

Connecting social values and environmental behavior: The case of Denali National Park and Preserve

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Abstract

Changes in human behavior that support environmental sustainability can be inspired by protected area landscapes that embody a range of social values and therefore give meaning to everyday life. Many values of nature are linked to human behavior, yet few studies have empirically evaluated ways in which social values influence reported or intended pro-environmental behavior. Drawing on participatory GIS research, we evaluated the relationship between the social values of landscape features and behavioral patterns of visitors to Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska, USA. We identified a multitude of reasons why the protected area was considered important, particularly what we term “nature-based social values” including wilderness, scientific value, ecological integrity, and recreation. Our study also revealed that social values accounted for more variation in intended, compared to reported, behaviors that benefit the environment. Understanding the reasons why people forge connections with natural landscapes and how these associations affect behavioral patterns is important for building environmental stewardship and guiding decisions about public land management of protected areas.