

# 2021 CONSERVATION POLICY TOOLKIT

A GUIDE TO LAND, WATER AND CLIMATE ISSUES  
& THE IMPACT ON LATINO COMMUNITIES



Hispanic  
Access  
Foundation

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# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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Thank you for reading this 2021 edition of Hispanic Access Foundation’s Conservation Policy Toolkit. This past year has spotlighted glaring inequities for Latinos and Black, Indigenous and other communities of color in all facets of life. From experiencing disproportionate rates of COVID-19 during this public health pandemic to people of color suffering first, last, and worst from climate-fueled natural disasters, we also witnessed a national racial reckoning following the death of George Floyd and countless other Black and people of color, revealing the danger many in our communities face in public spaces and the need to speak out and break down the systems that oppress us.

These injustices are intimately connected to the global need for conservation and action on climate change, for us, at the national level. Latino communities across the United States are experiencing disproportionate health and economic impacts of poor air quality, extreme heat and aridification, wildfires, drought and other severe effects of the climate crisis. With our nation’s shifting demographics and Latinos on track to becoming 30% of the U.S. population by 2050, Latinos will continue to experience these severe consequences of a warming planet at a disproportionate rate.

The environment unifies the Latino electorate. Latinos want their decision-makers to take bold action to power up our economy and by doing so combat the multidimensional challenges our country is facing – from climate to COVID-19, these crises are deeply interconnected. Regardless of partisan differences, Latino voters support legislation that makes real and lasting climate progress, and they want the president and Congress to reinstate and enforce environmental protections that were rolled back under a previous administration. Data and polling shows, Latino voters want to help rebuild our economy by investing in clean energy jobs and green infrastructure, and they overwhelmingly support legislation that ensures clean water and healthy air.

Each section of this toolkit covers the health, economic, public opinion, and cultural implications of the policies that protect our public lands, water, and ocean, as well as the threat posed by the climate crisis. This year, we have added a section on the COVID-19 public health pandemic, and how conservation and climate protection policies can mitigate the severity of the current pandemic and help prepare for future health crises.

With scientists urging policymakers to protect at least 30% of U.S. lands and ocean by 2030 to address the biodiversity and climate crises, the strong pro-climate support of Latino voters can be pivotal in protecting far more lands and waters over the next decade. The Latino community’s support for climate action can ensure that every child in the United States has the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of nature near their home.

Hispanic Access Foundation is headquartered in Washington, D.C., and our staff is based in communities across the nation. We have developed extensive, trust-based community networks across the country in order to develop Latino leaders and bring underrepresented voices to the table. We hope to be a resource for you moving forward.

*Shanna*

# CONSERVATION, CLIMATE & COVID-19 IN LATINO COMMUNITIES

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Many of the root causes of climate change also increase the risk of pandemics. Deforestation, which occurs mostly for agricultural or livestock purposes, is the largest cause of habitat loss worldwide. Loss of habitat forces animals to migrate and contact other animals and people, sharing germs. Large livestock farms can also serve as a source for spillover of infections from animals to people.<sup>1</sup> In addition, changes to temperature and rainfall patterns caused by global warming increase the spread of pathogens and disease vectors. Vastly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees would therefore help limit the increasing risk of infectious disease.

In addition, the production of oil and natural gas contaminates the air, water, and soil near oil and gas development facilities. Air pollution helps the coronavirus spread and makes those who breathe it sicker from COVID-19, meaning that oil and gas development increases COVID-19 risk for those who live nearby. Those nearby, contaminated communities are more likely to be made up of people of color, who even before COVID-19 were at additional risk of health problems caused by local pollution and systemic racism. Therefore, even without taking into account the impact that oil and gas has on climate change, fossil fuel production is disproportionately killing people of color who live in these environmental justice communities—and this racist threat to public health is accelerated during a respiratory pandemic like COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

We must use the pandemic as an opportunity to build lasting change toward a healthier future for all. Conservation is intimately linked to public health, from pollution reduction to stormwater management to the disease-spreading effects of climate change. If targeted with an eye for justice, conservation policies can have dramatic effects toward reversing inequities that cause Latinos to be disproportionately burdened by COVID-19, respiratory diseases, and other severe and chronic conditions.

- Latinos have been left behind in the pandemic: sickening and dying at higher rates, suffering from higher unemployment rates and worse economic outcomes, inability to work from home, healthcare disparities, and more.<sup>3</sup> Immigrants, college students, and disabled adults were also less likely to receive stimulus checks.<sup>4</sup>
- Low-income and communities of color suffered over 3 times more deaths per million than communities less vulnerable to COVID-19.
- The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads more quickly in areas with more air pollution, which are disproportionately inhabited by Latinos and other communities of color. Studies have also established a direct link between exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality.
- The coronavirus pandemic has also exposed an uneven and inequitable distribution of nearby outdoor spaces for recreation, respite, and enjoyment. Particularly in communities of color and low-income communities, families have too few safe, close-to-home parks and coastlines where they are able to get outside. At this time of social distancing, when clean, fresh air is most wanted and needed, nature is out of reach for too many.
- Studies have found that, because they are more likely to live in polluted areas without sufficient tree cover and spaces to get outdoors, people of color and low income communities are more susceptible to developing immunocompromising illnesses such as asthma—a risk factor for COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>



# LANDS & NATURE

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Public lands are a key component of our identity, and they weave a narrative of the diverse and complex history of our nation. These places, all of which are Indigenous ancestral lands, preserve our shared cultural heritage, provide places to recreate and connect with nature, spend time with family and our communities, and significantly contribute to industries, local economies, and millions of jobs and employment opportunities. Latinos have been an integral part of this shared history. However, our access to public lands, the equal representation of our cultural heritage, and our workforce contributions are not always acknowledged or represented.

All communities should have equitable access to nearby green space, the ability to reach it, and features that honor and welcome diverse languages, inclusive histories, and uses of parkland. Natural areas and natural resources should be managed inclusively and locally, reflecting the communities they serve, with co-management by Indigenous and tribal nations. Given historical inequities, nature deprivation of communities of color, and the theft of lands belonging to Indigenous communities, the priority of nature protection and restoration efforts should be in communities of color, particularly in urban areas and those historically marginalized and on the frontlines of environmental injustice.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

### LATINO HEALTH

- The U.S. Latino/Hispanic population exceeds 18.5% in the US.
- Latinos (31.7%) have the highest prevalence of adult physical inactivity, followed by non-Hispanic blacks (30.3%) and non-Hispanic whites (23.4%).<sup>6</sup>
- Latinos and other communities of color in the US are three times as likely to live somewhere that is “nature deprived” than white communities. This means there are far fewer parks, forests, streams, beaches, and other natural places near Black, Latino, and Asian communities. This “Nature Gap” has left a legacy of poorer health and COVID-19 severity, higher stress levels, worse educational outcomes, lack of recreation and business opportunities and greater vulnerability to extreme heat and flooding in these nature-deprived neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup>

- Latinos are 21% more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to live in urban heat islands, or areas dominated by asphalt and concrete where parks, shade-providing trees, and other vegetation are lacking. Urban heat islands can produce breathing difficulties, exhaustion, heat cramps, heat stroke and even death.
- Areas within a 10-minute walk of a park can be as much as six degrees cooler than surrounding parkless areas. However, parks in majority non-white neighborhoods are half as large and serve nearly five times more people than parks in majority white neighborhoods. Also, parks serving majority low-income households are, on average, four times smaller and serve nearly four times more people than parks that serve majority high-income households.<sup>8</sup>

## LATINO CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORY

- The U.S. Latino identity is composed of many narratives; there is not one dominant story that can completely tell the history and the contributions of Latinos, nor any particular community or culture, to the United States. Too often our stories and contributions to this nation are not represented in the narrative that our public lands portray. Thus, the protection of existing monuments, such as Cesar E. Chavez National Monument, and the creation of new parks and monuments are an opportunity to expand our nation's narrative to be inclusive of the histories and contributions of Latino communities in the United States.
- Since 1906, when Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act into law and granted the executive office the authority to establish national monuments, 17 presidents – nine Republicans and eight Democrats – have used the law to protect our natural and cultural heritage.



## LATINO RECREATION

- Demographics are changing: whites are projected to become a minority in the U.S. around 2045. By 2021 nonwhites will account for the majority of the nation's 74 million children.<sup>9</sup> Yet in 2018, almost three-quarters of outdoor recreation participants were white Americans, compared to only 10% Hispanic.<sup>10</sup> The future of public lands and public health thus depends on engaging and welcoming our diverse youth.
- As the Latino population becomes larger and more complex, their outdoor recreation preferences and perceptions are also changing.
- When asked which types of outdoor recreation they participate in regularly, Latino voters said that 77% participate in hiking, running or walking, 46% said camping, 36% said picnicking, 33% hunting or fishing, 29% said bird watching/viewing wildlife, 23% said sports, 23% said mountain/trail biking, 21% said off-road riding/snowmobile, and 21% said boating/rafting/kayaking.
- Latinos are great users of public lands — 91% of Latino voters have visited national public lands before, and 59 percent of Latinos would visit national public lands more often assuming the pandemic is under control.<sup>11</sup>
- Asked about what policymakers should place more emphasis on in upcoming decisions around public lands, 77% of Latino Western voters pointed to conservation efforts and recreational usage, prioritizing that over energy production.

## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- 94% of Latinos see public lands, such as national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife areas as an “essential part” of the economies in these states.
- The outdoor recreation economy generates \$887 billion in consumer spending and 7.6 million jobs.<sup>12</sup>
- 79% of National Park Service employees are white, and 62% of all employees are male. Black employees comprise almost 7% of the NPS’s permanent full-time workforce, significantly less than the 13.4% of Black people in the national population. Hispanic and Latino employees also are underrepresented, making up 5.6% of the Park Service general workforce despite accounting for 18.5% of the population.<sup>13</sup> Lack of racially-diverse representation is common across the U.S. conservation workforce.

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 83% of Latino voters in the West support setting a national goal of conserving 30 percent of U.S. land, inland waters, and ocean by the year 2030.<sup>14</sup>
- 93% of Latino voters agree that we should create new national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges and tribal protected areas to protect historic sites or areas for outdoor recreation.
- 70% agree that we should strictly limit where and how new oil and gas development takes place on public lands.
- 86% support directing funding to ensure adequate access to parks and natural areas for lower-income people and communities of color that have disproportionately lacked them.
- 78% of Latino voters agree that we should find money to protect their state’s land, water and wildlife, even with state budget problems.
- 83% support restoring protections for threatened species under the Endangered Species Act that were removed.





# RIVERS & WATERSHEDS

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The health of Latino communities is intimately tied to the health of our freshwater systems, which also play a role in Latino livelihoods, culture, history, and spirituality. Rivers flow through nearly 640 million acres of public lands in the US. Our public lands and waters are deeply connected to our stories, provide a place for families and friends to connect and relax, offer ample opportunities to create memories with loved ones, and are economic drivers from coast to coast.

Our rivers and streams are a priceless resource—they provide drinking water for a growing population, irrigation for crops, habitat for aquatic life, and countless recreational opportunities. In addition, water recreation has positive mental health benefits and can relieve stress.<sup>15</sup> But pollution from urban and agricultural areas continues to pose a threat to water quality. Since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, federal, state, and local governments have invested billions of dollars in reducing the amount of pollution entering streams and rivers. Yet more than half of the nation's streams have ecosystems in poor condition.<sup>16</sup>

The urgency to protect our rivers and watersheds is imperative. Healthy rivers and watersheds are needed to ensure clean water access for all, access to freshwater recreation for traditionally underserved communities, and resilience to droughts and flooding, which Latino communities are particularly vulnerable to.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

### LATINO HEALTH

- Communities across the country – primarily low-income, communities of color – struggle to afford their water, or are faced with concerns over contamination from toxins, like lead and PFAS. What's more, drinking water violations are more likely to occur in places where residents are people of color.<sup>17</sup>
- Living rivers and healthy watersheds provide profound benefits to nearby cities. They provide water supplies, filter out water and air pollutants, build coastlines by moving sand to ocean beaches, provide critical habitat, sequester carbon and other greenhouse gasses, regulate floodwaters, and create cooling oases for relaxation and recreation.<sup>18</sup>

- Challenges to drinking water vary across U.S. communities and include threats from aging infrastructure, ongoing pollution, climate change, mismanagement, dysfunctional regulatory frameworks, inadequate safeguards, and a shortage of funding to address these problems.
- Agricultural, extractive industry and urban runoff – from construction, pet waste and septic systems - contribute to the nutrient and contaminant loading of rivers and streams, as do microplastics.<sup>19</sup>
- Agricultural workers sacrifice their health on the job while contributing to the nutrient and chemical loading of air, rivers and streams. Latinos, who represent most U.S. agricultural workers, are among those who experience routine exposure to pesticides. Only 57% of crop workers report receiving instruction in pesticide best practices.<sup>20</sup>
- 15 million people in the U.S. experienced a water shutoff in 2016. Cities with higher rates of poverty and unemployment had the highest number of homes with water shutoffs.<sup>21</sup>

## LATINO CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORY

- Many communities are cut off from public lands and waters. A history of colonization, land theft, and centuries of racial injustice has created river landscapes that exclude Indigenous, Black and Latino people, disconnecting them from places and resources vital to their identities and survival. Those barriers also manifest themselves in the way the media is less likely to portray outdoor recreationists as people of color.<sup>22</sup>
- As a result of generations of discrimination, Black, Indigenous and Latino communities are often located in floodplains, drained wetlands, or adjacent to sewage outfalls, where they are disproportionately impacted by pollution and flooding.<sup>23</sup>

## LATINO RECREATION

- Water plays an important role in participants' preferences on where to recreate because of the activities enabled by water access.
- Latino non-visitation of recreation sites largely results from a lack of money, time, knowledge, language accessibility, and fear. Latinos often conceive of recreation as a place to gather with others in groups, which affects their decision-making on where and how to recreate.<sup>24</sup>

## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- The Colorado River is the lifeblood of the Southwest, where one-third of the nation's Latinos live and work. Its water sustains over 35 million people in seven states, driving a \$1.4 trillion economy, but over-allocation and drought have placed significant stress on water supplies and river health.<sup>25</sup>
- Lakes provide fertile soil and water perfect for agricultural production.



There are 2.5 - 3 million farmworkers in the United States, 80% of whom are Latino.

- The Great Lakes region is known for its bountiful and diverse agricultural production which provides ideal conditions for corn, soybeans and hay crops, as well as 15% of the country's dairy products. Between the production of crops and livestock, the region produces \$14.5 billion in annual agricultural sales.<sup>26</sup>

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 93% of Latino voters in the West support restoring Clean Water Act protections for smaller streams and seasonal wetlands.<sup>27</sup>
- 91% believe that it's very important for the president and Congress to take steps to protect drinking water from contamination.
- 68% think that low levels of water in rivers is an extremely serious issue.
- 89% of Latino voters support improving migration of salmon in Idaho rivers so that there are abundant populations.
- 93% of Latinos support increasing federal funding to extend running water and sanitation services to rural areas and tribal communities who currently lack access.



**The health of Latino communities is intimately tied to the health of our freshwater systems, which also play a role in Latino livelihoods, culture, history, and spirituality.**



# OCEAN & COAST

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The ocean is a part of Latino lives. It is a source of food, jobs, medicine, spirituality, family memories, and the very air we breathe. Its coral reefs protect us from storms, as do the adjacent wetlands that filter our waters. There isn't a facet of our lives that isn't touched by the ocean.

Coastal communities are ever more susceptible to the results of pollution and climate change: sea level rise, dead zones, flooding, and coastal disasters. These same communities are experiencing significant growth in Latino populations, many of which are among the most vulnerable to coastal threats increasing in severity and frequency.

Latinos and other communities, traditionally underserved, should have equitable access to a clean and safe ocean and coast for recreation, livelihoods, and culture. Wetland, coastal, reef, and underwater ecosystems should be protected and restored to improve coastal resilience to sea level rise, floods, and other effects of climate change. The ocean should be pollution- and plastic-free, as well as free of the threats of offshore drilling and mining that harm local communities and the global climate alike.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

### LATINO HEALTH

- 23% of coastal residents are Latino, and 6% of coastal residents live in primarily Spanish-speaking households.
- Beach and fishery advisories and closures—or a lack thereof—disproportionately impacts Latinos. Latinos are among the most susceptible to health issues following visits to polluted beaches remaining open for recreation. Latino anglers and consumers, including subsistence fishers, are less likely to be aware of fishery advisories.
- Reduced access to safe outdoor areas limits opportunities for exercise and may present obstacles to doctor-prescribed outdoor recreation.<sup>28</sup>
- Systemic and environmental racism have caused poverty, economic instability, health challenges, and reduced access to social and political resources among many Latinos. This lack of resources puts coastal

Latinos into an “elevated coastal hazard risk category” with increased vulnerability to the consequences of climate change.

- The ongoing loss of estuarine wetlands contributes to Latinos’ increased susceptibility to coastal hazards, including sea level rise and storms.

## LATINO CULTURAL HERITAGE AND HISTORY

- Coastal sites throughout the U.S. safeguard and honor Latino heritage. Contemporary Latino culture also thrives at other sites, existing and emergent, fostering strong coastal communities and connection to place.
- These sites include San Diego’s Friendship Park, Cumberland Island in Georgia, Chicago’s Paseo Boricua, Miami’s Jose Marti Riverfront Park, Padre Island National Seashore in Texas, Assateague Island in Maryland, San Juan Island in Washington, Monterey Bay in California, and many more.

## LATINO RECREATION

- 4.2 million Latinos participate in fishing, averaging more outings per year than the general fishing population. 12% of saltwater fishing participants over the age of six are Latino.<sup>29</sup>
- The Californian Latino beachgoer is typically a millennial parent with children visiting the beach as part of a large group. Their beach-going concerns are related to parking costs, overnight accommodations and the lack of public transportation options enabling their trips to the beach.<sup>30</sup>
- In Oregon, half of the Latino population participates in coastal activities.

## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- More data on the role Latinos play in the marine economy is needed, but it’s reasonable to infer the role is significant. The states with the largest Latino populations—California and Texas—are also the states with the greatest contributions to the U.S. ocean and coastal economy.<sup>31</sup> Three of the top five largest states with Latinos—California, Florida and New York—are among the five largest contributors to ocean-based tourism and recreation.
- More than 18 million people in the U.S. visit estuary and coastal waters each year for recreation and tourism. Ocean-based tourism and recreation alone, contributes approximately \$124 billion in GDP and 2.4 million jobs.
- Nationwide, the leisure and hospitality industry is 24% Hispanic and/or Latino. Nearly one third of workers in the U.S. construction industry are Hispanic and/or Latino; as marine construction is concentrated in California, Florida and Texas, Latinos are taking a large part in this ocean and Great Lakes economic sector.<sup>32</sup>

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 83% of Latino voters support setting a national goal of conserving thirty percent of U.S. land, inland waters, and ocean by the year 2030.
- Relative to other demographics, Latinos are most likely to find the ocean very important for their emotional well-being.
- Latinos are 73% in agreement that the health of the ocean is essential to human survival.
- In California, Latinos are more likely than other adults to see plastics and marine debris as a big problem along their local coast, and view urban development as a big problem for wildlife habitats and endangered species.
- 62% of Latinos in California are in favor of wind and wave energy projects off the coast.



# CLIMATE CRISIS

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The climate crisis cuts across all sectors of society, from the pollution generated by oil and gas usage to the natural disasters that are intensified by a warming planet. Efforts to address it must be similarly large-scale and cross-cutting, with an urgent need for investment in communities experiencing environmental injustices. The two overlapping streams of climate action are 1) mitigation of fossil fuel emissions, including oil, gas, and coal restrictions and a just transition<sup>33</sup> to a clean energy economy, and 2) resilience to climate hazards and natural disasters, enabling communities to prepare, withstand, and bounce back from the heightened risks we face in a warmer world. Climate solutions can cover one or both of these streams and could encompass renewable energy development, healthy agriculture practices, energy efficiency, public transit, nature protection and restoration, pollution reduction, and much more.

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT TO LATINO COMMUNITIES

### LATINO HEALTH

- Air pollution from fossil fuel emissions increases asthma risk and severity. Hispanic children are twice as likely to die from asthma as white children.<sup>34</sup>
- Latinos have the lowest rate of health insurance, hindering their ability to access care when afflicted by illnesses and injuries caused by climate impacts. Immigrants of all statuses are less likely to be offered employer-sponsored health insurance, and undocumented immigrants are not able to use public insurance like Medicare and Medicaid.<sup>35</sup> In addition, there are often language or affordability barriers preventing access.
- Most Latinos live in the three states experiencing the most serious effects related to climate change: historic droughts and wildfires in California, record-breaking heat and power outages in Texas, and increased sea level rise and flooding in Florida.
- 11 million undocumented Hispanic and/or Latino immigrants are not eligible for disaster aid.<sup>36</sup>

### LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- 81% of Latino voters in the West said it's very important for the U.S. to help jumpstart the economy by prioritizing clean energy jobs in wind and solar.<sup>37</sup>

- 84% believe it's very important to help jumpstart the economy by investing in green infrastructure.
- Latinos are more likely to work in the industries that are deeply affected by climate change, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction.
- Many Latinos depend on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods. Extreme weather hampers farm productivity and can mean lost jobs and incomes for many Latino farmers and farmworkers in the United States.

## LATINO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

- 78% of Latinos say they have directly experienced the effects of climate change.
- Latino communities face many barriers when dealing with disasters, many of which are caused by government agencies' failure to consider diverse languages, housing and transportation situations, access to information technology, and other needs. The barriers include:
  - Lack of inclusion in disaster planning
  - Lack of access to clear, multilingual information on disaster preparedness and response, such as emergency alerts
  - Lack of translated signage and culturally sensitive multilingual service providers
  - Lack of cultural competence by service providers
  - Failure to inform immigrants of their right to disaster aid
  - Failure to address fears of deportation and distrust of government
  - Discrimination and racial profiling leading to exclusion of individuals from shelters and aid and inquiries about immigration status
  - Lack of transportation assistance, especially for migrant workers
  - Unclear process for responding to loss of documents
  - Failure to acknowledge structural inequities and different social structures in diverse, rural communities
  - Lack of coordination between different government agencies and tiers in disaster response<sup>38</sup>



## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- Compared to other groups, Latinos are more worried about the climate crisis, more willing to take action and more likely to say they will vote for a candidate because of their stance on climate change.
- 83% of Latino voters support gradually transitioning to one hundred percent of our energy being produced from clean, renewable sources like solar and wind over the next ten to fifteen years.
- 64% of Latino voters think that climate change is an extremely serious issue.
- 85% of Latinos believe it is very important to reduce smog and air pollution.
- 60% of Latinos would vote for a candidate for public office because of their position on global warming.<sup>39</sup>



## CLIMATE IMPACTS:

# WILDFIRES

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Our nation's greenhouse gas emissions and resulting climate change are leading to higher temperatures, record-setting heat waves, and drier and more arid conditions in the West. These conditions, matched with underfunded forest management, outdated land use practices, and more people living in fire-prone areas has led to catastrophic wildfires that affect more people. More than 10.3 million acres burned in 2020.

These conditions have severe consequences on public health and access to services, job security, and economic productivity. Latino communities are more vulnerable to experiencing these wildfire impacts, and Latino voters are not only aware of these impacts, but are ready for Congress to take action to address climate change, provide more funding for forest management, and ensure communities have access to the services they need to respond to wildfires.

## LATINO HEALTH

- Wildfire potential correlates with places with high Latino populations. Latinos, Black, and Indigenous people experience a 50% greater vulnerability to wildfire than other census tracts. These socioeconomic vulnerabilities and lack of resources turn hazards into disasters and drastically reduce the ability for these communities to prepare and recover from wildfires.
- Latinos have the highest uninsured rates in the United States - half of Latinos do not have private insurance coverage. This means Latinos are less likely to have access to healthcare services to prevent and treat health threats caused by wildfires and smoke.
- The poverty rate among Latinos in 2019 was 15.7%, compared to the national poverty rate of 10.5%.<sup>40</sup> This means that 1 in 6 Latinos do not have the economic resources to prepare, adapt, or cope with health issues associated with wildfires and poor air quality.
- Low-income Latino communities are not only exposed to higher temperatures and wildfire risk, but also worse air quality due to smoke.
- 12% of Latinos do not have access to a car, almost double the percentage of their white counterparts. Latinos are more likely than any other group to live in a multigenerational household with young and/or aging family members who can't drive themselves to school, work, healthcare and other services. This limits their ability to prepare and respond to wildfires.

## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- The effects of wildfires range from access to emergency response, disaster relief, and physical and mental health services to job security, economic productivity, land use planning and affordable housing.
- Latinos make up the highest percentage of natural resource laborers. These high rates of outdoor employment leads to higher risks by Latino workers of being exposed to unhealthy levels of smoke and air pollution during and after a wildfire.
- Certain factors create additional barriers and challenges for Latino communities before, during, and after a wildfire. These may include distrust of government agencies, emergency responders or service providers; language and cultural barriers; access to information or alerts; or socioeconomic factors, such as access to transportation, adequate and affordable housing, income, and eligibility for insurance or government services.

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 73% of Latino voters agree that wildfires in the West are more of a problem than ten years ago.<sup>41</sup>
- 66% of Latino voters think uncontrollable wildfires that threaten homes and property are an extremely serious problem.
- 80% of Latino voters support updating zoning and building codes for new homes and development near forests or other fire-prone areas so homes are farther from or can better withstand fires.
- 91% of Latino voters agree with increasing the use of controlled burns to safely reduce the amount of fuel for fires.





## CLIMATE IMPACTS:

# EXTREME HEAT

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Higher temperatures and heat waves are leading to a disproportionate impact on Latino laborers. For many Latinos, staying indoors during high-heat days is not an option. Hazardous conditions are routine for farmworkers and include pesticide exposure, heat stress, lack of shade and adequate clean drinking water. Regardless of 100° or higher temperatures, unhealthy air quality, and lack of proper protection, many farmworkers continue to work in these hazardous conditions to support their families.

The frequency of extreme heat days is increasing as the climate warms. It is critical that we provide Latino workers with the necessary resources to not just survive, but prosper in these adverse environments, while also limiting climate change to mitigate this increasing risk.

## LATINO HEALTH

- Latinos are three times more likely to die from heat on the job than non-Latinos.<sup>42</sup>
- Increased daytime temperatures, reduced nighttime cooling, and higher air pollution levels associated with urban heat islands can harm human health by causing respiratory difficulties, heat cramps and exhaustion, non-fatal heat stroke, and heat-related mortality.
- Latinos are 21% more likely than whites to live in urban heat islands, or areas dominated by asphalt and concrete where parks, shade-providing trees, and other vegetation are lacking.
- About 30% of Hispanic households do not have air-conditioning.<sup>43</sup>
- Over 40% of Latino households are energy insecure—they cannot afford the energy required to heat and cool their homes, refrigerate food and medicine, or they must make the tough decision between paying their electric bill or paying for food, medical care, and other basic necessities.

## LATINO JOBS AND ECONOMY

- Latinos have less access to sick days and health insurance, which leaves them less able to manage health conditions that are exacerbated by heat.
- Workers in agriculture, construction, utilities, and manufacturing, who are disproportionately Latino, are more vulnerable to heat waves and higher temperatures, leading to lost productivity, increased healthcare costs, and economic strain.
- 17% of Latinos are natural resource laborers (agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting), compared to 10% of whites. Higher temperatures and heat waves will thus disproportionately impact Latino laborers.



## CLIMATE IMPACTS:

# DROUGHT

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Drought affects more people globally than any other natural disaster. Known as the “creeping disaster”, droughts can come unexpectedly and have a long lasting impact that can build over time. Droughts leave a trail of destruction as dangerous and deadly as any other extreme weather event.<sup>44</sup> In fact, drought has affected more people around the world in the past four decades than any other type of natural disaster.

In low-income communities, drought can create conditions of water insecurity and higher food prices. If the drought is severe enough, it is capable of bringing a country to the brink of collapse. In the United States, drought is the second-most costly form of natural disaster behind hurricanes. Drought can also lead to regionally specific problems. In California, for example, a large number of native fish populations that depend on the San Francisco Bay–Delta Estuary—from the bellwether delta smelt to the iconic Chinook salmon—have suffered sharp declines due to reduced river flows during the recent historic drought. These dry spells take a major toll on the economy and agricultural production, which many Latinos are dependent on for work.

### LATINO HEALTH

- Drought conditions have troubling consequences on public health and access to services, job security, and economic productivity, which affect Latino communities disproportionately.
- In the Southwest, agriculture accounts for 79% of water withdrawals. Across the Colorado River Basin, 43% of agricultural water use is sourced from the Colorado River.
- Between 2000 and 2014, annual Colorado River flows averaged 19% below the 1906–1999 average, the worst 15-year drought on record. Approximately one-third of the flow loss is due to high temperatures now common in the basin, a result of climate change.



## LATINO JOBS & ECONOMY

- Dry spells take a major toll on the economy, with the drought and extreme heat of 2012 alone resulting in an estimated \$17 billion in crop losses.
- There are 2.5 - 3 million farmworkers in the United States — whose livelihoods depend on agricultural production, water availability, and workable temperatures — 80% of whom are Latino.
- In 2015, drought in California led to losses of more than 10,000 jobs and the following of 540,000 acres, at a cost of \$900 million in gross crop revenue.

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- 82% of Latino voters see climate change as a threat to water supply — more than any other demographic group.<sup>45</sup>
- 96% agree that we should dedicate funding to modernizing older water infrastructure and restoring natural areas that help communities protect sources of drinking water and withstand impacts of drought.
- 88% of Latinos believe that funding cuts to water quality protection are a serious problem.



**Between 2000 and 2014, the Colorado River experienced the worst 15-year drought on record due to high temperatures now common in the basin, a result of climate change.**



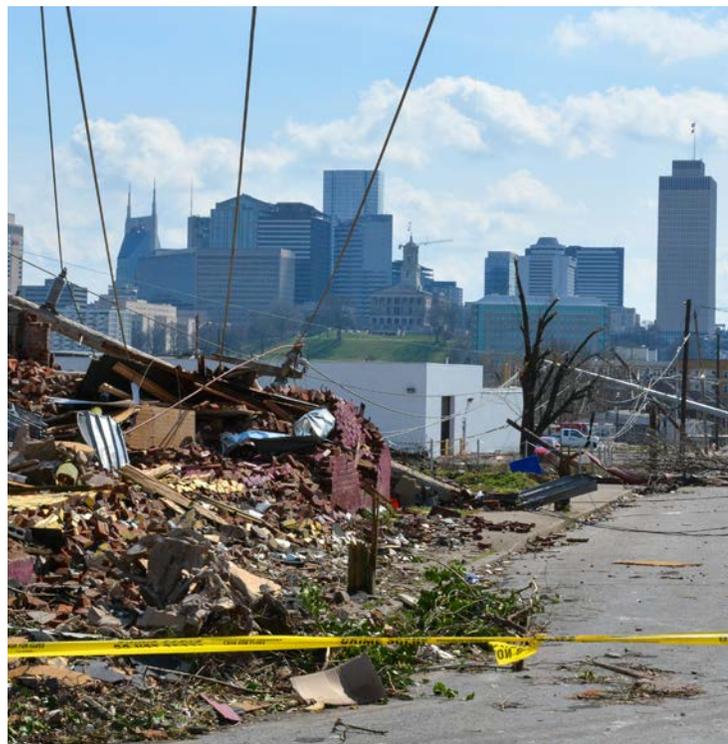
## CLIMATE IMPACTS:

# STORMS & FLOODING

Due to intense rainfall events, quick drainage of stormwater runoff, urbanization, a rapidly growing population, and climate change, many regions are becoming more prone to flood disasters. Research demonstrates Latinos and other communities of color experience greater social vulnerability during floods. Yet most flood and emergency management plans take a colorblind approach that does not factor in how communities of color experience disasters differently, often leaving Latinos behind.

### LATINO HEALTH

- The legacies of segregation and racism, gentrification, class inequalities, citizenship status, and language barriers that Latino communities continue to experience create greater risk and vulnerability to flood events.<sup>46</sup>
- Even without the amplifying effects of climate change, heavy rain and flooding present myriad dangers to human health, including injury, drowning, exposure to toxic materials, and lung and skin infections. After the 2006 flooding disaster in El Paso County, Texas, that damaged or destroyed 1,500 homes, scientists found that physical problems such as coughing, headaches, and eye irritation were 149% more likely among Latinos than among non-Latinos.
- Many Latino communities are located in high-risk floodplains, and sea level rise is boosting the risk of coastal flooding.
- The nature-deprived areas where many Latino communities live are covered with impervious surfaces that do not let water get absorbed into the soil. Thus the water is stagnant and begins to accumulate, creating more extreme flooding events.



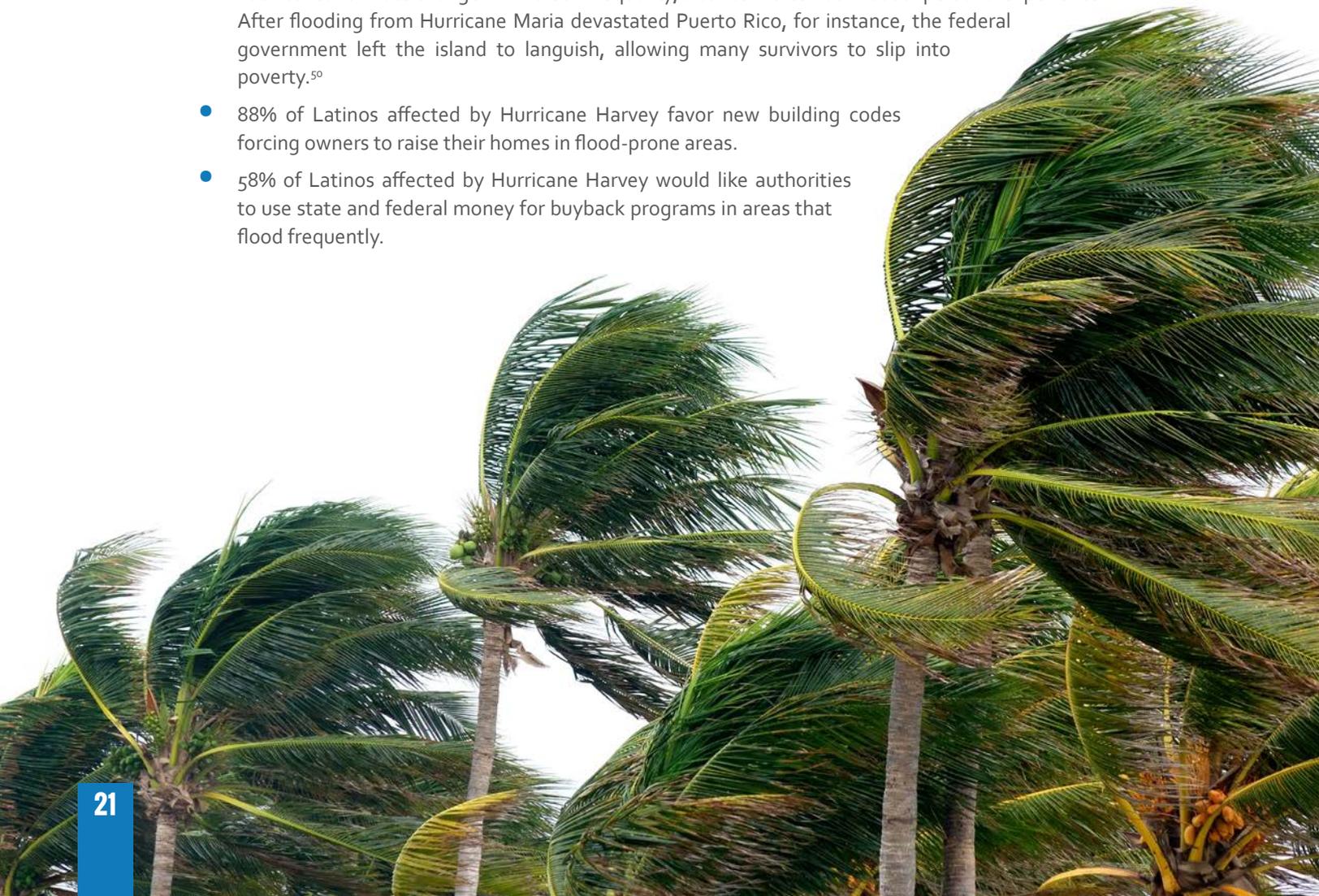
- Because property values are an important factor in building adaptation measures like flood walls, low-income neighborhoods are less likely to be physically protected from stormwater and residents may be forced to evacuate more often.<sup>47</sup>
- Latino immigrants exhibit lower levels of self-protection and hazard knowledge, and higher perceptions of risk, which reflects their heightened vulnerability.<sup>48</sup>

## LATINO JOBS & ECONOMY

- The economic costs of sea level rise will pose a significant budgeting challenge for all levels of government and impose particular hardship on low-income and disenfranchised communities near coastlines.
- Southern Florida—home to 2.7 million Latinos—could experience some of the highest impacts from rising seas and hurricane-driven flooding in the U.S. Communities including Miami, Hialeah, Fort Lauderdale and St. Petersburg could see floodwaters rushing higher and farther into their streets with climate change.<sup>49</sup>
- Inundated roads and public disruptions in transport and emergency services, damaged infrastructure and reduced property values, as well as compromised water quality, are endured by Latinos with limited capacity to resolve their situation through mitigation, adaptation or relocation.
- Millions of Latinos are undocumented immigrants and not eligible for disaster aid.

## LATINO PUBLIC OPINION

- Latinos are worried about climate change because they are more likely to hold an egalitarian worldview. Latinos fear climate change will worsen inequality, a concern often born out of personal experience. After flooding from Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, for instance, the federal government left the island to languish, allowing many survivors to slip into poverty.<sup>50</sup>
- 88% of Latinos affected by Hurricane Harvey favor new building codes forcing owners to raise their homes in flood-prone areas.
- 58% of Latinos affected by Hurricane Harvey would like authorities to use state and federal money for buyback programs in areas that flood frequently.





# CONCLUSION: EQUITY & JUSTICE

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All people have the right to a healthy environment, including clean air, water, and soil; nearby, accessible nature; resilience to natural disasters; and a stable climate. To achieve this, policies and investments must be made to uplift marginalized communities, address exclusion and discrimination, and correct historic injustices. Environmental justice cannot be achieved without social justice, and the connections between sectors must be recognized if systemic racism is to be addressed in conservation and the outdoors.

In the U.S., many Black, Indigenous, Latino and other communities of color face environmental racism. Disproportionate exposure to toxins and pollution, and a disproportionate lack of access to nature, occur in areas primarily inhabited by communities of color, including areas with large Latino and/or Hispanic populations. These communities often face multiple environmental injustices simultaneously, the impacts of which are compounded by high rates of poverty, unemployment, and disenfranchisement. Yet, recent surveys show that Latinos are environmentalists at heart.

With a warming climate comes increasing frequency of extreme events. We must provide our communities the necessary resources to be able to live and work in these adverse environments so that everyone can not just survive, but thrive. It is only through environmental equity and justice for everyone—including Latino communities—that we will be able to overcome the climate emergency.

In the face of these challenges, addressing climate change and nature protection presents a tremendous potential benefit for Latinos. Latino support for climate action and willingness to engage local, state, and federal leaders can help accelerate the transition away from dirty and dangerous fossil fuels and toward clean energy solutions for the 21st century. These solutions—like wind and solar energy, public transportation, nature protection and restoration, and increased energy efficiency—will create well-paid jobs, cut energy bills, improve our health, and help safeguard well-being for generations to come.

# ENDNOTES

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# ABOUT HAF

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

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



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