

SEA LEVEL RISE, SALTMARSH EXPANSION AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHOICES  
IN BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

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Environmental economics studies usually suggest that low-income groups tend to place a low value for conservation of endangered species. In this research, we examined people's willingness to support saltmarsh expansion for wildlife habitats, as part of actions taken to adapt to climate change. In a setting of increasing Sea Level Rise (SLR) and local economic recession, we were particularly interested in analyzing how low-income and low-education groups made choices between public spaces vs. bird species conservation.

The study was conducted in Bridgeport, the most diverse city in Connecticut, and also one of the most vulnerable to natural hazards. To explore residents' Willingness to Pay (WTP) for conservation, we employed a choice-experiment approach and a Latent Class Analysis based on socio-demographic variables. Results suggest that many residents of Bridgeport support allowing saltmarsh expansion that supports threatened bird species, while they also supported adaptation actions that would help sustain more homes and involve recovery of brownfields (old industrial sites) that also creates jobs. Respondents' choices did not show clear support for maintaining beaches or recreation fields rather than allowing salt marsh expansion. This research was partially funded by the Connecticut Sea Grant (Development Grant), Ecuadorian Secretary of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, and UCONN Center for Environmental Sciences and Engineering.