

# Engagement with natural environment a significant contributor to life satisfaction

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Credit: Oregon State University

Looking to improve your overall life satisfaction? Try regularly hiking in a forest or otherwise engaging with the natural environment.

And then, for good measure, look for ways to build your trust in the scientists and policymakers involved in managing the forest where you like to hike.

New research at Oregon State University empirically demonstrates that a variety of mechanisms for engaging nature significantly contribute to a

person's overall well-being.

Chief among those, the study found, was whether people believed their surrounding environments were being managed well—for the earning of income and the underpinning of cultural practices as well as for the pursuit of recreation.

"Whether people feel like things are fair and they have a voice in process of making decisions and whether governance is transparent—those are the foundations of why people even can interact with nature," said lead author Kelly Biedenweg of OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences.

Biedenweg, an assistant professor in the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, and collaborators from Colorado State University and the University of Georgia analyzed results from more than 4,400 respondents to an online survey conducted in the Puget Sound region of Washington state.

The researchers used 13 different metrics to illustrate the relationship between overall [life satisfaction](#) and engaging with the natural [environment](#). Among those metrics were community activities, access to wild resources, stress eased by time outdoors, and trust in policymakers.

"Eleven of the 13 had a positive correlation to overall life satisfaction," said Biedenweg, a social scientist who studies both how humans benefit from the natural environment and the impact human actions have on it. "The links between ecological conditions, like drinking water and air quality, and objective well-being have been studied quite a bit, but the connection between various aspects of engaging the [natural](#) environment and overall subjective well-being have rarely been looked at."

"We wanted to identify the relative importance of diverse, nature-

oriented experiences on a person's overall life satisfaction assessment and statistically prove the relationship between happiness/life satisfaction and engaging with nature in many different ways."

The researchers quantified the relationship between well-being and six common mechanisms by which nature has effects on well-being: social and cultural events; trust in governance; access to local wild resources; sense of place; outdoor recreation; and psychological benefits from [time outdoors](#).

"Controlling for demographics, all were significantly related to life satisfaction," Biedenweg said. "The fact that trust in governance was a significant predictor of life satisfaction—in fact, the most statistically significant predictor of the ones we looked at - it was nice to see that come out of the research. The way we manage is the gateway to people being able to get livelihoods and satisfaction from nature."

Findings were recently published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

**More information:** Kelly Biedenweg et al, How does engaging with nature relate to life satisfaction? Demonstrating the link between environment-specific social experiences and life satisfaction, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2017.02.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2017.02.002)

Provided by Oregon State University

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