



Exploring the dimensionality and social bases of the public's timber harvesting attitudes

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Abstract

We measured timber harvesting attitudes (THA) of the American public and explored the social bases of these THA by conducting a national random digit dial telephone survey over 2 years (2003 and 2004). We developed three reliable subscales to measure timber harvesting attitudes. Results of this study indicate that, in general, the public is not opposed to timber harvesting, particularly for economic and utilitarian reasons and as a management tool. Analyses of the social bases of THA revealed that the effects of individual demographic characteristics on timber harvesting attitudes varied with motivations for the harvest. While support for harvesting for present benefits differed across categories of income, education, and between republicans and democrats, support for timber harvesting for economic reasons differed across income classes. Support for harvesting as a management tool differed between those who are religious and those who are not. Congruent with previous research, attitudes of the general public do not differ from those of forestland owners. This research provides key findings regarding the public's THA and offers a novel framework through which public attitudes toward timber harvesting may be assessed.

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1. Introduction

With the increasing role and importance of public opinion in forest management planning, improving

our understanding of the public's attitudes towards timber harvesting and forest management in general may be essential to effectively incorporate public opinion into often controversial planning processes. Many questions about the nature and direction of relevant attitudes are raised as issues surrounding the management of both private and public forests gain prominence. In this research, we respond to the following five questions: How can we effectively measure public

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attitudes towards timber harvesting? Are there multiple dimensions that form people's timber harvesting attitudes? What levels of support does the American public hold for timber harvesting? How do these attitudes differ among Americans possessing different socioeconomic characteristics? Do these attitudes differ between those who own forestland and those who do not?

Past research has addressed many of these questions by exploring values (e.g., Manning et al., 1999), value orientations (e.g., McFarlane and Boxall, 2000; Vaske et al., 2001), and attitudes (e.g., Bliss et al., 1994, 1997; Bourke and Luloff, 1994; Broussard et al., 2001; Egan et al., 1997; Harmon et al., 1997) of various groups of individuals with respect to management of private and public forests. Following is a review of the extant literature on attitudes towards timber harvesting and forest management and our own proposal of a timber harvesting attitudes scale to capture the latent constructs therein.

Harmon et al. (1997) described two constructs related to attitudes toward timber harvesting and clearcutting in particular: (i) consequences of clearcutting or harvesting timber and (ii) clearcut acceptance. Despite the deep-seated opposition to clearcutting throughout much of society (Bliss, 2000), Harmon et al. (1997) found that after participation in an educational workshop, respondents became more knowledgeable and accepting of clearcutting as a silvicultural technique. Broussard et al. (2001) employed a revised version of Harmon et al.'s scale to investigate how a series of educational experiences affected forestry attitudes of inner-city youth in Philadelphia. They identified five constructs: (i) against timber harvesting, (ii) utilitarian view of forests, (iii) forest preservation not use, (iv) timber harvesting as a beneficial management tool, and (v) timber harvesting as permanently destroying forests. Students who participated in three cumulative educational experiences were more likely to have a utilitarian view of the forest and see timber harvesting as a beneficial management tool and were less likely to hold anti-harvest attitudes, feel that forests should be preserved not used, or believe that timber harvesting permanently destroys forests.

Other research has proposed additional constructs with regard to attitudes about forests and forestry, including (i) treatment of the forest, (ii) care of the forest, and (iii) responsibility for the forest (Bourke and

Luloff, 1994). Bourke and Luloff (1994) found no attitudinal differences between nonindustrial private forest owners and the general public, a finding congruent with research conducted in the mid-southern USA (Bliss et al., 1994, 1997). In a study of tree farmers and consulting foresters in West Virginia, Egan et al. (1997) grouped timber harvesting attitudes into two major categories: (i) general statements of harvesting and use and (ii) statements on specific harvesting practices and potential outcomes. Although these two surveyed populations appeared to express similar opinions on timber harvesting in general, there were significant differences in their perceptions of clearcutting and outcomes of harvesting, with tree farmers expressing much less support for clearcutting than consulting foresters.

The objectives of this study are to (i) develop an effective scale to measure public attitudes towards timber harvesting and (ii) determine the influence of individual characteristics including gender, race, age, education, income, political ideology and party affiliation, religiosity, region of residence, and forest ownership status on these attitudes.

2. Methods

With the assistance of the Social Research Institute of Purdue University (West Lafayette, IN, USA), we conducted a random digit dial (RDD) telephone survey of US residents in 2002, 2003, and 2004 administered via Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) facilities. In each year, a random sample of telephone numbers for US adults was purchased from Survey Sampling International (Fairfield, Connecticut, USA). The approximate cost to implement such a survey is US\$ 2000–3000. This cost, however, was largely alleviated in this research as services were provided in kind from the Social Research Institute. In 2003, we obtained 171 completed surveys with an adjusted response rate of 42.5%; in 2004, we obtained 173 completed surveys with an approximate response rate of 50.0%. This paper reports on results from 2003 and 2004 only, as the questions in year 2002 served as a pilot study and were revised for subsequent years. Given that there was no predicted temporal effect between years and that sampling techniques and questions were similar for years 2003 and 2004, these databases were pooled for analysis.

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