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**Title:** Public Opinion Poll Results in the Study of Select Economic Values of NH Lakes, Rivers, Streams and Ponds: Phase 3

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**Abstract:**

This paper is phase 3 of a study of economic values of surface water in New Hampshire. The purpose of this phase is to determine public opinion concerning:

- The relative importance of different freshwater attributes to New Hampshire residents when considering surface waters for recreational uses.
- How their attitudes and behaviors would change if these freshwater attributes were altered in any way.

This data was collected using a 33 question telephone survey of 504 randomly selected New Hampshire residents. Using the survey results, some understanding as to how quality and diversity of freshwater recreational experiences influence residential usage is very important since the economic value of New Hampshire surface waters is based on spending associated with usage.

Based on survey data, 95% of New Hampshire residents report using surface freshwater for recreational purposes. Of this group, 76% of them have been using them for over 10 years and over 90% said they are either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their overall experience at the freshwater sites. These figures indicate a high satisfaction level of long-term usage by the vast majority of residents in New Hampshire, which obviously contributes to the significant economic values discussed in Phase 2 of this study. The majority of residents also feel that the overall quality of these locations have remained the same, although long-time users have more definitive opinions about improvement or deterioration because they have more time to notice changes.

In addition, 69% go non-motorized boating, 51% go fishing, and 48% of motorboating. Most residents (65%) participate in one of these activities at least monthly and 38% of the 65% participate weekly. A high percentage (71%) of residents plan on taking some kind of trip to participate in one of these activities within the next 12 months.

When considering a visit to a freshwater body, residents cite that the top reason for choosing a specific site is that it offers the best fishing, boating, or swimming (44%). Second most important reason is the overall beauty of the area (31%) and third reason is the variety in activities at the site (20%). Water quality was a close fourth in importance (16%). In another question asking residents to cite the most important reasons to avoid visiting a particular site, pollution (25%), overcrowding of people and boats (20%), and poor water quality (15%) were the top choices.

Although 92% rate overall water quality as excellent, good, or fair, 68% indicate that they would decrease their activities if water quality were to decline. In addition, results indicate that invasive species and crowding are considered serious problems that would have a significant impact on recreational activities if they were to increase. Invasive plants also seem to have the potential to cause property values to decline. If development began to decrease the overall beauty of natural

views and scenery, 58% of residents state that they would decrease their visits. Therefore, protecting the overall beauty, variety, and water quality will help preserve the economic value of New Hampshire freshwaters and according to 60% of respondents, this is the equal responsibility of the federal, state, and local government.