

Lac La Biche Watershed
Management Plan

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

May 17, 2021



MUNICIPAL PLANNING SERVICES

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OVERVIEW

This What We Heard report provides a summary of the feedback received regarding the draft Lac La Biche Watershed Management Plan (LLBWMP). The details of the public engagement program and the feedback received are outlined in Appendix A, B, and C.

From late 2019 to 2021, Lac La Biche County in collaboration with the consulting team (Municipal Planning Services (MPS) and CPP Environmental) has been preparing the draft LLBWMP. The project Steering Committee consists of members of County Council and Administration, Alberta Environment and Parks, local and regional non-governmental organizations, Indigenous communities and organizations, local organizations, local area residents and industry (forestry, oil and gas) who provided direction, guidance and feedback through out the process. The preparation of the draft LLBWMP was informed by:

- the Summary of the Science, which is a comprehensive review of the available data, studies, and reports for Lac La Biche and the watershed;
- watershed management planning best practices;
- direction from the Steering Committee; and
- feedback received from the public.

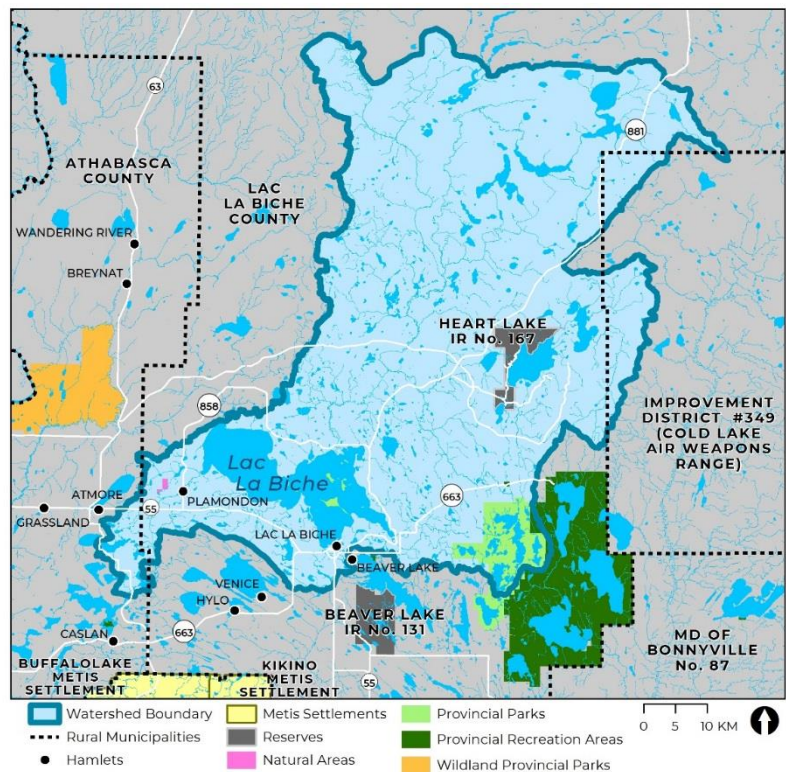
As part of the preparation of the LLBWMP, a public engagement program was undertaken to provide the public with information about the LLBWMP and provide opportunities to submit feedback. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the engagement program was primarily conducted through online means including:

- a dedicated webpage on the County's website;
- social media posts, e-newsletters, media releases;
- newsletter mail-outs;
- online open house; and
- online surveys.

The details of the public engagement program are outlined in Appendix A. To obtain comments and feedback from the public, there were two online surveys and an online open house. Survey #1 was released on the County's website in January 2021 to gather general input regarding watershed management plans. The results of Survey #1 are outlined in Appendix B.

The LLBWMP was presented to the public at the online open house held on April 22, 2021 via Zoom. At the open house, MPS gave a presentation to provide an overview of the draft LLBWMP. Following the online open house, the engagement materials were hosted online, including the draft LLBWMP, open house presentation slides and an online survey (Survey #2).

To obtain feedback and comments from the public regarding the LLBWMP, Survey #2 was released on the County's website in advance of the online open house and was available for two weeks following the open house. The results of Survey #2 are outlined in Appendix C.



WHAT WE HEARD

This section summarizes 'What We Heard' from the public regarding the draft LBLWMP. Overall the draft WMP was very well received. Where feedback was provided that resulted in revisions to the LLBWMP, MPS has documented the comments and outlined changes made to the draft LLBWMP to address the information provided during the engagement.

SURVEY #1 FEEDBACK

The purpose of this Survey #1 was to gather general information from watershed area residents about the watershed and the LLBWMP. There were **twenty four (24)** responses received. The survey questions and corresponding respondent feedback are provided in **Appendix B**. There were no revisions to the LLBWMP based on the Survey #1 feedback.

ONLINE OPEN HOUSE FEEDBACK

An Online Open House for the LLBWMP was held on April 22, 2021 via Zoom. There were approximately **thirty-two (32) attendees**, including members of Lac La Biche County Council and Administration.

MPS gave a presentation regarding the following purpose of watershed management plans, a brief history of the LLBWMP, and an overview of the draft LLBWMP. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period at which attendees could submit questions. The key themes discussed are outlined in **Appendix A**. The revisions made to the LLBWMP as a result of the open house discussions are outlined below:

<p>The following recommendation was added to Objective 2 - Land Use and Phosphorus Management: <i>"Consider the development of incentive programs for property owners near water bodies and watercourses that implement stormwater management BMPs, low impact development (LID), restoration of riparian area vegetation, etc."</i></p>
<p>The following statement was added to Table 1 in Section 4.1 Overview: <i>"In April 2021, Lac La Biche County amended Bylaw 15-001 Waterworks Connection Bylaw to require inspection of private sewage disposal systems in the Water/Sewer Connection Area outside a hamlet where connection to the regional system is available but property owners opt not to connect."</i></p>
<p>The following recommendation was added to Objective 3 – Clean Runoff: <i>"Compile existing groundwater quality data that is available, and partner with Alberta Health Services to map and monitor groundwater quality in the watershed."</i></p>
<p>In Recommendation 7.16 under Objective 7 Working Together, the following sub-bullet was added: <i>"Monitoring, restoration, and protection programs and activities undertaken in the watershed by the County, Government of Alberta, stakeholders, Indigenous communities, Healthy Waters, Cows and Fish, Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS), Alberta Lake Management Society (ALMS), and other relevant organizations."</i></p>

SURVEY #2 FEEDBACK

The purpose of Survey #2 was to gather feedback from watershed area residents about the draft LLBWMP. There were **seven (7)** responses received for Survey #2. The survey questions and corresponding respondent feedback is provided in **Appendix C**. There were no revisions to the LLBWMP based on the Survey #2 feedback.

MUNICIPAL AND AGENCY FEEDBACK

In advance of the online open house, the draft LLBWMP and an invitation to the online open house was circulated to the following municipal and stakeholder agencies:

- Athabasca County Planning and Development
- Improvement District #349 (now part of the MD of Bonnyville No. 87)
- Cold Lake Planning and Development (previous development officer for Improvement District #349)
- Cold Lake Air Weapons Range

No responses were received by the municipalities and agencies.

APPENDIX A – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Community Engagement Program for the preparation of the LLBWMP included various communication, information sharing, and feedback gathering methods. Due to the limitations on in-person activities, the Community Engagement Program focuses on an online presence with supporting physical engagement tools.

Lac La Biche County Website

In July 2020, a dedicated webpage was developed on the Lac La Biche County provide background information about the project and house future engagement materials. The website was updated as new information was available pertaining the LLBWMP.

Information Materials

Various information materials were utilized to provide updates on the progress of the LLBMWP:

- Social media posts, e-newsletters, media releases:
 - In July 2020, an announcement was released in the Athabasca Watershed Council's e-newsletter to announce the project and provide a link to the LLBWMP webpage on the County's website.
 - In January 2021, an announcement was released to provide background information about the LLWMP project.
 - In April 2021, an announcement was released on the County's social media, by e-newsletter, and in the Athabasca Watershed Council's e-newsletter to provide information about the release of the draft LLBWMP to the public and the online open house.
- Newsletter mail-outs:
 - In March 2021, a newsletter was mailed to County residents to provide information about the release of the draft LLBWMP to the public and the online open house.

Online Surveys

Surveys were utilized to obtain feedback from the public:

- In January 2021, a Survey #1 was released to gauge interest in the project. The results are outlined in Appendix B. The survey remained open until the beginning of April 2021.
- In April 2021, Survey #2 released on the County's website the week prior to the online open house to gather feedback on the draft LLBWMP. The results are outlined in Appendix C.

Online Open House

An online open house was conducted electronically on April 22, 2021 to provide information about the draft LLBWMP and gather feedback from the public. There were approximately **thirty-two (32) attendees**, including members of Lac La Biche County Council and Administration.

MPS gave a presentation regarding the following:

- Purpose of watershed management plans
- History of the LLBWMP
- Overview of the draft LLBWMP

The presentation was followed by a question and answer period at which attendees could submit questions. The key themes discussed with corresponding responses from MPS are outlined in the table below:

WHAT WE HEARD	RESPONSE/RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research, emphasis and enforcement on septic discharges. 	<p>Septic systems were considered during preparation of the plan; there are recommendations related to private sewage disposal systems.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incentives should be provided to property owners in the watershed area if they were to voluntarily increase the ecological value of the property 	<p>The following recommendation was added to Objective 2 - Land Use and Phosphorus Management:</p> <p><i>"Consider the development of incentive programs for property owners near water bodies and watercourses that implement stormwater management BMPs, low impact development (LID), restoration of riparian area vegetation, etc."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LLBWMP should provide for effective monitoring of the conditions for land owners as outlined in the LLWMP. (e.g., monitoring septic systems in close proximity to the lake, monitoring agricultural activity close to the lake, monitoring recreational areas/property to reduce modifications harmful to the lake.) 	<p>The Waterworks Connection Bylaw amendment requires inspection of private sewage systems in lakeshore area. Municipalities often do not have enforcement capabilities to have extensive monitoring. Many recommendations focus on voluntary action and sharing information to building awareness in the community. This can be more successful to provide information about what individuals can do voluntarily rather than relying solely on enforcement.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring septic systems in close proximity to the lake. The County recently amended Bylaw 15-001 Waterworks Connection Bylaw to require inspection of private sewage disposal systems where connection to the regional system is available but property owners opt not to connect. 	<p>The following statement was added to Table 1 in Section 4.1 Overview:</p> <p><i>"In April 2021, Lac La Biche County amended Bylaw 15-001 Waterworks Connection Bylaw to require inspection of private sewage disposal systems in the Water/Sewer Connection Area outside a hamlet where connection to the regional system is available but property owners opt not to connect."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private land should extend to current water level mark; the shore (exposed area) should not be public. (regarding Figure 18 Cross section of water body, riparian area, upland area) 	<p>The bed and shore is under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. Where private land is adjacent to a water body or watercourse, the private land ends at the legal bank.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the LLBWMP include groundwater testing, including the monitoring of groundwater quality? 	<p>The following recommendation was added to Objective 3 – Clean Runoff:</p> <p><i>"Compile existing groundwater quality data that is available, and partner with Alberta Health Services to map and monitor groundwater quality in the watershed."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The plan recommendations are in support of the provincial government's <i>Water for Life</i> strategy. Is there funding from the provincial government to carry out the work for the LLBWMP? 	<p>Not specifically at this time. One the tasks of the Implementation Committee will be to determine funding opportunities available.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>

WHAT WE HEARD	RESPONSE/RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there invasive species in Lac La Biche Lake? 	<p>The County undertook monitoring last year to do onshore sampling for Eurasian milfoil; samples were found to have native northern milfoil. More testing to be conducted this year.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Largest source of nutrients entering Lac La Biche lake. 	<p>There is not recent data to confirm the largest source. The nutrient budget data is from the 1980s and there is not complete flow-based water quality monitoring from all tributaries. It is known that internal loading occurs (nutrients that deposited on the bottom of the lake are released back into the lake and then redeposit) and a significant amount of nutrients likely comes from the Owl River because it is the largest tributary to the lake (has the most flow).</p> <p>There is a recommendation in the plan to prepare an updated nutrient budget.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Government of Alberta indicated how they might support plan implementation? 	<p>Alberta and Environment and Parks had representation on the Steering Committee that directed the development of the LLBWMP and will hopefully continue to have representation on the Implementation Committee. Much of the lands in the watershed are Crown Lands; one way the provincial government could support the WMP is alignment when reviewing/evaluation applications for activities on Crown Lands.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who will compile research on the Lake Objectives? LLB County staff or external consultant or academic partnership? 	<p>Part of the role of the Implementation Committee will be to work with the County, consultants, academic institutions, NGOs, the provincial government and others to determine who has capacity to support implementation.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are many elders who speak of significant algae on lake 100 years ago. Has algae levels changed and is there data to support any algae changed in lake? 	<p>Core sampling from the bottom of the lake showed that nutrients were present in the mid to late 1800s and also showed that the lake has become more nutrient rich. There is a history of algal blooms and there is more work underway to study blue-green algae issues in the lake.</p> <p>Continued relationship building with the Indigenous communities is important and will hopefully enable the inclusion of traditional knowledge of algal blooms in the next iteration of the plan.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>

WHAT WE HEARD	RESPONSE/RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If these policies reduce land values of lake property is there consideration of legal implications that this may create? 	<p>Implementing watershed management planning best practices is important to maintain/improve the health of the lake and watershed so that residents can continue to use and enjoy their properties.</p> <p>There is responsibility on the part of municipalities to consider the environment (as per the <i>Municipal Government Act</i>); when establishing processes and requirements, municipalities have to determine what information that the decisions makers need to appropriately assess the proposal without creating a list of requirements that significant unattainable.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The storm water data shows that the hamlet LLB contributes high nutrient waters to the lake following storm events. Are you going to impose no fertilizer policy within the town of LLB as well as us Lake front owners? 	<p>The recommendations regarding fertilizers do not focus solely on lakefront owners. The recommendations for fertilizer bylaws are worded to enable the Implementation Committee and the County to determine where the best locations are to implement fertilizer bylaws (e.g., near environmentally sensitive areas).</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LLBWMP could recommend education and awareness of programs such as Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS), Cows and Fish, etc. 	<p>In Recommendation 7.16 under Objective 7 Working Together, the following sub-bullet was added:</p> <p><i>"Monitoring, restoration, and protection programs and activities undertaken in the watershed by the County, Government of Alberta, stakeholders, Indigenous communities, Healthy Waters, Cows and Fish, Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS), Alberta Lake Management Society (ALMS), and other relevant organizations."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noted that the presentation mentioned that the County has established development setbacks and environmental reserves to help protect the lakeshores. 	<p>There are existing regulations and policies in the County's planning documents to support these actions and there are additional recommendations in the LLBWMP for additional considerations.</p> <p>No changes were required.</p>

APPENDIX B – SURVEY #1

SUMMARY OF SURVEY #1 RESPONSES

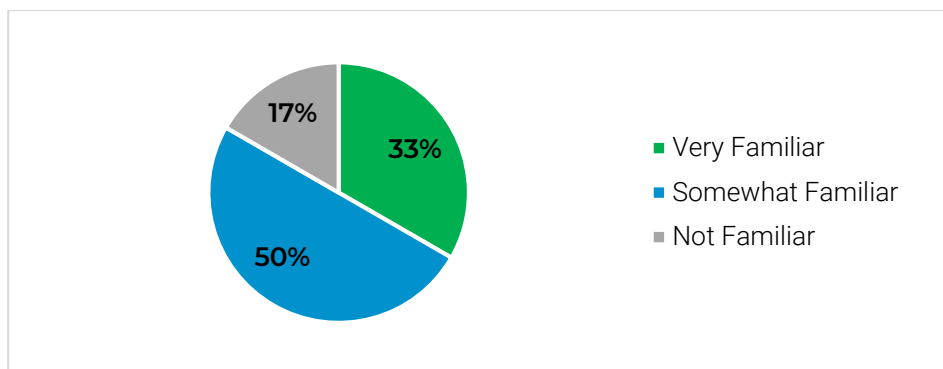
The following is a brief summary of Survey #1 responses and with corresponding comments from MPS.

WHAT WE HEARD	RESPONSE/RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 83% of respondents are somewhat familiar or very familiar with WMPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This helped MPS understand the background of respondents. <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 79% of respondents indicated they have noticed that water quality has worsened in the last five years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water quality is a primary consideration of the LLBWMP and many of the recommendations in the plan focus on water quality. <p>No changes were required.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key concerns identified by respondents include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water quality and algal blooms Impact of agricultural and industrial activities on water quality Monitoring, improvement and elimination of private septic systems Riparian areas and wetlands: loss, impacts of development, protection, and restoration Activities that increase nutrient loading Analysis of existing data and studies to determine future needs for research Impact of the LLBWMP on lakefront landowners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LLBWMP includes recommendations related to the concerns identified by respondents. <p>No changes were required.</p>

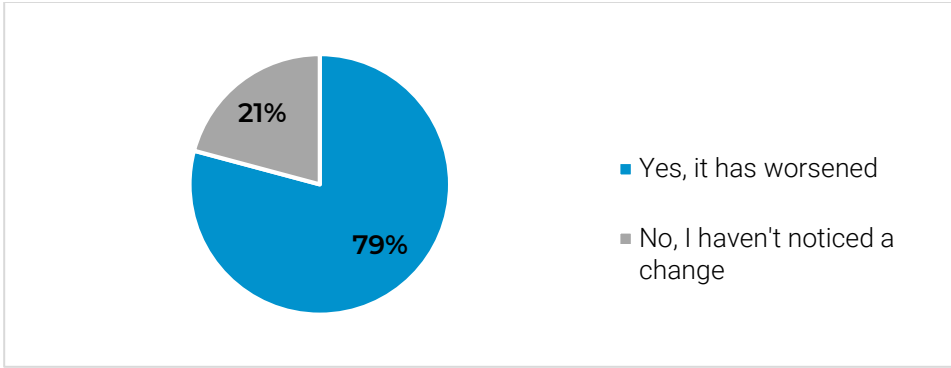
SURVEY #1 QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

The questions and responses to Survey #1 are outlined below.

1. How familiar are you with watershed management plans and what they aim to achieve?



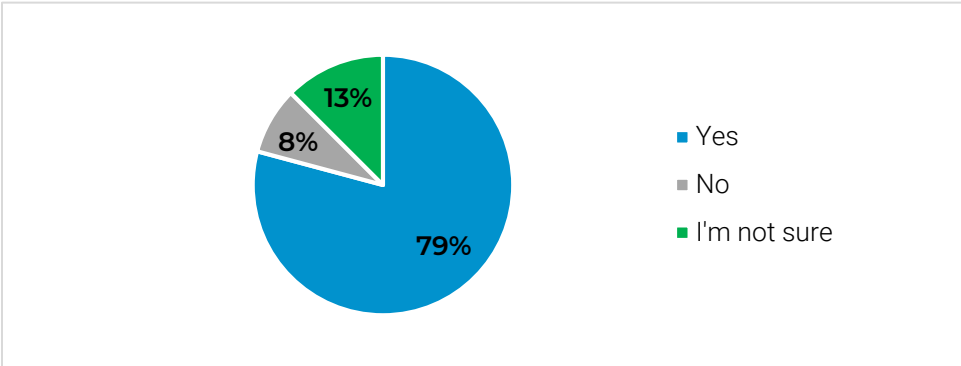
2. Have you noticed changes in the water quality of Lac La Biche Lake over the past five years?



3. Do you have any concerns related to the watershed or lake? Please describe. (Note: the responses have been summarized into general themes.)

- Quality of the lake water and increase in algae blooms
- Loss of tourism due to poor water quality
- little effort is being made to improve or eliminate residential septic discharges
- No monitoring or records maintained of all septic systems
- Loss of healthy riparian areas and wetlands
- Concerned about activities that increase nutrient loads into the lake
- Need for an analysis to be completed on all studies that have been completed to determine which future studies are required
- Loss of biodiversity and fish stocks
- Increased development close to water bodies, with no repercussions for altered landscapes (e.g. riparian areas)
- Agriculture and industry need to be focused on to determine their effects on water quality
- Install a dam to regulate lake water levels
- What implications will the WMP have on lakefront owners?
- Need to do better at protecting and restoring riparian areas and wetlands

4. Are you interested in learning more about the County's watershed management plan?



5. Where do you live (i.e. in the County, or outside the watershed area)? (Note: this information helps the team understand who is completing this survey. Your answers will remain confidential and will not be shared with other organizations, businesses, or individuals.)

Note: personal information redacted.

APPENDIX C – SURVEY #2

SUMMARY OF SURVEY #2 RESPONSES

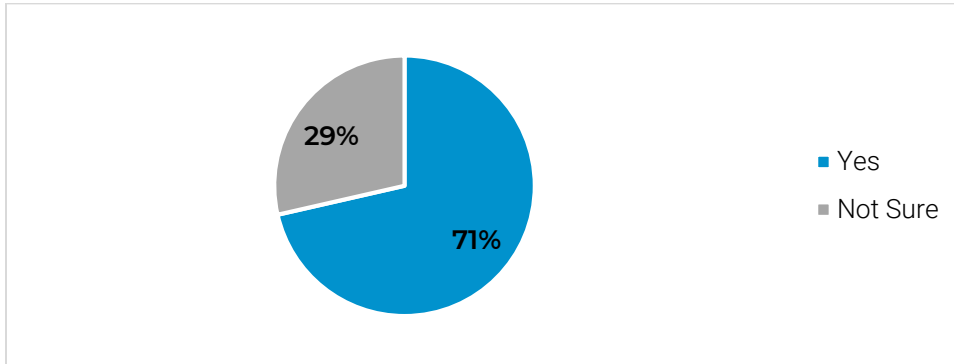
The following is a brief summary of Survey #2 responses and with corresponding comments from MPS

WHAT WE HEARD	RESPONSE/RECOMMENDATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 71% of respondents agreed with the LLBWMP primary focus on improving water quality 100% of respondents agreed with the statement “My actions have an impact on the water quality of lake and watershed.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses aligns with the LLBWMP’s primary focus on improving water quality. <p>No changes were required.</p>
<p>Top 3 priorities for the LLBWMP recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21% of respondents indicated ensuring wastewater systems aren’t leaching as a priority 16% of respondents indicated developing a phosphorus budget as a priority 16% of respondents indicated improving stormwater management as a priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LLBWMP includes recommendations that address these topics; the priorities identified by respondents may be a consideration for the Implementation Committee when establishing priorities and timelines for implementation of the plan recommendations. <p>No changes were required.</p>
<p>Concerns identified by respondents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Livestock access to tributaries Stormwater management needs to be improved, especially for developments such as boat launches Implications of the WMP on lakefront owners Restricting lakefront outhouses Everyone’s actions within a watershed affect the water quality, not just lakefront land owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LLBWMP includes recommendations for agricultural and ranching best management practices (BMPs), including livestock activities near water bodies and watercourses. The LLBWMP includes recommendations for stormwater management BMPs. The LLBWMP includes recommendations that may affect lakefront property owners as well as other property owners in the watershed, as action is required throughout the watershed, not solely along the shoreline of the lake. The LLBWMP includes recommendations related to septic systems and the County has recently amended the Waterworks Connection bylaw to require inspections for private systems near the lake. The LLBWMP includes recommendations under Objective 7 Working Together for education programs to help build awareness regarding watershed management planning and actions within the watershed to help to protect the watershed. <p>No changes were required.</p>

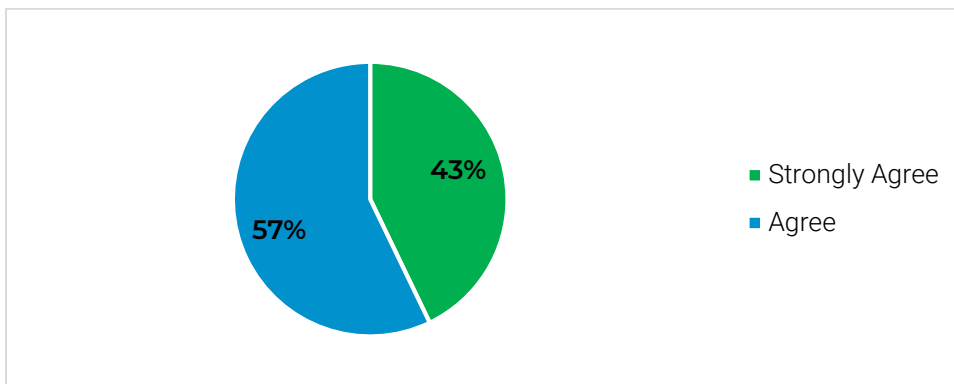
SURVEY #2 QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

The questions and responses to Survey #2 are outlined below.

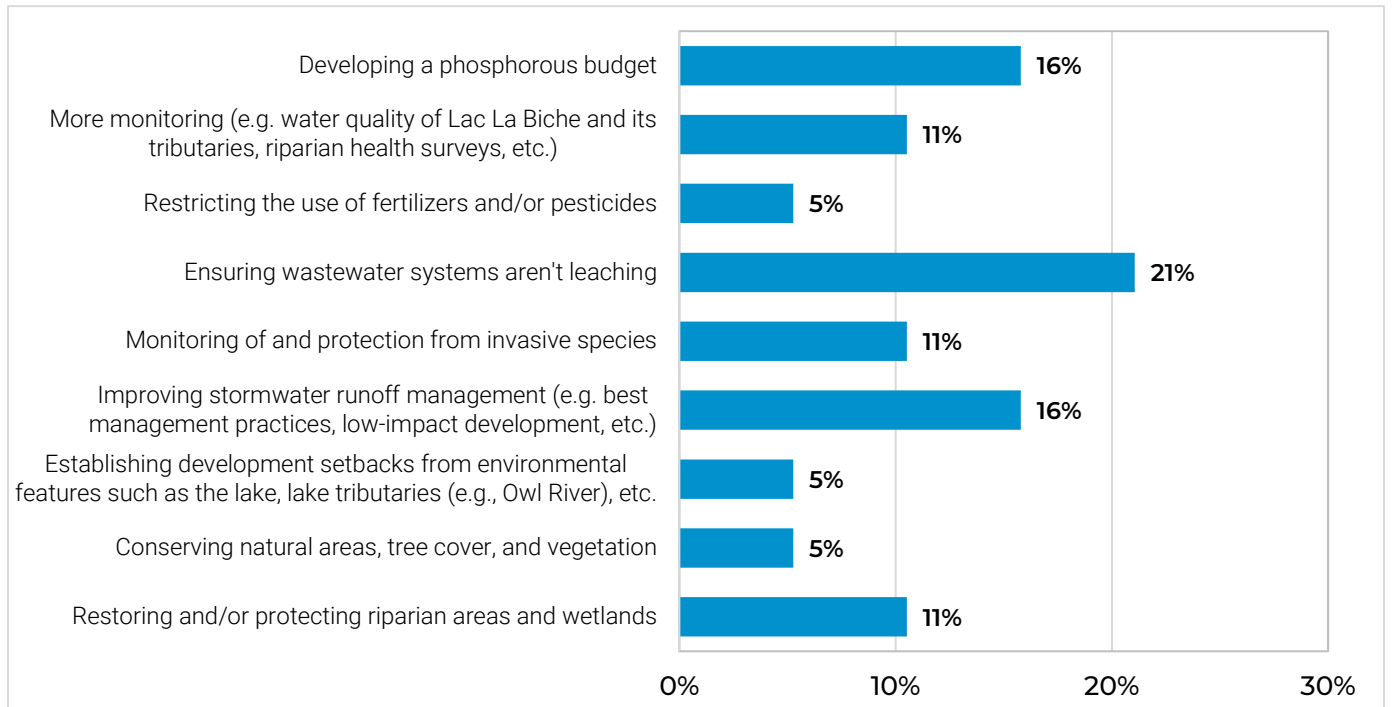
1. The primary focus on the LLBWMP is on improving water quality. Do you agree with this approach?



2. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "My actions have an impact on the water quality of the lake and watershed."



3. What are your top priorities for the LLBWMP recommendations? (Note: for each category, the percent indicates the percent of the total respondents that selected the category.)



4. Do you have any watershed concerns that were not covered in the draft LLBWMP? (Note: the responses have been summarized into general themes.)

- Livestock access to tributaries
- Stormwater management needs to be improved, especially for developments such as boat launches
- What implications will the WMP have on lakefront owners?
- Consider restricting lakefront outhouses
- Everyone's actions within a watershed affect the water quality, not just lakefront land owners

5. Do you have additional comments or questions?

- Consider nutrient/algae removal or harvesting during blooms to reduce the recycling of nutrients in the lake.

6. Where do you live?

