

Visitor Monitoring of Eight Recreational and Protected Areas

Tomm Jensen

Nordland County Council, Norway

tomm.jensen@nfk.no

Keywords: Outdoor recreational activities, national parks and protected areas, monitoring movements.

Introduction

The primary objective of the project is to provide answers on if, where applicable, and how the use of an area changes when it is awarded national park status, increased focus and attention. The project can also, as a side effect, provide knowledge and understanding of how various information, administrative and organisational strategies affect the use of, and level of attention paid to, our national parks.

The project can quantify the use of differing types of open-air recreational areas and help to clarify the usefulness of organisational initiatives in relation to the number of users.

The project is part of a more comprehensive cooperation with The Nordland Research Institute.

Four new national parks are under establishment in Nordland. One of the objections to the establishment of the parks is that public use of the areas will increase and thus threaten that which one wishes to preserve. This claim has not been verified. The main objective of the project is thus to increase our level of knowledge on how the establishment of national parks affects the use of these national park areas (and organised and adapted leisure areas) in thinly populated counties such as Nordland.

Methods

Pressure pads that were developed in Scotland are employed. The pressure pads are buried at a depth of 6-7 cm in pathways and covered with earth/gravel from the area immediately adjacent. The pressure pads are connected to a con-

cealed data pod. Both the pad and the pod are concealed under the surface. Data is transferred to a computer once per year. Each footstep on the pad results in a registration or "hit". The date and time of the hit is registered simultaneously. The registration period is from June 1st to October 31st.

The pressure pads are laid in recreational areas in the vicinity of populated areas, previously established national parks, newly established national parks and national parks under establishment. This pattern is designed to allow us to isolate the impact of national park status on the use of walking/hiking areas, and any changes in the impact of national park status over time.

Any increase in the level of interest in the area is monitored via Internet searches, searches in news media and similar. Registrations will cover a period of between 4 and 7 years in order to negate any incidental seasonal variations.

Expected results

On the basis of our general experience, we expect to see an increase in recreational use of areas that are established as national parks. The methodical layout will also illustrate the impact of any change in status, changes due to improved organisation/physical changes, and increased focus on the area.

The results are affected by a number of change factors simultaneously. Time series are entered in advance of the establishment and a three to four year period subsequent to this. This provides, together with the choice of areas studied, the possibility to make corrections for the impact of the various change factors.

Table1: Provisional results 2005.

| Location | Type of area | 2003/2004 | 2005 |
|---------------------|---|-------------------------|---------------|
| Futelva | Recreational area close to populated area | 25 231 (8601) | 26 144 (9431) |
| Sjunkan/Misten | Planned national park | 1 | 1 |
| Rago | Established national park | 1 314 (3769) | 2 026 (3160) |
| Junkerdalsura | Newly established national | 6 341 (3695) | 7 015 (5041) |
| Storjord Arboretum, | Recreational area close to populated area | 2 | 2 982 (3836) |
| Granneset | Established national park | 1 974 (3143) | 1 916 (3067) |
| Stavassdal | Planned national park | 368 ³ (2517) | 750 (2705) |
| Simskaret | Established national park | 1 839 (2593) | 1 596 (3145) |

Table 1 shows the number of hits on the pressure pads during the period they have been placed out. The pods at Futelva, Junkerdalsura and Storjord Arboretum register traffic from mid-April to the end of October. The pods at the other locations register traffic from around June 1st to the end of October. This is due to frost and snow conditions.

The figures in brackets show the number of hours the pads and pods have been installed.

¹ Installed in the autumn of 2005

² No registrations were made for the Arboretum in 2004.

³ This figure is lower than expected due to the temporary re-routing of the pathway.

Table 2: Assessment of expected results.

| Change | Recreational area close to populated area | Established national park | New national parks | Comments |
|--|--|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| General increase in outdoor activities | Increase | Increase | Increase | |
| Increase in impact of national park status | No change | Increase | Increase | Seen in comparison to the overall picture |
| Status results in increase in outdoor activities | No change | No change | Increase | Seen in comparison to the overall picture |
| Increased focus on some areas | Increase | ? | Increase | Depending on point of focus |
| Improved preparation for outdoor activities | Increase | ? | ? | Depending on where improvements are made |