



# Unsheltered Homelessness in Parks and Protected Areas in Northern California

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*The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or the policies of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.*

Raise your hand if your program, office, or public land unit is working with, or on issues related to, unsheltered homeless communities?



# National trends in unsheltered homelessness

- In the US in 2022, 582,462 people were homeless, including:
  - 233,832 unsheltered people (40%)  
(U.S. HUD, 2023)
- “Trends in homelessness remain stubbornly high despite policy initiatives to end homelessness.”

(Fowler et al., 2019, p. 465)

A person experiencing “**unsheltered homelessness**” resides in a place not intended for permanent human habitation, such as cars, RVs, parks, tents, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, or on the street.



US Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2023). 2022 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, Part 1 By the Numbers.

<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PA/documents/HUD-PIT-by-the-numbers.pdf>

Fowler, P. J., Hovmand, P. S., Marcal, K. E., & Das, S. (2019). Solving homelessness from a complex systems perspective: Insights for prevention responses. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 40(1), 465–486.

# A quick note on terminology

## Homeless? Unhoused? Unsheltered? Word choice matters when reporting on Oaklanders who don't have permanent housing

As a newsroom, we're committed to working with community members to define their experiences. Here's what we learned.

by **Natalie Orenstein**  
Nov. 10, 2020, 12:54 p.m.



## Time to Retire the Word 'Homeless' and Opt for 'Houseless' or 'Unhoused' Instead?

As the homeless crisis deepens, the words used to describe those most impacted are finally beginning to change



By **Nicholas Slayton**  
May 21, 2021

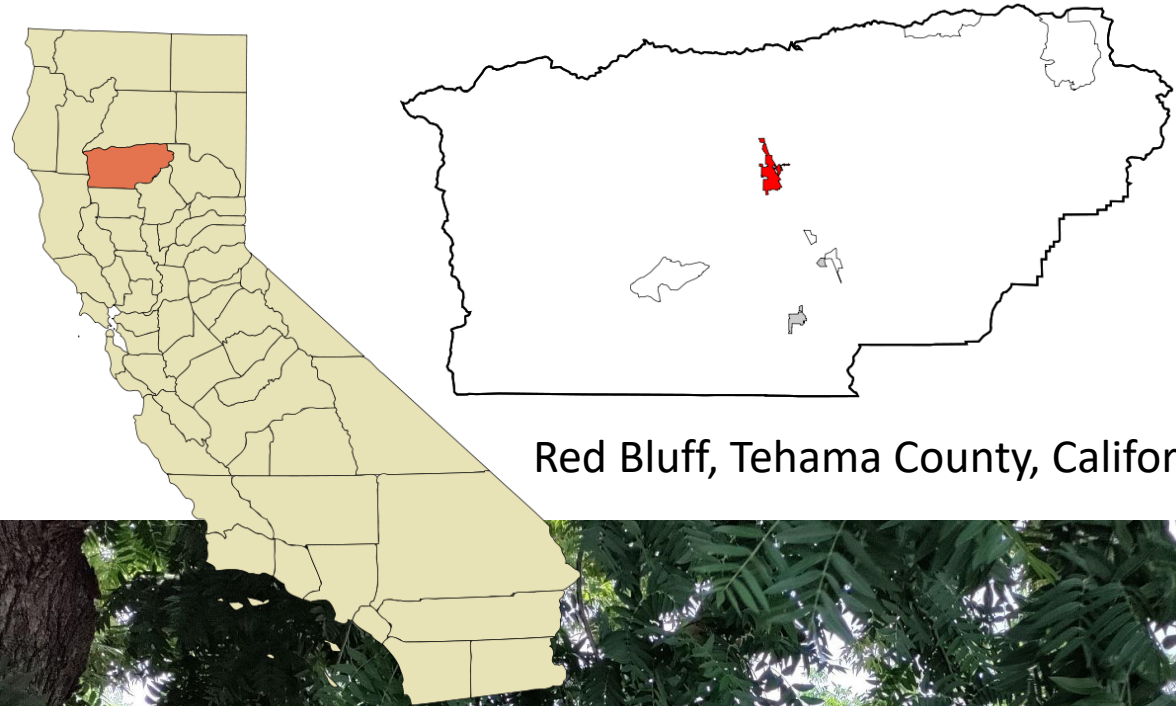
## Homelessness and **Nonrecreational Camping** on National Forests and Grasslands in the United States: Law Enforcement Perspectives and Regional Trends

**Lee K. Cerveney and Joshua W.R. Baur**



# Understanding nonrecreational campers

- Lived experiences of unhoused people who camp non-recreationally on public lands in Red Bluff, California (i.e., **non-recreational campers**)
- Oral history and ethnographic approach
- Hope to build theory about rural homelessness and develop guidance for land management agencies



Red Bluff, Tehama County, California





# Origins of project

- California State University, Chico partnership with the US Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Field Station
- Originally focused only on one USFS-managed campground
- Focused on non-recreational campers who violated 14-day stay limit





Del M

Submitted on 5/16/2022

**Loop:** SYCAMORE GROVE (RED BLUFF) CAMPGROUND, **Site:** 002

**Reservation Dates:** 5/8/2022 - 5/10/2022

Nice park with river access. However, campground appears to have alot of homeless people living in tents with cars coming and going all hours of the night.

Was this review helpful?

Yes (2)

No (0)



Amanda W

Submitted on 7/27/2021

**Loop:** SYCAMORE GROVE (RED BLUFF) CAMPGROUND, **Site:** 024

**Reservation Dates:** 7/21/2021 - 7/25/2021

Lots of homeless and very dirty .

Camp host honestly did not care, the conversation was very disheartening.



John M

Submitted on 3/29/2024

**Loop:** SYCAMORE GROVE (RED BLUFF) CAMPGROUND, **Site:** 012

**Reservation Dates:** 3/19/2024 - 3/22/2024

Extremely helpful and welcoming Camp Host. Bathrooms were very clean and well stocked. Showers took quarters, and were also very clean!! Campground was kept clean as well. Camped near camp host. She was very friendly and asked if we needed anything or had any issues to let her know. We liked that the bathrooms had a code for using. This way, only those were camping could use that facility. Camp was quiet at night. We were there for 3 nights in the middle of the week.

^ Show Less

Was this review helpful?

Yes (0)

No (0)



Vivianna P

Submitted on 3/11/2024

**Loop:** SYCAMORE GROVE (RED BLUFF) CAMPGROUND, **Site:** 012

**Reservation Dates:** 3/5/2024 - 3/8/2024

Staff were helpful, bathrooms were clean, and showers had good water pressure (just remember to bring some quarters).



**Phone Carrier:** Verizon



**Coverage Strength:** (3)Good Coverage

Was this review helpful?

Yes (0)

No (0)

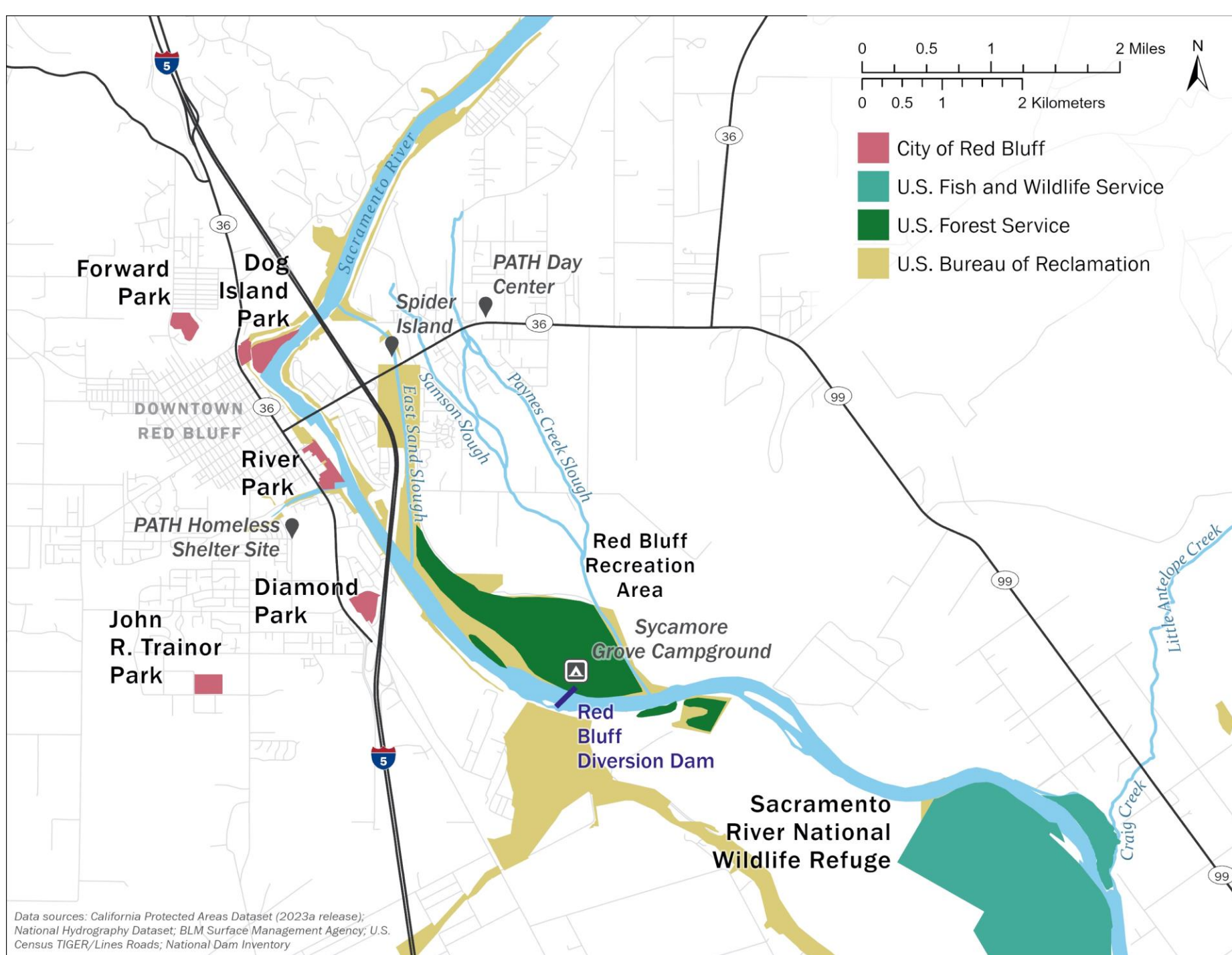




What kinds of input, if any, do you all receive about homelessness and non-recreational camping from the public?

# Reevaluation of research

- Variety of parks and protected areas
- Complex jurisdictional context
- Economically struggling town that historically had stronger economy from extractive industries





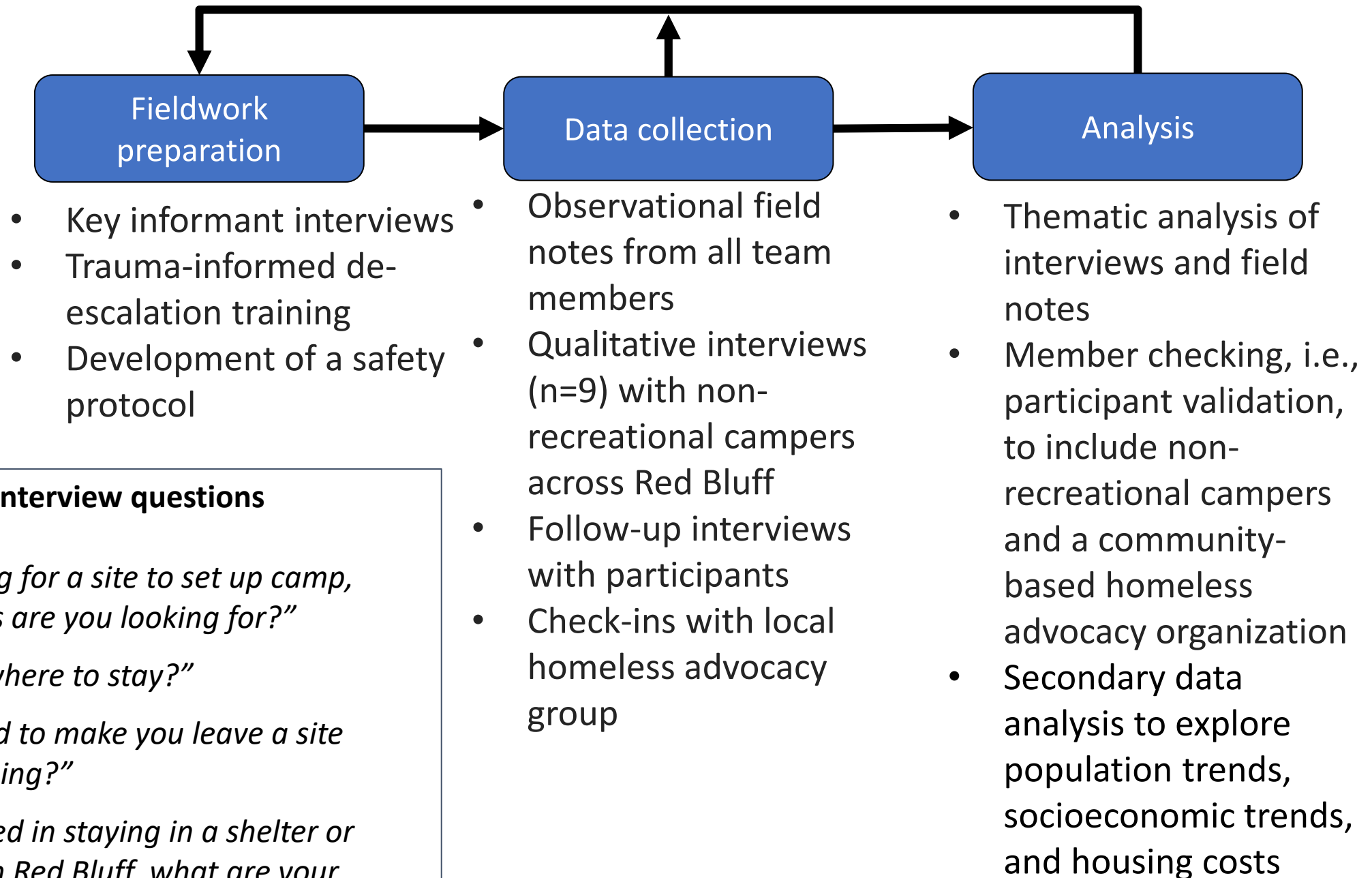
# Research goals

Describe the lived-experience of nonrecreational campers from their perspective

Investigate the factors that influence camping location choices and constraints

Explore factors that affect movement of nonrecreational campers across the region

# Methods



## Example interview questions

*“When you are looking for a site to set up camp, what kinds of features are you looking for?”*

*“How do you decide where to stay?”*

*“Has anyone ever tried to make you leave a site where you were camping?”*

*“If you aren’t interested in staying in a shelter or transitional housing in Red Bluff, what are your options around here?”*



# Iterative research approach and follow-up interviews



Flooding events of February 2024



Tehama County's only homeless shelter opened in early May 2024

## LATEST HEADLINES

### Red Bluff Police Chief Sanders addresses homelessness in River Park

Last week, the department's homeless liaison officer handed out written notices to vacate River Park. According to Sanders, 25 camps received those written notices. He added that they have received verbal notices for the last several weeks.

By [GEORGE JOHNSTON](#) | [gjohnston@redbluffdailynews.com](mailto:gjohnston@redbluffdailynews.com) | Red Bluff Daily News  
May 10, 2024 at 2:23 a.m.



# Managerial relevance of preliminary findings

- For managed campgrounds, **discretion of host(s)** matters
- Policy changes can affect noncreational campers' settlement trends
- May be disproportionately affected by local-level impacts of **climate change** (e.g., wildfire smoke, flooding, etc.)
- Deftly navigate some elements of complex and multiple **land-management jurisdictions** and their associated **bureaucratic systems**
- Intergenerational effects of the **decline of logging and other extractive industries** in the Pacific Northwest





# Scholarly relevance of preliminary findings

- Nonrecreational campers view themselves and the spaces they inhabit as simultaneously **invisible** and **hyper-visible**
  - Invisibility denies marginalized people recognition, legitimacy, authority, and voice (Lewis & Simpson, 2010; Simpson & Lewis, 2005)
  - Hypervisibility is “scrutiny based on perceived difference, which is usually (mis)interpreted as deviance” (Ryland, 2013, p. 2222)
- Employ **local ecological knowledge** in their day-to-day lives
  - Coheres with UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative’s work on rural vs. urban homeless populations



Lewis, P., & Simpson, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Revealing and concealing gender: Issues of visibility in organizations*. Springer.

Simpson, R., & Lewis, P. (2005). An investigation of silence and a scrutiny of transparency: Re-examining gender in organization literature through the concepts of voice and visibility. *Human Relations*, 58(10), 1253-1275.

Ryland, M. (2013). Hypervisibility: How scrutiny and surveillance makes you watched, but not seen. *The Body is not an Apology*.



# Large-group discussion

- What types of research questions or topics related to nonrecreational campers could inform your work?
- In what ways can you imagine collaborating with nonrecreational campers to ensure, or enhance, the stewardship of public lands?





# Next steps

- Follow-up interviews after opening of homeless shelter (and orders to vacate of existing camps)
- Member checking with participants
- Development of guidance for land management agencies and campground hosts
- Building of scholarship on rural homelessness







# Thank you!

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