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Landowner Attitudes Toward Conservation Easements: Balancing the Private and Public Interest in Land

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ABSTRACT

Private land conservation provides an opportunity to address problems of habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss caused by an increase in the development and parcelization of private land. Conservation easements (CEs) are used to protect significant natural qualities of private land. In this study, we explore landowner attitudes toward CEs through the implementation of a mixed-mode survey to private landowners in the Whychus Creek Watershed (Deschutes County, Oregon). The results of an exploratory factor analysis suggest there are two dimensions to landowner attitudes toward CEs, an internal dimension and an external dimension. We found that positive external attitudes are primarily influenced by environmental beliefs, whereas positive internal attitudes are influenced by a suite of factors, including financial beliefs

and perceived risk to private ownership. Awareness of CEs may also play a role in attitude development. Through this research, we argue that CEs may be beneficial in reintegrating the public good into private property.

KEYWORDS:

- Attitude extremity
- dual interest theory
- peer exchange
- property rights

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