

Regenerative Recreation:

Designing and Implementing Asynchronous Nudges for Ecological Health on Public Lands

Dr. Emily Wakild and Ryan Peck, PhD Candidate.

Executive Summary

Recreation on public lands has never been higher, while budgets directed towards ensuring the ecological health of recreation systems have never been comparatively lower (Shartaj, et al., 2022; Keiter, 2021). Public land agencies absorb the vast majority of recreators but have no access to research support that partners academic expertise with on-the-ground issues to offer strategic and timely interventions situated in particular ecological contexts.

This project will examine users' willingness to take part in ecologically regenerative actions while recreating in response to "nudges" (in the form of signage and educational materials). This research is critical in understanding alternative pathways for maintenance of the ecological health of public lands. Should this research show that "nudges" via signage and other methods can be effective at prompting and guiding users towards regenerative actions (pulling weeds, planting seeds) then these tools can be further developed and applied by agencies that have increased authority and discretion (e.g., US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management).

We assert that the US public lands (covering 64% of Idaho) comprise a social-ecological system in which directed social interventions can add to ecological health via simple and easy to implement management tools therefore offering opportunities to

scale up and scale out low cost, simple, engaging, asynchronous interventions with positive feedback loops for recreation.

Rather than center on technologically complex, expensive, and illusive data gathering techniques (e.g. drones, remote sensing) which require high start-up costs and continual inputs via constant updating and re-investment, this project doubles down on the most important resource for public lands: recreation users themselves.

By developing users as the mechanism for transformation, it provides research via field experiments into specific implements and tools deployable now but drastically understudied.

The proposed intervention signals a paradigm shift from focusing on enforcement of degenerative actions to the cultivation of regenerative actions.

This project is a continuation of the research begun by PhD candidate Ryan Peck and conferences convened by the Andrus Center. The project will consist of additional field research regarding users' willingness to adopt ecologically regenerative actions, as well as a survey instrument, and qualitative interviews with users. It is expected that results will directly inform managers' choice of policy tools at both the City of Boise and Ridge to Rivers. Outcomes from the research carry a degree of generality making them possible to be adopted and applied by other land managers.