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Volume 16, 2008 - Issue 2

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Exploring Visitor Acceptability for Hardening Trails to Sustain Visitation and Minimise Impacts

Kerri L. Cahill, Jeffrey L. Marion & Steven R. Lawson

Pages 232-245 | Published online: 29 Jul 2010

Cite this article https://doi.org/10.2167/jost804.0

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Abstract

Protected natural area managers are challenged to provide high quality recreation opportunities and ensure the protection of resources from impacts associated with visitation. Development of visitor use facilities and application of site hardening practices are commonly applied tools for achieving these competing management objectives. This study applies stated choice analysis to examine visitor opinions on acceptability when they are asked to make tradeoffs among competing social, resource and management attributes in backcountry and frontcountry settings of Acadia National Park. This study demonstrates that asking visitors about recreation setting attributes uni-dimensionally, a common approach, can yield less informative responses. Analyses that considered direct tradeoffs revealed more divergent opinions on acceptability for setting attributes than a unidimensional approach. Findings revealed

that visitors to an accessible and popular attraction feature supported trail development options to protect resource conditions with unrestricted visitor access. In contrast, visitors to a remote undeveloped island expressed stronger support for no or limited trail development and access restrictions to protect resource conditions.

Keywords:

park facility development | park planning | park zoning | stated choice analysis | visitor acceptability

Acknowledgements

This paper was derived from the doctoral research of Kerri L. Cahill at Virginia Tech. Scholarly review and assistance in conducting the study and preparing this manuscript was received by the student's doctoral committee that included Jeff Marion, Joe Roggenbuck, John Randolph, Mike Mortimer and Steve McMullin. Technical support on the statistical modelling was provided by Don Anderson from StatDesign Consulting and Ed Boone at Virginia Tech. Funding support was received from the National Park Service, Acadia National Park.

Notes

* Portrayed in the survey with these narrative statements, as well as photos.

* Coefficients for the excluded level of the attribute were not estimated by the statistical model, but rather were calculated as the negative sum of the coefficients on the other three levels of the corresponding attribute.

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