

Volunteer Water Monitoring Survey

2022 Volunteer Statewide Survey Report

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Table of Contents

Tables	3
Figures	3
1. Introduction	1
2. Data collection and analysis	1
3. Results	2
3.1. All volunteer water monitoring program results.....	2
3.1.1. Program information and demographics.....	2
3.1.2. Overall results.....	6
4. Citations	21

Tables

Table 1 Volunteer Water Monitoring Program Respondents	2
Table 2 Who Volunteers Recruited	6
Table 3 How Volunteers Heard About VWMP Opportunities	7
Table 4 Actions Taken To Protect Water Quality	20

Figures

Figure 1 Respondent Veteran Status	3
Figure 2 Respondent Active Duty Status	3
Figure 3 Respondent Student Status	3
Figure 4 Respondent Education Status	4
Figure 5 Respondent Gender	4
Figure 6 Respondent Hispanic Ethnicity	5
Figure 7 Respondent Employment Status	5
Figure 8 Future Volunteer Plans	6
Figure 9 Motivations To Volunteer	7
Figure 10 Participation In Past Training	9
Figure 11 Participation In 2022 Training	9
Figure 12 Efficacy Of Training	10
Figure 13 Influence Of Volunteering On Increased Understanding	12
Figure 14 Discussion Of VWMP Participation	12
Figure 15 Who Volunteers Talked With About Volunteering	13
Figure 16 Topics Spoken About Related To Their Vwmp	14
Figure 17 Different Opinions Among Who Volunteers Talked With	14
Figure 18 Perceptions Of Scientists	15
Figure 19 Frequency Of Information Used	16
Figure 20 Trust In Information	17

1. Introduction

Volunteer monitoring is widely recognized as a tool for engaging the public in science and enhancing stewardship outcomes across resource types and scientific disciplines. Volunteer water monitoring programs (VWMP) have been active in Montana for at least 20 years and there are more than 30 active programs across the state. The State of Montana relies on volunteer collected water quality data for many aspects of water management. Because of this reliance, VWMP managers need to understand what motivates their volunteers to participate in VWMPs and the efficacy of their monitoring trainings. Information on volunteers has traditionally been collected through exit surveys. Our team partnered with VWMPs in Montana to develop a standardized statewide online volunteer monitor survey, designed to be administered by Montana VWMPs repeatedly over time. Our initial survey, which was developed and implemented in 2021, includes questions to understand the following: motivations for volunteering; program-specific training efficacy; learning outcomes; general perceptions of watershed knowledge; whether and with whom respondents talk with about volunteering; and trust in scientists. The survey was re-administered in 2022 using the same questions. This report summarizes the findings of the 2022 survey.

2. Data collection and analysis

We developed this survey in collaboration with three Montana volunteer water monitoring program managers. We adapted many volunteer-specific questions from Church et al. (2019), the trust in scientists questions from Funk et al. (2019), and developed our own questions as a team. The volunteer water monitoring program managers informed the questions related to monitoring training. The survey discussed in this report was deployed for the 2022 volunteer year, and administered in November 2022 through May 2023. We generated an anonymous survey link, which was distributed to volunteers through each volunteer water monitoring program manager.

This survey received approval from Montana State University's Institutional Review Board (SC033122-EX). Survey data was analyzed using R statistical software. In the following sections, we use descriptive statistics to report survey data.

3. Results

Volunteer water monitoring program managers distributed the anonymous survey link, thus we do not know the total number of volunteers who received the survey; however, we intend to work to track this information in the future. Overall, we received 57 responses. We excluded responses from respondents who did not answer which VWMP they participated in, resulting in a total of 55 responses across all volunteer water monitoring programs. In the following pages, the number of responses are question-specific; thus although we received 55 survey responses total, each question response rate varies. Figures include the Likert mean in white on each scale item.

3.1. All volunteer water monitoring program results

3.1.1. Program information and demographics

TABLE 1 VOLUNTEER WATER MONITORING PROGRAM RESPONDENTS

“Please select which Montana-based volunteer water monitoring program for which you plan to complete this survey.” (n=55)	
Volunteer Water Monitoring Program	Frequency
Clarks Fork Yellowstone Partnership	3
Gallatin Stream Teams	10
Madison Stream Team	4
Missoula Valley Water Quality District	3
Stillwater-Rosebud Water Quality Initiative	1
Watershed Education Network	34

Race

- 91.1% of respondents are white (n=45).

Age

- Total count (n): 41
- Mean: 47.5
- Median: 46
- Standard Deviation: 20.5

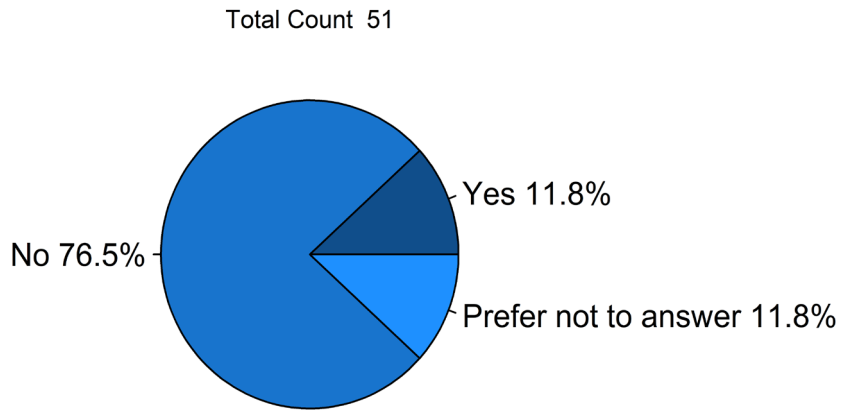


FIGURE 1 RESPONDENT VETERAN STATUS

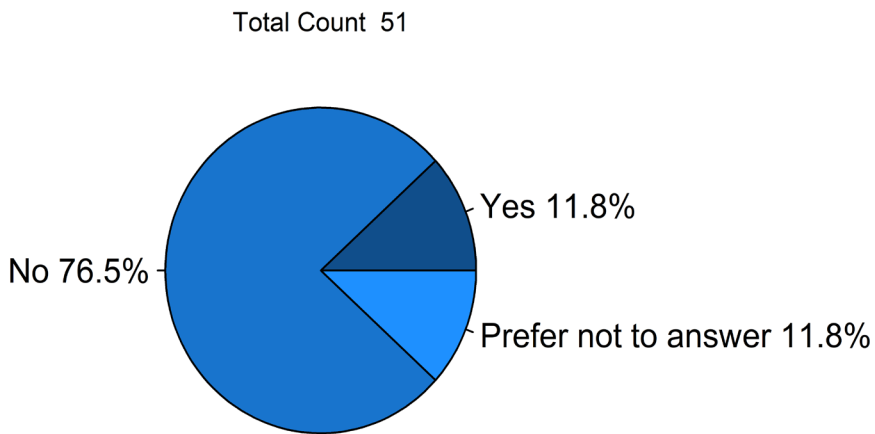


FIGURE 2 RESPONDENT ACTIVE DUTY STATUS

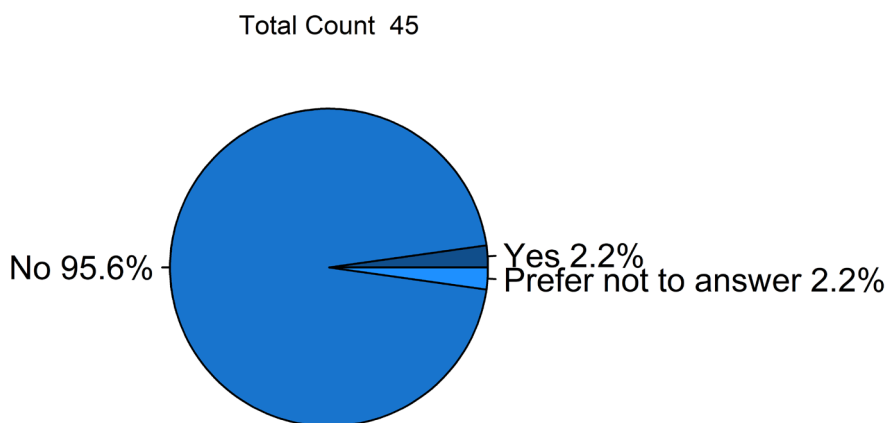


FIGURE 3 RESPONDENT STUDENT STATUS

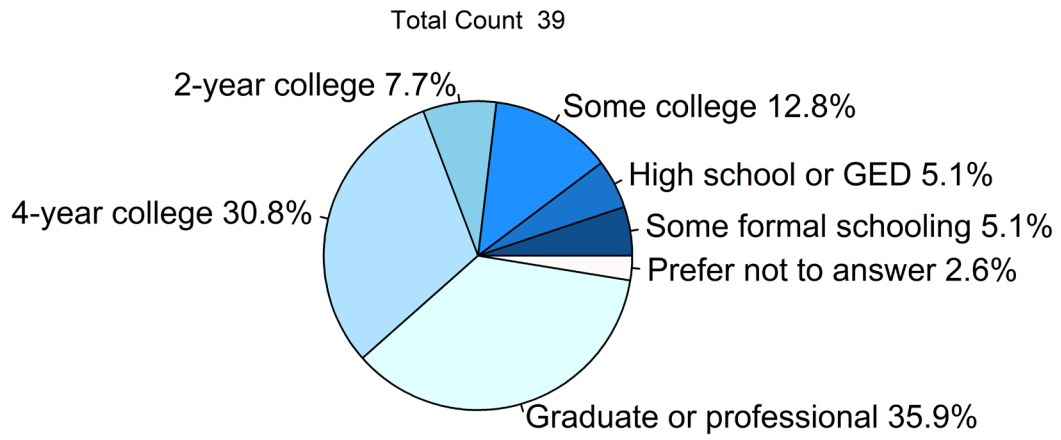


FIGURE 4 RESPONDENT EDUCATION STATUS

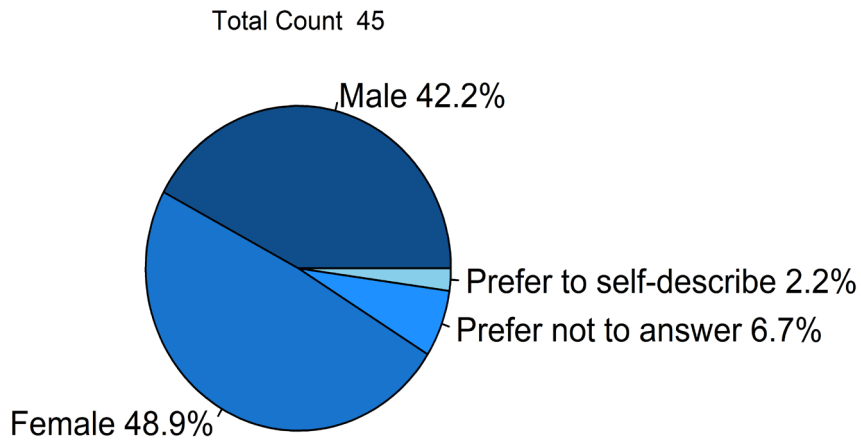


FIGURE 5 RESPONDENT GENDER

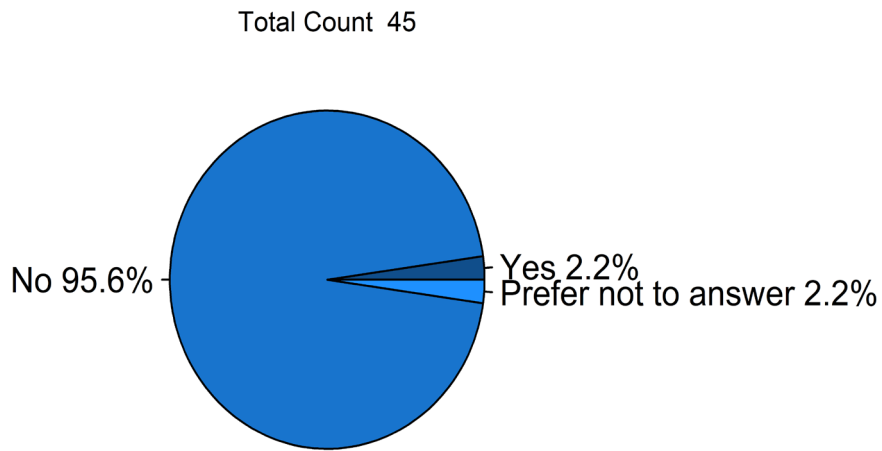


FIGURE 6 RESPONDENT HISPANIC ETHNICITY

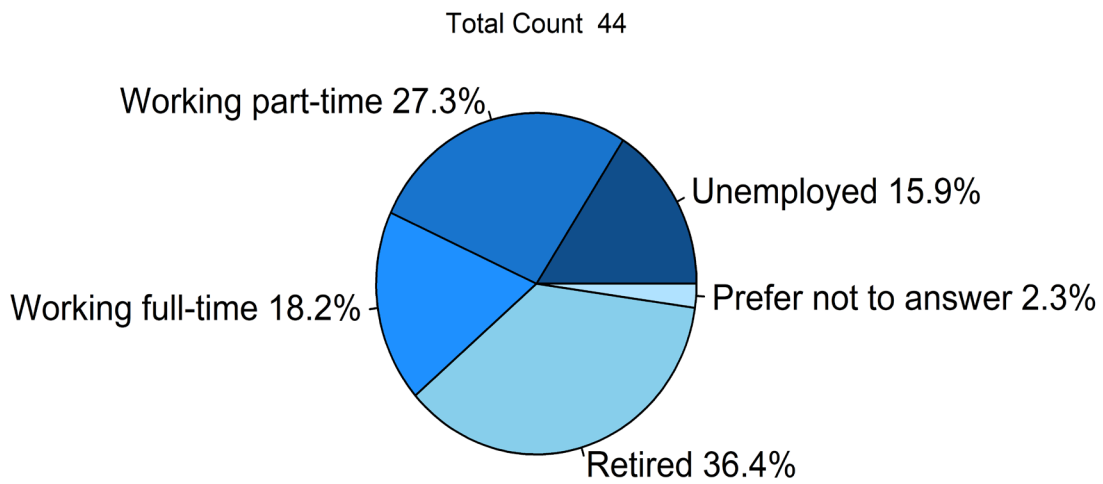


FIGURE 7 RESPONDENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS

3.1.2. Overall results

1. “How many seasons have you volunteered with the [specific VWMP]? (please enter a number rounded to the nearest year)”

- Total count (n): 51
- Mean: 2.1
- Median: 1
- Standard Deviation: 2.2

2. “Are you planning to volunteer with the [specific VWMP] in the future?”

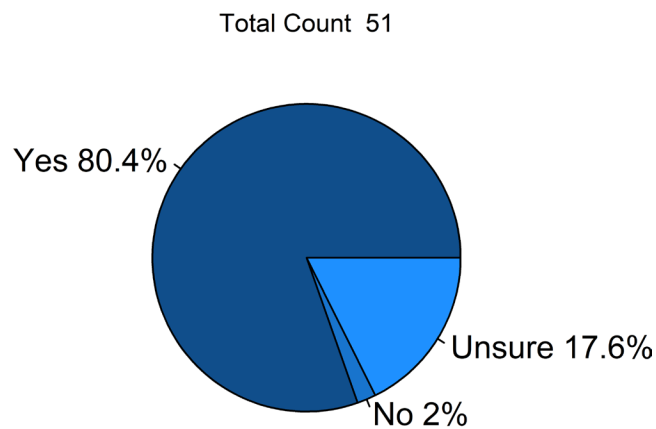


FIGURE 8 FUTURE VOLUNTEER PLANS

3. “Please indicate if you recruited someone from the following categories to volunteer with the [specific VWMP] in 2022.”

TABLE 2 WHO VOLUNTEERS RECRUITED

Recruitment Category	Total Count (n)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)
<i>Friend(s)</i>	44	18.2	72.7	9.1
<i>Coworkers/Classmates</i>	45	20	71.1	8.9
<i>Spouse/significant other</i>	45	13.3	84.4	2.2
<i>Children</i>	43	4.7	93	2.3
<i>Other</i>	34	11.8	79.4	8.8

4. “How did you hear about opportunities to volunteer with the [specific VWMP]? (select all that apply)” (includes all volunteers regardless of how many seasons they had volunteered)

TABLE 3 HOW VOLUNTEERS HEARD ABOUT VWMP OPPORTUNITIES

Sources	Count (n)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Word of mouth	47	44.7	55.3
Tabling or other outreach event	47	14.9	85.1
Meeting	47	10.6	89.4
Social media	47	8.5	91.5
E-mail campaign	47	4.3	95.7
News broadcasting	47	0.0	100.0
Print news media	47	0.0	100.0
Other	47	25.5	74.5

5. “Please indicate how much each of the following statements motivated you to volunteer with the [specific VWMP] in 2022:” (includes all volunteers regardless of how many seasons they had volunteered)

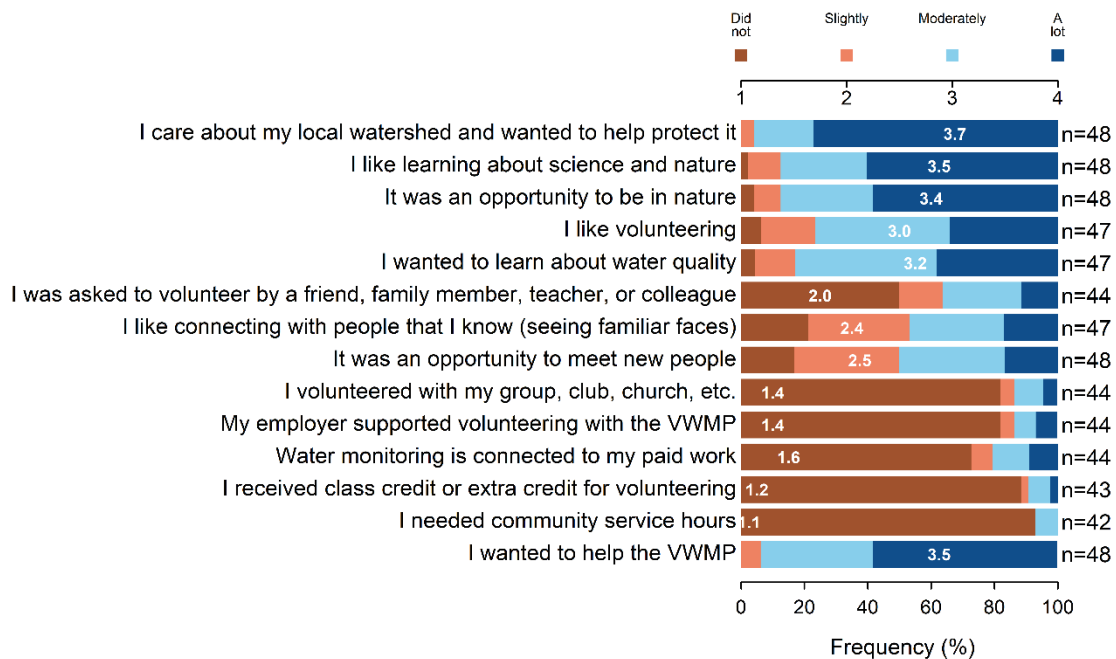


FIGURE 9 MOTIVATIONS TO VOLUNTEER

1=did not motivate me at all; 2= motivated me slightly, 3= motivated me moderately, 4 motivated me a lot

6. “You indicated that you are not planning on volunteering with the [specific VWMP] in the future. Why have you decided not to volunteer with this program in the future? (select all that apply)”

- “I moved away from the watershed” n=2
- “I had other volunteer commitments” n=1
- “I only wanted to volunteer for a limited amount of time” n=2
- “Other” n=6

7. **“Do you have any suggestions to improve the volunteer experience with the [specific VWMP]?”** *Answers below are verbatim (names have been removed).*

- "A follow up training Zoom after the first round of sampling would be good. That would be used to double check sites, inventory forms, and sample collection methods. Not only could the volunteers ask questions, the DEQ staff could look at the records and photos to see that they are what they expected."
- "I may have missed it in the description, but if it actually is not there, you might add a statement about what time commitment is expected on a typical day's outing. The first day I went I did not know to bring my lunch. I managed ok, but this might be an issue for some. Also, any advice for a first time wader user? I'd like to get myself a pair of my own :). Maybe a list of people willing to sell a used pair? Thanks!"
- "I think it would be good if at the training sessions the volunteers are told what the time commitment will be. I didn't realize it would take most of the day. The timing worked out for me, but it caught me by surprise that it was an all day enterprise."
- "I think they have been doing a fantastic job and always enjoy monitoring with [redacted]! I do not have any suggestions for improvement at this time."
- "More snacks?"
- "More time should be spent on what some of the outcomes of the work might be. Seems like a lot of data gathering and not so much use made of the data."
- "More volunteers are needed."
- "No"
- "None"
- "Nothing comes to mind"
- "Nothing I can think of"
- "No suggestions. The group in [redacted] is friendly, helpful, patient, and appreciative. Couldn't ask for a better experience!"
- "No, overall I think it was a very fun and enjoyable experience! The staff was very knowledgeable and the program was well organized."
- "No, the experiences working with them have been great!"
- "No, was a great program and hope to do it again in the future!"
- "Perhaps hold a few sessions for educated and vital elders"
- "Team members should bring waders and be prepared to get in the water."
- "The group in [redacted] are fabulous! They are appreciating and accepting and so informative."
- "The start of my internship was delayed and the communication with me was poor in the beginning - I could have spent a lot more time working on it in early June when the river was pleasant to be around, but couldn't get started until after the mosquitos were out."
- "They do a really great job on all aspects that I have experienced; organized, friendly, casual yet serious, educational yet fun, snacks, etc."
- "While I know it is difficult giving volunteers as much advance notice as possible would be helpful"

8. “Have you ever participated in a training related to the [specific VWMP]?”

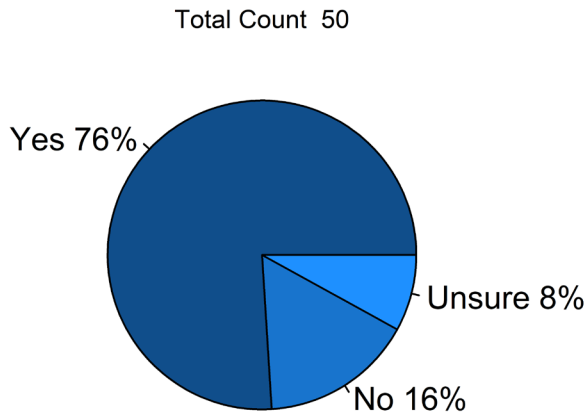


FIGURE 10 PARTICIPATION IN PAST TRAINING

9. “Did you participate in a training related to the [specific VWMP] in 2022?”

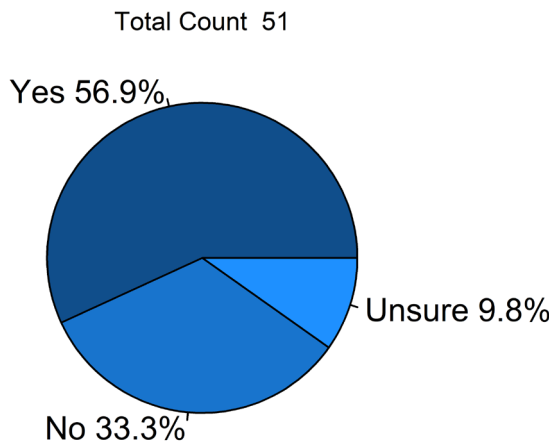


FIGURE 11 PARTICIPATION IN 2022 TRAINING

10. “How much do you disagree or agree with the following statements about the training(s) you had with the [specific VWMP] in 2022?” (includes only volunteers who participated in a training in 2022)

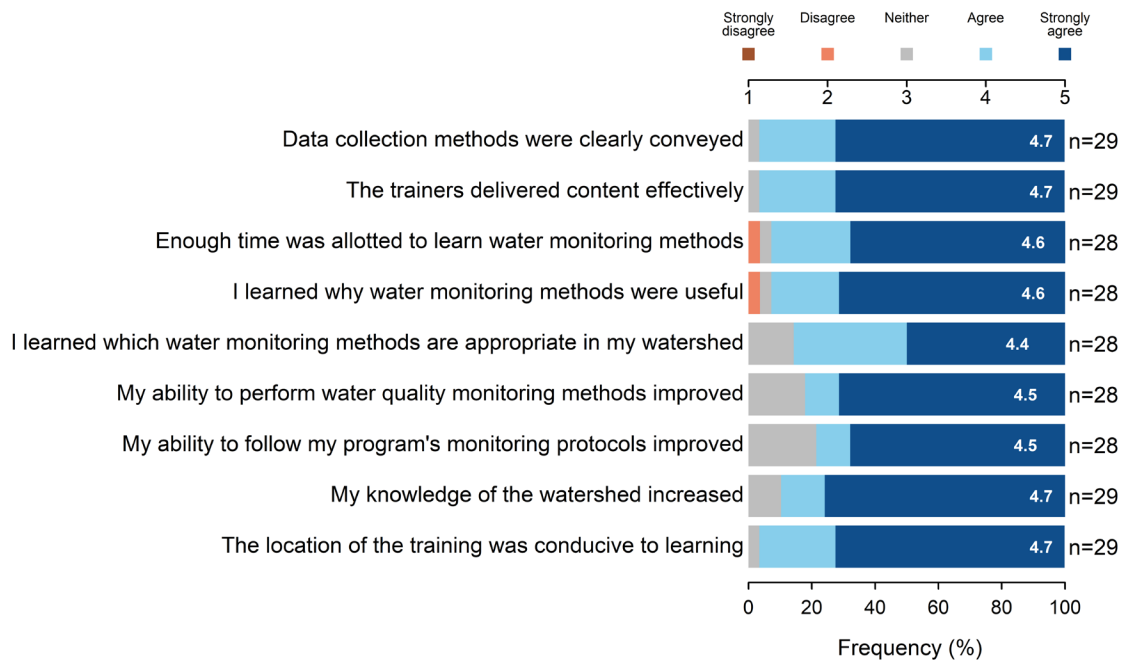


FIGURE 12 EFFICACY OF TRAINING

1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree

11. “Do you have any suggestions to make the [specific VWMP] trainings better?” *Answers below are verbatim (names have been removed).*

- "As a returning volunteer, and working professionally in the natural sciences / water rights, I have found the current training method of online videos / review paired with a shorter field session ideal, particularly to fit in with my busy schedule. However, this does require more self-guiding/initiative to make sure you are getting the proper training. I could see an option for a more intensive day training session, more like was done prior to COVID, being beneficial for first time volunteers. However, this would put a larger burden on the organizers, and I do not think is necessary to obtain a well-trained volunteer pool."
- "I have been to training every year. They are good as an introduction for new people. Hands on experience in the field is where you learn and get experience."
- "I know it would require more time from the staff, but I think two training sessions would be better, to allow for reinforcement and development of new skills. My first outing as a trained volunteer was almost two months after my training day, and by that time I felt I had not retained as much from the training as I would have liked."
- "It would be helpful to understand why stream monitoring is important and what past monitoring has achieved."
- "No"
- "Nope"
- "On site would have been helpful."
- "see previous comment about their excellent work and organization"
- "Stage closer to when we're then in the field; forgot some of the training in the four weeks."
- "Team continuity from year to year will be the biggest benefit/obstacle. If we keep the 2022 team as a core, then 2023 will be in good shape. We plan to work hard to bring in additional team members so we have extra people with experience in future years. Besides, being out on the river, collecting data, builds confidence and interest in the project. Great for getting local support for future goals."

12. “Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements. Because of participating in [specific VWMP], I have a better understanding of the following:”

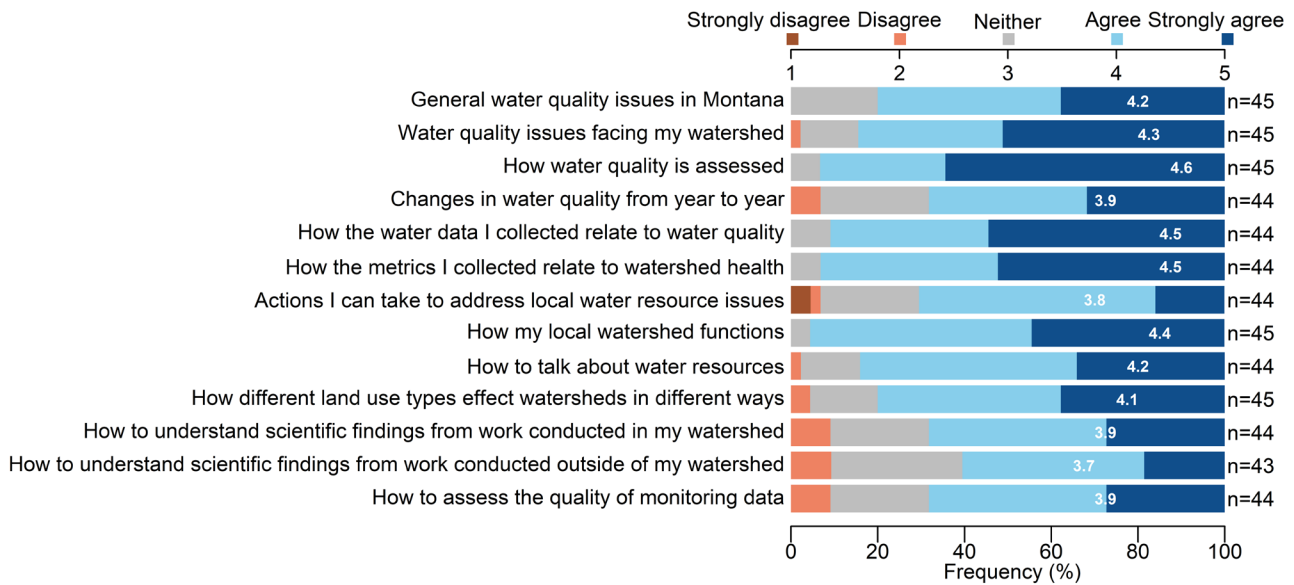


FIGURE 13 INFLUENCE OF VOLUNTEERING ON INCREASED UNDERSTANDING

1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree

13. “Did you talk with anyone about your participation with the [specific VWMP] in 2022?”

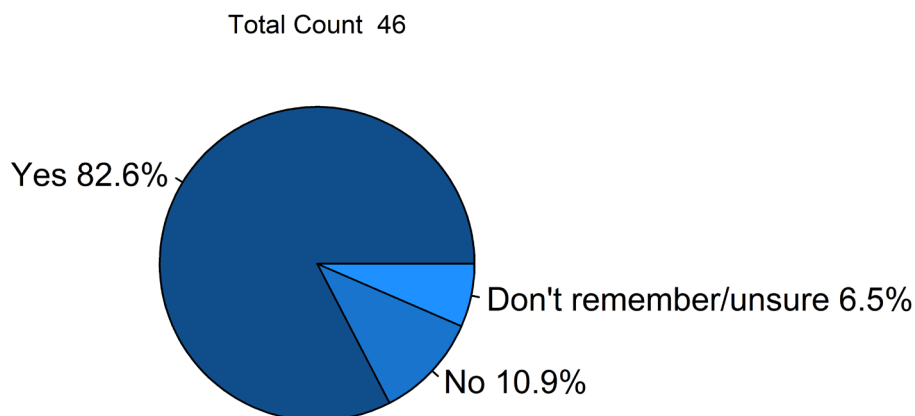


FIGURE 14 DISCUSSION OF VWMP PARTICIPATION

14. With whom did you talk about volunteering? (select all that apply)” (includes respondents who selected “yes” for “Did you talk with anyone about your participation with the [specific VWMP]”)

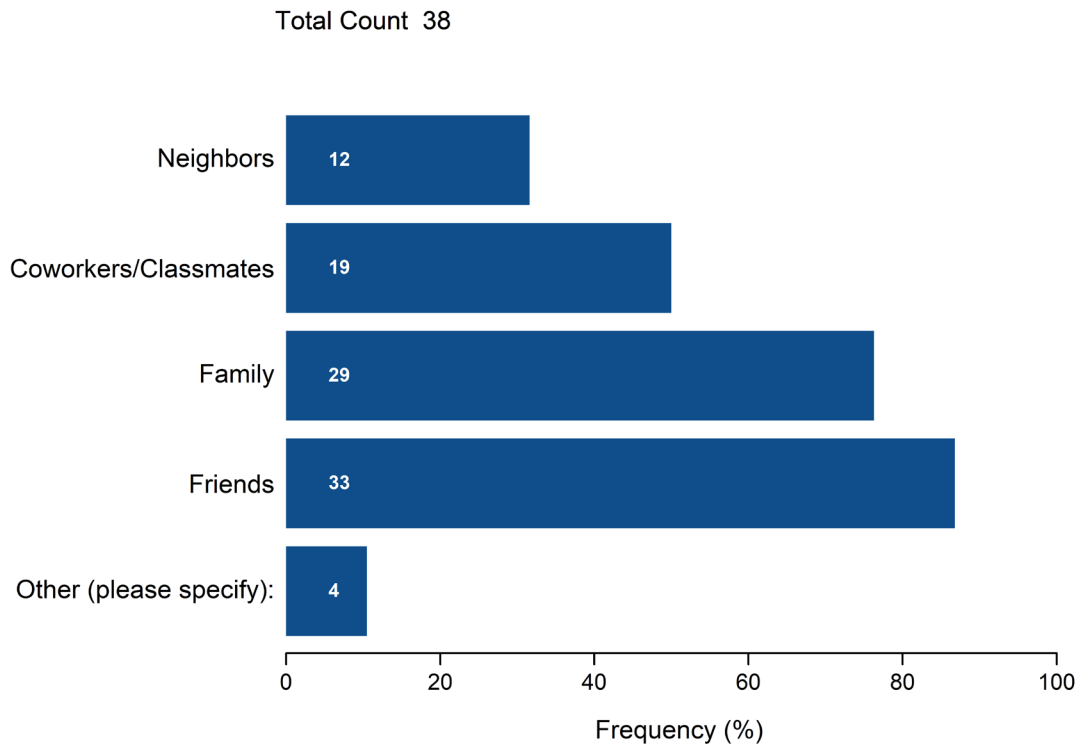


FIGURE 15 WHO VOLUNTEERS TALKED WITH ABOUT VOLUNTEERING

15. “When discussing the [specific VWMP], what topics did you talk about? (select all that apply)” (includes respondents who selected “yes” for “Did you talk with anyone about your participation with the [specific VWMP]”)

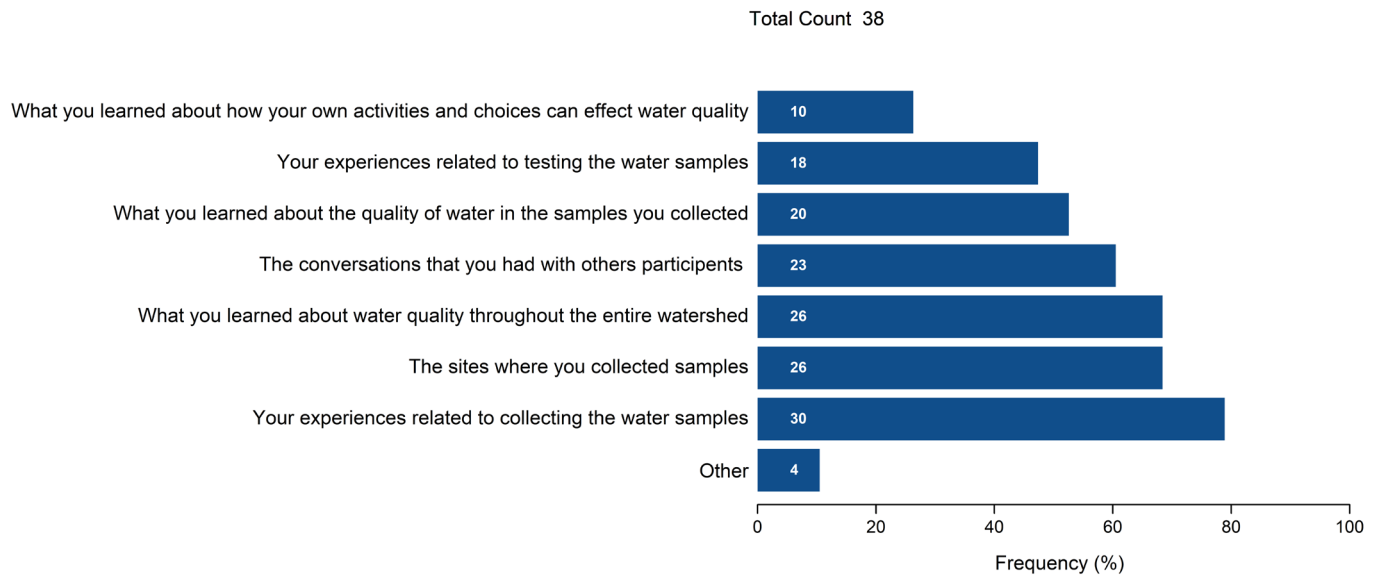


FIGURE 16 TOPICS SPOKEN ABOUT RELATED TO THEIR VWMP

16. “Does anyone you spoke with about the VWMP generally have different opinions than yourself about environmental issues?”

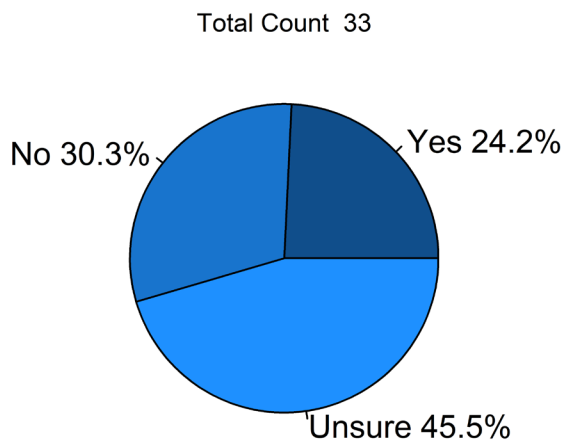


FIGURE 17 DIFFERENT OPINIONS AMONG WHO VOLUNTEERS TALKED WITH

17. “Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with the following broad statements about scientists:”

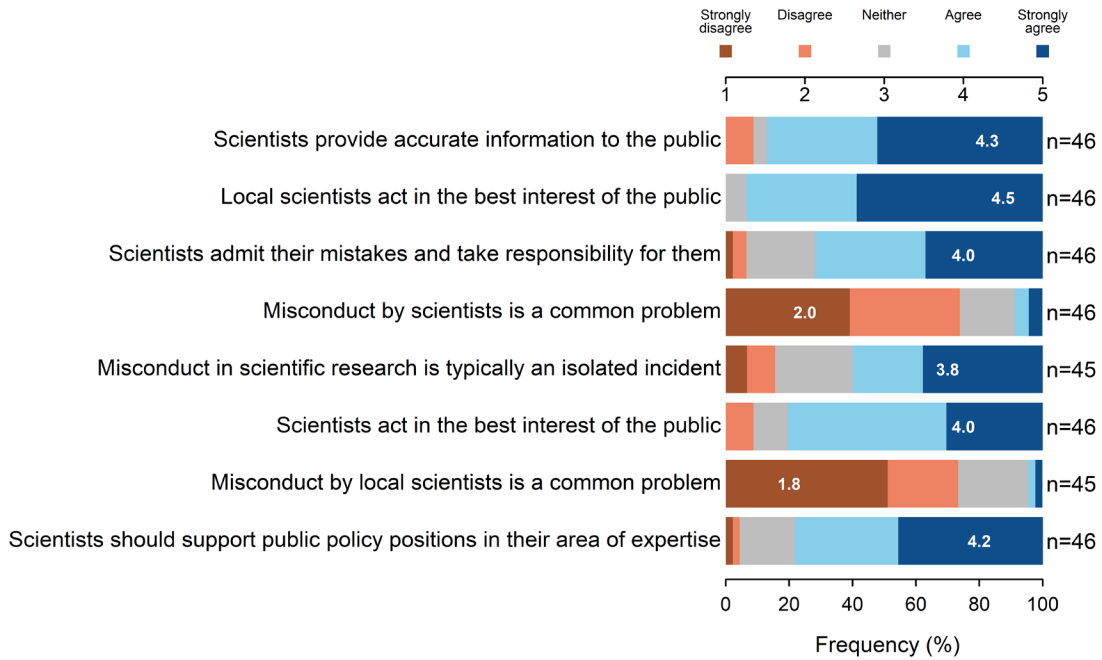


FIGURE 18 PERCEPTIONS OF SCIENTISTS

1=strongly disagree, 2=somewhat disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree

18. “In 2022, how frequently did you use the following sources to learn about issues impacting your local watershed?”

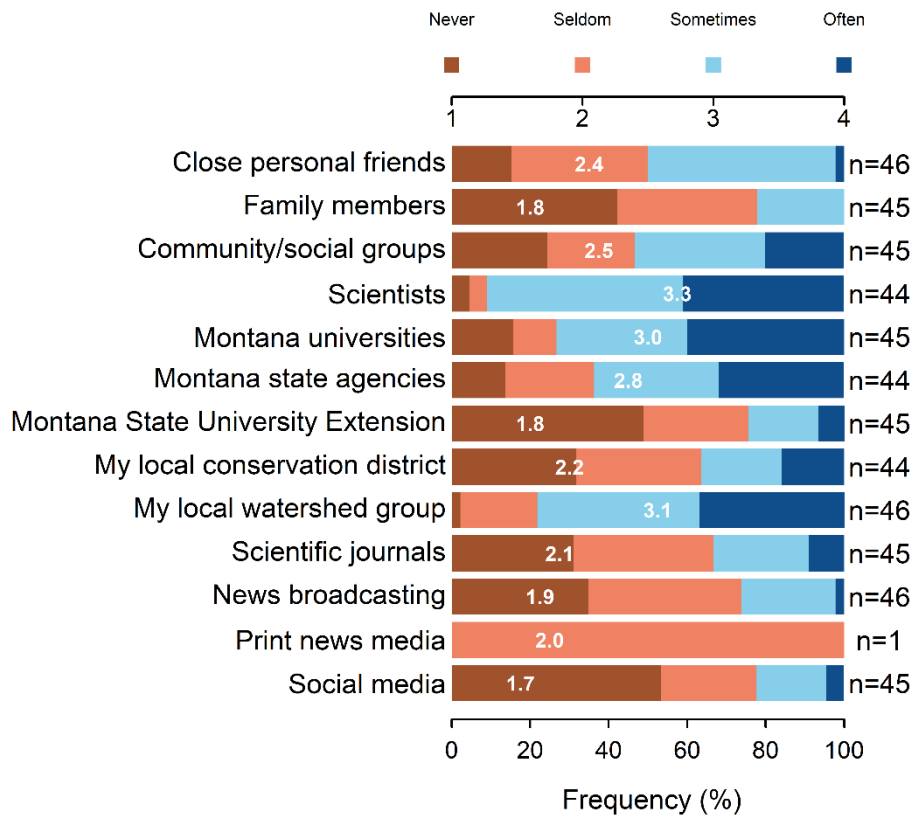


FIGURE 19 FREQUENCY OF INFORMATION USED

1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=often

19. “Please indicate how much you trust the following sources to accurately communicate scientific information in general.”

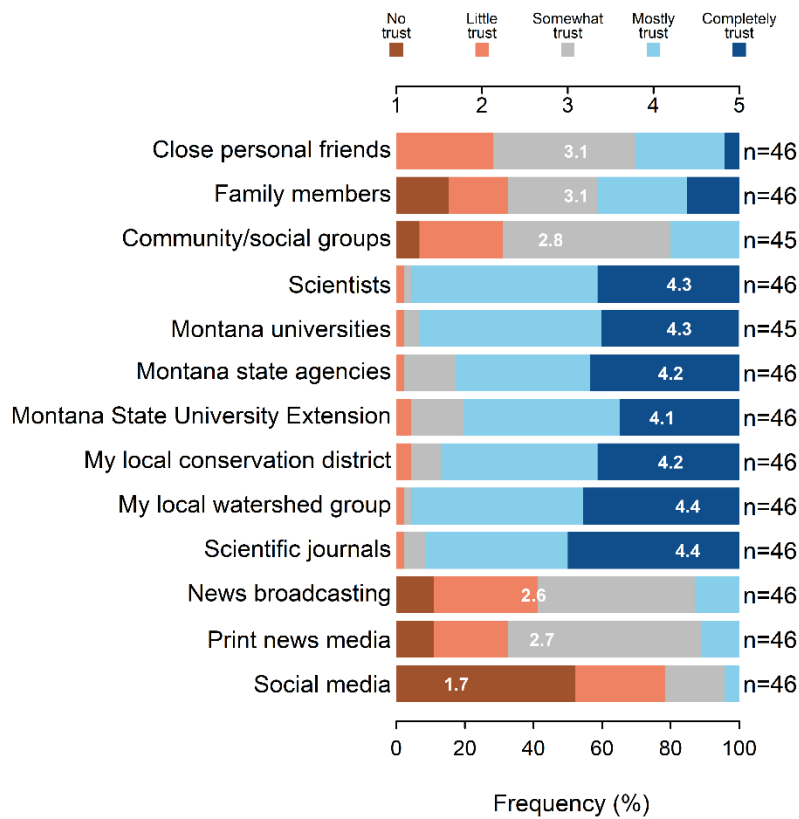


FIGURE 20 TRUST IN INFORMATION

1=I do not trust this source at all, 2=I trust this source a little bit, 3=I somewhat trust this source, 4=I mostly trust this source, 5=I completely trust this source

20. “In 2-3 sentences, please summarize the largest water quality issue facing your local watershed.” *Answers below are verbatim (names have been removed).*

- “Climate change – snow melt is earlier, climate is drier”
- “Climate change coupled with pollution, stream degradation, and strain on water resources from overdevelopment”
- “Climate change is the biggest threat to the [redacted] as a trout fishery. “
- “Drought as a consequence of climate change”
- “Drought, land use practices, water storage”
- “Elevated nitrate levels, dewatering, elevated temperatures.”
- “Encroaching urbanism”
- “For sure pollution. We have a very vulnerable aquifer and with a growing population the risk of contamination is going to continue to grow.”
- “From what I have learned this season, it seems that runoff from home septic systems poses a serious problem to the local watershed.”
- “Growing population and all that brings in terms of demands on water supplies and pollution (more cars, development, industry, agriculture, etc.). And climate change of course, since Montana is heating much faster than much of the country.”
- “Heavy metal sediment”
- “High sediment and nutrient loading. Lack of data, funding and commitment to address these problems.”
- “Human activity. The lack of oversight on sewage and potential industrial waste.”
- “Human and livestock impacts. Primarily regarding introduction of biological/pathogenic pollutants. Also, potential contamination of groundwater.”
- “I do not recall specifically, but I imagine wildfires and increase in population which has been causing changes in land use.”
- “I think development (clearing land, building, etc.) and non-point source pollution are the biggest threats to water quality in our local watershed. ”
- "I think the development of the Gallatin Valley is the biggest water quality issue we are facing and will face in the coming years. Changing land use patterns from ag to more residential / commercial uses will impact non-points source pollution and have the potential to alter both the physical and chemical nature of the watershed."
- "I think the largest water quality issues in my local watershed are likely related to agriculture and recreation. However, dwindling snowpack caused by global warming also threatens water levels."
- "In the [water body] there isn't any large water quality issues. I found that it was a very healthy stream that has had restoration work done on it for years."
- "Increased population sprawl where septic systems and well water extraction is poorly regulated resulting in degradation of aquifer quantity and quality. There is little public education or regulation that governs new (or existing) built environment or agricultural practices that impact water quantity and quality. "
- "Land being developed and the resulting changes to the watershed. Increased runoff from removal of vegetation, use of fertilizers, etc. "
- "less water from lack of snow run off "

- "Nutrient loading. The challenge is getting buy in from the local community. More than once we were asked why we care about water quality in the river. Also, our nutrient loads may enhance the success of invasive species, a problem not yet being addressed."
- "Ongoing Superfund Cleanup of the [redacted]"
- "Overuse by people with dogs is an issue I have identified, and that concerns me a great deal. Although it may not be the biggest threat, it is increasing in significance."
- "Pollution from industry and the associated cleanup."
- "Septic tanks , ranch and farm runoff"
- "Sustaining healthy, clean, abundant ground water. Land use changes and waste water treatment are two vital issues."
- "The input of nutrients from agriculture, septic and waste water is the biggest issues facing the [redacted] right now. "
- "The largest water quality issue facing my local watershed is probably the invasive species of goldfish that are being dumped in lakes. This produces too much waste, and competes with native species for food and shelter. "
- "The largest water quality issue in my watershed is pollution from homes and businesses. Additionally, waters are warming due to climate change and cold water species are facing trials."
- "The monitoring of the changes in the in the watershed after the dam removal "
- "The plans for increased massive development on the headwaters of [redacted]. Ranchers who knowingly allow their livestock to degrade streams and could care less about water quality."
- "Too many individual septic systems, drought, increased population"
- "Ughhhhhh is the largest issue stormwater runoff (that is polluted) due to the rapidly growing population and construction and pavementization of the hillslopes here? Or, is it all the dog poop in "biodegradable" bags littering the trails adjacent to streams, inputting organics? Or, is it "traditional" stuff like the [redacted] superfund residue? I'm not sure which. No matter what, it's due to humans being selfish, entitled, and probably also ignorant."
- "Very worried about overuse and pollution by people looking to toss fast food trash."
- "Volume and pollution"

21. “The following are examples of changes you could make at home, in your daily routines, or at work to try to help improve water quality in your community. Please indicate whether you have made any of the following changes (select all that apply).”
(n=29)

TABLE 4 ACTIONS TAKEN TO PROTECT WATER QUALITY

Practice	Total count (n)	I had already made this change		I made this change as a result of volunteering for the VWMP	
		Count	%	Count	%
<i>Implemented integrated pest management practices to reduce pesticide use</i>	43	27	62.8	0	0.0
<i>Reduced fertilizer use</i>	43	28	65.1	2	4.7
<i>Properly disposed of household waste (e.g. batteries, light bulbs, hazardous chemicals, oils and fats, etc.)</i>	43	36	83.7	2	4.7
<i>Attended a public meeting related to natural resource planning/management</i>	43	14	32.6	10	23.3
<i>Submitted a public comment related to natural resource planning/management</i>	43	15	34.9	7	16.3
<i>Properly disposed of pet waste</i>	43	29	67.4	2	4.7
<i>Properly disposed of used motor oil and antifreeze</i>	43	37	86.0	1	2.3
<i>Directed downspouts away from a paved surface</i>	43	26	60.5	2	4.7
<i>Decreased the amount of chemical products used in my house that go down the drain</i>	43	33	76.7	1	2.3
<i>Reduced storm water runoff from my property</i>	43	17	39.5	0	0.0
<i>Reduce run off of contaminants in storm water from my property (e.g., sediment, de-icer, etc..)</i>	43	23	53.5	2	4.7
<i>Volunteered for another water quality related project</i>	43	8	18.6	17	39.5

4. Citations

Church, S.P., Payne, L.B., Peel, S. and Prokopy, L.S., 2019. Beyond water data: benefits to volunteers and to local water from a citizen science program. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 62(2), pp.306-326.

Funk, C., Hefferon, M., Kennedy, B. and Johnson, C., 2019. Trust and mistrust in Americans' views of scientific experts. *Pew Research Center*, 2, pp.1-96.