

Likelihood to Pay for Oak Woodlands by the Residents of San Luis Obispo County¹

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The golden hillsides with scattered oaks, known throughout California, are decreasing each day. Some oak woodlands are being developed into residential and commercial communities while other woodlands are being converted into intensive agriculture, such as wine grape production. This continued decrease in oak woodlands has led some lawmakers to create preservation ordinances and policies to protect the remaining oaks. In areas where there are no woodlands protection policies, are residents likely to pay for the oak woodland preservation?

The purpose of this study is to determine if residents are likely to pay for oak woodland protection and to describe characteristics of the residents likely to pay.

A discrete double-bound contingent valuation survey was conducted in San Luis Obispo County during September 1997. Photos of three stages of oak woodlands development were used to illustrate for the respondents oak woodland development common throughout the county. These stages were:

State 1—Woodland areas undeveloped except for livestock production,

State 2—Areas with moderate to high intensive agriculture and ranchette style housing,

State 3—Areas with high density housing and shopping malls.

The survey was completed in two iterations with the payment values being increased in the second iteration, for a combined sample size of 300. Socio-demographic data was also gathered from the 300 respondents. Discriminant analysis was used to characterize the respondents' likelihood to pay while factor analysis was used to examine trends of the respondents.

All of the data presented in project tells a mixed story, however, it does show that there is support for oak woodland protection to some extent. The hypothesis testing has shown that San Luis Obispo County residents are likely to pay for oak woodlands. However, the payment value, stage of woodland conversion, and demographic trends differ greatly.

Future direction for the data gathered would be education to the policy makers in the region to make them aware of how the residents in San Luis Obispo County responded to this pressing issue. Determining what the willingness-to-pay for oak woodlands in San Luis Obispo County is the next step with the data collected.

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