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A qualitative approach to climate change resilience: Park manager's perceptions in the Midwestern United States

Ojetunde A Ojewola, Mark Morgan and Sonja Wilhelm Stanis
University of Missouri, USA

Climate change associated with parks and protected areas can affect visitor experiences, management priorities and legislative requests for disaster relief funds. Impacts are unequal in geographic distribution and so are the perceptions of those who live in different regions of the country. People have a tendency to be climate change deniers in areas where this phenomenon is less obvious, which could affect how they respond to its mitigation and adaptation. Some factors that often influence one's perception of climate change include personal experience with climate related environmental impacts and observable changes in the environment such as biodiversity loss, habitat degradation and more invasive species. Using a deductive approach focused on community resilience framework, qualitative interviews were conducted with eleven district managers to examine their perceptions of climate change impacts in Missouri State Parks and historic sites. An implication of this study focuses on vulnerability, resilience and adaptation strategies. This research is part of a larger effort to understand climate change in the Midwestern US, an area plagued by drought and flooding, prolonged heat waves, reduced air quality and new disease ecologies. Although the social construction of climate change by every park manager differs especially based on its causation and occurrence, every manager agrees that climate impacts are evident over time. Flooding is the most reoccurring identified stressor. Each of the stressor is often characterized by one or more dimensions, severity, frequency, predictability, duration and distribution. To build a more resilient system, identifying pre-existing vulnerabilities to reduce risk, strengthening adaptive capacities through monitoring, partnering with relevant agencies, team work in the system and including place based climate change communication are paramount. This study provides helpful insights to understand perceptions of resilience in park settings which are important determinants of environmental decision making behavior, policy formation and communication with relevant stakeholders such as park visitors.

Biography

Ojetunde A Ojewola is currently pursuing Doctoral degree at the University of Missouri majoring in Human Dimensions of Natural Resources. His research interest is in understanding how social and natural sciences can be integrated to improve resource management. Presently, he is working with a team of researchers who are studying vulnerability and resilience of Missouri State Parks to climate change.

oao4m7@mail.missouri.edu

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