

Pigeon River Watershed Survey Report

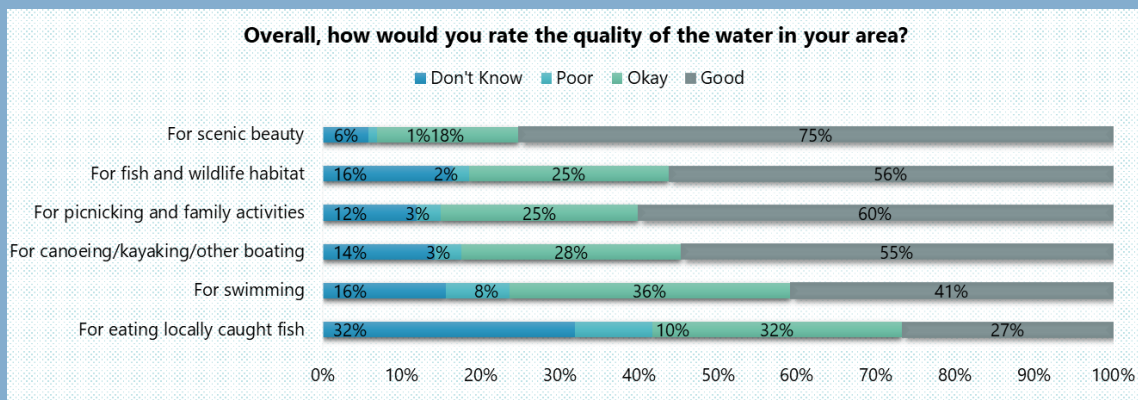
May 2021



In June 2020 Ottawa Conservation District (OCD) partnered with the Grand Valley State University Social Science Lab to conduct a survey of residential homeowners and farmers living in the Pigeon River Watershed (PRW). The purpose of the survey was to evaluate residents' knowledge of water quality and sources of water pollution in the PRW, use of best management practices (BMPs) for protecting water quality, and interest in participating in future cost share programs. The survey was mailed to 900 property owners in the PRW. A total of 301 completed responses were received.

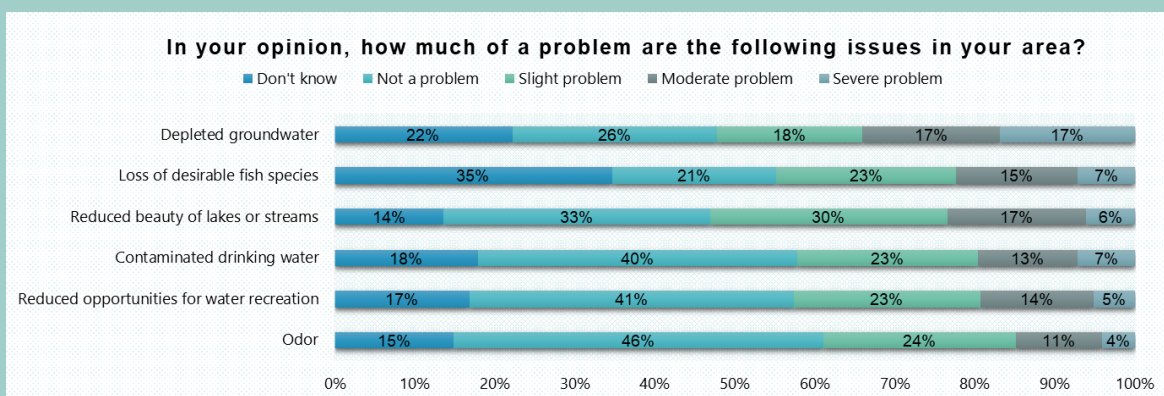
Perception of Water Quality

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their opinions of water quality and potential consequences of pollution in local water bodies. Respondents had largely positive impressions of water resources in the PRW but were uncertain about the extent to which several common consequences of water pollution are a problem in the watershed.



Consequences of Poor Water Quality

Forty-four percent of respondents believe that depleted groundwater represents a moderate-to-severe problem, indicating widespread awareness of aquifer depletion occurring in the watershed. Respondents were less sure about whether fish species are declining in the watershed. The majority of respondents ranked reduced beauty of lakes or streams, contaminated drinking water, reduced opportunities for water recreation, and odor as not a problem or a slight problem in the PRW.



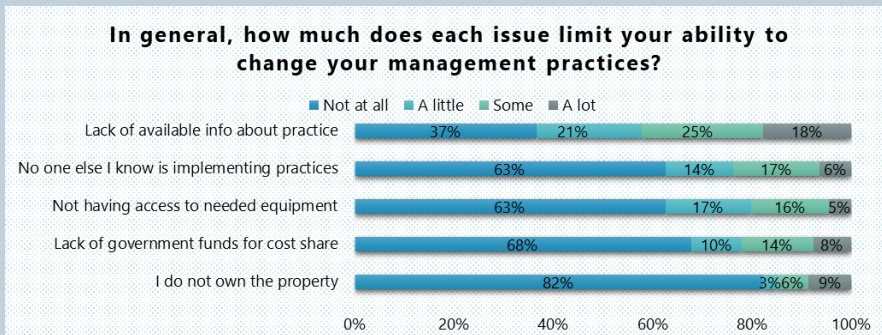
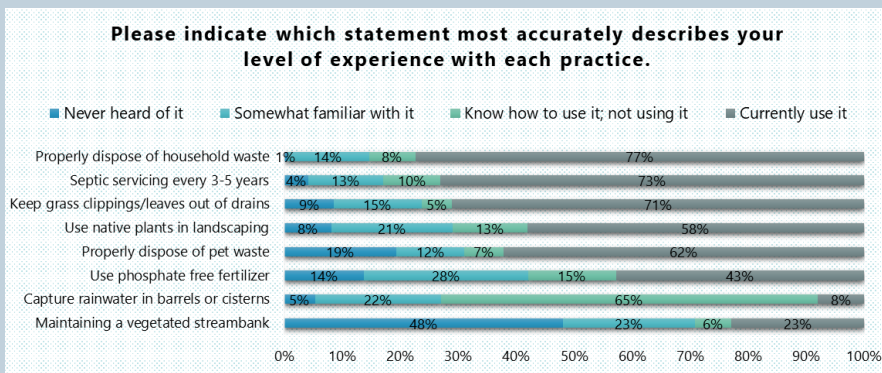
Best Management Practices

Participants were also asked questions about property management behaviors that commonly impact water quality and factors that limit their ability to implement water quality BMPs.

Residential Respondents

Residential respondents reported high levels of familiarity with and use of several BMPs important for reducing water pollutants. However, fewer respondents are familiar with using phosphate free fertilizer, capturing rainwater, and maintaining vegetated streambanks. For residential respondents, access in information was reported to be the biggest barrier to changing property management practices. Based on this information, some opportunities include:

- Develop information resources about lawn fertilizer contents, impacts, and safe application.
- Hold DIY rain barrel workshops and share ideas for using reclaimed water.
- Sponsor field days for demonstrating vegetated stream buffer installment and maintenance techniques.



Agricultural Respondents

Agricultural property owners also indicated that they are also implementing a wide range of BMPs in their operations but reported lower levels of familiarity with avoiding fall manure applications and maintaining vegetated streambanks. For agricultural respondents, access to equipment and cost-share programs were reported to be the biggest barriers to changing property management practices. Based on this information, some opportunities include:

- Assess adequacy of manure storage facilities and provide cost-share for enhancements.
- Develop information resources about ideal timing of manure applications.
- Sponsor demonstration field days and provide cost share to offset acreage changed from row crops to stream buffers.

