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A multi-attribute trade-off approach for advancing the management of marine wildlife tourism : a quantitative assessment of heterogeneous visitor preferences

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Résumé / Abstract

1. Wildlife tourism can be prone to unmitigated development to promote visitor satisfaction that is all too often progressed at the cost of ecological integrity. A manager is thus faced with the dual task of enhancing the tourist experience and protecting the wildlife species. Accordingly, this mandate requires research into how tourists would respond to proposed wildlife-management plans. 2. This study examines the heterogeneity of tourist preferences for wildlife management at a stingray-feeding attraction in the Cayman Islands, using a latent class stated preference choice model. A sample of visitors to Stingray City Sandbar (SCS) evaluated hypothetical wildlife viewing experiences in a discrete choice experiment. Its scenarios were characterized by seven attributes such as animal-feeding and handling rules, ecological outcomes, social crowding, and management cost (defined as a conservation access fee). 3. The latent class segmentation identified two groups in the population: approximately 68% preferred the implementation of fairly strict management rules, while the other 32% valued more the maintenance of status quo with its intensive human-wildlife interactions. Despite the differences between the 'pro-management' and the 'pro-current' segments, both exhibited a preference for the continuation of feeding and handling the stingrays (albeit at different levels of intensity) suggesting that one effective way to implement any management actions is to alter the promotional and marketing strategies for SCS. Other survey questions on trip experience, conservation values, and socio-demographics were used to define these classes further, with the main distinguishing trait being the level of concern for potential impacts occurring at SCS. The discrepancies between the two segments became most obvious when calculating their respective market shares of support for alternative management strategies. 4. This approach to determining visitor preferences can help explain how the various segments will be affected by management options, and therefore can provide the basis for developing feasible strategies that will assist wildlife managers in maximizing tourist satisfaction while achieving wildlife-protection goals.

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