

Key Findings from the 2010 Lake Charlevoix Watershed Landowner Survey

Dean Solomon
Senior Extension Educator

Michigan State University and the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council conducted a survey of land owners in the Lake Charlevoix Watershed during 2010 to identify the needs and concerns regarding the water quality of the lake. The results will help guide the direction of future education efforts to protect the water quality of the Lake Charlevoix watershed. Below are the key findings of the survey.

Landowners believe that our water quality is good

Overwhelmingly, landowners rate the quality of our water for boating, fishing, swimming, activities near water and scenic beauty as “okay” or “good.” Very few say “poor.” The most important activities to them are enjoyment and scenic beauty, boating and swimming.

Water pollutants and impairments such as sediments, phosphorus, bacteria and viruses, trash, toxic materials, algae, invasive plants and habitat alteration are potential risks in Michigan waters. Landowners generally believe that there are no severe impairments to the Lake Charlevoix Watershed. Invasive aquatic plants and animals is viewed as the biggest problem, rated by 6 of 10 as a moderate or severe issue. A fairly high percentage of respondents (between 14 and 60 percent) didn’t know if a listed impairment was a problem or not, especially phosphorus, toxics, bacteria and viruses and fish habitat – all impairments that are not easy to see. 3 of 10 do not know where their water goes when it runs off their property.

They also say that most pollutants were only slight problems. Once again, a significant percentage (17 to 47 percent) didn’t know if a particular pollutant was a problem or not.

It follows that landowners don’t think that issues like beach closures, contaminated fish, reduced beauty or opportunities for recreation are problems.

Landowners believe that good water quality is good *economics*

More than 4 of 5 respondents agree or strongly agree that economic stability depends on good water quality, that it is important to protect water quality even if it slows economic development, that it is not okay to reduce water quality to promote economic development and that quality of life in their community depends on good water quality in lakes, rivers and streams.

Who pays, though, is another matter. Although 3 of 5 agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to protect water quality even if it costs them more, only 2 of 5 agreed that they would be willing to pay more to improve water quality (for example, through increased taxes and fees).

Landowners are willing to make changes to their lawn and garden practices to protect water quality

9 of 10 believe that the way they care for their lawn and garden can influence water quality and that it is their personal responsibility to help protect water quality. 3 of 4 are willing to change the way they care for their lawn and garden to improve water quality.

The most common practices landowners currently use to improve water quality are planting trees and shrubs (7 of 10), following pesticide application instructions (5 of 10) and using phosphate-free fertilizers (3 of 10). A very high percentage (9 of 10) currently applies lawn fertilizer at or below manufacturer's recommendations.

Landowners were least familiar with newer practices like creating a rain garden and using porous pavement.

Landowners perceive few limitations in their ability to change their household practices.

Generally, issues such as physical abilities, information and education, approval of neighbors, potential environmental damage are viewed as limiting "not at all" or "a little." When they did indicate "some" or "a lot" it was most often related to a need for information, skills or demonstration of the practice. The most limiting issue (4 of 10) is personal out-of-pocket expenses.

Landowners receive information from a wide variety of sources

Landowners most commonly seek water quality information from newsletters, brochures and factsheets (one-half), conversations with others, the Internet, and newspapers and magazines (all 4 of 10). Only 1 in 6 seek information from radio or workshops, demonstrations and meetings. They most trust University Extension, the state agriculture agency, the local watershed project, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, conservation districts and conservation organizations. Least trusted are lawn care companies, tribal government and local community leaders.

About the respondents

Respondents to this survey were older (average age of 59), with more education (one-half with a four-year college or graduate degree) than the general area population. Nearly all were landowners, living in their current location an average of 19 years. Approximately one-half owned less than 5 acres. 6 of 10 were year-round residents and one-third lived in a city, village or township.

About the survey

This study was conducted between August 15, 2010 and October 30, 2010. 878 deliverable surveys were sent to randomly selected landowners in the Lake Charlevoix Watershed. 401 responses were received, 43 percent. Funding for the survey was from the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council through the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Non-point Source program.

For more information about this survey and other efforts to protect Lake Charlevoix, visit www.watershedcouncil.org.