Understanding the Traditions and Experiences of African American Hunters

Ezekiel Adesawe
eadesaw@clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses

Part of the Leisure Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Adesawe, Ezekiel, "Understanding the Traditions and Experiences of African American Hunters" (2024). All Theses. 4281.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/4281

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.
UNDERSTANDING THE TRADITIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN HUNTERS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfilment
Of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Science
Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management

By
Ezekiel Adesawe
May 2024

Accepted by:
Dr. Aby Sène-Harper, Committee Chair
Dr Elizabeth Baldwin
Dr Harrison Pinckney IV
ABSTRACT

Hunting is a significant cultural, economic, and wildlife management activity in the United States. However, African Americans remain underrepresented among hunters, with limited research to understand their perspectives and experiences. Hence, this study employed an exploratory focus group method design to profile African American hunters' real and perceived experiences, traditions, and needs. The interviews were conducted with 67 African American hunters from all regions across the country. The interview data were analyzed through thematic coding to construct key themes. Key findings from this study revealed that hunting is a strong tradition within African American communities that has been passed down through generations. Private land is preferred for hunting over public land, yet access to private land among African American hunters remains limited. Additionally, hunting serves multiple purposes other than recreation. For many of the participants, joining hunting clubs helped them buy or lease land that could be used for their hunting activities. Recommendations include federal and state-level fish and wildlife agencies working closely with organizations and non-profits serving African American hunters to run hunting programs. In addition, there is the need to increase land access for African American hunters, establish mentorship programs, and develop outreach initiatives for youth. Integrating hunting and wildlife education into school curricula, funding clubs and outdoor programs for minorities, and implementing programs to combat stereotypes are also crucial steps.
DEDICATION

To my dearest Rachael, thank you for your unwavering support. Thank you for standing by my side, cheering me on, and celebrating every milestone together. I am deeply grateful for your love, understanding, and unwavering faith in me.

To my parents, your investment and prayers have gotten me this far. Thank you!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to first acknowledge my advisor, Dr Aby Sene-Harper, for your guidance and support during my graduate school journey at Clemson University. You made it easy and enjoyable for me. Throughout my program, you proved to be more than my academic research advisor. You played the role of a true role model, mentor, and my true African aunty. I cannot thank you enough for your investment in me.

I would also like to acknowledge my thesis committee heartily, Dr Elizabeth Baldwin and Dr Harrison P. Pinckney IV. Thank you for believing in me and pushing me toward making the best of this project. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr Corliss Outley for your kind wisdom and insight. Also, thank you, Ms. Marian Robinson, for the good and memorable times. Cameron Smith, you’re indeed a brother, thank you. Alayna Schmidt, thank you for your friendship. Olalekan Ajayi, my Nigerian brother, I appreciate you dearly. Special appreciation to Dr Jeffrey Hallo, Dr Bob Powell, Dr Machlis Gary, Dr Matthew Brownlee, Dr Ryan Gagnon, Dr Iryna Sharaievska, Prof. Phil Gaines, Dr Stephen Lewis and Dr Felipe Tobar.

Lastly, I would like to thank the entire faculty and graduate students of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at Clemson University for making my time at Clemson University worthwhile.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ............................................................................................................................... 2  
**DEDICATION** ............................................................................................................................ 3  
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** ............................................................................................................. 4  
**CHAPTER ONE** .......................................................................................................................... 8  
1.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 8  
1.2 Problem statement .............................................................................................................. 10  
1.3 Objective ............................................................................................................................ 10  
1.4 Research questions ............................................................................................................. 10  
**CHAPTER TWO** ......................................................................................................................... 12  
2.1 The role of hunting in wildlife conservation ................................................................. 12  
2.2 History of African American hunting ............................................................................. 16  
   2.2.1 Pre-Emancipation Period prior to 1863 ................................................................. 16  
   2.2.2 Post-Emancipation, after 1863 ................................................................................. 17  
2.3 African American hunting constraint ............................................................................ 18  
2.4 African American hunters’ access to land ..................................................................... 21  
**CHAPTER THREE** ..................................................................................................................... 25  
3.0 Research Methods ............................................................................................................... 25  
3.1 Study design ....................................................................................................................... 25  
3.2 Study population and sampling strategy ......................................................................... 26  
3.3 Data collection and analysis ............................................................................................ 27  
3.4 Reflexivity and validity ..................................................................................................... 28  
**CHAPTER FOUR** ....................................................................................................................... 30  
4.0 Results ................................................................................................................................. 30  
4.1 Family traditions among African Americans sustain hunting participation ............ 30
4.2 Land loss continues to affect African American hunting participation. ............. 33

4.3 Opportunities exist for African American participation in hunting.................. 35

4.4 Several challenges limit participation in hunting for African Americans .......... 38

4.5 African Americans provides programs to increase hunting participation. ......... 41

CHAPTER FIVE .......................................................................................................................... 44

5.1 Discussion ...................................................................................................................... 44

5.2 Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 48

5.3 Limitations and future studies .................................................................................... 48

References ............................................................................................................................... 50
List of Tables

Table 1: The year-to-year participation in hunting. ................................................................. 9
Table 2: The year-to-year expenditure from hunting............................................................... 14
Table 3: Location and Participation in Focus Groups ......................................................... 27
Table 4: Where African Americans hunt for game ................................................................. 33
CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

Unlike many North American demographics, little scientifically rigorous or defendable data (qualitative or quantitative) has been collected capable of reliably documenting the traditions and experiences of African American hunters across many states in the US. Consequently, natural resource management agencies and conservation non-governmental organizations (NGO) have been chronically ill-equipped to deliver programs, policies, practices, and engagement points to the African American hunting community.

Though many past hunting-related research projects have included African Americans as a cohort in sample populations, these efforts have proven too generalized to capture the critical nuance behind their traditions, needs, and experiences, therefore, they have failed to provide actionable and effective recommendations for agencies and stakeholder organizations serving and engaging diverse populations.

Also, the scarcity of literature on the perspective and traditions of African American hunters can be attributed to a lack of research attention dedicated to this topic; this may be due to the low record of African American hunters. Reports have shown that the active hunting population in the United States is currently lacking representation from African Americans (You need to cite those reports here). This raises the question about the reasons for the underrepresentation of African American in hunting activities today. Yet African Americans have had a long history of hunting in their communities. In fact, scholars have written that during the colonial period through the reconstruction era, African Americans engaged in hunting to support their families and to get away from the rigorous workload they had to go through during the day. (Giltner, 2008, Meyers et al., 2020).
In the 2016 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report on wildlife and hunting in the US, the agency found that 11.5 million Americans hunted at least once in 2016. Of those hunters, 11.1 million, 96% were white and 3% were Hispanic. African American and Asians made up most of the remaining 1%, but at levels too low to pinpoint participation rates. (US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2016). However, in the latest National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (FHWAR) by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 2023, out of 14.4 million hunters across the country in 2022, 1.5 million of them were African American. While there seem to be an increase due to the methodological changes and expanded categories of participants, comparison between the latest survey and other years is not appropriate. Hence, the 2022 survey will be treated as a unique survey (US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2023).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>African American hunters</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>14.1 million</td>
<td>294000</td>
<td>2.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>14 million</td>
<td>300000</td>
<td>2.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>13 million</td>
<td>300000</td>
<td>2.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>12.5 million</td>
<td>200000</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>13.7 million</td>
<td>400000</td>
<td>2.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>11.5 million</td>
<td>Too low to report</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2022</td>
<td>14.4 million</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
<td>10.42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The year-to-year participation in hunting.

To address the additional activities beyond hunting allowed in the 2022 survey, this study will address the probable percentage of African American hunters from the data table 1. The percentage of African American participation grew each year, even if underrepresented, and following the trend may be closer to over 3.6% for 2022 if one grows the 2011 data by 20%, the
growth rate from 2006. 2016 data went down for all groups and is left out. In 2022 the 10.42% data provided is still underrepresenting African Americans that made up 13.6 % of the US population in 2022 (US Census). This research seeks to collect relevant data to inform strategies for growing this percentage closer to a representative part of the US population. Other trends, like the barriers still present for young people and women are not addressed in this study, but may benefit from findings, nonetheless.

1.2 Problem statement

Despite increasing efforts by state and federal agencies, conservation NGOs, and outdoor industries to engage African Americans in hunting, their recorded participation remain disproportionately low based on the 2022 findings. This is due to a lack of empirical data about the real and perceived experiences of African American hunters, and strategies to address challenges and barriers to hunting participation. While previous research projects have included African Americans in their sample populations, they have failed to capture the critical nuances behind the needs, experiences, and perspectives of African American hunters. As a result, programs may not fully understand and therefore be able to address the needs, and thus reduce barriers to increase participation in hunting by African Americans.

1.3 Objective

This exploratory focus group study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on African American hunters in the United States. In addition, the result from this study will be used to design a nationwide survey examining the hunting experiences of African Americans.

1.4 Research questions

The purpose of this study is to document the traditions, experiences, and needs of African American hunters, guided by the following research questions:
What are the African American hunting traditions and experiences today?

How does access to land open to hunting shape their hunting experience?

What are their aspirations in maintaining these traditions?

In the following section, I present the literature review in which I discuss critical contributions hunting management has made to wildlife conservation, the historical context of African American hunting tradition, and strategies to increase participation by the African American hunting community. This is followed by the method section, where I present the results from the study. In the last chapter, I make recommendations to help increase African American hunting participation and provide suggestions for future studies.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

2.1 The role of hunting in wildlife conservation

In the United States wildlife is a public common, and the first game wardens were appointed in 1850. However, shortly after, the first laws banning commercial hunting were put in place (Zaslovsy, 1986), the ethic of hunting by citizens as a part of the identity of Americans takes roots from this period, even though challenged as a form of colonialism that eliminated the Indigenous people from their lands. (Eichler, 2018; Herman, 2016). Many early conservation leaders were hunters and their awareness of the rapid losses of species led to wildlife laws that undergird conservation programs and policies today. The first refuge for waterfowl was Pelican Island in 1903 and the Lacy Act of 1900 protected and still protects wildlife from illegal poaching to name a few (Zaslovsy, 1986). The early colonial period was one of perceived endless abundance. Some hunting and trapping took place to sell, and some for sport. Uncontrolled and unrestricted killing was the main driver of certain species’ decline and disappearance (Heffelfinger et al., 2013), and laws and regulations that started with the Lacy Act and followed with many more including legislation to support wildlife conservation from the sale of ammunition and firearms like the Pittman-Robertson Act. Once hunting was regulated, populations of these animals were able to recover, and hunting became part of a successful system of wildlife conservation (Heffelfinger et al., 2013). Therefore, hunters are a crucial part in managing North American wildlife. Regulated hunting not only provides funding and support, but it is also an effective mechanism to control the population of some animals.

Studies show that when large mammal populations are too abundant for habitat, reproduction decreases and mortality increases because of intra-specific competition for resources.
(Carpenter & McCullough, 1980). Also, over-abundant big game populations can alter the habitat to the detriment of many other sympatric species (Horsley et al., 2003). Therefore, population reductions or maintenance at appropriate levels are a clear case of hunters acting as partners in wildlife management. (Heffelfinger et al., 2013).

One noteworthy contribution of hunting to wildlife conservation is the financial support that helps fund conservation efforts. In 2006, the U.S. state wildlife agencies received $233 million from taxes collected on hunting, fishing, and shooting purchases, which were specifically directed toward conservation efforts (Southwick & Allen, 2010). Combined with funds from the sale of hunting licenses ($612 million) and private donations by hunters for conservation efforts ($313 million), the total hunter-based contributions were $1.2 billion dollars in 2006 alone (Southwick & Allen, 2010). To give perspective to this significant financial support, the excise tax on hunting, fishing, and shooting equipment, along with funds from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, fund an average of 75% of the wildlife agencies’ annual budget in the U.S. (Scott et al., 1999). State wildlife agencies receive 60% of their funding from sources tied to hunting and fishing, yet only 4% of the public hunts and 17% engage in fishing. By contrast, 36% of the U.S. public engages in wildlife watching. (National Wildlife Federation; U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2022). In table 2 below, the US Fish and Wildlife National Survey showed that a total of $45.2 billion was spent on hunting and other related activity in the US in 2022. This is an increase from $26.2 billion in 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>14.1 million</td>
<td>$12.3 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>14 million</td>
<td>$20.6 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>13 million</td>
<td>$20.6 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Expenditure</td>
<td>Revenue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>12.5 million</td>
<td>$22.9 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>13.7 million</td>
<td>$33.7 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>11.5 million</td>
<td>$26.2 billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>14.4 million</td>
<td>$45.2 billion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The year-to-year expenditure from hunting. Source: USFW National Survey

Interestingly, one of the most important financial contributions to wildlife conservation made by hunters and anglers in North America is the maintenance of a large force of law enforcement officers. Regulated hunting is only regulated if the laws are obeyed (Heffelfinger et al., 2013). Surveys consistently show that about 50% of hunters and anglers have had recent contact with these enforcement personnel in the field and hold them in extremely high regard (Duda, Bissell, & Young, 1998).

Among other contributions hunting has made to wildlife conservation is the population restoration claim. The restoration of wildlife populations across North America is one of the greatest wildlife success stories in the history of conservation. Some species like the American bison, wild turkey, striped bass, Atlantic salmon among others that were over-exploited before the development and implementation of the North American Model have been restored (Mahoney & Geist, 2019b, Heffelfinger et al., 2013).

Mahoney and Geist (2019) described the North American Model as a conceptual framework that guides the conservation and management of wildlife in North America. They describe the model as having two foundational tenets; that fish and wildlife in North America are reserved for the non-commercial use of individuals hunters and anglers. The second guiding principle states that fish and wildlife be managed in such a way that their populations will be sustained at optimal levels forever. These two tenets serve as a guide to the seven principles of the model. They are that wildlife resources are a public trust, markets for game are eliminated,
allocation of wildlife is by law, wildlife can be killed only for a legitimate purpose, wildlife is considered an international resource, science is the proper tool to discharge wildlife policy and democracy of hunting is standard. However, there’s been criticism about how the model is not inclusive enough for diversity among wildlife species or stakeholders (Peterson & Nelson, 2016b).

Land management agencies manage wildlife habitat on millions of acres of federal land. In addition, many states and provinces have also purchased wildlife habitats with the proceeds from hunting licenses and taxes on hunting, fishing and shooting equipment (Heffelfinger et al., 2013). This says a lot about how hunting helps in the acquisition, protection, restoration, and enhancement of land. During a 5-year period (2005–2009) in the US $58.5 million dollars from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration funds were apportioned to the states for the acquisition of more than 12.2 million acres of wildlife habitat (USFWS, 2010).

In addition, wildlife conservation organizations such as Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wildlife Habitat Canada, Mule Deer Foundation, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Canadian Wildlife Federation, Pheasants Forever, the Wild Sheep Foundation and a myriad of state and provincial wildlife organizations have used private donations to purchase land or conservation easements on large tracts of wildlife habitat. Most of these acreages are purchased with game animals in mind, but wetlands acquired for waterfowl, forests purchased for deer and grasslands preserved for quail and pronghorn have benefitted countless nongame and endangered species that rely on those habitat associations (Heffelfinger et al., 2013).

Reports have shown that hunting has made immense contributions to research. In the USA, about $57 million was apportioned in 2009 to state wildlife agencies from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration program for conducting more than 10,000 wildlife research projects (USFWS, 2010). Another significant contribution is hunter education programs. They are
important to wildlife conservation because unsafe or illegal acts by a few hunters can cast all hunters in a bad light and erode public support (Mahoney & Geist, 2019). North America has an incredible volunteer-driven network of hunter education programs delivering structured coursework on wildlife management, hunter ethics, firearms safety, and hunting techniques. Each year, about 650,000 hunters are trained by this volunteer hunter education instructor force of more than 70,000 (Wayne East, IHEA, personal communication, 2010).

It’s important to note the role that African American hunters play in contributing to conservation efforts in the US. African American communities have a rich tradition of hunting for sustenance, with a deep connection to the land and its resources. These traditions have often coexisted harmoniously with principles of conservation, emphasizing the responsible use of natural resources. However, African American hunters have often been excluded from mainstream narratives about conservation, leading to a lack of recognition for their commitment to sustainable practices (Adams, 2010).

2.2 History of African American hunting

2.2.1 Pre-Emancipation Period prior to 1863

Early historical records are filled with accounts of hunting among African Americans. A closer examination reveals that the perspective of African Americans on hunting differed significantly from that of the elite white population (Meyers et al., 2020). Throughout history, African Americans relied on independent economic pursuits like hunting to endure the hardships of enslavement. They safeguarded these activities vigorously and resisted any attempts to strip them of this source of sustenance. Even after emancipation, the traditions of hunting and the use of loyal hunting dogs persisted among African Americans (Giltner, 2008).

Since the early colonial era, records indicate that both African American, Anglo American...
and Native Americans engaged in hunting and fishing for various purposes, be it sustenance, trade, or leisure (Herman, 2014). For individuals of these races, participation in the world of sportsmanship held a significant place in defining their racial and social status (Xiao et al., 2021). Wealthy white individuals demonstrated their affluence and social standing by their ability to hunt and fish without constraints, employ specific methods and equipment, and enlist the services of African American laborers for their excursions (Herman, 2014). For them, hunting was purely a leisurely pursuit devoid of the necessity that drove African American hunters (Giltner, 2008). For Native Americans, hunting was not only to secure food, and hides for clothing and other uses, but as recreation and sport (Graham, 2020; Stick, 2015).

Prior to emancipation, hunting held significant meaning for African Americans, serving as a vivid symbol of economic, cultural, and spatial separation from white society. It was emblematic of their struggle for autonomy over their own lives and livelihoods. Beyond this symbolism, hunting also became a practical means of survival, providing essential sustenance and income (Between the Waters, 2016). Early accounts reveal that for African Americans, hunting as a sport or leisure activity was, at most, a secondary concern (Vayer et al., 2021). Instead, it played crucial roles such as ensuring their ability to feed themselves when access to adequate food was limited, instilling a sense of pride through self-sufficiency in a system designed to maintain their dependence, and facilitating market activities, both modest and sophisticated, that supplied enslaved individuals and their families with much-needed cash and goods (Giltner, 2008 & Between the Waters, 2016).

2.2.2 Post-Emancipation, after 1863

In the wake of Emancipation, hunting and fishing emerged as natural solutions to the upheaval and challenges that accompanied the transition. Many newly liberated African
Americans, faced with limited employment opportunities, a lack of income and often unwilling to return to work for their former masters, turned to fishing and hunting as essential means of subsistence (Moore, 2021).

During the era of slavery, individual masters and local and state governments had imposed prohibitions on slaves' ownership of weapons suitable for hunting and fishing. However, African Americans found ways to obtain firearms despite these restrictions (Between the Waters, 2016). Following the Civil War, the federal government played a role by making numerous firearms available and selling surplus firearms to anyone who could afford them. This resulted in the distribution of many military-grade and outdated firearms into the hands of African Americans (Giltner, 2008, Gosalvez, 2020). However, it was still a challenge for some African Americans to acquire and maintain firearms; they resorted to many sporting methods that did not involve guns, like the use of dog trapping techniques, among others. In fact, the use of dogs became one of the most cherished traditions among African Americans (Gohdes, 1967).

By the 1920s, decades of vigorous public complaints from this coalition of elites' interests about African Americans’ hunting and fishing had secured several important victories (Between the Waters, 2016). With the explosion of sporting tourism and the rise of a national conservation movement, sportsmen had begun to accept limits on hunting and fishing as necessary measures to stop abuses by immoderate lower-class sportsmen (Borunda, 2021). By the beginning of the Jim Crow era, elites across the country agreed that failure to control African Americans lay at the heart of the economic, social, and sporting problems of some states. This ushered in the period of a wide-ranging legislative attack on African Americans’ right to hunt and fish (Giltner, 2008).

2.3 African American hunting constraint

As soon as the Civil War ended, there were complaints about labor irregularity that cited
hunting and fishing as a contributing cause. What this meant was that African Americans could avoid working for their former masters, and if they worked, it was on their own terms of availability. For employers, African Americans’ subsistence activities became sources of idleness and inefficiency (Herman, 2014). On the other hand, for African Americans, hunting and fishing brought some measures of economic and physical independence (Giltner, 2008).

Over time, the cacophony of voices raised against African Americans’ engagement in hunting and fishing, which led to labor shortage, would lead to the adoption of widespread and comprehensive legislative measures that left African Americans increasingly restricted in their use of such cultural traditions as a way of subsisting, or even prospering, apart from agricultural labor in the service of their former masters (Herman, 2014, Gosalvez, 2020).

White sportsmen offered loud and frequent objections to African Americans’ sporting behavior in the South between Emancipation and the 1920s, a period that began with former slaves enjoying more ready access to the South’s natural environment and ended with a coalition of white interests employing fears about lost racial control and negative characterizations of African Americans’ sporting behavior to impose greater regulation of hunting and fishing (Giltner, 2008). The attacks intensified in the late nineteenth century and peaked in the early twentieth century, when sportsmen, landowners, labor lords, and lawmakers exploited perceived connections between hunting and fishing and the race problem to establish effective state-level fish and game regulations (Meyers et al., 2020, Gosalvez, 2020).

Therefore, apart from the problem of obtaining the time, equipment, and financial resources to hunt and fish effectively even after emancipation (Meyers et al., 2020), game restrictions were introduced to limit the growing activities of African Americans who preferred hunting to work for their former employers (Gosalvez, 2020). White Southerners created barriers such as the various
“black codes” implemented across the South in 1866 (Giltner, 2008). Prohibitions against gun ownership were added to laws that regulated contract-breaking, restricted mobility, established apprenticeship systems, cracked down on vagrancy, and required African Americans to show proof of employment, all as attempts to return former slaves to semi-servitude (Meyers et al., 2020). In some Southern states, African Americans even needed licenses to hunt and fish, which their white counterparts didn’t need (Giltner, 2008).

Decades later, Lee (1972 in Philipp, 1995) reported that certain leisure activities and locations were labeled as either "White" or "Black." This kind of information is understood by members of the African-American community, even if it is not openly discussed (Bobo, 1987 in Philipp, 1995). Other studies have found that African Americans, even in integrated neighborhoods, maintained a distinct set of leisure activities (Schuman & Hatchett, 1974 in Philipp, 1995), and were underrepresented in wildland recreation (Washburne, 1978 in Philipp, 1995).

Although cultural differences abound such that African Americans do not find what is appealing to other races in the United States (Edwards, 1981; Philipp, 1995), studies have also shown that there are similarities in leisure preferences among Americans regardless of color (Floyd et al., 1994; Philipp, 1995). Hunting is one of those. However, according to West (1989), racial differences in leisure participation became a prominent topic of discussion, as many African Americans felt uncomfortable or unwelcome in some regional parks in the south (Pinckney et al., 2024). Blahna and Black (1992) also discovered that perceived discrimination was a major deterrent to leisure participation among African Americans. Philipp (1993) has further explored this issue and suggested that discrimination could play a significant role in shaping the travel preferences and choices of African Americans in selecting tourism destinations, interests, and
If we examine African Americans specifically, racial inequality remains a significant social problem in the U.S., even though equal opportunity initiatives born out of the Civil Rights era have increased socioeconomic mobility among African Americans and has contributed to a substantial African-American middle class (Shinew et al., 2004). Yet despite such socioeconomic advances, research indicates that African Americans lag in many quality-of-life indices and that African Americans continue to experience overt and symbolic forms of racism and discrimination. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to believe that race also matters in many African American leisure preferences, choices and behaviors (Philipp, 1999). Regrettably, the literature on recreation and leisure has not adequately explored and documented how years of continued discrimination and suppression have led to the formation of African American leisure preferences and participation patterns (Sène-Harper, Mowatt & Floyd, 2022; Pinckney et al., 2024). In fact, limited access and loss of lands for hunting are results of the systemic exclusion of African Americans from hunting (Scott & Lee, 2018).

### 2.4 African American hunters’ access to land

On May 20, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Homestead Act (Anderson, 2011; Friedfeld, 2021) to provide citizen, who had never borne arms against the U.S. government to claim 160 acres of land. Claimants were required to live on and cultivate the land. After five years on the land, they are entitled to the property for a small registration fee (Shanks, 2005; National Archives, 2022). In 76-year, 3 million applications were recorded and over 1.5 million households received titles to the 270 million acres of land. While the act was praised for aiding a remarkable transfer of wealth and asset to Americans (Shanks, 2005 & Anderson, 2011). The act made it possible for poor families to create a better life for the next generation. Not only were crops
produced and sold for money, but the land itself could increase in value as areas developed (Shannon, 1936).

However, the act had its downsides because it was framed ambiguously that it to invite fraud, and early modifications by Congress only compounded the problem. Most of the land went to speculators, ranchers, miners, lumbermen, and railroads. Of some 500 million acres dispersed by the General Land Office between 1862 and 1904, only 80 million acres went to homesteaders. Indeed, small farmers acquired more land under the Homestead Act in the 20th century than in the 19th (National Archives, 2022).

For African Americans, they were eligible to participate but faced challenges that prevented most of them from owning properties as some of them who submitted preliminary entries were intimidated into leaving their lands (Shanks, 2005). In addition, the act was a participant-centered policy, requiring each homesteader to be solely responsible for developing their land (Shannon, 1936) and many African American at the time were extremely poor and could not afford the resources to develop lands that were mostly swamp lands and pine trees (Shanks, 2005).

Due to the failure of the Homestead Act, Congress passed the Southern Homestead Act in 1866 to primarily support formerly enslaved Black people who did not have properties. 46 million acres of public land in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi were set aside for purchase of 80-acre plots and later upgraded to 160-acre plots (Hoffnagle, 1970; Canaday et al., 2015). Again, this act, repealed in 1876, failed due to the overall poor quality of land available for homesteading; white resistance to black landownership; fraud; mismanagement by government officials; and homesteaders’ lack of adequate farm implements, other capital, and access to credit (Canaday et al., 2015).
In 1910, the number of farm acres owned entirely by African Americans peaked at more than 15 million acres (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1913). However, due to historical oppression, land loss and the availability of various alternative recreational options, the African American hunting population has significantly declined. In 2007, that number dropped to about 3.4 million (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007), and in 2017, it dropped to 2.5 million (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019).

African Americans have lost land through a variety of means: tax sales, partition sales, land sales to non-African Americans, limited access to legal counsel, forceful land takings, discrimination by public and private institutions, and failure of the USDA and the land grant complex to provide adequate resources to small farmers (Thomas et al. 2004). In a different report, African Americans lost more than half of their land within a space of 19 years between 1950 and 1969, where the number of acres of farmland fully or partly owned by African American dropped from 12 million to 5.5 million (Browne, 1973). The land loss was colossal such that it was predicted that, at that rate, there would be no African American farmer with land by the year 2000 (Gilbert et al., 2002). As such, if hunters have disappointing and frustrating hunting experiences due to not having access to the resource, it is likely that they will simply lose interest in hunting, quit the activity, and pursue other interests that are perceived as less troublesome. A variety of alternative hobbies and leisure activities permeate society that are widely available and easily accessible to the public (Karns et al., 2015).

Despite the structural challenges leading to major land loss overtime, it is equally important to underscore that there exist strong motivations among African Americans to retain their lands. Adams (2010) study of 14 African American landowners in South Carolina revealed that historical and cultural legacy is the primary motivating factor for land retention. Furthermore, a notion of
collective landownership existed among the study participants, whereby land was owned within sibling groups, then as an extended family and finally as a community. Within these notions of collective landownership that shaped how their land was used and managed, hunting played a particularly important role. That is, instead of leasing forested land for hunting purpose, the participants in this study noted that they would prefer a family member or person in their community hunt on their land. Importantly, they remarked that their land was community property regarding hunting. Therefore, this study reinforced the strong link between landownership and hunting among African Americans (Adams, 2010).

Despite Federal and state agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) having devoted substantial funding and time to improve hunters' recruitment and retention through initiatives (Responsive Management & National Wild Turkey Federation, 2011), these issues persist because these barriers still exist and efforts have not been tailored to the needs of the African Americans. This is the reason Larson et al. (2014) suggested an enhanced understanding of the dynamic factors that influence the sociocultural environment, or “social habitat” for hunting, which, according to Warnke (2008 in Larson et al. 2014), human hunters also need suitable habitat to thrive.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Research Methods

3.1 Study design

The purpose of this exploratory study is to comprehensively profile African American hunters’ real and perceived experiences, traditions, and needs. Findings will then be used to design a nationwide survey for the second phase of this research project.

For this study, focus groups were used to facilitate group interviews designed to generate conversation among a homogenous audience. Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will yield the best information when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Also, it allows the researcher or interviewer to question several individuals systematically and simultaneously (Babbie, 2019).

Hence, this study is designed to use exploratory focus groups to understand the story, needs and barriers of African American hunters. There haven’t been empirical studies to explore the experiences of African American hunters, which is why these exploratory focus groups are appropriate for this study. This study is an effort to help uncover the universe of ideas or experiences that African American hunters hold about their barriers, to hunting. The findings from these interviews cannot be generalized as representing the opinion or experiences of all African American hunters but provides a clear picture of the perspectives held by participants of this study.

Focus group interviews were conducted with the use of Zoom technology. This is in consideration of the time and financial obligation to travel to the five regions of the country. The focus group interviews identified the experiences, barriers to participation, and common issues
prevalent among African American hunters. A series of 5 structured open-ended questions and follow-up questions were asked of the participants. The structured open-ended questions are;

- What is your hunting story; how and when you started hunting?
- Whenever you wanted to participate in hunting or become a hunter, what kind of barriers, if any, did you face? Or any challenges you may have encountered as you were looking to participate in hunting?
- Where do you hunt, private or public land?
- What are the opportunities that encouraged/helped you to start hunting or continue?
- What programs and policies would you like to see in place that you think could encourage African American to go hunting?

The result of this study is expected to guide further inquiries about the experiences of African American hunters in America.

3.2 Study population and sampling strategy

Participants for the focus groups were recruited through purposive sampling to identify African American hunters with the help of several state wildlife management agencies. The study started with focus groups covering African American hunters in Alabama, Arkansas, Tennessee, Virginia). These agencies are among the few that collect race/ethnicity data and email addresses in their public hunting license databases. License holders are made aware that their emails shared when applying for their hunting license. 10 people were recruited via email to fill predetermined dates and time slots. 125-dollar gift cards were offered as an incentive to participate, and these were mailed to those who attended the focus groups following completion.

The Minority Outdoor Alliance assisted in recruiting participants from their membership for the last two focus group interviews. To ensure broad geographical representation hunters
from the AFWA region participated in the focus groups. A total of 67 African American hunters were interviewed over 10 focus groups. The table below shows which states were represented in the focus groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Location</th>
<th>Number of Participants (n=67)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kansas and Colorado</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri, Ohio, Georgia, Oregon, Louisiana, Arizona and Washington</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>67</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Location and Participation in Focus Groups

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The ten focus group interviews were conducted on Zoom and lasted between 60-90 minutes. Prior to the interviews, the moderator read the consent script and demanded permission verbal permission to record the interview. Once verbal consent was given by all participants, the moderator began the recording. Each interview opened with introductions from the participants. These interviews were carefully transcribed. After that process, I coded the transcripts into categories using the in vivo coding technique. In vivo coding involves using participants' exact words or phrases as codes to capture their lived experiences and perspectives. The identified codes form the central themes that will then be discussed and used to answer all research questions for
this study. They are:

1. The Hunting Tradition Among African Americans.
2. Land loss continues to affect African American hunting participation.
3. Opportunities exist for African American participation in hunting.
4. Several challenges limit participation in hunting for African Americans.
5. African Americans provides programs to increase hunting participation.

3.4 Reflexivity and validity

As a researcher of African descent, I am deeply connected to this topic, particularly when considering the historical backdrop that has influenced the relationship between African Americans and hunting, regarding systemic challenges and cultural legacies. Recognizing this personal connection, I acknowledge the potential for bias in both data collection and analysis, and therefore, I engaged this research ethically, ensuring the voices of participants are authentically heard. I challenged myself to actively address and challenge my own biases and assumptions throughout the research process. With the partnership of other researchers on this project, I believe I upheld rigorous research standards that has led us to the conclusion of this research.

In addition, I engaged in triangulation, which involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme of perspective (Creswell, 2007). For this study, I checked historical documents on the experiences of African American hunters to ensure the validity of the interviews. In addition to that, I engaged in peer debriefing. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, in Creswell, 2007), a debriefer is an individual who keeps the researcher honest and asks hard questions about methods, meanings and interpretations. My advisor, thesis committee members and research seminar class in the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management at Clemson
University served as my peer debriefers for this study. I got feedback, criticism, and suggestions on reducing my bias in this study.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Results

4.1 Family traditions among African Americans sustain hunting participation.

To understand the hunting tradition within African American families in the United States, participants were asked to tell us their hunting stories including how they started hunting and their motivation. Throughout the interviews across the different states, one of the dominant themes of discussion is the historical hunting tradition within the African American families in the United States that has persisted till today. Most of the participants noted that they were introduced to hunting by members of their family members. It could be grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, or their in-laws. A commonality related to this point among most of the participants: they had a tradition of hunting that was passed down to them, and they have continued in it, to the point of exposing their children to hunting. This is well captured in the following quotes by two participants.

“I started, I was- may have been three, uh- three years old. Pops took me out. I was begging him, crying to go with him. It was freezing, and I- I- I was just happy to tag along for the ride. But- but now, I'm hunting on my own, and deer hunt, duck hunt, all kind. Rabbit hunt. So... Fish. So I'm kinda all outdoors, basically. Just a quick summary.”

“Uh, so I've been hunting since I was six, so that makes it about 30 years. So, yeah, my dad and my uncles got me into hunting and I liked it so much, they didn't really have to pull my leg or have to force me to learn anything, or I didn't really have to be around them. I just... Anytime they grabbed a, you know- a rifle or they said they were going outside to scout or they were walking through the woods or anything outdoors, I- I was with them.”
We found in this study not all participants were introduced to hunting by family ties. Hunting club was echoed as the opportunity to gain entrance into the activity of hunting. These clubs were mostly owned and controlled by African Americans who has had years of experience. In addition to hunting clubs, some participants of this study were introduced to hunting through social connection made in a church and work settings.

“I started about five years ago. There was a group that I ran across who, uh, had a sportsmen club here, and it's a group of African American men, um, all older, experienced hunters.”

The roles that nonprofit organizations like the Minority Outdoor Alliance and hunter’s education course play in introducing African Americans to outdoor programs like hunting was mentioned by some of the participants of this study. One participant mentioned it was after taking the hunter’s education course, he decided to give it a try and ended up loving it.

“I'm born and raised in Louisiana, uh, so in 2015, I had a supervisor who asked me if I wanted to, uh, do a hunter's education course, and I grew up fishing and stuff, so I figured I'd go ahead and take the course, and once I got the hunting certificate and, um, I was like, "All right. Well, let me try it out." Did some squirrel hunting and then, uh, fell in love with, actually, dove hunting as well, and so did some, a lot of dove hunting, um, some waterfowl hunting, and I put my hand in deer hunting. Haven't gotten a deer or anything, but I've attempted a few times. But I do mostly bird hunting.”

Um, so I'm pretty much a brand new hunter, I just started, um, last year, so I was 31 when I started. Um, and I, it's something that I had been wanting to do for a long time, but had
really no one in my life who was a hunter. Um, I didn't know who to reach out to. Like none of my friends really hunted, no one in my family hunted previously. Um, but I found some really amazing opportunities through different nonprofit organizations that put on different clinics on intros to how to hunt. And um, the big one was through the Minority Outdoor Alliance. They did a full weekend. Um, it was an overnight thing where they taught us ethics of hunting, how to get started, equipment that you need, where to go.

The responses gave a deep understanding into how the participants for this study started hunting. Additionally, the findings revealed that hunting is used as a means to an end. For some, it is for community building, legacy building, or land retention strategy; for others, it is a way to connect to nature; for others, it is an affordable means of vacation. Others used hunting as a mental health support, while others used it for spiritual connection.

“It didn’t... It’s, it's not working. But, um, I was born in a little place in Arkansas. And, um, hunting for my family was, was the holiday Because on that particular week of, uh, opening season, my father and all of his brothers, my grandfather, all of his brothers showed up for one week, that hunted... That they hunted, um, from Saturday, opening day, 'til next Saturday. And then on the, the closing day of, of opening week, which is Saturday, we-we're awarded a trophy.”

From the stories shared by the participants that hunting stood out as an outdoor activity that transcends the act of solely pursuing game. For the African American community, who have a long history of hunting, it emerged as a complex experience that offers social, traditional, economic, therapeutic, spiritual, and recreational benefits deeply rooted in a connection to nature.
4.2 Land loss continues to affect African American hunting participation.

A question asked to participants was where they hunt. A manual frequency count conducted showed that most of the participants hunted on private land that is either privately owned or owned through hunting clubs formed by families or groups of African American hunters. Others hunt on public land, while there are a few who hunt on both private and public lands, as shown in the table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Both</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kansas, Colorado, New Jersey</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri, Ohio, Georgia and Oregon, Louisiana, Arizona, New York, Washington</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>56</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Where African Americans hunt for game.
4.2.1 Private Land

A considerable number of participants prefer to hunt exclusively on private lands owned by their families, friends, lease arrangements, or hunting clubs. One reason is their full control over the area such that there’s no competition, safety issues or disturbance. Others prefer hunting on private land because of the safety that comes with hunting on private land. Another reason for private land preference is that landowners often engage in land management practices that enhance wildlife populations, which improves hunting opportunities. Others believe hunting on private land strengthens their social bond. This is true, especially for African American hunters who come together to form hunting clubs and pull resources together to acquire lands, as captured in the following quote:

“As far as my club, we're registered as a non-profit. So that's how we, that's how we operate our, our hunting club. Yeah, because it's, it's not for profit. We're just trying to sustain our land. Um and you know, so you can keep the tradition alive.”

4.2.2 Public Land

On the other hand, some participants who exclusively hunt on public land do so because it is what they have available to them and is more affordable, requiring only the necessary licenses and permits without the costs associated with leasing or owning land. Others believe public land provides a variety of wildlife experiences and challenges.

“But I do a lot of hunting in New York. Um, but I've never hunted on private land. It's always been public land. Whether I'm up in, um, New York or I'm down here in Virginia.”

4.2.3 Private and public lands

Some of the participants who hunt on both are those who, at some point, had leases to
private land, but the owners died, and the property was shared among the heirs of the owners. Others who hunt on both are those who started out on public land and then made friends with other hunters who had private lands. In all, participants in this study have hunted on all sides of land available to them. However, there is a significant number of African American hunters who prefer to hunt on private land.

“Um, so I feel like I've hunted both private and public, like almost half and half, I think ... through different opportunities, um, available and just connections that I've been able to make. Um, I feel that hunting public is a little bit more kind of like that adventure and like feel like it's, um, I get I or I gain more skills whenever it's like on public 'cause there's just more, um, planning, I feel. But I've, I've had some great opportunities. Um, I did a public land hunt down in Texas”

4.3 Opportunities exist for African American participation in hunting.

Responses from participants in this study showed different opportunity pathways through which African American hunters have participated in hunting. They include family tradition, mentorship and coaching programs, state-sponsored programs, networking, access to land, social media, and outreach programs by non-profits.

4.3.1 Tradition and Family

The transmission of hunting traditions within families and through hunting clubs is a foundational aspect of the hunting experience for many of the participants of this study. This tradition fosters a deep sense of heritage and continuity, connecting hunters across generations and reinforcing the cultural and social dimensions of hunting. Participants who have kids and grandkids introduced them to hunting and are committed to making sure the hunting tradition
within the family continues.

4.3.2 Mentorship and Coaching

Many hunters emphasized the importance of mentorship and coaching in their hunting journey. This ranged from informal guidance by experienced hunters to more structured mentorship programs, such as special opportunity hunts with game wardens and biologists. These experiences provided not only technical knowledge but also cultural and ethical insights into hunting practices.

“... I was fortunate enough to actually get invited to a mentored, uh, special opportunity hunt, which was at one of those high-dollar hunting camps. And so it was a fabulous, uh, experience. I actually went hunting with game wardens and biologists”

4.3.3 State-Sponsored Programs

Some of the participants credited state-sponsored programs as critical for gaining the technical knowledge necessary for successful hunting. These programs often serve as gateways to further opportunities, like mentored hunts or access to special hunting areas, demonstrating the role of formal education in hunter development.

“I, um, got my hunter's license. And when I did that, then other state-sponsored opportunities came up. But it is all, uh, state-sponsored, through the, uh, Wildlife Conservation, uh, here in Alabama”

4.3.4 Networking

Some participants highlighted the role of networking in helping them participate in hunting. For instance, one of the participants mentioned “My Hunting Buddy,” a social media platform that facilitates networking, offering hunters access to a broader community of like-minded individuals. The networks not only provide the participants with practical hunting opportunities but also foster
a sense of belonging and collective identity among African American hunters.

### 4.3.5 Access to Land

Access to hunting land, whether through private ownership, club membership, or relationships with landowners, emerged as a theme. This is the reason participants do their hunting on private land. The value of land ownership and the strategic pooling of resources to lease or buy land underscore the importance of physical space for hunting activities. This theme also touches on the challenges and strategies related to maintaining and accessing hunting lands by African American hunters.

“Uh, I currently own land in, uh, [redacted] Tennessee. I live in Nashville and I’ve been in Nashville about 20 years. But, uh, I own my own land in, uh, [redacted] Tennessee, so I just kinda, you know, um, hunt on that. You know, if I see anything that I would like to catch and eat for dinner, I just, uh, go there.”

### 4.3.6 Social Media

An important theme from this question is the relevance of social media in finding fellow African American hunters, hunting opportunities, hunting clubs, and hunting lands. Social media platforms play a significant role in connecting hunters, sharing knowledge, and promoting hunting opportunities. These digital platforms not only help to recruit and educate new hunters but also to sustain and grow the hunting community by facilitating mentorship and the exchange of information that new hunters find valuable to start and continue to participate in hunting.
4.3.7 Outreach programs

Outreach programs, mostly by non-profit organizations dedicated to serving the African American communities to engage more in the outdoors, were also credited to inspire new hunters as well as sustain them to continue hunting.

4.4 Several challenges limit participation in hunting for African Americans

Responses from the participants on the barriers and challenges they experienced with hunting are categorized into five types. They are access to land, economic barriers, access to information, community barriers, and psychological barriers.

4.4.1 Access to land

Although most participants of this study hunt on private land, one of the dominant and consensus challenges the African American hunters face is the issue of access to land either in the form of the sale of land due to family disputes about ownership or loss of lease agreements.

That happened to me. So, three years ago, I killed a nice buck. I was in a lease. Me and this guy have been friends all our life. He wanted me to join his lease. Okay. So it was four of us. Um, I, I work outta town. So I, I, I leave on Sunday. I get home on a Thursday. I only w-... I only can hunt w- Friday, Saturday. Okay. So I'm sittin' there and, and I'm like, "Well, it's a nice day. I'm gonna go huntin' today." So I went huntin', and I killed a, a nice buck. I wished I was at home to show you. Um, and, um, I couldn't get him out, you know. So I had to call him, say, "Hey, come help me get this deer outta here." He said, "How big is it?" I said, "He's all right," you know. I didn't wanna tell him on the phone. I want him to see it. And, uh, (laughing) when he saw it, that look on his face was like, "Wow," you know. And we took pictures, you know, but I already got it. I'm never... That, that nice, I, mm, took pictures of it, you know, it just a nice deer. And, uh, that followin' year, uh, I called and
say, um, "What about, you know, when do we pay our lease, you know, our, uh, dues for this year?" "I, I think I'm gonna let another guy in this year."

“Well, from my perspective, one of the challenges then, maybe a little bit less so, but it's still a challenge today, is access to land for hunting, especially if, uh, you're not too comfortable hunting on public land.”

“And I say, yeah, access to land because not everyone can afford acres of land. So it should be... Yeah, so that's the biggest thing”

4.4.2 Economic barriers

Participants in this study revealed that economic challenges were responsible for their participation in hunting or hunting-related activities. They claimed hunting equipment and the purchase of land or leases were expensive for some of them.

“And I say, yeah, access to land because not everyone can afford acres of land. So it should be... Yeah, so that's the biggest thing”

4.4.3 Access to information

One of the challenges the participants of this study claimed affected their participation in hunting is the lack of relevant information about hunting opportunities and public lands for hunting. Some others also expressed that the lack of information on the regulations and requirements for hunting has affected their continuous participation in hunting. This challenge was common among hunters who do not have mentors or are new to hunting.

“There's tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of acres in the United States that, that
you can go on and hunt, and we're limited because the information, they don't freely share information with us.”

### 4.4.4 Community barriers

Some of the hunters claimed that under-representation of the African American community affected their participation in hunting; this includes women hunters. Others said that they were not able to locate networks of African American hunters that could provide them with mentorship or a sense of belonging to continue to engage in the sport.

“... when people found out that I hunt, first of all, they're shocked 'cause I'm a lady that hunt. And then, their first question is, "Well, what huntin' club are you part of?" And sometimes, I do not even wanna let them to know that I hunt on private land. Uh, 'cause when you do, they're kinda like lookin' at you like, "How you get that?"

### 4.4.5 Psychological and physical barriers

Some participants of this study claimed that concerns about personal safety, including fear of racism and discrimination in hunting spaces, deter participation in hunting. This fear is believed to be from their experiences of harassment and racial profiling over the years. Other challenges were age-related. Some of the participants were aging and could no longer engage in hunting like they would like to.

“It's... I don't... Knowing the training that I went through, um, I was able to tr- uh, trust my f-fellow service member, you know, with having my back. But I don't know other people, whether or not they're gonna ha- be as diligent with firearm safety, um, or anything like that. And it's like, I wanna be able to come home in one piece”
4.5 **African Americans provides programs to increase hunting participation.**

Participants were asked to recommend programs that will increase their participation in hunting. Some of them echoed access to more land open for hunting purposes either through hunting clubs, NGOs or fish and wildlife agencies.

“*Space. Space. Land. That's... It's valuable. It's- it's very va- valuable. It's what you need to hunt.*”

Mentorship and outreach programs for African American hunters were also recommended as a contributing factor to hunters’ recruitment. Some of the participants confirmed the role mentorship programs played in their participation in hunting, especially how these programs put them through the techniques of hunting and how to get access to lands.

“But something like that in conjunction with some type of association, a group, to educate the younger generation, you know, and get them into hunting, and show they, Hey, someone that looks like you knows how to do this, enjoys this, and can help you, and take you along.”

Participants believe providing funds to hunting clubs and NGOs serving minority groups can increase hunters’ recruitment. These funds can used to run hunting programs, buy gears, run campaign, buy or lease land for hunting purposes.

“One of thing that I would like to see is just as far as preserving these, these older clubs that have been around for a long time where, whether it's giving the funding to bring younger black people into their clubs. Um, you, you know, because that's, that's one, that's one of the things about preserving these things is that they... If these smaller clubs that are dying had the funding to go after bigger pieces of land, than that would, that would change the dynamics a lot”
In addition, there’s the stereotype that hunting is not for African Americans, this needs to be addressed. Along with that, participants believe better access to information on hunting programs, regulations, and land leases will ease the burden for new and old hunters. Some of the participants explained how a lack of information to these programs limit affect their participation.

“Yeah. Yeah, I agree. Uh, I think, uh, eliminating the stigma of, um, what it means to be outdoors and, uh, outdoor activities. I think we can change the narrative of how, uh, young Black men want to be, uh, in nature and experience, uh, everything. Um, and that just comes with accessibility and just maybe, uh, an outreach program to help get them involved in these kinda things, especially, uh, being in, uh, urban cities.”

Participants also recommended safety measure needs to be strictly enforced, particularly in public lands as some of them have had to deal with situations with other hunters that threatened their safety.

“I think hunter's safety should 100% be reintroduced to, uh, to schools. And there's such an important aspect, especially on the economic importance of managing dear populations that people don't really think about, like especially smaller farms. And disproportionately small black farmers are vastly hurt by it, but there's certain areas where there's limited this or that that they can do about it. The process of being able to get tags to, for a damaged crop is can be long and there's timeframes you can do it.”

Increased representation of African Americans in wildlife management and law enforcement agencies is desired and participants believe this can also contribute to why some African Americans can be convinced to participate in hunting. They expressed positive feeling
when they see officials who look like them.

“And, uh, uh, I would like to see representation, like to see more outdoorsy Black men like myself, uh, a, a group, uh, so to say. Uh, that would make me feel more comfortable, uh, going out there, just to know that, uh, we're out there too”

Lastly, participants recommended events that bring together African American hunters from across the country annually.

“so the pl-, the perfect program for that would be something that, I feel like something that holds a convention every, allows people to gather and to speak on those type of things. ‘Cause I- I feel like with most people, easiest way to be taught is to talk with somebody who- who knows it. So, not talking with anybody is gonna be kinda hard for someone”
CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Discussion

Due to the little scientifically empirical data on the nuances of the African American hunters, federal and state-level fish and wildlife agencies and NGOs, have been ill-equipped to deliver effective programs, policies, practices, and engagement points to increase the participation of African American hunters (Fontaine et al., 2019; Robison & Ridenour, 2012; Morris, 2021). Therefore, this study employed an exploratory focus group method design to understand African American hunters' actual and perceived experiences, perspectives, and needs.

Confirming previous studies on the topic (Young et al., 2001; Samford, 1996; Marks, 1991), the study found that there is a historical hunting tradition within African American families in the United States that has persisted today. Most of whom were introduced to hunting through family affiliations, either by parents, grandparents, or uncles, among others, which is also supported by the scholarship (Giltner, 2008; Hadley, 2000; Dale, 2023; Fellows, 2024). However, the study also revealed that there are other ways African American get into hunting. Mentors, educational programs, job affiliations, or an outreach program by the government or nonprofits focusing on engaging minorities in outdoor programs were instrumental in leading them to hunting. In a similar study, Edmonds (2019) confirmed that many African American youths were introduced to the outdoors by key role models in their lives, either as children or as adults because they showed them how to participate in activities they had never tried.

Interestingly, this study found hunting has multiple use value. Historically, it was mostly used for subsistence and to resist the actions of slave owners before emancipation (Giltner, 2008; Young et al., 2001; Hadley, 2000). However, today hunting has become different things within the African American community. It is used for community building, legacy building, or land retention.
strategy, a way to connect to nature, an affordable means of vacation, a mental health support and spiritual connection. Adams (2010) study with African American landowners in South Carolina supports the claim on the crucial role of hunting as one land retention strategy, which also emerged from this study.

Also, this study showed that there is a strong preference by African American hunters to hunt on private land than on public lands. This finding is supported by Davis (2018), who argued that there’s a general lack of attention to black outdoor spaces, and the use of white outdoor values and pursuits as the criterion for which to assess African American outdoor ethos.

However, this preference is prevalent among those with family lands, leased land or who have connections that have lands that can be used for hunting. We found that the reasons for this preference are possession of family land, safety issues on public land, especially for the African American hunter. Also, the study revealed that lack of representation among game wardens, lack of information on hunting opportunities (Roberts & Drogan, 1993) on public lands, and territorial conflicts, were responsible for private land preference.

Consequently, this preference led to their affiliations with hunting clubs. Those who could not afford to buy land or did not have lands, collaborated or started a hunting club to either buy land or lease land through the contribution of every member of the hunting club. Serenari & Peterson (2018) argued that this happens because of the family life structure among African Americans. This study acknowledges the complexity of land allocation in the United State as noted by Armsworth et al. (2020) and Lerner et al. (2007), however, based on the response from participants, hunting participation among the African American will increase with access to subsidized land lease programs for hunting club and individuals as well as access to relevant information on lands available for lease should be made available to the local level. This position
is supported in a study by Hanses et al., (2018) about women landownership in Dakota Indian, immigrant Scandinavian and African American communities where their ownership of land gives them the opportunity to engage in different activities on the land.

This study found African American hunters have had opportunities to participate in hunting; mentorship and outreach programs from individuals or organizations, state-sponsored programs, social media networking, and hunter education programs.

To know what changes will possibly increase their participation in hunting, the study found that most participants want access to more land for hunting purposes. This is no surprise due to the value of land when it comes to hunting. According to Thomas et al (2004), African Americans have lost land through a variety of means: tax sales, partition sales, land sales to non-African Americans, limited access to legal counsel, forceful land takings, discrimination by public and private institutions, and failure of the USDA and the land grant complex to provide adequate resources to small farmers (Thomas et al. 2004). Consequently, the African American hunting population has significantly declined. Therefore, to increase African American hunters' participation, there’s the need for Access to land either through hunting clubs or fish and wildlife agencies.

Another key factor to increase participation is the increase in mentorship and outreach programs for African American hunters, because according to Christopher (2017), mentorship can help new hunters navigate challenges faced when doing an activity for the first time. There is a substantial number of hunters in this study who started or continued hunting through a mentorship program that put them through the techniques of hunting and how to get access to lands. They pointed out that access to these programs will increase participation among African American youths, as Roberts & Drogin (1993) suggested that mentorship programs can make entrance into
hunting easier.

Funding continues to be a challenge in supporting outdoor recreation programs across the country, Lerner et al., (2007) believes the situation is because of increased need to acquire and conserve more natural resources in the US. however, availability of funding options for clubs and non-profits to run programs targeted at young African Americans can develop an interest in hunting. In addition, there’s the stereotype that hunting is not for African Americans as supported by Whaley (2019) and Choi et al., (2017), however, there needs to be programs to tackle these stereotypes, as well as the discrimination faced by African Americans in their attempt to participate in hunting. One way to do this is for relevant agencies and NGOs to run a nationwide story telling campaign of the impact and participation of African American hunters in the history of the United States.

In addition, there needs to be easy and improved access to information on hunting programs, regulations, and land leases. Some of the participants explained that they are usually not aware of some programs, which according to Roberts & Drogin (1993) lack of information outdoor opportunities can limit exposure to hunting programs, especially those sponsored by states and federal agencies. Safety measure needs to be strictly enforced, particularly in public lands; participants in this study recounted their encounters with other hunters in the wild who did not follow hunting guidelines and posed a threat to their safety.

As Davis (2018) stressed, increased representation of African Americans in wildlife management and law enforcement agencies can contribute to the increase of African Americans in hunting. Some participants in this study expressed feelings of insecurity sometimes when they did not see the warden who looked like them. Lee (2023) stressed increasing the representation of African American in the outdoor fosters equitable resource allocation and decision-making, which
will be instrumental to increased participation among African Americans. Lastly, participants recommended events that bring together African American hunters from across the country annually.

5.2 Conclusion

Data from this research has shown that the African American community has a longstanding tradition of hunting, and they have continued to pass it down across generations. However, literature revealed that due to discrimination and oppression leading from the colonial period even until after emancipation, African American hunters have lost so many of their lands among other forms of discrimination.

Therefore, they prefer to hunt on private land as a recreational activity but also to build a strong social community through family lines or clubs. While data showed that most African American hunters started through an introduction to hunting by at least a family member, there are lots of other African American hunters who have benefited from government-sponsored programs, hunting clubs, and non-profits, social media connections, as well as individuals who mentor the young generation in the techniques of hunting. While this is true, the participation of African American hunters has continued to remain low due to loss of land, economic reasons, discrimination, low representation of African Americans, and public stereotypes against African Americans as well as women of color. Data also showed that there’s no easy access to information on hunting opportunities.

5.3 Limitations and future studies

One of the limitations of this study is that it was limited within the scope of the funding agency, Wildlife Management Institute. There are other nuances that I was interested in finding out, like the hunting as a tool of youth development among minority groups. Like the African
American community but could not because it was not in the scope of the study. However, this is a theme for future research for my PhD dissertation of peer-review article.

Another limitation is that this study is the first phase of the entire research project and due to time constraint, the second phase could not be embarked on for my thesis research. This means that this study cannot be generalized but is useful for helping guide the second phase of the project.
References


