

# Outdoor Recreationists in Oregon and Washington: A Comparison of Recreationists' Perceptions of Experience Satisfaction Across Two US Pacific Northwest States

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the differences in trip characteristics, levels of satisfaction, and economic expenditures of outdoor recreationists in two similar US states; Oregon and Washington. The states of Oregon and Washington make up the geographic area known as the US Pacific Northwest. The socio-economic makeup of the two states is somewhat different. The population of Oregon is approximately 3.5 million, while the Washington population is nearly 6 million. The median income for Oregon residents in 2000 was \$40,916, while the median income for Washington residents was \$45,776. Given a median income of US households of \$41,994, Oregon residents' income levels were similar to the national median, while Washington households were somewhat higher (US Bureau of the Census, 2002). The mean number of persons per household was 2.59, compared to 2.51 in Oregon, and 2.53 in Washington. According to statistics provided by the US Bureau of Census (2002), the poverty rate for families with three people is \$14,128. A total of 11.6% of Oregon households were under the US poverty level, compared to 10.6% of the Washington households.

The Pacific Northwest (PNW) includes 20 US National Forest (NF) units, including some urban-oriented forests (forests near Portland, Oregon and Seattle, Washington) and many rural National Forests in both states. The USDA Forest Service (USFS) is the land management agency charged

with providing recreation opportunities and other non-recreation uses on the 20 NF units. The NF units in the PNW are all managed under Region 6 of the USFS.

## Methods

The study was conducted as part of the US Forest Service's National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) initiative. NVUM interviewers conduct face-to-face interviews of recreationists as they exit from a national forest to understand recreation use patterns in every national forest. The NVUM study examined basic visitation patterns, satisfaction indicators, and spending patterns in and around the Forest unit. This study examines three years of data collected in Oregon and Washington (N=12,909). Data were collected through the use of on-site surveys of exiting recreationists from Oregon/Washington National Forests. Analysis was conducted through comparing mean scores, using SPSS (version 11.5).

## Results

Significant differences were noted for several of the trip characteristics. Washington users visited National Forests less frequently (WA=13.50 visits in past 12 months, OR=18.18), reported fewer days away from their homes on this trip (WA=4.97 nights away from home, OR=7.92), and visited undeveloped day use areas more often (WA=1.24 visits, OR=.48). The respondents reported their

economic expenditures in and around the National Forest that they were visiting. Although many of the economic expenditure categories showed no significant differences, some interesting disparities were noted between respondents in the two states. Washington respondents reported a significantly higher amount of money spent on outdoor recreation in an average year (WA=\$2392 in typical year, OR=\$2088). Washington respondents also reported that they spent over twice the amount of money on recreation fees on this trip than Oregon residents (WA=\$23.05 on this trip, OR=\$10.31). This study included ratings of importance and satisfaction for 14 experiential variables, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 is lowest, 5 is highest). Three of the importance variables and five of the satisfaction variables showed significant differences across the states. Interestingly, Washington respondents showed a higher satisfaction level for “value for fee paid” than Oregon respondents, for “condition of natural environment,” and for “helpfulness of employees.” Conversely, Oregon respondents reported higher satisfaction scores for “condition of developed facilities” and “condition of forest roads.” Regarding the importance of these same attributes, Oregon respondents rated the importance of “safety” higher, while Washington residents rated the importance of “condition of trails” and “helpfulness of employees” higher than Oregonians.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Numerous differences were noted in the responses of Oregonians and Washingtonians with regards to outdoor recreation. Although these two states are in close geographic and relatively close economic proximity, many differences were noted across the trip characteristics, economic variables, and satisfaction indicators. These differences highlight the importance of segmenting populations that may seem to be homogeneous at first glance, and validate the effort the US Forest Service is making in this monitoring effort. The Forest Service now uses these results in concert with management decisions, such as allocating funds for maintenance of recreation areas and deciding what sites may be too costly to operate, making these data increasingly important to managers.