



RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Offering Ideas to Expand Visitor Experience

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Almost one-third of Californians are 10-28 years old

HERE COME THE 'MILLENNIALS': WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO CONNECT WITH THIS NEW GENERATION

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This bulletin offers suggestions on how to engage America's young Millennial Generation ("Millennials") in outdoor recreation. Attracting young recreationists is key to park futures in a time when *per capita* attendance at U.S. parks is declining. After reading this bulletin you will be equipped with new ideas for attracting young visitors to your park. See pages 6-7 for ideas for California parks.

Who are the 'Millennials'?

Americans born between 1982 and 2000 are often called Millennials. (See boxed text at the bottom of this page.) Also known as Generation Y or Echo Boomers, Millennials are now about 10-28 years old.

Numbering about 11 million in California,¹ Millennials are almost one-third (29%) of the state population. The most educated of Americans, Millennials also possess the most disposable income and are the most ethnically diverse generation in U.S. history.²

Recreation habits of three generations

After a steady, half-century rise, in about 1988 *per capita* attendance at U.S. parks began to decline.³ A number

Defining American generations

The definitions of American generations and the Millennial characteristics on pages 4-7 are those of respected generational researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss. However, this Bulletin uses other sources that define American generations in different ways. And, of course, generational characteristics do not apply to all individuals.

Information in this Bulletin is best viewed as a summary of preferences of Americans in various approximate age ranges, with a focus on young Americans.



Youth group camping at Folsom Lake SRA.

of causes have been proposed for the decline, including changing recreation preferences.⁴ The recreation habits of three American generations seem to support this potential cause for the decline:

- Baby Boomers, about 8 million Californians born between about 1943 and 1960,¹ are big park users and were once key drivers of park design and development.
- While GenXers, about 10 million Californians born between about 1961 and 1981,¹ may visit parks as youngsters, they may not as they get older—the decline in *per capita* park attendance coincides with

the adulthood of early GenXers.³

- Millennials, about 11 million Californians born between 1982 and 2000,¹ are “the only generation significantly less likely to agree that all people should be connected with nature” and “that it is important to be outside as much as possible.”⁵ The Millennial Generation is also the second generation that is visiting parks less.⁶ (GenXers were the first.)

Table 1 summarizes some generational differences between Boomers, GenXers and Millennials. Note that the definition for “conventional” is “following accepted customs.” More on this characteristic later.

Table 1. Generational characteristics of Boomers, GenXers, and Millennials.⁶

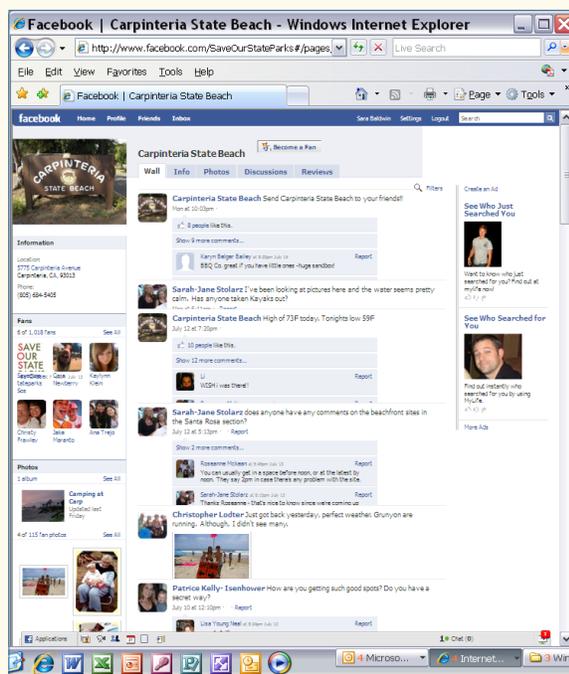
Generational characteristic	Millennials	GenXers	Boomers
Conventional or unconventional?	Conventional	Unconventional	Unconventional
What they seek outside home	Entertainment, socializing with friends and family	High-intensity vacations (OHV parks, rock climbing)	Adventure outdoors in nature and unexplored areas
Their ethnic diversity	More diverse than Boomers, GenXers	More diverse than Boomers	Not very diverse
What they value	Fast paced lifestyle with electronic tools; achievements	Spending time efficiently; fast-paced lifestyle; time with people	Spiritual enlightenment; experiences
Where they like to live	Urban areas	Urban areas	Rural areas

How one state park engages Millennials using a social website

On the Carpinteria State Beach Facebook page, fans of the page share information (such as recounting favorite times at the park or commenting on area restaurants) and socialize online.

Free Facebook membership is required to view Facebook pages or sign up as a fan (<http://www.facebook.com>). Once you are on Facebook, find the Carpinteria site by searching on the park name.

Note: As of this writing, the CSP Communications Office is preparing a formal policy for social websites, in accordance with guidance from the State Office of Information Security. If planning a public website, we ask that you coordinate with the Communications Office.



Surveys and studies show Millennial preferences

Two recent California State Parks (CSP) surveys reveal recreational preferences of Californians.

CSP survey of Californians

CSP's *Survey on Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California 2009*⁷ (SPOA), conducted in 2008, provides insight into Californians' recreation habits. Because those surveyed include *potential* visitors to state parks, these preferences can provide valuable clues for CSP staff.

According to survey results, Californians aged 18-24 (an age group that includes a portion of the Millennials) are participating in these activities *less* than those aged 25-44 and 45-64:

- walking
- visiting the outdoors
- visiting historic sites
- driving for pleasure
- picnicking

The 18-24 age group also visits the beach less often than 25-44 year olds and 45-64 year olds.

State Park Visitor Survey

CSP's State Park Visitor Survey,⁸ conducted at 26 California state parks from 2007 to 2009, reveals demographics, park use patterns, recreation activities and perceptions of visitors.

The survey confirms that similar to SPOA respondents, state park visitors 18-24 years old are *less likely* to report they participate in these activities at a state park than visitors aged 25-44 and 45-64:

- relaxing
- walking
- swimming

Other studies

The recreation preferences of Millennials are documented in numerous other studies. Conclusions are interesting if sometimes contradictory. For example:

- "They love to sit in front of a computer screen or television and play games, but they are also the most physically 'active' generation. The key is to combine action and games."⁹
- Millennials are "less active than earlier generations."¹⁰ When asked to associate words with the outdoors, "Gen Ys cite active impressions (adventure/fun) more frequently (54%) than Americans in general."¹¹



AmeriCorps volunteers.

Many organizations help nurture a conservation ethic among young Americans

Many U.S. organizations offer a chance to work in environmental and conservation causes. Members of the Student Conservation Association, headquartered in New Hampshire, serve several California state parks, including Bodie State Historic Park. <http://www.thesca.org>. AmeriCorps has projects such as trail maintenance and environmental conservation. www.americorps.gov.

Two of the many organizations connecting young Americans with conservation and environmental programs: the National Wildlife Federation's (<http://www.nwf.org>) Be Out There program; and the Sierra Club's (www.sierraclub.org/ico) Inner City Outings.

Why generational characteristics matter

Individuals who grow up together during roughly the same twenty-year period are influenced by many of the same events and experiences and tend to share certain basic preferences, beliefs and values. Researchers, marketers and human resource specialists label and analyze characteristics for what they categorize as "generations," such as Baby Boom, GenX and Millennial. Because characteristics may change as people mature, research is ongoing.

Park professionals can use generational characteristics when creating marketing plans, planning for facilities, greeting park visitors, recruiting and retaining volunteers, working with partners and reaching out to community and business leaders.

Characteristics of Millennials

In their 2000 book, *Millennials Rising, the Next Great Generation*, authors William Strauss and Neil Howe identify seven Millennials characteristics.² We add “technologically savvy” and “diverse” to their list. As mentioned earlier, all characteristics are generalizations.

1. Special. Used to receiving rewards just for participating, Millennials are raised to feel special. This feeling is reinforced by the “unusually strong” relationships they have with their parents.¹²

“They were raised by doting parents who told them they are special, played in little leagues with no winners or losers, or all winners. They are laden with trophies just for participating...”^{2,13}

2. Sheltered. Millennials lead structured lives filled with rules and regulations. As children, “baby-on-board” signs, soccer moms, and regimented schedules may be part of their daily lives. Less accustomed to unstructured play than previous generations and apprehensive of the outdoors, they spend most of their time indoors, leaving home primarily to socialize with friends and families.¹³

“This regimented schedule of extra-curricular activities has decreased opportunities for independent creative thought and decision-making...”¹²



Kayaking in a group at Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area.

3. Team oriented. This group has a “powerful instinct for community” and places a “high value on teamwork and belonging.”^{2,16} They start working in teams at an early age, and “tend to be more inclusive, optimistic and tech-savvy than their elders.”¹⁷



An Outdoor Youth Connection (OYC) group hiking at Mt. Diablo State Park. CSP and other entities collaborate in OYC. (See http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=24511.)

This generation has “.....a talent (and preference) for collaboration ...a passion for service, and a desire to make a (big) difference.”¹⁴

“...66.3% of freshmen ... said it is “essential or very important” to help others, the highest percentage to say so in 25 years.”¹⁸

4. Confident (and technologically savvy). Upbeat and with a can-do attitude, this generation is more “optimistic and tech-savvy than their elders.”¹⁷ Millennial teenagers are “confident, even cocky, about how they can improve things when their turn comes.”²

5. Pressured. Millennials feel “pressured to achieve and pressured to behave.” They feel they must “perform for those who would judge them.”¹² They have been “pushed to study hard and avoid personal risk.”² They do not read as much as previous generations and are not as interested in history.



'Junction,' a special-event light show by UCLA, Disney and CSP at Los Angeles State Historic Park.¹⁵

“Today’s kids feel a growing sense of urgency about what they have to do to achieve their personal and group goals.”²



Volunteers clean up a natural area in Los Angeles County.

6. Achieving. This generation is expected to do great things, and they may be the next “great” generation.

“Millennials have the potential to...rise to the occasion and show courage, character, determination, innovation and vision in ways that really make the country a better place.”¹⁸

7. Conventional (and diverse). Millennials are respectful of authority and civic minded. They believe “the government knows what’s best and will take care of them.”¹² Respectful of cultural differences because they are ethnically diverse, they also value good conduct and tend to have a “standardized appearance.”²



Visitor at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park grills burgers for a group.

“... [T]hey are fundamentally conservative in their lifestyle, with a dislike of ambiguity and risk.”...they “are not workaholics, and understand the relationship between a balanced life and productivity...”¹⁹

Ideas and examples for engaging Millennials in California parks

Here are some ways to connect with Millennials, based on the seven Millennial generation characteristics that Howe and Strauss defined, and a telephone interview with Neil Howe.⁶

Millennials are...

1. Special

Ideas:

- Give visitors and volunteers small rewards such as diplomas for participating in projects or completing individual “assignments.”
- Include park activities that give immediate feedback for visitors, such as geocaching with global positioning systems (GPSs).

Example: Participants in university study on PDA use at Los Angeles SHP uploaded interactive guidebooks to their GPS-linked PDAs at various park locations.

Example: In its annual trails challenge, East Bay Regional Parks District gives each participant a pin. Event is hosted entirely online. <http://www.ebparks.org/>.

“Hike 5 of the 20 trails... by December 1, and receive a commemorative pin with the Trails Challenge logo.”

Publicity on East Bay Regional Parks District website for its 2009 annual Trails Challenge.

3. Team oriented

Ideas:

- Encourage social and sporting groups (including festival organizers) to hold events at parks.
- Offer opportunities for Millennials to help others as volunteers.
- Provide opportunities for people to volunteer and visit in groups.
- Promote group facilities to friends who vacation together.
- Publicize benefits of group areas for events to service organizations.

Example: CSP website includes state parks suitable for weddings. http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=23428

Example: Mendocino Music Festival is held at Mendocino Headlands SP each July. <http://www.mendocinomusic.com/gateway.html>

2. Sheltered

Ideas:

- Feature safety and structure of parks in promotions, park literature, signs and presentations. Provide highly structured activities and programs with goals.
- Encourage use of electronic tools (podcasts, GPS, computers, Facebook, Yelp, (<http://www.yelp.com>), TripAdvisor (<http://www.tripadvisor.com>).
- Promote parks as places to “meet goals within visit” (versus “places to explore”) such as finding a unique species or structure.
- Offer orientation videos to stress safe design features at parks.
- Consider including scavenger hunts and games in park materials.

Example: Los Angeles SHP promotes special events on Facebook. <http://www.facebook.com>.



Los Angeles SHP promotes park events and activities and invites fans on Facebook.

CSP policy on social websites

As of this writing, the CSP Communications Office is preparing a formal policy on social websites. It will be encouraging of such sites, but offer guidance for use. When planning a public website, contact the Communications Office for information and assistance.

4. Confident (and tech savvy)

Ideas:

- Share information freely and allow information sharing.
- Survey visitors and volunteers online.
- Use technology (Facebook and other social networking sites, PDAs, podcasts, cell phones) to attract and inform, engage visitors while at parks and solicit volunteers. (Keep up with trends; preferences and technology can change quickly.)
- Find best practices for social websites online. One example: <http://www.diosacomunications.com/facebookbestpractices.htm>
- Use sites such as <http://www.californiavolunteers.org> to connect with Millennial volunteers.

Example: Visitors can download mp3-file audio tours on Mount San Jacinto SP website. See "audio tour" link at http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=636.

Example: California State Parks Foundation website features podcasts on State Parks (<http://www.calparks.org>).

Example: Users review parks and post to <http://www.yelp.com>.

5. Pressured

Ideas:

- Test and quiz for feedback.
- Include objects, visuals and sounds for interpretation, not brochures and signs.
- Relate historical events to current events.
- Minimize need for reading and share information visually and using electronic tools.

Example: New exhibits at Marshall Gold Discovery SHP, a favorite of school children, feature drawers that open to reveal various objects that visitors can touch. (Previous exhibits were less hands-on.)

6. Achieving

Ideas:

- Use electronic tools to communicate and encourage community involvement.
- Reach college-age visitors with ads on online bulletin boards.
- Offer opportunities for students to help on park projects for work experience.
- Give volunteers the chance to reach goals at each event.
- Offer challenges, tests and quizzes in brochures or flyers or online; provide immediate feedback.



Visitors to state parks use Yelp and other social websites to rate experiences. <http://www.yelp.com>. Here Sutter's Fort State Historic Park is reviewed.

7. Conventional (and diverse)

Ideas:

- Emphasize state park safety standards and other features that meet Millennials' need for structure.
- Design facilities and programs for ethnically diverse attendees and volunteers. (See <http://treesearch.fs.fed.us/pubs/33055> for examples of how the US Forest Service is meeting the needs of diverse visitors.)
- Promote benefits of state parks to healthy work/life balance.
- Offer service events at parks.

Example: Los Angeles SHP blog features photos of smiling international visitors and more. <http://www.lashp.com>.



The Los Angeles State Historic Park blog promotes the park online. <http://www.lashp.com>.

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Inner-city youth enjoying "Beach Play Day" at Huntington State Beach.

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