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Using stakeholder engagement to inform endangered species management and improve conservation.

Successful endangered species conservation requires understanding, support, and participation from user groups and stakeholders in conjunction with biological information. A representative survey of the boat-based angling population in Puget Sound, WA, USA, was conducted to provide baseline information regarding angler knowledge about rockfish, fishing practices, perceptions of threats to rockfish, and preferences for recovery measures to inform the recovery plan for three rockfish species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Generalized linear models were used to evaluate the hypothesis that variation in stakeholders' perceived threats to rockfish and preferences for rockfish recovery measures is related to their fishing practices and knowledge of rockfish biology. Knowledge of rockfish longevity and past experience fishing for rockfish were important predictors of support for conservation measures and willingness to take personal action to recover rockfish. These findings highlight the important role education may play in garnering the necessary long-term support for rockfish recovery. Further, locations where anglers fished in Puget Sound were found to shape perceptions of threats to rockfish, suggesting that place-based management options should be considered where biologically appropriate. This study illustrates the complexity of species management in social-ecological systems and provides a framework for comprehensively engaging stakeholders and understanding their relationships with endangered and threatened species prior to the development of a recovery plan. Such engagement may not only better inform management and outreach decisions but also pave the way toward more collaborative and effective endangered species management and conservation.

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