



Understanding the Views of Residents to Guide the Creation of Every Acres Counts: The Newfound Watershed Master Plan *Findings from a Watershed Community Survey*

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The human dimensions of issues relevant to the development of a watershed master plan are extensive and complex, and a scientific, random sample survey of residents of the Newfound Watershed was conducted to inform the creation of the Newfound Watershed Master Plan. Identifying residents' desires for the future through visioning processes, understanding concerns about management alternatives, and documenting the current understanding of best management practices are just a few examples of the ways successful watershed management plans require an understanding of social factors to develop effective information and recommendations. The survey data was collected and analyzed to improve understanding of these issues and to provide the watershed master plan project team, local communities, residents, and NHDES with recommendations about how they might continue to work to protect water quality and the well-being of residents of the watershed.

The self-administered questionnaire survey was administered to a random sample of property owners in eight towns in the watershed, and to develop the sampling frame the research team worked with town halls to obtain lists of property owners from tax records. The survey was administered using a modified version of the Tailored Design Method (Dillman, 2000) that employed several techniques intended to enhance response rates including customizing letters, sending multiple waves of contacts with carefully timed reminders, and providing clear information about the need for responses. A total of 1938 self-administered questionnaires were mailed, and a 41% response rate was obtained (n=794). Analyses of the questionnaire data were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, bivariate analyses, and multivariate procedures were used to examine the results and to identify important findings that can be applied to achieve the goals of the project.

As a whole there are many encouraging findings for future efforts to protect water quality from the survey, and a few broad findings are presented below as examples:

- Respondents have extremely positive sentiments about the watershed: an excellent overall image of the area, a strong belief in its visual attractiveness, and strong positive feelings about the “friendliness” of the region.
- Respondents express strong agreement with the assertion that the economic stability of their community depends on good water quality.
- Concerns in the watershed are highest about:
 - septic discharge
 - invasive plants
 - building practices on water bodies
 - lawn care runoff issues
 - water quality
 - loss of forested areas
 - loss of wildlife
 - development on steep slopes
- Residents express very high levels of attachment to the region, and the strength of their attachment is strongly related to willingness to protect water quality and natural resources in the watershed.
- When asked whether they would like to see less, more, or the same amount of various land uses in the watershed in the future residents expressed a desire for more wildlife habitat, forest or woodlands, more wetlands and agriculture, and more local businesses.
- When asked what objectives are most important for the management of the watershed respondents indicated that clean water supplies for public use, healthy water bodies supporting fish and other aquatic life, and habitat for wildlife are of highest importance.
- Respondents indicated a willingness to make changes to protect water quality, but indicated a need for direct education about techniques for doing so.
- Very few statistically significant differences exist across the responses from residents of different towns in the watershed, which is encouragement for all towns to work together for the common good of the watershed. The watershed plan can serve as an essential step in the process of developing these perspectives and relationships.

A detailed and extensive report presents the results of that research, and the report is intended to be used both as a summary document and as a reference for future needs. The document is available at:

http://www.newfoundlake.org/images/Community_Survey_-_Final_Report-Jun08.pdf and the accompanying

appendix at: http://www.newfoundlake.org/images/Community_Survey_-_Appendix_to_Final_Report_-_Jun08.pdf