

7-21-2004

# Public Support for Species Conservation Policies: the Case of Pacific Salmon in Oregon

Fomenko

Follow this and additional works at: [http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ucowrconfs\\_2004](http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ucowrconfs_2004)

This is the abstract of a presentation given on Wednesday, 21 July 2004, in session 25 of the UCOWR conference.

---

## Recommended Citation

Fomenko, "Public Support for Species Conservation Policies: the Case of Pacific Salmon in Oregon" (2004). 2004. Paper 50.  
[http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ucowrconfs\\_2004/50](http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ucowrconfs_2004/50)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Conference Proceedings at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2004 by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact [opensiuc@lib.siu.edu](mailto:opensiuc@lib.siu.edu).

Valentina Fomenko

Department of Political Science, 307 Gilkey Hall Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331-6206

[Valentina.fomenko@orst.edu](mailto:Valentina.fomenko@orst.edu)

(541) 737-1879 tel

(541) 737-2289 fax

## **Public Support for Species Conservation Policies: the Case of Pacific Salmon in Oregon**

The arduous task of finding a solution to the enduring salmon crisis calls for a non-trivial, comprehensive approach. Such a solution is likely to affect virtually everyone in the Pacific Northwest. Ensuring public understanding of and support for species restoration policies is especially important, because many of such policies involve making difficult trade-offs. This issue is especially relevant to the situation in Oregon where citizens are directly involved in environmental policy-making, thus, public support for salmon restoration options is a vital component of the policy process.

This study was designed to identify the major factors influencing public support for salmon restoration policies, including policy-relevant knowledge, risk perception, ideological and attitudinal factors, as well as a sense of political efficacy and social trust. Results of the survey suggest that there is significant hesitation to implement relatively resource-consuming restoration options, such as dam removal or elimination of hatcheries, while more ambiguously formulated, and seemingly less demanding options, such as limiting certain agricultural and forestry activities, along with urban stream protection, enjoyed greater levels of support among Oregonians.

Key findings indicate that ideological and attitudinal factors are the most important predictors of public support for salmon restoration alternatives, such as removal of hydroelectric dams, limiting certain agricultural and forestry practices, elimination of hatcheries, and urban stream protection measures. Ideological and attitudinal variables have both direct and indirect impacts on policy support. In addition, higher levels of social trust and a sense of political efficacy also led to stronger support for salmon restoration policies.

The influence of risk perception on public support for salmon restoration policies was another important—although much more expected—result. Directly dependent on respondents' policy-relevant knowledge, their environmental attitudes, and trust in salmon-related agencies, organizations, and reference groups, levels of perceived risks to salmon were a crucial predictor of support for corresponding restoration policies. These results also suggest that there are significant differences in levels of perceived risks among members of the public arising from demographic differences—with younger cohorts, females, and respondents possessing higher levels of formal education being more likely to perceive higher levels of risks to salmon.

Respondents' levels of policy-relevant knowledge were not uniformly significant in explaining public support for various salmon restoration options, and generally did not exert much direct impact on levels of public support for salmon restoration policies. However, the indirect influence of knowledge through risk perception is quite important.

Higher levels of policy-relevant knowledge led to perceptions of higher risks to salmon populations posed by human activities and so contributed to respondents' support for restoration actions addressing such risks.

The results presented in this study suggest the need for a more holistic approach to understanding the sources and assessing the limits of public support for salmon restoration options. In general, both outreach and research activities should concentrate on overcoming the negative impacts of ideological and attitudinal cleavages and reconciling seemingly insurmountable differences in opinions on salmon policy. Providing additional knowledge should be tailored to the needs of the various constituencies and should be sensitive to a wide range of ideological stances and attitudinal positions.

Key words: dam removal, environmental policy support, salmon restoration, public opinion

\*This study was supported by a grant from the Oregon Sea Grant (NA16RG1039) to Brent S. Steel (Department of Political Science, Oregon State University) and Denise H. Lach (Center for Water and Environmental Change, Oregon State University).