

Walworth County Lake Landowner Survey 2005 Results Summary

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Background

Since January 2001, the Walworth County Lakes Protection Program has successfully implemented a lake protection education program for lake residents, lake organizations and other interested parties throughout the County. During the past four years, the major focus of the Lakes Program has been the education of lake residents about methods and best management practices to protect and preserve water quality, wildlife habitat and natural scenic beauty of our lakes. We believe that this project has been extremely successful and lake residents have shown a genuine interest in protecting and improving the lakes in Walworth County.



However, Walworth County Land Use and Resource Management Department recognizes that the success of the Lakeshore Protection Project depends upon continued productive interactions and cooperation with you, the citizens who are most impacted by the Lakes program. By providing the technical resources, the County empowers lake residents to help ensure that future generations may enjoy Walworth County lakes. Through this survey, the Lakes Program can be more finely tuned and further improved to address the specific needs highlighted by responses received.

Summary of Survey Results

The first several questions in the survey were designed to assess the residency characteristics of lake residents. Knowing a little about respondents will help in understanding their perspective on lake questions.

Who Responded?

On average, residents who responded have owned lake property for 22.6 years. Part-time residents have owned property just over two years longer than permanent residents, perhaps revealing some bias toward inherited land. Some who responded have only owned lake property for six months, while others have had land in the

family for a century. All surveys tallied represented over 18,200 person-years of lake property ownership experience. While some landowners responding live on their property year-round, the majority of owners responding are part time residents. A county-wide average of lake landowner residency is summarized in Chart 1.

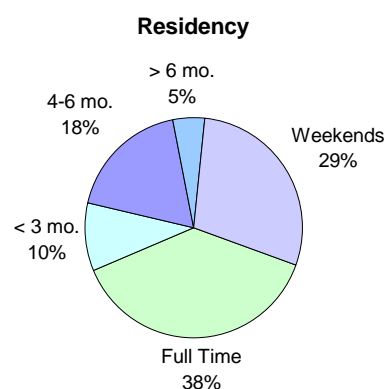


Chart 1 - Of all lake landowners, 62 percent are part-time residents. Almost 41% of part-time residents are considering full-time occupation.

A majority (71.7%) of all responding owners live on the lake. This majority represents the core group of owners who will have the greatest influence on lake quality in the coming years and decades.

The reasons for owning lake property are varied. Most people had several reasons for owning property, some being as simple as keeping the land in the family and carrying on their traditions. Chart 2 summarizes landowners' interests.

Primary Reasons For Ownership

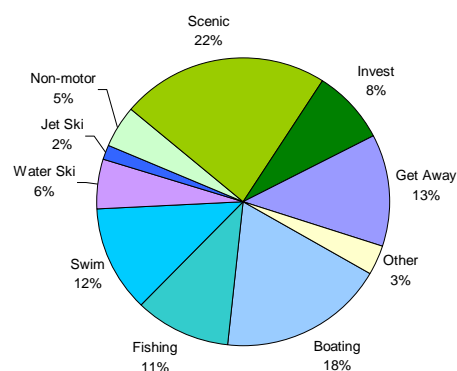


Chart 2 - Appreciation of scenic beauty topped the list of varied interests attracting landowners to the lake, highlighting the need for improved and sustained lake protection efforts.

Residents reported on lake protection groups associated with their lakes. By responding to the survey at all, respondents most likely represent the most concerned and involved of all lake residents. The following groups likely represent the most familiar resource to lake landowners in regards to information and education. Interestingly, part-time residents indicated nearly twice the involvement in Land Conservancy groups as full-time residents. Average, countywide lake groups exist as follows in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Lake Group Existence		Lake Group Membership	
Lake Association	33.3%	Lake Association	31.2%
Lake District	12.1%	Lake District	12.2%
Lake Improve/Protect	14.1%	Lake Improve/Protect	14.8%
Land Conservancy	10.0%	Land Conservancy	10.0%
Sanitary District	8.5%	Sanitary District	5.5%
Property/Homeowner Assoc.	20.6%	Property/Homeowner Assoc.	23.8%
Other	1.5%	Other	2.5%

What Do They Know?

In answering this survey most respondents showed indications that they did have some knowledge about lake issues. There was some general agreement for example on the most urgent countywide lake issues as a whole. Of course, each lake is quite unique in its own chemistry, biology, history and character. Individuals have been attracted to Walworth County lakes for the varieties of reasons previously listed in Chart 2. Varied, as these uses are all require that lake quality and beauty is preserved.

Full-time and part-time residents alike expressed similar sentiments in some of the tabular questions where survey respondents ranked various lake issues. Differing responses did reveal some subtleties that would indicate that knowledge on many issues was derived perhaps from direct observations and life experience.

Is Education Effective for Water Quality Protection ?

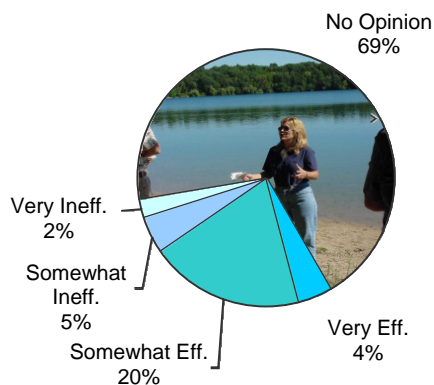


Chart 3 – The lack of opinion would seem to correlate with not having received any education to form an opinion.

The fact that over two-thirds (69%) of respondents had no opinion about the effectiveness of education indicates that the information has not reached them. Education has been reaching more full-time residents as 66.4% had no opinion, while 70.4% of part-timers indicated similarly. Believing education to be somewhat effective were 18.5% of part-time residents and 22.0% of full-time residents.

While most (60%) full-time residents claimed to be aware of zoning regulations, many respondents admitted they were not. Significantly less than half (46.5%) of part-time residents indicated that they had some familiarity with zoning regulations. It is interesting landowners are not very familiar with rules that are directly governing them. Furthermore, while almost a third of full-time residents believed shoreland regulations to be somewhat effective, over 43% had no opinion in the matter. Similarly, just over 27% of part-time residents felt that regulations were somewhat effective and a majority (57.2%) had no opinion on their effectiveness. Many lake problems can stem from violations of zoning or land disturbance regulations.

In an interesting pattern, neither residency group nor lake landowners as a whole indicated that they had an opinion nor felt it was important to enforce or strengthen zoning or land disturbance rules. Having an increased familiarity of the rules and perhaps greater observation of violations, a higher proportion of full-time residents did feel some increased enforcement of existing regulations is warranted. The photo series in Figure 1 reveals what can happen when violations occur.



Figure 1 – In violation of erosion control regulations, measures to reduce or prevent erosion have not been installed on this new construction site. On the far right lake water is clouded by sediment that cascaded directly down the landowner's stairway.

While runoff events like those above are hopefully rare and isolated, violations like these do occur and can be significantly detrimental to lake quality. Violations like these are also perhaps the most easily changed. By simply following regulations and using proper site preparation and protection measures, sedimentation such as this would be eliminated or at least greatly reduced. Hopefully confirming the isolated nature of these events, residential and construction erosion ranked 9th and 10th most important as strong contributors to lake water quality problems. Viewed from above, however, events similar to these do not appear to qualify as “insignificant” and may be a more important contributor than many people realize.



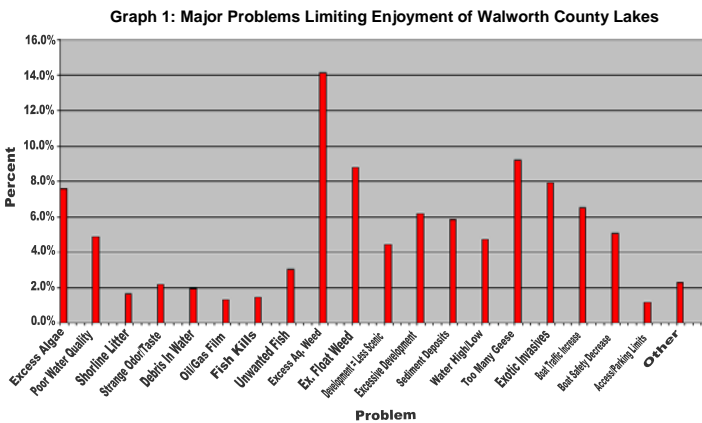
It is important to note that runoff does not only carry sediment, but also most every other contaminant of concern. As full-time residents are around for more weather events than part-time residents are able to observe, stormwater runoff and shoreline

erosion did raise their concern as more important contributors than occasional residents indicated.

While contractors and landscapers should be the most aware and able to prevent major runoff events as depicted above, landowners should be aware of what they can do. Most landowners do not know, however, the resources available to them. In fact, 73.9% of part-time residents and 64.6% of full-time residents indicated that they were not aware of the technical assistance or educational opportunities available through Walworth County. Some landowners do know these opportunities exist, but not very many. Only 8.0% and 15.3% of part- and full-time residents respectively have taken advantage of this resource. About two-thirds of respondents said they would like to utilize this opportunity.

What Issues are Important?

Respondents were asked to rank the severity of lake problems that limit enjoyment of their lake. Note the list of top ten issues that emerged as the major issues county-wide affecting enjoyment, selected from Graph 1 below: excessive aquatic weeds; too many geese; excessive floating weeds; exotic invasives; excess algae; increased boat traffic; excessive development; sediment deposits; decreased boat safety and poor water quality.



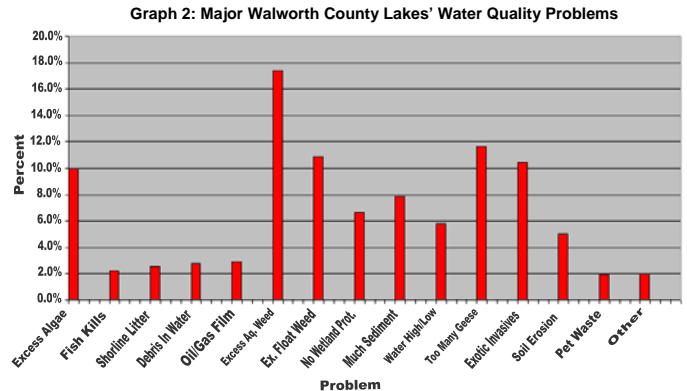
There was general correlation between part- and full-time residents with some of the differences once again likely related to experience and exposure to different observations. From the advantageous perspective of more constant observation, sedimentation, goose populations, exotic invasives, increased traffic and reduced safety of boats raised more concern of full-time residents. Full-time residents, during their average two decades of ownership, have also indicated that poor water quality and development's detrimental impact on natural scenery concern them.

Excess development ranked as the 7th most significant problem. This is no surprise as lake landowners regard scenic beauty as the most important feature attracting them to the lakes. However, simply following zoning and erosion control ordinances alone could reduce some of the visual and quantitative impacts. Coupled with adherence to the tree-cutting ordinance and installation of various

best management practices, thoughtful development can have a reduced impact.

What Problems Exist?

Lake landowners were similarly asked to respond to perceived water quality on their lakes.



Top ten water quality issues were indicated as: excessive aquatic weeds; too many geese; excessive floating weeds; exotic invasives; excess algae; sediment deposits; lack of wetland protection; lake level issues; soil erosion and an oil or gas film. There was once again good general agreement between respondents of differing residential patterns. Surfacing as more significant issues to full-time residents were sediment, goose populations, exotic invasives, and most significantly, soil erosion. Other differences arose either because full-time residents are accustomed to their lake or part-time residents have broader experience with more natural lakes. Part-time residents ranked excess floating weeds, excess algae and lack of wetland protection higher than permanent residents. In all cases, the visible end results of water quality problems were more highly ranked than their causes. This indicates that education would perhaps help in beginning to remedy some of the water quality problems. A major issue that many can agree on is the importation of exotic invasives. Many of these species are not only very prolific and endanger our specific lakes' native species but threaten the whole lake ecosystem with unknown long-term ramifications throughout the food web.



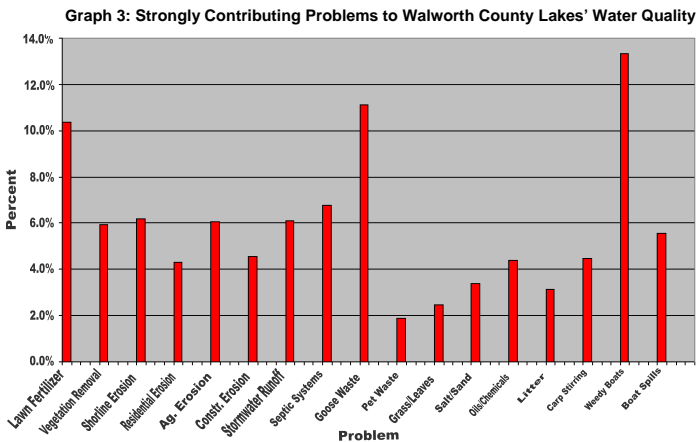
Figure 2 – Conscientious boaters and fishermen are our lakes best defense against exotic invasive species. Concerned lake residents can also organize monitoring of boat launches for responsible behavior.

Landowners should take care to recognize that not all plant growth is detrimental; in fact many native plants serve important habitat functions. Native shoreline vegetation can also soften the effects of the elements on the shoreline as well as the visual and land use impacts of development. Reduction of soil erosion and the volume of runoff will reduce the nutrient load to the lakes. Excess plant growth can be stemmed with these reductions. Planting native buffers can diminish many of these problems as well, by uptake of nutrients both in the water and before they reach the water. Buffers also will reduce the desirability of lakeshore to resident geese who prefer to browse on short tender lawn grasses.



How Extensive Are Problems?

There is once again agreement and differences between resident types when asked how much problems are detrimental to lake quality.



Weedy boats, goose waste and lawn fertilizers were clearly the most significant observed problems. Differences arose that can once again be tied to familiarity with the lake and direct observations and experiences. Full-time residents were able to recognize stormwater runoff, shoreline erosion and vegetation removal as more significant contributors than did part-time residents. Additionally, full-time residents realized that carp stirring sediments significantly contribute to increased turbidity, or cloudiness of the water. While all residents recognized the threat of contamination posed by failing septic systems part-time residents perceived the danger to be greater than full-time residents indicated in their answers. Conversely, perhaps because they may be boating more often, part-time residents considered boat spills to be a larger threat than their anchored counterparts.

How Can We Address Lake Concerns?

All lake landowners agree that a Lake Study and Management Plan or Aquatic Plant Survey are very important actions needed to address Walworth County lake concerns. These are important steps for Lake groups

and landowners to evaluate and document particular lake problems and identify long-term goals of the lake. Lake Management Plans should identify what needs to be done to sustain the various desired uses of the lake, so there need not be any sacrifices. Increased education was also highly ranked, showing a desire by residents to become well informed.

In lieu of a formal Lake Management Plan or in the interim, while one is compiled, individual landowners can take steps to improve their lake. In the long-term, individuals who are more educated about the facts of the problem will accept more accountability because they will understand methods of prevention and remediation. Long-term progress toward improvement or sustainability will also require increased education because individual landowner actions will cumulatively be the main source of improvement or degradation of our lake quality.

Best Management Practices Promoted

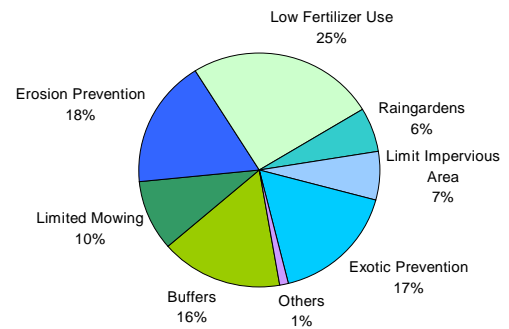


Chart 4 – While general awareness of BMP's is good, employing strategies to reduce runoff volumes such as planting rain gardens, limiting impervious areas and limited mowing can serve to reduce nutrient loading and consequential plant growth more than limiting fertilizers alone.

Enforcement of current regulations would offer some relief of lake contaminants. Clear-cut development with manicured lawns down to the water offer high nutrient load potential. The implementation of best management practices can reduce these impacts. Practices to reduce runoff volumes should be emphasized, as they will complement other efforts. Many visible best management practices utilize native species, functionally enhancing the scenic beauty coveted by lake landowners.

Continued education, particularly of part-time residents is vital to improved lake quality. Respondents revealed they may lack the most current information and two-thirds expressed the desire for technical assistance and continued education.

Want To Learn More?

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