

Modeling the trail uses of Jasper residents in Jasper National Park

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In Canada, only few National Parks contain significant numbers of residents. The Town of Jasper in Jasper National Park, located in the Canadian Rockies, is one such exception. Given the fact that the Canada National Parks Act of 2000 declares ecological integrity as the primary objective of national parks management, the recreation activities by town residents are of particular concern. Residents on the other hand perceive the unique recreation opportunities of the national park as an additional attraction.

Around the town of Jasper there exists an elaborate network of trails suitable for walking, mountain biking, and horseback riding. Many of these trails are located in the montane ecoregion of the park valleys, which are important habitat for several species, and also represent a crucial wildlife corridor.

Over the past few years, detailed habitat mapping and ecological monitoring had been undertaken. During the summer of 2003 we embarked on an elaborate monitoring of trail use, combined with a short intercept survey of users, who were then recruited for a larger mail survey.

In the presentation, I will focus on results of the mail survey, which also contained a discrete choice experiment of trail users, in which respondents chose between various hypothetical trail scenarios. The variables described trail management (which activities were allowed, presence or absence of warden patrols, and intensity of signage), trail characteristics (surface, topography, level of maintenance, forest type), trip highlights (lake / river, viewpoints, wildlife viewing), and encounters with other users (hikers / joggers, mountain bikers, horseback riders). In each choice set, respondents allocated a total of 10 outings between 3 hypothetical trails and the alternative of recreating outside of that area.

The analysis will explore the acceptance of several management alternatives, including ecologically preferable options, and alternatives that might reduce conflicts between different user groups. In that latter regard, valuable insights into influence of perceived crowding are expected.