

Closing forest areas for recreational use – acceptable or not for the visitors?

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Among the arguments for a more dynamic/flexible nature and outdoor recreation management practice in Denmark – like temporary access limitations – is that the wildlife seems to be more abundant – especially breeding birds of prey – in privately owned forests compared to state forests, because of a more peaceful environment. A fact supporting this hypothesis is that the state forests are open for access by foot day and night, all year round, and it is allowed to move outside the roads and paths - in contrary to the privately owned forests where the access is more restricted (6 am to sunset - and only on the roads and paths).

A research program funded by Danish Outdoor Council has been set up, aiming at getting knowledge on e.g.: 1) the influence on the wildlife by restricting the access to specific forest sites; and 2) the visitors' attitudes to such restrictions.

Visitors to the state forest 'Hestehaven' were interviewed seven weekends during May-September 2006 (n=192). As part of the survey the central part of the forest was closed for visitors from 1. May to 1. October, by a simple physical barrier across the roads, leading into the closed area. In addition, three different texts on signs informing about the access restrictions were used (changed every month).

The majority of the visitors stated that they were either not aware of the closure (42%) or that it did not make any difference (49%), while 9% indicated that the pleasure decreased. The visitors generally support ('eventually') restricting the access (to 'smaller areas' of the forest), and preferably by the means of fencing compared to signs/information.

When the wildlife data (collected by the National Environmental Research Institute, Univ. of Aarhus) is analyzed in connection with the present visitor data, future decisions in relation to nature and outdoor recreation management can be taken on a higher knowledge base. - An example of 'Integrative Science for Integrative Management'.