

2019 Public Opinion Findings

**Purpose**

Lakes cannot be all things to all people all the time, so finding ways to build a community of lake users that respects and makes space for each others’ preferences is important work shared by each of us. Opinion surveys have long been used by the Lake District to help evaluate public perceptions and priorities about lake use, as well as attitudes about general resource conditions, problems, and possible management solutions. Prioritization allows for the allocation of resources so that the benefits of management intervention out-weigh costs, the results are measurable, and the work is supported by the public. Surveys also facilitate public involvement and can help educate residents and users about the lake ecosystem. It is believed that a greater understanding and awareness of Lake Ripley and its problems will generally lead to increased cooperation and a greater likelihood of program success.

**Survey Style and Response Rate**

The 2019 survey questions and format were subject to review by social scientists at the WDNR to assure clarity, comprehension and lack of bias in the questions, before being mailed. This is a new requirement for grant-funded work that had not existed in prior surveying done by the District. The survey was sent to approximately 1200 households in October of 2019. 277 surveys were completed and returned to the District by year end for a response rate of 23%. This rate of return was identical to the 2007 survey and in line with all previous surveys. Some surveys represented views of residences that have up to 59 shared owners. The average household ownership/usage was listed as 4.6, indicating that responses may represent a higher number of viewpoints than 277.

These surveys were disseminated to area property owners to gauge general attitudes on a wide range of lake topics. Respondents were asked to share their opinions regarding the condition of Lake Ripley, the effectiveness of current management policies and programs, and what actions were believed to be needed to improve overall lake health

Demographics

Most respondents reported living within one-quarter mile of the lake, with 28.8% of survey respondents owning lakefront property and an additional 33.7% having property-deeded lake access. Of all residential homeowners, 68% identified themselves as full-time residents and 27% as part-time residents. Full-time residence has increased by 11% since the most recently-completed earlier 2007 survey. Reporting of part-time homeownership in the District fell 16% from 43% in ’07. Almost 3% of the respondents to the 2019 identified themselves as owning agricultural land in the watershed, similar to the 2.6% that identified as such in 2007. How many years had passed since respondents first visited Lake Ripley varied from as much as 82 years to as little as under 1 year ago, with the average time being 34.37 years ago. The above demographics patterns appear to be consistent with those identified in earlier surveys.

Survey-Identified Quality of Life Issues

These lake features were identified as contributing the most to respondents’ quality of life:

**Safe water quality** – a whopping 85% of people said this was “very important,” and less than 1% said it was “not important.” If you added those that said it was of “some importance” safe water quality was considered important by 93% of respondents.

When asked about change to water quality since their first visit to the lake, responses were across the board. Approximately a quarter felt water quality is improving (24.3%), remaining the same (23.9%), was degrading (20.7%) or were unsure (22.1%). Most people based that determination on water clarity and algae.

**A healthy aquatic plant community** was rated second with 67% marking that as “very important” and less than 3% saying it was “not important”. Adding those that thought a healthy aquatic plant community was of “some importance” brought the number of those thinking it was important to 89%.

Lake plants are perceived as “good” or “too scarce” by approximately 24% of respondents, but too many by 53%. The above perceptions are consistent with those documented in previous surveys.

**Rule enforcement, and Slow-no-wake policies**, came in tied at approx. 57% as the next items respondents agreed were “very important.” If you added those that said these were of “some importance” those numbers jump to 92% for enforcement, and 81% for slow-no-wake. Less than 3% of the people rated rule enforcement as “not important” but that number jumped to nearly 10% when it came to slow-no-wake.

**The presence of safety buoys** was considered of “some” or “very much importance” for 85% of respondents, with only 7% saying they were “not important.”

**When asked about how quality of life is affected by living on or owning property on or near Lake Ripley, 75% said it was positively affected, 16.5% said it had a neutral affect, and 2.2% were feeling negative about it. The rest were unsure or didn’t answer**.

**2019 Concerns that Rose to the Top of the list**

**Invasive Lake Weeds** were pointed to as limiting enjoyment of the lake at a level of “somewhat” or “a great deal” by 51% of respondents. In a related question **Invasive Species** were again identified as being of “big time concern” for 66% of respondents. If one added the response of “some concern” the number rose to 90%.

**Loss of Bird/Fish Habitat** was a “big time concern” by 64% of respondents. If one added “some concern” the number rose to 90%.

**Overuse of Lawn Fertilizers/Pesticides** and **Overuse of Agricultural Fertilizers/Pesticides** ranked as nearly identical high concerns for people at 87% and 86% as either “big time concern” added with “some concern”.

The next most offending features of our lake was **Algae** with 43% saying that it limits the enjoyment of the lake “somewhat” or “a great deal.”

**Canada Geese** were also limiting the enjoyment of the lake “somewhat” or “a great deal” for 33% of the respondents.

**Boat crowding** was “somewhat” or “a great deal” of concern for 32% of respondents.

**Native Lake Plants** limited the enjoyment of lake users “somewhat” or “a great deal” for 29% of respondents. It cannot be determined if many of the same people who were bothered by invasive lake weeds were also those that could not warm to native lake plants, but it seems likely.

The choices that did **not** seem to be as much of a concern included:

Litter, lake rules, quality of the fishing, conflicts with other users, carp, access to the lake, water levels, lake level fluctuation, climate change, and noise. The number of people saying that conflicts with other users, pier-related issues, and noise were all near 2% as limiting enjoyment “a great deal”, which could mean that if you checked one, you were likely to check the others.

The top concerns from the 2007 survey were invasive species, polluted run-off, development and over-crowding on the lake. The top concerns from the 2005 survey were invasive species, development pressures, misuse of lawn chemicals. The top concerns from the 1999 survey were motorboat and jet ski crowding, fertilizer and pesticide use, and polluted runoff.

**Top Four Activities that were enjoyed by the largest number of respondents in 2019.**

(Those saying it was “of some importance” or “very important” for them)

1. Enjoying peaceful, tranquil moments
2. Observing wildlife
3. Slow boat rides
4. Walking/biking around the lake

These activities were listed as favorites in earlier surveys, along with swimming, fishing, and motorboat rides.

**Kids Likes and Dislikes**

The 2019 Public Opinion Survey was the first to seek the input of children 12 and under. We discovered that swimming is the most popular activity with 92% of respondents saying that they partake. Boating is not far behind at 89%, and fishing is also well-represented at 69%. Among animal catching and releasing, frogs ranked first in desirability, with 48 votes. Bird-watching beat out watching the sky and watching boats with votes of 37, 29 and 25 votes respectively. Of 75 respondents, 15 also indicated a love for drawing and writing about the lake. See their comments on last page.

**Facilities for People with Disabilities**

Another pair of new questions in the 2019 Survey asked for input about improving the public pier or other facilities to make them universally accessible. Respondents replied “Yes” at a rate of 31% that improvements are needed, “No” got 28%, and those not answering or “Unsure” equaled 50%. A follow-up question asked if a respondent or anyone in their household was limited in participating in lake activities due to a physical disability. 5.5% of respondents answered “Yes”, 90% answered “No,” and the remaining were “Unsure”. To see the types of disabilities see comments at end of this document. Note: The Town of Oakland owns both the Public Launch and the Public Pier; therefore this information will be shared with them.

**Types of Boats Respondents Own**

When asked about types of boats people owned in 2019, the category that was owned by the largest number of respondents was kayak/canoe/SUP, with 44%. Pontoons were the next most listed at 35%. Motorboats that can exceed 25 mph were the next (34%). About 14% of respondents listed owning no boat.

Note: Interestingly, kayaks and paddleboards were not even options to be checked in any of the earlier surveys. However there is some evidence that the use of people-powered boats is on the uptick. Jetboats were not options on earlier surveys, but their numbers were reported at 1% in the 2019 survey.

**Anglers’ Input**

What people fish for in the lake today has not changed much from their choices in previous surveys:

Thirty years ago, 1999, the most desired fish to catch was a largemouth bass, with walleye and bluegill/sunfish following.

In 2005 the order changed to largemouth bass, bluegill/sunfish and then walleye.

In 2019, respondents said they fished for bluegill/sunfish, largemouth bass, and walleye.

Since 2017 the Lake has been part of The Wisconsin Walleye Initiative, stocking large-fingerling walleye in the lake annually, and to evaluate their success of growing to maturity and self-perpetuating. So far, it appears that we are not supporting a reproducing population of walleye successfully.

**How did anglers feel about the lake’s fishing?**

In 2019 less than 2% called it excellent, but nearly 46% said it was good or fair. 5% called it “poor” or “very poor.”

Thirty years earlier, 0% called it excellent, nearly 41% called it good or fair, and 12.7% called it poor.

**How Informed Do Respondents Feel about Issues?**

2019 – 32% feel well-informed, 60% feel somewhat informed, 5% not at all informed

2007 – On a scale of 1 – 6, with six being well informed and 1 being not at all informed, the average response was 4.5

2005 – 90% felt “reasonably informed” and 10% felt they were “not reasonably informed.”

1999 – 45% felt “reasonably informed” and 39% felt they were “not reasonably informed.”

**How do respondents get information about the Lake Ripley?**

2019 – First source for information – Ripples Newsletter, second – friends & family, third – Cambridge Newspaper

2007 – First source for information – Ripples, second – Cambridge TV, third – attending meetings

2005 – First source for information – Ripples, second – Cambridge News, third – friends & family

1999 – First source for information – Newsletters (note: Ripples began in XXXX), second – special mailers, third – local newspaper articles

Note: website and social media, that ranked 4th and 5th in 2019, did not appear as options in any of the earlier surveys.

**Support for District Efforts 2019**

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| --- |
| How do you feel about the following Lake Ripley Management District efforts? |
| Scale | A. Landowner cost sharing for eligible projects | B.Landowner project design help | C. Mechanical weed harvesting | D. Water quality monitoring | E. Control of invasive species | F. Maintaining lake dist. Preserve |
| Oppose | 6.2 | 4.3 | 1.1 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 2.9 |
| Neutral | 17.4 | 18.8 | 4.7 | 4.0 | 2.9 | 9.1 |
| Support | 54.7 | 56.5 | 81.9 | 85.5 | 87.0 | 74.6 |
| Unsure | 14.1 | 12.3 | 5.4 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 5.8 |
| No Answer | 7.6 | 8.0 | 6.9 | 6.2 | 5.8 | 7.6 |
| How do you feel about the following efforts? |
| Scale | G. Clean boats/water edu. | H. Pursuing funding/grants | I. Acquisition of conservancy areas | J. Lake research to diagnose problems | K. Lobbying for lake-protection policies | L. Holding public meetings |
| Oppose | 0.0 | 1.1 | 6.9 | 1.1 | 4.3 | 0.4 |
| Neutral | 6.2 | 4.7 | 12.3 | 6.5 | 14.1 | 12.3 |
| Support | 81.9 | 82.6 | 65.6 | 79.3 | 67.4 | 73.2 |
| Unsure | 4.7 | 4.7 | 8.7 | 5.1 | 7.2 | 6.9 |
| No Answer | 7.2 | 6.9 | 6.5 | 8.0 | 6.9 | 7.2 |

Note: There was strong support for the various Lake District efforts employed to protect and improve Lake Ripley. Controlling invasive species enjoyed 87% support. Water quality monitoring enjoyed 85.5% support. Pursuing grants had the support of 82.6% of respondents, while the Clean Boats, Clean Waters educational campaign and Mechanical weed harvesting each enjoyed 81.9% support. Opposition to any single program never reached above 6.9%.

A special question was asked to gauge homeowner awareness of the District’s 50% cost share and technical assistance program for projects that benefit Lake Ripley (rain barrels, shoreline restoration, native plantings, etc.) Approximately 40% of respondents answered “Yes” they were aware, 44% answered “No” and 16% “Maybe.”

**Budget and Donation Responses**

Three questions of the 2019 survey were about District funding and donations. These were not asked in earlier surveys. When asked how they felt about the portion of the tax bill that finances the protection and management of Lake Ripley ($0.55 per $1,000 of assessed value) responses were as follows:

6.2%: Insufficient

58.3%: Fair

10.5%: Excessive

13.4%: Unsure

5.1%: Property Not in Lake District

6.5%: No Answer

The next question asked how much additional property taxes would they consider paying to be exclusively used to purchase and maintain property considered important to improving the water quality of Lake Ripley. Responses broke down in this manner:

24.6%: $0

9.8%: $10

11.6%: $25

13.8%: $50

2.9%: $75

14.1 $100

10.5%: $100

12.7%: No Answer

Finally: How likely is it in the next few years that they will make a tax-deductible donation for improving and maintaining Lake Ripley?

19.2%: Not At All Likely

14.5%: Not Too Likely

36.2%: Unsure, Need More Information

13.0%: Fairly Likely

11.2%: Very Likely

5.8%: No Answer

**Kids Under 12 - Comments**

“I like going fast in the boat.” – age 6

“The scenery and how peaceful it is.”

“I like living next to the lake because I get to go swimming a lot with my family and friends.”

“I like playing with my friends in the sandy corner.”

“I like jumping off the raft and fishing.”

“The lake is perfect to be on. The water is clean and blue. The water is not too deep, and me and my family love going out there!”

“We love Lake Ripley for the waterskiing and spending time on the water.”

“Swimming in clear water at Shore Place where I can touch and collecting shells.”

“Going tubing, swimming with friends, hanging out, we like to use the paddleboat, hanging out on the boat.”

“Being near or on the water. Really enjoy how quiet the lake is during the week, especially with boating. Gets a little crowded on a nice weekend, and especially on a holiday, but usually during the week the boat traffic is pretty light. Great for tubing, kneeboarding, and just cruising around the lake.”

“I like swimming with friends and catching toads.”

**Disabilities as listed by respondents:**

I need special pier to get out of boat.

I need something to hold on to to get in and out of boat.

There is no wheelchair access

I have severe arthritis. I can’t walk very far & can’t stand for longer than 10 minutes.

We live on inlet – full of muck – dangerous. Can’t get up.

Wheelchair bound – ramp needed and restroom (accessiblity needs)

Difficult with the dock and getting on pontoon due to balance & gait problems.

Cannot get to the lake in walker or wheelchair – Grass difficult to use walker or chair in the park.

Everybody in a wheelchair struggles to use anything
The pier at the public launch could be 5 – 10’ longer?

Leg challenges

We give rides to friends especially elders who have difficulty with the steep steps down to the dock. We sometimes pick them up at the public dock. Handrails would be helpful.