

Lake Champlain Basin Public Awareness Survey



One of the challenges of watershed education and outreach work is the ability to assess the effectiveness of these efforts. Program- and location-specific evaluations capture participants' perceptions, immediate actions, and intentions for future behavior, but lasting behavior change takes some time to occur.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach efforts and broad-scale behavior change over the long-term, Lake Champlain Sea Grant, University of Vermont Extension, and the Lake Champlain Committee conducted a public awareness survey from June to October 2021 to assess the public's knowledge, attitudes, and engagement around lake and

watershed issues, and to determine sources of the public's information and knowledge. Nearly 1,700 respondents from New York, Vermont, and Québec answered 36 multi-part questions.

This survey will serve as a baseline for tracking the public's knowledge of watershed issues and engagement in stewardship activities. The intention is to repeat the survey periodically to assess how this knowledge and stewardship changes over time. It was crafted to reflect the work of the LCBP and its partners and will help guide future outreach efforts of these partners. Outreach and communications practitioners in the basin will use the results to target audiences, messaging, and communications channels.

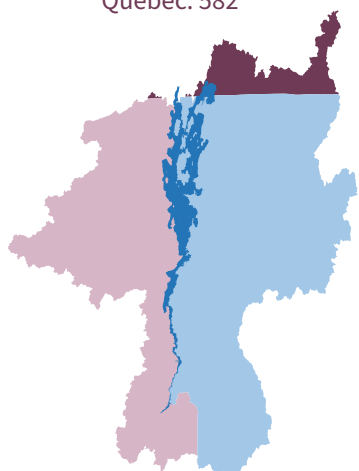
Survey Goals

- Assess the public's knowledge, attitudes and engagement around lake and watershed issues.
- Determine sources of the public's information and knowledge.
- Help target communications to specific audiences and channels.

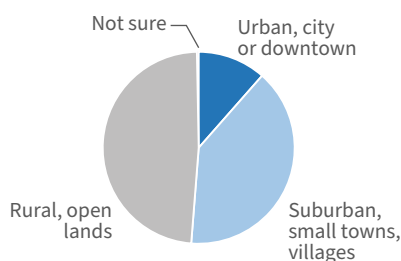
Demographic Summary

Residence

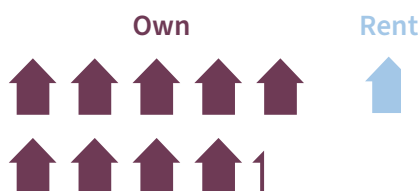
New York: 382
Vermont: 711
Québec: 582



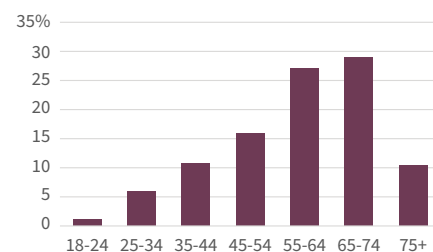
Residential Setting



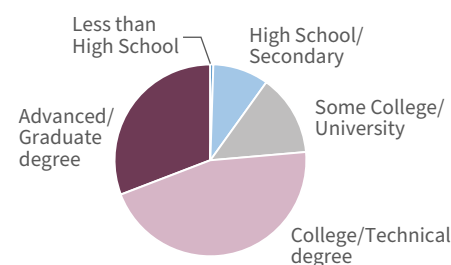
Home Ownership



Age



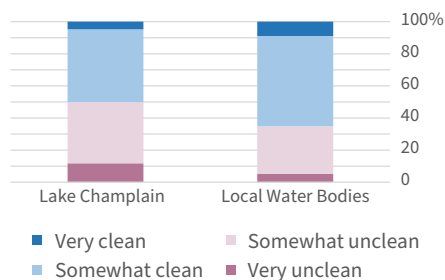
Education



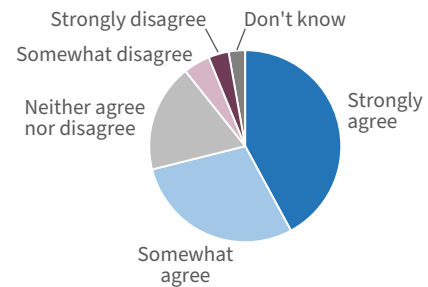
Values and Attitudes

The survey results show that basin residents place a high value on clean water, but that they are evenly divided on how clean Lake Champlain is. 86% of respondents agreed that healthy waterways are a critical part of thriving communities. 96% felt that addressing water quality should be a priority for communities, and 85% agreed that town budgets should help pay for stormwater runoff management.

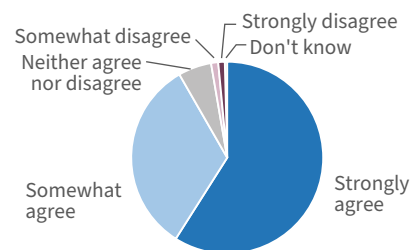
In general, how clean do you think waters are?



I rely on Lake Champlain for my wellbeing.



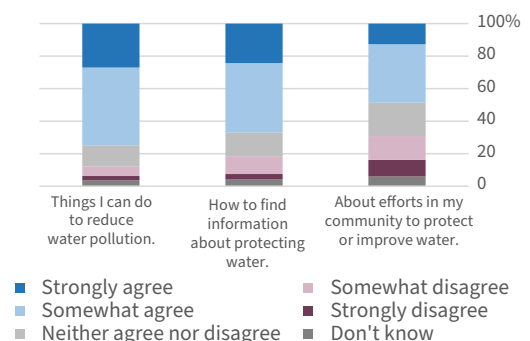
My personal actions affect the health of streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes



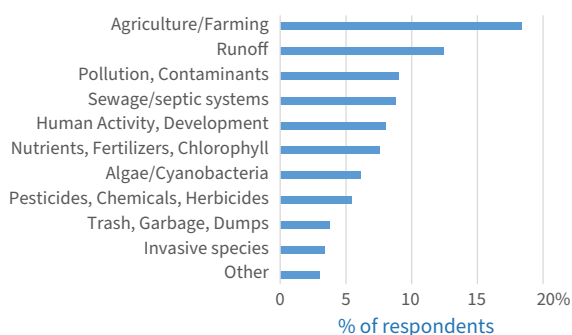
Knowledge and Awareness

Respondents identified agriculture and runoff as the most serious challenges to water quality. Residents specifically believed that phosphorus, fertilizers, manure, and cyanobacteria are the most significant pollutants. But they ranked wastewater treatment facilities as a more significant source of phosphorus than developed land, whereas research shows that runoff from developed land contributes nearly three times as much phosphorus at WWTFs.

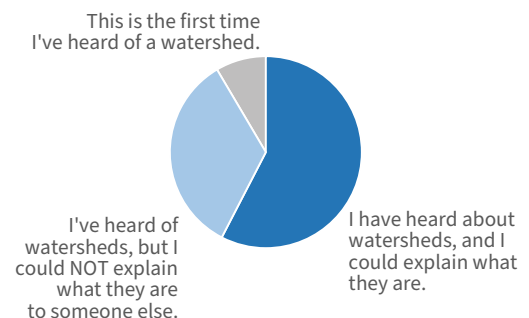
I know...



What do you feel is the most serious challenge impacting the health of waterways.



Which option best describes your personal familiarity with what a watershed is?



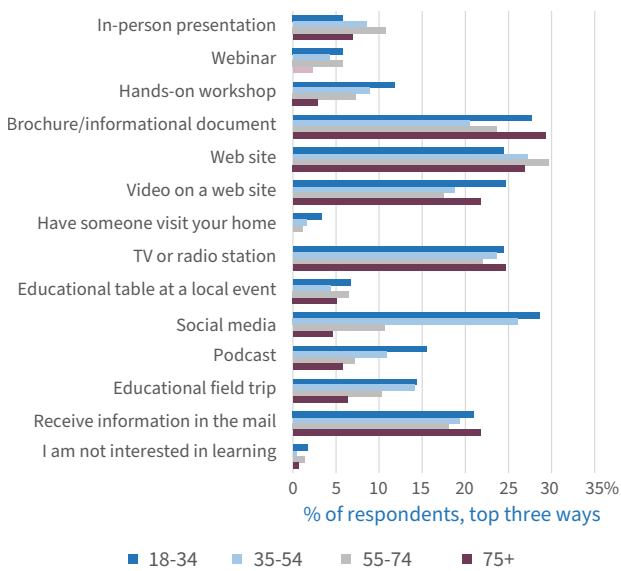
Engagement and Action

The survey showed that a significant percentage of residents have received news and information about lake and water issues from traditional media such as television news and newspapers. This makes sense, since survey respondents skewed toward an older demographic. But the percentages of respondents who preferred to learn through print materials, websites, and the news were consistent across age categories. Residents of all ages are getting involved through civic engagement in their communities and participation in on-the-ground stewardship activities. In some cases, there were statistically significant differences in the level of participation between age groups.

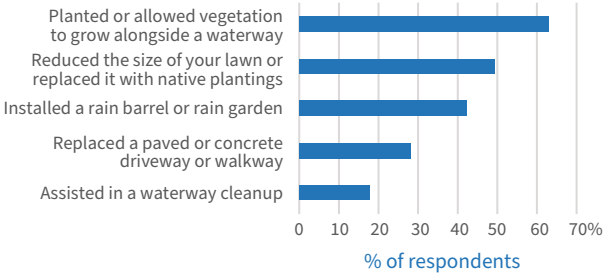
In the past three years have you ever done any of the following to help protect or improve water quality?



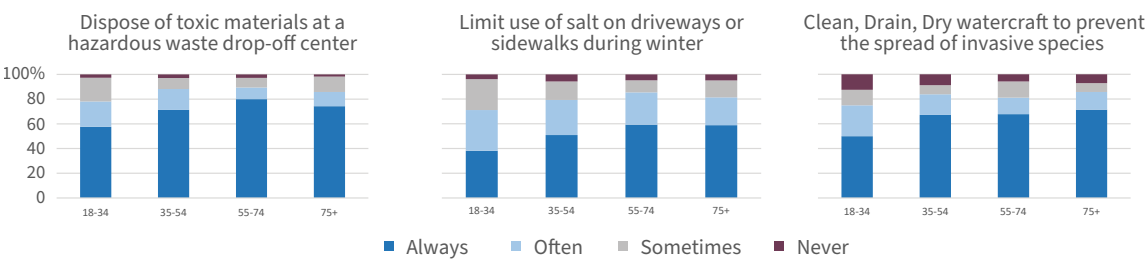
Preferred ways of learning about water issues by age



In the past three years have you done any of the following specifically to reduce runoff?



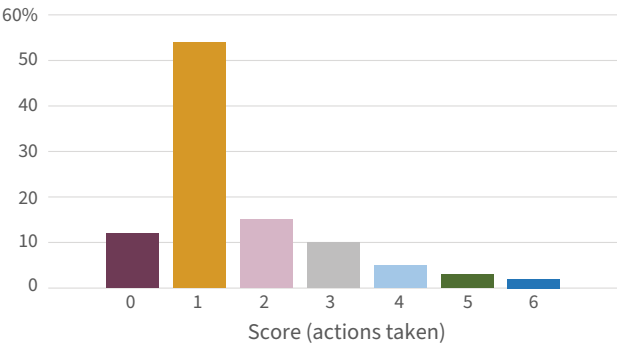
Frequency of Action by Age



Action Index

The survey team developed an Action Index to get a broad measure of the public's overall action and engagement. The index includes responses to six questions about whether residents had taken certain actions in the previous three years. The responses were summed for each respondent to produce scores from one to six and the relative percentage of scores calculated. An average score of 1.9 suggests a low level of action.

Action Index Score Distribution

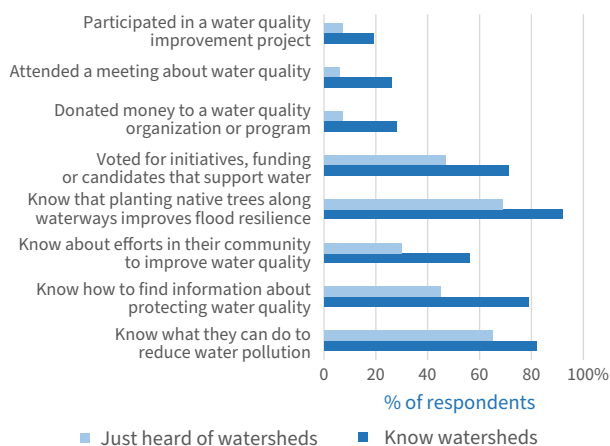


Relationships of Multiple Factors

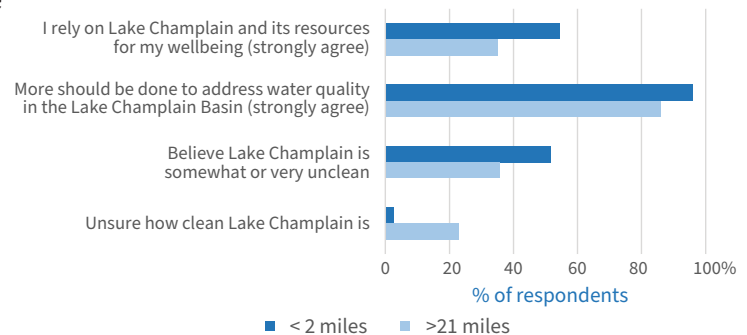
The survey team took a more nuanced look at the results by examining relationships between some of the categories measured. For example, they found that people who know what a watershed is are statistically more likely to take action and be engaged, suggesting that public education and action may be linked.

This kind of cross-tab analysis was also done to compare values, knowledge, and actions by geography. Not enough data were collected to look at results by town, but an analysis by distance from Lake Champlain was possible.

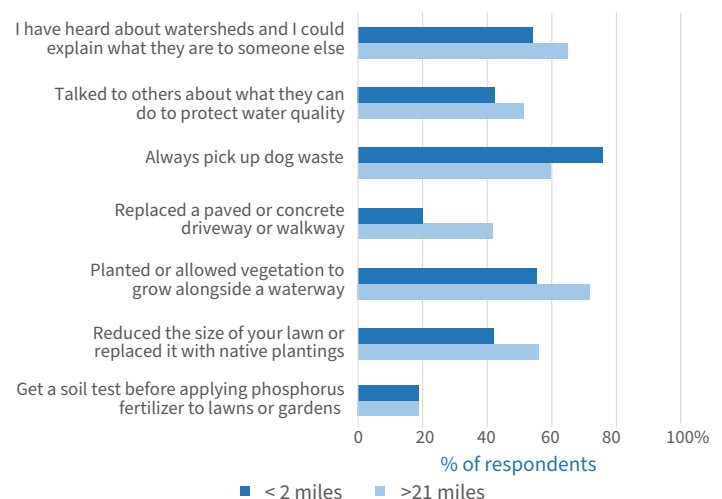
Relationship between knowledge and action/awareness



Difference in Attitudes with Distance from Lake



Difference in Action/Knowledge with Distance from Lake



Recommendations

- The LCBP and partners should continue to provide information in a variety of ways and include traditional communication methods while including newer media.
- The LCBP might consider developing or partnering with local TV and radio news shows to share water quality information.
- The LCBP should also consider forming partnerships with newspapers throughout the basin to share information about ongoing water quality projects.
- An opportunity exists for LCBP and its partners to highlight efforts in local communities that are intended to protect or improve water quality.
- The LCBP might consider developing short informational documents from its *State of the Lake* report.
- LCBP may wish to select a concentrated suite of critical practices that are predicted to have the biggest environmental benefits and implement or solicit development of community-based social marketing strategies to target key audiences to promote adoption of those practices.
- The LCBP might reinvigorate the Lawn to Lake partners' "Don't P on the Lawn" public education campaign.

For detailed analyses, findings, and recommendations, please refer to the survey team's full final report at lcbp.org.