Indicators and Standards of Recreation Quality in
The White Mountain National Forest
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Abstract

In the summer of 2014 the United States Forest Service (USFS) and the University of Vermont’s Park Studies Laboratory (PSL) began research on recreation experience in the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF). Currently, patterns of visitor behavior and quality of experience in the WMNF are largely unknown. The 1960 Multiple-Use and Sustained-Yield Act requires that the USFS manage for a balance of conservation and use, including recreation. In order for the USFS to achieve this mission it is necessary to understand the relationship between visitor use and quality of recreation experience. Five diverse areas serve as research sites: the Franconia Ridge, Pemigewasset Wilderness, Rumney Rocks climbing area, and both Crawford and Gulfside trails on Mt. Washington.

Methods of measuring, monitoring, and evaluating visitor use begin with identifying indicators and standards of quality. Indicators include visitor travel time, delay, people per view (PPV), and visitor encounters. Standards are formed from indicator monitoring and visitor surveys. Monitoring of indicators involves direct observation and electronic trail counters. Statistical evaluation determines whether the relationship between use and quality is violating standards or achieving management objectives.

Results highlight which indicators are best and whether or not use level is compromising recreation quality. This suggests that some indicators are better than others, experience does change with use level, further monitoring is needed, and trail counters are a cheap, effective, and transferable method of measuring use and impact. This study will assist the USFS in writing and executing a successful plan for adaptive recreation management.