Evaluating the effects of diverse learning sources on pro-environmental behavior

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Abstract

Conservation strategies have emphasized individual engagement in pro-environmental behavior (PEB) to confront the unintended consequences of landscape change that put pressure on protected areas. Although multiple frameworks explain the effects of internal motivators and external constraints on behavior change, individuals' expressed actions often deviate from their values. The sources from which an individual learns have been posited as factors that explain, and potentially increase, engagement in PEB. However, few studies have accounted for the relationships between learning and PEB, alongside other predictor variables, despite the important role that learning plays in social exchanges and behavioral adaptation that supports environmental sustainability. Here, we examine how learning from a variety of sources can help close the value-action gap. More specifically, we tested the effects of learning sources on private, public, and social dimensions of PEB using a household survey administered to 332 residents living in the Denali region of Interior Alaska. Using two-step structural equal modeling (SEM), we found that learning significantly increased the frequency of engagement in activities across all three PEB dimensions. The effects of learning worked in tandem with environmental concern and personal norms in predicting social and private PEB, whereas environmental concern and willingness to pay for environmental management predicted engagement in public PEB. Overall, our research highlights that diverse opportunities to learn about public land management can strengthen engagement across a range of behaviors that benefit the environment in response to global environmental change.