

Volunteer Water Monitoring Survey

2024 Gallatin River Task Force Report

Prepared May 2025 by:

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Suggested Citation

Warrenfeltz, B., S.P. Church, W.A. Sigler (2025). Volunteer Water Monitoring Survey: 2024 Gallatin River Task Force Report. People Places Water Lab and MSU Extension. Bozeman: Montana State University.

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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 and 2024 using the same questions. This report summarizes the findings of the 2024 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 2024 volunteer year and administered in October 2024 through February 2025. 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, but the program coordinator estimated 10. We received 5 responses from Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program volunteers and estimate a response rate of 50%. In the following pages, the number of responses are question-specific; thus, although we received 5 survey responses total, each question response rate varies.

3.1. Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program results

3.1.1. Program information and demographics

Age

- **Total count (n):** 5
- **Mean:** 52.4
- **Median:** 69
- **Standard Deviation:** 25.5

Race

80% participants are white (n=5).

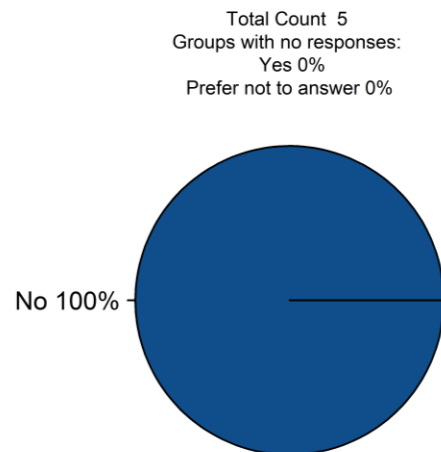


FIGURE 1. RESPONDENT VETERAN STATUS.

Answer choices that received no responses are listed at the top of the figure under the “Groups with no responses” text.

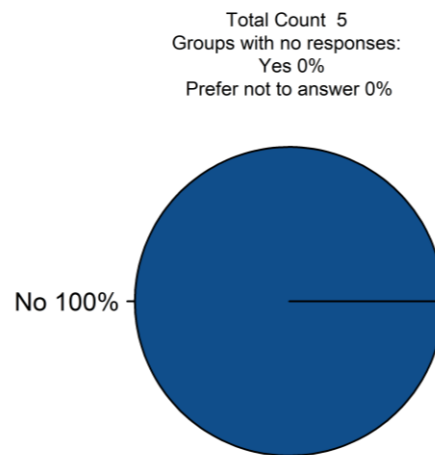


FIGURE 3. RESPONDENT ACTIVE DUTY STATUS

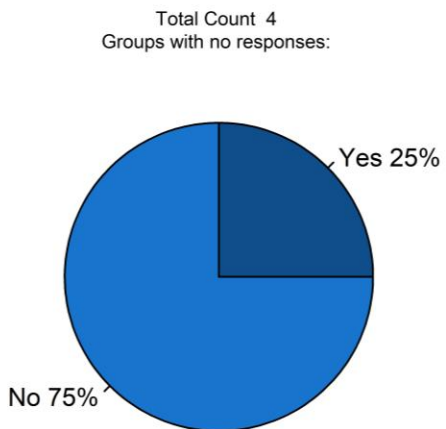


FIGURE 2. RESPONDENT STUDENT STATUS

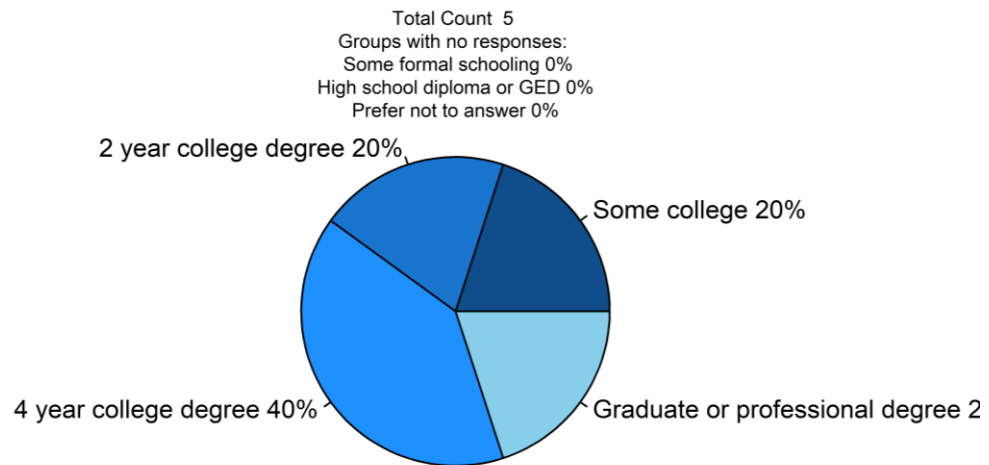


FIGURE 4. RESPONDENT EDUCATION STATUS

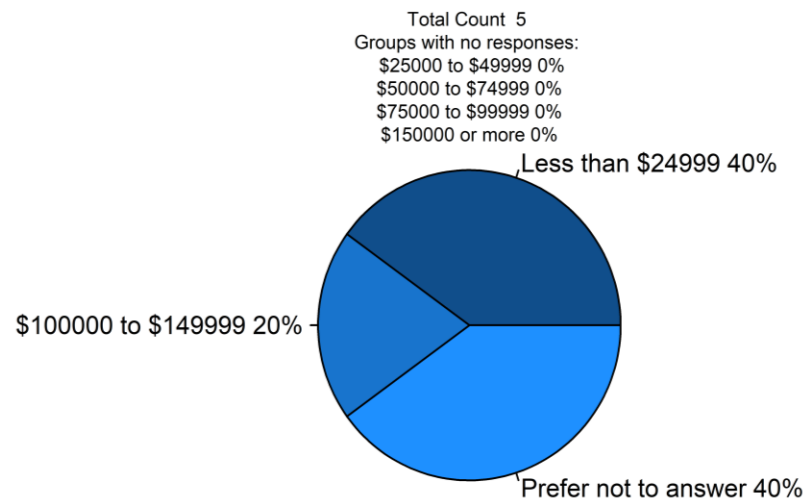


FIGURE 5. RESPONDENT HOUSEHOLD INCOME

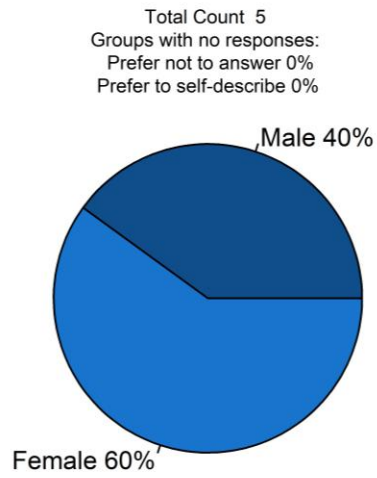


FIGURE 6. RESPONDENT GENDER

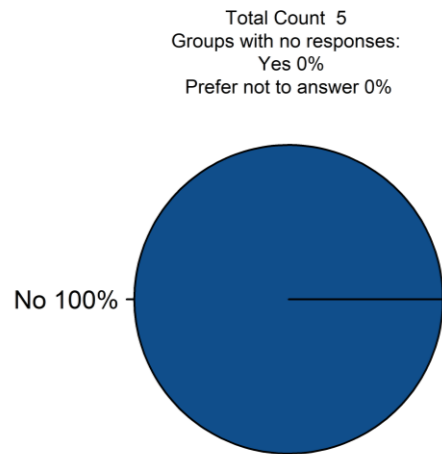


FIGURE 7. RESPONDENT HISPANIC ETHNICITY

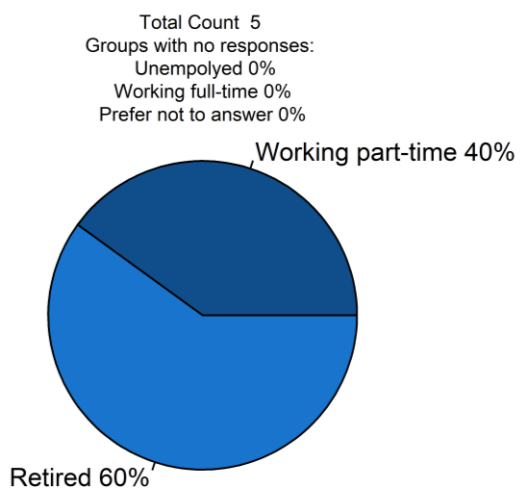


FIGURE 8. RESPONDENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS

3.1.2. Overall results

1. “How many seasons have you volunteered with the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program? (please enter a number rounded to the nearest year)”
 - **Total count (n):** 5
 - **Mean:** 2.4
 - **Median:** 2
 - **Standard Deviation:** 1.7
2. “Are you planning to volunteer with the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program in the future?”

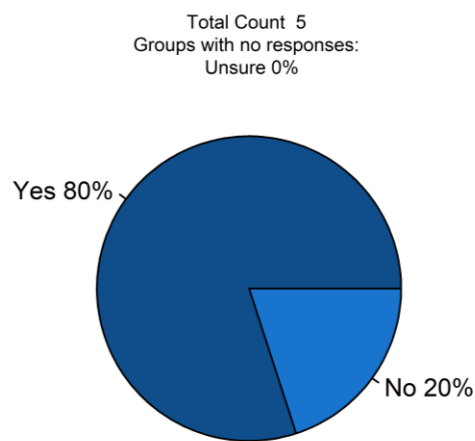


FIGURE 9. FUTURE VOLUNTEER PLANS

3. “Please indicate if you recruited someone from the following categories to volunteer with the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program in 2024.”

TABLE 1. WHO VOLUNTEERS RECRUITED

Recruitment Category	Total Count (n)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Unsure (%)
<i>Friend(s)</i>	4	50.0	50.0	0.0
<i>Coworkers/Classmates</i>	4	25.0	50.0	25.0
<i>Spouse/significant other</i>	5	40.0	60.0	0.0
<i>Children</i>	4	0.0	75.0	25.0
<i>Other</i>	3	0.0	66.7	33.3

4. “How did you hear about opportunities to volunteer with the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program? (select all that apply)” (includes all volunteers regardless of how many seasons they had volunteered)

TABLE 2. HOW VOLUNTEERS HEARD ABOUT VOLUNTEERING FOR THEIR VWMP

	Total count (n)	Count	%
<i>Meeting</i>	5	0	0.0
<i>Tabling or other outreach event</i>	5	0	0.0
<i>Word of mouth</i>	5	2	40.0
<i>E-mail campaign</i>	5	3	60.0
<i>News broadcasting</i>	5	0	0.0
<i>Print news media</i>	5	2	40.0
<i>Social media</i>	5	0	0.0
<i>Other (please specify):</i>	5	2	40.0

5. “Please indicate how much each of the following statements motivated you to volunteer with the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program in 2024:” (includes all volunteers regardless of how many seasons they had volunteered)

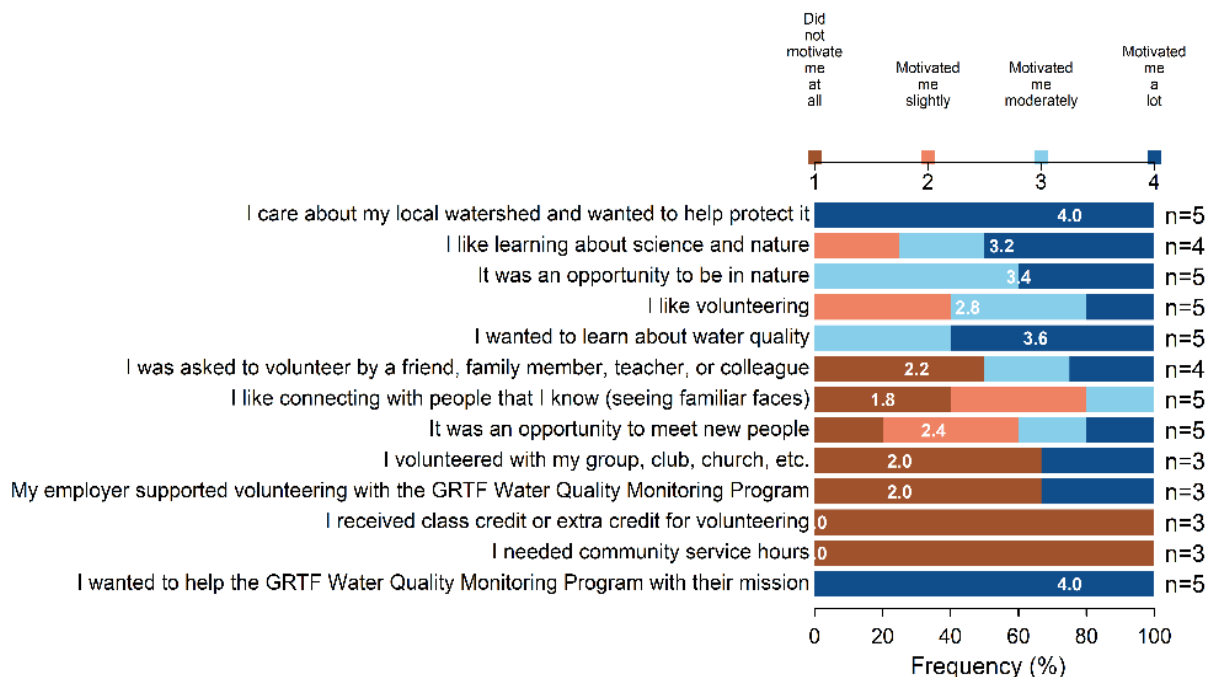


FIGURE 10. MOTIVATIONS TO VOLUNTEER

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 Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program 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=7
7. **“Do you have any suggestions to improve the volunteer experience with the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program?”** *Answers below are verbatim (names have been removed).*
- Reach out to get volunteers through classes at MSU that teach topics similar to this. I wish I had heard about this earlier.
 - Scheduling dates to go out on Fridays!
8. **“Have you ever participated in a training related to the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program?”**

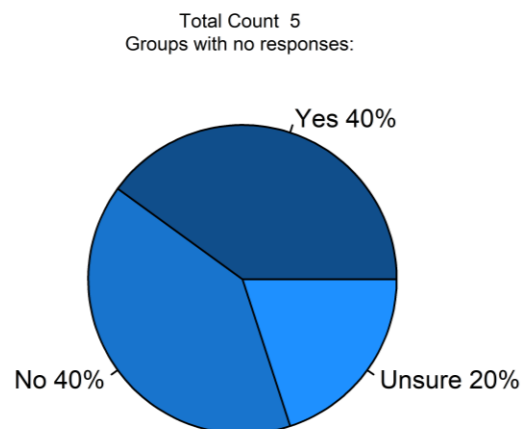


FIGURE 11. PARTICIPATION IN PAST TRAINING

9. “Did you participate in a training related to the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program in 2024?”

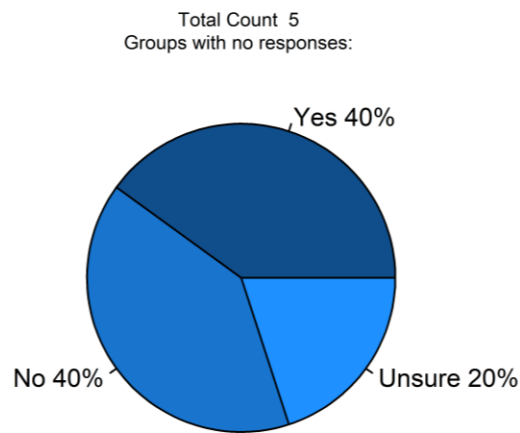


FIGURE 12. PARTICIPATION IN 2024 TRAINING

TABLE 3. WATER MONITORING TASKS COMPLETED IN 2024

Task	Total count (n)	Yes (%)	No (%)	DK (%)
<i>Filling out datasheets</i>	5	100.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Measuring field parameters with a multimeter</i>	5	80.0	20.0	0.0
<i>Measuring discharge with a meter</i>	5	80.0	20.0	0.0
<i>Collecting water samples</i>	5	80.0	20.0	0.0
<i>Collecting benthic algae samples</i>	5	100.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Conducting a visual assessment for algae</i>	5	60.0	20.0	20.0
<i>Other (please specify):</i>	1	100.0	0.0	0.0

TABLE 4. CONFIDENCE PERFORMING WATER MONITORING TASKS IN 2024

Task	Total count (n)	I felt confident performing this task (yes; %)	I have received formal training on this task (yes; %)	I feel that I need more training on this task (yes; %)
<i>Filling out datasheets</i>	5	100.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Measuring field parameters with a multimeter</i>	4	75.0	25.0	25.0
<i>Measuring discharge with a meter</i>	4	75.0	25.0	25.0
<i>Collecting water samples</i>	4	100.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Collecting benthic algae samples</i>	5	100.0	20.0	0.0
<i>Conducting a visual assessment for algae</i>	3	100.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Other (please specify):</i>	1	100.0	0.0	0.0

10. “How much do you disagree or agree with the following statements about the training(s) you had with the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program in 2024?” (includes only volunteers who participated in a training in 2024)

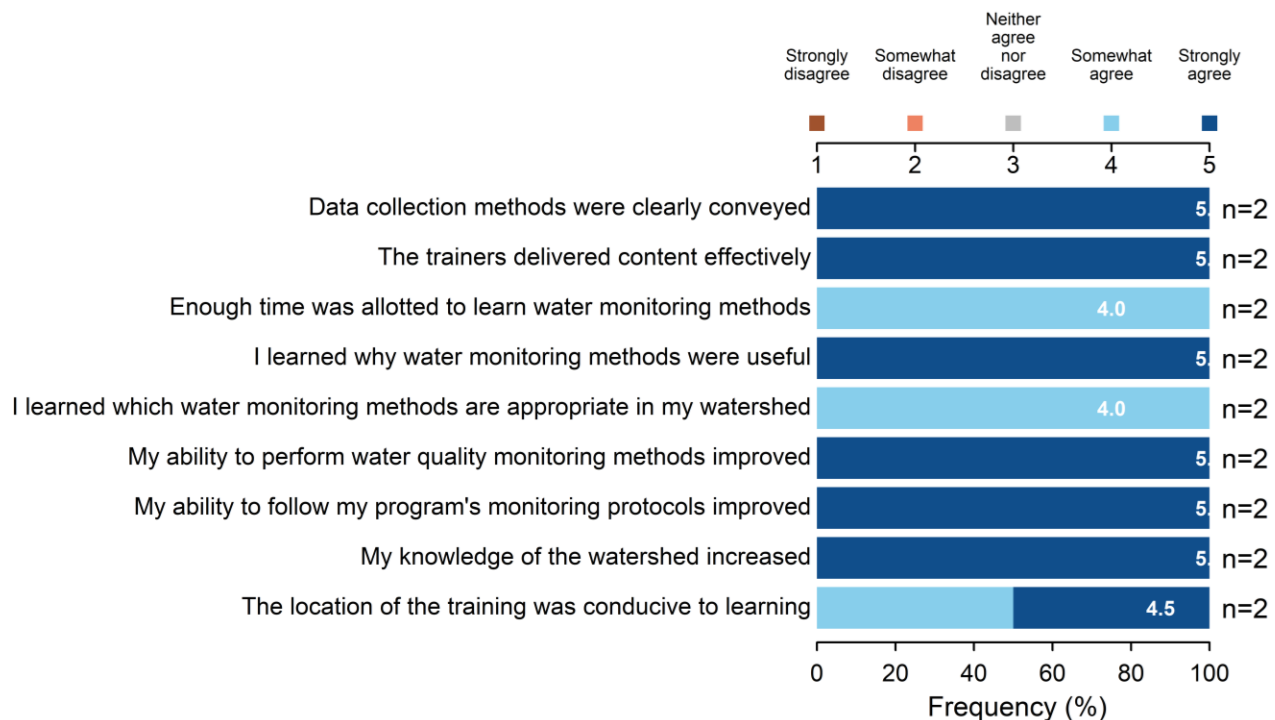


FIGURE 13. EFFICACY OF TRAINING

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 Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program trainings better?” *Answers below are verbatim (names have been removed).*

- Experience helps, so I believe my performance improved on the second and third date during the year.

12. “Please indicate how much you disagree or agree with the following statements. Because of participating in Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program, I have a better understanding of the following:”

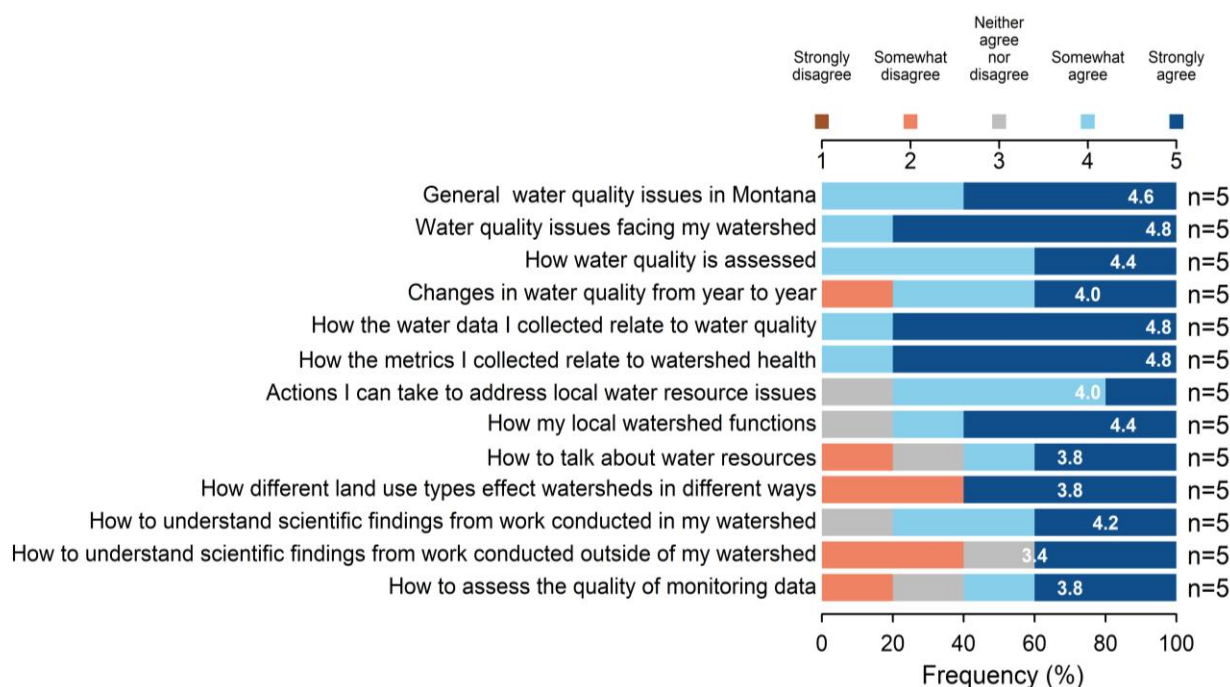


FIGURE 14. INFLUENCE OF VOLUNTEERING ON INCREASED UNDERSTANDING

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 Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program in 2024?”

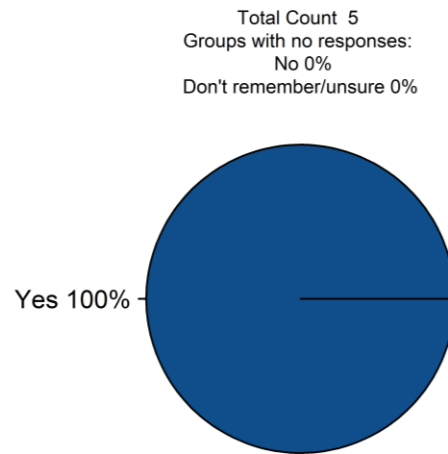


FIGURE 15. DISCUSSION OF VWMP PARTICIPATION

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 Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program”)

TABLE 5. WHO VOLUNTEERS TALKED WITH ABOUT VOLUNTEERING

	Total count (n)	Count	%
<i>Friends</i>	5	5	100.0
<i>Coworkers/Classmates</i>	5	2	40.0
<i>Neighbors</i>	5	1	20.0
<i>Family</i>	5	4	80.0
<i>Other</i>	5	1	20.0

15. “When discussing the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program, 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 Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program”)

TABLE 6. TOPICS SPOKEN ABOUT RELATED TO THEIR VWMP

	Total count (n)	Count	%
<i>Your experiences related to collecting the water samples</i>	5	4	80.0
<i>The sites where you collected samples</i>	5	5	100.0
<i>What you learned about the quality of water in the samples you collected</i>	5	3	60.0
<i>Your experiences related to testing the water samples</i>	5	2	40.0
<i>What you learned about water quality throughout the entire watershed</i>	5	2	40.0
<i>The conversations that you had with others participating in the GRTF Water Quality Monitoring Program</i>	5	3	60.0
<i>What you learned about how your own activities and choices can effect water quality</i>	5	1	20.0
<i>Other (please specify):</i>	5	0	0.0

16. “Does anyone you spoke with about the Gallatin River Task Force Community Water Quality Monitoring Program generally have different opinions than yourself about environmental issues?”

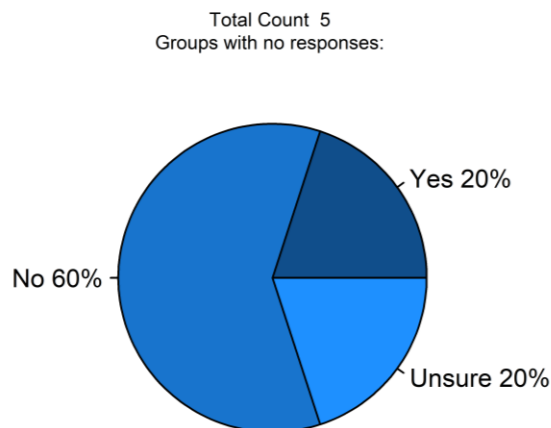


FIGURE 16. OPINIONS OF THOSE SPOKEN TO ABOUT VWMP PARTICIPATION

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

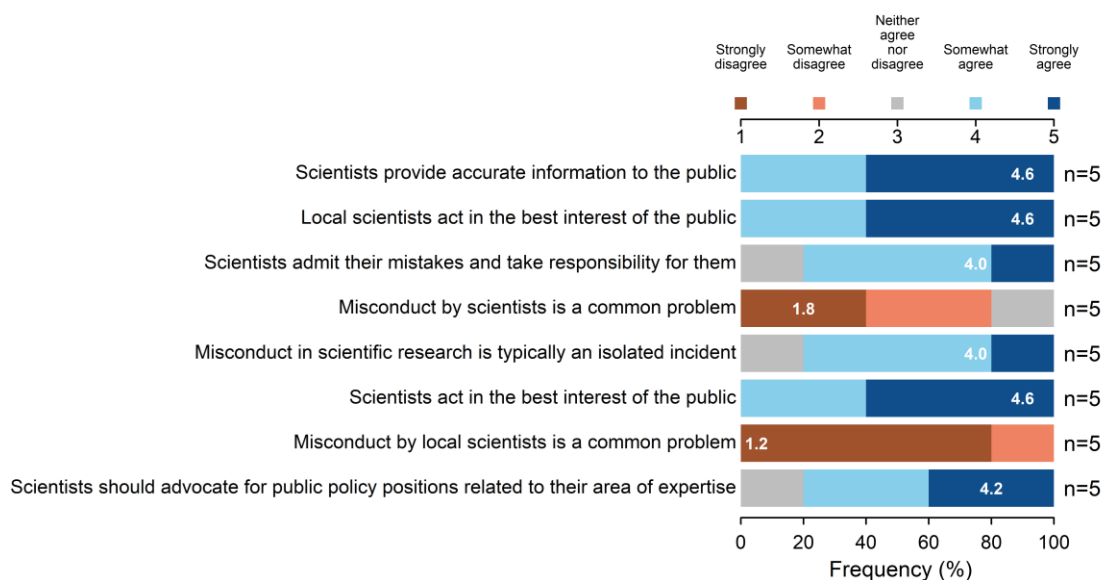


FIGURE 17. PERCEPTIONS OF SCIENTISTS

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

18. “In 2024, how frequently did you use the following sources to learn about issues impacting your local watershed?”

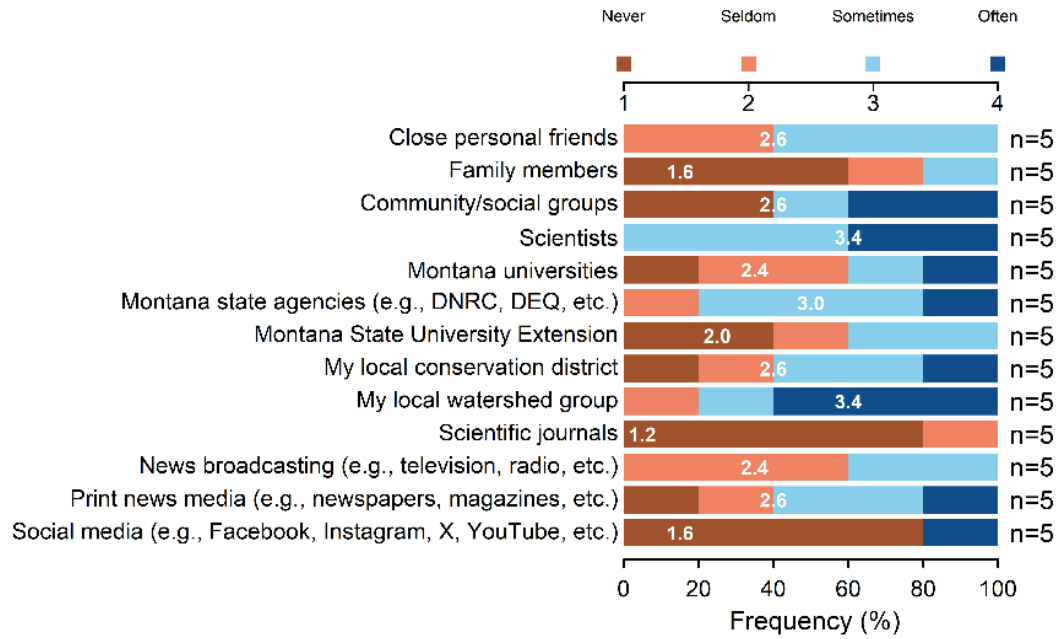


FIGURE 18. FREQUENCY OF INFORMATION USED

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.”

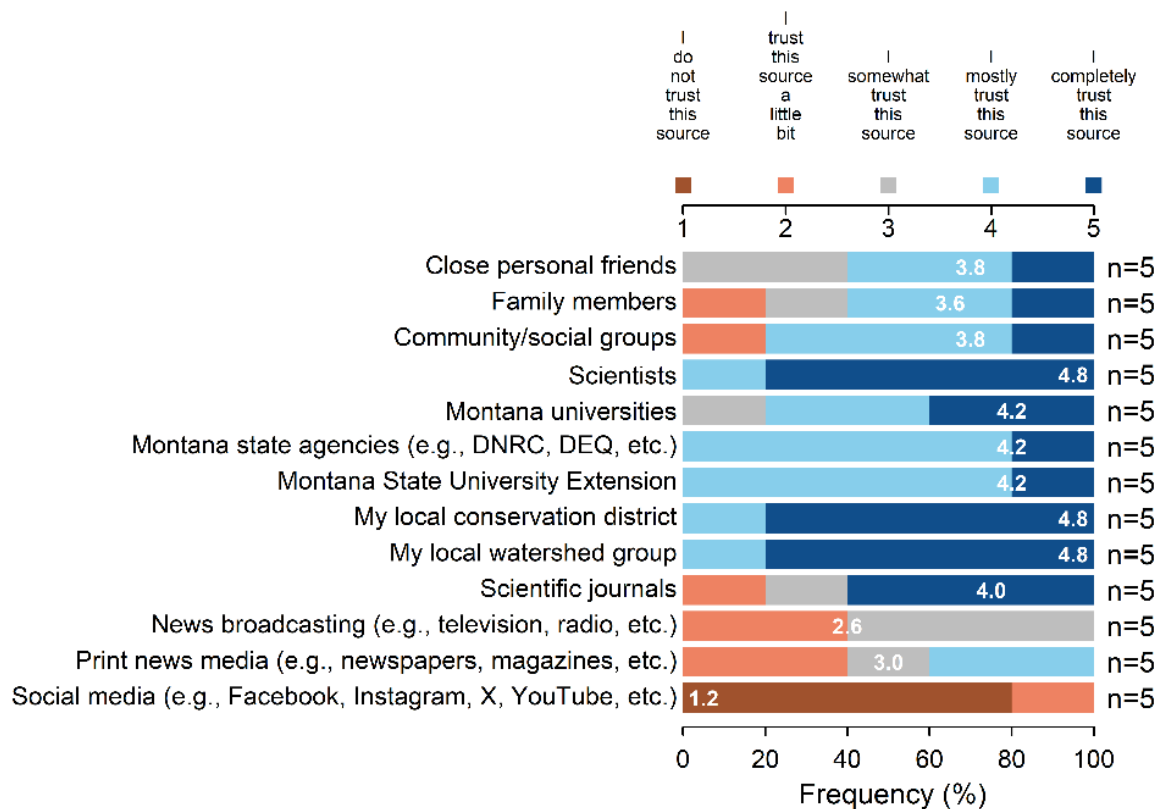


FIGURE 19. TRUST IN INFORMATION

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).*

- The population growth in our area through wastewater and runoff is adding pollution to our aquifers, streams and river. Most visitors and residents do not understand the damage that this is doing to the river and all the life that depend on clean water. Many in this population also do not understand how their use of water is wasteful and unsustainable. Our community needs training and incentives that will modify behaviors and develop new habits.
- Toxins and waste entering the watershed due to human activity. This also includes nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizer and wastewater. This leads to problems such as an increase in E. Coli and algae in the water.
- The largest water quality issue facing my local watershed (the Gallatin) is an excess amount of nutrients in the watershed, that sometimes causes widespread algal blooms. There is not a confirmed source for the excess nutrients, however, I believe that development in the Big Sky area does play a role, as well as climate change.

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=5)

TABLE 7. ACTIONS TAKEN TO PROTECT WATER QUALITY

	Total count (n)	Not applicable to my household (%)	I have not made this change (%)	I had already made this change (%)	I made this change as a result of volunteering (%)
<i>Implemented integrated pest management practices to reduce pesticide use</i>	5	80.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
<i>Reduced fertilizer use</i>	5	80.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
<i>Properly disposed of household waste (e.g. batteries, light bulbs, hazardous chemicals, oils and fats, etc.)</i>	5	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0
<i>Attended a public meeting related to natural resource planning/management</i>	5	0.0	40.0	20.0	40.0
<i>Submitted a public comment related to natural resource planning/management</i>	5	20.0	60.0	0.0	20.0
<i>Properly disposed of pet waste</i>	5	80.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
<i>Properly disposed of used motor oil and antifreeze</i>	5	40.0	0.0	60.0	0.0
<i>Directed downspouts away from a paved surface</i>	5	40.0	0.0	60.0	0.0
<i>Decreased the amount of chemical products used in my house that go down the drain</i>	5	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0
<i>Reduced storm water runoff from my property</i>	5	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Reduced runoff of other contaminants in storm water from my property (e.g., sediment, de-icer, etc.)</i>	5	80.0	20.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Volunteered for another water quality related project</i>	5	20.0	0.0	0.0	80.0
<i>Tested my well water</i>	5	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

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.