

Who should bear the burden of cost for protecting water quality? Maine and New Hampshire coastal resident perceptions about financial responsibility

Emma Fox, Caroline Noblet, Kathleen Bell, Abigail Kaminski, Tagwongo Obomsawin, Margaret Snell
 University of Maine School of Economics

Introduction

The Gulf of Maine provides ecological and economic benefits for coastal Maine and New Hampshire residents, including beach recreation and shellfish consumption/harvesting opportunities. The purpose of this study is to identify the perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes of coastal residents about the risks associated with poor water quality. Preliminary results indicate complex coastal resident perceptions and attitudes about the issue of financial responsibility for coastal water quality protection.

Quotations

“A free coast is expensive to maintain.”

“While we don't have a lot of money, I am willing to pay taxes for good, common sense programs that benefit all.”

“I'm a 'pay-as-you-go' believer. If you want something improved, you need to be prepared to pay for it. Can't expect others to pay for it.”

Discussion

Complexity: Many of those unwilling to pay higher taxes provided additional information such as their attitudes about the ineffectiveness of government, or their perception that visitors should be equally burdened by taxes to fund a coastal water improvement program.

Attitudes Toward Responsibility: Maine and New Hampshire residents generally feel responsible for coastal water quality improvement.

Implications: Our preliminary attitudinal findings indicate that framing around water quality issues is important. Coastal resident perceptions and attitudes about risks related to water quality extend across state lines— regional or watershed-scale policy could be a way to incorporate this information into existing management structures.

Next steps: Looking at responses relating to trust and perceptions about effectiveness in local versus state government programs, testing for differences, analyzing for a cut-off point in willingness to contribute to programs that benefit coastal waters.

Methods

Sample: Mixed-media surveys were distributed to a random sample of coastal ME (n=3960) and NH residents (n=2040).

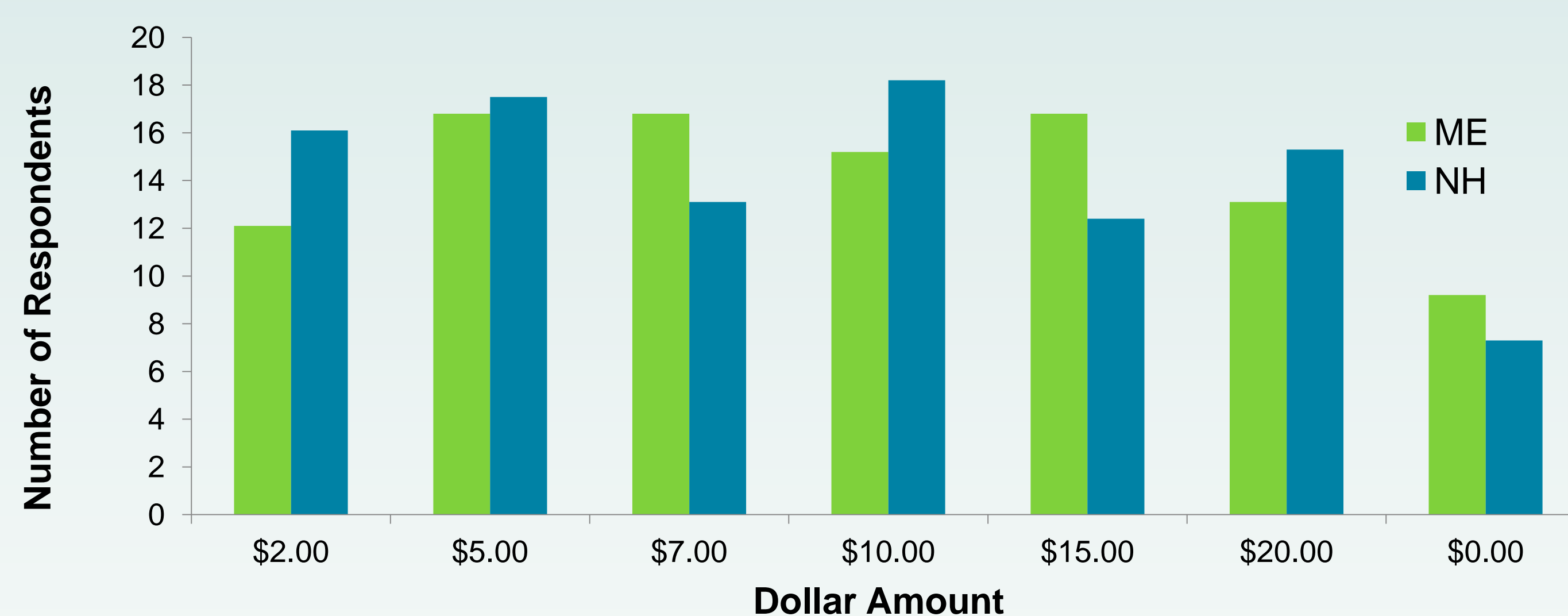
Survey: 50% of our sample received shellfish-related survey questions and 50% received beaches-related questions.

Response Word Clouds

These word clouds were generated using the free text responses for the “willingness to pay” survey questions. The top is NH resident responses, the bottom is ME resident responses. (www.wordle.net)



Results



ME and NH residents willing to pay for additional monthly fee of each dollar amount. Note that there was an option to pay \$0.00.

Willingness to contribute: 69% of ME residents and 67% of NH residents surveyed were willing to contribute to a hypothetical coastal water improvement program. On average, ME respondents were willing to pay \$8.92 in monthly fees to support coastal water improvement, while NH respondents were willing to contribute an average of \$8.87.

Coastal priorities: ME and NH residents agreed about top priorities for coastal managers.

1. Reducing pollution entering coastal and ocean environment
2. Protection or enhancement of coastal water quality



Acknowledgements

