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Oregon and National Public Values Concerning Federal Forestry Issues

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B.S. Steel and F.D.S. Conway

The Pacific Northwest has become the focus of regional and national debate over the use and well-being of public forest lands. Historically, timber has been the primary economic product from forested areas in the region. However, public concern for wildlife, fish, wilderness, recreation, and other values associated with these lands has increased substantially since the 1960s, and the primacy of management for timber has become the subject of increasing controversy and litigation, particularly with regard to Federal forest lands (i.e., public lands managed by the Federal government for multiple uses). At the heart of this debate are differing values about the environment and our relationship to it.

Using data from several public opinion surveys conducted over the past 2 years, this publication examines the degree to which citizens embrace differing values toward forests.

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OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERVICE

Oregon and National Values Toward the Environment

Prevalent Differences

In a 1989 Gallup survey on public support for environmental protection and the environmental movement, 41 percent of respondents considered themselves "strong environmentalists" and 35 percent called themselves (not strong) "environmentalists." Only 20 percent of survey respondents indicated that they were "not an environmentalist." In addition, 85 percent of respondents said they worry about the loss of natural habitat a "fair amount" to a "great deal" (58 percent said a "great deal"). Perhaps one of the most significant findings of the survey was that 49 percent of respondents "contributed money to an environmental, conservation or wildlife preservation group." Given these findings, the amount of public concern and activism over declining populations of certain birds and animals is not surprising.

Some observers have suggested important regional differences in values concerning the environment and natural resources. In a 1993 Oregon and national telephone survey conducted by researchers at Washington State University and Utah State University (in conjunction with Oregon State University), randomly selected individuals were asked their level of agreement or disagreement with a variety of statements concerning natural resources and the environment. The results from over 800 Oregon and 1,300 national interviews indicate strong support for protecting plant and animal species (see Table 1, page 11).

Most striking is the strong support by both Oregon and national publics for the statements, "Humans have an ethical obligation to protect plant and animal species" and "Wildlife, plants, and humans have equal rights to live and develop on this earth." A majority of Oregon and national respondents disagreed with the statement "Plants and animals exist primarily for human use." In addition, close to half of Oregon and national respondents disagreed with the statement, "Humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature." While one may take issue with the wording of these statements or the commitment of the respondents, the results do indicate strong support for protection of nature in both the Oregon and national context.

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Generational Differences

Social scientists have suggested that there are growing generational differences in value orientations toward the environment and natural resources in contemporary society. The data presented in Table 2 (page 6) provide some evidence for this pattern among Oregonians. Younger people are more likely to be concerned about nature than older people. The most striking finding is that 79.5 percent of the 18-29 age group disagreed with the statement, "Plants and animals exist primarily for human use," while only 36.6 percent of the 61-plus age group disagreed with the statement.

Oregon and National Public Values Toward Federal Forest Management

In 1991 and 1992 surveys, Oregon State University researchers asked 622 metropolitan Portland respondents (representing the tri-county area), over 800 Oregon respondents (representing the entire state), and almost 1100 national respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with nine statements concerning Federal forest land management. The nine statements were divided into two groups: commodity-based management and ecosystem-based management.

Commodity-based Management

The results in Table 3 (page 7) show that none of the commodity-based policies were supported by majorities of any sample. Overall, there was more support among the Oregon sample for a commodity-oriented approach. Less than one-third of the Oregon and Portland samples and a quarter of the national sample felt that "Federal forest management should emphasize timber and lumber products." Similar levels believed that "Endangered species laws should be set aside to preserve timber jobs." Only one commodity-based policy received more support than opposition in the samples; slightly more Oregonians and Portland residents agreed than disagreed that "The economic vitality of local communities should be given the highest priority when making Federal forest decisions."

Ecosystem-based Management

In stark contrast to commodity-based management, all of the statements concerning ecosystem-based management received majority agreement from both Oregon and national

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respondents. For example, over half of surveyed Oregonians and over three-quarters of the national sample agreed that "Greater protection should be given to fish and wildlife habitats on Federal forest lands." Respondents also supported a ban on clear-cutting, as well as greater protection for old-growth forests and managing Federal forests for a wider range of benefits and uses than timber and wood products alone.

Economics vs. the Environment

To further identify their values on Federal forest policy, survey respondents were asked to self-select their position on a scale regarding the importance of managing for environmental and economic considerations. Graph 1 (page 5) presents results for this "economics versus environmental trade-offs" question. Near majorities favored a balance between environmental and economic components in forest resource management. However, over one-third of Oregon and national respondents expressed a higher regard for environmental considerations than for economic considerations. These findings are consistent with those from national polls conducted by the Gallup organization.

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Oregon and National Values Toward Federal Forests

The final comparison between the Oregon and national samples concerns general values toward forests. Table 4 (page 8) presents results for four forest value indicators. Findings suggest that both Oregon and national publics are more ecologically than economically oriented toward Federal forests. Over half of Oregon and national respondents agreed that "Forests have a right to exist for their own sake, regardless of human concerns and uses." A majority of both publics disagreed that "The primary use of forests should be for products that are useful to humans," that "Forests should be used primarily for timber and wood products," and that "We should actively harvest more trees to meet the needs of a much larger human population."

*Oregonians and
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Summary

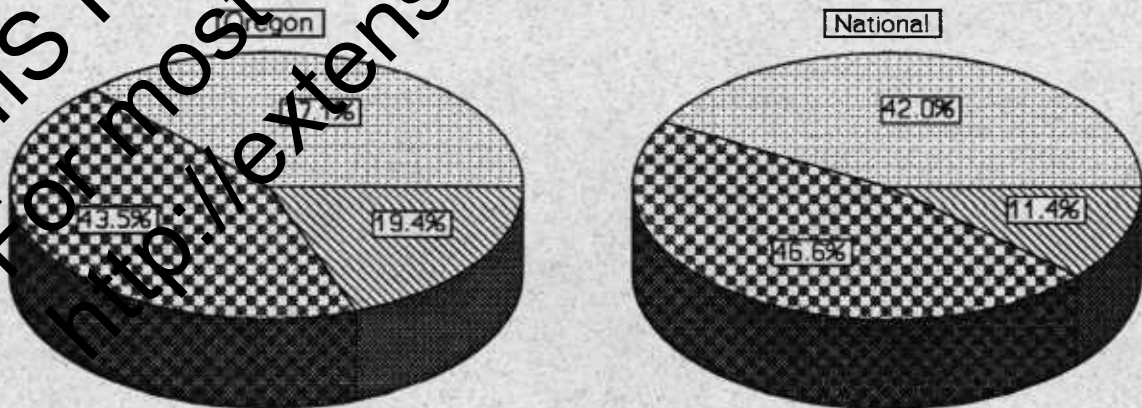
Although some observers have suggested important regional differences, the data presented in this paper indicate that Oregonians and people across the nation are concerned about the environment and support environmental protection of Federal forests. Among Oregonians, there is some evidence of generational differences in value orientation toward the environment.

These surveys indicate that both Oregon and national publics favor a balance between environmental and economic components in Federal forest management, although strong support was shown for maintaining natural environmental conditions even if there are negative economic consequences.

Graph 1.—Economic versus environmental trade-offs: Oregon and national publics compared

Many Federal forest management issues involve difficult trade-offs between natural environmental conditions (wildlife, old-growth forests) and economic considerations (employment, tax revenues). Where would you locate yourself on the following chart concerning these issues?

- Legend**
-  The highest priority should be given to maintaining natural environmental conditions even if there are negative economic consequences.
 -  Both environmental and economic factors should be given equal priority in forest management policy.
 -  The highest priority should be given to economic considerations even if there are negative environmental consequences.



(Brent Steel, Peter List, and Bruce Shindler, 1992)

Tables

Table 1.—Oregon and National public attitudes toward natural resources and the environment

		Oregon (%)	National (%)
Plants and animals exist primarily for human use.	disagree	53.5	55.0
	neutral	14.1	13.4
	agree	32.4	31.6
Humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature.	disagree	47.5	50.8
	neutral	12.4	13.1
	agree	36.8	36.1
Humans have an ethical obligation to protect plant and animal species.	disagree	7.0	7.2
	neutral	7.1	4.2
	agree	85.9	88.6
Wildlife, plants, and humans have equal rights to live and develop on the earth.	disagree	18.0	21.9
	neutral	16.0	7.5
	agree	66.0	70.6

(Brent Steel and Mark Brunson, 1993)

Table 2.—Generational differences in environmental values

		Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Plants and animals exist primarily for human use.	18-29 years	79.5	13.0	7.5
	30-45 years	65.4	11.0	23.6
	46-60 years	52.5	8.3	39.2
	61 plus years	36.6	22.4	41.0
Humankind was created to rule over the rest of nature.	18-29 years	63.7	15.1	21.2
	30-45 years	61.5	10.5	28.0
	46-60 years	44.9	10.2	44.9
	61 plus years	40.9	16.0	43.1
Humans have an ethical obligation to protect plant and animal species.	18-29 years	10.3	4.1	85.6
	30-45 years	2.9	4.2	92.9
	46-60 years	13.3	1.8	84.9
	61 plus years	6.7	4.9	88.3
Wildlife, plants, and humans have equal rights to live and develop on the earth.	18-29 years	7.1	2.1	90.7
	30-45 years	9.0	22.5	68.4
	46-60 years	25.8	11.3	62.9
	61 plus years	21.4	7.1	71.5

(Brent Steel and Mark Brunson, 1993)

Table 3.—National, Oregon, and Portland public management preferences for Federal forest lands

		Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Commodity-based Management				
The economic vitality of local communities should be given the highest priority when making Federal forest decisions.	National	42	37	21
	Oregon	43	41	46
	Portland	38	18	44
Some existing wilderness areas should be opened for logging.	National	52	20	28
	Oregon	71	17	32
	Portland	54	19	27
Endangered species laws should be set aside to preserve timber jobs.	National	65	18	17
	Oregon	48	15	37
	Portland	52	17	31
Federal forest management should emphasize timber and lumber products.	National	44	31	24
	Oregon	39	23	32
	Portland	40	28	32
Ecosystem-based Management				
Clear-cutting should be banned on Federal forest land.	National	2	16	63
	Oregon	31	12	57
	Portland	25	13	62
More wilderness areas should be established.	National	13	14	73
	Oregon	30	24	46
	Portland	21	26	53
Greater protection should be given to fish such as salmon on Federal forest lands.	National	14	10	76
	Oregon	20	21	59
	Portland	8	21	71
Greater efforts should be made to protect the remaining "Old Growth."	National	12	13	75
	Oregon	32	17	51
	Portland	20	19	61
Greater efforts should be given to protect wildlife on Federal forest lands.	National	12	10	78
	Oregon	25	21	54
	Portland	14	25	61

(Brent Steel, Peter List, and Bruce Shindler, 1992; and Brent Steel and Mark Brunson, 1993)

Table 4.—Oregon and national public values concerning Federal forests

		Oregon (%)	National (%)
Forests have a right to exist for their own sake, regardless of human concerns and uses.	disagree	32.5	24.8
	neutral	15.4	13.7
	agree	52.1	61.5
The primary use of forests should be for products that are useful to humans.	disagree	35.9	65.9
	neutral	17.5	13.7
	agree	26.6	20.4
Forests should be used primarily for timber and wood products.	disagree	67.2	74.8
	neutral	16.0	11.1
	agree	16.8	14.1
We should actively harvest more trees to meet the needs of a much larger human population.	disagree	66.8	66.7
	neutral	17.7	17.8
	agree	15.5	15.5

(Brent Steel, Peter List, and Bruce Shindler, 1992)

References

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