

Recreation Benefits of Natural Area Characteristics at the Caribbean National Forest

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Abstract. When selecting specific natural areas for recreation use and when protecting existing natural areas used for recreation, it would be helpful for managers to know which natural features are most economically valuable to visitors. For example, it may be costly in terms of road or trail access to locate recreation areas where there are certain natural features (e.g., waterfalls), or there may be opportunity costs of foregone hydropower or logging to maintain free flowing streams or native old growth forests.

Economics has developed non market valuation methods to appraise the value of goods and/or services that lack a market and explicit clearing prices. We apply the Contingent Valuation Method using a survey of visitors to determine the value of a trip to free-flowing rivers on the Caribbean National Forest. Further, we statistically decompose the trip value into separate values for statistically significant natural features, and different recreational activities occurring at different rivers. Sample data was obtained from 793 interviews conducted in 19 sites along the Mameyes and Espíritu Santo rivers during the summer months. The median net economic value of a visit to the two rivers without waterfalls or foot trails is \$96. Recreation at rivers with both waterfalls and foot trails has a median value of \$138 per trip. The presence of waterfalls accounts for \$23 and foot trails \$19 per trip. This information can be pertinent for managers in selecting where to locate recreation sites, as well as protecting sites from competing uses, such as locations with sufficient gradient for waterfalls, which are also coveted by others for hydropower development.

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