I. Introduction

Open space projects typically emphasize the economic benefits of conservation, sustainability, and recreational opportunities. However, even though studies have shown that experiencing nature can help reduce stress and boost mood, most projects do not explicitly consider the benefits that natural open spaces have in relation to promoting mental and spiritual well-being. The goal of this project was to survey visitors of popular outdoor sites in Boise in order to better understand how people use these sites, as well as how access to open spaces affects their sense of well-being.

II. Methods

We began by interviewing individuals from the Master Naturalist Sage Brush Steep Chapter, Morrison Knutson Nature Center, Boise Parks and Recreation, Golden Eagle Autobahn Society, and Idaho Fish and Game to get ideas on questions we should be asking open space users. We then composed a survey that we fielded at three sites listed on The City of Boise Reserve Management Plan; Fort Boise, Table Rock, and Camel’s Back Park. We physically surveyed 41 individuals at three locations mentioned above in addition to creating an online poll via Facebook that addresses the general question: Does being in nature/open-spaces help your mental well-being? Results are in sections III and V.

III. Survey Questions and Results


2) The activities that I engage in Boise Open Spaces includes (Select all that apply) [ 27% ] Walking [ 32% ] Hiking [ 13% ] Running [ 28% ] Biking

3) In general, do you agree that the above selected activities improve both your physical and mental health? Yes [ 100% ] No [ 0% ]

4) After being in Open Spaces do you feel your mental (or spiritual) well being is better? Yes [ 100% ] No [ 0% ]

5) Do you feel it’s important for Boise residents to be educated on the benefits of Open Spaces? Yes [ 100% ] No [ 0% ]

6) Should the benefit of using Open Spaces be taught in high schools? Yes [ 100% ] No [ 0% ]

Facebook Poll: Does being in nature/open-spaces help your mental well being? 52 Responses: Yes [ 100% ] No [ 0% ]

IV. Conclusions

The number health benefits associated with access to open space and parks are numerous. Our study revealed that a direct side effect of having access to open spaces, reduces stress levels, depression, anxiety, and contributes to overall mental and spiritual wellbeing. While outdoor activities combine both physical exercise and the outdoors, the mental wellness benefits are numerous and having access to these spaces is paramount for urban residents. Although the relationship between humans and nature is complex, the quality and accessibility of open spaces is very important in order to promote the use of these areas and their long term protection.

V. Charted Results

People can underestimate the happiness effect of being outdoors!