



Recreation Research Update



Pacific Southwest Research Station
Wildland Recreation and Urban Cultures

April 2005 No. 52
Caring for the Land and Serving People

OHV Messages and Their Impact

A study by Dale Blahna, Doug Reiter and Angie Cannon of Utah State University and Jim Absher of the PSW Station is now available. It reviews five separate off-highway vehicle (OHV) communication and education programs: 1) "Tread Lightly!" by the national non-profit organization Tread Lightly!, Inc.; 2) "On the Right Trail" by the USDA Forest Service, Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association and National OHV Conservation Council; 3) "Protect Your Privilege" by the USDA Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and Utah State Parks; 4) "The Adventure Trail" from the National OHV Conservation Council; and 5) "Sensible, Courteous Off-Road Enthusiasts" by the Pennsylvania Off Highway Vehicle Association.

These five programs provide diverse and well-received educational programs and messages designed to affect OHV drivers' environmental ethics and behaviors. The primary messages relate to staying on the trail, environmental impacts, safety, etiquette, and driver image. The most critical OHV communication and education needs identified included programs targeting high school aged drivers, nonmotorized user groups that have a stake in OHV use and road policies, and greater use of OHV clubs, manufacturers, and spokespersons. Better use of the web, training-the-trainer methods, and two-way communication are also suggested improvements.

Participatory communication and education methods were identified as further development and evaluation strategies. Some programs should be specifically designed to target adolescents and young adults. Another suggestion was to expand education messages to include a greater variety of site or region specific issues, with program templates designed so that managers can select and tailor messages to their needs.

Finally, although it seems these programs are very well received and worthwhile, there has been very little formative evaluation conducted, and virtually no formal research on the actual use and impacts of these programs with different target audiences (summative evaluation). This lack of program evaluation makes it difficult to state conclusively that these programs have achieved lasting behavioral change or contributed in a known way to agency objectives. *For more information or copies of this report contact Jim Absher at 951-680-1559 or jabsher@fs.fed.us.*

Recreation and Fire Management

A study was undertaken by Kelly Bricker (adjunct West Virginia University), Bill Hendricks (California Polytechnic State University), and Debbie Chavez (PSW) to understand the perceptions of USDA Forest Service (USFS) public land managers in relation to fire management and recreational use in Urban National Forests. This research was made possible through National Fire Plan funding. An on-line survey was used to understand managers' perceptions of how the presence of recreational activities and experiences are a constraint to fire management; how fire management and suppression activities influence the quality of a visit to a recreation site; and the relationships between fire management and recreation constraints. A total of 62 district rangers within Urban National Forests were contacted to participate in the online survey. Thirty-three responded; a response rate of 53 percent.

Overall, respondents were well educated, and had worked with the USFS for many years (96% over 20 years). Most respondents were male (84%) and attended at least one fire training session per year. The most common activities in the developed recreational area(s) of each district were hiking, camping, picnicking, walking trails, hunting and recreational shooting, wildlife viewing, fishing, sightseeing, driving corridors, mountain biking, and photography.

Most respondents perceived urban development and the occurrence of wildland fires as severely impacting their fire management decisions. Others felt that some recreational related events (such as campfires in non-designated areas) moderately impacted their decisions concerning fire management. Respondents perceived moderate to slight conflicts with day-use areas, trails, campgrounds and access roads. More than half of the respondents reported that visitors were not limited by campground closures from smoke, visible evidence of wildland fires, natural ecologically beneficial fires, fires from logging brush, and out of control fire from logging operations.

Overall, these managers perceive that most of the actions they take with regards to fire do not limit or only slightly limit visitors' pursuit of recreational opportunities. Findings also suggest that managers surveyed did not perceive their actions related to fire management as limiting visitor's pursuit of recreational experiences. Implications of this research suggest the

need for managers to include physical and facility features in fire management plans. They should incorporate considerations of smoke from prescribed burns and management actions that can reduce campfires in non-designated areas that may impact their ability to manage fires. There is also a need to compare manager perceptions with visitor perceptions about fire and fire management. *For more information about this study contact Deborah Chavez at 951-680-1558 or dchavez@fs.fed.us.*

Getting Forest Service Messages out to a Diverse Public

Although visiting populations at some Forest Service sites are primarily from groups of color, recreationists visiting National Forest lands are more likely to be White than any other ethnic or racial group. There are a number of reasons for this disparity in use levels, including a lack of information about outdoor recreational opportunities. The continuing shift towards an increasingly diverse society elevates the importance of ensuring that information is provided through means that are most appropriate to each ethnic and racial group.

A study completed by Bill Crano and Ryan Quist of the Claremont Graduate University and Pat Winter of PSW examined the use of various forms of media, including sources most used and most trusted for information regarding natural resource opportunities. The study involved a telephone survey of residents in the Los Angeles basin. The final sample of respondents included 195 Latinos, 200 Blacks, 195 Asians, and 202 Whites. While there is clearly heterogeneity within each of these ethnic groups, our aim was to examine variations at the larger group level. The majority of interviews were completed in English, nine percent were conducted in Spanish.

Comparisons of general media usage revealed significant variations by ethnic group. For example, Black respondents reported the most hours watching television, while Latinos reported the most hours listening to radio. Hours spent reading magazines and newspapers did not vary significantly by ethnic group. Comparisons of participation in community and church activities by ethnic group showed that participation in community organization activities was lowest among Latinos, while participation in church activities was highest among Black respondents. Which specific media outlets were most often used was also examined, revealing a wide variety of outlets, including many that were ethnically based.

Respondents were asked which source they most trusted regarding information about forest recreation opportunities. The most trusted sources were friends/family and computers/internet. Whites were

twice as likely to trust newspapers than were Asians, Latinos were two times more likely than any other group to trust television.

Findings suggest that communicating with diverse publics requires some variation in media sources to be used as points of contact for reaching different ethnic groups. The heavy reliance on family and friends, particularly in the Latino community, suggests that establishing and maintaining contacts in the community may be quite effective in disseminating information about recreational opportunities. While the trust in computers and the internet was reassuring in light of recent e-government efforts, geographic, economic, and educational variations in access to and comfort with the internet suggest caution in relying heavily on web information as the primary means of communicating with diverse publics. A combination of off-site communication routes that include the web, community contacts, and newspapers is recommended. *For more information about this study contact Pat Winter at 951-680-1557 or pwinter@fs.fed.us.*

Unit Publications

- Blahna, D.J., Reiter, D.K., Absher, J.D. & Cannon, A. 2005. **A Review and Analysis of OHV Messages and Their Impact on Target Audiences.** Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Research Station. 40 p.
- Bricker, K.S.; Chavez, D.J.; Hendricks, W.; Millington, S.J. 2005. **Recreation and fire management in urban national forests: A study of manager perspectives.** Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. 69 p.
- Chavez, D.; Schuett, M.A. 2005. **Profiling off-highway vehicle users: The case of the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, Inc. (NOHVCC).** Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. 14 p.
- Taylor, J.G.; Gillette, S.C.; Hodgson, R.W.; Downing, J.L. 2005. **Communicating with wildland interface communities during wildfire.** Open-File Report 2005-1061. Reston, VA: U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of the Interior: 26 p (*online at www.usgs.gov/pubprod*).
- Winter, P.L.; McCollum, D. 2005. **An exploration of recreation and management preferences related to threatened and endangered species revisited—2002: Report for the Angeles, Cleveland, and San Bernardino National Forests.** Unpublished report. Riverside, CA: Pacific Southwest Research Station, Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture. 61 p.