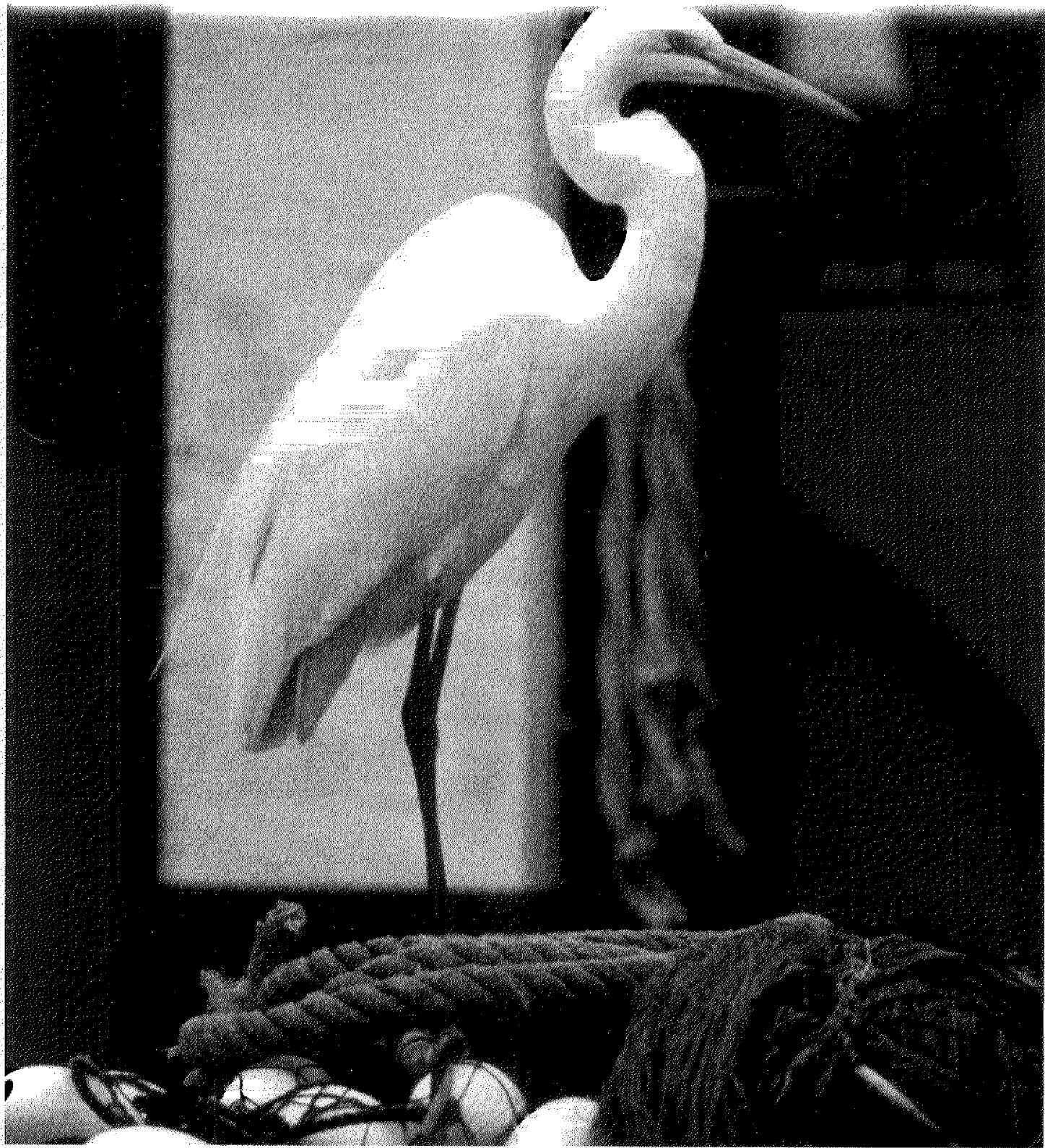
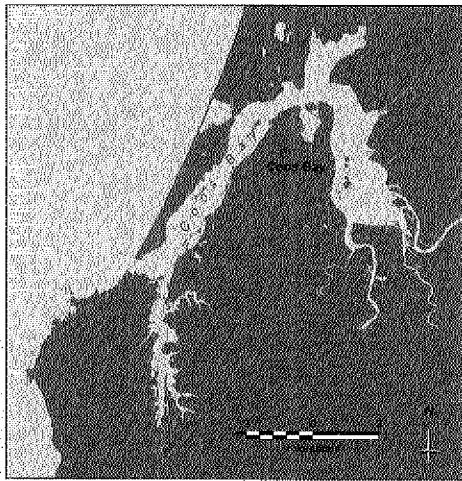


Coos Bay Living: PROFILE OF A COMMUNITY IN TRANSITION

A Report on Residents' Attitudes about Their Environment

Based on a study prepared by Dr. Rebecca Johnson and Christopher Farley, College of Forestry, Oregon State University, and Dr. Kathleen Bell and Dr. Daniel Huppert, School of Marine Affairs, University of Washington.





About PNCERS

The Pacific Northwest Coastal Ecosystems

Regional Study (PNCERS) is a multi-disciplinary program to study and evaluate the interrelated effects of human activities and natural changes in oceanic and atmospheric conditions. Experts in a range of disciplines are now gathering data on natural systems and social and economic influences in the PNCERS study area—the nearshore and estuarine ecosystems of the Pacific coasts of Washington and Oregon. By interpreting this information, PNCERS scientists hope to work with resource managers to develop better tools, models and databases to protect the environment and safeguard its resources.

The coastal resident survey is one of several social science projects completed as part of PNCERS. Other projects include a regional economic analysis, an analysis of demographic trends, a survey of scientists and managers of coastal ecosystems, an analysis of ecosystem and environmental management and a survey of visitors to coastal recreation sites.

PNCERS is a joint effort of the Oregon Coastal Management Program, Washington Sea Grant Program, Oregon Sea Grant Program and the National Marine Fisheries Service's Northwest Fisheries Science Center. It is supported by the Coastal Ocean Program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Research is coordinated with the Oregon Coastal Salmon Recovery Initiative and the U.S. Global Ocean Ecosystems Dynamics (GLOBEC) and Coastal Ocean Processes (COOP) programs.

The PNCERS Survey

To better understand how local communities use and appreciate coastal regions, a research team recently conducted a survey of households in five study sites—Yaquina Bay, Coos Bay and Tillamook Bay in Oregon and Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor in Washington.

The research team wanted to know:

- ◆ *How residents of the five bays value certain aspects of their communities and surrounding natural landscapes;*
- ◆ *What aspects of the communities and landscapes near these bays are perceived as changing—for better or worse;*
- ◆ *How residents participate in outdoor recreation activities tied to the natural environments of their local bays;*
- ◆ *What coastal residents think are threats to their bays; and*
- ◆ *What management approaches residents prefer and how they acquire information about the management and health of their bays.*

In February 2000, a total of 5,000 surveys were mailed to households within 30 miles of the five PNCERS study sites. More than half of these surveys were completed and returned. This special report summarizes the responses the research team received.

Who Completed the Survey?

In the Coos Bay site, most (75%) people who responded to the survey were men. Most (80%) of the respondents are 45 years old or older. Forty percent of this group is 65 years old or older. Close to half of all respondents say they are retired. Most households are small, with over 70 percent claiming a household size of two or fewer people.

Nearly 40 percent of Coos Bay residents are employed full-time outside of the house, with another 10% employed either part-time or at home. The main industries that provide employment are lumber and wood products, government, retail/wholesale trade, construction, transportation, real estate and agriculture.

Over 55 percent of Coos County residents have household incomes between \$20,000 and \$75,000 per year, while 20 percent have incomes between \$10,000 and \$20,000 per year. Only seven percent have incomes below \$10,000, and another seven percent have incomes above \$100,000 per year. Over 90 percent of residents have earned high school

diplomas, 32 percent have college diplomas and 13 percent have completed at least some post-graduate education.

What Residents Say About Coos Bay

When asked to assess the importance of 15 different characteristics of their community, residents rated views and scenery, lower incidence of crime, and recreational opportunities as the most important reasons for living in Coos Bay. Residents also value the absence of traffic congestion and low population of the area. More than half of residents rated these qualities as "very important." Other survey data suggest that residents may have moved to Coos Bay for different reasons—mainly job opportunities and the chance to be near family and friends.

Over half of the residents believe that job opportunities, overall cost of living and housing costs are "getting worse" in Coos Bay (Figure 1). In contrast, many feel that water quality and views and scenery are "getting better." An even higher proportion of residents believe that health care is improving.

"About a quarter of residents say Coos Bay is changing so much that they are considering moving away," says Dan Huppert, an associate professor at the University of Washington's School of Marine Affairs and one of four researchers who prepared the study.

These results show that Coos Bay residents consider the small-town characteristics and natural landscape of the area as very important to their quality of life. However, the economic factors that drew these residents to the area in the first place, especially job opportunities, are changing enough for many residents to consider moving away.

Most (82%) of the people responding to the Coos Bay survey say they have participated in at least one of 12 outdoor recreation activities in their county in the past year (Figure 2). Overall, hiking and beach-combing are the most popular outdoor recreation activities.

Kayaking/canoeing and surfing are the least popular.

More people participate in crabbing and salmon or steelhead fishing than in clamming or birdwatching. Generally, the residents tend to stick close to Coos Bay for these activities rather than going to the outer coast.

Threats to Salmon and the Bay Environment

As perceived by residents, the top five threats to Coos Bay are declines in fish habitat, oil spills, spread of European green crab, logging in upland areas and municipal sewage discharges (Figure 3). Residents are unsure about the threat posed by spread of non-native *Spartina* cordgrass. In contrast, scientists rank the spread of European green crabs and *Spartina* as the two highest threats to the bay. "The scientists are thinking in terms of potential threats, while the residents are likely reacting to recent events like the *New Carissa* oil spill of 1999," Huppert says.

Figure 1. Changes in Community Characteristics Near Coos Bay

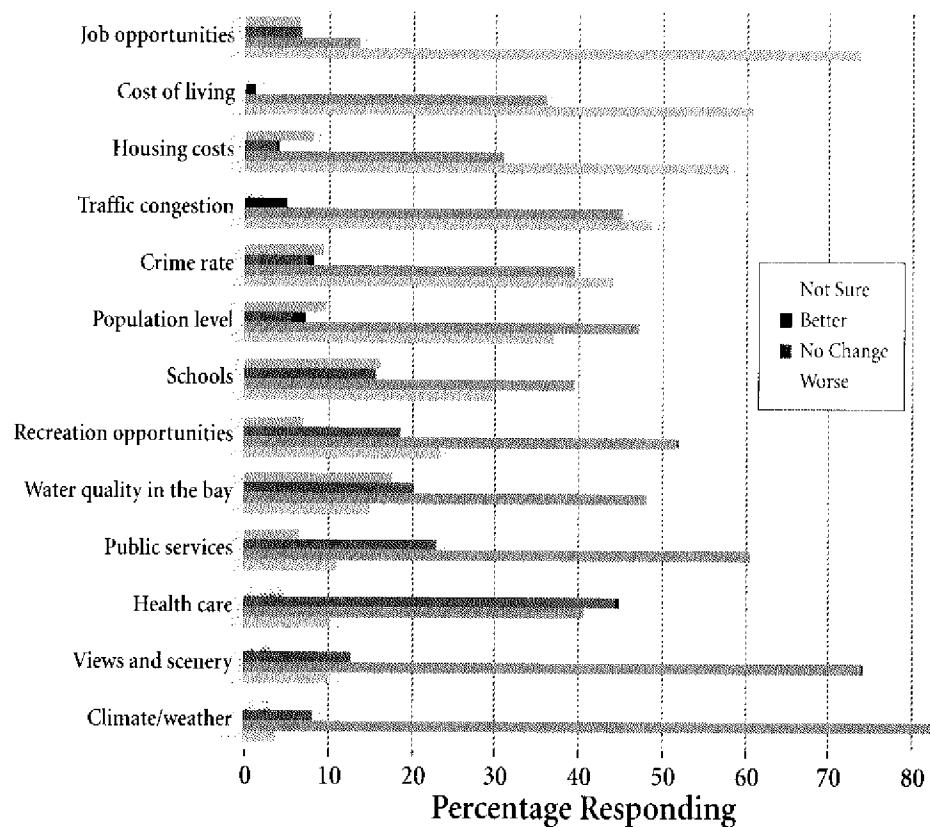
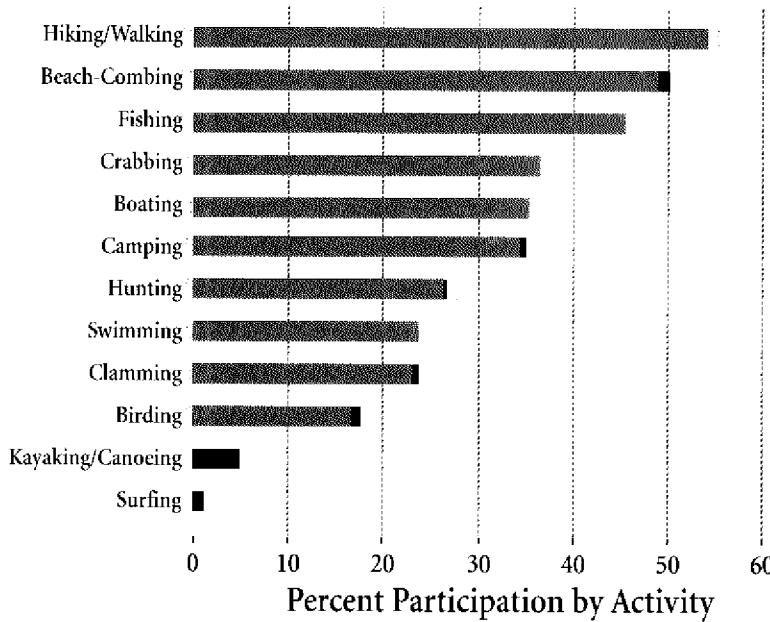


Figure 2. Participation in Outdoor Recreation Activities



Residents perceived poor ocean conditions, degraded river habitats in forestlands and water pollution as the top three reasons for salmon declines. They felt that excessive sport fishing was not a very important cause. Residents were also asked if they would vote in favor of an annual increase in taxes over a five-year period to help restore local coho salmon runs. The survey explained that tax money would be spent on improved fishery management and habitat restoration, which would cause a doubling or quadrupling of local runs. When presented with a hypothetical ballot measure that would fund such a program, 35 percent of residents voted for the measure, while 65 percent voted against it.

Who Decides?

Coos Bay residents overwhelmingly support existing partnerships between government and citizens. They also feel that county and state governments should be involved in making natural resource decisions. However, they do not think that environmental groups, city government or industry groups should be most influential. "What struck me as surprising was the low rating given to city government," says Huppert.

When asked about tradeoffs between environmental and economic concerns, more than half of residents favor a balance between the two. About 19 percent feel that the environment should be a higher consideration, while 25 percent feel that economic considerations should be given higher priority.

Where do residents get information about the Coos Bay environment? The local newspaper is the most popular source, followed closely by television. Residents also rely on word of mouth, radio and the regional newspaper. Residents rely less on the federal government and the Internet for this type of information.

Comparing Coos Bay with Other Coastal Communities

In general, there were more similarities than differences among responses from the five coastal communities surveyed. However, Coos Bay differs in several ways:

- ◆ Along with Yaquina Bay, Coos residents ranked views and scenery as the most important features of their community, in contrast to other bays, where absence of traffic congestion or low population densities were rated as most important.
- ◆ Coos Bay residents perceive shoreline development to be less of a threat than do other coastal communities.
- ◆ Residents of Oregon communities, including Coos Bay, were more likely to participate in natural resource based recreation activities than were their counterparts on the Washington coast. In particular, crabbing is more popular in Oregon, although Washington residents more frequently go clamming.

- ◆ Coos Bay showed the greatest extremes in income, with 25 percent making less than \$20,000 per year, and over seven percent making more than \$150,000 per year. In contrast, incomes in other communities fell mostly between these extremes.

What We Learned

"As expected, Coos Bay residents, like other residents of coastal communities, place a lot of value on the environmental attributes of their community, such as views, scenery and recreational opportunities," says Huppert. "They also value the lower incidence of crime, absence of traffic congestion and low population of the area."

Many residents are concerned about changes to their community, such as increased cost of living and housing costs, decreasing job opportunities, and threats to the environment. Among these threats, residents are most concerned about loss of fish habitat, oil spills, spread of European green crab, logging and sewage discharge.

Further, Coos Bay residents perceive that poor ocean conditions, degraded river habitats in forest lands, and water pollution may be contributing to local salmon declines. However, when asked if they would vote for a tax increase to help fund salmon recovery efforts, only slightly over one third of residents said yes.

Residents rely primarily on the local newspaper to get news about Coos Bay. "This seems to be typical in Pacific Northwest coastal communities that lack major television stations," Huppert suggests.

When making decisions about the Coos Bay environment, residents seem to favor existing partnerships between citizen groups and government agencies. Furthermore, most feel that environmental concerns should strike a balance with economic concerns, says Huppert.

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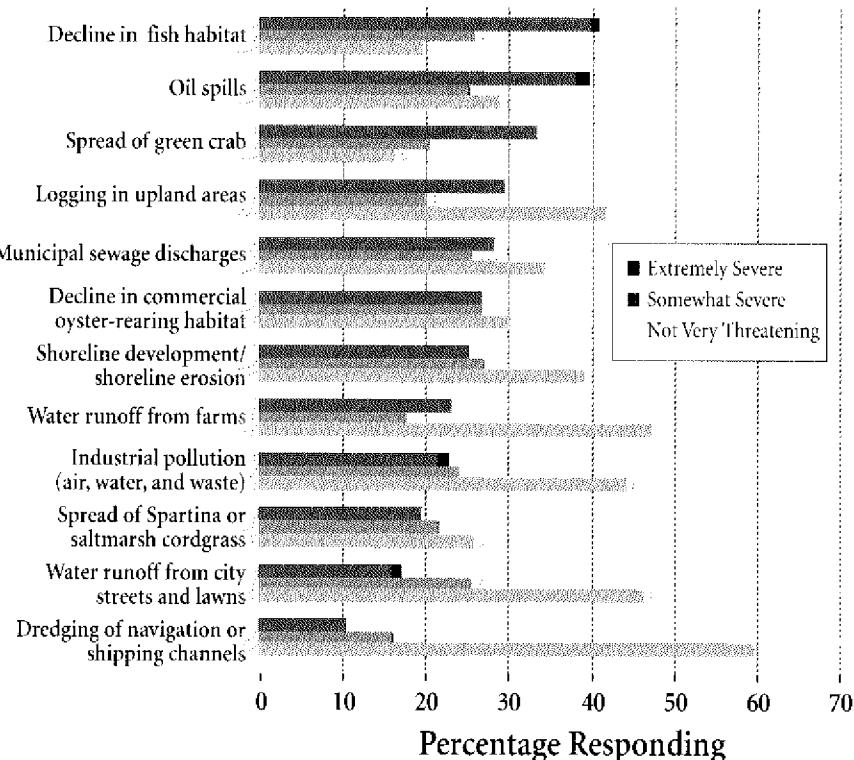
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Figure 3. Potential Threats to the Coos Bay Environment



Know Your Neighbors:

Who lives in the Coos Bay region? About 20 percent are relative newcomers, having lived in the area for ten or fewer years. These newcomers are more likely to have college degrees and higher incomes, and more are retired than longer-term residents. For recreation, newer residents go crabbing locally more often than longer-term residents.

Why do people choose to live in Coos Bay? For many newcomers, the low cost of living, climate, and weather; nice people; clean water; fewer people; lower incidence of crime; being near the ocean, views and scenery and the absence of traffic congestion are the main factors that drew them to the community and kept them there. For long-term residents, job opportunities, good schools and being near family and friends are more important. Newer residents are generally more optimistic about the state of many of these attributes and, correspondingly, fewer newcomers are considering moving away.

Younger respondents ranked such characteristics as job opportunities, being near family and friends, low cost of living, fewer people, and recreation opportunities as more important than did older residents. In turn, climate was a less important to them. They were generally more pessimistic about the state of various community attributes, and more of them are considering moving away from Coos Bay.



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