

Latino Outdoors 2019 Nuestros (Our) National Parks Strategy A Declaration of Action

Since 2013, Latino Outdoors (LO) has engaged people in National Parks and on other public lands. We are proud of the role our volunteers across the country have played in raising awareness about the importance of honoring, appreciating, and protecting these important places.

The current Federal Government shutdown continues to impact many essential public services across America, including public access to, protection for and enjoyment of our National Parks. During this time of uncertainty, LO's national leadership team is promoting a public "Call-to-Action" that includes simple measures that we hope everyone who believes in LO will support.

Our strategy contains three important guidelines for demonstrating our unwavering commitment to protecting, preserving and enjoying our treasured National Parks, Monuments and other outdoor public spaces.

Guideline #1 – Nuestros (Our) National Parks belong to all Americans. If we all believe this to be true, then we must be ready and willing to share and sacrifice in their protection, their preservation and how we use and enjoy them too. Regardless of the length of the current government shutdown, the old paradigm of expecting government to do it all is simply unrealistic. If we truly value our National, State, Regional and local parks, we must act in partnership with park leaders and seek opportunities to become park ambassadors, park champions and park volunteers.

Guideline #2 - The principles of "Leave No Trace" shall be learned, appreciated, modeled and are considered a core value and touchstone of our Latino Outdoors outings core curriculum. The old adage "take only photos, leave only footprints" doesn't relieve us from our responsibility to be respectful of the fragile environment of a Redwood forest, lead our groups around instead of through a fragile meadow, speak in quiet voices so that others might enjoy the serenity of a dimming sunset across the desert floor or pack-out trash that our groups (or others) may generate during an outing. Parks that do remain open during the current shutdown will be operating on skeleton crews -- a handful of patrol rangers and first-responder staff and possibly a small group of volunteers to help with trash removal and visitor services. So, people planning to visit parks during the current shutdown are encouraged to enjoy the park responsibly, stay on marked roads and trails and always have a plan in the event of an accident or unforeseen emergency.

Guideline #3 – Be aware, be prepared, and consider alternative destinations for outings and always model “good hiker/camper” behavior. As outings leaders, it is our responsibility to check on the availability and status of the park we are planning to visit. But during the shutdown, many National Park websites are displaying warnings that their sites are not being updated and offer no suggestions for finding current information. So, we recommend that our outings leaders take initiative and use creativity in contacting local NPS friends’ organizations, Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Bureaus to obtain the most current information on park closures, available services and hours of operation. If you find that the National Park you had planned to visit is closed, offers limited services or is already heavily impacted by visitors, then we encourage outings leaders to consider visiting a nearby State, Regional or County park as an alternative destination.

Lastly, in the days and weeks ahead, we at LO will be encouraging our staff, volunteers, and supporters to work alongside other outdoor recreation organizations, park agencies and industry leaders to provide needed outdoor education, awareness and new opportunities to better serve and care for our National Parks.

Respectfully,

Luis Villa, Executive Director
Latino Outdoors

Richard A. Rojas Sr., Chairperson
Latino Outdoors Advisory Committee

“Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together ... all things connect.” —Chief Seattle