



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Pacific Northwest

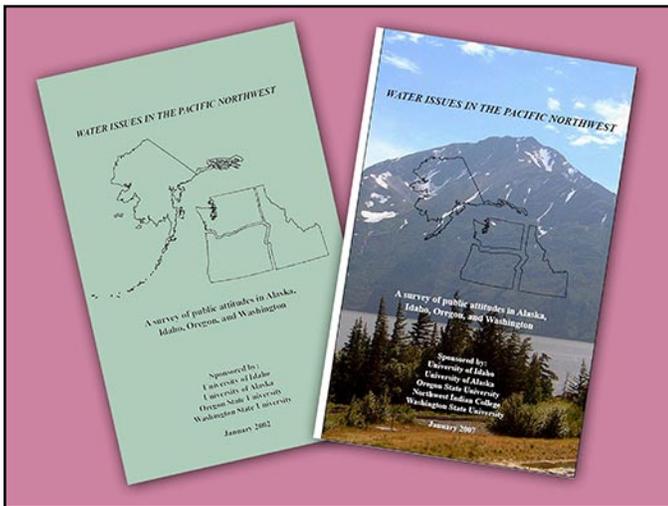
Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA CSREES
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

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PNWATER 100

Our 100th Update:

Using Surveys to Measure Public Attitudes and Actions Taken to Enhance Our Water Resources



The land grant institutions in the Pacific Northwest (Northwest Indian College, Oregon State University, University of Alaska, University of Idaho, Washington State University) mailed a water issues survey to 2,300 randomly selected residents of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington this month. The purpose of this survey is to measure change in attitudes and actions taken toward water resource issues in the region over the last five years. This is a follow-up to a similar survey conducted in the region exactly five years ago in 2002.

The 2002 water issues survey achieved a return rate of 52.3 percent. Over 32 percent of survey respondents lived in communities of more than 100,000 people. Conversely, 18 percent of respondents lived in towns with less than 7,000 people. Thirty-five percent of respondents had

lived in the Pacific Northwest all of their lives. Ninety-one percent of survey respondents were high school graduates. Overall, the demographics of the survey respondents closely reflected the actual demographics of the region. Because of this, the base line data collected in this survey could then be used to determine priorities and, in the future, gauge educational progress in all phases of our water quality programming efforts.

The 2002 survey found that residents of the region were particularly interested in three water resource topics: (1) drinking water and human health, (2) watershed management, and (3) water conservation and management. In 2002 the major issues associated with water resources were closely related to water quality; however, in the last five years water quantity issues have become increasingly important.

The water issues survey provided us with a wealth of information about public attitudes toward water issues in the Pacific Northwest. Even though differences were seen among states on some issues, it is noteworthy that there is much commonality in water attitudes among states. This commonality makes regional water educational programming logical and efficient for Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

The key water issues identified by the public in 2002 were:

- ◆ The vast majority (over 90 percent) of survey respondents considered clean drinking water, clean groundwater, and clean rivers very or extremely important issues in the region.



Pacific Northwest Regional Water Quality Coordination Project Partners

Land Grant Universities

Alaska

Cooperative Extension Service
Contact Fred Sorensen:
907-786-6311

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/water/index.html>

University Publications:

<http://www.alaska.edu/uaf/ces/publications/>

Idaho

University of Idaho
Cooperative Extension System
Contact Bob Mahler: 208-885-7025

<http://www.uidaho.edu/wq/wqhome.html>

University Publications:

<http://info.ag.uidaho.edu/Catalog/catalog.html>

Oregon

Oregon State University
Extension Service
Contact Mike Gamroth: 541-737-3316

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/>

University Publications:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/>

Washington

Washington State University
WSU Extension

Contact Bob Simmons:
360-427-9670 ext. 690

<http://wawater.wsu.edu/>

University Publications:

<http://pubs.wsu.edu/>

Northwest Indian College
Contact: Michael Cochrane:
360-392-4299

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Water Resource Research Institutes

Water and Environmental Research
Center (Alaska)

<http://www.uaf.edu/water/>

Idaho Water Resources
Research Institute
<http://www.boise.uidaho.edu/>

Institute for Water and
Watersheds (Oregon)
<http://water.oregonstate.edu/>

State of Washington
Water Research Center
<http://www.swwrc.wsu.edu/>

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA, Region 10
The Pacific Northwest
<http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>

Office of Research and Development,
Corvallis Laboratory
<http://www.epa.gov/wed/>

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- ◆ Over two-thirds of survey respondents considered having enough water for economic development, prevention of salmon extinction, wetland protection, watershed restoration, water for power generation, and water for agriculture to be very or extremely important issues.
- ◆ Most 2002 survey respondents did not consider water quantity to be a critical issue. However, people living in drier areas of the region (Idaho, eastern Washington, eastern Oregon) did express concern.
- ◆ Survey respondents felt that water for human consumption was the most important use of water. Conversely, the recreational use of water was ranked least important.

Drinking water was the most important water resource issue cited in the 2002 survey. Almost 70 percent of residents received their water from a city water system. Individual wells (19.1 percent) followed by community well systems (8.4 percent) were the next most common domestic water sources.

The answers to the drinking water-related survey questions indicate that most residents of the Pacific Northwest are satisfied with the quality of their drinking water. The drinking water portion of the water issues survey provided us with a wealth of knowledge about public attitudes and aptitudes in the Pacific Northwest. The key drinking water findings of the 2002 survey were:

- ◆ A large majority of residents in the Pacific Northwest feel that their drinking water is safe to drink.
- ◆ Almost 4 in 10 respondents do not have enough information to determine if bacteria, nitrates, pesticides, heavy metals, industrial pollutants, or minerals are a threat to their drinking water supply.
- ◆ Minerals (calcium, iron) were the most often cited pollutants in residential drinking water supplies.
- ◆ Approximately 25 percent of residents have a water filter on their sink to improve drinking water quality.
- ◆ Over 25 percent of Pacific Northwest residents use bottled water for drinking purposes.
- ◆ Females are more likely than males to use bottled water for drinking purposes and are less likely to be satisfied with the quality of their home water supply.

Results from our 2007 regional survey will show how attitudes and actions taken to protect water resources have changed in the last five years. We will share results from the new survey in upcoming issues of PNWWATER UPDATES.

National Water Quality Program Areas

The four land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest have aligned our water resource extension and research efforts with eight themes of the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension System.

1. Animal Waste Management
2. Drinking Water and Human Health
3. Environmental Restoration
4. Nutrient and Pesticide Management
5. Pollution Assessment and Prevention
6. Watershed Management
7. Water Conservation and Management
8. Water Policy and Economics

CSREES is the Cooperative States Research, Education, and Extension Service, a sub-agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, and is the federal partner in this water quality program.