



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

# Pacific Northwest

## Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA NIFA  
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

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### 2007 Citizen Survey Results:

## Priority Water Issues in the Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest Water Quality team just completed our second survey (the first was in 2002) to document public awareness, aptitudes, attitudes, and actions taken toward water resource issues in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. This mail-based survey was completed by 1,012 of the 1,800 residents who were randomly chosen to take part in this effort. We were especially interested in how people prioritized water resource issues in the region. Consequently, this update shares information about importance people place on 10 different water resource issues in the region. It is interesting to note that residents of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington share very similar views when prioritizing water resource issues.



As part of the water attitude portion of the 2007 survey, residents were asked about 10 specific regional water issues. Respondents were asked to label each water issue as not important, somewhat important, very important, extremely important, or having no opinion. The sampling error of the survey was +/- 3 percent.

When the *very important* and *extremely important* responses were added together a majority of respondents in 2007 considered nine of the ten issues as having *high priority* and will be described as such throughout this newsletter. Over 90 percent of the respondents considered clean drinking water, clean rivers, and clean groundwater as high priority (Table 1). Seventy-seven percent of the 2007 respondents indicated that having enough water for agriculture was high priority despite the fact that over 85 percent of Pacific Northwest residents live in urban areas.

**Table 1. The percent of survey respondents living in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington that ranked the following issues as very or extremely important in 2002 and 2007.**

| Issue                               | Very or extremely important |      |        |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------|--------|
|                                     | 2007                        | 2002 | Change |
| Clean drinking water                | 99                          | 99   | --     |
| Clean rivers                        | 94                          | 94   | --     |
| Clean groundwater                   | 93                          | 93   | --     |
| Water for agriculture               | 77                          | 84   | -7     |
| Prevention of salmon extinction     | 74                          | 69   | +5     |
| Loss of wetlands (wildlife habitat) | 73                          | 69   | +4     |
| Watershed restoration               | 72                          | 68   | +4     |
| Water for power generation          | 71                          | 72   | -1     |
| Water for economic development      | 65                          | 70   | -5     |
| Water for recreation                | 49                          | 58   | -9     |



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University Publications:

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University Publications:

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

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**Water Resource Research Institutes**

Water and Environmental Research  
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Idaho Water Resources  
Research Institute

<http://www.boise.uidaho.edu/>

Institute for Water and  
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<http://water.oregonstate.edu/>

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

**Environmental Protection Agency**

EPA, Region 10

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Over two-thirds of Pacific Northwest residents in 2007 indicated that prevention of salmon extinction, loss of wetlands, watershed restoration, and water for power generation were high priority items (Table 1). Water for economic development was considered high priority by almost two-thirds of respondents, while slightly less than 50 percent of people who completed the survey considered water for recreation a high priority item.

When the 2007 and 2002 survey responses are compared it is obvious that water priorities in the region have changed very little over the past five years (Table 1). The three highest priority issues (clean drinking water, clean rivers, clean groundwater) were rated identically in both surveys. Using the value of four percent as a statistically significant level of change between the 2002 and 2007 surveys, prevention of salmon extinction, loss of wetlands, and watershed restoration have become more important to the public in the Pacific Northwest. Conversely, water for agriculture, water for economic development, and water for recreation have become less important today compared to 2002.

Water for agriculture has probably become less important because the demographic shift toward urbanization has continued to accelerate in the last five years. Conversely, as the region has become increasingly urbanized water for recreation has become less important to a larger percentage of the region's residents.

The demographic factors of state of residence, race, occupation, educational level, and length of residence in the region did not impact how people viewed water issues; however, gender and age did influence answers to several of the water issues. Based on this survey, females were more likely to place a high priority rating on seven of the ten water issues contained in the survey. Younger respondents were more likely to consider loss of wetlands, prevention of salmon extinction, watershed restoration, and water for recreation as high priority issues than respondents older than age 50.

The results of the 2007 version of the Pacific Northwest Water Issues Survey are important because they show that water resource issues are very important to the public. Based on this survey, water resource issues are as important today as they were five years ago.



**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 National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

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

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