

Sacagawea, a Lemhi Shoshone woman, served as interpreter and guide for Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery, starting in 1804. As a teenager, she traveled with her infant, helping negotiate passage over lands inhabited by various tribes and securing additional guides and horses for the party. She received no compensation for her services, but her French husband received \$500.

Tie Sing, a Chinese backcountry cook, worked for the U.S. Geological Society as they mapped and explored Yosemite National Park in 1915. Sing fed an expedition of men who would eventually be instrumental in the management of public lands, including Stephen Mather, first director of the National Park Service.

The Buffalo Soldiers, an all African American army regiment, were among the first park and backcountry rangers, patrolling Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks both on horse and bicycle. Charles Young became acting military superintendent in 1903 and is considered the first African American park superintendent. Young oversaw the creation of infrastructure and worked to suppress wildfires, poaching, and illegal grazing within the parks.

George Washington Carver (1864-1943), was an African American born a year before the abolishment of slavery. He was a notable agricultural scientist, botanist, and environmentalist who developed methods for improving soil in order to maintain sustainable harvests.

In the 1770's, Brister Freeman and Zilpah White were freed slaves who lived around Walden Pond, famed retreat of writer, environmentalist and activist Henry David Thoreau. Walden was a settlement for freed slaves prior to Thoreau's residency and the stories of Freeman and White, among other freed slaves and individuals from marginalized communities, served as an inspiration to Thoreau.

African American men were allowed entry to serve in the Civilian Conservation Corps (1930-1942) but often faced discrimination, despite New Deal legislation banning the practice. African American enrollment was capped at 10% and thousands of men were turned away. While a few camps were racially integrated, most African Americans lived and worked in segregated camps. Their involvement in the CCC is largely undocumented. Projects included restoring Union and Confederate monuments at Gettysburg Battlefield and building infrastructure in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Blue Ridge Parkway. Indigenous Peoples also participated in the CCC-Indian Division developing infrastructure on reservations. The CCC-ID was administered by tribal leaders with the assistance of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

MaVynnee Betsch gave away all of her wealth, including her home, to environmental causes starting in the 1970s. She convinced the National Park Service to protect 8.2 acres of sand dunes on Amelia Island's American Beach. Her great grandfather had purchased it in the 1930's so that black people could live on and go to the beach in Florida during Jim Crow segregation.

Outdoor Afro continues to give voice to the myriad of African American and black experiences in the outdoors. One connection that is often talked about is the healing aspect of nature. They support #HealingHikes for those who are healing from traumatic experiences or those who just need to de-stress. One Outdoor Afro group recently explored portions of the Appalachian Trail that overlap with the Underground Railroad, following a path that Harriet Tubman may have taken.

Latino Outdoors has been working to tell the myriad of stories about the outdoors in the Latinx community. Latino Outdoors is a network of leaders committed to engaging Latinxs in the outdoors, connecting families and youth with nature, and supporting a community of storytellers to explore and share their personal experiences.

Nepantleras are a group of young Chicana women have begun hiking together and navigating “nepantla,” or the in-between space they find themselves in while navigating their own Indigenous identity and the Western culture of hiking. Together, they hike in public lands and build their own connections to land as it relates to their identity.

More than 9-in-10 Latinx voters (94%) say outdoor activities such as fishing, picnics, camping, and visiting national parks and monuments are important to them and their families. Therefore, it doesn’t come as a surprise that Latinx voters express strong support for the protection of public lands.

Starting in 1972, John Francis, the Planetwalker, spent 22 years refusing to ride in cars walking across the U.S. to spread a message of environmental respect and awareness of the harmful effects of oil spills. For 17 of those years, John did not speak. During his vow of silence, he completed three college degrees, including a PhD in Land Management from the University of Wisconsin - Madison, which he walked to from Montana.

Contemporary Acequia farmers in Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico are Indo-Hispanic farmers who have a unique understanding of high desert ecology that informs their farming, seed saving practices, water sharing practices, community relations, and erosion prevention. Though often not marked as “conservationists” by the environmental community, their farming practices and place-based knowledge certainly center around conserving the health of the land and community.

NativesOutdoors is working directly with tribal governments, community organizations, and individuals on increasing access to outdoor recreation and connecting resources and opportunities within the outdoor industry.

