ABSTRACT

TITLE: Salmon, Sea Lions and Fisheries: Real Management or Political Economy?

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An increase in human coastal populations coupled with an increase in pinniped populations and a decline in salmonid populations has created an increased opportunity for conflicts on the Central California Coast. As a result, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a report to congress recommending that lethal means of control be enacted to minimize these conflicts. Conflicts between pinnipeds and fisherman are generally measured in economic terms (loss of catch, destruction of gear, etc.). However, solutions to ameliorate the conflicts often use the economic damage caused by the offending pinnipeds as a weapon against them while overlooking the economic value that the pinnipeds possess. These values take the form of recreational and tourism dollars as well as an intrinsic value placed on them by society.

This study used Contingent Valuation Method (CVM) to determine an economic value for the sea lions that might be lethally removed due to damage to fishing gear or catch. It also examined the uses of the economic value in the policy-making forum, particularly those policies that are related to this conflict. The economic value of the proposed changes in the sea lion populations, determined to be between $21 million and $65 million, suggests that lethal control measures may not be the best option, and that the sea lions have a real value that must be considered before any decisions are made.