

## Abstract

THESIS: Getting Outside: Impacts of Outdoor Recreation Festivals on Participants' Levels of Outdoor Engagement

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Outdoor festivals are one method being used to attract youth and their families to the outdoors and increase their levels of engagement with the environment. While many attend festivals, research has not been done to determine if these events actually affect outdoor participation levels. This study took a novel approach to studying the impact of an annual outdoor festival in Indiana on participants' levels of outdoor engagement. Surveys were administered at the 2013 Ford Hoosier Outdoor Experience event and follow-up surveys were sent out to participants who agreed to participate in the follow-up study, nine months after the event. Follow-up surveys asked participants about their experiences at the event and subsequent outdoor activity levels. The evidence suggests that the event did not have an effect on participants' outdoor recreation levels, but did show increases in characteristics associated with outdoor recreation, such as helping participants learn specific outdoor skills and improving their skills in outdoor recreation activities. Findings also suggest that common barriers to participants' outdoor recreation include: the desire to use their free time to stay home, outdoor recreation opportunities being too far away, and outdoor recreation requiring too much effort. Based on these results, in order to positively affect participants' levels of outdoor recreation,

the Ford Hoosier Outdoor Experience must consider the following strategies: focus on educating event goers on the positive effects of engaging in the outdoors, focus its offerings on activities that can be done closer to home, and host additional events throughout the year. Furthermore, these results will ideally aid event hosts, planners, and partners to better serve the community and ultimately increase Hoosier engagement with the outdoors.