

# Lions and Tigers and Bears – Oh My!

## Understanding Wildland Visitation

### VOCABULARY

Vocabulary in article indicated in italics

#### **Demographic**

Physical characteristics of people, such as their age, sex, or race

#### **Hypothesis** (hi poth' eh sis)

An educated guess about the solution to a question or problem based on existing knowledge

#### **Meaning**

In this study, different meanings of *wildlands* are predicted by the attitudes people have toward those *wildlands*

#### **Outdoor recreation**

Activities done outdoors for fun and enjoyment

#### **Quantify**

To measure something and assign a number to it

#### **Rural**

Outside of the city

#### **Scale**

A special kind of questionnaire that social scientists use to understand people's opinions or attitudes

#### **Wildland**

Forested or other natural environment that does not contain buildings or other human construction

The scientists in this study conducted **basic research** to better understand why some people do not visit some natural areas, such as national forests and parks. Basic research is not always aimed at solving a particular problem, but serves to advance knowledge in a particular area of interest. In this study, however, the findings could be used by forest and park managers to improve the opportunities for all people to visit forests and parks.

### Introduction

National forests, parks, and other *wildland* areas are provided by state and federal governments for the use and enjoyment of all Americans. Not all people, however, use these areas for outdoor recreation. *Outdoor recreation* enables people to see and enjoy the great outdoors. Therefore, it is important that all Americans have an opportunity to visit *wildlands* if they want. When people do not visit *wildlands* and other outdoor areas, forest and park managers want to know why. In this research, social scientists Cassandra Johnson, Pat Horn, and William Pepper wanted to compare visitation to *wildland* areas for rural African Americans and White Americans. The scientists had a *hypothesis* that *wildland* visitation is related to the *meaning* that *wildlands* have for different people. In the past, scientists discovered that their race, age, gender, and other characteristics might explain why some people do not visit *wildlands*. The scientists wanted to test the *hypothesis* that a person's race, age, or gender are not the only factors involved with wildland visitation. They hypothesized (guessed) that the *meaning* of *wildland* areas plays a large part in whether a person will want to visit wildland areas for *outdoor recreation*.

*Adapted from:*

Johnson, Cassandra Y., P. M. Horn and W. D. Pepper. 1997. Race, rural residence, and wildland visitation: Examining the influence of sociocultural meaning. *Journal of Rural Sociology*. 62:89-107.

## Methods

The scientists mailed a questionnaire to people living in a *rural* area. People who received the questionnaire were asked to give their age, sex, and other *demographic* characteristics. But they also used a special kind of a questionnaire to collect information on *wildland meaning*. This kind of questionnaire is called a *scale*. The scientists' *scale* consisted of many statements about *wildlands*, and people were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement. If a person did not agree with the statement at all, the scientist gave that statement a score of one for that person. If they agreed completely with the statement, the scientist gave them a score of five. In this way, the scientists were able to *quantify* the responses. For example, the scientists might have asked people if they thought *wildland* areas were safe places to visit. If the person did not think wildland areas were safe to visit, they would get a score of one for that statement. The scientists also asked people whether they visited wildland areas. They compiled answers from 124 African Americans and 303 White Americans living in the *rural* Florida panhandle. The Apalachicola National Forest is located within this area.



## Reflection

- 1 How do you feel when you think of your favorite outdoor place?
- 2 What does your favorite place mean to you?
- 3 Do you think that your favorite outdoor place would be different if you were a member of the opposite sex? Why or why not?
- 4 Would your favorite outdoor place be different if you grew up in a country other than the United States? Why or why not?

## Reflection

- 1 What do you think the advantages are to assigning numbers to people's responses? What are the disadvantages?
- 2 What do you think the scientists found out about wildland visitation and a person's age, race, and gender?
- 3 Do you think wildland meaning was more important than age, race, and gender for people who did not visit wildlands?

## Results

Ms. Johnson and her colleagues found that *rural* African Americans visited wildlands less than *rural* White Americans. They also found that when people's attitudes toward wildlands were less favorable, they visited less--regardless of their race.

The scientists also found that older people and women visited wildlands less than younger people and men--regardless of their race. They concluded that *demographic* characteristics such as race, age, and sex helped them to understand some things about wildland visitation (see Fig. 1).

Based on the results of the *scale*, however, the scientists now believe that a person's attitude toward wildlands may be one of the most important things determining whether he or she visits a *wildland*. In particular, Ms. Johnson thinks that when a person feels that *wildlands* are not safe places for them to go, they are not likely to visit.

This research is important because it helps managers to understand that visitation may be more related to the *meanings* outdoor places have for a person, rather than to the person's race, age, or sex. With this information, forest and park managers may be able to take actions that would welcome more people to *wildlands*. This way more people can enjoy *wildland outdoor recreation*.

### Factors Affecting Wildland Meaning

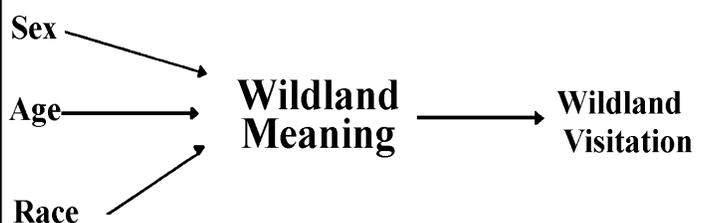


Fig. 1

This model illustrates how race, gender and age contribute to the overall meaning of wildlands. Wildland meaning, then, has an effect on visitation.

## Discovery

Respond to the following statements by circling the number on the right that corresponds to how much you agree with the statement:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree A Little Bit	Agree A Little Bit	Strongly Agree
1. Wildland areas are dangerous because of animals.	1	2	3	4
2. Six Flags over Georgia is safer than most wildland areas.	1	2	3	4
3. I have an outdoor hang-out where I feel safe.	1	2	3	4
4. I like going to parks and outdoor areas where I can only see trees and other vegetation around me.	1	2	3	4

## Reflection

- 1 If you were a forest manager, what would you do to encourage more people to visit your forest?
- 2 How might your actions have been different before you read this research?
- 2 What other ways could a scientist discover people's attitudes and the meanings they have toward wetlands?

You have just completed a *scale*, assessing your attitudes towards safety in *wildland* areas. To get your total score, you will need to reverse the numbers in statements 3 and 4. For statements 3 and 4, take your pen and cross out the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. Write 4, 3, 2, and 1 in their place (1 becomes 4, 2 becomes 3, and so on). Add all of the numbers that you circled for all four statements (substituting the new numbers for statements 3 and 4). If your score is between 1 and 8, move to one side of the room. If your score is between 9 and 16, move to the opposite side of the room. With the help of your teacher, hold a class discussion about how each group feels about being in wildlands. What is the difference?