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What Is Oahu's Open Space Worth?

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Soon, no sugarcane will be grown on Oahu. About 15,000 acres of former sugarcane land in central Oahu and on the North Shore will be open for other uses. People have strong feelings about how this land should be used. This fact sheet reports results of a survey of Oahu residents' feelings about the scenic value of open space and how they would like the former sugarcane lands to be used in the future.

280 people completed the survey. They were asked how they felt about the importance of keeping former sugarcane lands in open space. They were also asked how much it would be worth to them to keep this space open; in other words, how much money they would be willing to give up each year if that would ensure that former sugarcane lands stayed open space.

They were shown photos illustrating one or more uses of lands. Agricultural uses in the photos included sugarcane, pineapple, small-scale and large-scale vegetable farming, corn fields, hay fields, and pasture for grazing. Nonagricultural uses shown in the photos included unused (fallow) land, parks, and golf courses. They were asked which of these open-space uses they liked best, next best, and so on.

Finally, we asked about their household size, where they live, and their income, age, work, and interests.

The Importance of Open Space

81 percent of those surveyed feel that keeping open space is important or very important. The rest, 19 percent, feel it is somewhat or not important.

Survey participants who belong to an environmental organization, such as The Nature Conservancy, feel more strongly than others that keeping lands in open

space is important. Older people also put more importance on keeping open space.

Nearly all the people surveyed feel that at least half of the lands going out of sugarcane should be kept as open space. Compared to other people, those who live near the sugarcane lands think that more land should be kept as open space.

The Value of Open Space

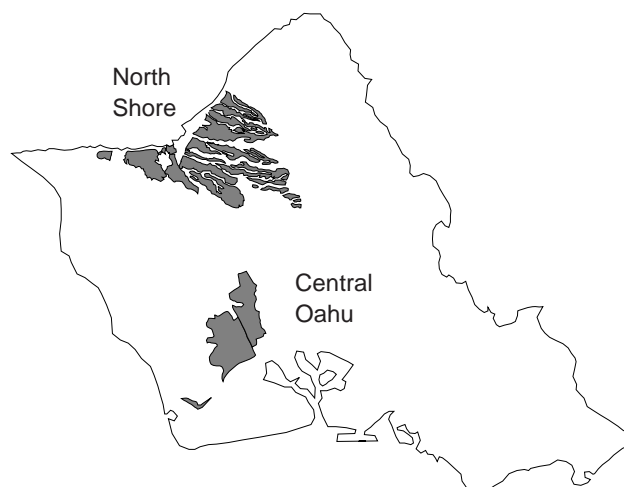
On average, the people surveyed are willing to pay \$81 per household per year to keep all the sugarcane land in open space. Half of the people would give more than \$25 per household per year, and half would give less. 25 percent of those surveyed would give \$100 or more per year.

14 percent wouldn't pay anything to keep open space. Of these people, 58 percent think that the government should pay for open space with the tax dollars now collected.

The number of households on Oahu in 1990 was 265,304. If each household were willing to give \$81, then the open-space value to Oahu residents of all the sugarcane lands would be more

than \$21 million. This does not include the value of this open space to other residents of the state and to visitors.

Household income level affects how much people are willing to pay to keep former sugarcane lands in open space. We calculated that for every dollar more of household income, willingness to pay for open space increased by six cents per person. If someone in the household belongs to an environmental organization, then the household is willing to pay almost \$40 more than if no one belongs to one. Although the older people surveyed tend to feel that open space is important, they are not willing to pay to keep sugarcane lands in open space.

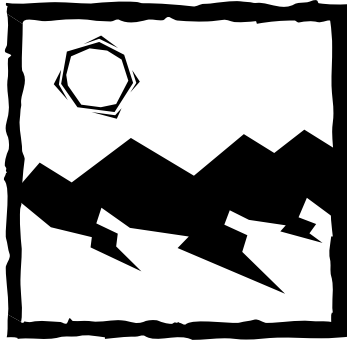


15,000 acres that will no longer grow sugarcane

Preferred Uses of Open Space

Not all survey participants like the same open-space uses, but we found some general patterns in their likes and dislikes:

- Agricultural uses are liked better than nonagricultural uses.
- Two uses together are liked better than single uses.
- Golf courses are not liked.
- Sugarcane and pineapple, the most familiar agricultural uses on Oahu, are not liked more or less, on average, than other agricultural uses. But people living in central Oahu or on the North Shore like sugarcane and pineapple better.



average of \$81 per household, to keep these lands in open-space uses. The value of this open space will likely go up in the future as incomes and environmental interests of Oahu residents increase. Also, as Oahu gets more crowded, open space is expected to be valued more.

The \$81 that Oahu households are willing to pay for open space is much more than people are willing to pay on the Mainland and in Canada. According to other studies, households there would pay between \$1.80 and \$13.50 per year to keep the same amount of land (15,000 acres) in open space. The higher values in those studies came from more developed areas, while the lower values came from rural areas.

The most preferred land use of 72 percent of those surveyed is either agriculture or trees. Although forests or tree plantings were not shown in the photos, 13 percent said this was their favorite use. Sugar and pineapple are common now, but only 12 percent said this was their favorite land use. Only 6 percent said they liked development that takes lands out of open space.

Hawaii's environmental groups, such as The Nature Conservancy and the Sierra Club, have found that households giving them money give an average of about \$35 per year, but those donations also bring membership benefits. In contrast, the people we surveyed are willing to pay just to ensure that they can continue to experience views of open space.

Summary and Conclusions

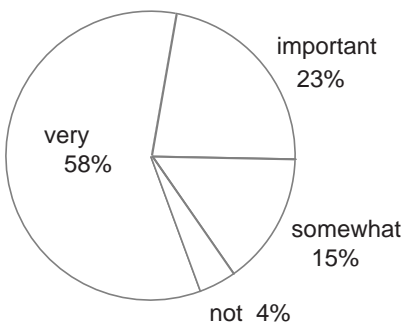
Oahu residents do not entirely agree on how former sugarcane lands should be used. But if the 280 people we surveyed truly represent the feelings of all the people living on Oahu, then some general conclusions about Oahu's open space can be made based on their answers.

Keeping open space on Oahu is important to people living here. We surveyed the feelings of Oahu residents, but people from the neighbor islands and visitors could have different views. These will need to be considered in open-space planning.

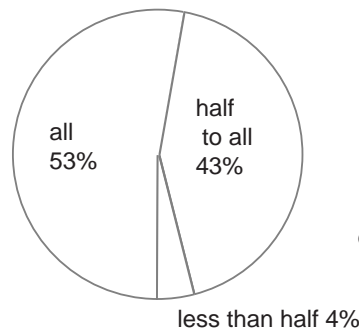
The majority of Oahu residents want to keep at least half of the sugarcane lands in open space. Oahu residents are willing to pay more than \$21 million, or an

Our survey asked only about the scenic value of open space. Peoples' feelings about the needs for housing and jobs are also important in making land-use decisions.

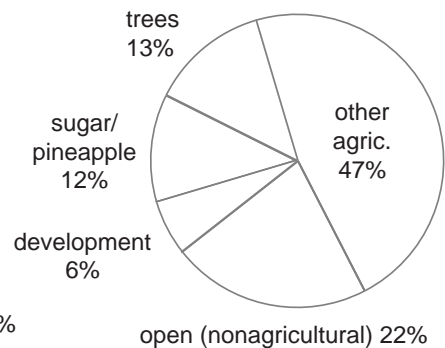
The importance of keeping land in open space



The amount of sugarcane land that should be kept in open space



Preferred uses for sugarcane lands



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