

Context matters in behavioural recreation research

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By now behavioural research on outdoor recreation is a mature field of investigation. A number of theories and concepts have been developed; some have been adapted from social psychology in general, some emerged as novel ideas within recreation. Usually such a concept is applicable to many outdoor recreation activities, and over time a solid basis of knowledge has accumulated about satisfaction, crowding, motivation, specialization and similar other theories. On some topics, meta-analyses have been conducted to consolidate findings from the many case studies.

It is somewhat perplexing that although our field of investigation is largely based on case studies, so far rather little attention has been paid to the context of these case studies. The vast majority of these studies apply the same theory on various scales or to various time frames without further scrutiny. Survey questions may require the respondent to focus on an entire year or a single visit, or the investigation may cover large management regions, or a very localized

area specializing in one or two very specific activities. Only few studies have explicitly compared this issue of context in space or time. The few studies which have focused on this context explicitly have observed – sometimes remarkable – differences.

My presentation will summarize past research and present the findings of several recent studies we have conducted in this regard, most with a focus on recreational fishing. Understanding context specificity is especially important if theory driven knowledge is to be transferred to other locations, or when it is to be used in integrated modeling such as socio-ecological models or agent based models.

