

Characteristics and Use Patterns of Visitors to Dispersed Areas of Urban National Forests

Donald B. K. English¹, Susan M. Kocis² and Stanley J. Zarnoch³

¹ U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Southern Forest Experiment Station, Athens, USA
e-mail: denglish@fs.fed.us

² U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Region 5, Six Rivers National Forest, Bridgeville, CA, USA

³ U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Southern Forest Experiment Station, Asheville, NC, USA

Public recreation areas near large urban centers are experiencing increasing pressure from visitation. Visitation pressure is particularly problematic in undeveloped and wildland areas that are close to expanding population centers. Understanding the use patterns, characteristics, and perceptions of recreation visitors is critical to managing these areas for maximum sustainable benefits. Of the over 120 National Forests in the United States, eighteen have been officially designated as 'Urban' National Forests, because of their proximity to large metropolitan areas. Over half of these forests have designated Wilderness areas within them. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of the recreation visitors to the undeveloped portions of those National Forests. Key market segments of visitors are identified with respect to demographics, residence, annual use frequency, and visit duration. In addition, visitor perceptions of crowding and safety and their relationship with visitation levels are examined. Management implications of the identified market segments are also discussed.

Key Words: Urban forests, use patterns, visitor perceptions, crowding, visitor characteristics, demographics, wilderness.