TO USE OR NOT TO USE: UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR EXPANDED FEDERAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION POLICIES

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Using the National Survey of Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) data, a nationally representative data set collected by the United States Forest Service, this research explores how socio-demographic, cultural, and environmental characteristics shape the likelihood of individual support for expanded wilderness preservation by the federal government. The continued preservation of wilderness largely depends on the significance and value that the American people attribute to it. However since the first public lands were set aside for preservation in the 1800's dramatic shifts have occurred not only in regards to what lands are worthy of preservation, but what Americans consider the appropriate role of the federal government in defining how such lands can and will be used. This dissertation addresses one aspect of this issue: what individual and community level factors shape individual attitudes towards wilderness preservation. My research suggests that despite the popular belief that individuals only support preservation when it comes at little or no personal cost, what actually drives such support stems from the base values and significance that individuals' attribute to such lands regardless of their personal experiences or economic circumstances.