



# Paddlers' level of specialization, motivations and preferences for river management practices



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 26 January 2015

Received in revised form

20 November 2015

Accepted 26 November 2015

### Keywords:

River management

Outdoor recreation

Specialization

Motivation

Canoe

Kayak

## ABSTRACT

Participation in canoeing and recreational kayaking (paddling) is growing rapidly. In response, this study identified paddlers' ( $N=221$ ) motivations for paddling Ohio's Cuyahoga River and paddlers' preferences for specific river management practices. Next, this study tested whether these variables relate to paddlers' Level of Specialization (LoS). Factor analysis with subsequent reliability testing identified four distinct motivations for paddling the Cuyahoga: intrinsic rewards, experiencing and learning about nature, social, and challenge; and four distinct river management practices: manage river and provide services, provide facilities, provide complementary activities, and ration river use. ANOVA demonstrated that motivations varied by paddlers' LoS ( $F \geq 4.16$ ,  $p \leq .017$ ); specifically, motivation increased as LoS increased. However, preferences for specific river management practices were largely independent of LoS ( $F \leq 0.571$ ,  $p \geq .566$ ). Indeed, paddlers appeared more similar than disparate in their preferences for the specific river management practices tested. Thus, it may be possible to develop a Cuyahoga River management plan which all paddlers, regardless of LoS, find equally appropriate. Implications for management are discussed.

## MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- Understanding the relationship between motivations and level of specialization is important. In this study, low specialists had different needs related to challenge and adventure than more specialized paddlers.
  - Motivations with broad appeal can be used in marketing and promoting the river's paddling opportunities such as enjoyment of paddling, enjoyment of the river and nature, peace, tranquility, and escape from routine.
  - This study suggests many paddlers have an interest in learning about nature. This may be an opportunity for environmental education and interpretation through ranger led paddle trips.
  - Paddlers support and may therefore volunteer to implement management practices which encourage greater use of the river.
  - Paddlers are opposed to rationing use. Therefore, rationing should be accompanied by education and information.
  - This study suggests that it is possible to identify and develop management practices which are widely accepted, regardless of paddler's level of specialization.

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## 1. Introduction

The Cuyahoga River, in northeast Ohio (USA), gained infamy in 1969 when a portion of the river burned. It was the industrial waste saturating the river's surface which actually caught fire, but

the image of a burning river grabbed the nation's attention and became a catalyzing event in the environmental movement. Since then, the story of the Cuyahoga River is the story of the Phoenix. The river has literally risen from the ashes of its past to become the centerpiece of northeast Ohio's outdoor recreation industry. Today, 22 miles of the river flow through Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), which preserves 33,000 acres of woodlands, meadows and river valley between the cities of Akron and Cleveland. Along the course of the river there are now nesting bald eagles, colonies of

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great blue herons, beavers, otters, and of course many outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Indeed, CVNP is among the nation's most frequented national parks receiving over 2.5 million visits per year (NPS, 2010). Visitors enjoy a variety of outdoor recreation activities; however, paddling (canoeing and recreational kayaking) is not currently managed for within the park despite a growing interest in this activity.

According to the [Outdoor Industry Association \(2014\)](#), recreational generalist paddling is one of the fastest growing outdoor recreation activities in the US (2014). According to the report, participation in recreational kayaking more than doubled from 2006 to 2013, while participation in canoeing increased 10.9% during the same period. In terms of gross numbers, 10.2 million Americans participated in canoeing and another 8.7 million in recreational kayaking during 2013. Likewise, there has been a great increase in paddling along the entire 100-mile length of the Cuyahoga River. Paddlers typically divide the Cuyahoga into three navigable sections: the upper, the middle, and the lower. The upper has State Scenic designation and offers the rivers' most primitive opportunities. The middle passes through small towns, local parks, and farmland offering opportunities for more developed recreational paddling. The lower flows from Akron to Cleveland and includes the river's most urban settings (downtown Akron and Cleveland) as well as the contrasting natural settings of CVNP. Each section is characterized by flat water interspersed with class I and II rapids. Presently, there are successful liveries operating along the upper and middle Cuyahoga which cater to paddlers' needs. There are no liveries on the lower. In response to growing demand, as well as stakeholder input, CVNP is exploring options for developing paddling opportunities along the lower Cuyahoga. Indeed, the park's newly approved Trail Management Plan includes, for the first time, river access for paddlers (NPS, 2013).

Thus, in consideration of the growing interest in paddling nationally as well as the growing interest in paddling the Cuyahoga River, the purpose of this study was to investigate local paddlers' motivations for Cuyahoga River use (upper, middle and lower sections) and their preferences of specific river management practices for the lower Cuyahoga. Findings will inform the theory and practice of managing developed and natural rivers for recreational use, while demonstrating that the improved stewardship of our rivers provides increased opportunities for outdoor recreation.

## 2. Level of specialization, motivations and preferences for management

River recreation managers, like those responsible for developing paddling on the Cuyahoga, generally strive to provide opportunities suitable for a range of users with varying skill levels and experience. These are two important dimensions of the more descriptive level of specialization concept. Level of specialization was originally conceptualized as a "continuum of behavior from the general to the particular, reflected by equipment and skills used in the sport and activity setting preferences" (Bryan, 1977, p. 175). Bryan developed the concept in a study of anglers. His observations suggested that as level of specialization increased from generalist to specialist then anglers' motivations, equipment and setting preferences, and preferences for different management practices all changed in predictable ways. As Bryan's original concept has been refined and extended, it is now understood that level of specialization is positively related to skill level, previous experience, involvement and persistence in an activity over time, equipment investment, and preference for specific and challenging settings (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Bryan, 2000; Lee, Graefe, & Li, 2007; Virden & Schreyer, 1988). Furthermore, as recreation

specialization increases, the activity becomes more central to an individual's lifestyle (Beardmore, Haider, Hunt, & Arlinghaus, 2013) and more closely associated with personal identity (Schroeder, Fulton, Lawrence, & Cordts, 2013). Consequently, substitutions for the activity and the settings upon which the activity depends become less desirable and less likely (Needham & Vaske, 2013; Oh, Sutton, & Sorice, 2013). In summary, it is well established that level of specialization is related to attitudes, motivations, setting and equipment preferences, and behavior. Such relationships have been identified among birdwatchers (Hvenegaard, 2002; Scott, Ditton, Eubanks, & Stoll, 2005), hunters (Needham & Vaske, 2013; Schroeder et al., 2013), anglers (Oh et al., 2013), mountaineers (Dyck, Schneider, Thompson, & Virden, 2003; Ewert, 1994), mountain bikers (Hopkins & Moore, 1995) and vehicle based campers (McIntyre & Pigram, 1992) to name just a few of the activities studied.

Level of specialization has been used to understand paddlers as well. In a survey of over 600 canoeists, Lee et al. (2007) found that primary motivations included the desire to explore, experience nature, escape daily pressures, be with like-minded people, and challenge their abilities. In addition, motivation tended to increase as specialization increased, particularly for motivations related to challenge. Similar variations were found when assessing site preferences. Highly specialized paddlers showed a greater preference for new sites and wilderness while low specialists showed a greater preference for facilities such as shuttle services, restrooms, picnic sites and parking. Likewise, Galloway (2010) demonstrated that specialization differences among whitewater kayakers were associated with motivational differences in achievement, teaching others, challenge and safety. In slight contrast, Galloway (2012) later found that motivations for river use and site preference were better predicted by activity preference (whitewater kayaking, the paddling component of multisport racing, fishing) than level of specialization. Nevertheless, level of specialization did predict differences related to participants' desire for teaching others, challenge and safety. Similarly, level of experience (a single dimension within the level of specialization concept) has also been used to predict motivational differences between both sea and whitewater kayakers (Ewert, 2013; O'Connell, 2010). Finally, it is important to note that although this research has explored specialists in different types of paddle-sports (i.e. canoeists, white water kayakers, sea kayakers, racers), research by Galloway (2012) suggests that these individuals may be more closely aligned with each other in terms of motivations and site preferences than they are with non-paddle-sport river users (i.e. anglers). In summary, multiple motivations (e.g. experiencing nature, enjoyment, escape and relaxation, challenge and achievement, social reasons, teaching others, equipment use, physical fitness, identity development and maintenance, novelty, curiosity, and exploration) and site preferences (e.g. facilities, natural environment, density of paddlers, convenience, safety, and appropriate levels of challenge) have been identified for paddlers and these tend to vary predictably with a paddlers' level of specialization.

Certainly research investigating paddlers' motivations and site preferences has immediate utility for managers. Knowledge gained can be used to determine which recreation opportunities (i.e. activities, settings) are needed to produce the experiences paddlers desire (Clark & Stankey, 1979). More directly, research investigating paddlers' preferences for specific river management practices and policies can be equally useful but has received less attention. Here too, level of specialization may be an important variable to consider. In Bryan's seminal study (1977), he concluded that anglers vary by level of specialization in their preferences for specific management practices. For example, high specialists preferred management practices aimed at streamside conservation and enhancing wild stock, while low specialists preferred ease of

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