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Willingness to contribute to the management of recreational quality on private lands in Finland



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ABSTRACT

In Finland, privately owned nature areas are widely used for recreation due to open public access. However, since landowners are not obligated to take everyman's rights into consideration when making management decisions, the recreational quality of nature areas is not guaranteed for users. We examined whether individual recreationists on private lands would be willing purchase management actions from landowners that influence recreational quality. In addition to willingness to pay, we assessed willingness to contribute labor to such actions. The results demonstrated that about half of the recreationists who participated in our survey were willing to contribute labor and about 10% were willing to pay to direct the management of their typical recreation site on private lands. The mean willingness to pay was 92 euros per year and the mean willingness to contribute labor 3.5 days per year. A latent class regression model revealed that recreationists were not, however, completely homogeneous in their preferences for the actions or in their preferred contribution forms. On the basis of the results, there is moderate demand from recreationists for management to improve recreational quality and the potential for local landscape management arrangements that allow individual recreationists to contribute labor.

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Introduction

Two out of three adult Finns annually use privately owned nature areas for recreation (Silvennoinen and Sievänen, 2011), and about 40% visit privately owned areas on a weekly basis. Approximately 250 million visits per year are made by Finns to privately owned land or water areas for recreational purposes. This is natural, as 70% of forest land is privately owned (Finnish Statistical Yearbook of Forestry, 2011). The use of private land is related to the Nordic “everyman’s right,” the traditional right of open access that basically covers walking, skiing and cycling freely in the countryside, camping temporarily, gathering wild foods and flowers, fishing with a rod and line, and using water areas for boating and swimming (Finnish Ministry of the Environment, 2011). However, everyman’s right does not guarantee the quality of the recreational environment on private lands and waters. For example, forest management such as thinning and clear-felling for timber production can take place in areas with a high recreational value. Private landowners manage the land based on their own objectives without requirements to adjust their management practices according to the recreational use of the land. Although landowners’ own recreational use can be an important objective (Karppinen, 1998) in forest management, it does not presume consideration of the quality perceptions of other users.

In many cases, the privately owned areas used for recreation are located in the surroundings of recreational homes. Regular access to a private recreational home is available for 41% of the population, and Finns spend on average 38 days per year at a recreational home (Neuvonen and Sievänen, 2011). Recreational homes are located in the countryside, in the ‘the rural idyll’, appreciated for its recreational and esthetic values (Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010), and users often feel deep attachment to the place and its nature (Pitkänen, 2011). Many studies have demonstrated that the natural environment in the surroundings of a recreational home is an important motive to purchase such a home in the first place and for spending time there (Pitkänen and Vepsäläinen, 2005; Pitkänen et al., 2011; Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010; Van Patten and Williams, 2008), although there is uncertainty over the management of these private lands. Preserving the quality of the landscape and recreational environment causes costs to landowners, and they probably have little interest in covering the costs if the area is not used for their own recreation. On the other hand, taking into account the benefits of landscape management and preservation perceived by recreational home users and other recreationists may increase the social benefits of natural areas. Therefore, there is a need to find tools to agree on the management of natural areas for recreational and other uses, and furthermore to negotiate how to cover the costs of landscape preservation and how to share the costs between landowners and recreationists.

An alternative to resolve the possible conflict between landowners and recreational users is payment for environmental services (PES). PES has been suggested as a flexible approach to guarantee the quality of the environment and the production of environmental services (Engel et al., 2008; Pagiola and Platais, 2007) with market-based incentives. Wunder (2005) defined PES as “a voluntary transaction where a well-defined environmental service (ES) is being ‘bought’ by a minimum of one service buyer from a minimum of one service provider if and only if the service provider secures service provision.” PES examples from developing but also developed countries are abundant in the literature (for a review, see Whittington and Pagiola, 2012; Tacconi, 2012). However, PES schemes are in most cases ‘government-financed’ rather than ‘user-financed’ programs. Local user-financed PES schemes are likely to be efficiently targeted at those actions and sites that produce the most benefits with the lowest costs (Grammatikopoulou et al., 2013). As the actors with the most information about the value of the service are directly involved, they can be expected to ensure that the mechanism is functioning well to re-negotiate the agreement if needed (Engel et al., 2008). To evaluate the feasibility of a PES scheme, it is particularly important to know whether the price providers demand a match with the offers of the buyers (Wunder, 2007). In this study we focused on local user-financed PES in the recreational environment from the buyers’ point of view.

Previous case studies concerning PES schemes for recreation services are rather rare in the literature, and they usually comprise an ex-post valuation of a PES scheme and a review of the relevant implementation (see Hackl et al., 2007; Dobbs and Pretty, 2008). Hackl et al. (2007) illustrated how local PES schemes can be used in tourism communities, but concluded that further research is needed to investigate how local compensation schemes could be implemented in non-tourist communities.

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