Indiana University's Woodland Campus: A case study of urban forest patch sustainability

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Abstract

Urban green spaces are increasingly seen as vital resources contributing to ecological and social health. The ecological concept of patch dynamics over space, scale, and time also applies to patches in urban settings and is important in understanding the complexity of relationships between and within the ecological and social spheres interacting in urban settings. This case study investigates forested and natural patches on Indiana University's Bloomington campus. Data gathered through university archives includes historical maps, campus plans, and meeting documents for a study period beginning in 1884 when the university moved to its current location. Documents were reviewed for evidence of patches being labelled by name, or by drawings of trees. Findings include patterns where patches were indicated on maps (1902 -early 1940s), followed by a period where natural/forested areas were left blank on maps (post WWII - 1960s), followed by patches reappearing on maps and being suggested for preservation (1960's - present). Although some natural patches were "lost" during the study period, others including Dunn's Woods and Dunn Meadow persisted. Patches that endured may be defined as Commons, or shared resources protected by formal/informal rule processes. This novel research framework for the IUB patch project serves as a template for use in investigating green patches in the city of Bloomington. The Bloomington project expands the IUB framework, adding GIS analysis of current patches and historical imagery, and assessment of current ecological patch condition. Additional considerations reflect complexity of municipal settings and include patch ownership, sociodemographics and equitability in access.