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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Regional Survey Results:

Information Sources and Learning Opportunities

A 50-question survey was developed by the Pacific Northwest Water Quality Team to document public awareness, aptitudes, attitudes, and actions taken toward water resource issues in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. This statistically designed survey was administered by mail to over 1,800 residents in the region in 2002 and 2007. We achieved a response rate of over 50 percent in both years. The sampling error of this survey was +/- 4 percent.

This newsletter highlights information we obtained on sources of water resource information used by the region's citizens and their preferred types of learning opportunities to address their information and education needs. We are presenting the data from both the 2007 and 2002 surveys below.

Water Resource Information Sources

Based on the 2007 survey data, newspapers and television are the most frequently cited sources of water information by citizens of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington (Table 1). Environmental agencies (47 percent) and environmental groups (41 percent) have provided almost half of adults in the region with water resources information in the last few years. Conversely, Extension, universities, the Internet and public schools have a much lower reach. Compared to the 2002 water issues survey results, except for the Internet, all information sources are being used less frequently for information about water by the public in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. In this five-year reporting period (2002-2007) the Internet's reach has increased from 15 to 20 percent of the public.

Table 1. The percent of survey respondents living in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington that have received water resource information from the following sources in 2002 and 2007.

Information source	Percent citing		
	2007	2002	Change
	---------- % ----------		
Newspapers	65	68	-3
Television	56	59	-3
Municipal government	51	NA	--
Environmental agencies (government)	47	51	-4
Environmental groups (citizen groups)	41	46	-5
Extension Service	25	28	-3
Universities	24	25	-1
Internet	20	15	+5
Schools (elementary and secondary)	18	20	-1

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/
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 Dan Burns:
360-392-4328
dburns@nwic.edu or
http://www.nwic.edu/

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/

For more information contact Jan Seago at 206-553-0038 or seago.jan@epa.gov

Preferred Learning Opportunities

When the public was asked about their three preferred water resources learning opportunities in 2007, 62 percent cited reading printed fact sheets, bulletins, or brochures (Table 2). This preference for printed materials increased from 53 percent in 2002 to 62 percent in 2007. This is an interesting finding since most educators assume that printed materials should be less important in our modern electronic information age.

Table 2. The learning opportunities citizen selected as being preferable for learning about water resource issues in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington in 2007 and 2002. Note: respondents could choose three choices

Information source	Percent citing		
	2007	2002	Change
	---------- % ----------		
Read printed fact sheets, bulletins, or brochures	62	53	+9
Read newspaper articles	48	54	-6
Watch television coverage	47	55	-8
Visit a web site	32	30	+2
View a demonstration/display	17	21	-4
Watch a video or DVD of information	12	16	-4
Attend a short course	7	18	-11
Take a course for certification or credit	4	7	-3

Almost half of the 2007 survey respondents cited newspapers and the television as preferred learning opportunities for water information (Table 2). The use of web sites on the Internet to gain water knowledge was preferred by almost one-third of survey respondents. Demonstrations, displays, and/or the viewing of a video/DVD containing water information was preferred by less than one-fifth of the public in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Less than 8 percent of the public is willing to attend a short course/workshop or take a course for credit to gain water resource knowledge.

Except for printed materials and the Internet, all suggested water resources learning opportunities were less popular in 2007 than in 2002 (Table 2). The data presented in this newsletter indicate that the public in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington are hungry for water resources information; however, they are only willing to devote a limited amount of time in pursuit of this information. Consequently, printed materials and quick time media sources (newspapers, television, Internet) are the preferred learning opportunities. Time intensive learning methods (workshops, displays, short courses, credit classes) will not meet the needs of the busy lifestyles of the region's citizens.

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.