

EXPLORING PARK VISITOR'S PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
A STUDY IN COLUMBIA NATURE AREAS, MISSOURI

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine visitor's perceptions of climate change and its perceived impacts in selected three city nature areas in Columbia, Missouri. Specific goal of this study are: (1) assess park visitors' concerns and knowledge of climate change in Columbia city nature areas; (2) examine possible impacts of climate change to visitation and visitors support for management actions; (3) investigate differences in concerns, knowledge, visitation impacts, and support for management actions by park use and demographics; (4) contrast the climate change risk perceptions of Columbia Nature Area visitors to the American public. A secondary purpose of this study was to serve as pilot test for a larger statewide study to be conducted in Missouri State Parks and Historic Sites. Data were collected via survey from 199 park visitors at three city nature areas in Columbia, Missouri. Overall, Columbia Nature Area visitors reported high climate change concerns and relatively high knowledge level of climate change. Findings indicate that the visitors perceived climate impacts could affect their visitation and visitors were generally supportive to the management actions that can mitigate the impacts of climate change. Differences in concerns, knowledge, perceived impacts and support were found across demographic groups. In contrast to the broad American public, the Columbia Nature Area visitors perceived greater climate change risk. This study also found that a longer onsite survey yielded a better final response rate than a combination of short onsite survey and online follow-up. Understanding visitor's perceptions of climate change, as well as differences between visitor demographic groups, can provide important information to assist create a systematic managerial strategy for park managers to address climate change and ensure sustained stratification and benefits for visitors.