

PRESS RELEASE

All work, no perks for Hispanic forest labor in the US

Study examines ethnic differences in job quality among forest workers

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Forest management is hard work in the United States, but it is even tougher if you are Hispanic. According to Cassandra Moseley, director of the ecosystem workforce program at the Institute for Sustainable Environment, University of Oregon, Hispanics form a disproportionately large part of the forest restoration and maintenance workforce, particularly the labor-intensive workforce. They are also more likely than whites to work seasonally, with less job security, away from home, and with no health insurance. Her findings¹ are published in the latest issue of *Policy Sciences*, a Springer publication.

Moseley's study compares the working conditions of white and Hispanic forest workers from 131 businesses that contracted with six national US forests between 1998 and 2002 - Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest in Colorado, Bitterroot in Montana, Coconino in Arizona, Deschutes in Oregon, Nantahala in North Carolina and Willamette in Oregon.

The author reviewed the available literature on ethnicity and job quality and interviewed the owners or managers of the contracting companies. The contractors were asked about the type of work they perform, where they work, how far they typically travel to work, how many people they employ, the ethnicity of their workforce, and benefits they provide to employees.

Moseley found that of the 5,636 forest workers, 53% were white, 42% Hispanic, and 5% from other ethnic origins, during the high season. In the low season, 62% of workers were white, 30% Hispanic and 7% other.

When the 131 contractors were split according to the type of work they perform, 36 were labor-intensive (physically demanding tasks with no machinery), 72 equipment-intensive (tasks that involve expensive equipment such as road maintenance and stream restoration), and 23 technical (tasks that require considerable training and skill). Moseley found that Hispanics were more likely to work for labor-intensive companies whereas whites were more likely to work for equipment-intensive companies.

In terms of job quality, 67% of high season workers were employed by companies that work away from home more than 75% of the time, with both white (59%) and Hispanic (77%) workers more likely than not to work away from home. In addition, 64% of Hispanics worked for companies that offered no health insurance compared with only 21% of white workers.

Overall, Moseley noted that, although Hispanics seemed to have more onerous jobs with fewer benefits, there were very few high quality jobs in the forest sector in the US, regardless of ethnicity.

1. Moseley C (2006). Ethnic differences in job quality among contract forest workers on six national forests. *Policy Sciences*; 39:113-133.

Article is available to journalists as a pdf.

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