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Links between outdoor recreation and environmental concern among Utahns

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I. Rationale

- Research has shown that the processes which drive the way that people experience and perceive the environment around them are complex and dynamic. This extends to the perceptions that people have regarding environmental and natural resource concerns.

- Outdoor recreational activity allows for people to have varying types of tactile experience with bodies of water, as well as providing a social space in which distinct subcultures may develop. This study explores the possibility that recreation specialization, or type and frequency of water-based outdoor recreational participation, as well as their level of concern about poor water quality. Respondents were also asked to rate the quality of water in their community.

- The Recreation variables were tested individually and in an aggregate index for associations with level of concern about poor water quality, as well as four separate water quality rating items and an aggregate water quality rating index.

II. Methods

- Shoppers were randomly intercepted by students at 28 urban grocery stores in Utah and asked to complete a brief iPad survey concerning their perceptions of water issues. The Utah Water Survey contains responses from 6,891 adults and has a response rate of 40.6%.

- Among other things, the survey included questions asking respondents about their frequency of water-based outdoor recreational participation, as well as their level of concern about poor water quality. Respondents were also asked to rate the quality of water in their community.

- The Recreation variables were tested individually and in an aggregate index for associations with level of concern about poor water quality, as well as four separate water quality rating items and an aggregate water quality rating index.

III. Results

- The results from the analysis show that people who participate more in boating activities are less concerned about water quality in Utah, while those who more regularly hike or walk near water are more concerned. However, measures of participation in fishing, snowsports, and a combined index of all recreation activities was not linked to water quality concern.

- Higher participation in all forms of water-based recreation are associated with more positive perceptions of water quality. This is true whether we ask about upstream and downstream lakes and rivers or groundwater and drinking water in the respondent’s community.

- These differences remained even after controlling for age, gender, education, and being a Utah native.

IV. Conclusions

- People who participate in more water-based recreation rate the quality of various types of water in Utah more positively.

- People who boat more often are less concerned about water quality threats, while people who walk/hike near water tend to be more concerned.