

SOCIOECONOMIC ASSESSMENT OF MARINE RESERVES IMPACTS

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The purpose of this session is to engage participants in a discussion on the application of socioeconomic research to address a central question posed by marine reserve designation: How does society assess the socioeconomic impact of nearshore marine conservation?

The Context of Our Discussion. In 2008, the state of Oregon began a public engagement process that led to the establishment of five marine reserves within state territorial waters. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is the agency responsible for implementing and managing this marine reserves system. One legislative mandate was the establishment of a human dimensions research program to provide information for marine reserve legislative evaluation and to support nearshore marine resource management. The ODFW human dimensions research program is designed:

- Determine if marine reserves increase knowledge of Oregon's nearshore environment, resources, and uses. Does this information inform nearshore resource management?
- Determine if the marine reserves avoid significant adverse social and economic impacts to ocean users and coastal communities.

During the marine reserves evaluation period from 2009 to 2023, ODFW socioeconomic research should describe the related impacts for communities, social groups, and individuals that occur with marine reserve implementation:

- How communities of place, occupation, and interest are impacted.
- The impacts of implementation on both extractive and non-extractive uses and users.
- The regional economic impacts of reserves, both economic contributions and losses.
- Interactions between the economy, the marine environment, and coastal communities.

The agency developed a broad program of social and economic research to address this mandate. This body of research ranges from longitudinal interpretation of secondary demographic data to large scale primary survey research, and includes ethnographic investigations, sociological case studies, and development of bio-economic models. Many of these studies are pilot approaches using different tools or constructs to investigate various dimensions of marine conservation.

The Upshot of This Exercise. The specific ODFW studies, however, are not the primary subject of this session. This forum will create a unique opportunity for collective "brainstorming" about assessment of the impacts of nearshore marine conservation. What are the contributions of various disciplines? The relevant constructs and research questions? What are the interdisciplinary opportunities presented by this challenge? How can social sciences be integrated with ecological research in this context? What are the limitations of current tools? Are there promising new approaches, and if so, how well developed are these new lines of inquiry?

The practical application of this exercise is that during 2016 ODFW will review the existing research agenda and explore new opportunities. Critiques of existing research projects may be considered. Other suggestions may identify gaps in the information derived from these studies. Expectations are that participants will be able to offer unique insight into new approaches. One promising and anticipated outcome of this workshop is identification of new research opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and/or inter-regional research designs. As marine reserves expand to promote marine conservation, interdisciplinary collaborative social, economic, and ecological studies are crucial for effective research on the value and impacts of this tool of marine resource management.