The Outdoor Latino Learning Initiative (OLLI): Connecting Latino Youth and Communities in South Texas to Natural Resource Education, Stewardship, and Nature-Based Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

- Ethnic diversity in natural resource fields is more limited than many other disciplines.
- Little effort has been invested in outdoor programs targeted to diverse youth at all educational levels.
- It is imperative to inspire an interest in conservation issues and educational and career paths in natural resource conservation and management.
- Several locations in the U.S. with majority-minority populations are an untapped resource of potential recruitment.

THE APPROACH

- Use GIS modelling to determine which areas are more suitable for recruitment efforts, based on parameters, such as graduation rate, health concerns, and Latino population data.
- Recruit neighboring and other interested organizations/institutions for a joint approach.
- Contact educational systems most suitable for recruitment efforts and propose program options.
- Write grant proposals for execution of new conservation projects, curriculum use, and campus renovations.
- Train teachers via Project Learning Tree on how to implement natural science.
- Visit students and show them the possibilities of working in forestry and natural resource fields.

OBJECTIVES

- Increase Latino recruitment in forestry by educating youth about conservation issues and natural resource opportunities.
- Provide Latino youth with the tools and skills needed to make a difference in their schools, communities, and beyond.

WHY SOUTH TEXAS?

- The Rio Grande Valley (RGV) is home to a population of more than 1.3 million, most of which are Latino (Figure 7).
- There is a lack of public knowledge about forestry or natural resource education and careers.
- There are 525 schools from all grade levels in the RGV (Figure 8).
- Efforts are needed to promote healthier lifestyles in a population with a rate of diabetes that is twice that of the rest of Texas.
- Efforts are needed to help improve the socioeconomic status of region through recruitment and implementation of conservation and stewardship projects.

POTENTIAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Starr County is most suitable for outreach efforts based on the parameters analyzed (Figure 10).
- The same model will be used to determine which district within Starr county will be selected.
- Once a program is established, teachers will undergo Project Learning Tree training and the school will apply for GreenSchools grants.
- Expansion of the project will slowly broaden to the rest of the Rio Grande Valley.

CONCLUSION

- A binary model was created via ArcGIS (Figure 9), based on the parameters seen in Table 1. The model will indicate which county is most suitable for outreach programs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Jodi Hill and John Boyette for their assistance with the project.