

**A Case Study of Stakeholder Involvement
in the Net Benefits Analysis of the
Deschutes Estuary Feasibility Study**

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Introduction

A successful exploration of coastal management and restoration opportunities depends on having quality scientific information about the natural, physical, and social context in which these activities take place. Conventionally, studies of the social and economic benefits of natural resources have focused on attaching dollar values to goods and services that are bought and sold in markets (e.g., fish or timber), and quantifying “nonmarket values” (e.g., the benefits of wetlands in improving water quality or the value of an undeveloped forest for recreation) for goods not transferred within the market place. Further, government agencies often identify which goods and services should become the focus for these valuation studies.

These methods, however, do not always capture the full range of values that are important to local communities. In addition, the high cost of conducting purely quantitative nonmarket valuation studies has meant that they are not always feasible, given the limited resources available for restoration and other coastal management efforts.

The State of Washington encountered these problems when it began considering restoration options for the Deschutes Estuary, so it partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) Coastal Services Center to develop a new approach to involving stakeholders in assessing the estuary restoration alternative. The State and the Center conceived a process in which local stakeholders would identify the types of benefits for which quantitative market and nonmarket valuation studies will be completed and also highlight particular benefits that need to be characterized through qualitative analysis. This process would contribute to a Net Benefits Analysis (NBA) of estuary restoration, an important component of the larger Deschutes Estuary Feasibility Study (DEFS). The approach used in the NBA is consistent with effective natural resource management and coastal restoration efforts in other regions (Casagrande 1997; Driver 1996; Lipton and Wellman 1995; Page 1997; Thayer et al. 2005). The descriptions and results of the NBA process are outlined in this case study.

Case study background

Capitol Lake in Olympia, Washington, is an impoundment of the Deschutes River. The lake was created in 1951 through the erection of a dam that retained fresh water from the river from its entry into the saltwater bodies of Budd Inlet and Puget Sound. The state created the lake to realize a reflecting surface for the Washington State Capitol Building. This feature was contained in the site plan that the architectural firm of Wilder and White created for the capitol campus in 1911.

The Washington Department of General Administration (GA) has taken responsibility for maintaining and operating the lake and the associated dam and Deschutes Parkway since inception. The Capitol Lake Adaptive Management Plan (CLAMP) steering committee is a multijurisdictional committee that provides guidance to the GA on the management of Capitol Lake. The committee includes representatives from the GA, the City of Tumwater, the City of Olympia, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the

Washington Department of Ecology, the Squaxin Island Tribe, Thurston County, and the Port of Olympia.

The committee is exploring a variety of management options for the lake. It is thought that restoring estuary processes, such as tidal inundation, could eliminate several of the problems associated with maintaining the lake environment, which include sedimentation, invasive species, and compromised water quality. To explore this possibility, the CLAMP steering committee initiated the DEFS, which includes a socio-economic study called the Net Benefits Analysis (NBA). The NBA, which is the topic of this case study, represents an effort to assess potential changes in the value of various social and economic attributes of the Deschutes Basin.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coastal Services Center accepted a formal request from the Washington State Shorelands and Environmental Assistance Program, the state's coastal zone management agency, to assist with the NBA. During the initial discussions of the DEFS and the NBA, the WDFW and Center staff recognized the need to: 1) identify ways to gather input from nongovernmental groups, the business community, and citizens about the types of benefits they derive from the Deschutes Basin, and 2) develop a formal social and economic assessment that would integrate both quantitative and qualitative estimates of the value of these benefits.

Integrating local input in both the project development and analysis stages has been found to be a superior approach for involving the public in natural resource management decision-making (Casagrande 1997; Heinz Center 2002; Imperia 2005; McCool and Gutherie 2001). These types of studies have also shown that approaches merely presenting management options for public comment often lead to conflicts between different interest groups. Based on these experiences, the Center and the WDFW staff worked to develop an approach that would engage local and regional stakeholders in each stage of the NBA.

Stakeholder involvement process

The project team identified several planning tasks integral to the stakeholder-involvement aspect of the NBA.

The first planning task was to clarify the objectives of the stakeholder-involvement process. This clarification resulted in three distinct objectives:

- Identify attributes related to the Deschutes Basin that should be analyzed in the Net Benefits Analysis
- Recommend whether the identified attributes should be analyzed quantitatively or qualitatively
- Suggest ways for the community to be involved in making a final decision about the long-term management of Capitol Lake

The second planning task was to identify a framework that would best achieve the objectives. The WDFW, the Center, and facilitator John Kliem designed a series of meetings consisting of two three-hour focus group sessions followed by a three-hour public meeting.

In the focus group sessions, the facilitator asked a sample of community members to provide specific responses and opinions regarding the scope of the NBA, quantitative and qualitative analysis of Deschutes Basin attributes, and future public involvement in the decision-making process. The public meeting gave the broader community an opportunity to review the work of the focus group, identify additional Deschutes Basin attributes, and add to the “brainstorming” on public involvement in the decision-making process. The meetings were held in the evening at locations in downtown Olympia. Each of these meetings was facilitated, and a professional stenographer recorded the proceedings and provided summary notes.

The facilitator employed the Institute of Cultural Affairs’ Workshop Method™ (Standfield 2002), which is intended to generate team consensus, creativity, and responsibility in a diverse group. The Workshop Method™ relies on work by individuals, teams, and the full group. As an outcome of this work, the participants “brainstorm” a list of ideas, find relationships among the ideas, and discover greater insight into their meaning.

One of the most important steps in the Workshop Method™ is to create a focus question that drives the entire workshop by triggering the “brainstorm” and providing direction at various other points in the workshop. Thus, the focus question must illuminate the issue and also encourage imaginative thinking. The facilitator used the concept of “mental maps,” developed by sociologist Dr. Lorraine Garkovich (Garkovich, on-line), in creating the following focus question—“How does the Deschutes Basin fit within your mental map of our community?”

The third planning task was to identify meeting participants. Focus group participants were identified by targeting local organizations and soliciting interested citizens. The WDFW staff created a list of invitees using an early draft of a CLAMP communication strategy that identified local and regional constituent groups.

Although Capitol Lake is located in Olympia, it represents the state of Washington through its inclusion in the capitol campus. Thus, a regional perspective was an important facet of the focus group. The invitation list included local and regional business and trade associations, local and regional environmental groups, an educational organization, neighborhood and historic groups, and a local tribe. The CLAMP steering committee recommended several additional groups. The local newspaper ran an article that outlined the community involvement effort and solicited interested individuals to contact WDFW staff. Ten citizens responded to this call for participation.

Staff communicated with potential focus group participants in several ways. The CLAMP steering committee sent an invitational letter and background information to each individual, and when applicable, to the leader of their respective organizations. The letter requested an RSVP and emphasized the importance of participants attending both meetings to assure continuity of process and information. The WDFW staff spoke on the phone or via e-mail with each organization and individual, and 25 of the 28 organizations and/or individuals confirmed their participation and attended the first meeting.

Public meeting participants were sought through a combination of advertisements, distributing fliers, and e-mail distribution. The public meeting was advertised in the local newspaper and on local radio stations, and fliers were posted at locations around town, including the local college campus. Fliers were distributed in hard copy and electronically to focus group participants and via e-mail to several Capitol Lake

distribution lists. Many recipients forwarded the flier within their organizations or to additional distribution lists, creating another layer of awareness.

Results

The focus group achieved each of the three objectives set before them. They identified more than fifty attributes of the Deschutes Basin that they felt should be included in the NBA. They organized these attributes into eight categories and gave the categories creative names that described the value of those attributes (See Table 1, below).

Table 1. Summary of Focus Group’s Deschutes Basin Attributes.

SUSTAINABLE FUTURE	HEALTHY ECONOMY	EVERYBODY’S BASIN	WEB OF LIFE	COME PLAY OUTSIDE	IT’S THE WATER	FROM HERE TO THERE	SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS
A place to teach kids about nature	Safe haven for mooring boats	Unique cultural amenity (community celebrations, capitol, history, etc.)	Accessible, natural habitat close to downtown	Old Brewhouse becomes vital historical focal point	Aesthetic value of water	Connects Chehalis & Woodland Trails	A wonderful, broad learning experience
Model for thoughtful stewardship	Destination for visitors	“Central” public resource	Seasonal change	“Green Lake” atmosphere	Reflecting pond for our grand capitol	Various basin areas unique & integrated	Causes me to pause/ slow down
Risk management of water level rise (climate change)	Drawing card for economic activity	Shared community asset	Peaceful, beautiful, natural open space	Community events (Proc. of Species, Lakefair, Lighted Ships)	Views of Puget Sound & mountains	Waterway connects from West Bay to Falls	Spiritual connection to something larger
Demonstrates sustainable environmental practices	Not a large tax burden	Lake is point of civic pride	Ecological & social link to Puget Sound & Pacific Ocean	Expand and develop use	Castle @ St. Helier, Jersey, C.I.	All the improvements completed @ Heritage Park	Close-in, quiet space
Sustainable natural environment within an urban setting	Economic driver (incl. transportation, tourism, port, marine businesses, yacht club)	Waterway tells story of the history of the community	Wildlife habitat	Family & romantic getaway	A reflecting estuary for our capitol		
Deal with sewage, pollution	Help keep downtown alive & healthy		A place to observe salmon	Walk, run safely			
Provide flood protection	Lake/estuary attracts downtown business		Honoring local (NW) flora & fauna	Picnicking & watching kids swim			
	Ecotourism and wildlife viewing		Extension of Puget Sound	Wonderful, safe area to exercise			
	Promotes water based activities			Canoe/kayak to experience tides			
				Swimming			
				Getaway boat fantasy			

KEY:
Quantitative Analysis
Qualitative Analysis
Both Recommended

The public meeting participants also contributed to the first objective. Several of their suggestions echoed or built upon ideas identified by the focus group, and many public meeting participants described their attributes in sentences or long phrases. A handful of public meeting attributes had not been identified in the focus group and thus added new dimensions to the categories. Some of these novel attributes included indigenous shellfish farming, Native American history, biodiversity, and existing infrastructure investments. The three-hour time frame constrained the evening's activities, so public meeting participants were not asked to specify whether they thought these attributes should be qualitatively or quantitatively analyzed. Even so, the longer, narrative-style attributes mentioned by many participants in the public meeting provided details that were useful in the context of the NBA.

The focus group fulfilled the second objective by working together to recommend qualitative or quantitative analysis for each attribute. The group recommended quantitative analysis for 47 percent of the attributes and qualitative analysis for 34 percent of the attributes. Participants recommended both kinds of analysis for the remaining 19 percent of the attributes. In addition, the focus group provided detail to guide analysis for all but 7 of the 53 attributes.

Finally, both the focus group and the public meeting participants created lengthy lists of public involvement suggestions that satisfied the third objective of the stakeholder involvement process. The focus group followed the ground rules of the brainstorming methodology closely (e.g., deferring judgment, considering every idea valid, valuing a large quantity of brainstorming ideas) and produced a list of more than 100 ideas about how the public could be involved in future decision-making. In addition to suggestions on decision-making, the focus group offered ideas about how to involve the public and disseminate information. The public meeting participants added 35 more suggestions.

Discussion and Next Steps

By most measures, the NBA stakeholder involvement process was successful. Participants accomplished the three objectives, and the products associated with each of these objectives will shape the investigation and evaluation within the NBA as well as future communication and public involvement related to broader Capitol Lake issues. All of these efforts contribute to the consideration of the human and social aspects of Capitol Lake and Deschutes Basin management and, hopefully, more sustainable decisions for the management of this coastal area. Perhaps more significantly, the focus group participants enjoyed working together in a cooperative atmosphere, which evoked creative thinking and a sense of satisfaction in creating a visible product.

For all of the stakeholder attributes to receive due consideration in the NBA, the WDFW staff must effectively communicate the meaning of that information to the economic and other social science experts conducting the analysis. To facilitate this communication, WDFW staff and Center staff worked together (with feedback from the focus group) to reorganize and "translate" the descriptive and informal language from the focus group and public meetings. This "translation" is in no way intended to replace or prioritize particular attributes identified by the focus group and the public. Rather, the translation is simply an effort to more concisely and clearly define those attributes and

group them based on the types of data that will be collected during the formal economic assessment.

All of the attributes, additional detail, and qualitative and quantitative recommendations created by the focus group and public meeting participants will help shape the scope of work of the forthcoming NBA. All of this information will be included in the analysis and will continue to be part of the body of information that is being created about the estuary alternative for Capitol Lake. In the course of the NBA, additional quantitative and qualitative information will be gathered to ensure that all possible changes in attributes are measured and/or described. Also, additional stakeholder participation has been arranged following the finalization of the NBA, so that stakeholders can comment on the results of the study.

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