

Green space no guarantee of greenbacks

Tuesday, February 15, 2000
By **Lucy Chubb**

The notion of green space may appeal to a community's conscience or civic pride, but it may not open any purses or pocketbooks, a recent study suggests.

Professor Greg Lindsey of Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis collaborated with professor Gerrit Knaap of the University of Illinois to conduct a survey of residents in the Indianapolis area about the use and management of land near a watershed called Crooked Creek. The project focused on the willingness of survey subjects to pay for projects on the land, a publicly designated urban greenway.



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This photo of Crooked Creek at Juan Solomon Park in Marion County, Indiana, appeared on the first page of a research questionnaire about green space.

The researchers used a controversial research technique known as "contingent valuation" to gather their information. Their study was also designed to test the validity of this method.

"In CV surveys, citizens are asked to reveal how much they would be willing to pay for a particular public good or service," Knaap and Lindsey noted in their report.

It is "an approach for estimating the value of things that are not exchanged in markets," said Knaap.

While many researchers find the CV approach useful, the method is controversial. Environmentalists criticize the approach because it is frequently used to evaluate environmental services, a process that is political by nature, according to Knaap. Economists don't like the method because results aren't based on what people actually pay but on what they say they will pay for an intangible commodity.

"CV has been used frequently to estimate the value of water and air quality, fishing and hunting opportunities, wildlife preservation and a variety of other public and environmental goods," said the researchers.

The approach has also been used to evaluate the benefits of environmental

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regulations.

Knaap and Lindsey sent a 33-question CV to more than 2,700 households, including property owners along the Crooked Creek greenway, renters who lived along the greenway and county residents. The questionnaire asked survey participants to answer questions about the use of land adjacent to Crooked Creek and their willingness to contribute to the White River Greenways Foundation, a local organization responsible for managing the area.



Source: Journal of the American Planning Assoc.

Crooked Creek greenway, highlighted in green, is the focus of Knaap and Lindsey's survey.

All of the questionnaires polled residents about their willingness to pay. Fifty percent of the mailings contained direct solicitations for donations to the foundation.

The researchers found that many more people responded to the straight survey than to the survey that included a solicitation. Many people who received the solicitation did not even bother to complete the survey.

Fifty-one percent of property owners responded to the simple survey, while 36 percent answered the survey with the solicitation. Only 10 property owners sent contributions.

Knaap and Lindsey found the CV technique helpful but imprecise. "These results provide evidence that CV experiments can help identify sources of support and suggest strategies for planning, but do not provide unambiguous estimates of the value of public goods," the researchers allowed.

"It reconfirms previous studies that have shown that hypothetical estimates of

willingness to pay are high," said Lindsey.

On the other hand, Lindsey added, the survey shows that some people do place a value on such things as green space, and this can help planners make better decisions about designating money for the management of such lands.

Lindsey and Knaap's study won an award from the American Institute of Certified Planners.

(Pictures of Crooked Creek reprinted by permission of the Journal of the American Planning Association from the article "Willingness to Pay for Urban Greenway Projects" by Greg Lindsey and Gerrit Knaap. The story appeared in JAPA, Volume 65, No. 3, 1999.)

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[Greg Lindsey](#) is a professor in the [Center for Urban Policy and the Environment](#) at [Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis](#).

[Gerrit Knaap](#) is a professor in the [Department of Urban and Regional Planning](#) at the [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#).

The study was published in the [Journal of the American Planning Association](#).

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