

# Student Research Spotlight: Alex Caraynoff

Field research in the Green Mountain National Forest

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**PHOTO COURTESY ALEX CARAYNOFF**

*Alex Caraynoff '22 is a master of science student in recreation management and policy. He is from Minooka, Illinois and came to UNH in 2020 after completing his undergraduate education at Pennsylvania State. Alex spent the summer in Vermont's Green Mountain National Forest conducting research that's part of a study funded by the USDA Forest Service.*

## Why did you choose UNH?

One of the things that drove me to UNH was the Applied Recreation Research Collaborative (ARRC) lab which allows students to use applied research to solve actual problems that exist in parks and protected areas. I've been fortunate to work while at UNH on funded studies that are actively tackling real problems. Another thing that drew me here was the culture of the program, being very close knit and homey. Everyone is really open and helpful and supportive. Those factors made it a pretty easy choice to come here.

## Tell us about your summer research experience.

This summer I was afforded the opportunity to conduct in-person social science field research in the Lye Brook Wilderness (LBW) area of the Green Mountain National Forest. Parks and protected areas visitation in the United States has increased substantially over the past several decades, and dramatically within the past few years; especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This expansion in visitation raises concerns regarding the influence of social, situational, and ecological factors upon visitor experiences, natural resources, adjacent communities, and the outdoor industry and economy. This innovative study investigated the interconnected relationship between these impacts and visitors' behaviors and decision-making in one of the few Congressional Designated Wilderness Areas on the east coast- the LBW.

This applied research experience allowed me to engage visitors from all walks of life, listening and learning about their recreation experiences. It was a true adventure, and one that I won't soon forget. Each visitor had their own story to share, and a special lens they viewed their experiences through, presenting me with an abundance of both management and theoretical insights. Also, the timing of the study couldn't have been better as part of the study considered the influences of weather on visitor behaviors. Putting it lightly, the abundance of rain we encountered this summer served us well within this study context!

All in all, working within the recreation management and policy department's ARRC lab on an applied and funded research study in the LBW has been nothing short of a phenomenal experience. It has given me the opportunity to not only partner with natural resource managers - like the USDA Forest Service - in New England to solve real-world and local problems, but also countless opportunities for academic growth serving as my master's thesis and peer-reviewed publication alongside assistant professor and project principle investigator Mike Ferguson. The knowledge I have gained has propelled me further in reaching my future career goals, and I cannot wait to see what else my time in the ARRC Lab has in store!

- WRITTEN BY:  
[Alex Caraynoff](#) | Recreation Management and Policy
- COMPILED BY:  
[Callie Carr](#) | UNH College of Health and Human Services | [callie.carr@unh.edu](mailto:callie.carr@unh.edu) | 603-862-0970

## RESEARCH



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