

Building a Constituency of Forest Productivity Advocates

***What do we know about Minnesotan's
Natural Resource Priorities?***



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Overview

- ✿ Environment and public opinion in Minnesota
- ✿ Surveys about trails, lakes and outdoor recreation
- ✿ Recent statewide information
- ✿ Conclusions

The report used to prepare this presentation is part of the *Seeing the Forest AND the Trees* project of the Blandin Foundation's Vital Forests/Vital Communities initiative. For more information, visit <http://www.blandinfoundation.org/>. The full report *Building a Constituency of Forest Productivity Advocates: What do we know about Minnesotan's Natural Resource Priorities?* is available at the Blandin Foundation and Dovetail Partners websites.




Environment & Public Opinion

- ✿ The public receives information about environmental issues from professional organizations and public interest-groups;
- ✿ Individuals may express concern about issues, but there is fairly widespread confidence in the ability of science and technology to address those concerns;
- ✿ Specific opinions vary according to the direct consequences on the community most affected;
- ✿ There is a bias toward the status quo, and being more informed about an issue does not necessarily mean a person will support actions to address that issue;
- ✿ Environmental issues have the potential to lead to intense conflict within and between communities; and
- ✿ Attitudes on environmental issues may be fixed and resistant to influence.

Source: Tichenor, P.J., Donohue, G.A., Olien, C.N., and Bowers, J.K. 1972. *Environment and Public Opinion in Minnesota*. University of Minnesota. Institute of Agriculture. Department of Sociology. St. Paul, Minnesota. <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED060412>





One of the questions asked in the 1970 statewide Minnesota poll was: “Do you agree or disagree with this statement:

“Life as we know it today will be in serious trouble if nothing is done about pollution.”

Some 95% of college educated and 77% of grade school educated Minnesotans agreed with this statement, the highest positive response rate and narrowest percentage spread of the seven questions asked.

Source: Tichenor, P.J., Donohue, G.A., Olien, C.N., and Bowers, J.K. 1972. *Environment and Public Opinion in Minnesota*. University of Minnesota. Institute of Agriculture. Department of Sociology. St. Paul, Minnesota. <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=ED060412>



Surveys about Trails, Lakes and Outdoor Recreation

- ✱ 85% and 96% of trail users identified the **trail scenery and wildlife** viewing opportunities as a primary source of enjoyment
- ✱ 78% and 90% of the users on each trail indicated being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the “**management of vegetation in the trail corridor**”
- ✱ 80% perceive **natural shoreline vegetation** as “about right” and some 60% saw the **condition of land** near and away from shore as “good” to “excellent”
- ✱ 60 to 70% of **lake users** perceive conditions as having “remained about the same” over the previous ten years
- ✱ **Timber harvesting** was ranked 15th (second to last) - with less than 20% of statewide respondents indicating timber harvesting as having “great” or “moderate” impact on worsening water quality perceptions
- ✱ Timber harvesting was ranked 4th by respondents from the northeast region of the state.
- ✱ Among respondents who perceived worsening **scenic quality** about 33% of respondents identified timber harvesting as having “great” or “moderate” impact.



Surveys about Trails, Lakes and Outdoor Recreation

Support for Regulations

- ✱ 72% supported stricter controls on exotic species
- ✱ 68% supported stricter septic system regulations
- ✱ 66% supported motorboat size and speed limits
- ✱ 60% supported more enforcement of existing shoreland protection laws
- ✱ 58% supported stricter zoning regulations, including protection of shoreland trees and shrubs.

Support for Education

- ✱ 79% supported programs targeting shoreline property owners and farmers
- ✱ 54% supported programs for loggers and foresters

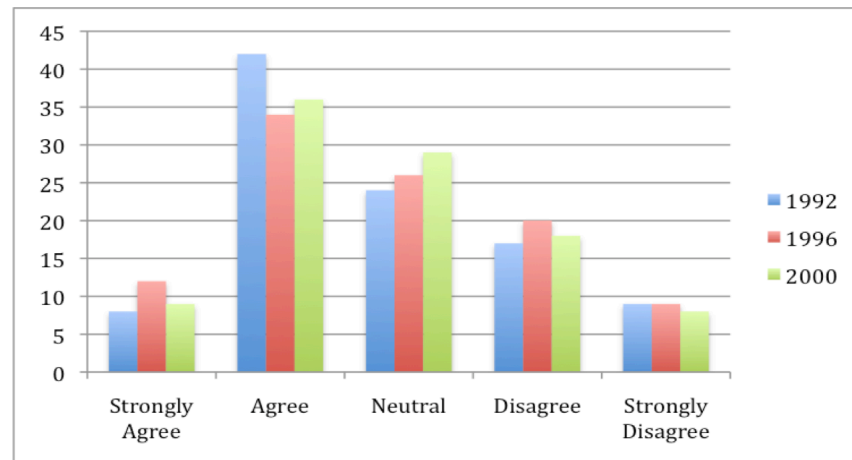
Support for Management

- ✱ 68% supported increasing protection for fish habitat



“The DNR should manage forests to help meet consumer demand for forest products”

Survey responses in 1992, 1996, and 2000 to the statement:
“The DNR should manage forests to help meet consumer demand for forest products.”



Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Awareness and Satisfaction Survey Results, June 2000



Surveys about Trails, Lakes and Outdoor Recreation

- ✿ 60% of respondents checked “strongly agree” when presented with the statement that “Minnesota lakes must be taken care of so that we can pass them along to future generations for their enjoyment”
- ✿ Over half of surveyed state park visitors (55%) “Strongly agreed” that “it is very important that my children and my children’s children will be able to visit this park.”

Sources: MN DNR, U of MN





Recent Statewide Information

- ✿ The *Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan* included recommendations identified by the public as most critical to their region.
- ✿ In Grand Rapids the Land and Aquatic Habitat recommendation receiving the most votes was to "improve connectivity of/access to outdoor recreation areas"
- ✿ There were several forestry related recommendations that received a few votes in Grand Rapids but received zero votes in Morris or St. Paul. These recommendations included "support the use of fire to increase forest health and biodiversity", "create deer exclusion pilot projects in every ecological subsection", "promote collective/cooperative management of forestlands at the landscape level", "assess and improve sustainable forestry best management practices", and "establish state leadership on natural resources and land use".

http://www.lccmr.leg.mn/statewideconservationplan/SCPP_FinalPlan.html



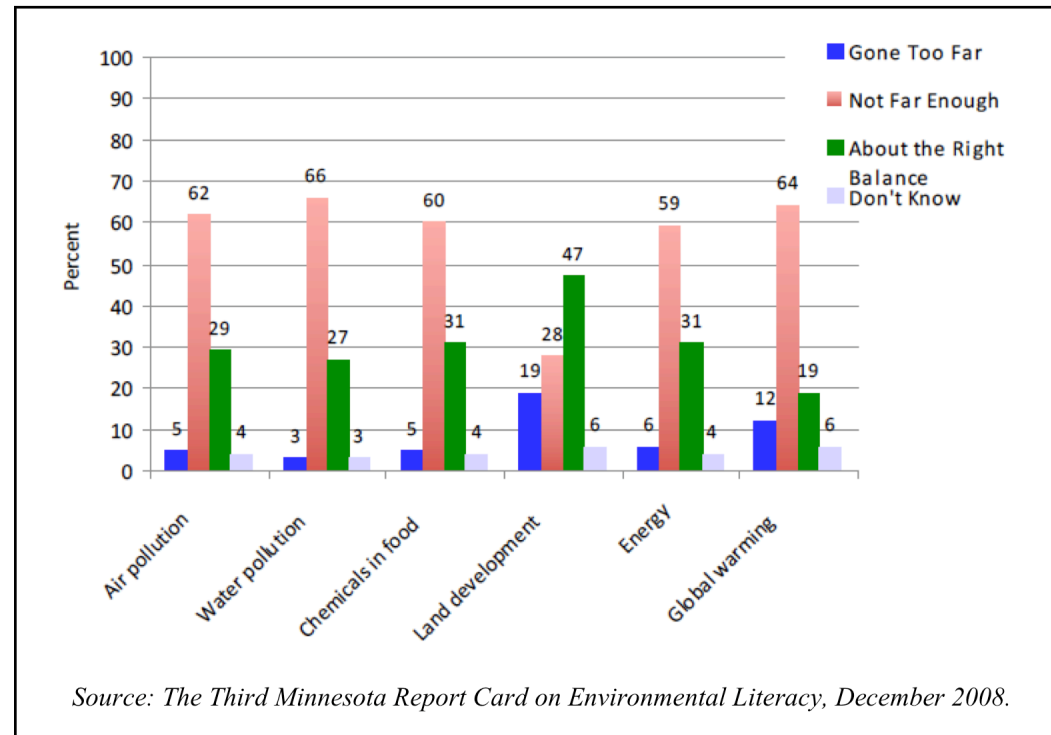
Recent Statewide Information

- ✿ The *Third Minnesota Report Card on Environmental Literacy* was released in 2008.
- ✿ 43% of Minnesota adults met the survey's definition of above-average environmental knowledge by correctly answering at least five of the eight general knowledge environmental questions.
- ✿ 42 to 44% of respondents indicated they felt they were highly knowledgeable in each on the five environmental topics: environmental problems, air pollution, energy issues, water quality and global warming.

http://www.seek.state.mn.us/eemn_b.cfm

Have environmental laws and regulations gone too far, not far enough, or struck about the right balance?

Percentage of Minnesotans who think that the environmental laws and regulations for specific environmental topics have gone too far, have not gone far enough, and have struck about the right balance



Source: *The Third Minnesota Report Card on Environmental Literacy, December 2008.*



Conclusions

- ✱ Minnesotans care about the access to and the quality of the state's lakes and rivers
- ✱ Minnesotans care about leaving a natural resource legacy for future generations
- ✱ Minnesotans are generally neutral to or satisfied with current forestry practices
- ✱ Minnesotans have fairly clear environmental priorities, including strong interest in participation in outdoor recreation and solutions that address water quality concerns, including regulatory changes
- ✱ Minnesotans also have fairly strong knowledge of environmental issues
- ✱ However, few questions have been directed specifically toward gaining an understanding of public perceptions and views regarding forests outside of parks and management of multiple use areas.
- ✱ The little indirect information that is available suggests a softening of support for extractive management.
- ✱ Despite obvious broad support for sustaining our natural resources, it is less clear how forests, and the management of forests, are viewed by Minnesotans.



The Bottom Line

If forestry advocates want to champion any significant policy changes and increase the odds of success, or at least be better able to anticipate the public reaction to a given proposal, additional public polling and opinion surveys would be beneficial.

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