

Marengo River Watershed Partnership Project Local Community Survey Summary
*A summary of sociological survey responses related to land and water resources
in the Marengo River Watershed*
Bad River Watershed Association
September 2010

Introduction

The Bad River Watershed Association (BRWA) is a community organization that works to involve all citizens in taking care of and enjoying their home watershed. In 2009 BRWA initiated the Marengo River Watershed Partnership (MRWP) Project, which is a coalition of local governments, agencies, and citizens working together to develop a Watershed Action Plan for the Marengo River Watershed. The goal of the MRWP Project is to maintain or improve the health of the Marengo River Watershed by investing local citizens, governments, and agencies to create the watershed action plan which will identify what projects should occur to improve watershed health, who will do them, and how to pay for them. As part of the development of the watershed action plan, BRWA worked to engage local citizens to learn more about their watershed issues and concerns, and gathered ideas for what the community needs are to improve watershed health.

As part of the development of the Marengo River Watershed Action Plan, BRWA worked with a Citizen Involvement Team to identify the concerns and interests of local citizens related to the land and water resources in our area. One tool used to assess these interests and concerns were some local community surveys that have been conducted over the last few years. Community surveys were conducted in Ashland County (2003) and Bayfield County (2008) for the purposes of comprehensive plan development. A survey of woodland landowners in the Lake Superior Basin was conducted by University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (2009) to learn more about their forest activities and effects on water quality in the Lake Superior Basin, of which the Marengo River Watershed is a part. Additionally, BRWA created and distributed a short questionnaire (2010) to watershed landowners specific to the MRWP Project to further identify specific watershed uses, concerns, and needs in the watershed.

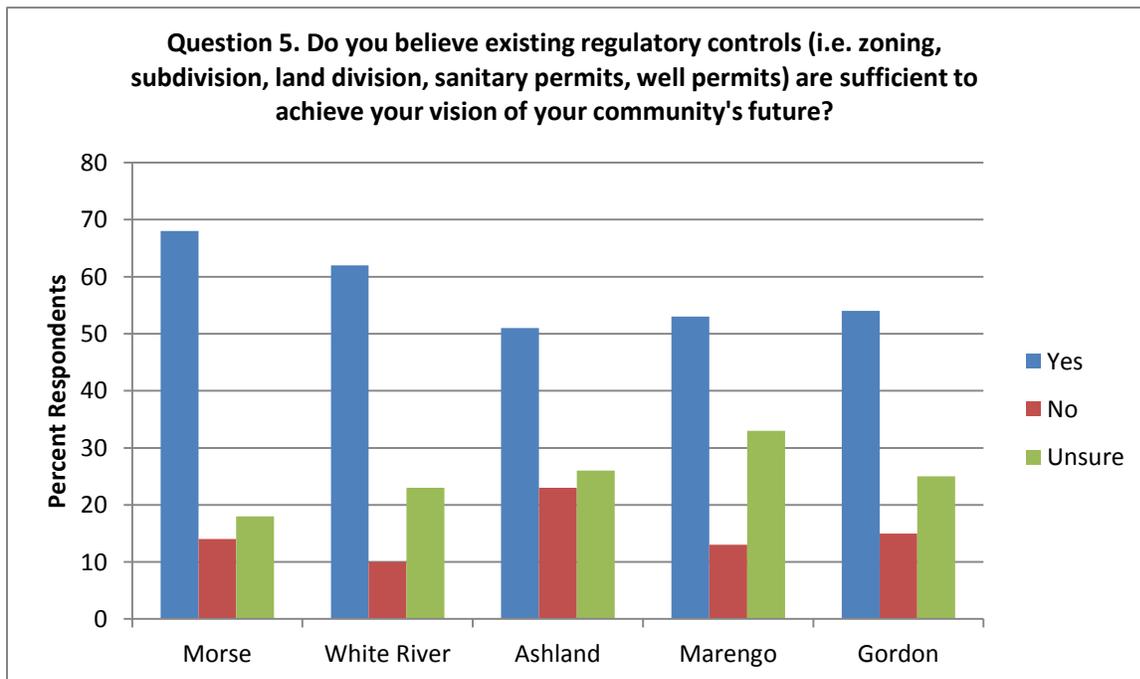
An abbreviated version of this report has been included within the Marengo River Watershed Action Plan as part of characterizing the watershed and the people that live there. Additionally, the survey responses described here also helped to inspire and shape some of the action items and project ideas as identified in the Marengo River Watershed Action Plan.

Ashland County Comprehensive Plan Survey (2003)

As part of the Ashland County and participating communities' Comprehensive Planning program(s) a random sample survey was designed and implemented in 2003. Ashland County has five townships (Ashland, Marengo, White River, Morse, and Gordon) that are completely within or part of the Marengo River Watershed. BRWA summarized the survey responses specific to those townships to tailor survey results for the purposes of the MRWP project.

Regulatory Environment

In Ashland County, existing county level regulatory controls include: 1) Private sewage system ordinance, 2) flood plain ordinance, 3) shoreland amendatory ordinance, 3) scenic ordinance, 4) subdivision control ordinance, 5) junkyard ordinance, 6) scenic ordinance, 7) zoning ordinance, 8) nonmetallic mining ordinance, and 9) fee schedule. In the towns of Morse, White River, Ashland, Marengo, and Gordon there is no local zoning, and so these towns are subject to county zoning regulations. Respondents were asked about their level of willingness to be additionally regulated to achieve individual visions of what the county should become. In the Marengo Watershed towns, over 50% of respondents felt that existing regulatory controls are sufficient.



However, when asked if any additional regulations should be adopted to manage growth, the town of Marengo responded with a positive indication for stormwater and erosion control (57%), density standards (50%), local shoreland zoning control (50%), and local subdivision control (50%). The town of Gordon responded with a positive indication for local land division control (50%) and local subdivision control (54%).

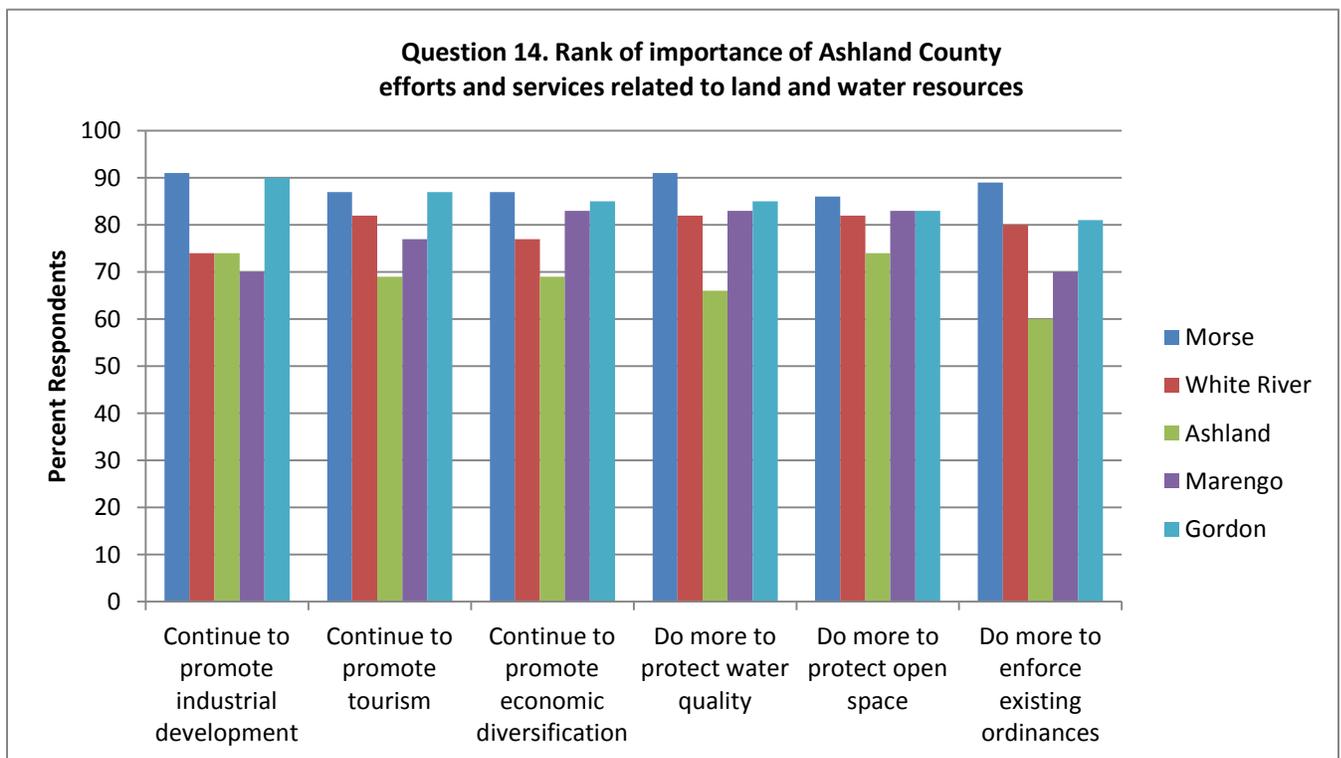
These responses indicate that in general the residents feel that the existing regulatory environment is sufficient to meet the challenges of the next twenty years in these towns. However, there is also recognition that ordinance strengthening and some limited local ordinance adoption and local control may be needed to meet these challenges. Efforts to strengthen existing ordinances and their enforcement along with local efforts to adopt regulatory measures on perceived local need and issues should be successful and supported (Ashland County 2003).

About Ashland County

When asked to rank the importance of County level efforts and services, doing more to protect water

quality and protect open space received a consensus of more than 60% support in the Marengo Watershed towns, while comparatively these efforts received a consensus of just over 30% county-wide. These results indicate that respondents from the Marengo Watershed highly value the natural resources of the watershed.

However, other Ashland County efforts and services that received a consensus of more than 60% were promoting industrial development, tourism, economic diversification, and enforcing existing ordinances. Continuing to promote industrial development was the effort that received the greatest consensus from all Ashland County respondents (54%). Promoting tourism and economic diversification received less support county-wide (36% each), and enforcing existing ordinances was not as well supported county-wide (15%).



The responses indicate that residents in these towns are supportive of industrial expansion and recruitment, building upon the existing economic base, continuing to grow the tourism market sector, and enforcing existing regulations. However, it is also evident that the area’s natural resources are highly valued, and that part of preserving the quality of life in the Marengo Watershed portion of Ashland County includes protecting natural resources in addition to maintaining a good local economy.

Town specific questions

The Citizen Survey conducted at the township level for the Ashland County Comprehensive Plan also

contained some questions specific to those towns. The following summarizes those questions and responses:

Town of Morse

Should the town have a park system? Yes- 36% No-61%

Should the town work to develop lakefronts for recreational and public use? Yes- 52% No- 46%

The town has valuable natural resources (minerals, forests). What part should these resources play in our future? More- 66% Less- 21% Not at all- 9%

Town of White River

Are there areas in our township that should be set aside for future generations? Yes-31% No- 46%

Are you willing to pay for it? Yes-28% No- 46%

Would you be in favor of the town creating and using a Conservation Easement Acquisition Fund?

Yes- 18% No- 59%

Town of Marengo

Some mining methods can visually scar the landscape, cause changes in ecosystems, and impact water resources. Based on potential mine proposals, how concerned are you about these possible impacts?

Very- 53% Somewhat- 17% Not at all- 27%

How do you feel about feed-lot style large agricultural developments? Like- 17% Dislike- 53% Unsure- 27%

Should the town enact an ordinance to protect groundwater and aquifer resources? Yes- 63% No- 33%

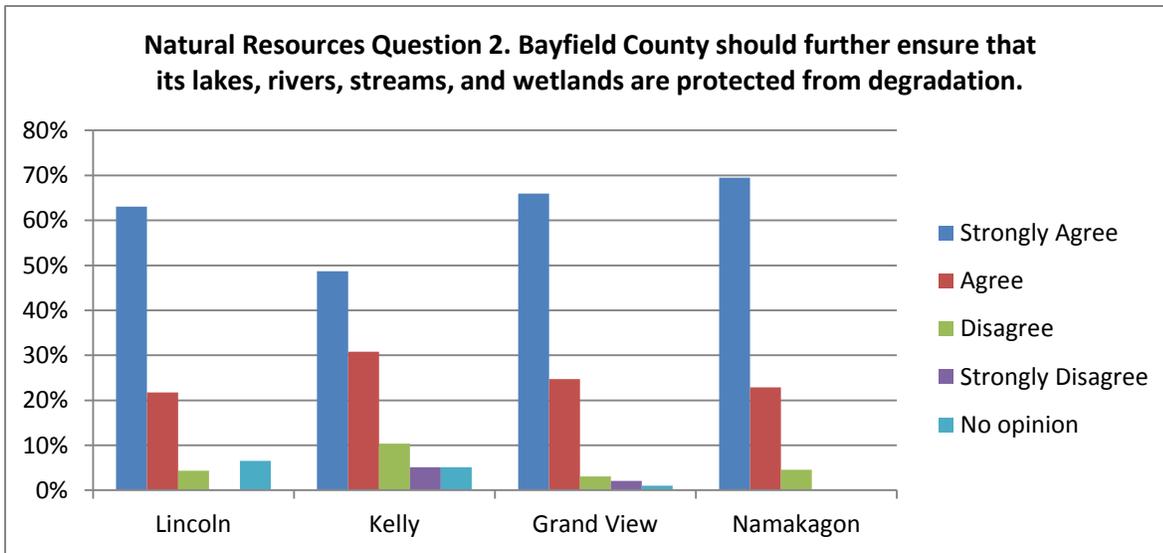
Should the town undertake regulating local mining? Yes- 57% No- 40%

Bayfield County Comprehensive Plan Survey (2008)

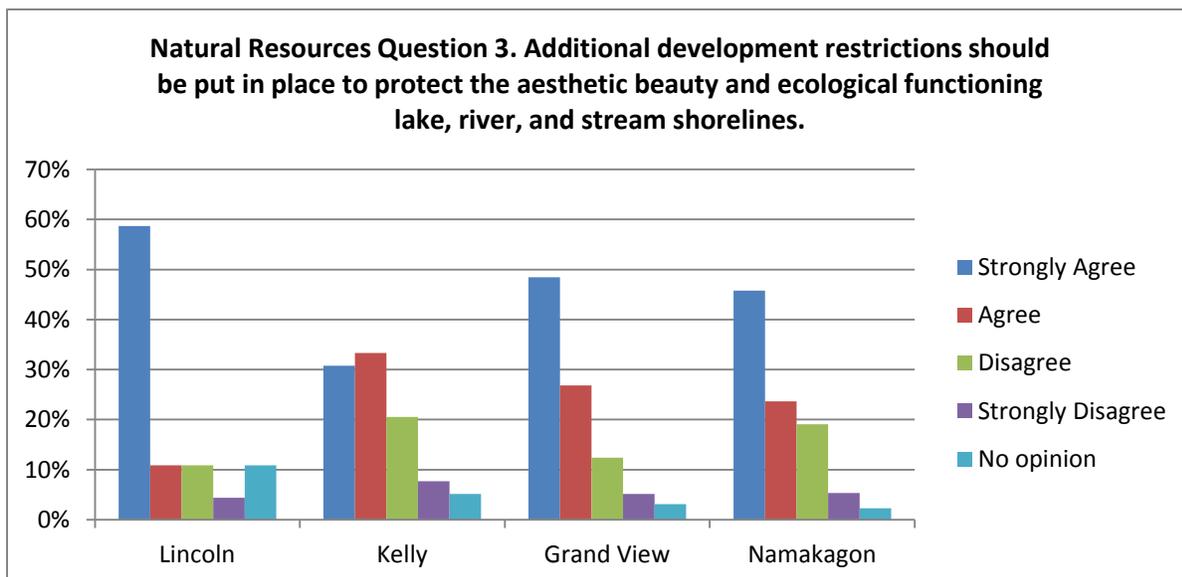
A county-wide survey was completed in Bayfield County in 2008 to determine issues and opportunities to address in the Bayfield County Comprehensive Plan Update. The survey data collected was broken down by town, age, and length of residence in Bayfield County. BRWA reviewed the data by town, to review the responses from residents of the four townships (Lincoln, Kelly, Grand View, and Namakagon) that represent a portion of the Marengo River Watershed.

Natural Resources

In general, residents are passionate about maintaining the unique natural environment that Bayfield County has to offer. Accordingly, the majority of the respondents wanted greater protection and regulation of these natural resources. However, recreational enjoyment of the environment is a concern.



Over 80% of respondents from each of the four towns agreed or strongly agreed that Bayfield County should further ensure that its lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands are protected. Only 5% in Lincoln, Grand View, and Namakagon disagreed or strongly disagreed that Bayfield County should not further ensure its natural resources are protected from degradation; 15% disagreed or strongly disagreed in town of Kelly. However, given the larger percentage (60%+) of respondents strongly agreeing, natural resource protection is an important issue in maintaining these resources for future residents and tourists. The numerous natural resources are features of Bayfield County, and also the Marengo River Watershed, that make it a unique place to live and play.



Sixty-nine percent of respondents from the four towns agreed or strongly agreed that additional development restrictions should be put in place to protect the aesthetic beauty and ecological functioning of lake, river and stream shorelines. This response also shows support for protection of land and water resources in this portion of Bayfield County.

Agricultural Resources

Along with the lakes, rivers, and wetlands, agricultural lands are also an important attribute of Bayfield County, particularly in the town of Kelly, which is in the lower part of the watershed where more farming is occurring.

In the town of Kelly, 64% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that agricultural lands should be preserved exclusively for farming use in Bayfield County. Respondents from Grand View, Lincoln, and Namakagon were lower, but still averaged at 48% agreeing or strongly agreeing. However, 52% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that single-family residences should be allowed to be constructed on agricultural lands. These were contradictory answers found within the survey; however, the responses may relate to the importance of preserving natural resources.

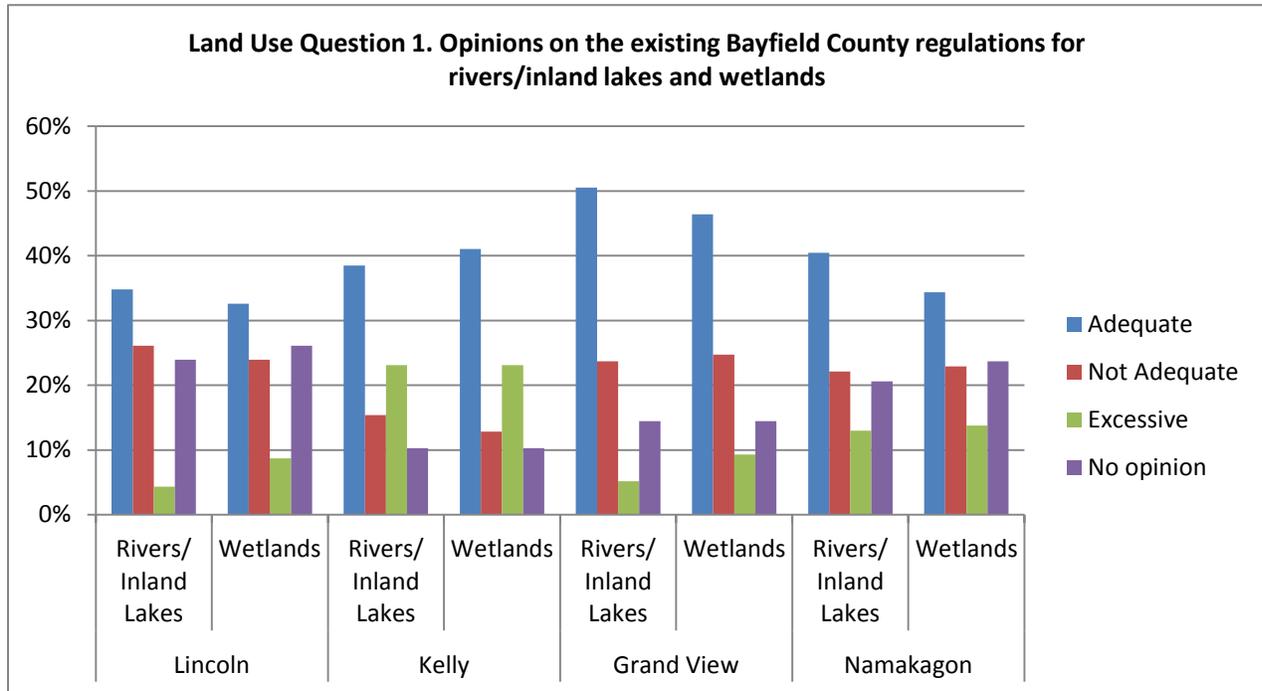
Thirty-four percent of respondents in the four towns believed that the current residential density within agricultural area should remain the same, while 51% of respondents believed that the density should be lowered.

Land Use

Land uses in the four towns included private forest land, agricultural land, residential, commercial, industrial, rivers/inland lakes, and wetlands.

About 70 percent of respondents from all of Bayfield County agreed that the county should allow the option of clustering single-family residences on a large acreage. Since the residents are very concerned about preserving environmental resources, the findings are consistent with other environmental questions. However, other questions found that the majority of respondents wanted a minimum lot size. This is slightly inconsistent, but the awareness of preserving natural resources is still considered.

In the four towns, an average of 52% of respondents felt that private forest lands were most adequately regulated by County regulations out of all land uses. For water resources (rivers/ inland lakes and wetlands), there was mixed opinion on the adequacy of regulations on rivers/ inland lakes and wetlands.



The town of Kelly had the greatest percentage of respondents that felt regulations for water resources were excessive (23%), while the other three towns had higher percentages of respondents that said regulations for water resources was not adequate.

When asked about regulations for agricultural lands, respondents from the town of Kelly felt most strongly out of the four towns that regulations for agricultural lands were inadequate (18%), while the other three towns felt that agricultural lands were adequately regulated (47%). This could be a reflection of the higher value that town of Kelly respondents may place on agricultural lands, as it is more prevalent in that town and more important to livelihoods here than in the other towns.

It is worth noting that land use was indicated to be the most important element to the residents in the towns of Grand View, Lincoln, and Namakagon, with agricultural, natural, and cultural resources being second. In the town of Kelly, the importance of land use was second to agricultural, natural, and cultural resources. Economic development was the third most important element to all of these towns.

These results indicate that agricultural lands are valued more to respondents from the town of Kelly, where more farming is occurring in this area of the Marengo River Watershed.

Lake Superior Basin Natural Resources Survey (2009)

A survey of Wisconsin landowners in the Lake Superior Basin was carried out in May-June 2009 by the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The survey population of interest was private woodland landowners with ten acres or more, without forest management plans, who own land in the Lake Superior Basin. 981 surveys were sent out with 478 being returned, for a return rate of 49%.

The results of this survey indicate that landowners in the Lake Superior Basin have the sense that our water resources are in pretty good shape. A high percentage of respondents rated the water quality okay or excellent for scenic beauty, swimming, catching, and eating fish. In the Lake Superior Basin, fish managers and hydrogeologists are very concerned about sand eroding from stream banks smothering gravel spawning beds and degrading fish habitat. This is an even larger concern in the Marengo River Watershed, as it is the largest contributor of sediment to the Bad River, and in turn the Bad River is the largest contributor of sediment to Lake Superior. However, this survey showed that most of the public surveyed (76%) doesn't believe the water quality is affecting fish, and another 20-21% did not know.

Respondents in this survey were less sure about the quality of their drinking water. One third (35%) of the respondents didn't know the quality of their drinking water, and more than half thought their drinking water was just okay or poor.

The strongest response in the survey came from questions about water quality and economic development. In general, respondents valued water quality over economic development. 20% of respondents strongly agreed and 55% agreed when asked generally "it is important to protect water quality even if it slows economic development." However, when asked specifically about themselves, if they would be willing pay more to protect water quality, then 6% strongly agreed and 43% agreed. As the question became more specific to the individual level, the willingness to pay for water protection decreased, but respondents still agreed it was important. When asked about the top considerations when making a decision to do a management activity on their land, the top consideration was the out-of-pocket expense, followed by their own views about effective woodland management, then the environmental benefits of the management activity and the environmental damage that may be caused by the management activity.

When asked about water pollutants of concern, 34% of respondents indicated that the biggest perceived pollutant is trash and litter. This may be because it's more visible than other pollutants, such as sand and clay. Interestingly, sand and clay were not identified as much of a problem by the respondents, but are indeed serious pollutants in streams like the Marengo River and the bays of Lake Superior. A large majority of the respondents did not perceive any problem, or perceived only a slight problem, with the sources listed in the survey as contributors to water quality problems, such as litter, septic systems, roads, slumping stream banks, parking lots, harvested areas, etc.

When asked about landowner's experience with forest management activities that affect water quality, there were high numbers of "does not apply" answers coupled with high numbers of willingness to try a

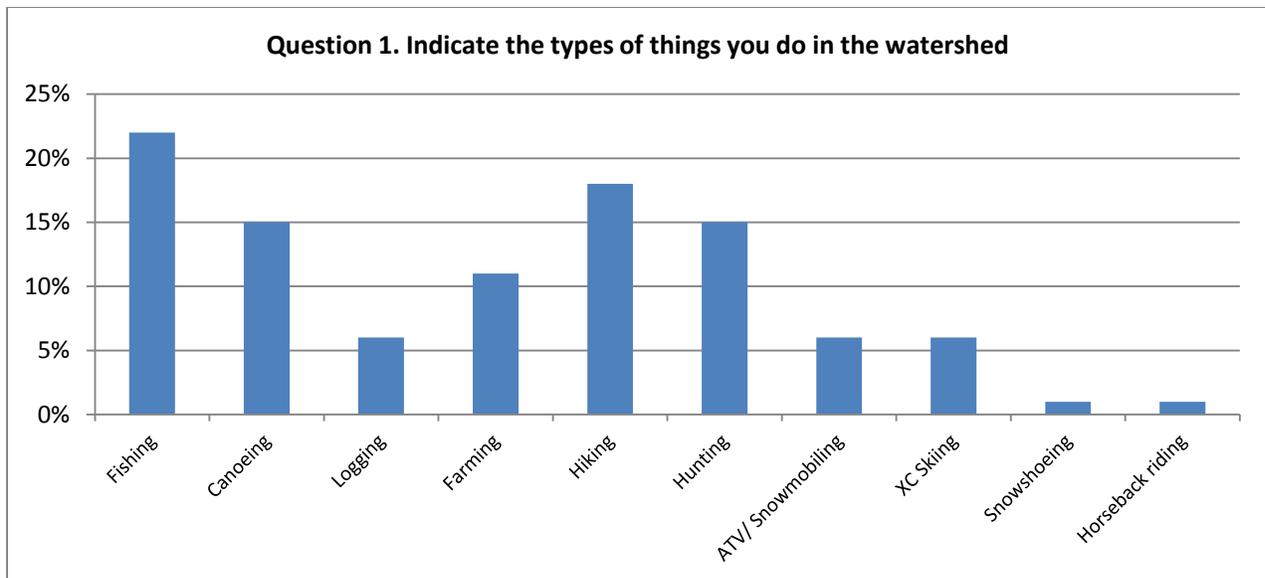
practice. More than half of the landowners that responded didn't think practices like stream crossings, improving logging roads, relocating roads off steep slopes and delaying a harvest for 3-5 years applied to them. Yet, those same practices were identified by slightly fewer landowners as ones they are willing to try. High levels of willingness to try some forest practices bode well for future efforts to get more landowners to implement forest management activities.

Some recommendations and actions to consider from the results of this survey:

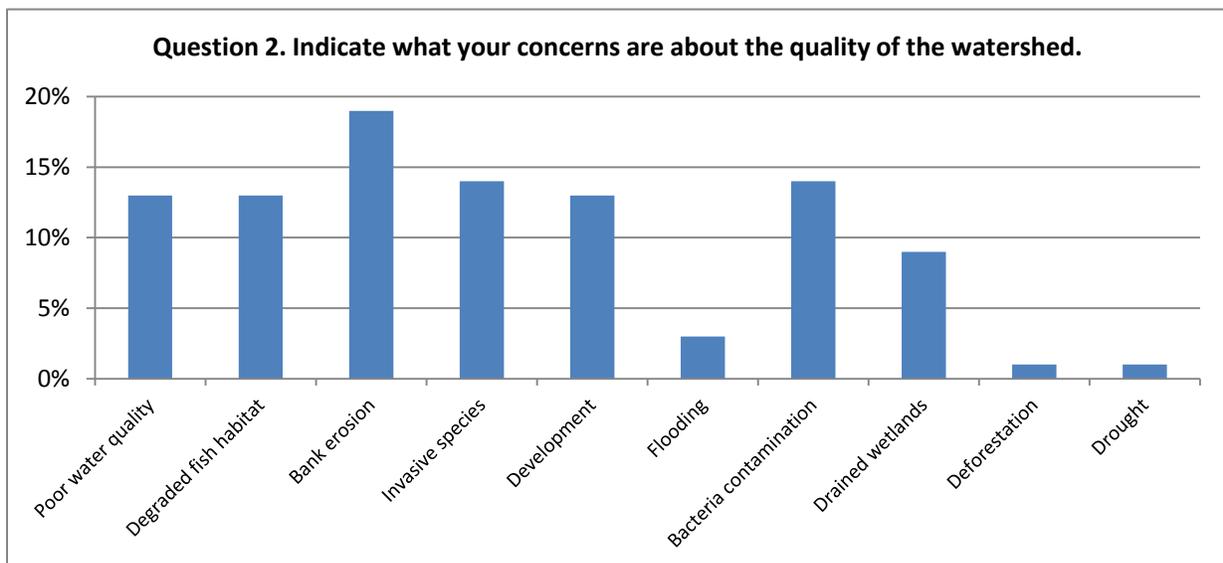
- Increase public outreach and education on water quality threats to fish and activities that can maintain good water quality and healthy fish. Use fish and fishing as a way to educate about water quality since that is one of the most important aspects of living here related to water.
- Establishing a drinking water testing program to help residents learn more about their drinking water and get information if there is a problem
- Establish ways to express sense of stewardship among landowners in the watershed. Landowners need to know that not only they, but their neighbors also care strongly about water resources.
- Establish a "learn from your neighbor" program and provide examples of landowners "doing their part" to protect water through forest activities, agricultural activities, etc.
- Consider how to raise awareness about runoff and its effects on lakes and streams. Determine how to describe pollutants that are not as visible as litter and trash.
- Help landowners calculate the costs of planning and forest management activities, such as developing a cost spec sheet or an online calculator that could be personalized for size of property and types of management activities.
- Establish alternatives to government programs that would work for a larger number of landowners.
- Promote easy-to-do forest management activities that are less resource intensive and don't require a lot of time, equipment and labor.
- Work more closely with county conservation departments and US Forest Service to design and deliver woodland owner programs and information.
- Acknowledge that most watershed citizens that own their land enjoy the natural beauty. Look for ways to validate that and connect with stewardship activities to the enhancement of the natural beauty and health of the woodland and water.

Marengo River Watershed Action Plan Landowner Survey (2010)

BRWA developed a simple questionnaire to learn more from Marengo River Watershed landowners how they use the watershed and what their concerns might be for watershed health. The questionnaire was mailed to 1,100 Marengo River Watershed landowners in the Spring 2010 issue of the Marengo Riffles, a newsletter developed to inform the public about the MRWP Project. The questionnaire was also made available on BRWA's website to respond online, and was made available at events that BRWA attended to promote the MRWP project. We received 18 responses to the questionnaire (n=13 mail or event responses, n= 5 online responses).



Fishing was the most common response for what people do in the watershed (22%), followed by hiking (18%) and hunting (15%) and canoeing (15%).



Bank erosion (19%) was the most common concern about water quality in the Marengo River Watershed. Other important concerns were invasive species (14%) and bacteria contamination (14%), as well as degraded fish habitat (13%), development (13%), and poor water quality (13%). Drained wetlands were also of concern (8%), and some indicated flooding, deforestation, and drought.

When asked about hopes for the watershed into the future, responses were consistent with other area community surveys, and input we have received to date for developing the vision statement for the Watershed Action Plan. Themes emerged of maintaining rural character, keeping the watershed natural and wild, preserving scenic qualities, limited and careful development, and preserving or improving water quality.

Respondents were also asked to submit ideas for projects that would protect the health of the watershed. Most responses were general and did not indicate real specifics or project locations in the watershed. However, suggestions indicate support for projects such as:

- Educational opportunities or programs for farmers to help reduce chemical use on farms; also conservation programs for farmers to help keep cattle out of creeks or improve manure management
- Working with local government and agencies for stronger enforcement of ordinances, rules and regulations
- Improved help for landowners to protect stream banks and control erosion
- Invasive species control or eradication
- Nonpoint source pollution control
- Drinking water testing

An additional comment was the importance of partnering with the US Forest Service, particularly in relation to issues in the headwaters of the watershed, of which the majority is a portion of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.