

The Impact of Temporary Group-Level Conservation Incentives across Diverse Institutional Landscapes*

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Abstract

Monetary incentives for conservation often target groups with diverse institutions and capacities for cooperation. We employ an online experiment ($N = 1,010$) using a modified public-goods game to examine how pre-existing institutions influence the effectiveness of group-level incentives. To replicate the high monitoring costs typical of resource management contexts, we limit individuals' information about peer contributions and, hence, their ability to achieve full cooperation through peer punishment. We use a staggered 2x2 design to introduce two treatments: First, a forum, defined as a voluntary, costly information-sharing institution where participants reveal verifiable contribution data. Second, temporary payments that reward additional contributions exceeding a group's specific pre-payment baseline. Our findings show that average contributions rise by 18% under the forum and 11% under payments. Access to the forum does not significantly raise the effectiveness of payments. Crucially, when the temporary payments end, contributions never fall below the pre-intervention baseline. For groups with high initial cooperation, contributions remain significantly above their original baseline even after incentives are removed — a form of "crowding in".

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