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Vegetation alteration along trails in Shenandoah National Park, Virginia

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Abstract

Most studies in the USA of vegetation alteration and human impact along trails have been located in large western wilderness areas. The objective of this study was to determine vegetation changes occurring along trails in an eastern ecosystem supporting second-growth deciduous forest. The location of this study was Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, which has a long history of trail use by humans. Located in different sections of the park, ten trails were chosen as study areas. In each, transects were established to measure ground flora in trailside, transition, and undisturbed areas perpendicular to the trail. Field data were collected on frequency, life-form, and percent cover for ground flora of 25 cm or less in height. Cover and species diversity increased toward the trail in eight out of ten cases. Competition for light and resistance to trampling were thought to influence the occurrence of plants along the transect. Plants found along the trail border were represented by low growth-forms, early blooming, or

graminoid characteristics, and hemicryptophyte, therophyte, or chamaephyte life-forms. Plants found in the undisturbed zone were represented by scattered cover and frequency, woody growth forms or delicate herbaceous forms, and phanerophyte or geophyte life-forms.



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