



LAKE CHARLEVOIX WATERSHED A DECADE OF SOCIAL SURVEYS: 2010-2020 Summary Report

Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council conducted a series of three mail surveys in the Lake Charlevoix Watershed during 2019-2020. These were done to follow up a similar series of surveys done in 2010-2011, in partnership with Michigan State University Extension. This Fact Sheet is a summary of results and recommendations for educational efforts to protect water quality. The full report is available on the Watershed Council website.

Local Officials Survey

April–June 2011 Sent: 315 Received Responses: 192=60% return (very high) April–June 2019 Sent: 241 Received Responses: 111=46% return (good)

More male local officials responded in 2019, 73% up from 70%. In both survey series, several respondents served multiple roles in the community, and we asked them to identify all that applied to them. In both survey series, a majority were planning commissioners. The majority in both surveys were township officials, followed by officials from cities, then the county, village, and tribe. This is a highly educated group, with well over half of the officials responding having a 4-year college degree or graduate degree in both surveys.

Shoreline Property Owners Survey

August–October 2011 Sent: 664 Received Responses: 391=59% return (very high) July–September 2019 Sent: 711 Received Responses: 238=33% return (good)

For shoreline property owners, both survey series respondents were a majority of homeowners; 4 years older, on average, in 2019. 2% more females responded in 2019, who were still a minority in submitting answers. Both surveys represented highly educated respondents. In both series, one-third of respondents lived in a city, village, or township. In 2019, 40% of respondents called their shoreline property their primary residence, a 6 point increase from 2011.

Watershed Residents Survey

August–October 2010 Sent: 934 Received Responses: 403=43% return (high) June–September 2020 Sent: 826 Received Responses: 188=22% return (low)

For watershed residents, respondents to both survey series were also a majority of homeowners. In 2020, they were 10 years older at age 69, on average, and 5% more females, who were still a minority in submitting answers. The new survey represented more highly educated respondents, with 62% having college degrees, a 12-point increase. There are slightly fewer year-round residents in 2020 at 53%, and a 6% increase in respondents living in townships, villages, or cities rather than more isolated, rural non-farm or farm residences.

General outreach and education programs in the Lake Charlevoix Watershed do not need to persuade local leaders or residents about the importance of good water quality. Audiences in the watershed already value good water quality, and we can build upon and emphasize that in outreach and education projects.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In all three surveys, local officials, shoreline property owners, and watershed residents all believe:

- ✓ Quality of our water is “good”
- ✓ Economic stability depends on good water quality
- ✓ Quality of life in their community depends on good water quality in lakes, riversstreams
- ✓ Invasive species are a problem

- The Watershed Plan Advisory Committee members should continue all educational efforts on the invasive species issue. They are fostering a measurable increased awareness in all three groups who were surveyed.
- Watershed residents show an increase in general knowledge and concerns for water quality. Local officials and shoreline property owners, however, remain unsure about specific pollutants and potential impairments. Education programs should focus on specific pollutant and source risks, especially phosphorus. Education and field projects directed at improving habitat and managing aquatic plants, in addition to stormwater runoff, would likely resonate.
- Watershed residents and shoreline property owners are very willing to make changes in household practices that impact water quality, and perceived few limitations on their ability to do so. Programs targeting homeowners should concentrate on information, skills, and demonstrations of specific practices.
- Knowledge of vegetated buffers increased for local officials from 56% to 65%, a 9-point rise. And knowledge of rain gardens increased 7 points, from 23% to 30%. For both topics, the Watershed Plan Advisory Committee members should identify successful outreach actions and build upon this work in future water quality protection projects.
- To reduce barriers to adoption or revision of water quality-related plan or zoning ordinance changes, education efforts could emphasize additional public participation. Public engagement throughout the process may help with approvals needed by community residents, economic concerns, or resistance to new regulations. Hold additional meetings for controversial proposals, or do events in a workshop type of setting, or a Town Hall, to help improve support for change.
- Survey results indicate that the message to “pump your septic tank regularly” has been getting through to property owners, demonstrated by an increase ranging from 12-14% reporting they now do so. These efforts on septic system education should be continued. Since a majority of septic system owners have not had problems, the prevailing attitude is that things are fine. However, given the research done on this topic by the Watershed Council for the Septic Question Project, this is a topic in need of additional outreach and education.
- Attitudes are changing among local officials, shoreline property owners, and residents toward more support for public funding for water quality, and we see this reflected in responses. Outreach efforts should consider this emerging support for public funding, with the caveat that we are also now dealing with COVID-19 and a damaged economy as a result. The surveys did not take the virus into account in any way, and economic attitudes are surely impacted by it.
- The surveys revealed that workshops, demonstrations, and meetings should be scheduled with local officials, as they are popular and provide opportunities for conversations with others. If possible, the agenda should provide formal peer-to-peer learning opportunities. Shoreline owners and residents also use workshops, demonstrations, and meetings for information about water quality efforts. Also noted as favorite sources to get information were the internet, in addition to newsletters, brochures, and fact sheets. Make materials also available online, and keep websites up to date and interesting.



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