

Preferences for forest characteristics: Does heterogeneity between stands matter?

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Recreationists' preferences for how a forest looks has long been an issue, and the most common approach is to show different pictures and ask people to choose their preferred. However, most people see more than a single stand when they move around in the forest during the visit. Therefore the question is how this variation between stands affects their preferences. In this study we examine the effect of visual diversity within and between stands on recreational preferences for forest types in Denmark. We conduct a choice experiment (CE), where respondents are selecting a site for their next forest recreation visit based on drawings of two forest types, each consisting of three stands and the distance to the site. Each forest type is described by two attributes: species composition and stand age. Furthermore, species and age diversity indices have been derived for the whole forest visit in each alternative. In addition to the CE we asked respondents to "design" their ideal forest for recreation by selecting three forest types from 12 presented drawings (without any restrictions on a number of times each drawing could be selected). The data collection was administered through an online survey.

Previous studies have found that mixed tree species are preferred over broadleaves and conifers, and uneven-aged stands are favored compared to newly established and young phases of stand development. We hypothesize, that people prefer heterogeneity not only in the stand but also between stands in a forest and will be able to test this with the collected data. Information about visual diversity between stands may have implications for forest and nature management in relation to how forests should be designed and maintained.

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