

The Influence of Activity Selection and Travel Distance on Forest Recreation Policies

Authors : Mark Morgan, Christine Li, Shuangyu Xu, Jenny McCarty

Abstract : The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by the U.S. Congress in 1968 (Public Law 90-542; 16 U.S.C. 1271 et seq.) to preserve outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values of some U.S. rivers in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations. This Act is notable for safeguarding the special character of these rivers while supporting management action that encourages public participation for co-creating river protection goals and strategies. This is not an easy task. To meet the challenges of modern ecosystem management, federal resource agencies must address many legal, environmental, economic, political, and social issues. The U.S. Forest Service manages a 44-mile section of the Eleven Point National Scenic River (EPR) in southern Missouri, mainly for outdoor recreation purposes. About half of the acreage is in private lands, while the remainder flows through the Mark Twain National Forest. Private land along the river is managed by scenic easements to ensure protection of scenic values and natural resources, without public access. A portion of the EPR lies adjacent to a 16,500-acre tract known as the Irish Wilderness. The spring-fed river has steep bluffs, deep pools, clear water, and a slow current, making it an ideal setting for outdoor enthusiasts. A 10-month visitor study was conducted at five access points along the EPR during 2019 so the US Forest Service could update their river management plan. A mail-back survey was administered to 560 on-site visitors, yielding a response rate of 53%. Although different types of visitors use the EPR, boating and fishing were the predominant forms of outdoor recreation. Some river use was from locals, but other visitors came from farther away. Formulating unbiased policies for outdoor recreation is difficult because managers must assign relative values to recreational activities and travel distance. Because policymaking is a subjective process, management decisions can affect user groups in different ways (i.e., boaters vs. fishers; proximate vs. distal visitors), as seen through a GIS analysis.

Keywords : activity selection, forest recreation, policy, travel distance

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