

Lake Butte des Morts Shoreland Owners Survey



December 2007

Summary

In early 2007, the University of Wisconsin-Extension, the Winnebago Lakes Council, and the Butte des Morts Conservation Club conducted a survey of lakeshore residents around Lake Butte des Morts. Approximately 70% of the 609 distributed surveys were completed and returned. Survey sponsors were interested in the perceptions of lake residents regarding lake related conservation practices and in particular how residents viewed low or no phosphorus fertilizer and buffers. Understanding residents' views of conservation practices was deemed critical for planning future outreach efforts that support improved water quality in the Lake Winnebago System.

Survey Development and Methodology

The Winnebago Lakes Council and Butte des Morts Conservation Club, both non-profit organizations dedicated to preserving and enhancing the Lake Winnebago System, collaborated to apply for and administer a DNR small scale lake planning grant.

The survey instrument was developed by the University of Wisconsin Extension with input and testing provided by the Winnebago Lakes Council. The Winnebago County Land & Water Conservation Department generated a list of property owners on Lake Butte des Morts. Surveys were distributed according to the following schedule: a pre-survey postcard was sent to all addresses followed a few days later by a survey packet containing the survey, a cover letter, and a stamped and addressed return envelope. A reminder postcard was sent to those that had not responded to the initial survey mailing. Finally, a second survey packet was sent to those that had not yet responded. All correspondence was signed by both the Winnebago Lakes Council president and the Butte des Morts Conservation Club president

Data were analyzed through the collaborative efforts of UW-Extension's Environmental Resources Center and a graduate student at UW-Oshkosh. Survey response were coded and entered into SPSS, a statistical analysis software program.

Survey Findings

Finding 1

A typical Lake Butte des Morts property has less than 100 feet of frontage, a low bank, and rock rip rap. The property has been owned for an average of 19 years and is the primary residence of its owner. Most owners purchased the property for the beauty of the location or because it was on the water. Pleasure boating, fishing, bird watching and swimming are the most popular activities.

Finding 2

Property owners definitely showed an affinity for lawns. Over 90% of respondents value how their lawn looks. The perception of neighbors is also important. Most owners (76%) care what their neighbors think of their lawn and believe their neighbors value a well maintained lawn (89%). Respondents also believe that a well maintained lawn to the shoreline creates an eye-appealing property (82%) and increases property value (88%).

Finding 3

Using professional lawn care services are relatively uncommon: Most mow their own lawns (83%), apply fertilizer (68%), and do weed control applications (66%). Between 10 and 15 percent always use professional lawn care services for those activities. Those with gross incomes greater than \$100,000 are more likely to hire a professional for their lawn care services.

Finding 4

Many property owners are unfamiliar with no- and low-phosphorus fertilizer. Over half don't know if it is too expensive (52%), if it is less effective than fertilizer with phosphorus (56%), or if it is readily available (66%). While the attributes of no- and low-phosphorus fertilizer are mostly unknown to property owners, 14% report already using it and 52% would consider switching to it.

Survey Findings, continued

Finding 5

Just over a third of property owners indicate that they have a buffer on their shoreline (36%). Of those, 69% report that the buffer covers “all” or “most” of their waterfront length. The average buffer width is less than 15 feet for a majority of residents (72%). Many of those with buffers cite impact on water quality (61%), improved fish or wildlife habitat (56%), and improved property appearance (50%) as reasons for installation.

Finding 6

Perceptions about buffers are mixed. About 36% strongly agreed that buffers protect water quality. Other statements having at least half of respondents marking either strong agreement or somewhat agreement include: buffers may reduce property values (52%), buffers are messy and look unkempt (56%), buffers make lake access difficult (62%), and buffers obstruct lake views (65%). In contrast, a majority of respondents disagreed with these statements: I know where to go for technical assistance (54%), installing a buffer is too expensive (53%), and maintaining a buffer is too expensive (62%).

Finding 7

When given a list of potential pollution sources and asked to indicate the level that each contributes to Lake Butte des Morts, agricultural fertilizers and pesticides (56%) and manure from farm animals (51%) were ranked as the highest contributors. Those perceived to be low pollution sources include pet waste, disposal of used motor oil and antifreeze, grass clippings and leaves, and improper disposal of household hazardous waste.

Finding 8

Survey respondents were asked to comment on changes to some indicators of water quality in Lake Butte des Morts. Results indicate a lack of consensus on how these indicators are changing.

	Increasing	Decreasing	About the Same	Not Sure
<i>Amount of algae</i>	33%	26%	34%	8%
<i>Water clarity</i>	52%	20%	23%	6%
<i>Amount of aquatic plants</i>	45%	14%	26%	15%
<i>Quality of fishing</i>	15%	24%	34%	27%

Acknowledgements

The survey design team included Chad Cook, UW-Extension Basin Educator for the Upper Fox and Wolf River Basins; Catherine Neiswender, UW-Extension Community Resource Development Educator for Winnebago County; Jake Blasczyk, UW-Extension Evaluation Specialist; and Nicole Dekeuster, Winnebago Lakes Council and UW-Oshkosh.

Survey data analysis was completed by Jake Blasczyk, Tom Murray, and Sue Vang, from UW-Extension’s Environmental Resources Center, and Nicole Dekeuster.

More information

A more comprehensive report with more in-depth analysis is available upon request and at the following web addresses:

<http://www.winnebagolakes.org>

<http://basineducation.uwex.edu/foxwolf>

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