

# The value of nature close to home for outdoor recreation in Sweden

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## Introduction

In Sweden there is a strong tradition of using nature areas for outdoor recreation. The Swedish people have the right of public access to nature for outdoor recreation. However, over the last century the population has changed from being predominantly rural to being mainly urban. The distance from home to nature areas for recreation then becomes an issue. In a study of preferences for distance to recreational forests in Sweden, Hörnsten and Fredman (2000) found that residents were willing to pay to avoid an increase in the distance to recreational forests. Similar results have also been found in other countries (Tyrväinen, 1998; del Saz Salazar and Menéndez, 2007). This study explores preferences and willingness to pay regarding outdoor recreation in different natural environments close to home, by means of the contingent valuation method. In order to include all nature that might also be considered urban proximate the maximum distance for these recreational visits was set at 100 km and the maximum length of the stay was set at 24 hours to exclude tourist visits and focus more on “every day recreation” (Becken, 2002; Naturvårdsverket, 2009).

## Methodology and some preliminary results

The data originated from a nationwide mail survey that involved 4700 randomly selected Swedish citizens between 18 and 75 years of age. The willingness to pay question was of the open-ended format. The respondents were asked to state the maximum amount of money they would be willing to pay to avoid losing their current level of outdoor recreation close to home.

The response rate was approximately 40%. About 60% of the respondents stated that they use nature areas close to their home for recreation and their average frequency of visits to these areas each year was in the range 70 to 85 times, depending on the delimitation of the sample. The average distance travelled to visit the most important nature area was about 15 km and the average time spent at the area was 3–4 hours. About half of the respondents had visited areas dominated by forests for recreation and the corresponding figure was about 25% for water dominated areas (see Figure 1). Multiplying the willingness to pay per visit by the visiting frequency suggested an annual mean willingness to pay of more than 7000 SEK (-US\$ 1000) for outdoor recreation close to home. The willingness to pay was found to be influenced by factors such as nature area type, degree of urbanization, and income.

## Discussion

This study indicates a willingness to pay for outdoor recreation close to home that is of the same order of magnitude as found in some other Swedish studies (Fredman et al., 2012). The willingness to pay for recreation in different nature types varies considerably. For example, the results suggest that nature areas dominated by forests are associated with a lower willingness to pay than some other types of nature. This may be due to forests often being visited closer to home and for activities that are less exclusive. Moreover, respondents in urban areas were found to have a lower willingness to pay for their outdoor recreation in comparison with respondents living in less urban areas. This could be due to differences in preferences, but also to a general shortage of suitable environments for outdoor recreation in more urban areas relative to less urban areas. The findings highlight the importance of nature types for close to home recreation. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of considering the supply of outdoor recreation opportunities as well as preferences of urban residents. This becomes an important issue when allocating land between competing uses in increasingly densely built environments. The results provide one input to the land use planning process by considering the demand for nature-based outdoor recreation close to home.

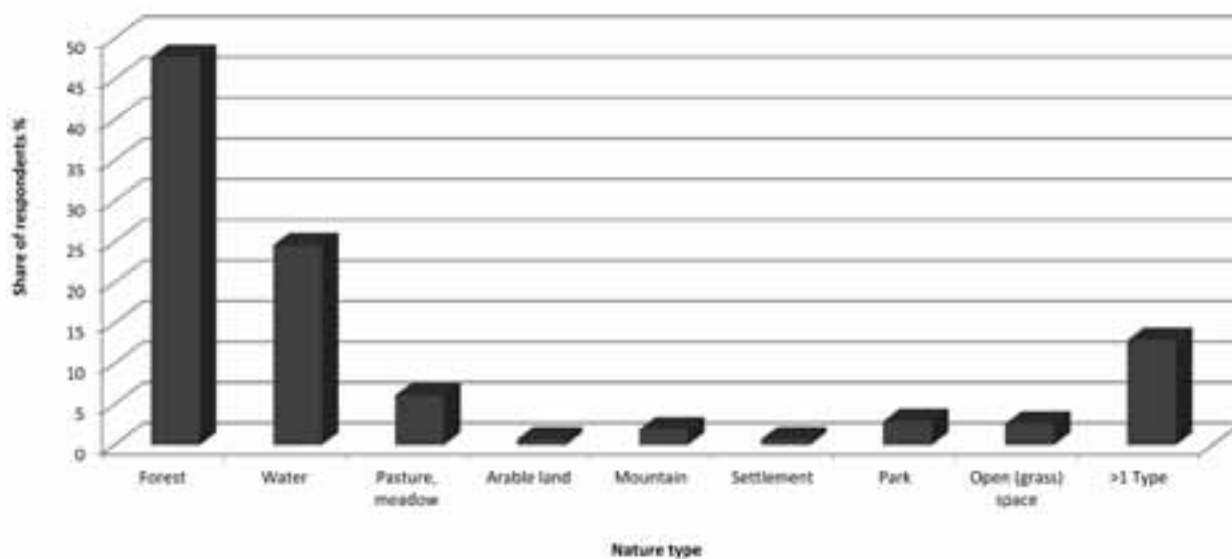


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents according to type of nature visited close to home (within 100 km and for less than 24 hours).

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