



# **Burnett County LAKELines Newsletter Survey Report, 2013**

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**Survey Research Center Report 2013/23  
October 2013**

Staff and students working for the Survey Research Center at UW-River Falls were instrumental in the completion of this study. We would like to thank Denise Parks, Shelly Hadley, Erin Ingli, Caleb Riedeman, Rosie Krum, and Jessica Mueller. We gratefully acknowledge their hard work and dedication. The SRC would also like to thank Burnett County UW-Extension Educator Mike Kornmann for his guidance and input throughout the process. Finally, we would like to thank the Burnett County lake property owners who took the time to complete their questionnaires.

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to gather recipients' opinions about the LAKELines newsletter produced by the Burnett County UW-Extension Department and Burnett County Lakes and Rivers Association. In July 2013, the SRC mailed surveys to 1,044 randomly selected residential addresses on the LAKELines mailing list. The response rate was 34 percent (355 completed returns).

A large majority of respondents regularly read LAKELines, and more than half read all articles in the newsletter. About 40% of households have more than one person who reads LAKELines, but few share the newsletter with friends or neighbors. Over 40% of reported newsletter readers are age 65 or older, and a third are age 51 to 65.

Large majorities of respondents expressed positive opinions about the newsletter content, topics, readability, article length, and publication frequency. Nearly three-fourths of respondents prefer only print distribution rather than online delivery.

Slightly less than half of respondents said they have participated in a lake association meeting or event in the past year. Participation in lake association meetings and events is more frequent among regular readers of LAKELines.

A majority of respondents disagree that they are not interested in conservation issues, and 44% have implemented a conservation or lakeshore project on their lake property. Over half said they seek conservation information from sources other than their lake association.

Topics of interest for future issues are centered on property owner rights, shoreland regulations, and water quality.

## **Survey Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to gather recipients' opinions about the LAKELines newsletter produced by the Burnett County UW-Extension Department and Burnett County Lakes and Rivers Association. These organizations chose to work with the Survey Research Center (SRC) at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls to collect these data and analyze the results.

## **Survey Methods**

In July 2013, the SRC mailed surveys to 1,044 randomly selected residential addresses on the LAKELines mailing list. The surveys were followed at roughly 14-day intervals with reminder postcards and a second mailing of the survey to non-respondents. The response rate was 34 percent (355 completed returns). The results provided in this report are expected to be accurate to within plus/minus 4.9 percent with 95 percent confidence.

Any survey has to be concerned with “non-response bias.” Non-response bias refers to a situation in which people who do not return a questionnaire have opinions that are systematically different from the opinions of those who return their surveys. As described in **Appendix A**, the SRC was not able to perform meaningful non-response bias testing on this data set due to the small number of responses to the second mailing.

In addition to numeric data, respondents provided additional written answers that are contained in **Appendix B**.

**Appendix C** contains a copy of the survey questionnaire with a complete quantitative summary of responses by question.

## Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the sample.

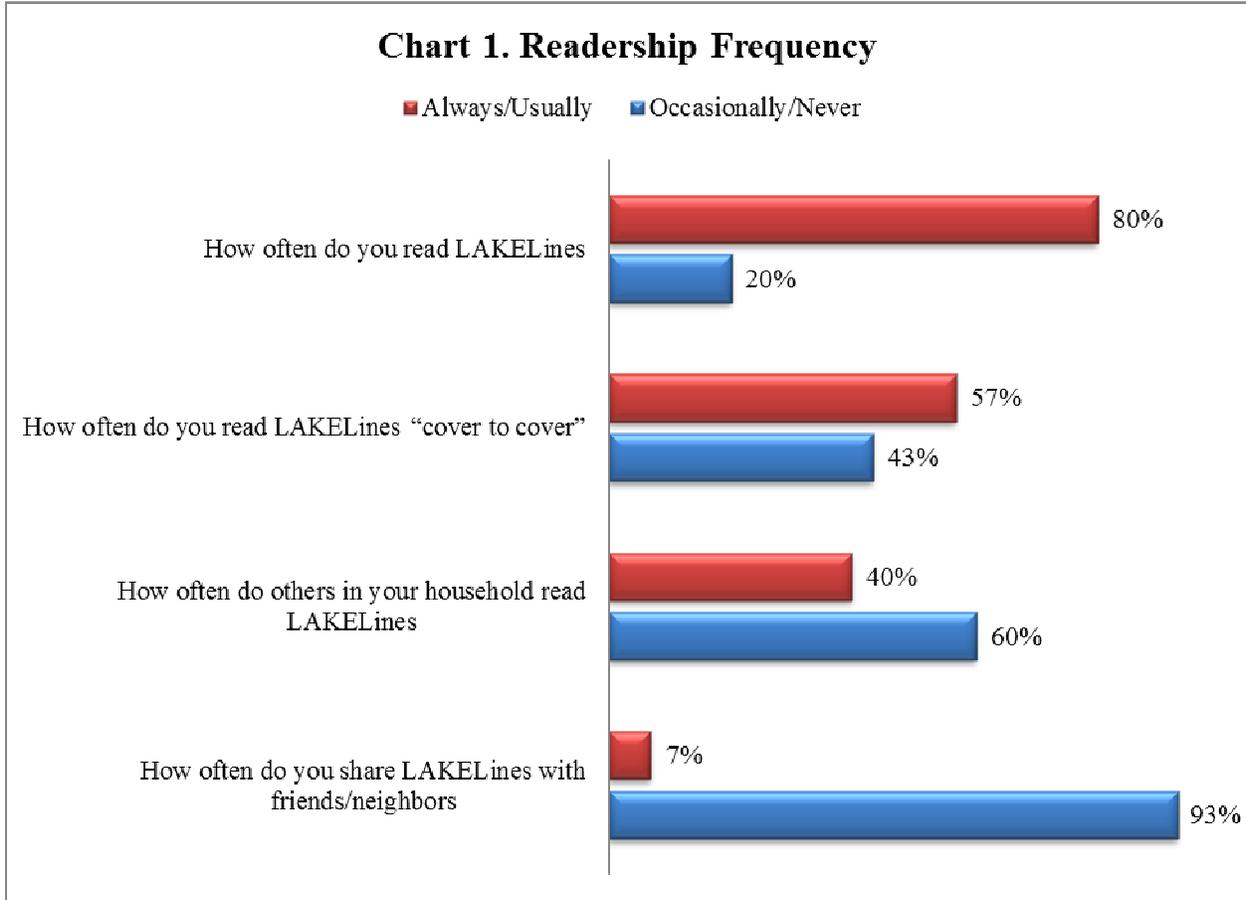
- There were more men (63%) among the respondents than women (37%).
- 53% of the respondents are retired.
- 60% have a four-year college degree or an advanced degree.
- 65% have two owners of the lake property. Only 16% have 3 or more owners.
- 74% have their permanent residence outside of Burnett County.
- The highest occupancy rates are between May 1 and August 31, averaging 57 days.
- Nearly two-thirds have household incomes above \$75,000, with 44% above \$100,000.

<b>Gender (Age 18+)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>				
Sample	344	63%	37%				
<b>Employment Status (Age 16+)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Self-Employed</b>	<b>Employed Full-Time</b>	<b>Employed Part-time</b>	<b>Home-maker</b>	<b>Un-employed</b>	<b>Retired</b>
Resident sample	344	11%	29%	6%	1%	0%	53%
<b>Highest Level of Education (Age 25+)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Less than High Sch.</b>	<b>High Sch. Diploma</b>	<b>Some College/ Tech</b>	<b>Tech/ College Grad.</b>	<b>Bachelor Degree</b>	<b>Graduate/ Profess. Degree</b>
Sample	346	1%	10%	21%	8%	29%	30%
<b>Number of Owners</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5+</b>	
Sample	336	19%	65%	5%	9%	2%	
<b>Lake Home Occupancy Average # Days (non-residents)</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>May 1 to Aug 31</b>	<b>Sept 1 to Nov 30</b>	<b>Dec 1 to Apr 30</b>			
Sample	260	42 days	20 days	14 days			
<b>Place of Permanent Residence</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Burnett County Lakefront</b>	<b>Burnett County Off Lake</b>	<b>Outside Burnett County</b>			
Sample	350	22%	3%	74%			
<b>Household Income</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Less than \$25,000</b>	<b>\$25,000 – \$34,999</b>	<b>\$35,000 - \$49,999</b>	<b>\$50,000 - \$74,999</b>	<b>\$75,000 - \$99,999</b>	<b>\$100,000+</b>
Sample	266	5%	7%	10%	20%	15%	44%

The SRC performed statistical tests within the demographic groups and found no instances where there were large and substantial differences within a demographic group. The few statistically significant differences were matters of degree of the strength of the overall pattern. For example, 9% of men said they want future issues of LAKELines to include articles for elementary age children compared to 17% of women respondents. Although this difference is statistically significant, it does not impact the interpretation of the results.

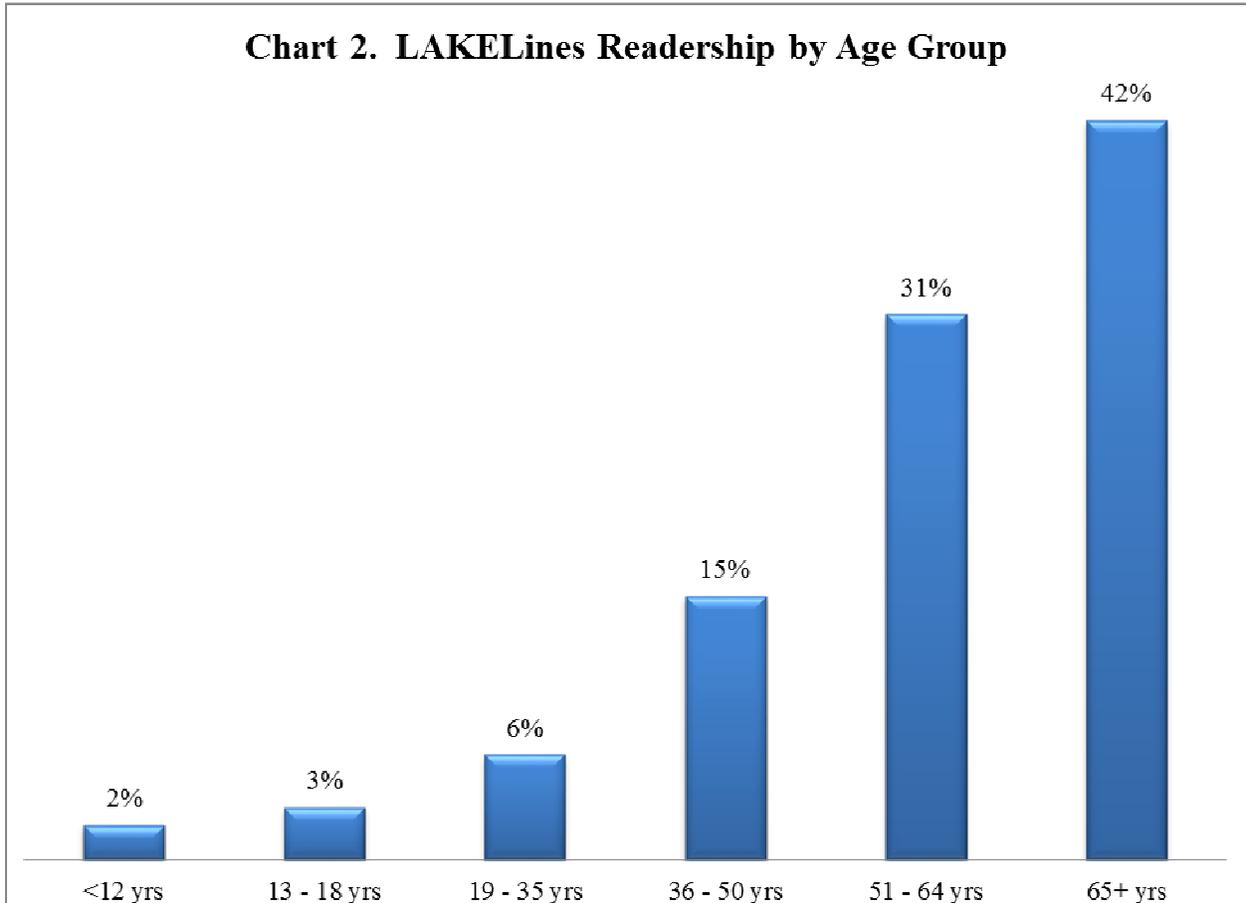
## Frequency of LAKELines Readership

As shown in Chart 1, a large majority (80% - top bar) said they “always” or “usually” read the LAKELines newsletter. Over half of respondents (57%) said they read all articles in the newsletter. However, only 40% indicated that other household members always or usually read LAKELines. Relatively few respondents said they regularly share the newsletter with friends or neighbors.



## Age of LAKELines Readers

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of LAKELines readers in their household by age group. The SRC compiled the entries, and the results are shown in Chart 2, which indicates that the newsletter is reaching an audience that is quite “mature.” Nearly three-fourths of respondents are age 65+ (42%) or age 51 to 64 years (31%). Middle-age respondents, age 36 to 50, comprise about 15% percent of the readership.

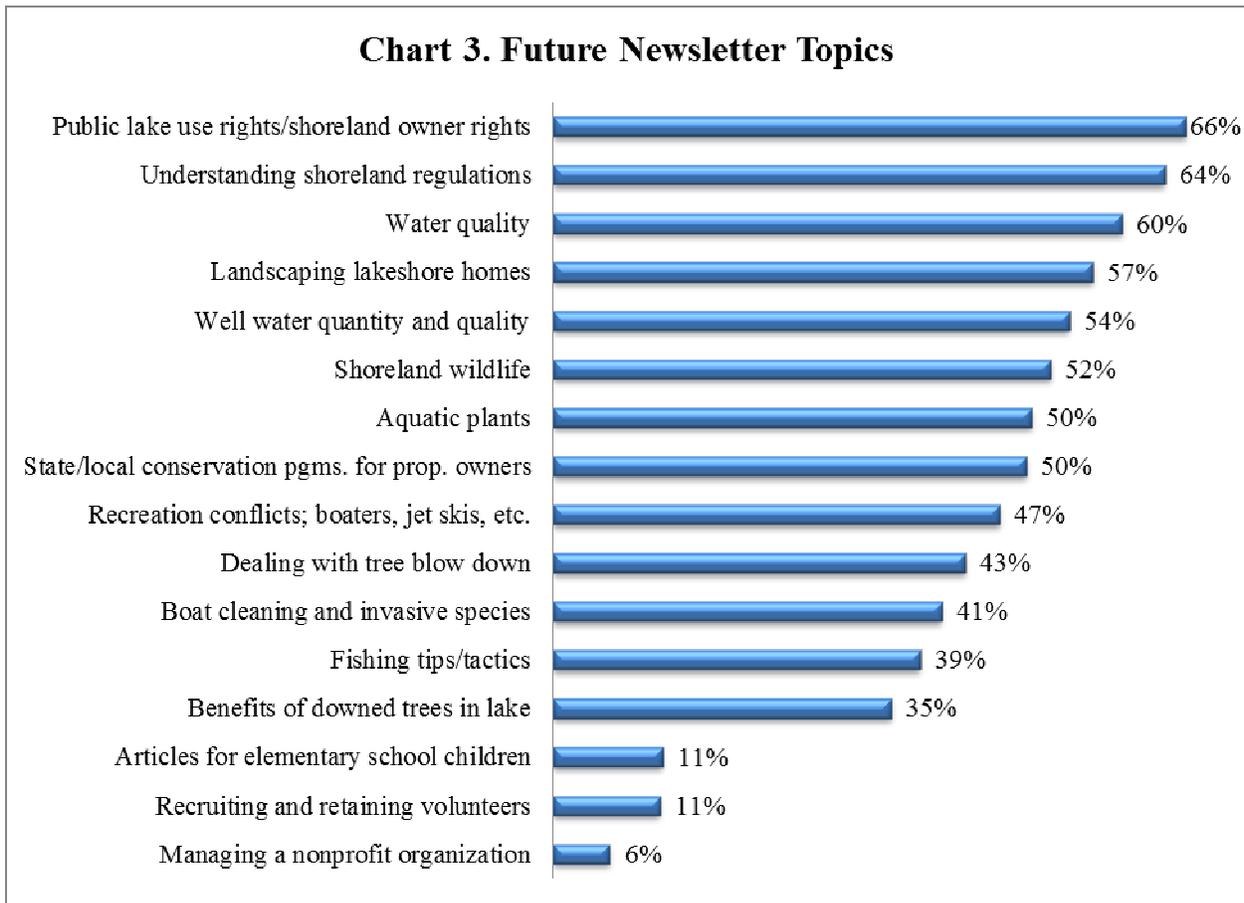


## Future Topics for LAKELines

Respondents were shown a list of 16 topics and were asked to indicate which topics they would like to see included in future issues of LAKELines. Respondents could choose as many or as few topics as they desired. The results are shown in Chart 3. The most frequent topics were about legal issues. Two-thirds of respondents want articles about the respective rights of the public and the rights of shoreland owners. Nearly as many respondents (64%) said they want articles about shoreland regulations. Future content about water quality was identified by 60% of respondents.

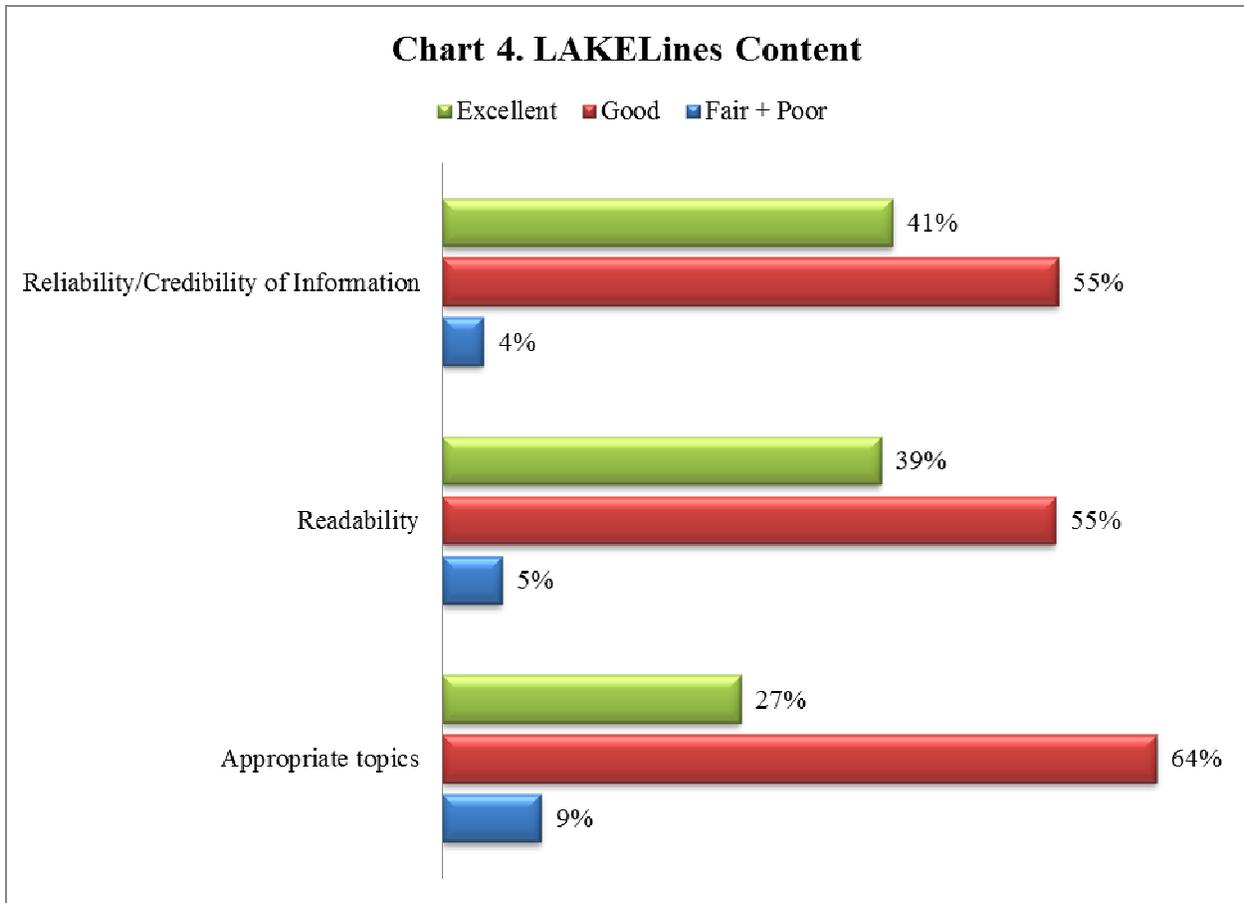
Between 50% and 57% of respondents chose landscaping lakefront homes, well water quantity and quantity, shoreland wildlife, aquatic plants, and information about government conservation programs for property owners.

There was little interest in articles for elementary school children, recruiting and retaining volunteers, and management of a non-profit organization; none of these polled more than 11%.



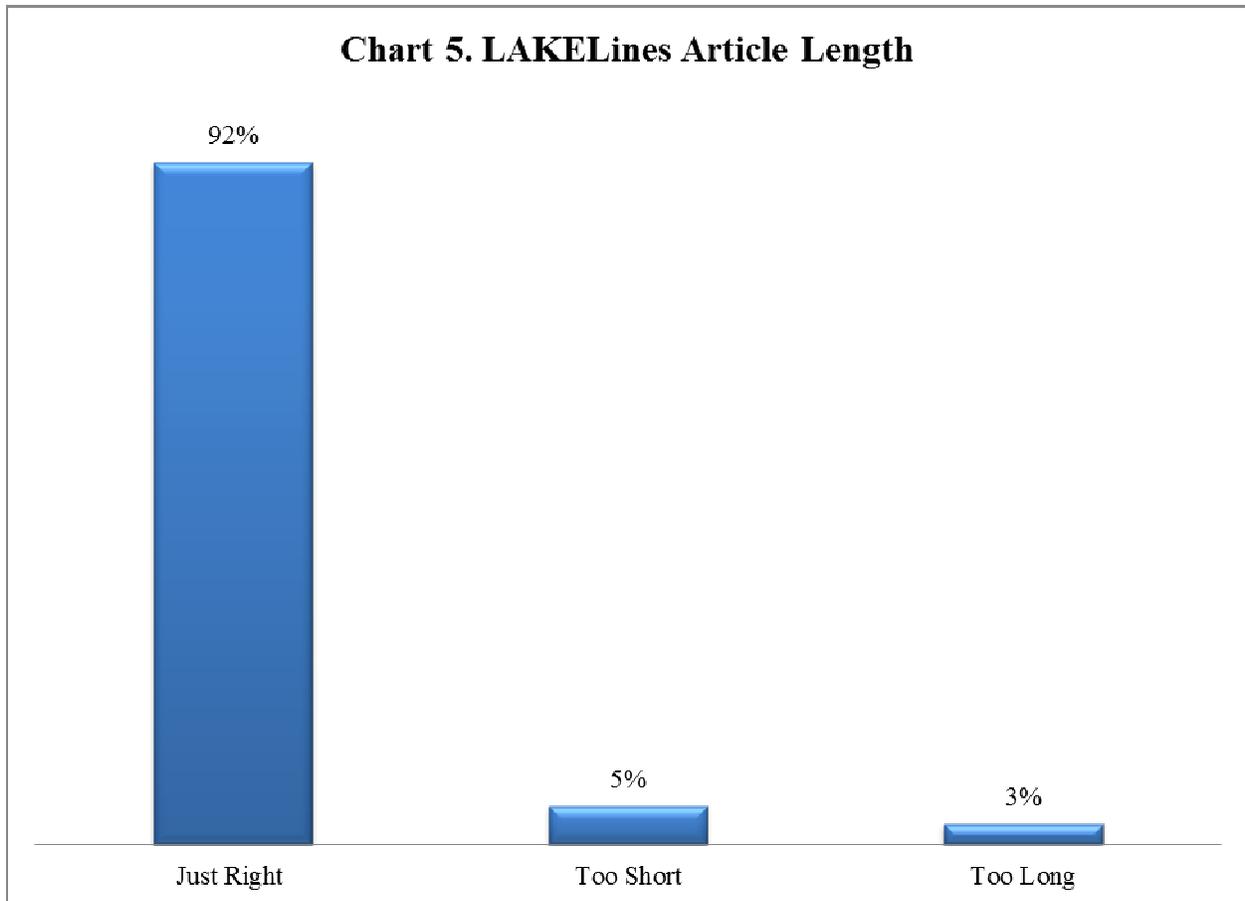
## LAKELines Content Ratings

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of LAKELines on three measures: reliability/credibility of the information, its readability, and the appropriateness of topics included. Answer choices were excellent, good, fair, or poor. The results are shown in Chart 4; the top bar is the percentage in the excellent category, the middle bar is the percentage of responses in the good category, and the bottom bar is the sum of the percentages of the fair and poor responses. Overall, the ratings present a positive message for the publishers of the newsletter. Large majorities of respondents said the all three measures (reliability/credibility, readability, and appropriateness) were excellent or good. The largest percentages of the ratings were in the good category rather than the excellent category, which suggests an opportunity for modest improvements. The percentage of respondents who rated these LAKELines measures as fair or poor were in single digits.



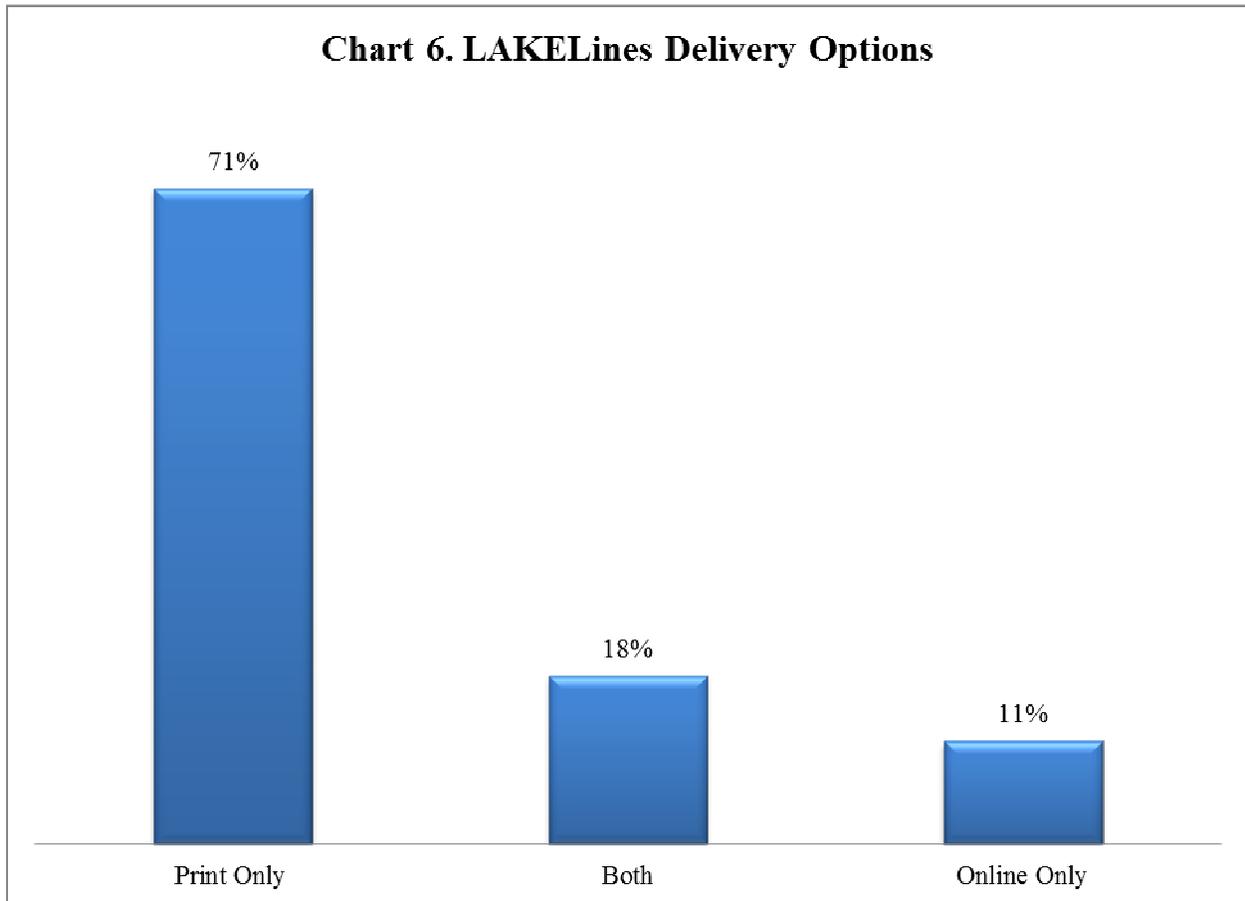
## Article Length

As shown in Chart 5, respondents are nearly unanimous (92%) in their opinion that the length of articles in LAKELines is “just right.”

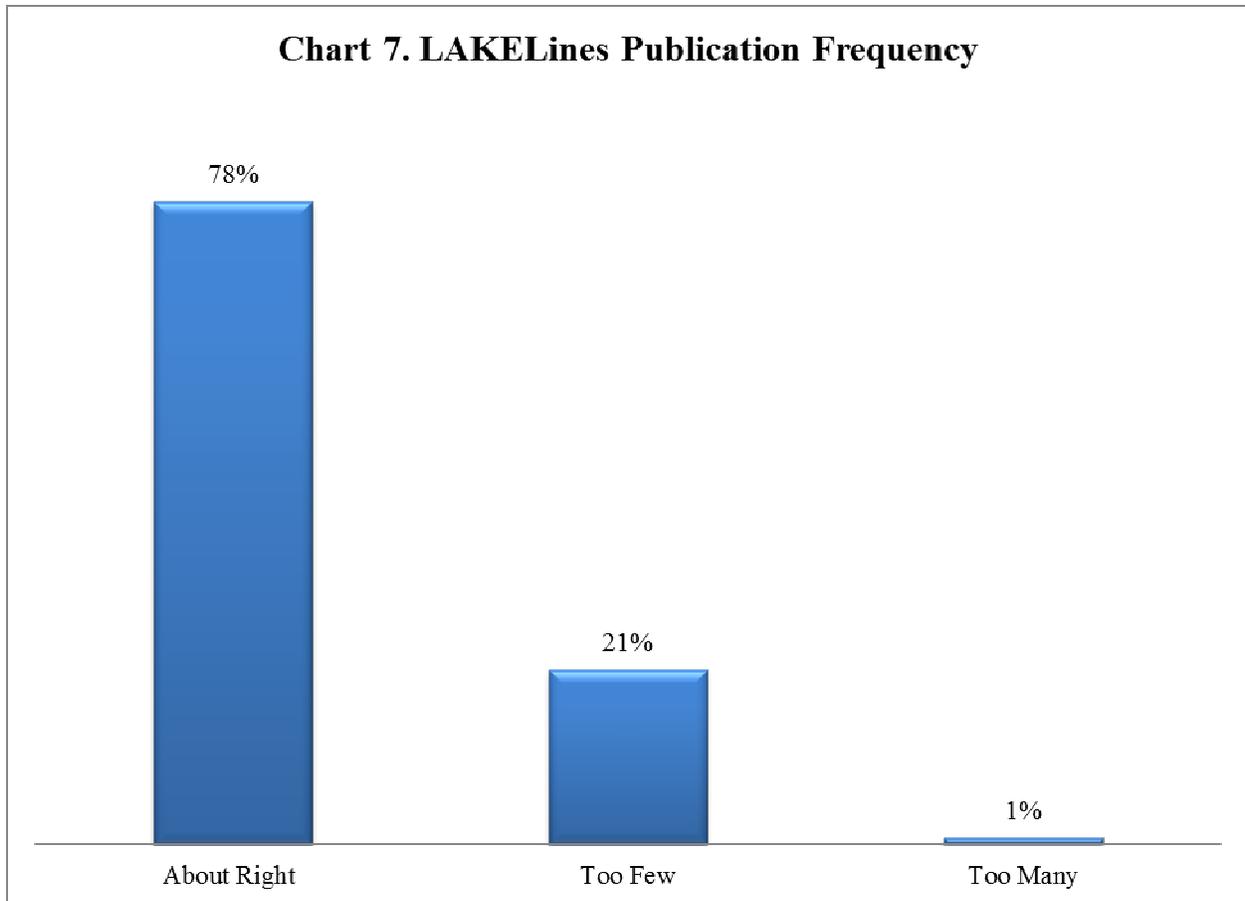


## LAKELines Delivery Options and Publication Frequency

When asked how they prefer to receive LAKELines, respondents indicated they have a strong preference for a physical copy of the newsletter. Chart 6 shows that over 70% prefer that it only be available in printed form, while an additional 18% said it should be printed and online. Only 11% said the newsletter's distribution should be limited to an online presence.

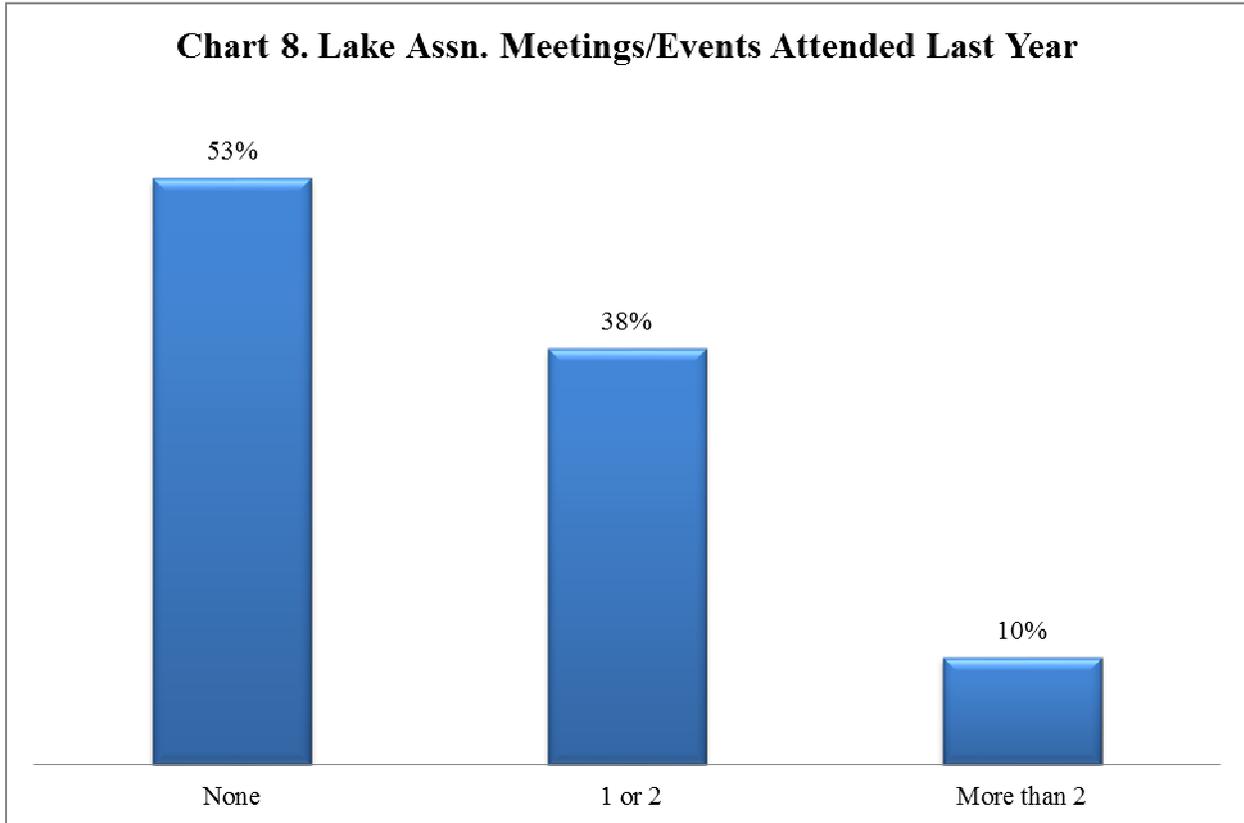


LAKELines is published twice yearly. Chart 7 shows that a large majority (78%) of respondents agreed with this frequency of publication. Among respondents who preferred a change in the publication frequency, those wanting more issues per year outnumber those favoring fewer issues per year by a large margin – 21% to 1%.



## Lake Association Participation

About half of respondents said they have not attended or participated in a meeting or an event sponsored by a lake association within the past year (Chart 8). Among those who have participated or attended a meeting or event, the largest proportion have been involved one or two times rather than two or more times.

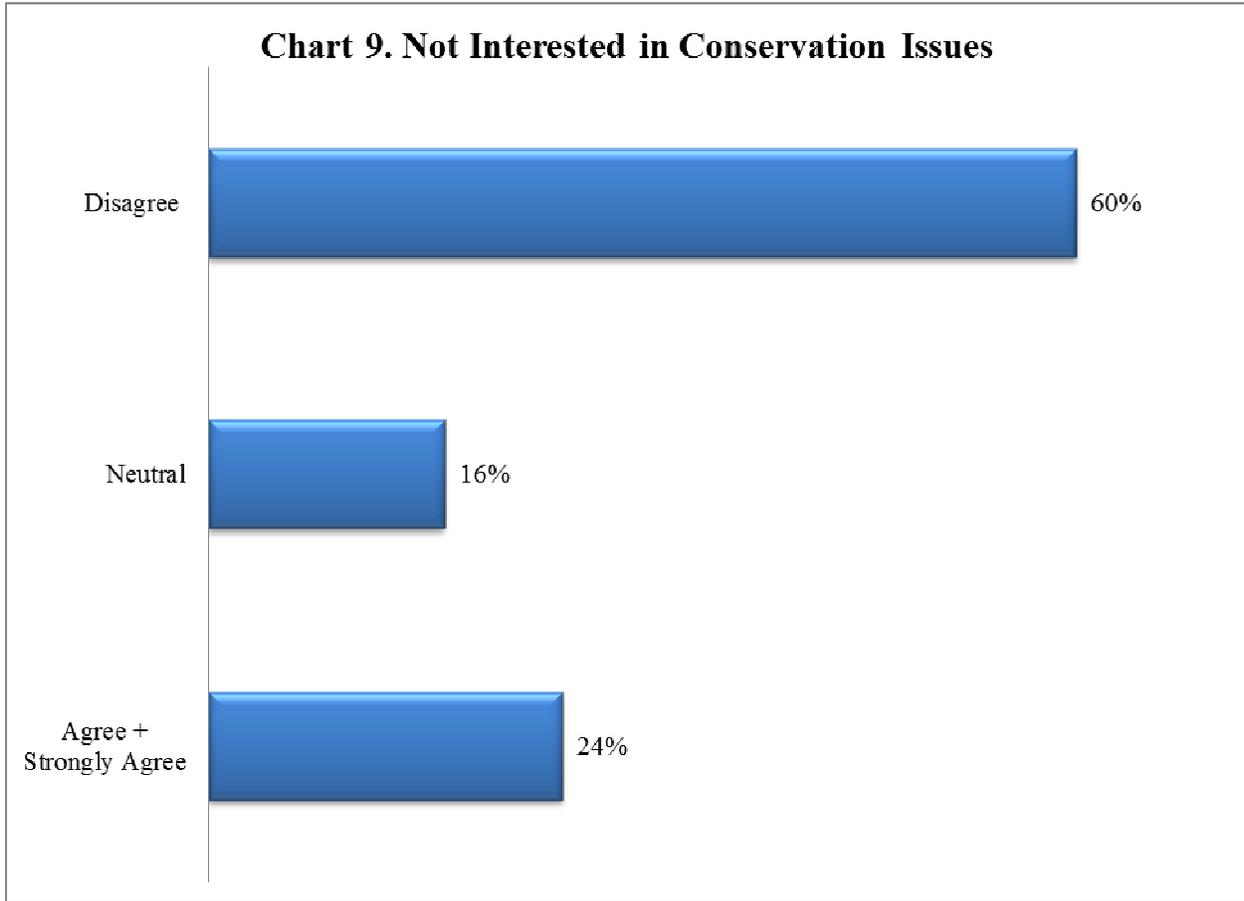


At the request of the survey sponsor, the SRC cross tabulated respondents' readership frequency (Chart 1) with their participation in lake association meetings/events (Chart 8). As shown in Table 2, respondents who always or usually read the newsletter are more likely to participate in lake association meetings and activities. Table 2 indicates that 55% of respondents who always read LAKELines attended at least one lake association meeting/event last year compared to 7% of respondents who said they never read LAKELines. These differences are statistically significant ( $p=.009$ ). It is not clear if reading LAKELines "causes" more active participation in the lake associations or if more active association participation induces more active reading of the newsletter.

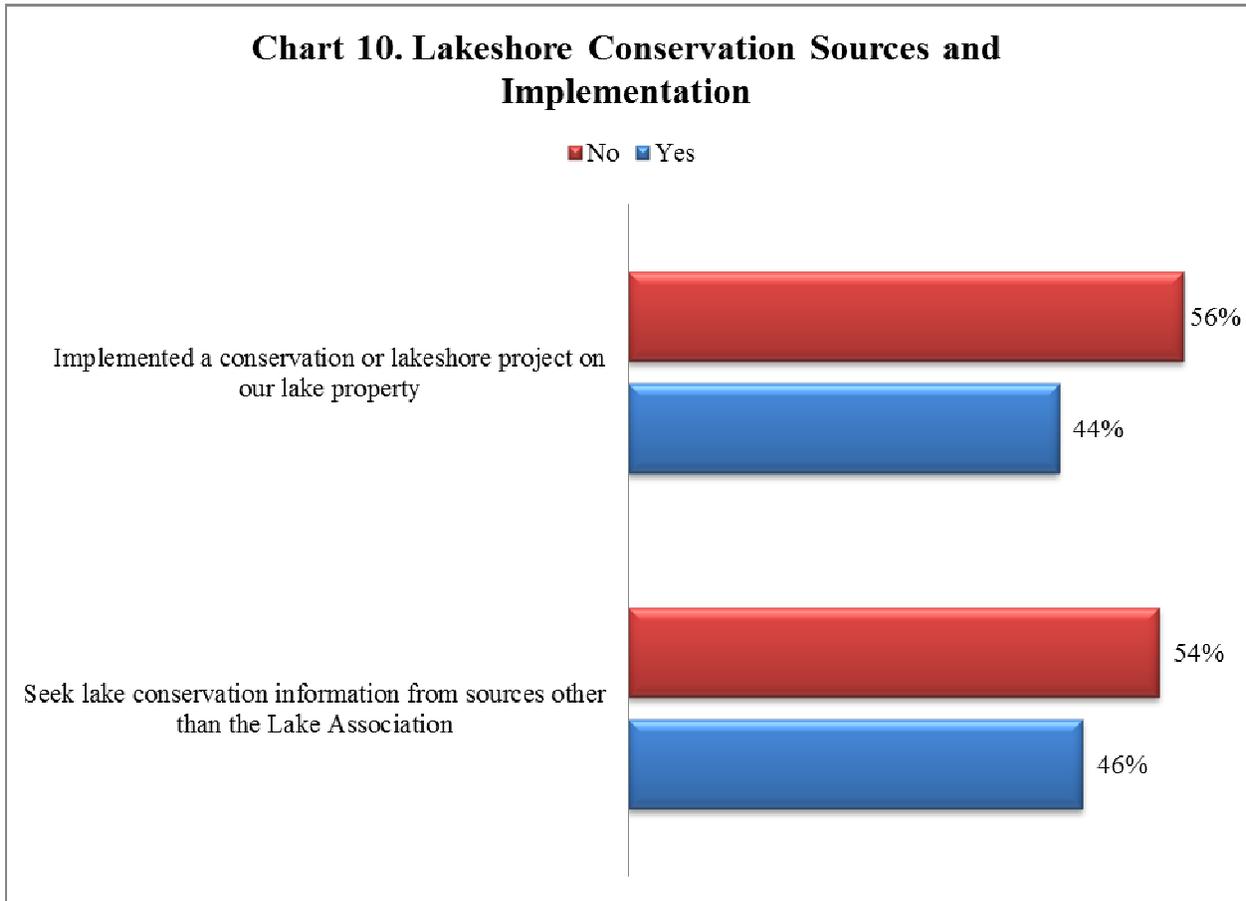
<b>Table 2. LAKELines Readership Frequency and Lake Association Participation</b>				
<b>Number of Lake Association Meetings or Events Attended In Past Year</b>	<b>How often do you read LAKELines</b>			
	<b>Always</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Never</b>
None	45%	54%	65%	93%
1 or more	55%	46%	34%	7%

## Conservation Practices

As shown in Chart 9, only one in four respondents agreed or strongly agreed they are not interested in learning about conservation issues. About 16 percent were neutral, and 60% said they disagreed. Due to an error in the questionnaire, the “strongly disagree” answer choice was not listed.



The results in Chart 10 indicate that 56% of respondents have not implemented a conservation or lakeshore project and may be an indicator of additional education and information outreach yet to be done with lakefront property owners. Over half of respondents (54%) said they have not used other sources than their lake association for lake conservation information, which implies that lake associations are an important conduit for this information.



## Written Comments

The survey contained an open-ended question in which respondents could add comments about LAKELines or suggestions for additional topics to be included in future issues of the newsletter. A total of 59 respondents entered comments in the space provided. The SRC placed those comments into 6 categories plus a miscellaneous group. Comments containing multiple topics were split into their appropriate topical groups, resulting in 61 comments. They are summarized in Table 3. Appendix B contains the complete list of comments.

The most frequent comments were about plants, animals, and invasive species, which comprised about a quarter of the total. The following quotes are examples:

*“Help lakes like ours that need weed attention. It's getting terrible.”*

*“How to take care of lily pads on lake.”*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Plants, Animals, Invasive Species	16	26%
Positive Feedback	12	20%
Water Quality	8	13%
Boats and Docks	6	10%
Zoning and Property Rights	6	10%
Don't Receive LAKELines	4	7%
Miscellaneous	9	15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100%</b>

The second most frequent topic (20%) consisted of positive feedback about the newsletter. The following quotes are examples:

*“Enjoy it very much and find it useful.”*

*“The articles are excellent and I use them for our lake association meetings, newsletters and websites.”*

## **Conclusions**

The results of this survey indicate that most lake property owners read the LAKELines newsletter. Large majorities of respondents hold positive opinions about the content, article length, readability, and frequency of publication.

Readers have a strong preference for delivery of the print version mailed to their residence rather than online.

Topics of interest for future issues are centered on property owner rights, shoreland regulations, and water quality concerns.

A majority of respondents are interested in conservation issues, and 44% have implemented conservation projects on their lake property.

Overall, the results of this survey present a positive set of reader opinions about LAKELines.

## **Appendix A – Non-response Bias Test**

Any survey has to be concerned with “non-response bias.” Non-response bias refers to a situation in which people who do not return a questionnaire have opinions that are systematically different from the opinions of those who return their surveys. For example, suppose most non-respondents said they prefer LAKELines to be published more frequently, whereas most of those who returned their questionnaire prefer the current publication schedule. In this case, non-response bias would exist, and the raw results would overstate the preference for the current twice yearly publication schedule.

The standard way to test for non-response bias is to compare the responses of those who return the first mailing of a questionnaire to those who return the second mailing. Those who return the second questionnaire are, in effect, a sample of non-respondents (to the first mailing), and we assume that they are representative of that group. In this survey, there were only 18 responses to the second mailing compared to 337 from the first mailing. The small number of second mailing responses precluded meaningful non-response bias testing in this survey.

## Appendix B – LakeLines Survey: Open-ended Responses

### Q.18: Is there anything else you would like to say about LAKELines or additional topics you would like covered in LAKELines? (61 responses)

#### Plants, Animals, Invasive Species (16 responses)

- Animals in and around lake.
- Fish stocking programs.
- Fish studies.
- Help lakes like ours that need weed attention. It's getting terrible.
- Help with cleaning out our lake- weeds along our little lake. So many weeds- had to remove them.
- How to eliminate invasive lake weeds.
- How to take care of lily pads on lake.
- I like birds- add some water or shore bird articles. Loons-everyone loves loons- I read climate change is not good for them. To get people to think about the big issues- climate change. Tug at the heart- loons. [Read the comment as written in ID# 296.
- List of Burnett County lakes w/invasive species.
- More on invasive species protection!
- People on our lake trap and kill otters and muskrats because of damage to pontoons, and I abhor this practice and would love to see an article about it.
- Protection of trees/forest.
- Take related bird life osprey, swallows, ducks, etc. Short reviews of positive lake association programs, report on legislation effecting lakes and property recent zoning low changes.
- We enjoyed the coupons for free/discounts for native plants. We hope to see that program continue.
- Why do they not allow control of aquatic weeds any longer? These species are choking out fish in the bays.
- Wish to see an article on growing snail problem or indicate it is an invasive species.

#### Positive Feedback (12 responses)

- Appreciate it and the info in it.
- Appreciate articles for Lake Association- I'm chair of Deer Lake Association.
- Enjoy it very much and find it useful.
- Good publication! Recommend focus on local issues and policies unique to Burnett Co. and WI. Reference to helpful educational programs is something I really like.
- Helpful publication. Thank you!
- I look forward to receiving and reading it! Thanks!
- Information is always helpful and relevant.
- Keep it coming!
- Keep up the good work.
- The articles are excellent and I use them for our lake association meetings, newsletters and websites.
- We appreciate your work- it's a helpful publication and good resource.
- We have not been to Burnett County in 4 summers. We really like articles with "Did you

know...?" a nice surprise.

**Water Quality (8 responses)**

- Swimmer's itch. (2x)
- How to improve water quality. Info/comparisons/stats on local water quality.
- Enforcement of water quality and lake/lakeshore preservation laws, environmental standards and policies, etc.
- The water quality of our lakes contributes significantly to our property values. I'd like to see more publicity regarding the organization and the value it brings to resident/users of lakes possibly signage at landing?
- We really are most interested in keeping the lake clean. People don't seem to understand how quickly it could be ruined.
- Many years ago the DNR started buying up River shorelines on the Namekagon River. Their reason was to protect the water. I would love to see someone challenge the DNR since they started this program they have polluted the water. If you ask them they even have excuses. But I know one thing, the water was crystal clear before and you could always see the bottom. Now the DNR has polluted the water for our future children. With some things they're allowing to be done, the river is getting bad. What a shame, the river was so wonderful.
- We would like to see articles on how we can reduce the amount of agricultural nutrient runoff into lakes/streams.

**Boats and Docks (6 responses)**

- Any changes in Lakeshore rules and regulations. Boat houses or staying closer to water.
- Effects of large boats and high powered water vehicles on lake vegetation beds- fish spawning beds- on small lakes.
- I would like to see an improved boat landing on Northland Lake with paved ramps and larger parking lot.
- Motor boat repairs of local ads for misc. for sale items. Local fixer up guys.
- Please address the need for more enforcement of no wake restrictions. Too many boats create excess wakes on the Yellow River- perhaps more education is needed and Enforcement.
- Theft problems from docks and boats.

**Zoning and Property Rights (6 responses)**

- Burnett County building set back/building codes on lake shore.
- Feature on lakeshore and riparian Rights, riparian zone identification.
- I would like to continue to see "how to" articles that tell property owners how to do things. Things being Govn't regulations, wildlife conservation, water quality, legal ordinances/laws.
- Options of giving up land for our property to be set aside for no development, in order to find a place to build a cabin w/ Lakeview.
- Please include county agency contacts with zoning issues, wardens, land and water, natural resources, committee etc.
- More rights of Wisconsin farmers (i.e. Cranberry).

**Don't Receive LAKELines (4 responses)**

- Do not receive LAKELines. (2x)
- I'd like to get a copy of LAKELines however the instructions on page one indicate not to provide my name not too useful.
- Have never seen it.

**Miscellaneous (9 responses)**

- LAKELines should be on Facebook. (2x)
- I also own a small cabin on devil's lake but live permanently about 6 miles from cabin.
- I am a 94 year old widower and will be transferring my lot and year round home to my children.
- I prefer article with scientific depth from qualified sources. I like the sources to be cited in the article.
- I understand that everyone is untrained in lake water quality but the people complaining around our lake are typically the newcomers. The wealthy folk who bought the 50' lot and crammed a full house into it. They went to complain about the 1 cabin that has existed for years. It is unfortunate those lots were allowed to be sold but it can't be undone.
- I would like to see specific profiles of individual lakes in Burnett Co., their history, development, etc.
- Polk-Burnett clearing widths vary from home to home along the lakes. What can be done about this? Off road vehicles run (mostly ATV's) run just about anywhere they want. I see them driving along the shorelines and down the State Hwy 70.
- The families of our lake property probably received the newsletter. All support lake conservation efforts.

## Appendix C – Quantitative Summary of Responses by Question

### Burnett County Lakes Association Survey

Using blue or black ink, please fill the circle that most closely matches your response on the following questions. Like this: ● Not like this: (✓) (X) (∕)

LAKELines, Burnett County Extension’s newsletter for Lake Associations comes out twice a year. How would you describe use of LAKELines in your household with respect to the following:

	Always	Usually	Occasionally	Never
1. How often do you read LAKELines?	50%	30%	15%	5%
2. How often do others in your household read LAKELines	12%	28%	35%	25%
3. How often do you share LAKELines with friends/neighbors	1%	6%	22%	71%
4. How often do you read LAKELines “cover to cover” (read all articles)	19%	38%	29%	14%

5. In the table below enter the number of people in your household read LAKELines by age group.

	Age					
	< 12 yrs.	13-18 yrs.	19-35 yrs.	36-50 yrs.	51-64 yrs.	65+ yrs.
Number of readers	2%	3%	6%	15%	31%	42%

6. What topics would you like to see included in future issues of LAKELines? (Mark • all that apply)

43% Dealing with tree blow down	66% Public lake use rights/shoreland owner rights
47% Recreation conflicts; boaters, jet skis, etc.	64% Understanding shoreland regulations
35% Benefits of downed trees in lake	57% Landscaping lakeshore homes
11% Recruiting and retaining volunteers	11% Articles for elementary school children
41% Boat cleaning and invasive species	39% Fishing tips/tactics
50% State and local conservation programs for property owners	60% Water quality
52% Shoreland wildlife	50% Aquatic plants
54% Well water quantity and quality	6% Managing a nonprofit organization

How would you rate your LAKELines with respect to the following:

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
7. Readability	39%	55%	5%	0%
8. Reliability/Credibility of information	41%	55%	4%	0%
9. Appropriate topics	27%	64%	9%	0%

	Just right	Too short	Too long
10. Article length	92%	5%	3%

	Print only	Online only	Both
11. How do you prefer to receive LAKELines?	71%	11%	18%

	Too many	About right	Too few
12. Do you think the frequency of LAKELines' publication (twice a year) is:	1%	78%	21%

	None	1 - 2	More than 2
13. How many Lake Association meetings, events, or functions did a member of your household attend last year?	53%	38%	10%

	Yes	No
14. A member of this household researches/seeks lake conservation information from sources other than the Lake Association	46%	54%

	Yes	No
15. I/We have implemented a conservation or lakeshore project on our lake property	44%	56%

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Agree
16. I have no interest in learning about lake conservation issues	19%	5%	16%	60%	0%

	Burnett County Lakefront	Burnett County Off Lake	Outside of Burnett County
17. Where is your <u>permanent</u> home?	22%	3%	74%

18. Is there anything else you would like to say about LAKELines or additional topics you would like covered in LAKELines?

See Appendix B

**Please tell us something about yourself and your family.**

19. Your gender	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>							
	63%	37%							
20. Your age	<b>18–24</b>	<b>25–34</b>	<b>35–44</b>	<b>45–54</b>	<b>55–64</b>	<b>65+</b>			
	0%	0%	5%	18%	26%	50%			
21. Your highest level of education	<b>Less than high school</b>	<b>High school diploma</b>	<b>Some college/tech</b>	<b>Tech college graduate</b>	<b>Bachelor’s degree</b>	<b>Grad or professional deg</b>			
	1%	10%	21%	8%	29%	30%			
22. What is your current employment status	<b>Self-Employed</b>	<b>Employed Full-Time</b>	<b>Employed Part-time</b>	<b>Home-maker</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Retired</b>	<b>Other: _____</b>		
	11%	29%	6%	1%	0%	53%	0%		
23. What is your household income level	<b>Less than \$25,000</b>	<b>\$25,000 – 34,999</b>	<b>\$35,000 – 49,999</b>	<b>\$50,000 – 74,999</b>	<b>\$75,000 – 99,999</b>	<b>\$100,000+</b>			
	5%	7%	10%	20%	15%	44%			
24. How many adults (18+ years old) have an ownership stake in your lake home?					<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5+</b>
					19%	65%	5%	9%	2%
25. Please estimate the total number of days in the following months that your lake home in Burnett County was occupied during the past year.									
a. May 1 to August 31	<b>Avg: 57</b> /days			b. Sept. 1 to Nov. 30			<b>Avg: 36</b> /days		
c. Dec. 1 to Apr 30	<b>Avg: 35</b> /days								

Please return your survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope to:

Survey Research Center  
 University of Wisconsin – River Falls  
 124 Regional Development Institute  
 410 S. Third Street  
 River Falls, WI 54022-5001