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Abstract

Public attitudes toward sustainable forest management: Opinions from forest-dependent communities in British Columbia

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Although public participation is a requirement of sustainable forest management (SFM), it can be difficult for forest managers to obtain broad levels of representation through traditional public participation mechanisms, such as open houses, information sessions, and public advisory groups (PAGs). Some of the difficulties stem from barriers to participation, (e.g., knowledge, time availability, accessibility, and household income). There is a need for social science tools, such as public opinion surveys, to complement existing approaches by soliciting the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of broad sections of the public: getting closer to "the silent majority." We examine the opinions of residents of nine forest-dependent communities in British Columbia to better understand attitudes toward public participation in forest management decision making, beliefs about SFM and the appropriateness of certain trade-offs, and perceptions of the role of forest managers. Results suggest a need to develop better methods of engaging and communicating with people beyond the PAGs; to increase the public knowledge of SFM; and to increase trust in forest companies as stewards of the forest.

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