NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR URBAN POPULATIONS NC-4902

A Research Work Unit of the North Central Research Station, Forest Service, US Department of Agriculture

1033 University Pl #360
Evanston, IL 60201

(847) 866-9311
fax: 847/866-9506

Staff:

John Dwyer *(x17)*
Project Leader/
Research Forester
economics, management
jdwyer@fs.fed.us

Paul Gobster *(x16)*
Research Social Scientist
landscape architecture, recreation
pgobster@fs.fed.us

Sherry Griffith *(x10)*
Business Mngt. Asst.
business administration
sgriffith@fs.fed.us

Sarah McCaffrey *(x20)*
Research Social Scientist
fire policy, culture and resource management
smcaffrey@fs.fed.us

Herbert Schroeder *(x15)*
Research Social Scientist
environmental psychology
hschroeder@fs.fed.us

Susan Stewart *(x13)*
Research Social Scientist
recreation, resource economics
sistewart@fs.fed.us

Lynne Westphal *(x11)*
Research Social Scientist
policy analysis, planning, community revitalization
lwestphal@fs.fed.us

In partnership with:
Tom Dilley *(x14)*
Chicago Metropolitan Initiatives Coordinator, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry
tdilley@fs.fed.us

Restoring and Managing Natural Landscapes with People in Mind

Restoring natural landscapes is gaining popularity across the U.S. as a way of improving the ecological health of natural areas in all sizes of cities, suburbs, and natural areas. While significant advances have been made in recent years in our knowledge of the biophysical aspects of landscape restoration and management, there is an equal need for knowledge about its human dimensions that has received little attention from researchers and practitioners. As a result of this neglect, some highly regarded land management programs have been derailed in recent years due to politics and conflicting values, and significant benefits to both people and the ecosystems have been lost.

Social scientists at the North Central Research Station have been working with managers, planners, and researchers in a variety of urban and wildland settings to better understand how natural landscapes can be restored and managed in ways that are socially acceptable as well as ecologically appropriate. We have identified problems, issues, and values underlying restoration and management programs and practices—looking at how conflicts arise and how they can be dealt with through more effective means of planning, design, public involvement, and implementation.

Key guidelines based on the research include: **Communicate the benefits:** Environmental services like clean air can be increased through restoration, and communicating these benefits clearly and realistically is an important step in the restoration dialog. Photo simulations are an important tool in this respect; in one study using photo simulations, rural Illinois residents found forest buffers to be an aesthetically attractive means of ecological management for agricultural landscapes. **Engage local community:** Restoration plans often create public debate. To keep this debate productive, managers and decision makers need to understand the range of perspectives held by stakeholders. Identification and analysis of these perspectives helped policy makers in the Chicago Park District develop park plans that meet the needs of a diverse set of users. **Design socially acceptable plans:** If people don't like a restoration plan, they may block it, neglect it, or otherwise reduce its effectiveness. In Calumet's rustbelt landscape, researchers developed landscape prototypes that are ecologically healthy and also please business owners and workers. Chicago is incorporating these findings into new industrial landscape guidelines. Products from this research have received awards from two professional societies and have provided information for decision makers from city parks to rural forests.

With greater understanding of the social implications of restoration, policy-makers can help to reduce conflicts and promote desired future conditions for landscapes across the country.