**Final report for 2013 citizen aesthetics surveys**

In 2013, a UW-Green Bay student was hired to conduct short surveys of citizens using the same 11 sites that were evaluated by the dedicated volunteers. The survey (see Appendix ?) was only five questions long, and included some of the same questions on the long survey form, including the question regarding their overall aesthetic impression of the site. The purpose of the survey was to gather opinions from the broader public in order to provide additional input on the status of the impairment from the people who were actually using the resource.

The student utilized a tablet computer and a mobile hotspot during data collection. Rather than collect survey data on paper and then have to transfer responses into the Surface Water Integrated Monitoring System (SWIMS) database at a later time, it was decided to utilize the tablet and mobile hotspot to directly enter the responses into SWIMS as the respondent was engaged. This saved a step in the data collection process and left more time for the student to collect survey data. The student also carried paper copies of the survey form as a back-up in case of trouble with the electronic system. Since SWIMS logs off if there is no activity for 15 minutes, he found that in some circumstances it was more convenient to use the paper forms and enter the data into SWIMS at a later time. He also carried a laminated copy of the survey so the citizens could follow along as he asked them the survey questions.

The student visited the eleven survey sites on his own schedule, starting in June. He set up a rotating weekly schedule (3 or 4 sites each week) to visit all of the locations on a regular basis. Initially, he visited each one for an equal length of time, but he learned that the number of people using the sites differed quite a bit. Rather than waste his time at a site that was rarely visited, he opted to gather more surveys by waiting for about ten minutes at a site and then, if there was nobody to interview, moving on to another site. If he knew a big event was going on he made sure to go to the park nearest to the event if possible (e.g., De Pere Days in Voyageur Park, Tall Ship Festival at Metro Boat launch). After his initial visit to the Bay Beach site, he decided not to collect surveys there due to the difficulty in getting to the water. (Visitors do not currently use the shoreline because of the invasive Phragmites.)

Although we set an initial goal of 450 surveys, the actual total was much less, at 117 (see table below). One reason for this is that the student spent only 70 hours surveying out of the budgeted 200. This was partly due to his availability (he set his own hours) and partly due to the season being shorter than planned. The budget was set up with a sampling season of April through October, but he was not actually hired until late June, and he stopped surveying in early October, due to a sharp drop off in new (not already contacted) park/launch users after Labor Day.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Survey Location* | *Number of Surveys* |
| Wietor Wharf | 8 |
| Fox Point Launch | 16 |
| Leicht Park | 11 |
| Metro Boat Launch | 28 |
| Perkofski Boat Launch | 2 |
| Porlier Pier | 3 |
| Riverview Place Park | 3 |
| Voyageur Park | 28 |
| West Lazarre Avenue | 13 |
| Communiversity Park | 5 |

Numbers of visitors/users differed quite a bit between sites. Some sites—such as Voyageur Park and the Metro Boat Launch—were relatively popular, while others—such as Riverview Place Park—were not visited much. The student did not actually encounter anyone using Riverview Place Park while he was there, so the three surveys for that site were ones that he filled out himself. Also, at some sites—such as Bay Beach, West Lazarre Avenue, and Porlier Pier—there were often people in the area, but not necessarily down near the water. So, if he approached them for surveys, he made it clear that the survey questions were focused on the water and shoreline.

Survey results showed that the citizens surveyed found almost all of the sites to be aesthetically pleasing. For the overall aesthetic impression rating (Question #2), all respondents answered “very pleasing” or “somewhat pleasing,” except for one “very displeasing” rating at Voyageur Park and “very displeasing” ratings for all three of the surveys at Riverview Place Park. As noted above, the surveyor did not encounter anyone else at the Riverview Place site, so he filled out the surveys himself. Reasons noted for the “very displeasing” impression were trash on the shore and in the water, a muddy parking area, and a generally unkept appearance. The reason given for the “very displeasing” rating at Voyageur Park was dredging in the river, which is a temporary inconvenience and beneficial in the long-term (contaminated sediment cleanup). On the other hand, folks listed a variety of factors that made the sites pleasing to them, such as a nice view, easy access, good fishing, and well-maintained trails and facilities.

Responses to Question #3 about whether there were materials present in or on the water or on the shore producing color, odor, or unsightliness to the extent that they made the area unpleasant or blocked access to the water revealed a slightly different story. When asked this more specific question, some people replied “Yes” even though they had rated the site as “very pleasing” or “somewhat pleasing” overall. The “Yes” answers were still less common than the “No” answers, except for the Riverview Place Park and Perkofski Boat Launch sites. At both of these sites, all those surveyed answered “Yes” to this question. At Riverview Place Park the problem listed was trash along the shore and in the water. At Perkofski Boat Launch the problem was the green color of the water. Interestingly, 16 people answered “No” to the first part of this question but then answered the second part (“If yes, please describe.”) This was most likely due to the SWIMS question not lining up well with the actual survey question. It starts off with “List the other things that made the area unpleasant.” So, if the surveyor was reading the question from SWIMS, respondents might think they should answer it even if they said “No” for the first part. Including both “Yes” and “No” answers, green or brown water, garbage, and algae were the most common answers given for the second part of this question. Other responses listed on more than one survey were poor water clarity, bird droppings, and noise.

The majority of respondents said for Question #4 referring to change in overall appearance over time that they had not noticed a change. A couple of sites were notable for the number of people who had noticed an improvement. At Voyageur Park, 9 people out of a total of 28 surveyed said that they had noticed an improvement over time, while 14 said they had not noticed a change and 5 did not know. The most common reason given for the improvement was a decrease in garbage or trash in the area. At Metro Boat Launch, 6 people out of a total of 28 surveyed said that they had noticed an improvement over time, while 13 said they had not noticed a change, 1 noticed a change for the worse, and 8 did not know. The most common reason given for the improvement was an increase in water clarity. On the other hand, the one respondent that noticed the appearance getting worse over time noted a decrease in water clarity.

In summary, this was an initial trial in the use of short citizen surveys to gather input on the users’ impressions of 10 of the survey sites being studied by the volunteer monitoring program. Although the number of surveys was small, especially for a few of the less-visited sites, the results do provide some insight about the users of the sites and their opinions on what makes each site more or less pleasing to them. In general, the citizens surveyed rated the sites as more pleasing than the volunteer monitors did, which makes some sense since these were folks using the sites for their own recreation and enjoyment, and would likely not visit sites that they did not find pleasing (at least more than once). This is probably a reason why the surveyor did not find anyone at the Riverview Place Park site.

The main advantage of this survey method is that the survey is short and relatively simple to administer, so it allows us to gather opinions from more people. Like the volunteer monitoring program, it also helps focus people’s attention on our local AOC waterways, asking them to think about what they like and dislike, and what they would like to see changed. The people being surveyed are those actually using the site, rather than trained observers who might otherwise never visit the site. This might be seen as either an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on whether one’s focus is the current users of the sites (“average citizens”) or trained volunteers who evaluate the sites by standard criteria. In both cases, the subject matter is subjective and two people can have very different evaluations of the same site on the same date. This is why it is so important to get a variety of opinions, and why we feel that a survey of this sort should be repeated to provide data supplemental to that being collected by the dedicated volunteers. Perhaps in 2015, another surveyor should be hired to visit the same sites, starting earlier in the season and gathering more surveys. There should be a focus on asking the questions in the same order and using the same words as the original paper survey, in case quoting the SWIMS questions caused some confusion in the 2013 surveys. Also, the surveyor should receive some guidance on how often and for how long he or she should visit the various sites, to make tracking and comparison of sites easier.