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An environmental group wanted to see whether scuba divers would be willing to pay to help protect populations of ocean wildlife. A majority of divers surveyed said they would. Janet Babin reports.

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A handful of baby sea turtles (STR/AFP/Getty Images)

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TEXT OF STORY

BOB MOON: An environmental group is offering up an economic incentive for protecting the sea. A new survey from Oceana looks at what a creature-filled ocean is worth to scuba divers. Placing a dollar value on natural resources is a new and controversial concept. Marketplace's Janet Babin reports from the Innovations Desk at North Carolina Public Radio.

JANET BABIN: Shrinking shark and sea turtle populations might be easy for us land-dwellers to ignore. But scuba divers see the ocean's decline on every descent. So Oceana thought divers would be willing to pay to protect ocean wildlife.

Suzanne Garrett with Oceana says 76 percent of divers it surveyed said yes:

SUZANNE GARRETT: They're willing to pay to see healthy corals. They're also willing to pay for sea turtles and for sharks.

She says collectively, they'd pay an extra \$212 million. The shark fishing industry is worth \$19 million, so Oceana says clearly sharks are worth more alive.

But that kind of math worries economist Frank Ackerman with Tufts University:

FRANK ACKERMAN: I would object to any assumption that the value of nature is in total what you can dream up in these kind of studies.

Because we could lose our natural resources to the highest bidder.

I'm Janet Babin for Marketplace.

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