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PRT 240
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April 5, 2022

Great Smoky Mountain Project Report- Diversity and Inclusion Center

[Julia Egler WebMap Link](#)

Background of Minority Visitation in National Park

In reading several sources, it came to my attention that most National Parks do not have a large number of diverse visitors. According to Karan Chavez (2020), this is due to the fact that minorities were not allowed to participate in national parks until around the 1950s due to segregation from the Jim Crow Era. Also, it is a fact that minorities are usually of a lower economic status than others so they have less time for leisure activities to visit the park. Making minorities feel welcome in National Parks is obviously detrimental to promoting a more inclusive environment.

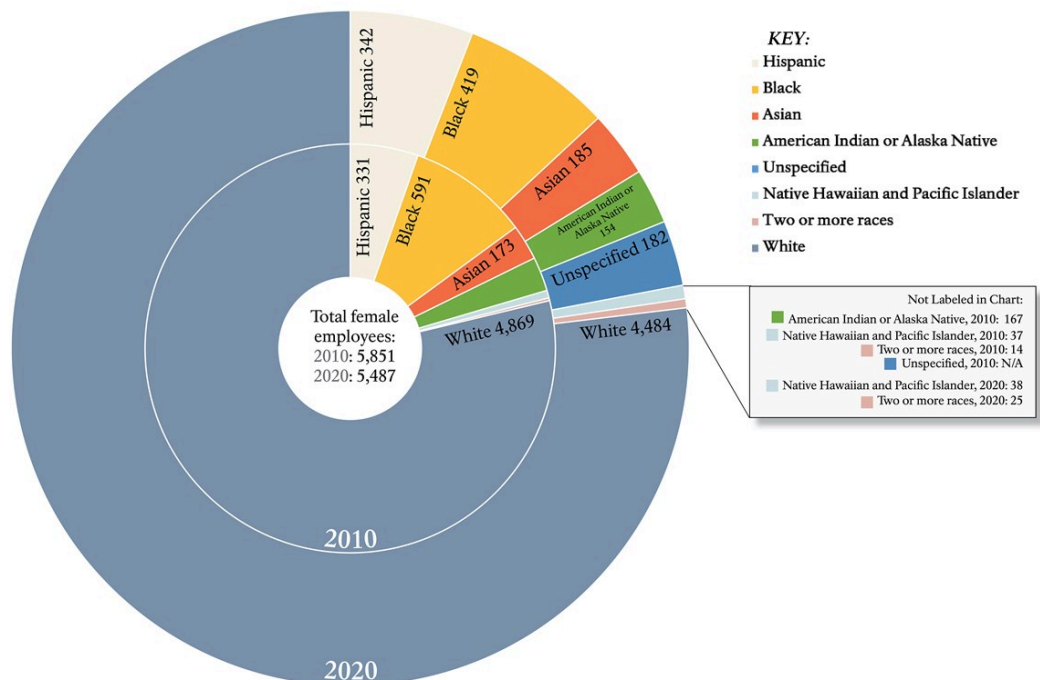
After reading another of Chavez's articles (2021), it is evident that in the early 1800s, many African American slaves lived near or in the national park. They also mentioned that even after slavery ended, this area was racist and minorities were not allowed in Gatlingburg, Tennessee. Chavez also quotes that in "2008, only 1% of African Americans visited Great Smoky Mountains National Park" (2021). Even though minorities have a history of living around the park, there are still few minority visitors.

Along with this, Lilly Knoepp wrote about how the National Park is missing the history of African-Americans. She quoted that "The outdoors have historically been a place of work not a place of recreation so hopefully this project can be a catalyst for folks – for African Americans – to feel like they are a part of the outdoors" (Knoepp 2019), proving that there is not as much visitation of African-Americans. The park is currently trying to get oral histories about African-American's experiences at the park (Knoepp 2019). It is evident that there needs to be some sort of way to promote diversity and inclusion.

The graph to the right shows that within National Parks, there are mainly white employees. It is shown that from 2010 to 2020, there have been more minorities employed but sadly, female employees have decreased. This is another factor in why there is little

TOTAL PERMANENT NPS WOMEN EMPLOYEES BY RACE (2010 - 2020)

Source: Lynda Orbik, Office of Equal Opportunity Programs, National Park Service, March 2021.



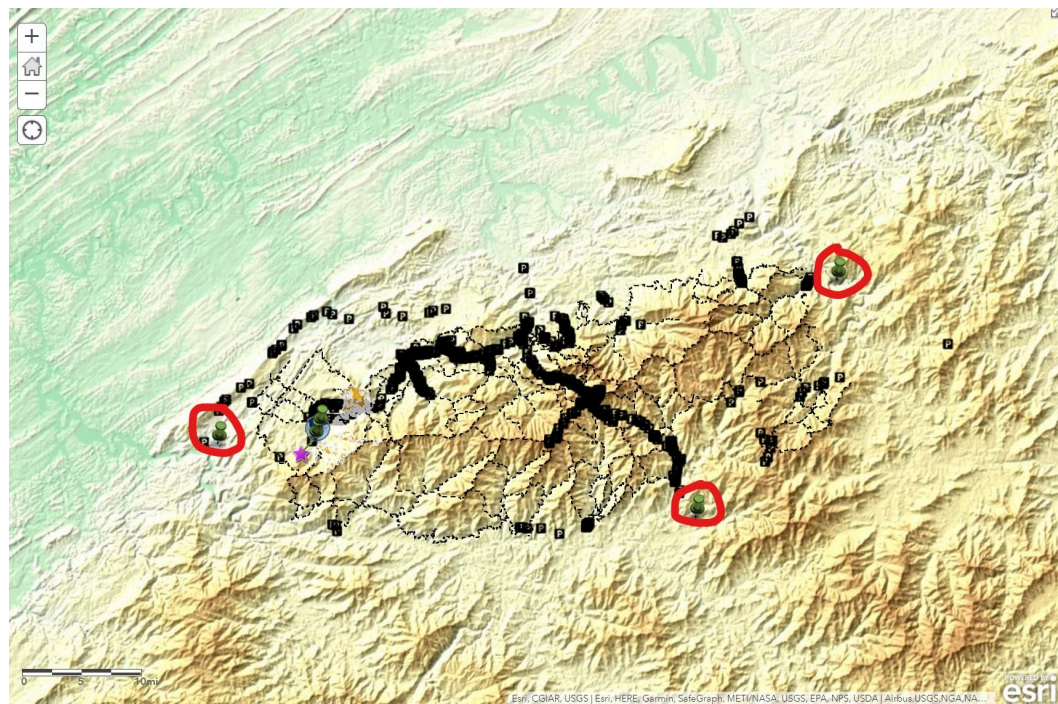
diversity in the park. If most of the workforce is white, then minorities will not feel represented when visiting the park. It is obvious that there is a diversity issue, and my idea for a diversity and inclusion center should be the answer.

The Diversity and Inclusion Center at the Great Smoky Mountains

To help increase diverse visitation, creating a diversity and inclusion center would attract minorities. Within the center, there could be weekly hikes with a tour guide to show minorities around the park who have never visited. Many minorities probably feel intimidated going to the park, especially if they do not know where to hike or explore. The center could also have a history in the area of minorities. It is crucial to talk about race and educate others about why many minorities do not visit parks. There could also be interactive maps that show the way around the park, in case there are no tour guides that day. Another component is that the center could reach out to local schools, and promote field trips to come to the center. This could make children, especially minorities interested in the park and ask their parents to take them there and create a tradition. This also could make the park more profitable and supported. It could be the first national park with a diversity and inclusion center.

Analyses Performed

For my intended location, I performed many analyses to find where I wanted the center to be. I want it to be near the most diverse communities so that it will be frequently used by them. I used an enriched layer and made a map note of three points on the boundaries of the park. As shown to the right, I put three: one on the west, east and south sides. The three green push pins circled in red, represent these locations. Then I used the enrich tool to find out where the nearest African-American



communities are within thirty miles of each point. I decided to focus on African-Americans because of the sources I read. They consistently said that the park is lacking in African-American stories. It is important to include these stories in the center so I wanted to focus on African-Americans. The west point had the highest amount of African-American population at 3,378 people whereas the east had 1,079 and the south had 1,374. In finding this, I knew that I wanted to have the center on the west side of the park.

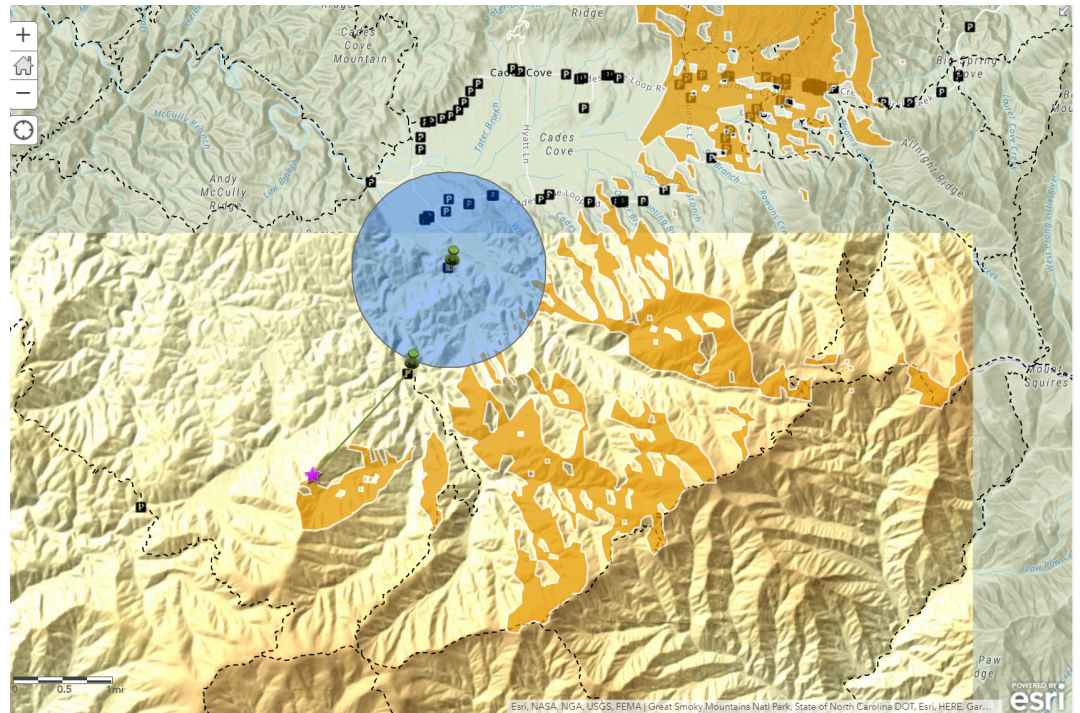
After this, I looked at the viewsheds of the park to see what would have the best view. For a good view, I want the center to be in a nice area, on top of a mountain, or hill where the viewshed was

highlighted. In looking at this, I found a few viewsheds on the west side that would work. Another layer I found was elevation and terrain. The elevation and terrain helped show me where the mountain peaks were. There was a good view highlighted on top of a mountain peak, so I thought this would be a great spot.

Once I found this spot and made a map note there, I measured the distance from the nearest parking lot to this location. I wanted to see how long it would take visitors to get from the parking to the center. I wanted it to be somewhat close, but also a good distance so that it would be secluded. It ended up being 1.4 miles from the parking lot which was perfect.

Then lastly, for my external analysis, I found all the historic sites in the park. Seeing this, helped me decide on the location I had pinpointed. I did not want it to be too close

because I want it to be a separate center from the historic sites. I created a one-mile buffer around the nearest historic site to the center, to make sure it was not too close to the center. The intended location for the center is about 2 miles from the nearest historic site which is great. It helped me decide on the location of the center which is represented by the pink star above.



Board Recommendations

Creating a diversity and inclusion center can help increase more minorities visiting the park. This will increase money for the park and will help create more equal opportunities. In order to fix this issue, it needs to be talked about and that is why it is crucial that the center talks about the diverse history of the park. Along with this, the reason why so many minorities do not visit parks is that they are not sure where to start, since they are not familiar. It is also passed on from their grandparents, who were not allowed to go to National Parks. That is why having scheduled tour guides for those who are new to the park is crucial. This way, minorities can feel more comfortable visiting the park and know where to go. Encouraging minorities to visit the park will influence their children, and so on. Then hopefully, there will be a greater equal number of different races visiting the park.

Holly Kays from Smoky Mountains News explains that the National Park is failing in telling the history of African-Americans within the park. They set up two open houses where they educated the

community about African-American history (Kays 2019). This is a great start, but to expand this, they should create a center for diversity and inclusion for all minorities that include the history of them

I highly recommend building a diversity and inclusion center at the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Since the park is the most visited National Park, it is crucial to include the center here. Having the center will attract more visitors throughout the country. Now, being inclusive is a huge factor in which people decide to travel to parks. This also can promote more diversity within the work field for park rangers. As stated above, there is little diversity in the National Park workforce. The center can help to recruit minorities to become Great Smoky Mountain employees. This can help to make minorities feel comfortable visiting and expanding their leisure opportunities.

Going Forward

There needs to be more research about the diversity and inclusion center and see if this is something that is important to visitors. A great way to go about this is to provide a survey of areas surrounding the park and see if minorities agree with the center. It could also be a great way to see what other components should be within the center. This would also require more park rangers, and have them trained to give tours and understand the history of minorities in the park. Overall, I believe that looking into a diversity and inclusion center would be a huge step in the right direction for Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

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