



Recreation Research Update



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Law Enforcement Patrol Captains and Commanders Study: Impacts to Recreation

This study was the third in a series of nationwide studies evaluating perceptions of USDA Forest Service (USFS) law enforcement personnel of the roles, responsibilities, and issues entailed in their jobs. The study was conducted by Dr. Debbie Chavez (PSW) and Dr. Jo Tynon (Oregon State University). One of the research objectives for this Patrol Captains and Patrol Commanders (PC) study was to determine PC perceptions of the impacts of crime and violence to recreation visitors and other forest users. An e-mail survey was administered to PCs in the USFS. Of the 79 questionnaires sent via email, 70 were completed and returned, for a response rate of 89%.

Most of the PCs who responded were male (89%) and White (74%). The PC respondents had been in law enforcement an average of 20 years and with the USFS an average of 24 years. They had been a PC an average of 6 years. Years of school completed averaged 15 years, with 43% holding an academic degree related to their work in law enforcement.

The PC respondents ranked their highest job priorities as protecting National Forest System (NFS) employees and forest users. They believed that the NFS line officers with whom they most commonly interacted had a similar set of priorities. Almost two-thirds of the PC respondents felt they had good relations and rapport with the line officers with whom they most commonly interacted. Most believed that LEI's relationship with the rest of the Forest Service should be one of collaboration and teamwork. Most felt supported by LEI line officers, NFS line officers, or local NFS employees.

Several types of crime were on the increase, according to PC respondents. Dumping of household waste, criminal damage, and dumping of landscape waste topped the list, followed by shooting (indiscriminate), thefts of public property, thefts of visitor personal property, personnel threats, methamphetamine chemical dump, methamphetamine labs, road hazards, marijuana cultivation, and domestic violence.

The PC respondents viewed forest users (defined as forest visitors, the American public, and the recreating public) as their primary customers. They believed that forest users wanted to be assured of a safe and

enjoyable experience while on the forest, and wanted conservation of the natural resources. About half of the PC respondents felt that recreation visitors were mostly safe from other visitors and physically safe from site features, while about one-third noted that these conditions varied within the patrol area. The types of crime or law enforcement violations that PC respondents said most commonly affected recreation visitors were urban-associated crimes (e.g., theft, weapons violations, and break-ins) and drug activity.

In examining the data for common responses across questions, we found that one concern for USFS PC respondents was relationships within and outside the USFS. Another common concern was having adequate personnel and equipment. Natural resource protection was also seen as important. Safety of forest users, customers, and USFS employees was another concern. Urban-associated activities and drug activity were problematic and seen as on the rise.

There are several ways to use the results of this study of PCs in the USFS. The identification of issues, particularly issues that are consistent across regions, could be used to prioritize law enforcement efforts. Considering some of the successes that PCs identified in combination with a focus on the characteristics integral to a successful LEI program could identify priority focus areas for officers and leaders. This approach has some serious implications for budgeting and staffing. Some consideration might be made of the current allocation of resources and whether it is congruent with the issues identified by the PC respondents. *For more information about this study contact Deborah Chavez at 951-680-1558 or dchavez@fs.fed.us.*

Sustainable Operations in Region 5 and PSW

A survey of region and station employees was recently conducted to examine issues related to sustainable operations (environmentally responsible actions). Respondents were randomly selected and included 451 individuals, mostly from the region (74.3%). Respondents averaged about 17 years as Forest Service employees, with about 15 years of that in California or Hawaii.

Most agreed they had a professional and personal responsibility to behave pro-environmentally whenever

possible. In addition, they tended to agree they are personally committed to practicing pro-environmental behaviors. They viewed most coworkers as supportive of sustainable operations. However, just under half viewed station and regional leadership as supportive of sustainable practices. They tended to agree that the public expects sustainable operations within the Forest Service.

Frequent waste reduction measures taken included turning off water when not in immediate use, reusing file folders, and editing documents on the computer before printing. Infrequent practices included reusing envelopes and/or diskette mailers and reuse of single sided paper in a printer for drafts.

Some energy conservation measures were also frequently practiced, such as turning off lights when leaving the office for the day or extended periods, and turning off electrical equipment and computers. Unplugging electrical equipment when not in use was much less frequent.

The majority expressed support for sharing fleet vehicles using a reservation/sharing system, although respondents with field and fire related assignments expressed several concerns about this type of program. Downsizing to a smaller fleet vehicle or using a hybrid found support by more than a third directly affected by this option, however about a tenth did not support this. A majority of those not in support of this also raised concerns related to fire assignments and field assignments such as the ability to carry equipment and crews, as well as to travel safely on forest roads.

Barriers to sustainable operations were rarely agreed with as issues; however, one fourth or more agreed that many green practices are impossible or impractical at their location, and green products were believed to be more expensive than other products. Open ended responses echoed concerns over policies affecting purchasing that sometimes deterred 'green choices'. A few comments suggested direct resistance to the implementation of sustainable operations.

The majority supported all fifteen suggested items as important to implementing sustainable operations. Those supported by the vast majority included practical systems put in place by staff on-the-job, commitment from station and regional leadership, a better understanding of the environmental benefits or costs of current practices, more commitment from folks 'on the ground', and support from coworkers. Least important to these respondents were rewards for 'doing the right thing' not just 'feel good' feedback.

A number of ideas for more sustainable practices were offered by respondents, including arranging meetings in locations accessible by public transportation, locating offices in places accessible by

public transportation, increasing the focus on green practices in fire camps or incident situations, and changing policies regarding mileage use to retain fleet vehicles.

Findings should be of assistance to Region 5 and PSW in their continuing efforts to implement sustainable operations and may also be of help to others with similar interests. *For more information about this study contact Pat Winter at 951-680-1557 or pwinter@fs.fed.us.*

Unit Publications

Absher, J.D., Vaske, J.J., Bright, A.D. 2007. Salient value similarity, social trust and attitudes toward wildland fire management strategies. *Human Ecology Review*, 14, 2: 217-226.

In: Kruger, L. E., Mazza, R., Lawrence, K., eds. 2007. *Proceedings: National Workshop on Recreation Research and Management*. Gen. Tech. Rep. PNW-GTR-698. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station:

*Chavez, D. J. 2007. Ethnic diversity and recreation preferences; 43-46.

*Chavez, D. J. 2007. Crime on national forests and grasslands: research perspective; 181-185.

*Chavez, D. J. 2007. Introduction: special issues in recreation; 161-165.

*Winter, P. L. 2007. Communicating with recreation visitors: a brief synthesis of findings; 149-156.

*Winter, P. L. 2007. Equity in access to recreation opportunities: a synthesis of research and management implications; 167-180.

Chavez, D. J.; Tynon, J. F. 2007. Forest Service law enforcement officer report: national study. Res. Pap. PSW-RP-252. Albany, CA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 284 p.

Li, C.; Chick, G. E.; Zinn, H. C.; Absher, J. D.; Graefe, A. R. 2007. Ethnicity as a variable in leisure research. *Journal of Leisure Research* 39(3): 514-545.

Taylor, J. G.; Gillette, S. C.; Hodgson, R. W.; Downing, J. L.; Burns, M. R.; Chavez, D. J.; Hogan, J. T. 2007. Informing the network: improving communication with interface communities during wildland fire. *Human Ecology Review*. 14(2): 192-205.