

WILDERNESS VISITOR PERCEPTIONS OF OBTRUSIVENESS AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD THE AGENCY IN PREDICTING RECREATION FEE LEVEL SUPPORT

ALAN E. WATSON, CHRISTINE VOGT

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

While national emphasis has mostly been on methods of pricing, predicting revenue and monitoring satisfaction with newly imposed recreation fees on public lands, research at the Desolation Wilderness in California has focused on understanding the sources of negative reaction to the fees. While it is most commonly assumed that visitor response to fee programs will be a function of satisfaction with on-site recreation experiences, this paper addresses the possibility that response to the fees is at least somewhat based on trust, confidence and perceptions the public has of the agency administering the fee program.

METHODS

At the Desolation Wilderness, surveys of overnight and day users from the 1997 use season (see Watson and others, elsewhere in this site, for details), provided the opportunity to determine the relationship between attitudes towards fees and feelings toward the Forest Service. A measure of obtrusiveness ("the magnitude of negative emotional response by the visitor attributed to managers' decisions") used elsewhere to determine visitor response to conflict management actions, was adopted to judge response to the fees. A five item summative scale included questions about how much the fees affected enjoyment of a particular trip, how reasonable the fee is, how the fees influence attitudes toward management, and how effective the visitor believes the fees will be in maintaining or improving environmental and social conditions in the wilderness. A second, more specific measure of attitude toward the agency was included in the survey, also. This was a measure of perceived similarity between the visitor's and the agency's interest and values was obtained through a 5-item summative scale, assessing how strongly the visitor thought they shared values with the agency, how much they were alike, if they had similar goals, if the agency supported the visitor's views, and whether they thought alike.

The relationships between these two measures of attitude toward the agency and acceptability of wilderness use fees, response to the current fee level, maximum and appropriate prices, intention to donate and overall feelings toward the fee program at the

Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute: Publication # 337

CITATION: Watson, Alan E.; Vogt, Christine. 1998. Wilderness visitor perceptions of obtrusiveness and their attitudes toward the agency in predicting recreation fee level support. [On line]. In: Societal response to recreation fees on public lands; 1998 May 27-31; Columbia, MO. Posted at: http://www.fs.fed.us/research/rvur/wilderness/recreation_fees.htm.

Desolation were examined through correlation coefficients. The magnitude of the coefficients indicate the strength of the relationships.

RESULTS

Table 1. Correlation coefficients (absolute value) measuring association (with significance levels) for obtrusiveness and perceived similarity of interests/values with attitudes towards fees at the Desolation Wilderness

Acceptability	Obtrusiveness	Interests/Values
Camping permit fee:		
..Overnight Form A	.64 (<.001)	.27 (<.001)
Overnight Form B	.63 (<.001)	.27 (<.001)
Day use Form A	.55 (<.001)	.23 (.010)
Day use Form B	.62 (<.001)	.34 (.001)
Permit reservation fee:		
Overnight Form A	.58 (<.001)	.23 (<.001)
Overnight Form B	.59 (<.001)	.20 (.001)
Day use Form A	.46 (<.001)	.13 (.116)
Day use Form B	.54 (<.001)	.40 (<.001)
Parking fee:		
Overnight Form A	.47 (<.001)	.17 (.008)
Overnight Form B	.33 (<.001)	.14 (.017)
Day use Form A	.70 (<.001)	.30 (.001)
Day use Form B	.66 (<.001)	.24 (.009)
Day use fee:		
Overnight Form A	.43 (<.001)	.28 (<.001)
Overnight Form B	.34 (<.001)	.19 (.002)
Day use Form A	.63 (<.001)	.28 (.002)
Day use Form B	.59 (<.001)	.17 (.042)
Response to fee level		
Camping permit fee:		
Overnight Form A	.65 (<.001)	.23 (<.001)
Overnight Form B	.61 (<.001)	.26 (<.001)
Permit reservation fee:		
Overnight Form A	.54 (<.001)	.20 (.003)
Overnight Form B	.52 (<.001)	.19 (.007)
Annual camping pass:		
Overnight Form A	.56 (<.001)	.04 (.396)
Overnight Form B	.71 (<.001)	.37 (.001)
Maximum willing to pay		
Day use Form A	.52 (<.001)	.21 (0.16)
Day use Form B	.34 (<.001)	.28 (.004)

Maximum appropriate to pay

Day use Form A	.47 (<.001)	.20 (.036)
Day use Form B	.48 (<.001)	.29 (.006)
Amount would donate, if asked		
Day use Form A	.25 (.023)	.26 (.017)
Day use Form B	.23 (.037)	.24 (.032)
Overall fees are good thing		
Overnight Form A	.69 (<.001)	.32 (<.001)
Overnight Form B	.61 (<.001)	.35 (<.001)

There are significant relationships between obtrusiveness and attitudes toward fees, both real and proposed. There are also significant, but weaker relationships, between similarities in perceptions of interests and values and attitudes toward the fees, both real and proposed. Obtrusiveness would be an excellent indicator for monitoring the overall attitude towards fee programs. It would be a better measure than simply a measure of on-site satisfaction. Attitudes toward fees are a function of impacts on the experience and perceptions of reasonableness of the fee structure, attitudes toward agency actions, and likely effectiveness of controlling environmental and social condition effects.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

There is need for greater understanding of negative visitor response to recreation fees on public lands. Research is needed to further investigate the roles of agency image, trust in the administering agency, past experience in relations with the agency, and perceptions of how well agency actions represent the values of the responding public. Better understanding of how these off-site factors influence attitude toward fees programs will contribute substantially to policy decisions at places where new fee programs are applied. More broad application of the obtrusiveness and values/interests scales is needed across opportunity classes and agencies.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Managers must realize that attitudes toward the fee programs are not solely related to trip satisfaction. The beliefs, attitudes and knowledge the public holds about the managing agency influence overall reaction to the fees. In the past, we have assumed that visitors react to wilderness management actions based primarily upon how well the agency is managing the wilderness. Evidence from this fees research suggests that there are many things that happen away from the site that influence attitudes toward management actions. The obtrusiveness scale would be an excellent indicator to use to establish

baselines and monitor the response of visitors to fee programs.

CONTACT AUTHOR

Alan E. Watson
Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute
USDA-USDI
Box 8089
Missoula, MT 59807
406-542-4197
406-542-4196 (FAX)
awatson/rmrs_missoula@fs.fed.us

Source:

Societal Response to Recreation Fees on Public Lands. A research session at the Seventh International Symposium on Society and Resource Management: Culture, Environment, and Society. May 27-31, 1998, University of Missouri, Columbia. Posted at:
http://www.fs.fed.us/research/rvur/wilderness/recreation_fees.htm

Back to Table of Contents