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Effects of travel cost and participation in recreational activities on national forest visits

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Highlights

- Explored impacts of travel cost on demand for specific recreational activities
- Found negative travel-cost effects, but of different magnitudes across activities
- Found more price-elastic demand for non-water activities than water activities
- Findings can be used to predict recreational-site visits for specific activities.

Abstract

In the face of higher travel costs due to rising gasoline prices and scarce budget resources, we explored differences in the impacts of travel costs on recreational demand for visitors participating in various recreational activities. Five individual travel cost models were estimated, one for each of 5 national forests (i.e., Allegheny, Coconino, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie, Ouachita, and Wenatchee). Travel cost had a consistently negative effect on the number of visits (and thus caused losses in aggregate consumer surplus) across all recreational activities and national forests, although the magnitudes of the effects varied significantly. For example, decreased visit numbers (and thus the aggregate loss of consumer surplus) resulting from hypothetical increases in travel costs are greater for non-trail and backpacking-activity participants than for trail and backpacking-activity participants in the Allegheny national forest. This finding implies that increases in funds allocated towards improving non-trail and backpacking-based recreational activities may stem the loss of consumer surplus due to the decline in visits to the Allegheny national forest caused by the increase in travel cost more than similar increases in funds allocated to trail and backpacking-activities. These results are important because many national-forest managers are facing declining visits resulting from the effects of higher gasoline prices on travel costs. Thus, they can use our results in making decisions about allocating scarce budget resources to recreational activities that have the greatest potential to stem the decline in national-forest visits.



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JEL classification

D12; Q26

Keywords

National forest visits; Recreational activities; Travel cost; Consumer welfare

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