

Abstract

BIOCENTRIC ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AND SUPPORT FOR THE ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION OF AN URBAN WATERSHEDS

By

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Projects that restore the ecological integrity of urban watersheds are costly, and for this reason it is unclear whether urban watershed residents are willing to foot the bill. To determine the degree to which urban residents are indeed willing to support the ecological restoration of urban streams, a survey research project was undertaken in the Oak Creek and Menomonee River watersheds, both located in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin in the U.S. One goal of the project is to assess the willingness to pay (WTP) of urban watershed residents for urban stream restoration using survey research techniques and to investigate the underlying economic, psychological, and social motivations for WTP. Until fairly recently the psychological foundations of WTP have been neglected by researchers who have focused rather narrowly on demographic correlates. Recent research suggests that survey respondents are expressing their moral attitudes in WTP responses. The purpose of this paper is to explicitly incorporate ethical attitudes toward the environment in a statistical analysis of WTP responses for an urban watershed restoration project using the Theory of Planned Behavior. The basic hypothesis to be tested employing multivariate regression analysis is that environmental attitudes affect specific beliefs and values (cognitive structure) about WTP for urban watershed restoration and that these beliefs and values in turn affect WTP. The paper concludes that a broad measure of environmental attitudes, the Awareness of Consequences Scale (AC), is a statistically significant explanatory variable in a regression equation for cognitive structure and that cognitive structure is in turn a statistically significant explanatory variable in a regression equation for WTP. The magnitude of the regression coefficients indicate that a change in AC at the margin has a substantial effect on WTP. Moreover, including specific measures of environmental values in addition to the AC scale, such as the degree to which respondents hold biocentric attitudes, adds to the explanatory power of the cognitive structure regression equation. This means that the extent to which respondents believe that the natural world is valuable in its own right has a positive impact on WTP.

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