

# **Listening to Neglected Voices: Hmong and Public Lands in Minnesota and Wisconsin, USA**

David N. Bengston<sup>1</sup>, Michele Schermann<sup>2</sup>, MaiKia Moua<sup>2</sup> and Tou Thai Lee<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Northern Research Station, USDA Forest Service, St. Paul, MN, USA, dbengston@fs.fed.us

<sup>2</sup> University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN, USA

Natural resource managers need to understand the cultures and concerns of ethnic communities in order to serve them effectively. The Hmong are an Asian ethnic group that is heavily involved in natural resource-related activities but has been largely overlooked by social scientists. We conducted a series of five focus groups with Hmong Americans in Minnesota and Wisconsin, USA, exploring their experiences and perspectives on public lands, including: activities, positive and negative experiences, needs and concerns, special needs of new refugees, and suggestions for improvement. Our participants revealed deep cultural and personal connections with the natural world and the importance of public lands to many Hmong. But we also heard about profound problems and concerns. Perceptions of racism, discrimination, and harassment from public land managers and other agency personnel, recreationists, and private landowners are common. Participants had many suggestions for improvement and insights regarding the special needs of new refugees who arrived in the United States in recent years.