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The Value of Urban Parklands: A User Study of the Baldwin Hills Park System

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Purpose

Urban parklands are well-documented as critical resources that provide users with extensive benefits and protect open spaces and natural areas. In this study, we examine the use and benefits of urban parklands. This study seeks to understand how park users engage in park activity and how parkland use impacts their mental and physical health.

Method & Site Description

The Parklands study is being conducted in two phases: a short-term pilot study which spanned the time period from August to December, 2014, and a more extensive, longitudinal study culminating in July, 2017 (Table 1). The pilot study focused on the necessary development and testing of the data collection instruments. A total of 8 visitor surveys were conducted. This study examined how park users engage in park activity and how parkland use impacts their mental and physical health.

Preliminary Results

Visitor profile survey questions focused on the following: 1) Number of park users, 2) Frequency of use, 3) Demographics, 4) Park activity engagement, 5) Park accessibility, and 6) Health and disposition. We share a representation of some of the results here.

Implications & Future Research

The pilot study is an important preliminary step to the extensive, longitudinal survey to ensure that a rigorous and reliable study can be conducted. In the pilot study, a larger, more comprehensive study will be implemented that will capture a much larger participant sample size which is key in obtaining significant quantitative findings; (ii) collect data during two different seasonal time points, important for capturing temporal differences in park use and accessibility; and (iii) allow the research team enough time in between data collection points to have the opportunity to review findings thus far and pursue additional lines of questioning.

Pilot results were presented at a December, 2014 Board meeting of the Baldwin Hills Conservancy. Feedback from members was elicited at this time. A focus group of all research assistants was also held to collect input from the field team on how to improve the comprehensive study. The BHC Board was enthusiastic about the results and rigor of the pilot study. This feedback allowed us to change the survey questions and some of the methods, including the use of tablets to collect electronic surveys instead of unwieldy stacks of paper.

Future efforts will be focused on expanding the scope and scale of the survey assessment and visitation rates determination. Visitation rates can ultimately be determined throughout the span of the day or year. Future evaluative questions will be better targeted to more concretely understand the significance of the Baldwin Hills’ park resources throughout its connected neighborhoods and communities. Additionally, demographic information on the race, ethnicity, sex and religion of park visitors would be collected in order to assess the equitable accessibility of the urban park resources amongst different cultural groups.

References


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