

**BOOK REVIEW****Conflict in the Great Outdoors: Toward Understanding and Managing for Diverse Sportsmen Preferences**

Hobson Bryan  
University of Alabama Press

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Recreation specialization “refers to a continuum of behavior from the general to the particular, reflected by equipment and skills used in the sport and activity setting preferences” (p. 29). Few researchers of leisure and recreation behavior will fail to recognize the source of this definition as Hobson Bryan. In fact, many of us can recite his definition from memory. Many will know that Bryan originally published his specialization concept in the *Journal of Leisure Research* in 1977. Fewer will know that his groundbreaking ideas were then published in much greater detail two years later as the monograph *Conflict in the Great Outdoors: Toward Understanding and Managing for Diverse Sportsman Preferences*. Fewer still will have ever had access to that expanded work. That unfortunate situation changed in 2008 with the reprinting of the original monograph which remains remarkably insightful and valuable after more than three decades.

As David Scott points out in his new foreword to the work, “There are few areas of outdoor recreation or leisure research that can trace roots back to a beginning as clearly as research on recreation specialization” (p. xi). Likewise, there are few works in our field that have been as successful in launching and guiding subsequent studies. The research and concepts summarized in this small book (just over 120 pages) proved instrumental in stimulating and guiding a particularly productive line of research. As just one indication of the concept’s importance, the 2008 edition includes a new 14-page bibliography containing more than 200 studies published since 1979 that utilized or examined the specialization concept. It has been employed in studies in at least half a dozen countries and in areas as diverse as fishing, hunting, mountain biking, contract bridge, climbing, tourism, boating, wildlife viewing, ultimate Frisbee, sport, scuba diving, windsurfing, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, camping, and birdwatching. Recreation specialization has also played a role in advancing our understanding of other important concepts including crowding, conflict, satisfaction, place attachment, choice behavior, involvement, and commitment.

*Conflict in the Great Outdoors* is organized into six chapters. It begins with its original foreword and a new one by David Scott, followed by Bryan’s original and new forewords, and the updated bibliography. The introductory chapter effectively establishes the purpose of his research, introduces the problem he set out to address, and the strategy employed. Chapter II provides a brief overview of

the research to support his case that the literature available at the time was "...an uncoordinated jumble of social and human behavioral studies of outdoor recreationists" (p. 2). In his day, Bryan mostly found descriptive participation studies, profiles of participants' socioeconomic characteristics, and a rather uncoordinated collection of studies related to motivations. He felt then that the social sciences had not been effectively brought to bear on the problems of recreation resource management and attributed this to a number of factors. These included a common false premise of homogeneity among participants in a particular activity, a paucity of preliminary research to define and spell out objectives before larger scale studies were undertaken, an under-reliance on inductive approaches to guide later work, and the lack of sustained support for outdoor recreation research in favor of small amounts for short periods in local areas. But particularly problematic in his mind was a lack of conceptual frameworks to guide research in a coordinated fashion. To varying degrees, these problems still hamper our research. Bryan, however, made a major contribution to recreation research by providing just the type of conceptual framework he felt was needed.

The third chapter launches into the meat of Bryan's contribution by describing the details of his inductive methodology and then presenting his findings about recreation specialization among the trout anglers he studied. Central to his findings is his typology of angler types: occasional fisherman, generalists, technique specialists, and technique-setting specialists, and his elaboration on the characteristics of each. The chapter ends by addressing his most important aim, extending his typology into a conceptual framework meant to guide further research. He does this by setting forth four broadly applicable propositions based on his findings. His short fourth chapter, "Theoretical Antecedents of Outdoor Recreation Behavior and Inductive Methodology," elaborates on the behavioral perspective that guided his research and reinforces his case for greater reliance on analytic inductive methods for developing general principles to guide later deductive studies.

Chapter V will be entirely new to those who relied solely on his 1977 *JLR* paper. Here he applies his conceptual framework to a series of other recreation activities through additional reviews of popular and technical literature and interviews with established participants in each activity. His aim was to look for evidence of the applicability of recreation specialization to other activities including photography, hiking and backpacking, mountain climbing, skiing, canoeing, birdwatching, and hunting. In each case, he applies his specialization framework to suggest the likely subgroups and possible progression of participants through various stages as their levels of specialization increase. These applications did indeed demonstrate the value of the specialization concept as a starting point for explaining variability among activity participants. The work culminates with his conclusions and their implications by presenting a number of generalizations about the specialization concept and explicitly attempting to address how specialization might be applied to help advance theory. It is here that he proposes his concepts of activities varying in both their range and degree of specialization and discusses possible implications of his framework for recreation resource management and future research.

In his original preface, Bryan shares that he undertook his study to address three concerns: “the continuing gap between theory and applications in the social sciences,” “the proliferation and fragmentation of social and behavioral studies in outdoor recreation,” and his own “frustration at coping with management policies based on the supposed will of the majority or average recreationist” (p. xv). Work over the past 30 years suggests that he made major contributions in addressing each of these concerns, particularly the first two.

Why did Bryan’s study and this monograph have such sustained impact and why are they worth returning to today? In rereading *Conflict in the Great Outdoors*, I believe there are two main reasons. First, he carefully conceptualized a pressing research need then designed an appropriate study to address it, in his case using a disciplined inductive approach. Inductive approaches are still used too infrequently in our field and the justifications he provided over 30 years ago for employing them are still valid and, in some ways, even more compelling today. His approach also provides a timely reminder that popular literature, especially historical materials, can sometimes provide valuable insights and perspectives for our research. Given the diversity and sheer volume of information now available in the blogosphere alone, we have ever expanding opportunities in this regard. It is interesting that Bryan’s work has historical value now as well. For example, his description of the sources of conflicts between long ski and short ski proponents at downhill ski areas in his day (p. 74) could be helpful in better understanding conflicts between skiers and snowboarders today. Second, and most importantly, he understood the need to advance theory through establishing conceptual frameworks that could guide subsequent deductive studies. Without solid theoretical grounding, we still risk producing uncoordinated studies like those he found in 1979. Although we have made considerable conceptual and theoretical progress, being reminded of the fruitfulness of solid theoretical grounding is as important today as it was then. The concept of recreation specialization seems so intuitive today some might be tempted to discount Bryan’s contribution. Reading (or now rereading) this monograph will quickly dispel that notion. The clarity and intuitiveness of his ideas are testimonies to his thoughtful research approach and his ability to articulate the meaning and broader implications of his findings. There is much important theoretical and applied work yet to do of course, as Bryan himself pointed out again in *JLR* in 2001. He wonders there, for example, why we still know so little about the range of specialization across activities or the proportions of users at various levels. In rereading the monograph, I also noted dozens of other ideas that would still make interesting and useful studies and that could help inform my own research.

It may seem strange to recommend an outdoor recreation book that is dated enough that it predates mountain biking and snowboarding and talks about loading film in cameras. How many of us remember leafing through a library copy of the *Readers Guide* as Bryan did during his original literature review? To be honest, I was skeptical when asked to review this new edition of *Conflict in the Great Outdoors*. I knew the original monograph was a classic in its day, but I was not fully expecting what I found—a thoughtful, stimulating, challenging, and forward-looking work that remains relevant after more than three decades. I recommend

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*Conflict in the Great Outdoors* as a rich and surprisingly current resource for leisure researchers in general and those focusing on natural resource-based recreation in particular.

### References

- Bryan, H. (1977). Leisure value systems and recreation specialization: The case of trout fishermen. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 9, 147-187.
- Bryan, H. (2001). Reply to David Scott and C. Scott Shafer, "Recreation Specialization: A Critical Look at the Construct." *Journal of Leisure Research*, 33(3), 344-347.