

How Safe are the Woods?

Researchers tackle tough problems

Notable notes in forest research at Oregon State University College of Forestry



According to the FBI, it is more dangerous to be a National Park Service ranger than it is to work for the Drug Enforcement Administration or the FBI. How safe are visitors to national parks and forests? What are managers and law enforcement officers doing to protect the recreating public and themselves?



Social scientists like Jo Tynon, a faculty member in the Department of Forest Resources, are interested in how people behave and interact, and why they do what they do. She's especially concerned with keeping recreation resources like campgrounds, parks, and trails in our forests safe. "Managing people requires knowing psychology and sociology and being politically savvy—understanding how people think," she says. As a teacher, Tynon guides her students in gaining the many different skills they'll need to become effective recreation resource managers.

In her research, Tynon studies the relationship between nature-based recreation and crime in national forests. Some crimes, such as car-clouting and tree theft, have been going on in more remote areas for a long time. But people have become more mobile, cities have grown, and crimes that used to be "city problems"—robbery, arson, drug manufacture, even murder—are moving to the forests. At the same time, more and more people are looking to those same forests for recreation and freedom from the stresses and restrictions of urban life. How can their desire for outdoor recreation be met while keeping them safe from both natural hazards and crime? That is the challenge that Tynon is working to help recreation managers meet.

What does she like most about her research? "I'm learning something new all the time," she says. "There aren't many people doing this kind of research, and people don't know what's happening. There are so many questions to be answered, and I get to talk to a variety of people with great ideas."

To find out more about the work of Dr. Tynon and other social scientists in forestry at OSU, visit

<http://www.cof.orst.edu/cof/fr/>