

Human noise pollution disrupting wild places

By Rachel Buxton, Colorado State University

As transportation networks expand and urban areas grow, noise from sources such as vehicle engines is spreading into remote places. Human-caused noise has consequences for wildlife, entire ecosystems and people. It reduces the ability to hear natural sounds, which can mean the difference between life and death for many animals, and degrade the calming effect that we feel when we spend time in wild places.

Protected areas in the United States, such as national parks and wildlife refuges, provide places for respite and recreation, and are essential for natural resource conservation. To understand how noise may be affecting these places, we need to measure all sounds and determine what fraction come from human activities.

In a recent study, our team used millions of hours of acoustic recordings and sophisticated models to measure human-caused noise in protected areas. We found that noise pollution doubled sound energy in many U.S. protected areas, and that noise was encroaching into the furthest reaches of remote areas.

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