

- o Never
- o Once or twice a year
- o Once or twice a month
- o Once a week or twice a week
- o Three to five times a week
- o Daily

2. What are your primary motivations for spending time in the outdoors? Choose up to three:

- o Connecting to your culture
- o Connecting to place/land
- o Education/learning
- o Exploration/adventure
- o Landscape/scenic appreciation
- o Mental/emotional benefits
- o Personal development (e.g. self-confidence, self-discovery)
- o Physical benefits
- o Relaxation
- o Resource collection (including food, medicine, materials, etc)
- o Spending time alone

- o Spending time with friends/family/community
- o Wildlife appreciation/plant appreciation
- o other:_____
-

3. What activities do you prefer to do in the outdoors? Mark all that apply:
- o Artmaking
- o Biking
- o Camping
- o Climbing
- o Cultural traditions
- o Please specify if possible:_____
- o Dog walking
- o Fishing
- o Foraging
- o Games (non-sport, such as scavenger hunts, board games, etc)
- o Hiking
- o Horseback riding
- o Hunting
- o Kayaking/Canoeing
- o Meditation
- o Photography
- o Picnics/BBQs
- o Running/walking
- o Socializing
- o Spiritual traditions
- o Please specify if possible:_____
- o Sports (organized or informal including soccer, volleyball, football, etc)
- o Stewardship/activities that include caring for the land or environment
- o Storytelling
- o Swimming
- o Wildlife/plant viewing/identification
- o Yoga/stretching
- o Other: _____

4. What are the barriers to you spending more time outdoors in the Howard Buford Recreation Area? Mark all that apply.
- o Amenities
- Discrimination
- o Please specify if possible:_____
- o Lack of interest
- o Lack of programming/structured activities
- o Lack of welcome/sense of belonging
- o Please specify if possible:_____

- o Rules/regulations
- o Please specify if possible:_____
- o Safety concerns
- o Please specify if possible:_____
- o Time
- o Transportation
- o Other: _____
- o No barriers

5. Would you be more inclined to participate in outdoor activities as part of a group?
   - o No
   - o Yes (if yes, would you be more inclined to participate in a group if all members shared an aspect of your identity—for example race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability)
     - Yes
     - No

6. To the best of your knowledge, what organizations have significant influence on decision-making in the Howard Buford Recreation Area? Please select all that apply.
   - o Friends of Buford Park and Mt. Pisgah
   - o Mt. Pisgah Arboretum
   - o Sheriff's Mounted Posse
   - o Lane County Parks
   - o Whole Earth Nature School
   - o Nearby Nature Outdoor School
   - o Lane County Search and Rescue
   - o McKenzie River Trust
   - o Other:_____

Demographic Information:

1. Do you live in Lane County?
   - o Yes
   - o No

2. What is your age within the following range?
   - o 18-24
   - o 25-34
   - o 35-44
   - o 45-54
   - o 55-64
   - o 65-74
   - o 75+
   - o Prefer not to answer

3. What is your gender? Mark all that apply
   - o Woman
   - o Man
   - o Nonbinary
   - o Genderfluid
   - o Gender Non-conforming
   - o Other:_____
   - o Prefer not to answer

4. Do you identify as LGBTQIAS2+?
   - o Yes
   - o No
   - o Prefer not to answer

5. What is your race/ethnicity? Mark all that apply
   - o Latino/a/e/x
   - o Black
   - o Indigenous (Turtle Island/North America)
   - o Asian
   - o Kānaka Maoli/Pacific Islander
   - o White
   - o Other:_____
   - o Prefer not to answer

6. Do you identify as having a disability?
   - o Yes (if yes, does your disability include either of the following?)
   - o Physical impairment
   - o Mental impairment
   - o No
   - o Prefer not to answer

7. What is your household Income (before taxes)?:
   - o under or equal to $15,000
   - o $16,000-28,000
   - o $29,000-44,000
   - o $45,000-$63,000
   - o $64,000-87,000
   - o $88,000-110,000
   - o $111,000-145,000
   - o $146,000+
   - o Prefer not to answer

8. How many people in are in your household (including yourself)?:
   - o Total Number_____:

- o _____ Adults (Working)
- o _____ Adults (Non-Working)
- o _____ Children
- o Prefer not to answer

APPENDIX B

GROUP ONE: BIPOC Affinity Group Participant Interview Questions

2. Demographic Info (self-identified):

    a. How old are you?

    b. What race and/or ethnicity do you identify as? For how many generations has your family lived in the United States?

    c. Do you identify as LGBTQIAS2+?

    d. What gender do you identify as?

    e. Do you identify as having a disability? If yes, does your disability include physical or mental impairment?

3. What does nature mean to you? What is the place of humans in nature?

4. How would you define outdoor recreation? Does it capture all the ways you interact with the outdoors/nature?

5. What kinds of activities do you enjoy most outdoors? How did you learn about/become exposed to these activities? Family, friends, etc

6. What motivates you to do activities outdoors?

7. Are there any outdoor activities you've wanted to do, but haven't? What has kept you from doing it?

8. What local outdoor areas do you visit most often? Why? (may be specific areas or conditions)

    a. Do you visit the HBRA? Why/what are any barriers to visiting more often?

9. Do you prefer programmed recreation activities (i.e. organized by a group/organization), or doing them yourself? Why?/What are the advantages or disadvantages for you?

    a. Do you prefer to participate in activities as an individual, in a small group, in a large group, or with family?

10. If you were offered to join outdoor recreational activities/events hosted by an organization or group, what are the most important factors you consider in making the decision to participate?

    a. Does it matter to you if the other members share a part of your identity (e.g. all BIPOC, all NB/trans/women, all queer, etc)? Why?

11. What kinds of outdoor or recreational events/opportunities offered by organizations here in Eugene have interested you? Why? How do you hear about them?

12. What conditions or factors are most important for you to feel comfortable and empowered in the outdoors?

13. What are barriers to participation in outdoor recreation for you or others in your community? Either being outside in general or participating in specific activities?

14. What affinity group(s) are you a part of? How did you first hear of and become involved with the group?

    a. Did you have technical skills prior to joining?

15. What kinds of activities do you do/how often do you participate?

16. How has participating in an affinity group affected your experience in outdoor recreation?

17. What is the importance of outdoor affinity groups?

    a. What benefits does participation in affinity groups offer for you?

    b. Are there specific resources the group offers or qualities the group has that appeal to or help you in enjoying the outdoors? What is the impact/benefit of all members being BIPOC?

    c. Does being part of the affinity group increase the likelihood you'll participate in outdoor recreation/or certain activities?

    d. What do you enjoy most about participating in affinity groups?

    e. Have you participated in other affinity groups/spaces/events? What was that experience like?

18. Are there any drawbacks to participation in affinity groups? If so, please explain. Exclusionary, partners?

19. Is there a difference to you in participating in an activity hosted by the affinity group or participating in an affinity event hosted by another organization?

20. What is like to be (x identity) outdoors? Are there experiences you've had specifically tied to your intersectional identity?

    a. As a person of (x) ethnicity, how has being (y) gender, (z) sexuality, etc impacted your experiences outdoors? Do you feel comfortable participating in outdoor recreation here in Eugene?

    b. Has hypermasculinity or toxic masculinity, heteronormativity, and/or white supremacy affected your experiences outdoors?

    c. Are you more drawn to affinity groups based on your race/ethnicity (or BIPOC) in general, gender, sexuality or other identity? Would you be more drawn to participate in an affinity group that encompassed multiple intersections of your identity? E.g. women or NB of color, etc

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