

Lake Butte des Morts Shoreland Owners Survey



November 2007

Summary

In early 2007, a survey was distributed to all shoreland property owners around Lake Butte des Morts. Approximately 70% of the surveys were completed and returned. Responses were tabulated and some of the findings are presented here.

Survey Rationale

The water quality in our lakes is linked to actions in the watersheds that drain to the lakes. Whether we realize it or not, many of our day-to-day actions and decisions can impact, both negatively and positively, the health of our lakes. Sound conservation practices and best management practices have been identified that protect water quality but there exists a gap between the knowledge of these practices and implementation on the landscape. The goal of this survey was to gain information on the attitudes and behaviors of lake residents as a step toward developing ways to encourage environmentally sound behaviors. Of special interest were lawn fertilization behaviors and those associated with lakeshore buffers. Questions focusing on these two behavioral sets were a major portion of the survey. Questions included demographics as well as perceptions of sources of lake pollution.

Survey Development and Methodology

The Winnebago Lakes Council, a local non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting and improving the ecological health and scenic beauty of the Winnebago Lakes System, developed a grant proposal that was submitted by the Butte des Morts Conservation Club, another local non-profit organization dedicated to conservation, preservation, and restoration of wetlands and wildlife habitat. A survey of lakeshore property owners was proposed to assess attitudes and behaviors in order to develop educational campaigns to minimize barriers and promote benefits for environmentally sound landscape practices. A DNR small scale lake planning grant was awarded to the Butte des Morts Conservation Club for the project.

The survey instrument was developed by the University of Wisconsin Extension with input and testing provided

by the Winnebago Lakes Council. A list of 625 lakefront shoreline parcels was developed with help of the Winnebago County Land & Water Conservation Department. Parcels owned by sporting/conservation clubs, real estate investment companies, or construction companies were deleted from the list, as well as two parcels because of a lack of an address. The owners of the final 609 parcels were mailed a survey and 425 returned completed surveys for a response rate of approximately 70 percent.

Surveys were distributed according to the following schedule: a pre-survey postcard was sent to all addresses on the final list. A survey packet containing the survey, a cover letter, and a stamped and addressed return envelope was sent to all addresses. A reminder postcard was sent to those that had not responded to the initial survey mailing. Finally, a second survey packet was sent to those that had not yet responded. All correspondence was signed by both the Winnebago Lakes Council president and the Butte des Morts Conservation Club president.

Data were analyzed through the collaborative efforts of UW-Extension's Environmental Resources Center and a graduate student at UW-Oshkosh. Survey response were coded and entered into SPSS, a statistical analysis software program.



A typical Lake Butte des Morts property has less than 100 feet of frontage, a low bank, and rock rip rap. The property has been owned for an average of 19 years and is the primary residence of its owner. Most owners purchased the property for the beauty of the location or because it was on the water. Pleasure boating, fishing, bird watching and swimming are the most popular activities.

Survey Findings

Finding 1

Property owners definitely showed an affinity for lawns. Over 90% of respondents value how their lawn looks. The perception of neighbors is also important. Most owners (76%) care what their neighbors think of their lawn and believe their neighbors value a well maintained lawn (89%). Respondents also believe that a well maintained lawn to the shoreline creates an eye-appealing property (82%) and increases property value (88%).

Finding 2

Using professional lawn care services are relatively uncommon: Most mow their own lawns (83%), apply fertilizer (68%), and do weed control applications (66%). Between 10 and 15 percent always use professional lawn care services for those activities. Those with gross incomes greater than \$100,000 are more likely to hire a professional for their lawn care services.

Finding 3

When questioned about no- and low-phosphorus fertilizers, many respondents are not familiar with the product. Over half don't know if no- and low-phosphorus fertilizer is too expensive (52%), if it is less effective than fertilizer with phosphorus (56%), or if it is readily available (66%). While the attributes of no- and low-phosphorus fertilizer are mostly unknown to property owners, 14% report already using it and 52% would consider switching to it.

Finding 4

Perceptions about buffers are mixed. About 36% strongly agreed that buffers protect water quality. Other statements having at least half of respondents marking either strong agreement or somewhat agreement include: buffers may reduce property values (52%), buffers are messy and look unkempt (56%), buffers make lake access difficult (62%), and buffers obstruct lake views (65%). In contrast, a majority of respondents disagreed with these statements: I know where to go for technical assistance (54%), installing a buffer is too expensive (53%), and maintaining a buffer is too expensive (62%).

Finding 5

Percent of survey respondents that feel lake indicators are changing.

	Increasing	Decreasing	About the Same	Not Sure
<i>Amount of algae</i>	33%	26%	34%	8%
<i>Water clarity</i>	52%	20%	23%	6%
<i>Amount of aquatic plants</i>	45%	14%	26%	15%
<i>Quality of fishing</i>	15%	24%	34%	27%

Acknowledgements

The survey design team included Chad Cook, UW-Extension Basin Educator for the Upper Fox and Wolf River Basins; Catherine Neiswender, UW-Extension Community Resource Development Educator for Winnebago County; Jake Blasczyk, UW-Extension Evaluation Specialist; and Nicole Dekeuster, Winnebago Lakes Council and UW-Oshkosh.

Survey data analysis was completed by Jake Blasczyk, Tom Murray, and Sue Vang, from UW-Extension's Environmental Resources Center, and Nicole Dekeuster.

More information

A more comprehensive report is available upon request and at the following web address:

<http://www.winnebagolakes.org> or <http://basineducation.uwex.edu/foxwolf>

Project contributors include:

Winnebago Lakes Council ♦ Butte des Morts Conservation Club ♦ UW-Extension ♦ Citizens Natural Resources Association

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