

Visitor Conflicts and their Resolution for Forest and Park Management in Jozankei National forest, Japan

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Introduction

During the past decade, demand for recreational use in the national forests is a major concern for forest management, especially in protected forests. In Japan, it has been difficult for forest managers to satisfy these demands because they lack the data on recreational use in the forest, social scientific knowledge to analyze the conflict between visitors and managers; as well as discussions to solve the conflict. Furthermore, in recent years, accidents during outdoor activities are increasing steadily. Thus, it is also a matter for the managers and public sectors to avoid or reduce every type of accident in the forest.

This paper seeks to illustrate the present situation and the conflicts between the visitors and the forest managers and to discuss how to solve the conflicts in the Jozankei National Forest, Japan, as an example.

Method

Jozankei National Forest is a part of the Shikotsu Toya National Parks and many citizens venture into the forest for recreational use. According to the leading survey, at least 10,000 people come into the forest per year. Concurrently, it is vital as the water source for the 1.8 million population of Sapporo city. The forest manager has to satisfy these demands and produce timber simultaneously.

We conducted two questionnaire surveys: 1) For visitors at the Jozankei National Forest, we distributed the questionnaire sheets on the windshield of the parked cars along the forest roads with envelopes to send it back after filling out the responses in June 2005.

2) For foresters belonging to the Ishikari forestry management office which is responsible for maintaining the forest, we directly distributed and recovered the questionnaire sheets in 2002.

Results

We distributed 207 questionnaire sheets for visitors during 5 days in June 2005 and received 118. Thus, response rate was 57.0%. The main age brackets were 50's and 40's, and the ratios were 41.4% and 33.4% respectively. About three-fourth of the visitors were male. The major pattern during the visit was: 1) to go into the forest around 8 o'clock in the morning 2) to stay at least 4 to 6 hours while doing various activities, 3) to go back to their own place around sunset. These findings well followed the result of mechanical monitoring at the control gate (Takahashi 2002). Most of visitors lived in Sapporo city, which is one of the major urban areas surrounding the forest, and no one visited who lived outside the one-hour drive vicinity. The objectives of the visit were mostly to cultivate bamboo shoots and wild edible plants. Most of them were collected for self-consumption or gifts for relatives and neighbours, not for merchandise. 86.2% of the respondents visited with family, neighbours and colleagues as a group. The average number of persons per group was 2.8; only 13.6% of them visited solely.

While in the forest, they rarely feel at risk of an accident, but 53.4% of them took measures for preventing accidents. 63.6% of the respondents accepted to share the cost if effective measures for accidents in the forest would be in place. On the other hand, they were not satisfied with control of

the gate at the entrance of the forest. Acceptable ideas for gate control were varied depending on the respondent's opinion from full control to free access.

We also proposed the survey to 16 foresters belonging to the Ishikari forestry management office in June 2002. As a result, four-fifths of them considered that visitors have at least some sort of effect on management activities such as additional maintenance of the forest roads and other facilities, illegal cutting and dumping of waste. They also pointed out that the current method of gate control at the entrance of the forest for controlling the visitors was not effective. The ideas for visitor control were varied from free access to strict control, same as the results from visitors.

These results indicate that Jozankei National Forest gives unique recreational opportunities for the neighbouring citizens, especially for the middle- and senior-aged. But, many gaps exist between the visitors and the managers, and both sectors are not satisfied at the current moment. On the other hand, visitors could accept to pay the cost in return for valuable services, and both sectors had various ideas for filling the gaps. Thus as a next step, we will emphasize integrating harmonizing visitor use into the forest and recreational management plan.

References

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