

Beyond pro-vs-anti hatchery:

Understanding fishing community perceptions of salmonid hatcheries in Oregon



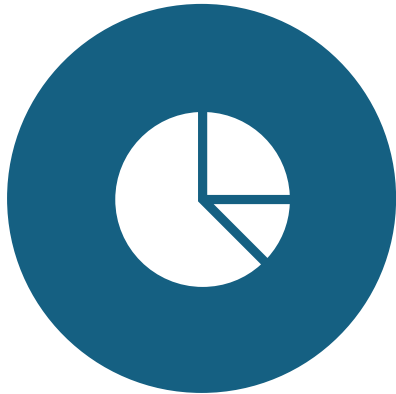
Image: USFWS

Megan S. Jones, Brian Erickson, and Kelly Biedenweg
Thursday, April 23rd, 2026
Lower Snake River Compensation Plan Annual Meeting

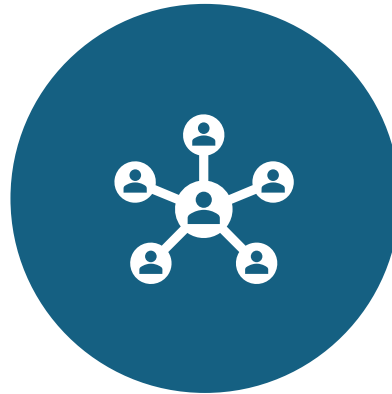


If you had to **categorize fishers into distinct groups** based on their views of salmonid hatcheries, which groups would you use?

Agenda



METHODS



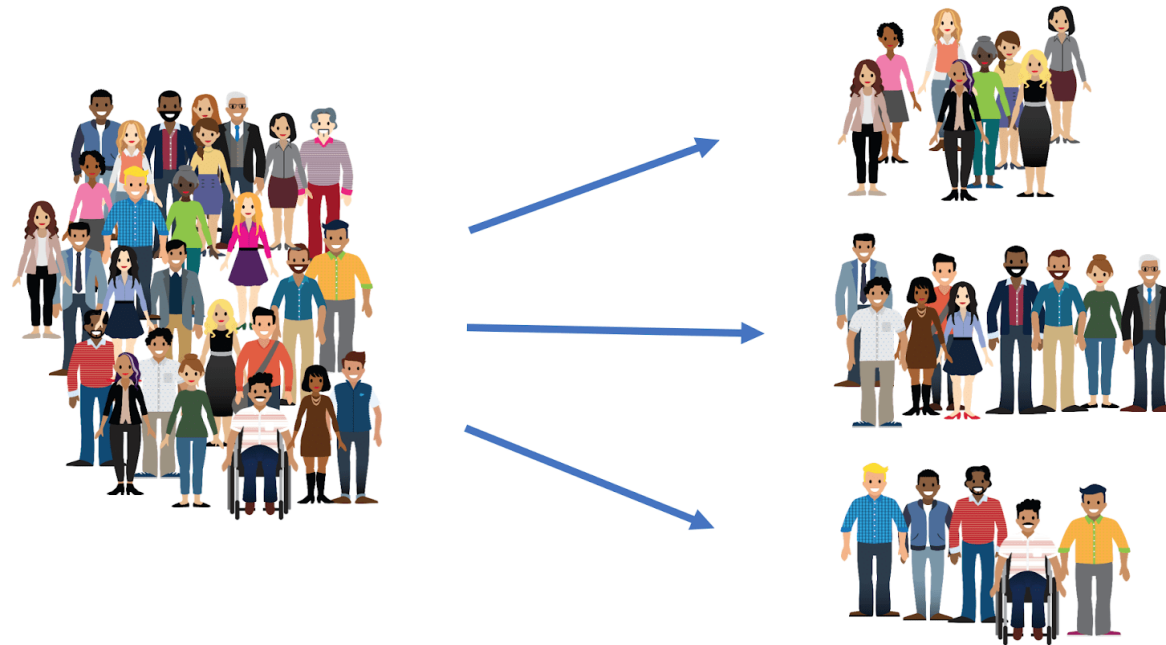
BELIEF-BASED
SEGMENTS



COMMUNICATION
IMPLICATIONS

We asked two questions:

1. How do non-tribal fishing community members view hatcheries?
2. Can we identify meaningful subgroups based on shared beliefs?



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18 Interviews

Purposive & snowball sample

Codebook refined with AI summaries



Identifying "segments"

Like a field
guide to
people's
perceptions

● Oregon's Common Pacific Salmon & Trout

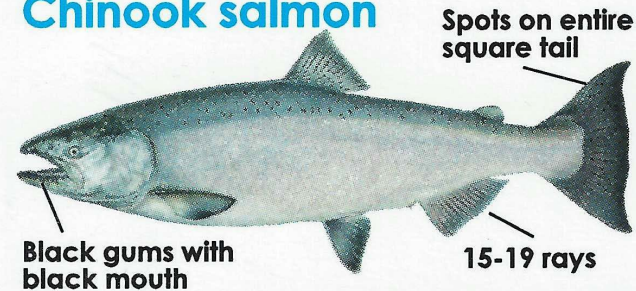
Coho salmon



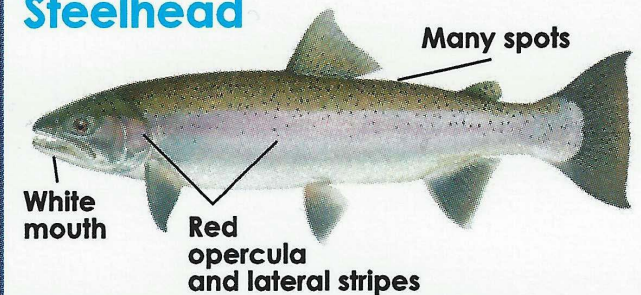
Chum salmon



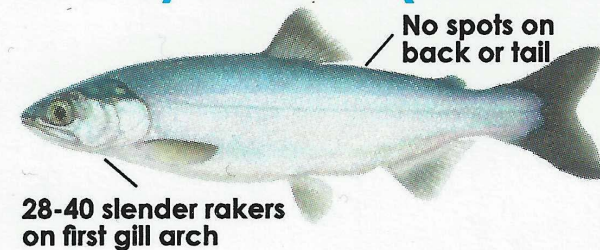
Chinook salmon



Steelhead



Sockeye salmon (kokanee)



Sea run cutthroat trout

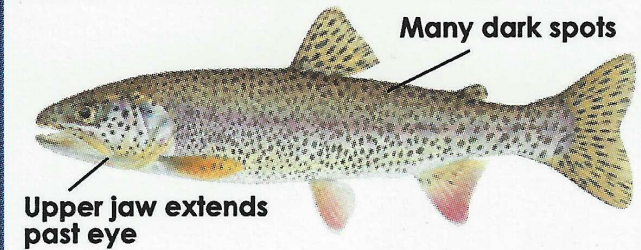


Image: Pinterest

Our findings

People's views
fell into five
categories

Social impacts

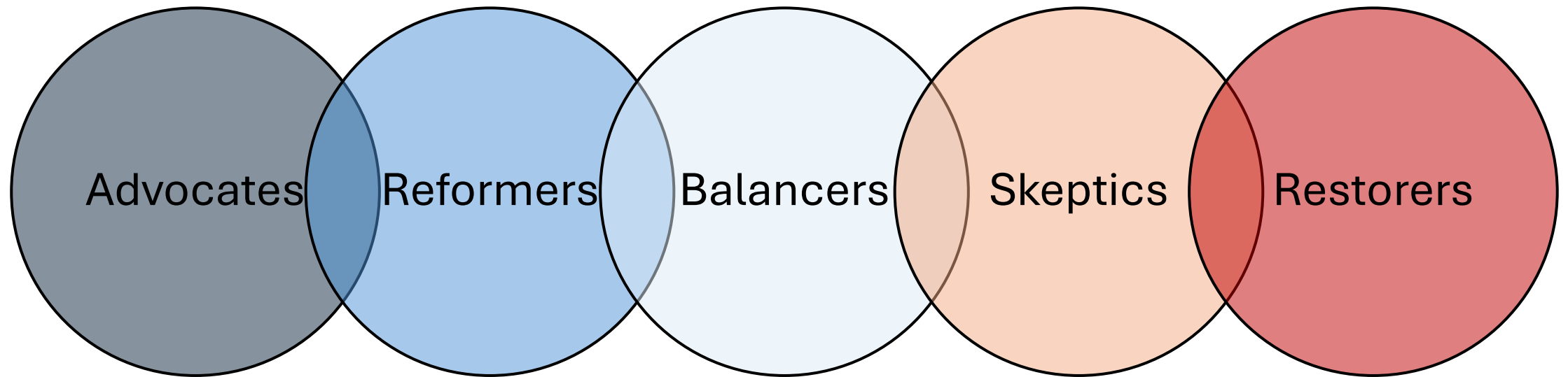
Ecological impacts

Governance legitimacy

Management acceptability

Myths others hold

We identified five belief-based segments



Advocates see hatcheries as essential

- See social & ecological benefits
- Believe more production is better

"I don't see any drawbacks to salmon and steelhead hatcheries in Oregon. I only see benefits."

– I14a

Reformers want to improve hatcheries

- See social & ecological benefits
- Believe modern techniques reduce harm
- Want reform, not removal

“Without hatcheries, we don't have fisheries [...] Healthy salmon and steelhead fisheries mean jobs [...] Because of hatcheries we can keep people working.”

–110

Reformers want to improve hatcheries

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- Believe modern techniques reduce harm
- Want reform, not removal

“I'm very pro-hatchery when done right.”

– I10

Balancers want conservation & harvest

- See social benefits and varied ecological impacts
- Believe hatcheries are useful but need careful management
- Want context-specific solutions

"I want to maximize the benefits of operating a fish hatchery while minimizing the negative impacts on the naturally produced populations of salmonids."

– 107

Balancers want conservation & harvest

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“I am a wild fish advocate. I would love for there to be no need for fish hatcheries... but I am keen to the fact that if I want the ability to go harvest a fish or to take my kids out fishing... we're going to be increasingly reliant on hatcher[ies].”

–107

Skeptics believe hatcheries harm wild fish

- See questionable social benefits
- See clear scientific evidence of harm to wild fish
- Want to phase out hatcheries, shift to habitat restoration

“We went through this era [of] technical fixes to see if that would help produce fish that were less impactful in the wild [...] I don't think we've been successful at minimizing them to the degree that they don't still carry [...] substantial risks.”

Restorers see primarily negative impacts

Believe hatcheries...

- fund agency budgets
- are incompatible with wild fish recovery
- reflect a flawed, human-centered approach to nature

“Artificial propagation is a real issue with me. The entire infrastructure of the thing is built on us just playing God with these fish.”

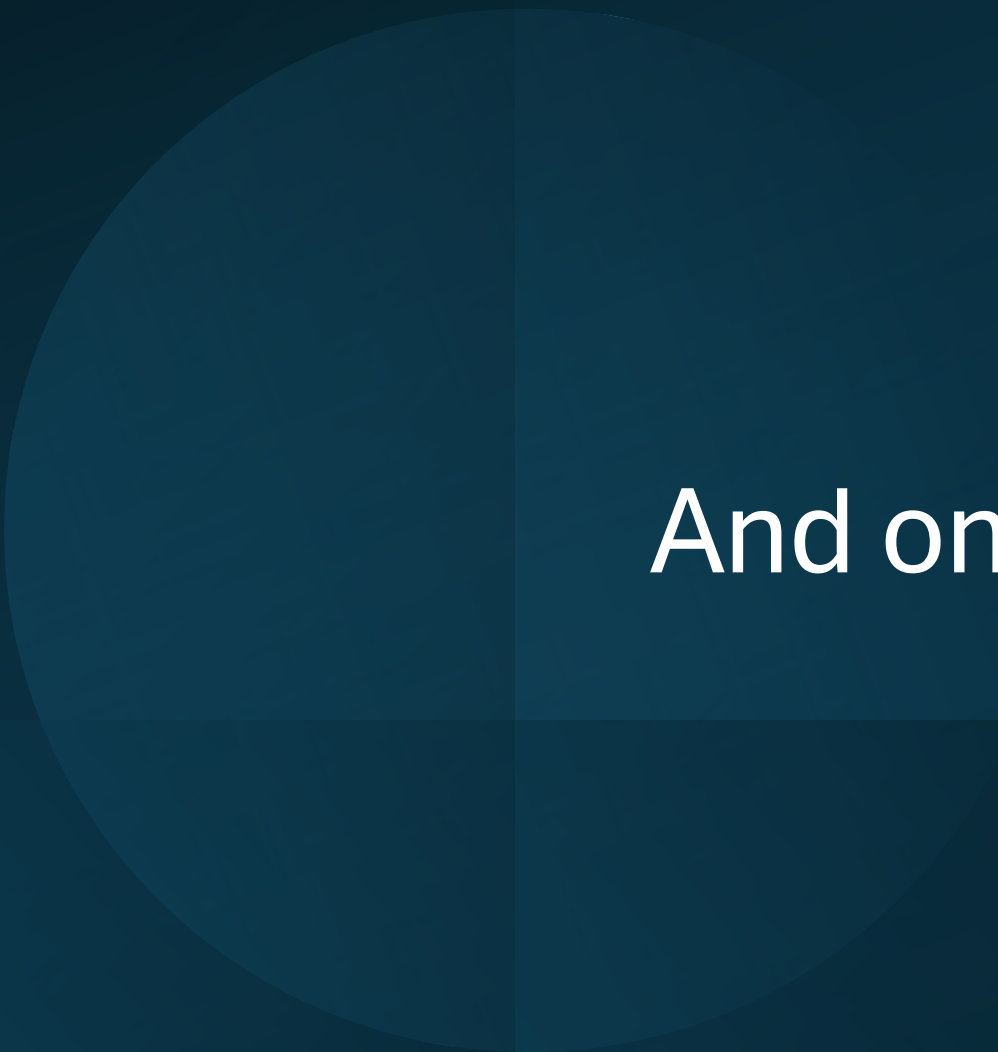
– 106

Restorers reject hatcheries entirely

Believe hatcheries...

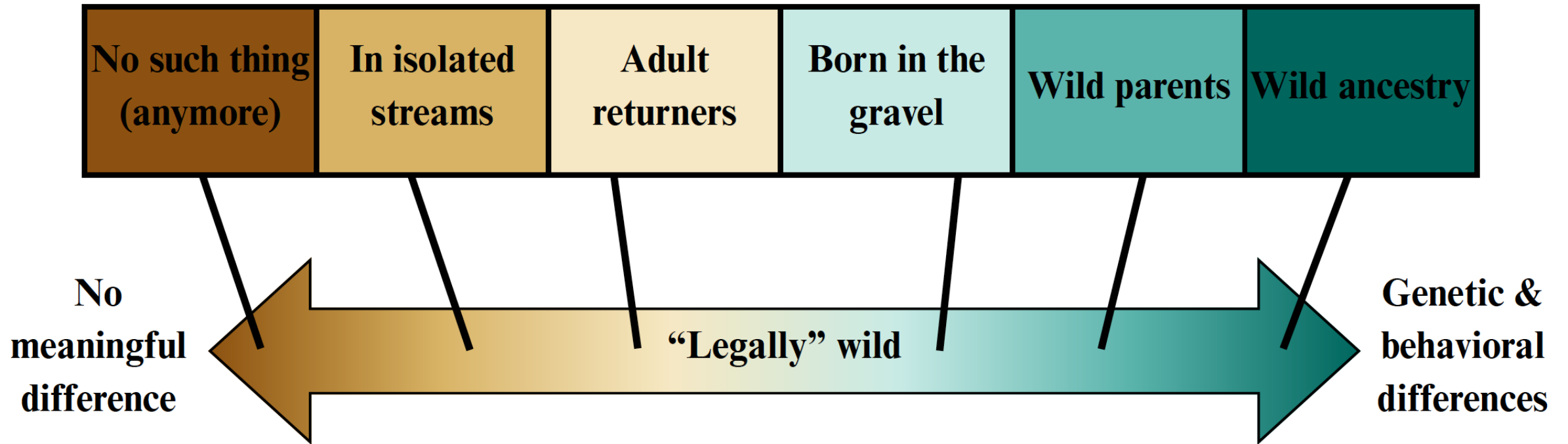
- fund agency budgets
- are incompatible with wild fish recovery
- reflect a flawed, human-centered approach to nature

“The agencies aren't telling the public the truth about what's going on. The scientific literature is full of information about what's going wrong. [The] agencies aren't confiding with the public about the problem that needs to be fixed.”



And one bonus finding...

What is a “wild” salmon or steelhead?



Key takeaways

Similarity to Manfredi et al.'s value orientations

Advocates & Reformers <i>Traditionalists</i>	Balancers <i>Pluralists</i>
Disengaged advocates? Disengaged restorers? <i>Distanced</i>	Skeptics & Restorers <i>Mutualists</i>

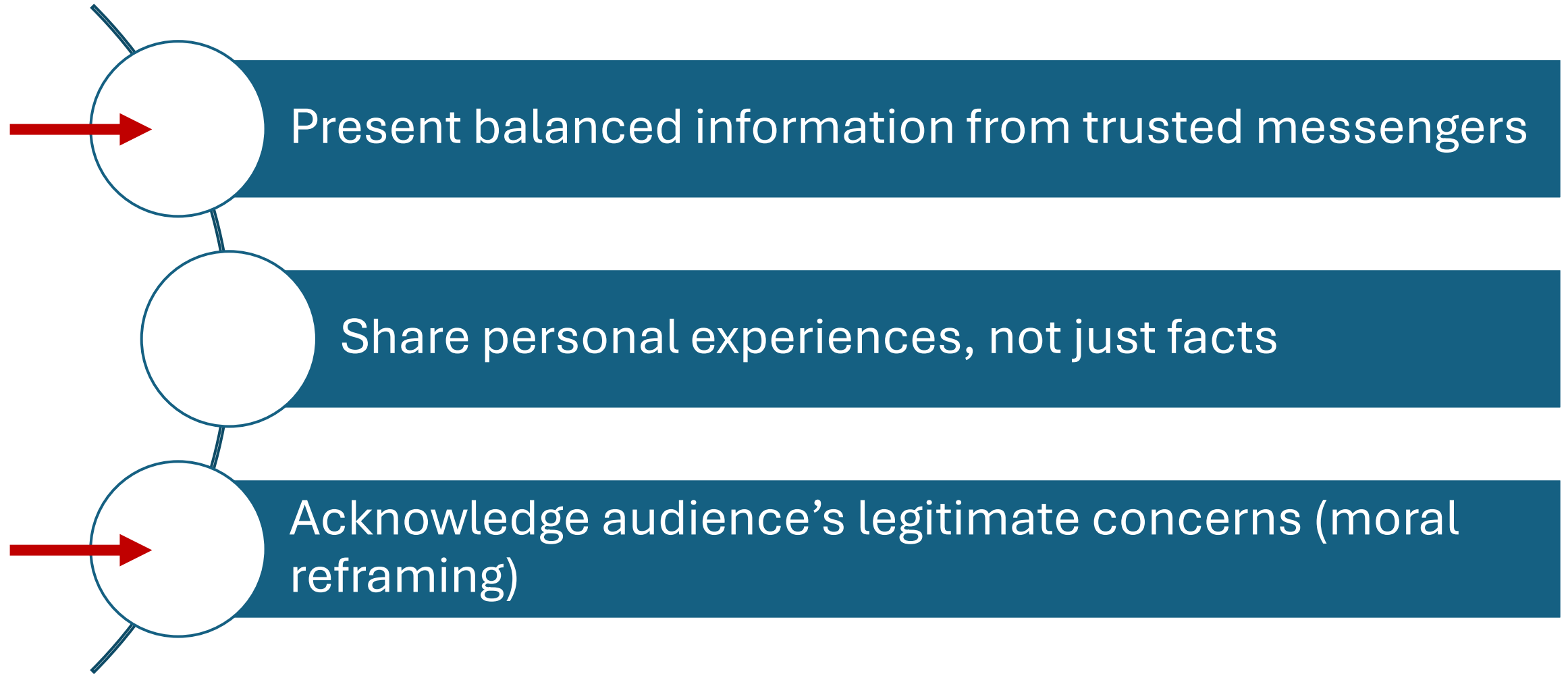
Hatchery debates are polarized

- Interviewees anticipated counter arguments from the “other side”
- Interviews revealed distrust and dislike of opposing groups

Implications

- More evidence won't resolve debates, but may increase polarization
- Anticipate biased information processing

Communicating in the face of polarization



Presenting balanced info & acknowledging concerns

Advocates	• Emphasizing community and economic benefits • Providing harvest opportunities
Reformers	• Highlighting past/present science-based improvements • Acknowledging limitations of reform
Balancers	• Presenting case-specific cost-benefit analyses • Developing science-based reform guidelines
Skeptics	• Being transparent about risks • Prioritizing habitat restoration and preventing extinction
Restorers	• Acknowledging risk and existing protections for wild fish • Emphasizing natural process-based restoration

In summary

5 hatchery-
related belief-
based segments

7 definitions of
“wild”

Approach
communication
with polarization
in mind

Future opportunities



Analyzing public comments
and responses



Surveying license-holders or
the public



Facilitating (and studying)
public engagement meetings

Future opportunities



In-group – out-group dynamics



Conflicting risk perceptions

beav.es/hatchery
comms



**Salmonid Hatcheries
Communication Toolkit
2025**





Stay in touch

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