Insights into Oregon anglers: How angler opinions can help fisheries management

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Fish and wildlife agencies often manage harvest opportunities based on the desires of their customers. These desires are often determined through public meetings or stakeholder groups. These desires are also often presented as testimony at commission or board meetings where rule making is being considered for harvest opportunities. All too often, the opportunity decision is based on “who shows up” more so than what the majority wants. During the development of a fisheries conservation and management plan, ODFW took the opportunity to try and better inform the process by conducting a random survey of Oregon anglers, as well as the general non-angling public. The surveys were designed with the assistance and oversight of the Survey Research Center at Oregon State University. At the same time the surveys were developed and sent out, four regional stakeholder teams were recruited from a broad range of interest groups. Several key issues discussed with the stakeholder groups were also the subject of questions in the surveys. This allowed a comparison of preferences between the stakeholder groups and the licensed anglers, as well as the general public, which provided some interesting results. As an example, when both the stakeholders and anglers were asked about their support for new wild winter steelhead harvest fisheries the two groups had very different reactions with the anglers very supportive of such fisheries and the stakeholders almost unanimously opposed. This disparity between a small group of interested individuals and the average angler shows the difficulty in accurately defining what management opportunities should be. This presentation provides highlights from the surveys, including estimates of angler preferences and opinions, how anglers compare to the general public, and what the results may be telling us about how to manage fisheries and conserve wild fish.