

To the Woods

Grad student finds her place

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COURTESY PHOTO

If everything goes according to plan for Krista Rodrigues '22G, you may come across her one day working on a trail in the Whites. If not there, then along another mountain belt. It doesn't matter where exactly, so long as its connected to the outdoors.

Rodrigues is pursuing a master's degree in [recreation management and policy](#). She didn't start out on this path. After receiving her undergraduate degree in human resource management and then spending several years in administrative positions, Rodrigues began to wonder what she might do next. Then, in 2019, she landed a job at

UNH in an outreach program. Being back in a university setting got her thinking about graduate school. And that made her wonder about parlaying her passion into a career.

"...part of the beauty of this journey has been learning other ways to take my career to the woods."

"I'm an avid outdoorsperson who was already a little bit of a rec management and visitor use nerd, without knowing the terms," the Massachusetts native says. "Then I met with Patti Craig and Mike Ferguson (both teach recreation management and policy) and I knew this was where I needed to be to forward a career that aligned with my values and lifestyle. At the time though, it was simply 'oh my gosh this so cool, where do I sign up?'"

The program has provided a way for her to mesh her interests with a career where she "will get to be a part of conservation efforts, engender respect for nature in others, work outside a bit and have a career I feel excited and confident about."

In September Rodrigues signed on with Ferguson, who has launched a one-year study of UNH's College Woods to, among other things, assess the extent to which visitors use the approximately 250 acres of woods, streams and small fields and what health outcomes visitors derive from that use.

"College Woods is a valued resource to many for a lot of different reasons. This is a big part of why a study like this is important," Rodrigues says. "On the management level, we're gaining insights into people's experiences that provide relevant data to contribute towards any future plans for the woods. On the broader level, we're learning about the less tangible benefits of College Woods to recreators, such as details about the physical and mental health outcomes they perceive from their visit."

Rodrigues deems this information essential not just for this tract of land but for public natural spaces as well. She notes understanding the effects that recreating these spaces has on people can influence future policy and programs as well as spur future research.

"Visitor use research on the whole can contribute to all kinds of decisions and policies, from financial support to preservation," Rodrigues says. "This study will provide management guidance related to recreation (satisfaction, usage numbers, motivations, etc.). Empirical data goes a long way in helping to make and guide the specifics of those decisions."

As to where she sees her degree taking her, Rodrigues says "I'm particularly interested in being a park ranger or rec/trail manager but, part of the beauty of this journey has been learning other ways to take my career to the woods."

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