



REGIONAL  
DISTRICT  
OF NANAIMO

## FRESHWATER PERSPECTIVES PUBLIC BENCHMARK SURVEY RESULTS

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Board receive the Freshwater Perspectives Public Benchmark Survey results for information.
2. That the Board endorse the use of the findings for informing DWWP program implementation and support the reissuing of a similar survey in 4-5 years to gauge change and progress over time.
3. That the Board direct staff to present the survey findings particular to each municipality to the City of Nanaimo, the City of Parksville, the Town of Qualicum Beach and the District of Lantzville councils.

### BACKGROUND

The Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) Drinking Water and Watershed Protection (DWWP) program's 2020-2030 Action Plan includes a commitment to tracking performance through public opinion surveys. A professionally designed and delivered survey was issued to a random selection of RDN residents over the month of July 2021 to gauge public awareness of the DWWP program, as well as ascertain community priorities, key issues, and behaviour, related to freshwater in the region. This is intended to serve as a benchmark by which to evaluate progress of the RDN DWWP program at intervals throughout the next 10 years (e.g., another survey would take place in 2025 and 2030 to track changes in public opinion / perspectives / behaviours over time). The survey findings will help guide DWWP program implementation.

Between June 28 and August 2, 2021, there were 1,393 surveys completed using a mixed telephone / online methodology, delivered by market research company Ipsos on behalf of the RDN, for a total of 800 via telephone and 593 online. The aim was to capture a balanced mix of residents from Electoral Areas and municipalities.

#### Summary of Overall Findings

- All the evaluated freshwater issues are important to residents.
- Motivations for conserving water encompass a variety of environmental, social and financial factors.
- The most commonly cited water conservation behaviours are leak repair, sharing knowledge, and monitoring water usage.
- 70% of respondents have a lawn, and the most common water conservation behaviour cited is not using pesticides or herbicides; the least frequently cited action is using a rain sensor that shuts off the irrigation when it is raining or has recently rained.
- 87% of respondents have trees, shrubs and outdoor plants, and the most common water conservation behaviour cited is watering early in the morning to avoid losses to evaporation; the least frequently mentioned action is using drip irrigation.

- 57% of respondents have a vegetable garden, the most common water conservation behaviour is to place plants with similar water requirements together; the least frequently cited is mulching to increase water retention and using drip irrigation.
- Nearly half of those with outdoor landscapes cannot identify barriers to conserving more water outdoors. Of all barriers mentioned, 'caring for plants' tops the list.
- 16% of respondents have riparian areas on their property and the majority report that they do not dispose of yard waste along the streambank nor install seating, trails or bridges. A minority mention that they plant additional native species to expand the vegetated buffer zone along the stream.
- Most respondents are unaware of any rain gardens in their community; they don't have one of their own and don't know of any in their neighbourhood.
- 41% of residents are aware of the RDN's DWWP program and similarly 2 in 5 residents have participated in at least one of the mentioned DWWP activities.
- The most common types of participation are sharing regional water information with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours; accessing regional water reports and information online; and attending an event or workshop about local water issues.
- There are some misconceptions around where residents get their drinking water.
- At least one-third of residents are unsure what watershed they live in.
- One-third of residents say they don't know what the RDN can do to preserve and protect the local freshwater supply. The most commonly mentioned suggestion for what the RDN can do is more public education / awareness / advertising (12%), followed by manage growth and development (8%).

The results can also be summarized in more detail by Electoral Area and Municipality and/or by drinking water source. This analysis will help tailor DWWP program implementation to best suit the needs of and address the gaps present in the various communities. Generally, the findings point to some positive uptake of water conservation behaviours, some awareness and participation in RDN DWWP activities, and widespread care for freshwater issues. There is more work needed to be done to enhance public literacy on their drinking water source and home watersheds amongst residents, and there is room to improve uptake of certain water conservation behaviours already encouraged through RDN rebate programs such as drip irrigation and soil improvements. There is also opportunity to expand the prevalence and knowledge of rain gardens as well as increase riparian planting among streamside landowners.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This professionally designed and delivered, statistically significant survey was funded through the DWWP operating budget in 2021 for \$46,000 plus advertising.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT**

People and Partnerships - Improve the governance and awareness of RDN activities for citizens throughout the Region.

Environmental Stewardship - Protect and enhance the natural environment, including land, water and air, for future generations.

## **REVIEWED BY:**

M. Walters, Manager, Water Services  
 E. Tian, General Manager, Regional and Community Utilities  
 D. Holmes, Chief Administrative Officer

## **ATTACHMENT**

1. RDN Freshwater Perspectives Public Benchmark Survey Report