

Improving Our Understanding of Recreation and Tourism

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Over the past century, American society has changed in many ways that affect the management of natural resources for recreation and tourism. The nation's population is more racially and ethnically diverse. Baby boomers are reaching retirement age and many have money to travel. The nation's population has more than tripled, causing our once rural country to become urbanized. This movement toward a more fragmented rural land base has changed values and attitudes toward natural resources and recreation. While shifting from a dominant, utilitarian focus on commodity production to one that embraces other values including aesthetics and recreation, America stretches the per capita footprint ever larger. New uses and expectations often have led to contention and conflict.



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The development of resorts, visitor facilities and other industries influences where people choose to live and visit. Technology also influences the kinds of activities in which people engage, and at the same time, facilitating access to resources further from city centers. Increased average income and changing work environments allow for more recreation. Walking for pleasure, photographing wildlife, birding, kayaking, snowboarding and backpacking are growing outdoor activities that use public and private land.

These increasing and more diverse demands for recreation and tourism have produced a variety of challenges for private, local, state and federal

agency resource managers. These include conflicts between recreation users, crowding at popular sites, competition between recreation and commodity production, and increased impacts on resources. More recently, people have been moving into the wildland-urban interface areas where residential development and forest meet and mix, making wild places accessible to more people, increasing the pressure on public and private lands for a different blend of goods and services than in the past, and complicating management for fire and wildlife.

To help find solutions to the complex challenges of public and private providers of recreation and tourism, the Focused Science Delivery Program is sponsoring the Recreation and Tourism Initiative. The initiative addresses several issues important for recreation and tourism, and this article summarizes five of those issues.

Topic 1: Assessing current collection methods, analysis and use of recreation data

The first component of the initiative includes collecting available recreation and tourism data, identifying data gaps and analyzing the adequacy of existing measurement methods. Descriptive information on recreation use types and patterns is needed to provide baseline information for management decisions, enable the identification and assessment of trends, identify possible effects of management actions on recreation, and assess the reciprocal effects of environmental change and recreation use. Currently, descriptive information on recreation use types and patterns is inconsistently collected, and what does exist is often not available at scales useful to land managers. It is difficult to make informed decisions about resource management

that affects recreation under these conditions. Researchers are interviewing managers to better understand what measurement methods are being used, what works best and under what conditions, and how data are used in planning and management.

Topic 2: Understanding peoples' connections to the land

Understanding why people care about places, the degree of attachment that they hold, the meanings they ascribe to them and how these meanings are related to expectations and visitation patterns forms a second focus of the recreation-tourism initiative. Such understanding may help identify and locate areas of public concern and interest so that management actions and promotion programs do not inadvertently impact them; conversely, this information may provide managers with opportunities to enhance delivery of recreation services to people. We are only beginning to understand how *place* influences recreation and tourism. The following questions are being explored: What is the relationship between place attachment—the bonds that people have for particular places—and how people recreate? What is the relationship between place attachment and the expectations people hold for management? How can a better understanding of place attachment help to inform management?

Topic 3: Implications for resource-based communities

This topic explores the role of tourism in resource-based communities. It is unclear if tourism represents a viable economic development sector in communities. A prerequisite to this may be an improved understanding of the resources, skills and attributes required to capitalize on opportunities for developing an economically viable tourism industry. What do community leaders need to know in order to determine the role tourism will play in their economy? Because the types of benefits and costs

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Trails provide recreation and education opportunities for national forest visitors. Increasing visitation to popular recreation trails prompts managers to consider visitor management strategies.

from tourism differ from those associated with traditional industries, when would community residents support the transition from being a resource-based community to a "tourism community?" These issues of desirability often have not received adequate attention, and systematic evaluations are lacking.

Topic 4: Tools for informing decisionmakers

The focus of the fourth topic concerns increasing the capacity of managers to make decisions about tourism and recreation. In a recent workshop, participants identified a need for understanding how and when to use existing frameworks for managing recreation and tourism, such as the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), for measuring management effects on recreational opportunities.

Outside of the workshop, other land managers have conferred with this sentiment. They also identified the need for innovative processes for place-based planning, broaching the following questions: How are frameworks currently being used? What factors limit their application? What adaptations might be required? How might we better incorporate social and cultural values and uses of individuals, groups and communities into multi-scale risk assessments of alternative resource management strategies?

Topic 5: Comprehensive valuations

Finally, valuation processes that include economic, social and cultural considerations make up the fifth topic to be researched. These processes are critical to improving and understanding the policy and land management practices that relate to tourism and recreation. Such processes are needed to better determine the full extent of costs and benefits of tourism and recreation at both the community and regional scales. Non-market valuation methods such as travel cost and contingent valuation often are used to determine the economic value of environmental resources such as recreation and wilderness activities and sites. How can we better identify the impacts and benefits of tourism and recreation at the community and regional scales? What are the contributions of recreation and tourism to national, regional and local economies? How can valuation methods be used in conjunction with recreation models such as ROS to determine demand for recreation in various places?

Products, outcomes and benefits

These studies will lead to an increased understanding of the role of recreation and tourism in sustaining local communities, an enhanced ability to make informed decisions, improved integration of recreation and tourism in planning and management processes, and reduced adverse impacts among recreation, tourism and other resource values.

In addition to several workshops (including a national recreation workshop to be held in Portland, February 8-10, 2005) and presentations, a series of PNW Research Station general technical reports is being edited to communicate the results of several studies. Journal articles are also being prepared

and a series of short summaries will be available to interested individuals and community groups. ♦

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Understanding the Role of Place

Two workshops, one for managers and one for researchers, provided a forum to examine the role of place in community development and forest management. The first workshop in November 2003 provided managers an opportunity to share their planning and public involvement techniques. Results of the workshop are being compiled and published as case study examples of field application. A workshop in April 2004 provided an opportunity for researchers to discuss the application of "sense of place" and place attachment. A small group of university participants and Forest Service researchers discussed a variety of disciplinary concepts, theories and perspectives of place.

Participants discussed how attention to place affects or transforms conflict among stakeholders and the role of place in collaborative learning and building trust and understanding. Each workshop participant is currently writing a paper about place; this collection of papers will be published later this year.



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