

Angler Workshop Report

Improving equity and participation in recreational fishing in Colorado



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Human Dimensions of Natural Resources
May 2026

THE WORKSHOP



On February 9, 2026 we held a workshop that brought together 13 participants from state agencies, nonprofits, community organizations, and recreation stakeholders to discuss barriers and opportunities related to increasing participation in recreational fishing among women and other underrepresented communities in Colorado. Discussions were informed by findings from three interconnected research projects focused on Latino anglers, women anglers, and a state-wide survey of anglers of minoritized identities.

Workshop attendees worked in groups to identify barriers and solutions to inclusivity and access. Across groups, participants emphasized that barriers to participation are deeply interconnected, spanning structural, cultural, economic, informational, and institutional dimensions. Participants also identified collaborative and community-centered solutions that could improve long-term access and belonging.



Photo by Anna Lavoie

KEY BARRIERS

1. Structural and Institutional Barriers

Participants repeatedly identified institutional complexity and limited organizational capacity as major barriers. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) regulations, licensing systems, and informational materials were described as difficult to navigate, particularly for first-time participants, immigrants, and individuals unfamiliar with outdoor recreation systems. One participant noted that “you need a PhD to understand the regulations”, reflecting widespread frustration with technical language, fragmented information, and inaccessible websites.

Additional institutional barriers included:

- Limited multilingual resources and lack of Spanish-language materials.
- Complicated licensing systems and invasive documentation requirements, including concerns about social security number requests.
- Barriers for undocumented immigrants seeking access to licenses.
- Limited staff time and organizational “people power.”
- Insufficient long-term funding for outreach and engagement programs.
- Limited transportation access to fishing areas and public lands.
- Inadequate investment in nearby fishing locations and concerns about environmental quality and water pollution.

Participants also noted that public lands and recreation systems often lack culturally responsive outreach and education, especially regarding land ownership, regulations, signage, and enforcement practices.



Photo by Anna Lavoie

2. Cultural Exclusion, Representation, and Sense of Belonging

One of the strongest themes across all groups involved cultural exclusion and lack of representation. Participants described fishing and hunting as culturally coded as activities primarily for white men, which contributes to feelings of exclusion among women, BIPOC communities, immigrants, and younger participants.

Key concerns included:

- Lack of representation of women and non-white anglers in advertising, media, and leadership positions.
- Gender stereotypes and the normalization of sexism in outdoor recreation spaces (e.g., the “hey little darlin’ syndrome” referenced by one participant).
- Racial stigmas and surveillance experienced by BIPOC participants in outdoor spaces.
- Fear of law enforcement and concerns about safety, especially under the current political climate.
- Feelings of discomfort, unwelcome treatment, and lack of belonging on public lands.

- Cultural norms that discourage participation or frame fishing as “not for us.”

Participants emphasized that these barriers are not simply informational, but relational and emotional, affecting whether individuals feel safe, represented, and entitled to participate in outdoor recreation.

Gender stereotypes in outdoor recreation spaces is an issue as one participant stated, “it’s the ‘hey little darlin’ syndrome.”

3. Lack of Access to Knowledge, Mentorship, and Social Networks

Many participants emphasized that underrepresented communities often lack opportunities to learn how to begin fishing, where to go, or how to connect with others. Barriers included:

- Lack of beginner and novice-oriented programs.
- Limited mentorship opportunities and community champions.
- Lack of networking opportunities and collaborative community events.

- Limited awareness of fishing opportunities among younger generations.
- Lack of outreach through culturally relevant spaces and events.

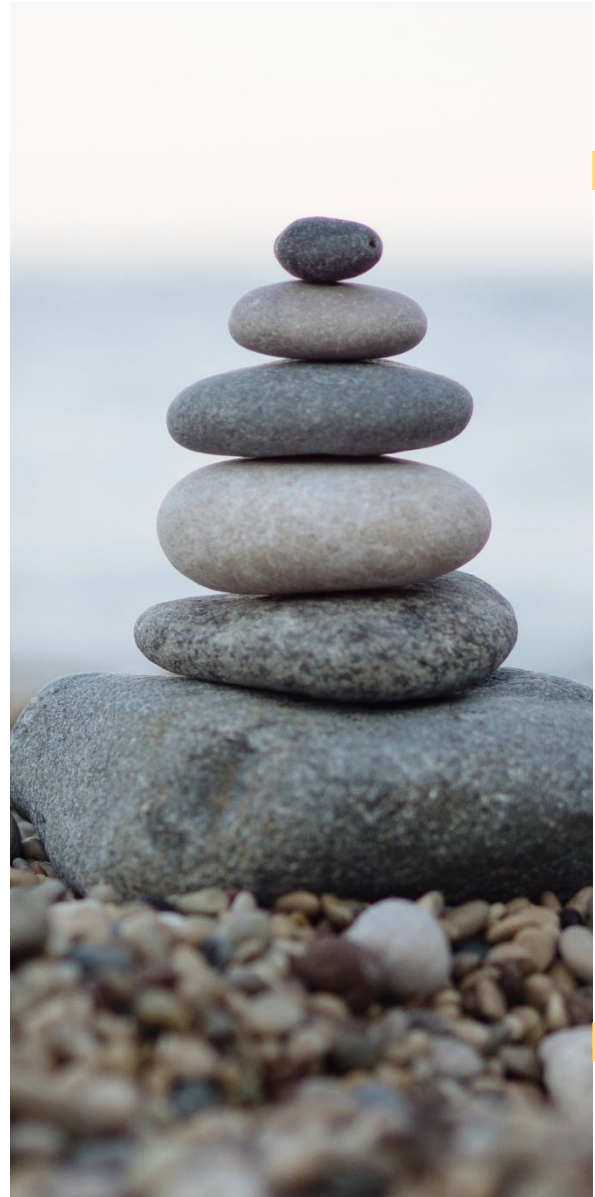
Participants noted that access to fishing is often dependent on social connections and informal knowledge sharing, which creates inequities for newcomers and historically excluded groups.

4. Economic Constraints

Economic barriers were another major theme. Participants identified:

- Costs of licenses, equipment, clothing, and transportation.
- Socioeconomic inequalities limiting leisure time and participation.
- Lack of affordable access to quality fishing gear.
- Limited time available for volunteering or participating in programs.

Participants also emphasized that younger people and families may face compounded economic barriers that limit long-term participation.



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KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

1. Collaboration and Long-Term Partnerships

The most consistently emphasized solution was collaboration across agencies, nonprofits, community organizations, and underrepresented communities themselves.

Participants stressed that meaningful inclusion requires long-term, relationship-based partnerships rather than short-term outreach efforts.

Participants emphasized:

- Formalized partnerships between agencies, nonprofits, and private organizations.
- Collaboration grounded in trust and community relationships.
- Multi-generational and long-term approaches to engagement and funding.
- Expanding partnerships beyond traditional fishing organizations to include broader community-based groups.

Several participants highlighted the importance of working with organizations already trusted within

underrepresented communities, such as Colorado Treks and culturally specific organizations.

2. Representation and Culturally Relevant Outreach

Participants emphasized the need to reshape how fishing is represented publicly. Suggested strategies included:

- Increasing representation of women and BIPOC anglers in advertisements, media, and outdoor publications.
- Highlighting leaders and mentors from underrepresented communities.
- Developing culturally relevant recruitment strategies by attending underrepresented community-centered events.
- Creating media campaigns and storytelling efforts that normalize diverse participation in fishing and outdoor recreation.

One participant suggested creating a documentary film glamorizing women in the community fishing, like *A River Runs through It* reboot, balanced with recreation.

3. Expanding Access through Education and Mentorship

Participants identified mentorship and beginner-oriented programming as critical opportunities. Suggested actions included:

- Expanding fishing clinics and introductory learning experiences.
- Creating mentorship networks and compensating community mentors.
- Developing listservs and communication systems for outdoor events and clinics.
- Offering family-oriented and community-centered programming.
- Improving multilingual educational materials and signage.

Participants stressed that successful recruitment alone is insufficient without retention strategies that build confidence, relationships, and belonging.

4. Reducing Economic and Material Barriers

Participants proposed several strategies to reduce financial barriers:

- Creating gear lending libraries and equipment loan programs.

- Partnering with outdoor brands for gear donations.
- Establishing progressive or low-cost permit systems, including learner permits.
- Improving public transportation access to parks and fishing locations.
- Maintaining accessible, nearby, and environmentally healthy fishing areas.

One participant suggested public libraries as ideal locations for community-based gear libraries because libraries are trusted and accessible public spaces.



Photo by Anna Lavoie

5. Institutional Change and Equity Training

Participants also highlighted the need for broader institutional and cultural transformation within outdoor recreation systems. Recommendations included:

- Mandatory DEI and de-escalation training for law enforcement and park personnel.
- Greater attention to environmental justice and equitable access to clean water and quality recreation areas.
- Policies that explicitly address discrimination, exclusion, and safety concerns.
- Better evaluation metrics and accountability for inclusion initiatives.

Participants emphasized that inclusion efforts must move beyond recruitment to address systemic inequities, discrimination, and environmental conditions that shape participation.



Photo by Anna Lavoie

6. *Connecting With Nature*

Lastly, participants expressed the general sense and importance of connecting with nature. Being outdoors by the water fishing or just sitting there allows people to escape from daily stress and feel a sense of connection to a higher power, and everyone deserves to have access to this. One participant felt the need for people to re-establish, and heal their relationships with the land and water, and heal themselves. He stated, “We are nature, we're not engaging with nature, you fall in love with self”. Participants expressed the importance of bringing more youth outdoors to experience the healing effect of nature and have this connection early on in life, especially in an era technological domination and poor cognitive development in youth.

***“We are nature, we're not
engaging with nature, you fall in
love with self”***



OVERALL OUTCOMES

Across discussions, participants consistently framed inclusive angling not simply as a recreation issue, but as a broader issue of equity, belonging, environmental justice, and community wellbeing. Participants emphasized that fishing can foster healing, connection, identity, and relationships with nature, but only when individuals feel safe, welcomed, and supported.

The workshop participants also highlighted strong enthusiasm for continued collaboration and networking. All participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to connect across organizations and sectors, suggesting that networking and relationship-building itself was one of the workshop’s most valuable outcomes. However, the group recognized that more representation from other organizations was, and is, greatly needed. We hope this workshop and report inspires communities of practitioners and anglers to continue to make recreational fishing more inclusive.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the workshop attendees for their time and insight. We thank Michael Quartuch of Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and Arianna Basto and Angela Cindy Emefa Mensah, who played integral roles in a research program on anglers between 2022 and 2025 that informed this workshop. We also thank the funders and supporters of this workshop including the U.S. BLM and Colorado State University.



Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Disclaimer: Any opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed here are those of the authors and workshop participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of Colorado State University.

Recommended Citation: Lavoie, A. and Teumer, M. 2026. Angler Workshop Report: Improving Equity and Participation in Recreational Fishing in Colorado. Colorado State University.