

Does recreation ecology have a place in East Asia? Some insights from Taiwan

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Abstract — The significance of East Asian protected areas to support biodiversity conservation and nature-based tourism is increasingly recognized, so is the tension between these two objectives. Recreation ecology, the scientific study of visitor impacts in protected areas and their effective management, seems to have a role to play in resolving this conflict. At the last MMV conference, the general status of recreation ecology research in East Asia was summarized (Leung 2006). Three major developmental stages of this area of research development and some key challenges were identified. This presentation at MMV4 is intended to follow up with this line of dialogue by examining recreation ecology research on Taiwan Island as a case example. In Taiwan, the common occurrence of visitor impacts in forest recreation areas has long been acknowledged by managers and researchers. There were significant concerns about extensive soil and water conservation problems associated with recreation facility development in sensitive mountain areas in the 1980s. Such concerns led to focused research efforts carried out by several researchers since the 1990s. However, the diversity of topics and research methodology remained low and many of these earlier studies had a weak connection to management practice. Many studies were short-term investigations with limited management utility, mirroring the nature of research funding mechanism. Despite the constraints, several recent projects are showing signs that some protected area administrators may be more receptive of the role of recreation ecology research and long-term impact monitoring in supporting a more proactive approach to visitor management in protected areas. These projects, the trends they may represent, and the implications to the East Asian region in regard to challenges and opportunities will be highlighted

Index Terms — Recreation ecology, nature-based tourism, East Asia, visitor impact.



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