

Environmental Justice in Recreational Permitting

U.S. Reps. Deb Haaland (NM-01) & Grace Meng (NY-06)

The problem. The United States of America is home to vast public lands that belong to everyone, however communities of color and low-income communities in the American West have fewer natural areas and open space near their communities. Policy makers need more information to better understand which segments of the population are benefitting from public lands, including recreation permits to use public lands, to ensure equitable access and government support for environmental justice and communities who need access to fresh air the most.

The solution. The Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting aims to increase access to public lands for all communities and fight environmental injustice by gathering important data requiring the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to deliver a report to relevant committees on case studies, barriers to access, and recommendations.

Background

According to the Center for American Progress, nearly 84 percent of communities of color and 80 percent of low-income communities in the West live in areas where the amount of natural area is less than the state average. Cross-sectional data studies suggest that people who live close to parks are more active and have better health outcomes.

Though they accounted for 30% of the U.S. population in 2010, Black and Latinx park visitors only accounted for 8% of visitors to National Forests at the time of [the study](#). Further data on recreation is an important first step to building equal access to the outdoors.

EJ in recreational permitting specifically:

- Gather important data on inequities in access to recreation
- Require Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture to deliver a report to the House Committee on Natural Resources and Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee providing the following information:
 1. An estimate of special recreation permit use by providers serving environmental justice communities,
 2. An overview of policies at all scales of government that facilitate public lands access that serves environmental justice communities,
 3. Case studies of special recreation permits, partnerships, or cooperative agreements are being effectively used to expand public lands access to environmental justice communities
 4. A list of current or potential barriers for access for environmental justice community access providers, and
 5. Recommendations for how to improve public lands access for environmental justice communities