

The Quiet Crowd: Encouraging Quiet Behaviors Improves Park Experiences

03/26/2021

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Many people head outdoors for a bit of peace and quiet, but those resources are becoming harder to access as visitation continues to increase in parks and protected areas. Human noise such as engines, music and voices have led to reduced opportunities for natural experiences in quiet acoustic environments. The extra noise affects more than just people—wildlife can also be negatively affected by human-caused noise pollution in the outdoors.

[In a recent publication](#) from IORT's Zach Miller, Chris Monz, and their colleagues, researchers used signs to encourage quiet behaviors on a trail system at Muir Woods National Monument, California. By measuring sound in the area, they found that the signs significantly lowered noise levels by approximately 1.2 decibels. In a follow-up survey, they found that the quieter environment increased the visibility of birds for visitors, and made the recreation experience more enjoyable.

By lowering human-caused sound levels, the researchers created an acoustic environment equivalent to an approximately a 21% reduction in visitors. The better

experience could lead to more support and protection of natural areas, creating a positive feedback loop, they said.

"The study shows that some 'over-tourism' issues can be addressed through light handed techniques, like good communication, rather than restrictive actions," said Miller. "It is amazing that something as simple as a sign can increase the quality of the visitor experience, bird detections, and visitor support for quiet places. It's a win-win-win."