



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Spring 2003
PNWWATER 012

Pacific Northwest

Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA NIFA
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Water Issues are a High Priority



A 50-question survey was developed by the Pacific Northwest water quality team to document public awareness, aptitudes, attitudes and actions toward water quality in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Demographic data about the survey respondents were also collected. This statistically designed survey was completed by over 50 percent of the 1,800 residents who were solicited for this study in 2002. As part of the water attitude portion of the 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 +/- 2.5 percent.

When the *very important* and *extremely important* responses were added together a majority of respondents considered all ten issues as having *high priority* and will be described as such throughout this pamphlet. Over 90 percent of respondents considered clean drinking water, clean rivers and clean groundwater as high priority (Table 1). Eighty-four percent of the survey respondents indicated that having enough water for agriculture was high priority despite the fact that over 80 percent of Pacific Northwest residents live in urban areas.

Over two-thirds of Pacific Northwest residents indicated that water for power generation, water for economic development, loss of wetlands, prevention of salmon extinction, and watershed restoration were high priority (Table 1). Water for recreation (58 percent) received the smallest majority from the respondents.



Table 1. The percent of survey respondents living in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington ranking the following water issues as very or extremely important.



Issue	Very or extremely important %
Clean drinking water	99
Clean rivers	94
Clean groundwater	93
Water for agriculture	84
Water for power generation	72
Water for economic development	70
Loss of wetlands (wildlife habitat)	69
Prevention of salmon extinction	69
Watershed restoration	68
Water for recreation (fishing, boating, rafting)	58



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.htm>

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 Charlotte Clausing:
360-392-4319

cclausing@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

The demographic factors of state of residence, occupation and education level did not impact how people viewed water issues; however, gender, age and length of residence in the Pacific Northwest did influence answers to several water issues. Based on this survey a higher percentage of females than males view clean groundwater, prevention of salmon extinction, loss of wetlands, water for power generation and water for agriculture as high priority (Table 2).

Table 2. The influence of gender on ranking water issues as high priority in the Pacific Northwest.

Issue	Female %	Male %
Clean groundwater	96	92
Salmon extinction	72	66
Loss of wetlands	78	64
Water for power generation	76	69
Water for agriculture	87	81

A higher percentage of younger respondents than older respondents viewed the loss of wetlands as high priority (Table 3). Conversely, senior citizens were more likely than younger people to view having enough water for power generation as high priority.

Table 3. The influence of respondent's age on ranking water issues as high priority in the Pacific Northwest.

Issue	Age in years		
	< 50 (%)	50-69 (%)	> 69 (%)
Loss of wetlands	74	67	55
Water for power generation	67	75	82

Over 80 percent of respondents who have lived in the Pacific Northwest less than five years considered salmon extinction and loss of wetlands as high priority water issues. However, only about 60 percent of the long-term residents considered these issues high priority.

Table 4. The influence of length of residence in the region on ranking water issues as high priority in the Pacific Northwest.

Issue	Time in PNW (years)			
	All	> 10	5-9	< 5
Prevention of salmon extinction	60	72	75	89
Loss of wetlands	64	72	74	83

The survey results shown above indicate that a substantial majority of people in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington care about water issues in the Pacific Northwest. It appears that citizens of the region regularly scrutinize these 10 water issues and have a need for relevant and current information. Based on information learned from this survey the land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest plan to develop educational programs to meet these needs.