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Presentations	Session 1.2	<i>Policy implications on management of urban forests as nature based solutions.</i>

Abstract Session 3.3 – COVID-19-induced visitor boom reveals the importance of forests as critical infrastructure.

During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the globe have implemented a certain degree of lockdown, restricting citizens' freedom of movement and freedom of assembly. This presentation aims to illustrate the impact that the measures against the spread of COVID-19 have on forest recreation, building on a study in an urban context around Bonn (Germany) that was conducted between April 2019 and February 2020. The quantitative and qualitative data on urban forest visits from that study were supplemented with new census data supported by selected expert interviews. We found that visitor numbers since the inception of COVID-19 measures in March 2020 have more than doubled. Visitor patterns have drastically shifted, from an even distribution throughout the day with small peaks before and after office hours to a culmination in the late afternoon. Lastly, the interviewed forestry professionals have noted that a new set of visitors, i.e., young people, families with children and non-locals, have arrived in the forest. This influx of more and novice visitors poses challenges for forest managers and urban forest policy. It is, however, also a unique opportunity for a substantial engagement of forestry with society at large, that has implications for forest policy, especially in urban areas, possibly beyond the COVID-19 pandemic era.

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