

## Visitor Management in a Floodplain Area near Zurich

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### Introduction

We present our approach to visitor flow management and visitor information in a newly recreated floodplain area in Geroldswil and Dietikon near Zurich.

The area was recreated in 2004 as an ecological compensation for the renovation of the hydroelectric power plant Wettingen, operated by the Electric Power Company of the City of Zurich (ewz). The floodplain measures 900 m<sup>2</sup> and is situated close to an old 2'000 m<sup>2</sup> nature reserve area across the river Limmat. One year after construction, some sensitive bird species like the Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) have already bred in the new alluvial plain area. The floodplain has become a natural reserve. In 2005, the opposite riverside was recreated. New gravel isles and coves were built to revitalize the borderline.

However, on weekends, the number of visitors on the trails bordering the area rises to approximately 70/h, many of them walking their unleashed dogs. Although prohibited, people tend to enter the area

in summer, to go for a swim in the river or to have a picnic at the riverbank. Authorities had to take measures to manage the visitor flow and to protect the area from trespassing.

### Methods

We identified potential problems related to visitors and established protecting measures.

To manage visitor flow and inform the public about regulations for protection of the area the following actions were taken:

- Structural measures (fencing off trails)
- Placement of information boards
- Informative articles in the local press
- Surveillance service by student rangers

During surveillance, rangers journalized misdeeds and recorded and evaluated discussions with visitors and other observations.

### Results

The mean number of visitors is 21/h on weekdays and 67/h on weekends. On weekends, 66% of all visitors are walkers. On weekdays 43% of all visitors are dog walkers. In summer, swimmers are numerous. Birdwatchers are infrequent.

### Identified problems are (decreasing relevance)

- Trespassing on the isle and gravel banks
- Swimming in forbidden areas of the river
- Free running dogs in protected zones
- Entering protected zones.



Figure 1: Investigation area near Zurich. Paths are marked in red, viewing platforms and hide as yellow points. The protected area is hatched.



Figure 2: View of a hide for birdwatchers to observe without disturbing animals.

In summary, the most important misconduct is walking on gravel banks along the riverside (35% of all misdeeds). On summer weekends, swimming is very popular (32% of all misdeeds). On weekday, in contrast, freely running dogs are the main problem (20% of misdeeds). Misconduct is always located in the same places. Thus, problem areas can clearly be located and dealt with on the spot (i.e. with information boards or fences). Problems arise from habits such as walking along the river's side. Also alternative non-prohibited swimming areas need to be offered closely. The local press was found to be an appropriated forum for informing the public and for discussion.

Landscape elements such as hedges, fosses, gravel-covered areas, vegetation units, and water increase attractiveness of an area. Once an

area is made attractive and accessible, rangers or appeal boards have little effect on visitor flow. Clear and reasonable protection rules are then vital for effective work of the rangers to protect the area. Protecting fences are relatively well accepted by the public and can be added to hedges. Hides and viewing platforms are appreciated when placed at attractive viewpoints.

### Conclusion

- Key for a successful management of visitor flow is the composition of landscape elements in situ
- Alternative possibilities (swimming) should be offered
- Rules have to be clear and reasonable
- Surveillance service effectively increases acceptance of protection rules
- The local press and information boards are appropriate means of communication to the public

### References

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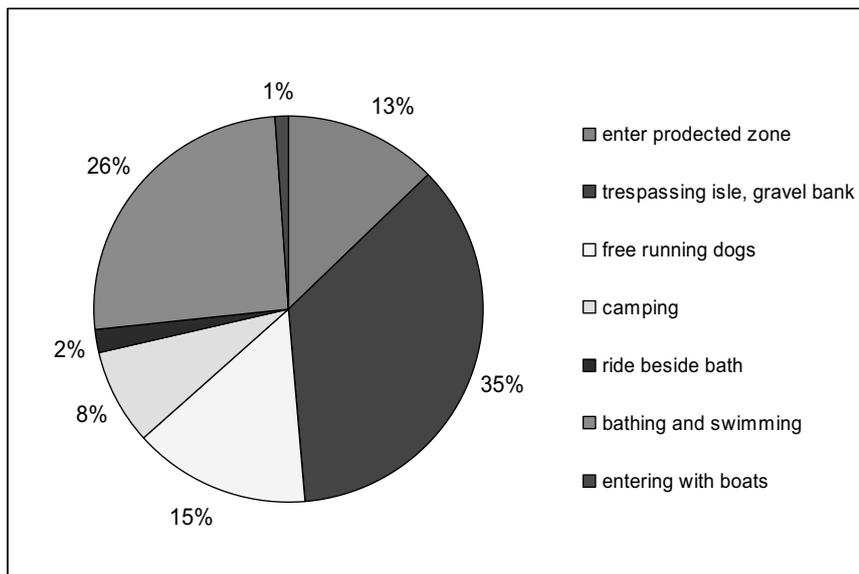


Figure 3: Percentage of all misdeeds in the investigation area between April 16th and July 17th, 2006 (number of control rounds = 37). Only during eight of all 37 rounds (22%) no misconduct was recorded.