

Ecologist uses social media data to gauge recreational value of coastal areas

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Where to play and spend money while on vacation depends on characteristics of the environment. To correctly value ecosystems, researchers must account for outdoor recreational opportunities and understand how changes in the environment lead to changes in visitation rates.

But that information is costly and hard to get because site-specific data are necessary to predict how changes in the environment will lead to changes in visitation rates. In most places, particularly developing countries, scientists lack data on where people go.

[Social media](#) may provide an answer, says Spencer Wood, a [marine ecologist](#) at the Natural Capital Project at Stanford University. Wood uses geotagged photo locations that have been posted to social media sites to create an estimate of the number of "user-days" for locations around the world. By illuminating where people go, this approach permits predictive models of how visitation rate will change given future changes in natural and built environments.

"This novel use of [crowd](#)-sourced information can not only break the logjam of expensive [empirical data](#) requirements to enable prediction and valuation of recreation and tourism after changes in the landscape, but also can provide revolutionary new sources of information for understanding all manner of questions about where people go," Wood says.

Wood will detail his work in a presentation titled "Social Media as Data on the Recreational Value of [Coastal Areas](#)" at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science on Friday, Feb. 15 at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston.

Provided by Stanford University

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