



Recreation Research Update



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Social Reliance and Risk Management

Trust, reliance, and cooperative risk management are discussed in a newly published book chapter by Dr. George Cvetkovich of Western Washington University, and Dr. Pat Winter. The distinction between trust and relational assurances is presented. Trust is primarily a social emotion, derived from implicit information processing. This is distinctly different from relational assurances, including confidence, that involve explicit information processing. The bases of relational assurance can include past performance, institutionalized accountability, and procedures aimed at just decision-making.

Trust has been found to emerge from perceived salient value similarity. In addition, trust is important in perceptions of risk, including judgments about the risks and benefits of various actions.

Four patterns of trust have been revealed in public trust of the Forest Service including 1) distrust, resulting when a lack of similar salient values exists, and agency actions are believed to be inconsistent with one's own values; 2) distrust/trust somewhat, when salient values are believed to be shared, actions are inconsistent with one's values, and those inconsistencies are believed to be unjustified; 3) trust, when salient values are believed to be shared, actions are inconsistent, and inconsistencies are justified; and 4) trust, when salient values are shared, and agency actions are viewed as consistent. These patterns are useful in that they help us understand the potential resilience of trust.

The more that individuals know about a topic, the less sway trust has, and relational assurances, particularly confidence, takes over. What we still don't know is how trust and relational assurances work together. For example, if trust is low yet there are very strong regulatory mechanisms in place, reliance might still be a result. Implications of this presentation include a documented resilience of trust, and the distinction between reliance based on trust and that based on direct personal experience (confidence). Trust and confidence are both important drivers of public response emphasizing the value of understanding perceptions of publics less 'expert' in critical management issues. *For more information about this study contact Pat Winter at 951-680-1557 or pwinter@fs.fed.us.*

Developing Volunteer Management Capacity

Research about volunteer management capacity (VMC) is emerging for public land agencies. Borrowing on successful work in other sectors of philanthropy, Dr. Jeff Brudney, Cleveland State University, and Dr. Jim Absher, PSW, have recently completed a survey of Forest Service (FS) volunteer program managers. Ideas were adapted from other sectors about best practices in volunteer administration and organizational support structures as they might apply to natural resource or recreation agencies. One particular innovation has been to distinguish between volunteers that are managed directly by staff and those that are available through management of partnership arrangements.

A web-based survey was sent to a targeted group of 253 FS staff at all levels on a nationwide basis, and 158 (62%) responses were obtained. A short, overview report on VMC will be available soon, as will information from the first two presentations from this project. One was directed at a practitioner audience and one was directed at a research audience.

Results highlight the FS' status quo in this important and emerging area, revealing the practical issues for volunteer managers and providing a foundation for benchmarking performance and increasing capacity to more successfully use volunteers, engage our local communities and work with our partners more effectively. Specific findings show that the VMC in the FS does not deviate substantially from that typically found among nonprofit agencies, and in places the FS seems to be fully engaged and has implemented many of the "best practices" available despite the limitations of part time duties and financial support challenges. Yet much can be improved, especially in the areas of administration support, especially in information, training, coordination and oversight. Further the results suggest the importance of accountability mechanisms and ongoing evaluation practices.

Future use of these results are mainly directed at building VMC on the ground, and perhaps replicating the survey process in other agencies or settings, so interested parties are encouraged to contact Jim Absher for possible direct involvement by us with your group or department as we make available training modules to

do self-assessment and planning in VMC. *For more information about this study contact Jim Absher at 951-680-1559 or jabsher@fs.fed.us.*

Health Study at a Forest Recreation Site

A multi-year multi-state study was conducted to examine perceived and realized health benefits of outings to urban proximate and distant recreation lands. Data were collected by co-Project Leads in Minnesota by Dr. Ingrid Schneider, University of Minnesota, in Illinois by Dr. Kim Shinew, University of Illinois, and in California by Dr. Debbie Chavez, PSW. At each location, an urban-proximate (e.g., city park) and an urban-distant site (e.g. national forest or state park 50 miles or more from city) were selected. Onsite questionnaires were employed to interview users at these sites. This summarizes the findings obtained from the urban distant site in California—the San Gabriel Canyon (SGC; n = 253).

More than half of the respondents in the SGC were Hispanic (58%; another 32% said they were not Latino and 10% did not answer the question). Almost three in ten (29%) reported their highest level of education as a high school degree, while 21% had a college degree and 7% had advanced degrees. Just over half the respondents were male (53%), and average respondent age was 34.9 (SD = 9.81). Seventeen percent of the respondents characterized their general health as “excellent”, another 27% said “very good”, 31% said “good”, and 23% said “poor” or “fair”.

Most arrived at the site by car (95%) and most arrived in less than an hour’s drive. On average they planned to stay 4½ hours at the site. More than half (55%) were on a repeat visit to the site. Repeat visitors had been to the site a median of 3 times in the past year. They also had been coming to the site for a median of 4 years. Most respondents were at the site to picnic (25%), relax (14%), bike (11%), swim (9%), or jog (7%). More than six in ten (62%) respondents reported they came to the site for physical activity. Site attributes that were thought to be very important for physical activity included: parking (75%), cleanliness of facilities (73%), restrooms (72%), beauty (70%), and maintenance (68%). Constraints to additional visits for physical activity at this site included: family obligations (19% strongly agreed) and not enough time (15% strongly agreed).

The data indicate SGC is used by many visitors for physical activity; indeed most respondents to the survey came to the site for physical activity. Those activities

are consistent with the management direction of the site—people were there picnic, relax, bike, swim, or jog. Other activities were also consistent with management direction at the site: playing with kids, fishing, dog walking, and bird watching. A large proportion of site visitors were of Hispanic origin. In order to continue to serve SGC visitors attention should be paid to the site attributes thought to be very important to these respondents for physical activity: having parking and restrooms available, as well as attending to the cleanliness and maintenance of site facilities. *For more information about this study contact Deborah Chavez at 951-680-1558 or dchavez@fs.fed.us.*

Unit Publications

- Absher, J.D.; Brudney, J.L. 2007. Understanding and improving volunteer management capacity in land management agencies. APPL Annual Conference, Sacramento, CA, March 18-21; Program and Abstracts, pg 15.
- Absher, J.D.; Kyle, G.T. 2006. Perceptions of wildfire management issues by San Diego County’s wildland-urban interface residents. Third International Fire Ecology and Management Congress; San Diego, CA; November 13-17; Program and Abstracts, pg 82.
- Cvetkovich, G.; Winter, P.L. 2007. The what, how, and when of social reliance and cooperative risk management. In: Siegrist, M., Earle, T.C. & Gutsher, H., eds. Trust in Cooperative Risk Management: uncertainty and skepticism in the Public Mind. London: Earthscan; 187-209.
- Fege, A.; Absher, J. 2006. Lessons from workshops with Southern California professionals. Third International Fire Ecology and Management Congress; San Diego, CA; November 13-17; Program and Abstracts, pg 227.
- Winter, P.L.; Bigler-Cole, H. 2006. Improving a national fire information program: A needs assessment approach. Proceedings of the Third International Fire Ecology and Management Congress; 2006 November 13-17; San Diego, CA. [on DVD, track 2, public perception]