



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Pacific Northwest Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA CSREES
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

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PNWWATER 037

Citizens Have Balanced View of Natural Resources

Most residents of the Pacific Northwest believe that there should be a balance between the use and protection of our natural resources. Natural resources can be defined as soil, water, air, minerals, and biological organisms (trees, fish, etc.).

In a 2002 survey, residents were asked how they viewed the use and protection of natural resources compared to the average American adult. They were asked to rate use/protection of natural resources on a scale from 1 to 9. A value of 1 indicates that all natural resources should be freely used by humans, while a value of 10 indicates that all natural resources should be protected and not used by humans. A value of 5 indicates an equal balance between resource use and resource protection. The average ranking of the 940 residents of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington who completed this survey was 5.6 (Figure 1). This value, although leaning toward the environmental protection side, indicates that residents want to see a balance between natural resource use and protection. The demographic factors of state of residence, age, education, length of residency in the region, and community size also impacted the response to this question.

Residents of Washington (5.8) and Oregon (5.6) tended to rate environmental protection higher than residents of Alaska (5.4) and Idaho (5.1) (Figure 2). This would be expected because a larger percentage of jobs in Idaho and Alaska are dependent on the use of natural resources (forestry, agriculture, mining, fishing,

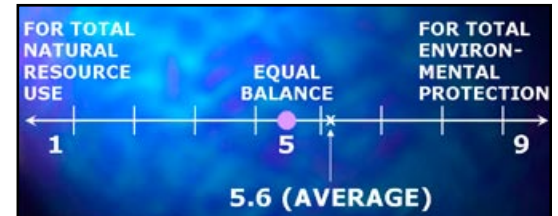


Fig 1. Average rating of how residents of the Pacific Northwest balance the use and protection of natural resources.

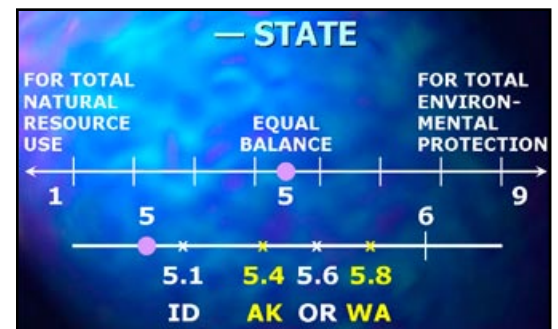


Fig 2. The influence of state of residence on how respondents balance the use and protection of natural resources.

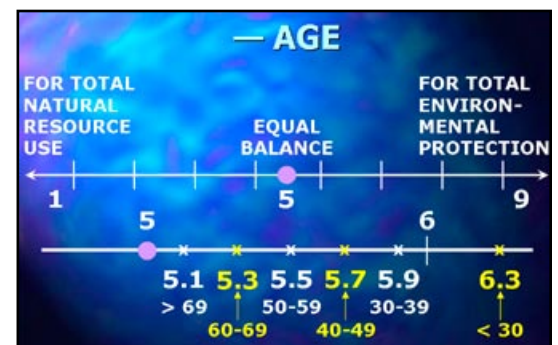


Fig 3. The influence of age on how respondents balance the use and protection of natural resources.

The PNW Water Survey

A 50-question survey was developed by the Pacific Northwest water quality team to document public awareness, aptitudes, attitudes and actions toward water quality in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Demographic data about the survey respondents were also collected. This statistically designed survey was completed by over 50 percent of the 1,800 residents who were solicited for this study in 2002. Several questions in this survey dealt with drinking water quality. The sampling error of this survey question was +/- 3 percent.



Pacific Northwest Regional Water Quality Coordination Project Partners

Land Grant Universities

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<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/water/index.html>
University Publications:
<http://www.alaska.edu/uaf/ces/publications/>

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Water Resource Research Institutes

Water and Environmental Research Center (Alaska)
<http://www.uaf.edu/water/>

Idaho Water Resources Research Institute
<http://www.boise.uidaho.edu/>

Institute for Water and Watersheds (Oregon)
<http://water.oregonstate.edu/>

State of Washington Water Research Center
<http://www.swwrc.wsu.edu/>

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA, Region 10
The Pacific Northwest
<http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>

Office of Research and Development, Corvallis Laboratory
<http://www.epa.gov/wed/>

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etc.). Conversely, the scores are higher in Oregon and Washington which have larger urban populations where jobs are not as dependent on the exploitation of natural resources.

Younger residents are more likely to lean toward protection/preservation of natural resources than senior citizens (Figure 3). This may be explained by the emphasis placed on environmental education in schools over the last 25 years.

Education level had a major impact on how respondents viewed natural resource use (Figure 4). Respondents with a high school education or less favored resource use over resource protection (4.7). Conversely, respondents with a college education favored resource protection over resource use (5.6+).

Newcomers to the Pacific Northwest (5.9) were more likely to favor resource protection over resource use than residents who have lived in the region all of their lives (5.3) (Figure 5). This is likely due to the observation that a larger percentage of long-term residents have jobs that are based on natural resource exploitation than newcomers.

Community size also had an impact on the natural resource use/protection rating (Figure 6). Residents of large communities (>100,000) were more likely to favor natural resource protection over natural resource use than residents of smaller communities. This is logical because residents of smaller communities are more dependent on natural resource exploitation for their livelihoods.

Over two-thirds of the 940 residents who answered this question scored themselves between 4.0 and 6.5. This narrow range of values indicates citizens want a balance between natural resource use and protection/preservation.

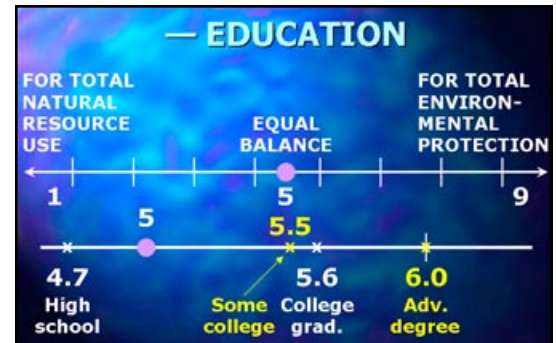


Fig 4. The influence of education level on how respondents balance the use and protection of natural resources.

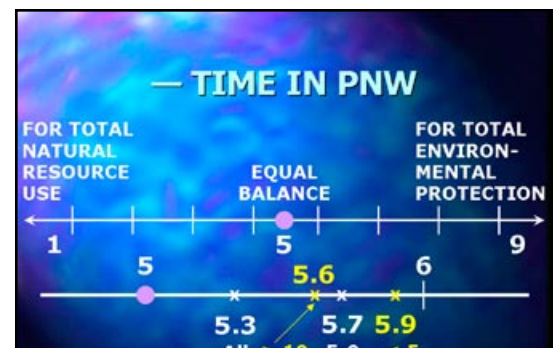


Fig 5. The influence of length of residence on how respondents balance the use and protection of natural resources.

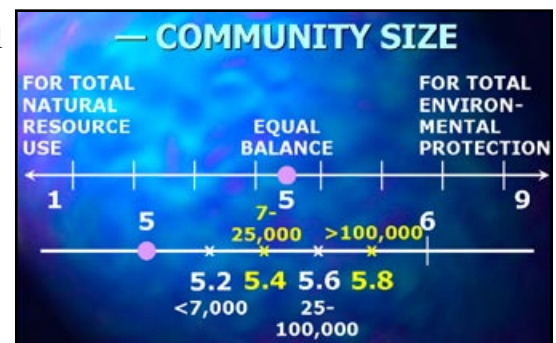


Fig 6. The influence of community size on how respondents balance the use and protection of natural resources.

CSREES is the Cooperative States Research, Education, and Extension Service, a sub-agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, and is the federal partner in this water quality program.