



Ecosystem Workforce Program

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SURVEYS FIND SUPPORT FOR EWEB'S VOLUNTARY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

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The McKenzie River Watershed provides the sole source of drinking water to residents of Eugene, but increasing residential development could impact water quality. To protect drinking water quality, the Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB) is developing the Voluntary Incentives Program (VIP) to pay landowners to maintain healthy riparian forests that provide high quality water and other environmental benefits. Although the development of this initiative is ongoing, two crucial concerns remain regarding its feasibility: 1) Are EWEB customers willing to support such a program and 2) are landowners in the watershed willing to participate?

Approach

We surveyed 411 EWEB customers and 272 McKenzie River Watershed landowners about appropriate contribution and payment levels, program terms, and levels of trust in partners implementing the program.

Results

EWEB customer willingness to pay

EWEB customers were generally supportive of the VIP concept, with 80% of customers expressing support for establishing programs to maintain the environmental benefits provided by the McKenzie River.

Support is strong at modest amounts. At modest amounts, customers were willing to participate in the program. For instance, 72% of customers were definitely or probably willing to pay an additional \$0.50 per month on their EWEB bills whereas 64% were definitely or probably willing to pay \$1.00 per month. Support dropped to 39% at \$3.00 per month, and declined even further at higher prices.

Customers' connection to the McKenzie matters.

The stronger the connection customers had to the McKenzie watershed, the more supportive they were of efforts to maintain the environmental benefits of the watershed. This connection was one of the most important variables influencing customers' willingness to participate in the program.

Customers trust local nonprofits and EWEB the most. Customers were presented with a diversity of different types of organizations (e.g., national nonprofits, local government, etc.) as potential implementers of new programs such as VIP to protect the environmental benefits provided by the McKenzie River Watershed. They reported the most trust for local nonprofits and EWEB and the least trust for federal natural resource agencies and private landowners.

McKenzie Watershed landowner willingness to participate

Landowners are interested but want more information. Many landowners expressed interest in participating in a program like the VIP, but a

substantial number remain cautious. For instance, 48% expressed interest in participating in programs to maintain streamside forests, while 27% reported they were unsure. When asked about their willingness to participate at various annual payment amounts, roughly 40% of landowners remained unsure at all payment levels, indicating a need for more information or visible demonstration projects.

Higher annual payments increase participation.

The survey asked landowners about their willingness to enroll in a program like the VIP at annual payments ranging from \$25 per acre to \$400 per acre. Willingness to participate increased with increases in the annual payment amount.

Terms of agreements influence landowner participation.

The specific terms of landowner agreements greatly influenced participation likelihood. Landowners preferred shorter contract lengths, such as ten years. Beyond ten years, landowners reported that they were much less likely to participate, and interest in 20- or 30-year contracts was viewed as essentially as low as for permanent contracts.

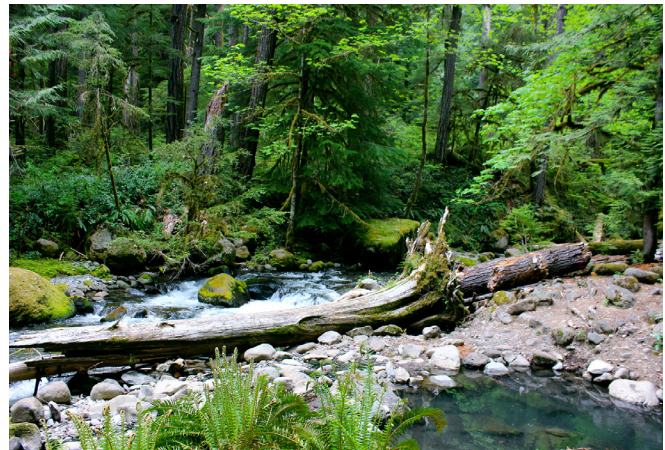
Previous participation in conservation programs matters. Landowners that previously participated in conservation programs were much more likely to participate in a program like the VIP.

Landowners trust EWEB and local nonprofits the most. Landowners were presented with a diversity of potential organizations that could act to support the environmental health of the McKenzie River Watershed. Landowners reported that they primarily trusted other landowners to support the health of the watershed; however, trust in other landowners was followed closely by trust in EWEB and local nonprofits. They reported the least amount of trust in Eugene residents and local government.

Implications

Our results suggest that the VIP may be a feasible program and offer several ways to increase the VIP's viability by maximizing customer support and landowner participation. Customer support is likely to be greatest if contribution levels are limited to \$1.00 per month or less and EWEB presents the program in a way that builds on customers' connection to the McKenzie River Watershed. For landowners, education and outreach will be essential as landowners were interested but uncertain about the details of the VIP and wanted to learn more. Pilot demonstration projects may be important to help key stakeholders learn about the program.

Although a potential obstacle to the VIP appears to be the rural-urban divide between EWEB customers—mostly Eugene residents—and rural landowners, EWEB and local nonprofits are mutually trusted organizations with potential to bridge these two groups and increase support on both sides.



More information

More information on the VIP can be found at:
<http://www.eweb.org/sourceprotection/vip>

More detail on the survey results are available at:
<http://www.eweb.org/public/documents/water/VIPimplementation.pdf>

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