

*Enjoying the great outdoors: what role does land management play?*

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Spending time outdoors in nature brings many benefits. It's great for mental and physical wellbeing, makes people think about the natural world and their relationship with it, and to consider sustainability issues more deeply. Clearly, it's good to encourage people to be outdoors as much as possible but to do so we need to understand what types of landscape people like and why.

People value landscapes for different reasons: they are appreciated for their scenic beauty, provide opportunities for recreation and education, are important wildlife habitats, and hold historical and heritage interest. Of course, there are lots of factors that affect where people go and why. For example, does it have easy access and a car park, is it free to visit, is it important culturally, what sort of habitat is it? Some of these things are fixed, like the position of buildings, roads or rivers but other factors can be changed more easily, like land management choices (such as the type of habitat, management regimes or species planting choice). By disentangling these factors, we can work out how to increase landscape value by changing its management: to work out whether, for example, an area of forest is valued because it's managed as broadleaved woodland or simply because it's near a visitor centre.

We tackle this challenge in a large UK forest as part of a much larger study of the whole range of benefits or 'ecosystem services' provided by forests. In an extensive survey, we asked visitors to the forest to mark on maps the areas that they valued for different reasons. Our analysis accounted for the influence of the fixed factors that can affect the places they value, such as access points, amenities and waterways, and teased out the effect of management. We found that people do indeed have preferences for different types of land management in the forest. For example, broadleaved tree species were generally preferred to conifers, and open space is an important

part of the forest landscape. As a result, we have been able to suggest practical ways in which the management of the forest could be changed to improve the landscape to provide greater public enjoyment and benefits.



Forest landscape. Photo credit: Eleanor Tew

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