

Study links outdoor recreation with water quality concerns

3 April 2018, by John Kirkland

People who camp, hike, fish or participate in other forms of outdoor recreation generally have a higher level of concern about water quality than those who don't, according to a recent study co-authored by Portland State University professor Melissa Haeffner.

Haeffner and her colleagues used data from surveys conducted in the Wasatch Front region of Utah, the most populous part of the state stretching from Ogden to Provo. The area's water quality is impacted by the combined effects of [human population](#) and agriculture. It's also an outdoor recreation hub.

Survey data from the study, which was published in the *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, showed that people who recreate outside are more sharply attuned to water quality than the population at large. The rest of the population generally perceived water quality to be good, but expressed less concern about it than their more outward bound counterparts.

"This makes sense, because people wouldn't be spending time recreating in water they didn't think was clean enough. And if it was clean, they'd be more concerned about keeping it that way," said Haeffner, an assistant professor of environmental science in PSU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The amount of concern over water quality also was linked to education level and socioeconomic status. Higher levels of both tended to correspond with [higher levels](#) of [outdoor recreation](#) and interest in water quality.

The researchers' interest in water quality perceptions was linked to a broader desire to understand differences in the level of support for public policies addressing water quality issues in the region. She said the information can be used by [water managers](#) in Utah to track shifts in public

attitudes toward [water quality](#) as the state grapples with rapid climatic and demographic changes in the coming years.

More information: Matthew J. Barnett et al, Influence of recreational activity on water quality perceptions and concerns in Utah: A replicated analysis, *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jort.2017.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2017.12.003)

Provided by Portland State University

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