



 OREGON
STATE PARKS™

BEYOND

BOUNDARIES

BRIDGING THE GAP TO UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES.
OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

A photograph of a forest stream with moss-covered rocks and a wooden bridge in the background. The text "CHANGE IS THE STEPPING STONE TO PROGRESS." is overlaid in large white letters.

**CHANGE
IS THE
STEPPING
STONE TO
PROGRESS.**

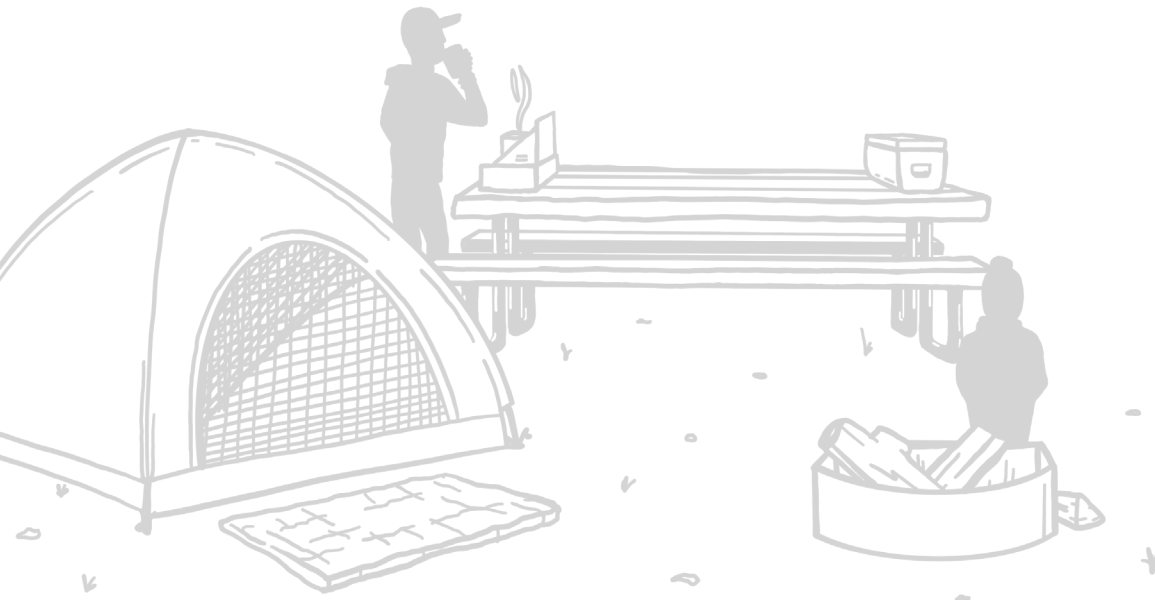


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

Outdoor recreation is a privilege many Oregonians take for granted. Outdoor enthusiasts and government planners routinely highlight outdoor recreation as a vital component of human well-being, offering numerous physical, mental, and social benefits.

It fosters a connection with nature, promotes health and wellness, and provides opportunities for social interaction and community building. However, access to the outdoors is not universal and the benefits of Oregon State Parks do not flow equitably to all Oregonians. Underserved communities in Oregon, including those with low income, BIPOC communities, LGBTQIA+, immigrants/refugees, rural residents, neurodivergent and developmentally disabled individuals, and those with limited mobility face significant barriers to accessing and utilizing Oregon's outdoor resources, including those found in Oregon State Parks (Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, 2019).

This report seeks to shed light on these barriers and propose actionable recommendations to address them. The report is the result of a comprehensive research process, which included an extensive literature review, stakeholder interviews, community surveys, and data analysis. It provides an in-depth examination of the social, economic, and structural barriers faced by underserved communities and outlines a set of recommendations aimed at promoting equitable access to State Parks for all Oregonians.

The goal of this report is to contribute to the ongoing efforts to make Oregon State Parks more inclusive, accessible, and enjoyable for all. By addressing the barriers faced by underserved communities, we can ensure that everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical abilities, or socioeconomic status, can experience the beauty and the many benefits found in Oregon State Parks. In doing so, we will not only increase the accessibility of Oregon State Parks, but increase their promotion and utilization among all Oregonians.





PROBLEM STATEMENT

Underserved communities in Oregon, including low-income, rural, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, immigrants/refugees, neurodivergent and developmentally disabled individuals, and those with limited mobility, face significant barriers to accessing and utilizing Oregon State Parks and outdoor recreation opportunities. These barriers can be categorized into three primary areas: social, economic, and structural (Roberts & Chitwere, 2011).

These barriers contribute to reduced utilization of outdoor spaces by these communities, thereby limiting their ability to reap the physical, mental, and social benefits associated with outdoor recreation. The challenge lies in addressing these barriers in a comprehensive, inclusive, and culturally sensitive manner to ensure equitable access to outdoor recreation for all members of the community.





INTERSECTIONALITY

The concept of Intersectionality is vital to this work. It is a framework recognizing how various forms of social inequality intersect and shape the experiences of underserved communities. It acknowledges that individuals face overlapping systemic barriers based on income, race, gender, class, sexuality, and more.

It is vitally important to understand that the barriers faced by underserved communities are often intertwined. Barriers feed off each other and reinforce one another, creating a complex web of challenges that BIPOC, low-income, LGBTQIA+, and other underserved communities face. By understanding the interconnectedness of these identities, we can address the unique challenges faced by individuals. To effectively address barriers to accessing outdoor recreation, a comprehensive approach is needed; one that not only considers economic factors, but also social and structural ones.



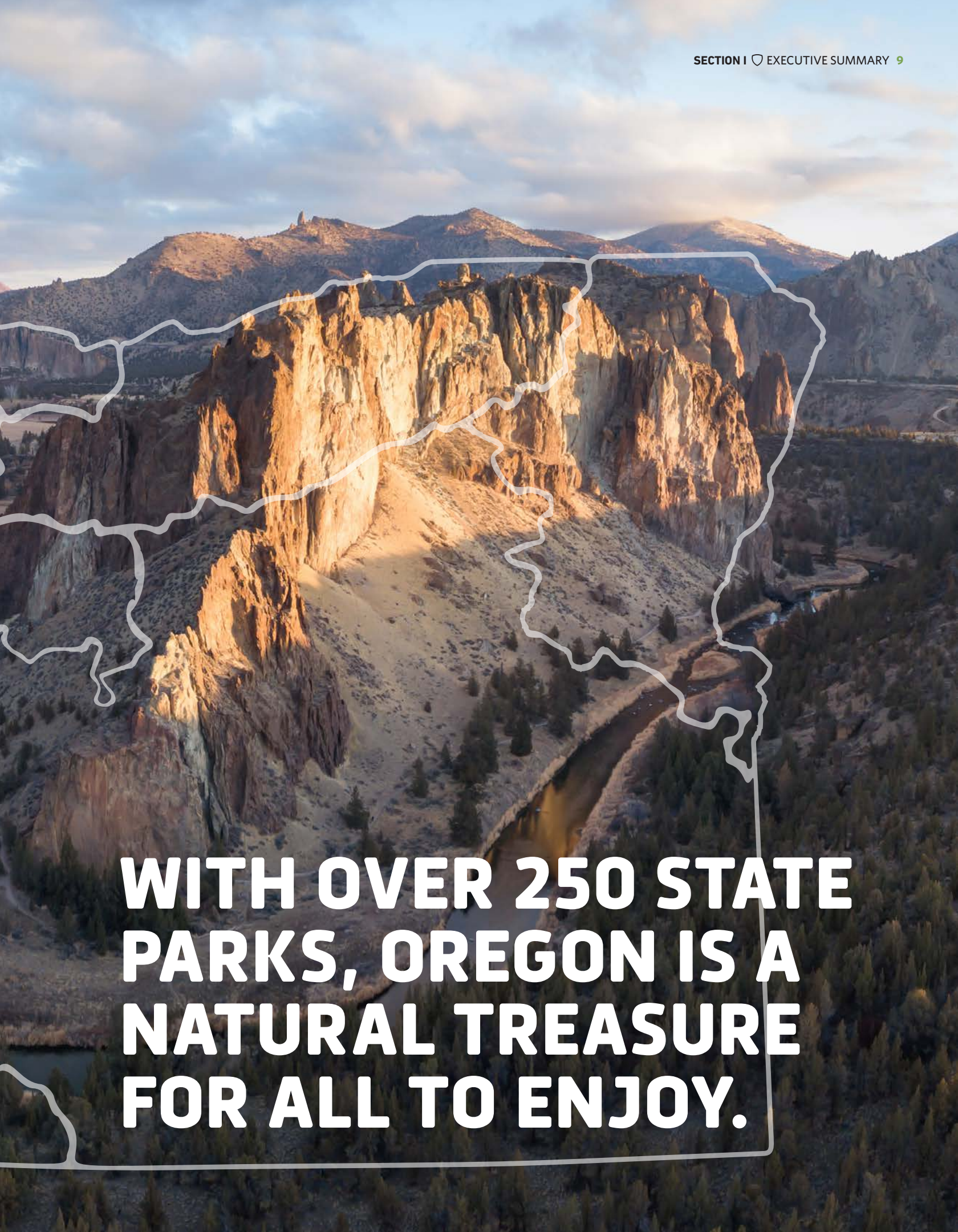


OBJECTIVES

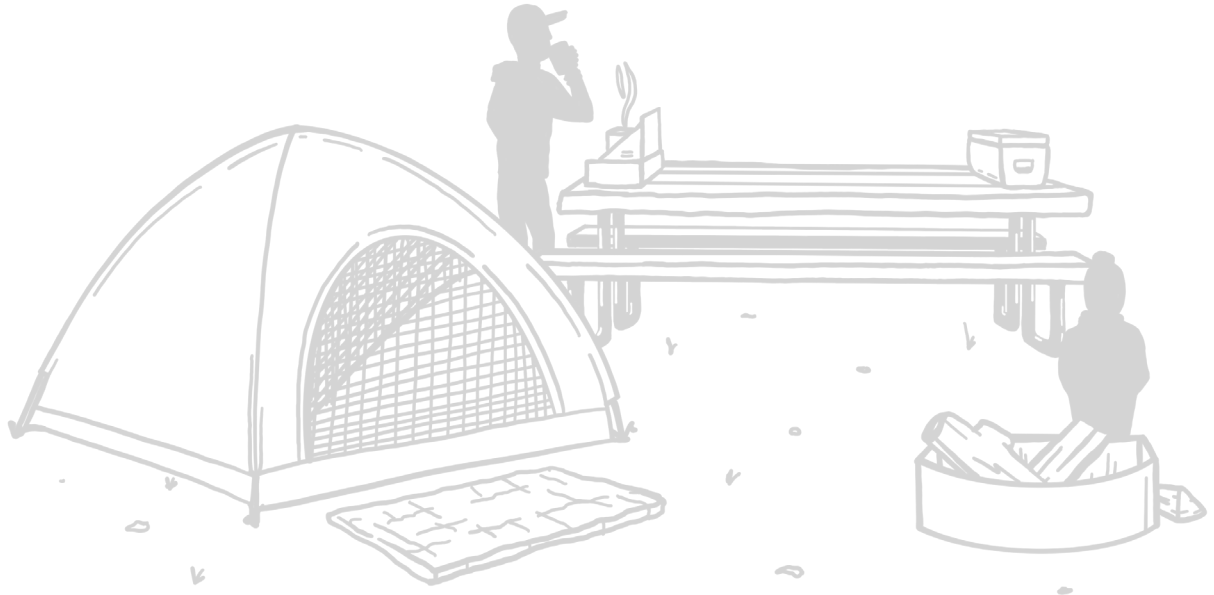
The goal of this report is to provide guidance on how to create a more welcoming, accessible, and enjoyable environment for everyone.

This report will gather information and insights from organizations representing underserved communities in Oregon to identify barriers to equitable access, belonging, and utilization of Oregon State Parks and outdoor spaces. The goal of this report is to listen and learn from interviewees, understand the needs and concerns of the populations they represent, and reduce barriers faced by underserved populations when accessing Oregon State Parks. Most importantly, this report will also include recommended steps to actively address barriers and enhance OPRD's approach to ensuring that all individuals, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, or socioeconomic status, feel welcome, have access to, and can enjoy the Oregon State Parks.





**WITH OVER 250 STATE
PARKS, OREGON IS A
NATURAL TREASURE
FOR ALL TO ENJOY.**



METHODOLOGY

Working directly with representatives from diverse organizations directly serving underserved communities ensures an authentic understanding of their experiences and the barriers they face. The approach used in this project was comprehensive and multifaceted. Qualitative interviews were combined with quantitative analysis and external research to generate a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by underserved communities. Participants offered valuable insights for policymakers, managers, and stakeholders working towards greater inclusivity in Oregon State Parks.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with representatives from 14 organizations representing underserved communities throughout Oregon. Participants included organizations from community non-profits, civil rights organizations, advocacy groups, park staff, and participants in OPRD programs. All participants were in leadership roles and directly serving and working with the populations they represent. Interviews were used in three ways.

- 01.** All discussions were recorded. Transcripts were created and reviewed for common themes, barriers, and action items that apply broadly across organizations or within communities.
- 02.** Live notes were taken by a third party not participating in the discussion. Key themes and learnings from each discussion were identified based on qualitative observations. These were collected and referenced for relative emphasis, recommendations, and key learnings.
- 03.** Interviews were analyzed quantitatively for common themes, key topic identification, and intersectionality. Live notes were cross referenced to identify any missed key content or topics.

Questions focused on the mission and work of the organizations, and the barriers they face when working to increase access and belonging in outdoor spaces. Discussions included Oregon Parks and Recreation facilities, infrastructure, and processes; as well as broader learning from their experience working with various underserved communities. Specific recommendations for improving inclusivity in Oregon State Parks were also requested. Where appropriate, those recommendations and observations contributed to the recommendations outlined in this report.





CONFIDENTIALITY AND RETALIATION

Multiple interview participants requested anonymity and expressed fears about retaliation over their potential comments. Project participants included current and former OPRD employees and their spouses, as well as associated organizations who receive funding or other supports from the Department. In order to secure honest feedback this report includes summaries of concerns and supporting quotes without attribution rather than full transcripts.

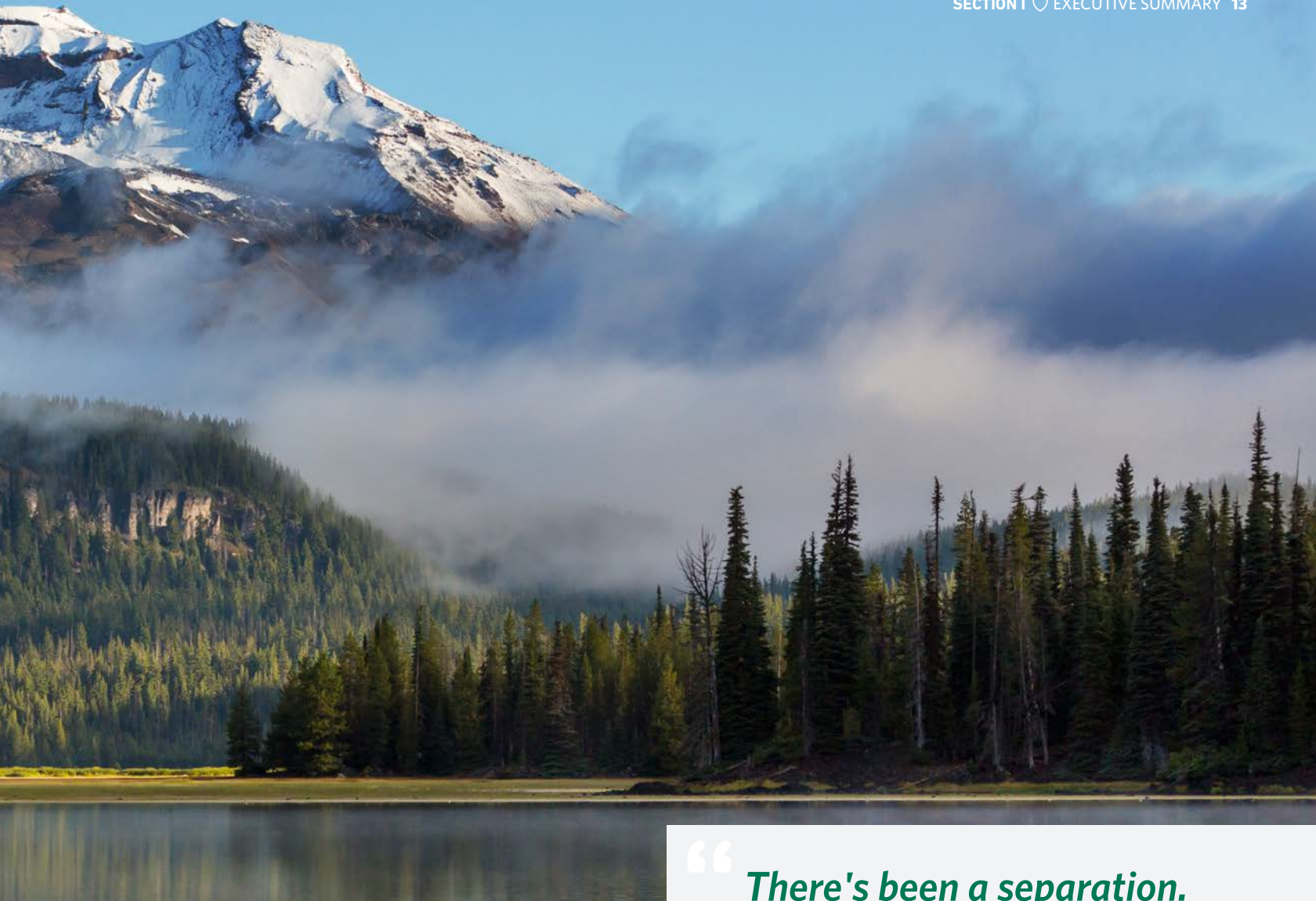
EXTERNAL RESEARCH

Third party reports, academic research, and past Oregon State reports and survey data have been referenced and included in this report where appropriate. When referenced, external sources are cited in-text with a detailed citation in Appendix A: References. External quantitative research proved limited in several key areas. Many survey metrics measured participation in any outdoor behavior when determining participation in outdoor recreation. While accurate, this measure may not reflect actual usage of state parks and more intensive activities. Additionally, findings for rural residents, specific minority communities, and LGBTQIA+ populations are often limited in scope, but were not found to not contradict statements of interview participants or the findings of this report.



FINDINGS SUMMARY

These interviews uncovered many areas of concern among members of underserved communities that contribute to reduced utilization of Oregon State Parks and outdoor recreation opportunities as a whole. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that considers and respects the unique experiences and needs of individual underserved communities.



“*There's been a separation.
Culturally, there's been a separation from the outdoors.*”

THESE BARRIERS CAN BE BROKEN DOWN INTO 3 PRIMARY CATEGORIES:

Social Barriers: Members of minority communities face a wide range of social barriers to accessing outdoor spaces. Cultural norms, social pressures, lack of knowledge, and safety concerns all contribute to generational causes of inequity in Oregon State Parks.

Economic Barriers: Economic factors play a significant role in limiting access to outdoor recreation for underserved communities. Low income Oregonians are unable to access many of the outdoor recreation opportunities provided by OPRD and unaware of many of the options they can afford. Because income is so closely tied to many social, racial, and ethnic indicators, economic factors significantly impact the ability and desire of many Oregonians to engage in outdoor activities (Governor's Taskforce on the Outdoors, 2019).

Structural Barriers: While there are many social and economic barriers to accessing outdoor spaces, there are also very real physical barriers to equitable utilization of Oregon Parks. Systemic and institutional factors that limit access to outdoor recreation are particularly acute for rural residents and members of marginalized communities.

SECTION II

DETAILED FINDINGS



BARRIERS, FEARS, AND CHALLENGES TO ACCESSING OREGON STATE PARKS

Inclusive access to outdoor recreation does not have a one-size-fits-all solution and requires listening to and working with communities to understand their unique needs and experiences. It also requires intentional and continuous effort from all stakeholders, including individuals, communities, organizations, and policymakers.

The first step in determining how to best meet the needs of diverse populations is to learn what those needs are. Through discussions with advocacy and affinity groups we identified a wide range of barriers to access, fears, and challenges that make accessing outdoor spaces uniquely difficult for underserved communities.



**EMBRACE
INCLUSION,
IGNITE
CHANGE,
AND SHAPE
A BRIGHTER
FUTURE
TOGETHER.**

INTERSECTIONAL BARRIERS

Through these discussions, it became clear that most issues faced by underserved communities impact multiple segments across those populations. Many of these issues sit at the core of challenges faced by most, if not all, of the underserved communities included in this report.



SAFETY

Remote locations: Some outdoor activities take place in remote or secluded areas where assistance may be limited or response times for emergency services can be longer. This can raise concerns about personal safety, especially if individuals are unfamiliar with the area or participating alone. Additionally, the time required to travel to many parks creates the perception that visiting Oregon State Parks is difficult, time consuming, and costly.

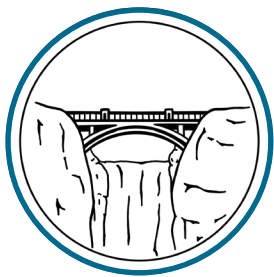
Natural hazards: Outdoor activities often involve exposure to natural elements and potential hazards such as extreme weather conditions, wildlife encounters, or rugged terrain. Concerns about encountering these hazards without proper preparation or assistance can impact the perceived safety of new visitors.

Historical context: Historical experiences of violence, such as lynchings, hate crimes, or other forms of racial violence, have left lasting trauma and fear of rural and wilderness areas within the African American community. Indigenous communities, in particular, have been systematically dispossessed of these lands over centuries, which can limit their ability to participate in outdoor activities that their cultures traditionally engaged in. These historical contexts influence perceptions of safety and contribute to apprehension about venturing into unfamiliar outdoor spaces.

Mistrust of law enforcement: Members of marginalized communities may also have safety concerns during interactions with law enforcement due to past experiences, perceived racial bias, language barriers, or immigration related concerns. Fear of unnecessary arrests or use of force often can cause avoidance, which may include mistrust of park rangers and others acting in an official enforcement capacity. This mistrust exacerbates safety concerns in the event help is needed.

Safety concerns: Personal security is a significant concern for marginalized communities. Fear of harassment, hate crimes, or targeted violence can prevent people of color, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minorities from feeling safe in public spaces, leading to self-imposed isolation or avoidance of certain areas. These concerns are particularly acute in central and eastern Oregon due to the remoteness of the parks, the presence of firearms, perceptions of an increased likelihood of harassment, and mistrust of local law enforcement.

Physical safety at events: Depending on the nature of the events, there are concerns about ensuring the safety of participants from physical violence and harassment. Interview participants also cast doubt on the ability and likelihood of intervention by OPRD Rangers and volunteers.



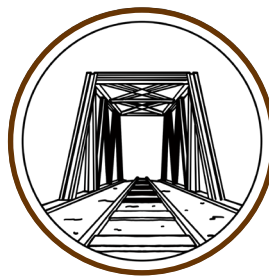
AFFORDABILITY

Cost: Many outdoor recreational activities require or are perceived to require expensive gear, entry fees, or travel expenses, making them less accessible to low-income individuals or families.

Time: Low-income individuals often work long hours or multiple jobs, leaving little time for recreational activities. The opportunity cost of taking time off for outdoor recreation might be too high for these individuals.

Access to transportation: Outdoor recreational spaces are often located outside of urban centers, and people who do not own a car or cannot afford public transportation may find it difficult to reach these locations.

Flexibility: Members of underserved communities are also disproportionately low-income. Individuals often lack the ability to plan far enough ahead to be able to access some Oregon State Parks due to the State's reservation system and the requirement to book spaces far in advance.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Geographic access: Access to green spaces or natural parks is not evenly distributed. Facilities and amenities that support outdoor recreational activities may not exist in areas predominantly inhabited by underserved communities. Low-income rural Oregonians often face limited options due to their distance from many parks and the relative costs of the recreation that is in close proximity. This further exacerbates access disparities. Additionally, existing facilities may not meet the recreation preferences of more diverse populations.

Logistical barriers: Transportation and geographical barriers make it difficult for some communities, especially BIPOC communities, to access Oregon State Parks. Traffic congestion and limited transportation options pose challenges for individuals attending programs or camps, particularly when it comes to early morning or late afternoon schedules.

Policy and funding: Policies related to land use and the allocation of resources for recreational infrastructure often favor wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods. This further exacerbates access disparities.





INCLUSION & BELONGING

Lack of representation: Lack of representation in marketing and media related to outdoor recreation can further alienate marginalized communities. When individuals do not see people who look like them involved in these activities, it can discourage participation (Byrne & Wolch, 2009).

Lack of suitable amenities: Current group camping facilities do not meet the needs of diverse groups. Sites that support groups are often not able to also support those with mobility issues, electrical support requirements, and special facilities needs. Additionally, existing recreational spaces may be ill-suited to the interests and uses most attractive to marginalized communities. Members of underserved communities may have different recreational interests than those currently offered at many Oregon State Parks.

Communication and outreach: Many members of marginalized and underserved communities have limited knowledge of Oregon State Parks and outdoor recreation options available to them. They are rarely if ever exposed to content about Oregon State Parks, and therefore are unlikely to learn about the opportunities available, much less access them.



“

Minorities may prefer different physical settings than whites, including traditional park landscapes, urban proximate locations, and areas that allow for extended and multiple family gatherings. (SCORP, 2017)

”



COMMUNITY SPECIFIC BARRIERS

BIPOC COMMUNITIES

Stereotypes and Perceptions

Outdoor recreational activities have historically been dominated by white, upper-middle-class participants, which can create a perception that these activities are not for everyone. These stereotypes can deter BIPOC and marginalized communities from participating. Additionally, certain outdoor activities like backpacking, ATV/UTV, and horseback riding may not be culturally relevant or meaningful to specific

communities. The dominant narrative around what outdoor activities have been "appropriate" or "desired" in Oregon State Parks may not align with the cultural practices of some communities.

"Many members of minority groups regard some outdoor recreation activities as culturally irrelevant and may have little interest in them."
(SCORP, 2017)

Misappropriation

BIPOC communities have been systematically removed from natural spaces. Efforts to attract members of these communities is not simply asking for trial, but asking for people to return to spaces they were intentionally removed from. While there is generally no direct memory, there is cultural memory that may manifest in some of the negative attitudes towards outdoors spaces and State Parks referenced by interviewees. There can be a hesitance to return to those spaces that manifests as a difficult to define but generalized discomfort. This issue is particularly relevant to black and indigenous communities (Butzier & Stevenson, 2016).





“

just recognition that a place like this [is] very off limits for a lot of communities of color... returning is quite a big act.

Coming back and being able to be free of persecution and walk around and feel comfortable and consider the space.”

”

Language: One of the main challenges in reaching out to non-English speaking populations is a lack of awareness of the opportunities available to them. The lack of promotional and informational content in their native languages may contribute to a feeling that the outdoors is not accessible or welcoming for them.

Historical and cultural barriers:

Outdoor spaces may be seen as unsafe based on the country of origin and past experiences. Refugees and migrants may have spent extended periods of time unhoused. Additionally, wilderness may be associated with violence and sources of danger for migrants who come from conflict zones.

“I have experienced war for three months. I have the refugee experience where the forest was where the soldiers were hiding to attack civilians.”

Immigrants vs refugees: Immigrants and refugees may have dramatically different experiences and needs. Immigrants are often more financially secure, but may be more culturally and socially isolated. Refugees often face significant economic and cultural barriers, but are often more culturally connected to peers and aware of social support structures.

“The more affluent people are, the more isolated they become.”

Xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment:

Immigrants and refugees may face xenophobic attitudes and anti-immigrant sentiment. Hate crimes targeting individuals based on their race, ethnicity, or immigration status can be a safety concern. Community members may face the risk of being victimized, particularly in areas with a history of racially motivated violence. The awareness and fear of racism can

be particularly acute for immigrants whose country of origin is not racially and ethnically diverse.

“I didn't have an understanding of racism before the United States. That's a typical immigrant experience... I started finding out about the largest existing KKK chapters here, the history of Japanese internment.”



RURAL OREGONIANS

Distance and lack of information: Rural Oregonians face additional challenges to accessing the great outdoors. Many rural areas face economic challenges, including lower income levels and higher poverty rates. These factors can limit access to outdoor recreational equipment, certain sports, and other activities that require financial investment.

Rural communities are often geographically remote, making it challenging for people to access outdoor amenities. Residents may have to travel long distances to reach parks, hiking trails, or other outdoor recreation areas.

There may be safety concerns related to wildlife, rough terrain, or inadequate emergency services. This can deter people from venturing outdoors, particularly if they are not familiar with the area.

Rural areas often have a mix of public and private lands, and some private landowners may restrict public access to certain outdoor areas, limiting the available options for outdoor activities.

LGBTQIA+

Safety concerns: Members of the LGBTQIA+ community not only worry about their safety in Oregon State Parks, but may also be skeptical of whether their concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon. Because discrimination is often framed in terms of political or religious freedom, harassment of LGBTQIA+ people is often dismissed or ignored.

One interviewee recounted a recent experience that caused them to leave an Oregon State Park and avoid them from that point forward. After reporting being repeatedly harassed and called slurs by another camper a few years ago, a lesbian couple was confronted by a park ranger who received a complaint about the rainbow stickers on their car.

"I asked the park staff why it wasn't okay for me to have a rainbow flag or even the equal rights sticker on my car, but someone else, the man across the road, could have a Confederate flag flying on the back of his truck. The park staff said, 'No one complained about the Confederate flag.' Then told me I had to turn my car around. At that point, we realized that we really weren't safe in the park because the park staff was viewing us as the problem, and we wouldn't be able to rely on park staff for any protection of our rights to safety."

LIMITED MOBILITY

Accessibility: Participants emphasized the issue of accessibility in terms of physical amenities such as nearby bathrooms, paved walkways, and level surfaces at campsites. These improvements would particularly benefit people with mobility issues.

Costs: Adaptive equipment for outdoor recreation can be expensive. The added cost of specialized gear or necessary personal support can make participation in outdoor activities economically challenging.



Inaccessible infrastructure: Many outdoor recreation facilities and natural areas are not designed with accessibility in mind. This can range from lack of wheelchair ramps to inaccessible restrooms, or trails that are not suited for people with mobility issues (Foderaro, 2023).

Policy limitations: While there are laws and regulations, like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the U.S., designed to promote accessibility, their implementation is often incomplete, especially in natural and outdoor settings.

Information: The website is limited in its usefulness when assessing park accessibility. Its catchall designation of a property as “accessible” is insufficient as it is often inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading. The lack of 24/7 phone support leaves disabled users and their families with limited options when trying to plan trips to Oregon Parks.

NEURO DIVERGENT AND DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Stigmatization and stereotypes: Social attitudes and misconceptions about the abilities of disabled or neurodivergent individuals can act as barriers. These negative attitudes can make people feel unwelcome, undervalued, or deter them from participating in outdoor activities.

Loneliness and isolation: Parents and families of children with disabilities often experience feelings of loneliness and isolation. The diagnosis and the demands of caring for a child with special needs can lead to a sense of disconnection from their local communities and social networks.

Lack of awareness and understanding: There's often a lack of understanding or awareness about the specific needs and abilities of people with disabilities or neurodivergent individuals. This can result in exclusion, inappropriate or patronizing attitudes, or the inability to provide adequate support.

Safety concerns: Depending on the disability or neurodivergent condition, individuals often have heightened safety concerns about participating in outdoor activities. They worry about the risk of injury or the lack of necessary support in emergency situations.

MARGINALIZED YOUTH

In discussing the needs of underserve communities, it is important to recognize that youth from those communities face all of the same challenges as their parents. However, they also face an additional barrier that is particularly harmful to their chances of engaging in outdoor recreation at Oregon State Parks.

Lack of exposure and opportunity for trial: Children and adolescents are limited in their ability to discover and engage in outdoor recreation not facilitated by the adults around them. A child from a household that does not visit Oregon State Parks is unable to do so on their own, and is likely not aware of the existence of those parks.

“ **Minorities may have had less socialization and exposure to outdoor recreation / parks, a self-reinforcing cycle. This may reflect the absence of parental or other role models and support for engaging in outdoor recreation.** (SCORP, 2017) ”



SECTION III

RECOMMENDATIONS



INITIATIVES FOR INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY IN OREGON STATE PARKS



While the challenges and barriers to increased outdoor recreation and utilization of Oregon State Parks are numerous, there are solutions that address multiple issues simultaneously. While these recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive, they do directly address the thoughts and concerns of those interviewed.



01

COMMUNITY OUTREACH LIAISONS

Leverage the credibility and reach of outside organizations to achieve strategic and programmatic objectives.

02

EXPANDED PARK DISCOUNTING PASSES

Improve utilization of Oregon State Parks among low income Oregonians through recognition of government-issued indicators of need.

03

OUTSIDE IS FOR EVERYBODY CAMPAIGN

A strategic marketing and communications campaign designed to promote and encourage utilization of select low-barrier Oregon State Parks among underserved communities.

04

COMPENSATED COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Standing committees can provide advocacy and practical guidance informed by lived experience.

05

WEBSITE UPDATES

While online access to information about Oregon State Parks has improved dramatically in recent years, there were suggestions for how to improve the Oregon Parks website experience.

ACTIVE YOUTH OUTREACH

Investing in outdoor exposure and education for kids who would otherwise grow up without visiting outdoor spaces will lay the foundation for lasting change and equity.

ACTIVE INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Directly address feelings of exclusion and a fear of being alone and not being welcome.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Collaboration with local organizations that support underserved communities to host events in the parks could help attract families and make them more comfortable in the environment.

PARK SAFETY

Address concerns among many underserved communities that they may face harassment or violence in Oregon State parks.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation factors heavily in the barriers faced by all the communities we researched. This issue is particularly acute in rural areas and urban cores.

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07

08

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1 COMMUNITY OUTREACH LIAISONS

Current outreach efforts by OPRD were popular and appreciated. And the desire to work together to expand outreach efforts was widespread. Building on the successes of previous joint programing, OPRD can leverage the credibility and reach of outside organizations to achieve strategic and programmatic objectives.

"I think trust in community-based organizations goes a long way, and trusting folks who have lived experience that they know what their community needs and that they can reach their community."

Official designation, recognition, and longer term agreements with Community Outreach Liaisons serving target underserved communities throughout Oregon will allow for consistent planning and expanded programming. (Wolff & Wolff, 2001).

- ▣ Sign multi-year memorandums of understanding recognizing Community Liaison's special status, standards, and expectation.
- ▣ Prioritize Community Liaison designation based on applicant organization's demonstrated ability to host large events attracting members of underserved communities.



LIAISON BENEFITS

By providing them with special access and limited support, Community Outreach Liaisons can bring underserved communities into Oregon State Parks. In addition to any assistance the OPRD is able to provide, the recognition and longer term agreements provide credibility to the Organizations, and may empower them to be more effective (Wolff & Wolff, 2001).

- ▣ Liaisons can reserve facilities 6-12 months in advance and prior to those facilities becoming available to the public, which makes planning events far more feasible.
- ▣ Assistance and fee waivers for special use permits will facilitate more special events and outreach opportunities for underserved communities.
- ▣ Liaisons can reserve any available facility on any available date, barring holidays, allowing them to better manage costs and logistics.

"If it's too far away or it's too expensive, it doesn't matter, we can't do it."

- ▣ Limiting reservations to day use areas or a maximum of 2 night stays promotes larger and more frequent events.
- ▣ Waive fees for Liaisons reservations.
- ▣ Partial or full grants for shuttle transportation. Shuttles can address transportation challenges.
- ▣ Assistance from OPRD on event and organization promotion and using OPRD media channels.



“

When we go to those spaces, we're often looked at like you don't belong in this space.

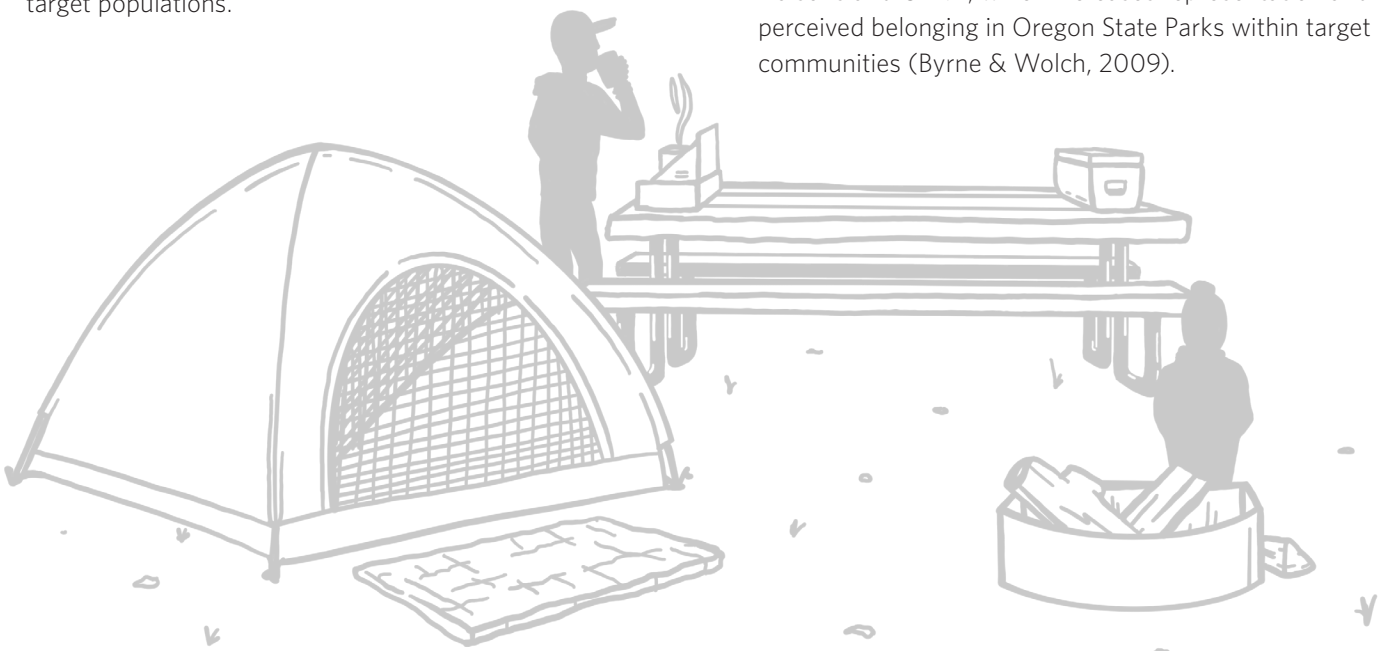
***You have to go with the group.
You don't go by yourself.***

”

INTENT AND OPRD BENEFITS

Community Outreach Liaisons provide credibility with underserved and marginalized communities and communication channels not available to OPRD. Group events also mitigate park visitor concerns over belonging and safety through larger numbers of peers.

- ▣ Park visitor concerns over transportation and preparation mitigated through Liaison organizations.
- ▣ Liaisons provide organization, planning, programming, and execution of special events and large gatherings.
- ▣ Liaison events generate increased frequency and awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities in target populations.
- ▣ Limited costs make it feasible to designate multiple Community Outreach Liaisons for target populations and will result in more utilization opportunities for members of underserved communities.
- ▣ High potential for marketing and positive public relations content to maximize impact of program for both Liaisons and OPRD, which increases representation and perceived belonging in Oregon State Parks within target communities (Byrne & Wolch, 2009).



INCLUSION MEANS ACCESS FOR ALL.

2

EXPANDED PARK DISCOUNTING PASSES

Improve utilization of Oregon State Parks among low income Oregonians through recognition of government-issued indicators of need. This would reduce a significant barrier to access for Oregonians from multiple underserved communities.

STRUCTURE

Recognizing more populations for discounted entry to Oregon State Parks in a way that does not require them to take additional steps or overcome further barriers will increase access and utilization.

- ▣ Honoring the federal America the Beautiful Disabled Access Pass and Handicap Placards would enable many disabled Oregonians and their families to utilize state parks.
- ▣ Recognize valid Oregon Trail Cards
 - ▣ Free Parking/admission to day use areas
 - ▣ Providing low income families with a low-cost recreation opportunity combats systemic barriers to equity in outdoor recreation and encourages trial.
- ▣ Recognize active military IDs
 - ▣ Free Parking/admission to day use areas
- ▣ Add veterans and foster families to groups qualifying for discounted passes.



INTENT AND OPRD BENEFITS

Because this benefit would accrue disproportionately to individuals not currently utilizing Oregon State Parks, the direct cost to OPRD in the form of lost fees would be minimal.

- ▣ Increased utilization of Oregon Parks by members of underserved communities encourages others within their communities to do the same due to providing social proof and normalization within their networks.
- ▣ The intersectional nature of income inequality within underserved communities means that this program will directly and disproportionately impact target communities and children.



3 OUTSIDE IS FOR EVERYBODY CAMPAIGN

One of the primary barriers referenced by interview participants was a lack of representation in OPRD communications and programming, and media as a whole (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). There was also a common sentiment that providing more information, reassurance, and opportunities for curated and guided experiences could yield significant results.

"I feel like that disconnect exists because there's not really an effort to reach out to the community and provide them with that information on a large scale."

A strategic marketing and communications campaign designed to promote and encourage utilization of select low-barrier Oregon State Parks among underserved communities would directly address the barriers highlighted in this report and promote utilization among non-traditional users. Additionally, this kind of campaign would attract members of the general public who may have simply have been previously disinterested.



PROGRAMMING IDEAS

Discount Days

All interviewees indicated cost as a major barrier to their communities. By creating opportunities for low and moderate income Oregonians to access the parks, OPRD would not only reduce barriers to underserved communities but do so in a way that attracts new visitors and incremental revenue.

- ▣ Equipment Rentals
- ▣ Free Parking/Admission
- ▣ Guided interpretive content

“Nearby Nature”

Campaigns in urban areas promoting easy-to-reach, low-barrier outdoor recreation opportunities can attract urban visitors who may be unaware of outdoor recreation opportunities nearby.

- ▣ The top day trips from Portland/Bend/Baker City/Eugene/Grants Pass/etc.
- ▣ Low cost excursion ideas
- ▣ Oregon Coast on a budget
- ▣ One Hour (drive) Wonders

Special Interest Content

Many participants expressed the fear of embarrassment and lack of guidance as a major cause of avoidance of outdoor spaces. By creating curated experiences, OPRD can address those fears and reduce perceived difficulty of accessing its parks.

- ▣ Most ADA Accessible Parks
- ▣ No Hassle Day Trips
- ▣ Relaxing Walks in the Woods
- ▣ Sensory Experiences
- ▣ Hikes for Kids
- ▣ Easy Field Trips
- ▣ Oregon History Alive

Trip and Activity Rating Level System

One of the largest barriers referenced by representatives from groups working with underserved communities was fear of the unknown. Because members of underserved communities are often inexperienced with outdoor activities, there is a lack of awareness of what is needed and what to expect when recreating in Oregon State Parks.

“

One of the strategies I use is clearly defining what the expectation of the event is.

The level of difficulty where it's located, where it's going to be located at, what you need to bring.

”

Creating a clear, visually appealing system to quickly explain how strenuous an activity is, what kind of skills are needed, and what gear participants will need could help reduce intimidation and hesitation to try new activities. By packaging and promoting activities accordingly, a rating system could become a powerful marketing tool for increasing trial and utilization among non-users and underserved communities.

- ▣ Simple visual classification system
- ▣ Displayed on trailheads and day use areas
- ▣ Can be used to create lists and other suggested activities

PROMOTION

In order for this kind of programming to be successful, awareness must be built in a very strategic and targeted way. Members of specific communities need to be made aware of the opportunities through their preferred media outlets.

Public Relations and Targeted Advertising

Active promotion leveraging online targeting tools will be necessary. Because of the specific nature of events and the communities being targeted, platform specific audience delivery tools will be important.

- ▣ Age Based
- ▣ Psychographic Targeting
- ▣ Geography Specific
- ▣ Multi-lingual

Messaging

Reflect alternative benefits and equities more attractive to non-traditional users, as opposed to great outdoors/adventure/wilderness messaging.

- ▣ Relaxation
- ▣ Connection
- ▣ Wellbeing
- ▣ Family Togetherness
- ▣ Low cost fun
- ▣ Diverse visitors, staff, and activities

**CELEBRATE
DIFFERENCES;
THEY ARE
THE COLORS
THAT MAKE
OUR WORLD
BEAUTIFUL.**

COMPENSATED COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Members from virtually all interviewed groups expressed a willingness to work with the Department to address areas of concern. But many voiced feeling unappreciated and frustrated with being excluded from decision making. They reported being repeatedly asked for guidance with no results, follow-up, or compensation. Members should be compensated for their time and lived experience, either monetarily or through free passes. This is a model used by METRO in Portland.

"Accepting people's free advice again and again, and not doing anything with it is disrespectful. It builds distrust."

Maintaining healthy relationships with community organizations is essential to the Department's work with underserved communities moving forward. The repeated message was that the people best suited to make recommendations to address the needs of underserved communities are members of those communities (Wolff & Wolff, 2001). An official standing committee or committees should be formed to work on reducing barriers to underserved communities on behalf of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

"We need everybody at the table to help make these decisions, so our world is an inclusive place and accessible for us all."

POTENTIAL COMMITTEES

Accessibility for the disabled

Convene a group that includes representatives from disabled rights groups to prioritize the ADA updates list based on impact, as determined by persons with disabilities. This group would also be tasked with identifying accessibility barriers in Oregon State Park using a network of persons with disabilities who visit and audit parks.

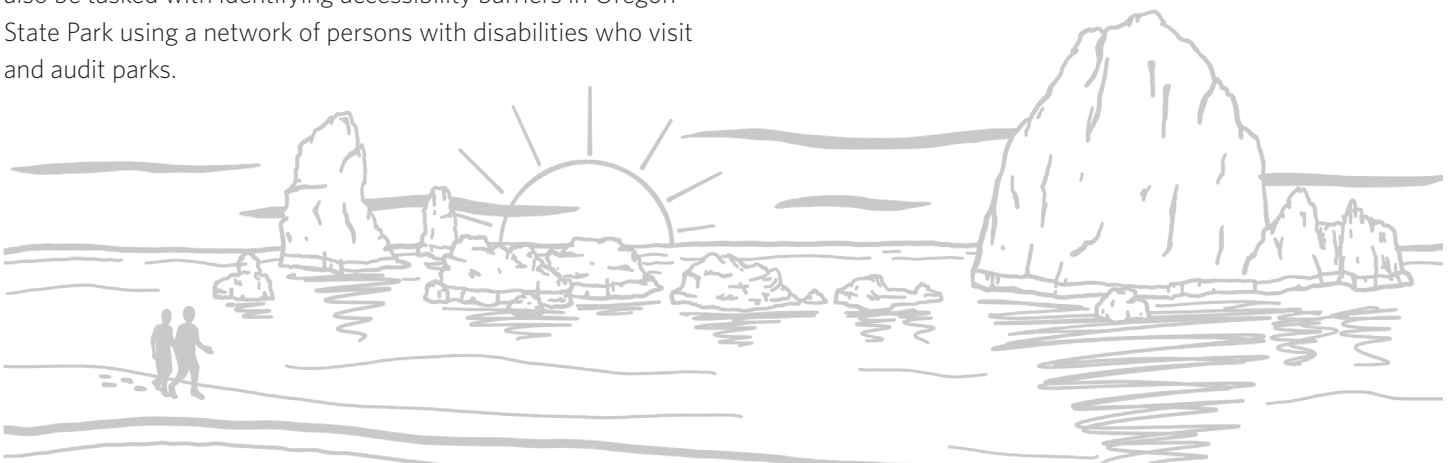
"We have to think bigger. When we're making new plans and doing new things, we need to have some people there who are experiencing disabilities so they can give their feedback."

Inclusivity and Belonging

Representatives of Marginalized communities should be involved in identifying and addressing barriers to inclusivity and belonging. The process should be a stakeholder driven one that includes community members in evaluation and decision making.

Rural Support

Many of the barriers faced by rural residents are a result of physical distance and income inequality. Additionally, broadly applicable problems and solutions can be particularly difficult to identify due to the broad spectrum of socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural issues at play. A committee specifically charged with identifying and addressing those issues, that is composed of people working with residents in rural Oregon, may be highly beneficial to OPRD.



5

WEBSITE UPDATES

While online access to information about Oregon State Parks has improved dramatically in recent years, there were suggestions for how to improve the Oregon Parks website experience.

EMPOWER VISITORS WITH INFORMATION

Park Visitors are in the best position to make decisions about which parks and experiences are right for them. However; this requires that they have access to the information they need to make those decisions. The lack of 24/7 phone support can be partially mitigated by increasing the amount of information available on the website.

Language

Move Language options at top of stateparks.oregon.gov pages rather than bottom. Users reported missing the link at the bottom or leaving the site before scrolling.

Accessibility Information

Representatives from disability advocacy groups uniformly expressed frustration with the lack of reliable information on accessibility at Oregon State Parks. The accessible icon is vague and can mean many different things. What is accessible to one person may not be accessible to another. Also, the presence of the handicap icon could indicate one small accessible area or many.



Rather than a single catch-all icon of limited utility of facilities and properties, show actual conditions and accessibility accommodations rather than a generic accessible icon on a website. This would allow visitors to decide whether the Park is accessible to them specifically.

"I find that with photographs, you can really opt-in and make your own choices instead of being like, 'This is accessible, but is it or is it not?'"

"You have to see things and get a feel for things before you really know if it's going to work for people."

Park Filtering and Call Outs

Provide tools to filter parks based on enhanced accessibility content. Actively highlight any improvements or special facilities provided for the disabled community.



RESERVATION SYSTEM

The current reservation system was identified as a major barrier to equitable access by every group interviewed. There was consensus that it disenfranchises low income campers and anyone unable to plan many months in advance. Due to the intersectional nature of income inequality, this disproportionately impacts every underserved community.

Identified Problems

- ▣ Campers with more income frequently book spaces far in advance that they may or may not show up for.
- ▣ Low income campers are often not able to anticipate their finances 6 months in advance and are unable to make the financial commitment of a camping trip that far out.
- ▣ Working class and hourly workers are often not able to reliably plan time off that far in advance.
- ▣ Users reported spaces becoming available at inconsistent times, early in the morning, and late at night. This is particularly problematic for parents and the working class.
- ▣ Most campgrounds require reservations. Those that do not are often remote, difficult, and costly to reach for most Oregonians.

Suggested Solutions

- ▣ Maintain a block of first-come first-served spaces in every campground.
- ▣ Reduce the reservation availability period for some or all sites from six months to three months.
- ▣ Set the availability time for reserving spots to a fixed weekly time outside of standard working hours. (Example 7pm on Sundays)
- ▣ Add the ability to list all available spaces across all campgrounds in a region for a given period, rather than requiring users to search one campground at a time.
- ▣ Users who repeatedly reserve spaces they do not use should face repercussions. Possible options include:
 - Suspension of reservation rights.
 - Restricted reservation window.

5 ACTIVE YOUTH OUTREACH

One of the largest barriers to long-term equitable growth in outdoor recreation is the impact of multigenerational norms. Kids who do not grow up visiting outdoor spaces become adults who do not visit outdoor spaces. They then become parents who do not take their kids to outdoor spaces. This cycle is particularly felt in BIPOC communities, where it is reinforced by multiple other cultural and systemic barriers.

Disrupting that cycle requires a long-term investment in outdoor exposure and education for kids, before attitudes and behaviors become entrenched. Targeting youth has a secondary benefit of reaching their parents. Children can be the catalyst to get an entire family to go on an excursion they would not otherwise go on.

SUPPORT SCHOOL BASED PROGRAMMING

The most direct way to introduce children from underserved communities to Oregon State Parks is through schools. By familiarizing kids with outdoor activities and spaces at an early age, OPRD can mitigate many of the social and cultural barriers that these kids may develop later in life. The goal of this initiative is to create opportunities for exposure and learning that may not otherwise be available in the home.

- ▣ Maintain, distribute, and promote nature and history educational modules for teachers to use in the classroom.
- ▣ Create field trip ideas built around Oregon State Parks and featuring the unique biology, geology, and history found there.
- ▣ Create outdoor school schedules and curriculum that can be hosted at Oregon State Parks.



- ▣ Make Rangers and park staff available to schools and educators.
- ▣ Ensure educational materials are inclusive of relevant BIPOC and Immigrant stories and information.
- ▣ Provide free passes to nearby parks to students from schools in target communities.

Establishing school programs, school district partnerships, outdoor school, teacher training, and other youth-focused programming will lay the foundation for lasting and self-sustaining changes in park user behavior.

MARKETING

Target youth in underserved communities with messaging and imagery that communicates that outdoor recreation is fun, accessible, and something they should try. Campaigns should feature low barrier outdoor recreation, day trip ideas, and diverse people.

“

We started to move the needle in our house and I saw things shifting...

*Young people have the ability to
move that needle in their households*

”

**THE ONLY
SUSTAINABLE
CHANGE IS
ORGANIC
CHANGE.**



ACTIVE INCLUSION AND BELONGING

The perception among all participants in this project is that Oregon Parks and outdoor spaces are for high income, white, able-bodied, heteronormative, cisgendered people. An often expressed sentiment was that those spaces are not only not diverse, but also potentially hostile.

One of the primary drivers of avoidance of outdoor spaces identified by marginalized communities was a feeling of exclusion and a fear of being alone and not being welcome.

“When I get there, I’m going to be the only one. There’s not going to be anybody else that looks like me. That’s scary when you’re in an environment that you’re not used to for that first time.”

In addressing this fear, representation is critically important. The OPRD official Instagram account has more than 76,000 followers. In the posts over the past year, there was only one person of color. That was a photo from 1895 for Black History



Month. The official Facebook page had one additional person of color who was an attendee at an event. There did not appear to be any person of color working or volunteering for the department, and no person with a visible disability.

“It’s important for people to see other people that look like them because they feel like nobody’s going to try to intimidate me. Nobody’s going to do anything to make fun of me. Nobody’s going to make me feel embarrassed because of my inexperience. Nobody’s going to make me feel stupid.”

When images of people in outdoor spaces do not include diverse participants, it sends a message that the outdoors is not for those communities (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). While the OPRD does not have the ability to control other media outlets, official channels of communication and marketing should promote an inclusive and welcoming environment for all Oregonians.

PUBLIC RELATIONS, MARKETING, AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Create a strategic marketing and communications plan that provides a roadmap to reach organizational diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging goals by effectively targeting underserved audiences. This will enhance departmental alignment, resource efficiency, and allow for progress measurement.

Intentional Inclusion Objectives

- ▣ Tell stories and promote activities appealing to a diverse audience.
- ▣ Reduce avoidance and increase trial and ongoing utilization among members of underserved communities.
- ▣ Increase awareness of day use and low investment recreation opportunities available in Oregon Parks beyond camping.

“In my own personal experience, I didn't start really utilizing Oregon's hiking. We have great hiking spaces, but it was never offered. It wasn't like I didn't want to go, I just didn't know it was there to be used. What does it look like? Who gets to hike? Do you have hiking shoes?”

Core Messaging and Content

- ▣ Promote park safety and communicate non-discrimination policy openly and consistently.
- ▣ Focus on providing inspiration and trip ideas designed to initiate action.
- ▣ Intentionally include members of marginalized communities in OPRD content and media.

“[I say] It's not our fault that we're not on the ads when people are hiking or snowboarding or skiing, but we do do those things. You'll love it.”

Strategic Public Relations

- ▣ Target underserved communities through paid media and content to support inclusion goals.
- ▣ Leverage earned media and social media platforms through active management and curation.
- ▣ Consistently engage with community organizations and schools with high concentrations of members of underserved communities through strategic programming, community outreach, and member organizations of the Community Liaison program.



IN PARKS

Inclusive History

Create more monuments, interpretive exhibits, and engagement at historical sites highlighting diverse stories, specific individuals, and compelling history within state parks where appropriate.

Organizations like the Oregon Black Pioneers, the Oregon Historical Society, Universities, and others have already collected information “about known individuals whose picture we can look at and whose stories are well-documented.”

“[This] is a part of our state history. It's our shared heritage. No matter what, someone's racial or ethnic background might be, these are stories that matter”

Universal Access

Universal Access should be the norm when building and improving OPRD facilities. Design environments in a way that allows equal and independent access for individuals with mobility challenges rather than trying to simply add accessibility accommodations to inaccessible infrastructure.

“Aim for universal access, and then everybody has access. Why are you building a cabin [with] stairs? Have you tried to lug your gear up stairs to go into a cabin? That's terrible. Why would you do that?”

Electrical Access

More powered accessible locations would enable visitors with medical equipment needs to access more parks.

“Hey, parks are great, but if there's no power outlet, we can't go.”

Signage

Accurate signage indicating accessibility limitations at the head of areas and trails would prevent failed outings and negative experiences. When signage for an accessible space fails to address accessibility barriers, it creates a negative experience that may result in that family not returning to that and other State Park again.

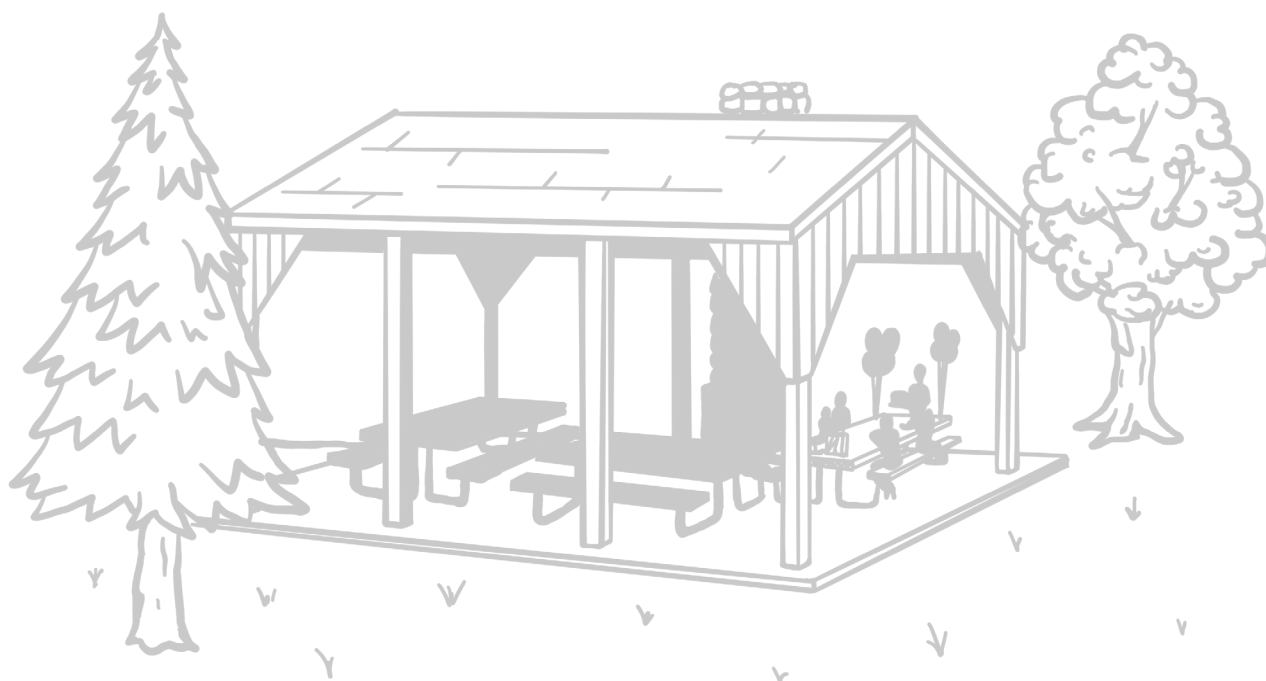
“You're going on the best hike ever and then all of a sudden there's stairs and it's like, “Oh. ‘... One's going to go back with the person in the wheelchair and wait for the rest of the family to take the hike. That's not cool.”

Neurodivergence

Create and promote spaces for Neurodivergent children who may wander, especially near bodies of water. Railing or fencing around certain areas would also help improve safety in these situations. Parks with these accommodations could become a destination for these families if effectively promoted.

Diversity

Actively recruit volunteers and Rangers from marginalized communities. Emphasize placement in parks within daytrip distance from urban areas likely to be frequented by diverse visitors.





“

Having something to look forward to is huge in our world.

Even if you can't make it, the fact that it's on the calendar and there's something happening that you're going to be included in, is really powerful.

”

SPECIAL EVENTS

Work with local organizations that support underserved communities to host events in the parks. This collaboration could help attract families to the parks and make them more comfortable in the environment.

CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY BASED

Work with community organizations, municipalities, and official Community Outreach Liaisons to encourage them to host events in Oregon State Parks. Assisting Community Liaison Organizations by heavily promoting events through official OPRD accounts and paid media has the added benefit of increasing outreach and diverse representation among all underserved communities. Focus on planning events near or in urban areas to maximize attendance, and relevance.

Example Include

- ▣ 4th of July
- ▣ Juneteenth
- ▣ Day of the Dead
- ▣ Veterans Day
- ▣ Pride
- ▣ Chinese New Year
- ▣ Limited Mobility/Intellectually or Developmentally Disabled Events

PARK SAFETY

There were multiple reports of instances where volunteers and staff have made offensive or harmful statements, or failed to act on harassment, reflecting a lack of training and understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging principles. While these may have been isolated incidents, they are shared widely within communities.

HARASSMENT

The perception among many marginalized communities is that they may face harassment or violence in Oregon State parks and that volunteers and staff may not intervene. It is important that OPRD address these concerns directly.

- ▣ Create a comprehensive non-discrimination policy that includes standards of behavior and enforcement mechanisms.
- ▣ Prominently post the policy and reporting process at all Oregon State Parks.
- ▣ Require policy enforcement and diversity, equity, and inclusion training for all volunteers and employees that includes specific policy instruction on how to respond when issues do arise.
- ▣ Clarify staffing and oversight of specific properties on the OPRD website and during reservation.



FIREARMS

The presence of firearms in campgrounds heightens the concerns of members of marginalized communities when visiting campgrounds and other Oregon Parks in remote and rural areas. There was an often-stated fear that visitors may not only face harassment, but that the perpetrators could have weapons.

However, there was also a recognition that Oregon Parks are used as a base for outdoor recreation that includes hunting. While extending the ban on firearms already in place at other government properties could address their concerns, banning firearms from campgrounds may not be feasible or even desirable.

It is important to recognize that the primary concern was not the simple presence of guns, but rather the presence of threatening or aggressive individuals who are armed. The perception of a lack of Rangers and proactive volunteers in many Oregon Parks exacerbates these fears. While there was no clear consensus on the question of arming Rangers, there was an expressed desire among many participants for an increased presence of Rangers and volunteers as an effective way to mitigate safety concerns.

“

**"[He] was holding a rifle.
It really freaked the girls out...**

He didn't have to be doing anything but holding it for it to be very scary for them... if we have the goal of welcoming more Black and Brown people to use the state parks, having white men with guns hanging out in the campground is a complete non-starter."

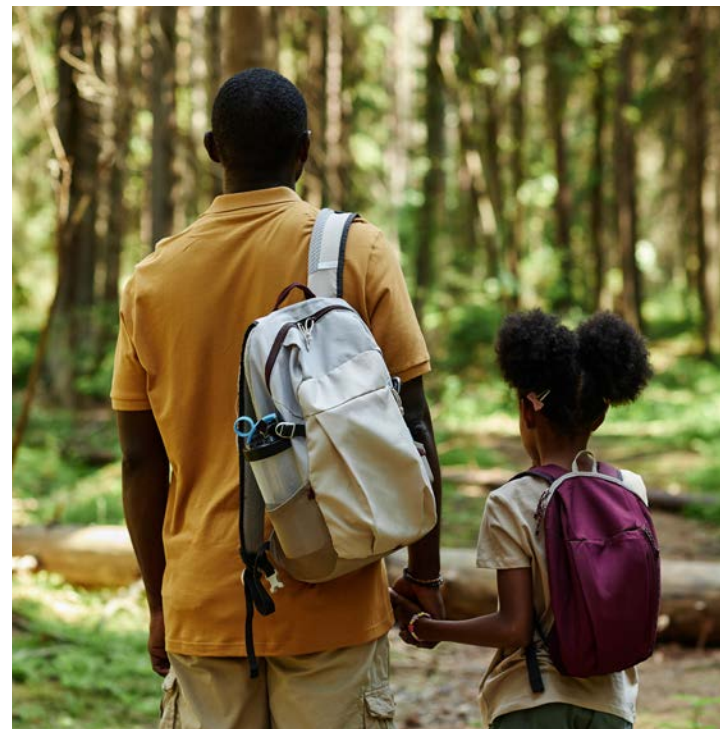
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10

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation challenges were mentioned by nearly every group we spoke with. Because of the intersectional nature of income inequality and the geographic concentration of underserved communities, transportation factors heavily in the barriers faced by all the communities we researched. This issue is particularly acute in rural areas and urban cores.



Recommendations from participants included:

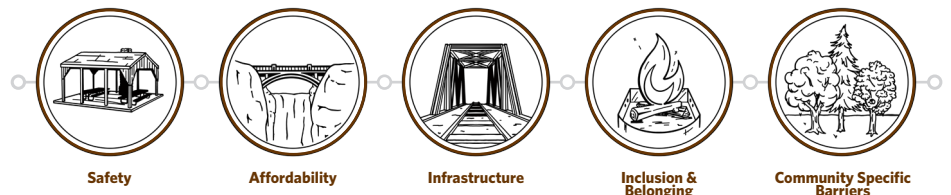
- ▣ OPRD shuttle services from major metropolitan areas
- ▣ Partnering with local public transit providers to add routes to parks
- ▣ Providing grants to community organizations

Due to the complexity of this issue and logistical challenges of solutions, this subject is recommended for further study. However; this issue is among the most widespread and impactful of all issues examined in this report.

NEXT STEP INITIATIVES

Planning the next steps to make Oregon's parks more accessible and inviting to all Oregonians will take time and effort. But the work will benefit OPRD and all Oregonians for generations to come.

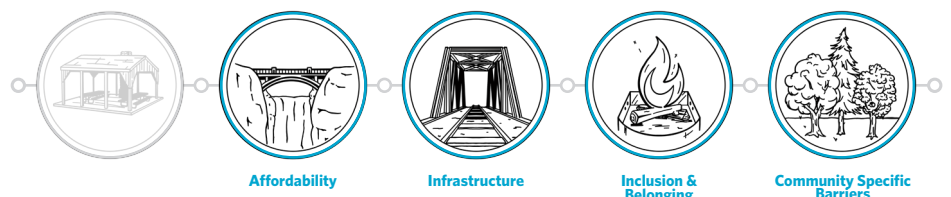
1 COMMUNITY OUTREACH LIAISONS



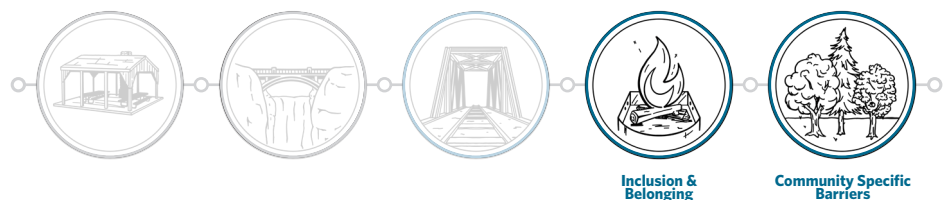
2 EXPANDED PARK DISCOUNTING PASSES



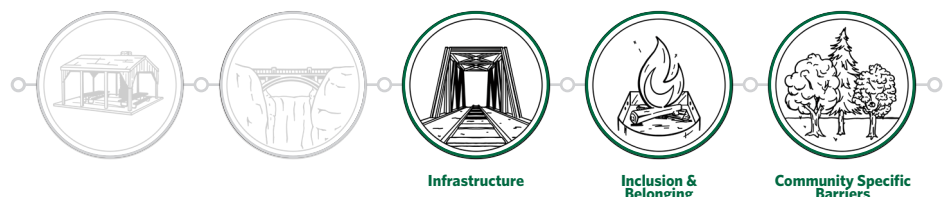
3 OUTSIDE IS FOR EVERYBODY CAMPAIGN



4 COMPENSATED COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES



5 WEBSITE UPDATES



CHANGE IS PROGRESS IN MOTION.

6 ACTIVE YOUTH OUTREACH



7 ACTIVE INCLUSION AND BELONGING



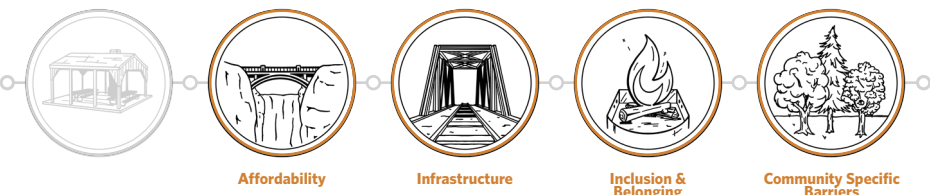
8 SPECIAL EVENTS



9 PARK SAFETY



10 TRANSPORTATION



SECTION IV

CONCLUSION

**MAKING OREGON
STATE PARKS MORE
ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL**



Based on the research and analysis presented in this report, it is clear that underserved communities in Oregon face significant social, economic, and structural barriers to accessing and utilizing outdoor recreation opportunities, including those found in Oregon State Parks. These barriers not only limit access to outdoor spaces by these communities but also restrict their ability to develop outdoor interests, habits, hobbies, and appreciation. Perhaps more concerning, these barriers and their impacts affect the children of underserved communities, perpetuating barriers and creating a cycle of underutilization and exclusion.

These findings underscore the need for a more inclusive, economically aware, culturally sensitive, and comprehensive approach to addressing barriers. It is crucial to engage with these communities, understand their unique needs and experiences, and work collaboratively to create solutions that are both effective and sustainable. The responsibility of ensuring equitable access to outdoor recreation lies not only with the individuals and communities affected but also with organizations and policymakers who have the power to effect change.



This report offers a detailed examination of the issues at hand. More importantly, it also provides a set of actionable recommendations aimed at improving access to State Parks for all Oregon residents. While some of the recommendations in this report may prove infeasible, the aims and strategies behind them are directly informed by feedback from underserved communities, and can be the basis for actionable policy decisions moving forward.

The overarching goal of this report is to contribute to the ongoing efforts to make Oregon State Parks more inclusive and accessible. Achieving this goal will require ongoing efforts, collaboration, and commitment from all stakeholders. This is not just a matter of fairness and equity, but also a vital component of human well-being, community building, serving the public trust.

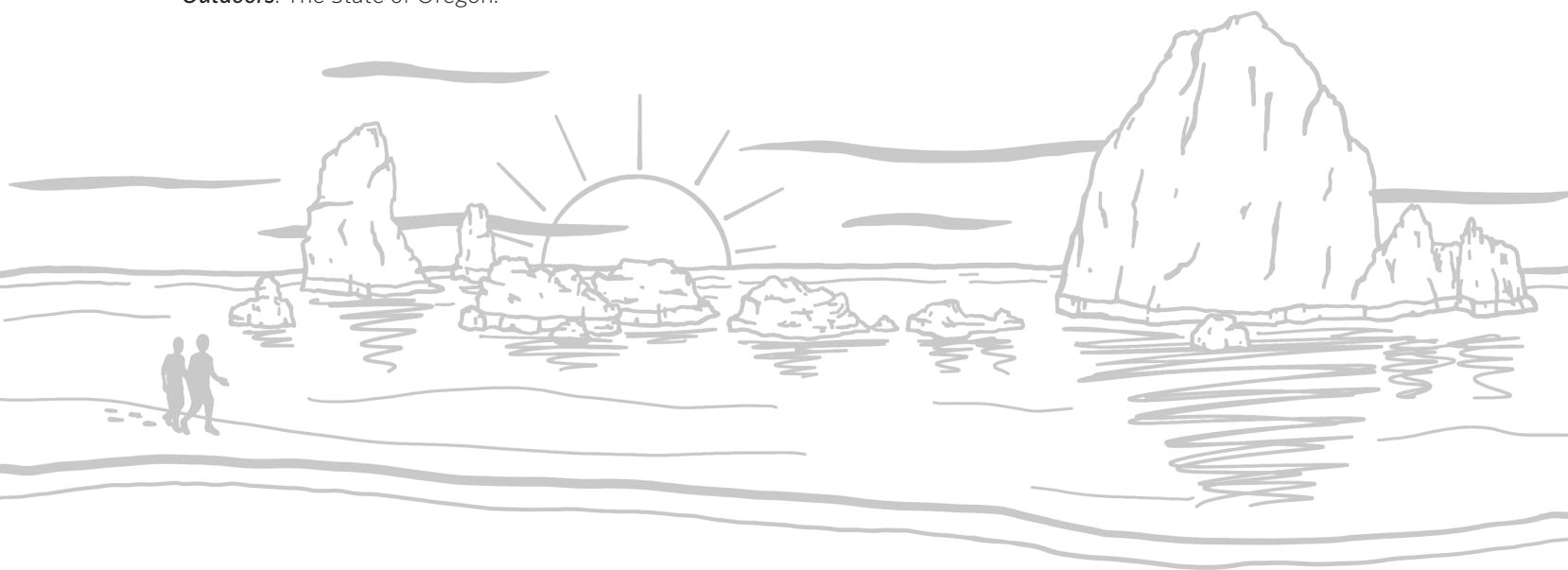
It is our hope that the insights and recommendations presented in this report will serve as a valuable resource in the ongoing efforts of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department as it works to create a more equitable and inclusive park system for all Oregonians. By addressing the barriers faced by underserved communities, we can ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, ability, or socioeconomic status can enjoy the natural beauty and diversity of Oregon State Parks.



APPENDIX A

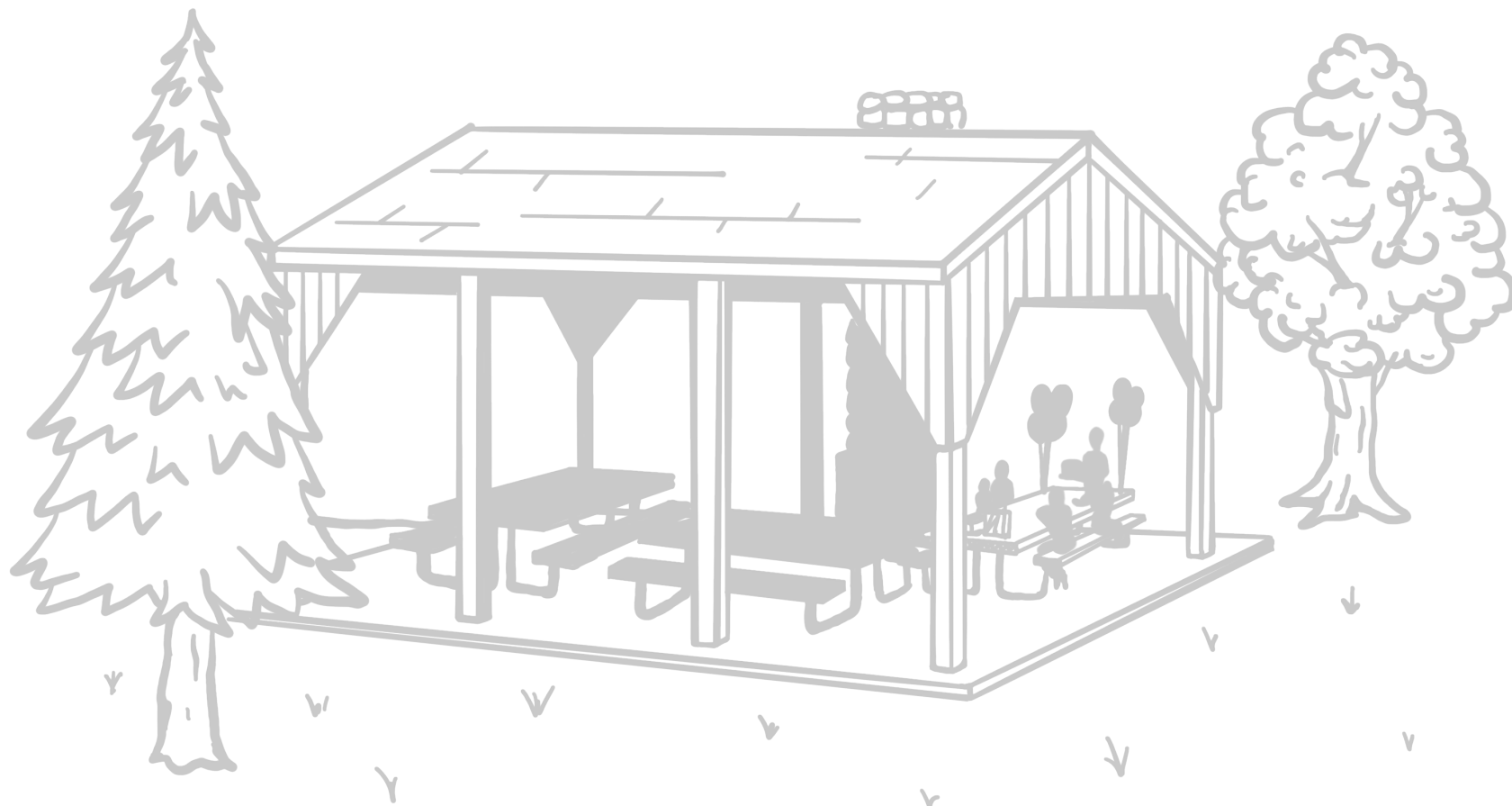
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“ **We need everybody at the table
to help make these decisions,**
so our world is an inclusive place and accessible for us all. ”



This report was prepared by Revolution Design Group in conjunction with the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department and community organizations throughout Oregon.

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