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

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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

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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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