

Saskatchewan River Basin – Wide  
Survey of Residents and  
Key Informant Interviews

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Prepared for  
Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### SURVEY OF RESIDENTS

A survey was conducted of a random sample of 550 residents of the Saskatchewan River Basin in late February and early March 1994. The survey involved 250 residents in Alberta, and 150 each in the Saskatchewan and Manitoba portions of the Basin. Thus Saskatchewan and Manitoba respondents are over-represented in proportion to their share of the Basin population. This stratification was designed to allow for comparisons among the three provinces. When the results below refer to the basin as a whole, the sample has been weighted so that each province is represented in correct proportion to its population.

#### **Environmental Actions**

- Respondents were asked to rate the importance of a number of environmental actions. Of the 10 actions offered two were seen as very important by almost all respondents (parenthetically after each is the average rating out of 10)
  - *reducing pollution in rivers and lakes (9.3);*
  - *reducing pollution of the atmosphere (9.0);*

Three others were rated highly by respondents:

- *reforestation (8.8);*
- *protecting wildlife habitats (8.7);*
- *protecting fish habitats (8.4);*

Protecting fish habitats was rated much higher among Manitoba respondents than in the other provinces reflecting the importance of fishing in that portion of the Basin.

- Less important among respondents were these environmental actions:
  - *wetland preservation (7.7);*
  - *preserving old growth forests (7.7);*
  - *creating more protected areas (7.5);*
  - *creating water-related tourism development (5.8);*

## Water Management Issues

- Overall, only about one-quarter were highly satisfied (a rating of 8 out of 10 or higher, and an average rating of 6 out of 10) with the management of water resources in their area. Alberta respondents tended to be the least satisfied on average, while Manitoba respondents were the most satisfied.
- When asked what changes if any they would like to see in the way water resources are managed in their area, about 20 percent stated that no changes were necessary. The most common (38%) change suggested was reducing pollution in rivers and lakes in their area.
- However, about 30 percent of respondents stated that they do not know who is responsible for managing water in their area. Provincial or municipal governments (each cited by 28% of respondents) were the most often seen as responsible for water management.
- The vast majority of respondents feel it is very important that people in all areas of the Basin have more of a say in the overall management of all water resources within the Saskatchewan River Basin. Manitobans were the most likely to feel this way, while Albertans were the least likely.
- The respondents' average rating of the quality of water in the rivers and lakes in their area is 5.8 (on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is terrible and 10 is excellent). Manitoba respondents gave the highest rating, with over 40 percent rating the quality as very good (that is, 8 or higher out of 10). Alberta respondents gave the lowest quality rating with 25 percent rating the water quality very good. The higher the perceived quality of water, the more satisfied respondents tend to be with the management of water in their area.

## Water Management Concerns

- Respondents were read a list of water management issues and were asked to rate their concern with each. On average, the greatest concern was for:
  - *pollution from industry* (average rating of 9.0 out of 10, where 10 meant a great concern);
  - *protecting the quality and quantity of ground water* (8.6);
  - *pollution from cities and towns* (8.5);
  - *loss of fish habitat* (8.2); and
  - *forestry practices* (8.0);

- Of less concern to respondents were:
  - *loss of wetland and riverbank habitats (7.8);*
  - *agricultural practices (7.5);*
  - *amount of water used in homes (6.7);*
  - *loss of heritage resources such as archaeological sites due to riverbank development (6.7);*
  - *use of water from lakes and river water for irrigation (6.6); and*
  - *recreational developments such as golf courses along lakes and rivers (5.8).*

### **Information on Water Management**

- Saskatchewan River Basin residents do not consider themselves to be very well informed about water management issues. The overall average rating was 5.5 out of 10 about midway between “not at all informed” and “very well informed”. About one-quarter classified themselves as well informed.
- The most common sources mentioned by respondents when asked where they would go first to get answers or information about local water issues were a branch or department of their municipal (34%) or provincial (25%) governments. This is not surprising since nearly as many residents had said such government bodies were responsible for water management in their area.
- When asked to rate their personal interest in obtaining additional information on issues of local water management, most respondents showed that they were at least somewhat interested and over 40 percent indicated they were very interested.
- Those who identified themselves as being well informed about local water management issues are also the most likely to express interest in obtaining more information.
- The ways these respondents thought it best to receive additional information were: newspaper, TV, through schools, and mail pamphlets.
- These methods of receiving information are reflected in how these respondents had obtained information on the environment in the last year. Over 80 percent of respondents had received such information from TV or radio news, newspapers, or magazines, or TV/radio programs on the environment.

- Respondents rate their likelihood of becoming involved in a public process for managing water resources, if given an opportunity to do so. The average overall rating of 5 out of 10 (where 10 meant they definitely would) indicated some apathy on the part of residents. However, a fifth of these respondents thought they would be very likely to get involved (that is, a rating of 8 or higher out of 10).

## **Current Water Use**

- Although nearly two-thirds (63%) of homes in the Basin have water meters, there are regional differences. Only one-quarter of the Manitoba respondents have meters in their homes. Just over half the Saskatchewan residents (55%) and two-thirds of these in Alberta (66%) have water meters.
- The most common conservation device in use within homes in the Saskatchewan River Basin is a flow-regulating shower head. About half the respondents claim to have such a device, and over 40 percent use some method to reduce the volume of water used by their toilets. Under a third use flow-regulated taps on their faucets. Whether or not a respondent's home is metered makes no difference in their use of these devices.
- The most popular water-related activity overall is walking or cycling along rivers and lake shores, mentioned by over 80 percent of Basin residents. Three quarters also camp along a river or lake during a typical summer, or have a cottage in such an area. Swimming and wading was cited by 70 percent of respondents.

All the other activities are undertaken by less than half the respondents during the summer. Hunting, jet-skiing, and commercial fishing are activities for under 10 percent of the Basin population.

## **KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS**

- 20 representatives of organizations with an interest in water management issues representing industry, government, and non-governmental organizations were interviewed.
- All respondents supported the concept of sustainable development, although there were some differences in the definition, approach and implementation.

- The misconceptions about water cited by these respondents as being commonly held by the public were numerous and include:
  - there is an unlimited abundance of water, both in quantity and quality;
  - rivers and lakes are more polluted than they actually are;
  - industry causes most of the water pollution and other negative impacts on rivers and lakes;
  - water delivered to urban residents is contaminated, or in some way a health concern.
  
- The survey of residents appears to support the view that many of these “misconceptions” are held by the public. For example. The public appears to believe that rivers and lakes are quite polluted and that industry and cities are the main causes of this pollution.
  
- The major water management issues cited by these respondents revolved around:
  - educating the public about water management issues;
  - maintaining the quantity and quality of water;
  - allocation of a scarce resource among competing interests;
  - having more input into the management of water resources.
  
- Several methods of encouraging sustainable water use were mentioned, including:
  - education;
  - greater public involvement in water management;
  - pricing;
  - better government regulation.
  
- Most respondents acknowledged that there was a need for greater cooperation and coordination among various public, private and non-profit stakeholders in the management of water resources in the Saskatchewan River Basin. The benefits of such cooperation and coordination include:
  - conserving resources;
  - sharing information; and
  - building understanding.

- Respondents gave the following advice to the Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin:
  - It should try to involve all groups that utilize the Basin, including industry, agriculture, NGOs and government.
  - The Partners should try to act as a clearinghouse of water management information to encourage a sharing of knowledge.
  - The Partners should develop a plan for educating the public on: the nature of the Basin (its size, the various users, etc.), water management issues and techniques, and the sustainable use of water.
  - It should focus on problems on which it has a realistic chance to make a positive impact.
  - It should consider methods used by other successful water resource organizations.
  - The Partners must be non-partisan in the educational and organizational activities.
  - There is the need for better definitions of the Partners' goals. Some of the goals are seen as "*too general*".
  
- Respondents identified several priorities for the Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River Basin:
  - Gather and disseminate information of water management issues;
  - Educate the public;
  - Facilitate among stakeholders.