



CHAPTER 2. OUR VALUES

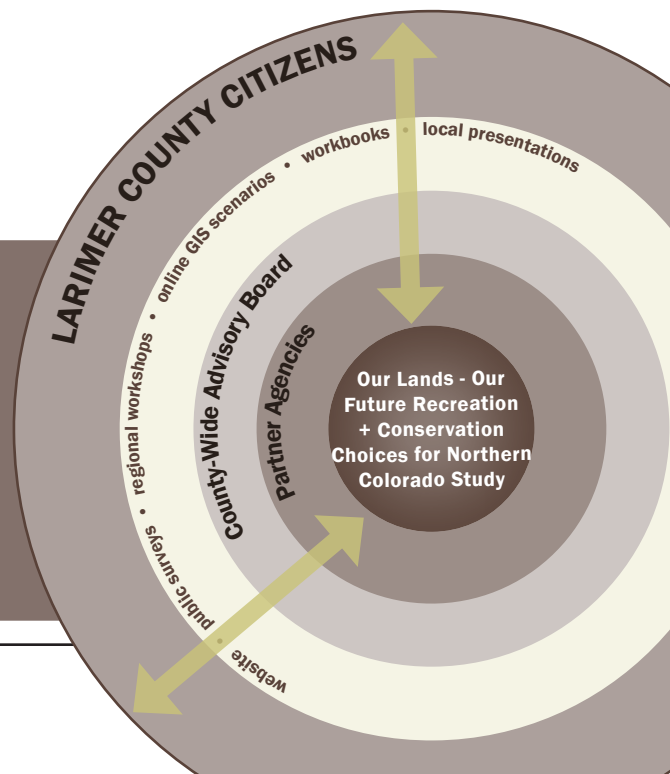
An important focus of Our Lands - Our Future was a comprehensive program of public engagement designed to document the conservation values and activity preferences of Larimer County residents. Input was solicited through a county-wide Advisory Board, a project website, two public surveys, two regional events, interactive online GIS scenarios, and over 45 local presentations outlined in the public involvement graphic below. The public was routinely invited to discuss the project with the Advisory Board members and Partner Agencies and offer feedback through any of the outreach mechanisms provided. In total, over 4,200 citizens shared their concerns and visions for the region's future.

PARTNER AGENCIES

Staff representatives from Larimer County and each municipality served as the steering committee to guide the overall process, build awareness of the project, conduct stakeholder outreach, and communicate project goals to stakeholders. The Partner Agencies were actively engaged throughout the process and were instrumental in defining study objectives, prioritizing issues for further analysis, identifying the best available data sources, and recommending technical approaches for the analysis. The community also played a fundamental role in guiding the development and direction of the study. The planning team recognized that effective public involvement was critical to the success of this study, and members of the community were strongly encouraged to participate in the process. Every effort was made to encourage meaningful public involvement throughout the process by involving interested parties early, frequently, and effectively.

"In a collaborative project to identify community needs and desires associated with natural areas and outdoor recreation, the Town of Windsor is a partner and contributor. It's exciting not only for the results, but to have that kind of collaboration is really great. [The study is providing] information that we can use as we build our collaborative partnerships with Larimer County, with the Poudre River Trail Corridor Board, with Greeley, and Great Western Trail Authority. It's a real kudos for northern Colorado that you have that kind of regional collaboration.

- Melissa Chew, Director of Windsor Parks, Recreation, and Culture. Quoted in MyWindsorNow.com, September 18, 2012





When asked to list "the top three to five things Larimer County should focus on in the future," protection of open spaces was seen as the **single most important concern**. - Larimer County Quality of Life Survey, 2013

Devil's Backbone Open Space; photo by Jeff Andersen

PREVIOUS OUTREACH

This study built upon a number of previous outreach efforts and partnerships in an effort to continuously educate stakeholders and be responsive to public preferences regarding land conservation and management practices. The lessons learned, stakeholder relationships and public input developed during previous outreach activities were essential to this new planning effort.

In the past six years, a number of scientific and other community surveys have been implemented in Larimer County to gauge citizens' satisfaction with current conservation, stewardship, and recreation efforts (Table 1). "Quality of life" surveys, for example, are regularly conducted by several municipalities. These helped frame the awareness, appreciation, and demands that residents have towards government services, including management of their respective parks, natural areas and open space programs. Quality of life surveys, along with specific land conservation and recreation surveys, have demonstrated that Larimer County citizens remain enthusiastic about land conservation and passive outdoor recreation, with high program performance ratings in all surveys – a finding that mirrors statewide trends.

Notable results from prior surveys, which were not re-evaluated in Our Lands – Our Future, include the following:

- Larimer County residents have a strong culture and affinity of spending time in nature. This finding is true across all demographic types.¹
- When asked to list "the top three to five things Larimer County should focus on in the future," protection of open spaces was seen as the single most important concern. Residents are concerned about conserving open spaces, maintaining them properly, and about

encroaching development into the spaces.² Natural areas that are easily accessible and close to home are the most important to county residents.³

- Open end comments offered in the surveys indicated a strong passion for open areas, parks, and recreation.⁴
- Assessments of the recreational and cultural opportunities provided in and by several municipalities remained strong. Overall, ratings were stable over time and were much higher than those given by residents in other communities across the country and in the Front Range.⁵
- Respondents were asked to rate a list of conservation, recreational, and cultural programs and facilities provided by their municipality. The most favorable quality ratings were often natural areas and open space (94% "very good" or "good"), recreational trails (93%), and parks (93%).⁶ While residents felt that less effort and funding is needed for parks and recreation, more effort is needed for environmental protection and land conservation⁷.
- Recreationists are satisfied with Natural Areas Rangers (83% very good or good) and perceptions of safety in natural areas (85% always or usually safe).⁸
- More passive forms of recreation and activities that require less technical expertise and/or gear receive greater participation. This includes use of trails, wildlife-viewing and using a playground. Activities such as hunting and mountain biking that require greater degree of specializations are less common.⁹
- Parents in Larimer County would like their children to spend more time outdoors. Parents feel that mountains, trails, forests and water resources have the highest value for connecting families to nature.¹⁰



Table 2.1: Local Conservation, Stewardship and Recreation Surveys (2006-2013)

Survey Title	Agency	Year
Citizen Surveys (Routine Quality of Life Surveys)	Multiple	2012-2013
Plug In To Nature Survey	Larimer County Natural Resources	2011
City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Resident Survey	City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program	2011
Town of Timnath Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Master Plan Community Survey	Town of Timnath	2010
Estimating the Economic Benefits of Maintaining Peak Instream Flows in the Poudre River through Fort Collins	City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program	2008
Natural Areas Observational and Intercept Surveys	City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program	2006

- Residents gave very positive ratings to natural areas overall, and to the facilities and services of the natural areas¹¹. Residents feel the natural areas add value to the community by providing recreation and wellness opportunities, improved quality of life and conserving habitat¹².
- Survey respondents were generally more familiar with the natural areas themselves, and less familiar with the County or city program that administered it.¹³
- More than half of visitors get to a natural area by driving to it.¹⁴
- Most weekday recreation occurs on land managed by local governments, rather than state or federal agencies.
- Four out of five say that children not spending enough time in the outdoors is a serious problem in Colorado and want their children to spend even more time in nature. Undeveloped / limited developed areas (state and national parks, local natural areas, etc.) are the preferred location for connecting with nature.¹⁵

Statewide findings for conservation and the economy:

98% - virtually all Coloradans – say that public lands are an “essential part” of Colorado’s economy.

85% believe the presence of public lands in the state helps to attract high quality employers and good jobs to Colorado.

74% oppose the sale of some public lands in order to reduce the budget deficit.

Nearly four in five (79%) voters believe public lands in the state support the economy, provide recreation opportunities and enhance quality of life, rather than being a fiscal burden and preventing creation of jobs in traditional industries.

- Conservation in the West Poll, 2013

Statewide findings for funding conservation:

86% say that “Even with state budget problems, we should still find money to protect and maintain Colorado’s land, water and wildlife.”

76% would prefer to continue to have Great Outdoors Colorado Lottery funds distributed to protect natural areas and to school construction, rather than redirecting all that funding to the state education budget and eliminating this source of funding for conservation (15%).

- Conservation in the West Poll, 2012

Land conservation "is an issue that unites, rather than divides, the American people."

As found in the 2012 national study, more than 70% of U.S. voters across political, geographic and demographic boundaries, agrees that "conserving our country's natural resources - our land, air and water - is patriotic."⁶ Seventy-five percent of voters believe that protecting public lands is one of the things the government does best, and an even greater percentage (85%) feel that public lands are essential to their quality of life. These preferences extend to conservation funding, as more than three-quarters of all voters support the Land and Water Conservation Fund, oppose cuts to conservation funding, and would be willing to pay more in taxes to protect land, water and wildlife.

- In Public Opinion Strategies and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates. (2012). American Voters View Conservation as Patriotic, and Strengthening on the Economy; Broad Support for Current Conservation Legislation." Memorandum to The Nature Conservancy, July 2, 2012.



ADVISORY BOARD DIRECTION

A 30-member project Advisory Board was assembled to provide guidance to the project. The Advisory Board helped to guide the public involvement process, including outreach to populations traditionally underrepresented in the planning process, and reviewed and analyzed the results of each phase of plan development. It was comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders intended to represent the vast array of interests in Larimer County. Advisory Board members attended four board meetings; discussed, debated, and worked through the issues presented in this report; and continually reached out to others in the community for broad-based public input. The Advisory Board represented all of the jurisdictions in Larimer County, as well as a diverse cross-section of viewpoints present in the County.

To ensure a diversity of perspectives, all of the open lands citizen advisory boards from across the county were invited to participate in three of the four Advisory Board meetings. These “regional board summits” provided a forum for offering suggestions, defining open land assets, expanding awareness of the process, assisting with stakeholder outreach and public events. Each board was continually updated, usually monthly.

PROJECT WEBSITE AND ONLINE MAPPING SCENARIOS

Larimer County dedicated a website (http://larimer.org/ourlands_ourfuture) to publicize information about the study process, and partners provided links to it from their respective city websites. Surveys, survey results, and invitations for local presentations were available on the website. During Phase II of the project, interactive GIS scenarios were developed and hosted on an intuitive web interface as an educational tool for the public at meetings and at home. The online mapping website will continue to be available through 2014 so that it can be used by the public and partners for updating local open space plans.

Three “Regional Board Summits” brought together six Advisory Boards for the project and from each local government to network, strengthen partnerships, share survey results, obtain input on model ranking, new and future recreation choices, and funding choices.

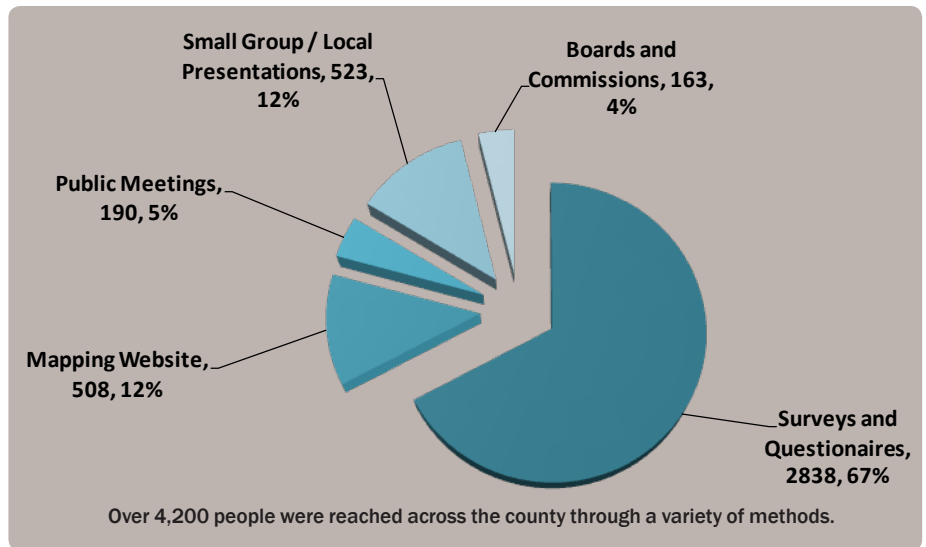
- Our Lands - Our Future Project Advisory Board
- Open Lands Advisory Board, Larimer County
- Land Conservation & Stewardship Board, City of Fort Collins
- Open Lands Advisory Commission, City of Loveland
- Parks, Recreation, & Culture Advisory Board, Town of Windsor
- Parks & Open Space Committee, Town of Berthoud



MEDIA COVERAGE

Public event notification and updates were highlighted on the project website, Facebook, Twitter, through newspaper advertisements, and during two radio interviews. Press releases and newspaper coverage also expanded the project's visibility.

LOCAL PRESENTATIONS AND LISTENING SESSIONS:



At project milestones, the partners extended the project's reach into their own communities, presenting project "road shows" to community groups, briefing county/city/town councils, boards and commissions on the project's progress, and incorporating opportunities for input into their normal public programs. Project partners and Advisory Board members organized more than 30 listening sessions that reached over 500 people with the following community groups:

Board, Commission, and Agency Meetings:

- Estes Valley Parks & Recreation District
- Larimer County: Land Stewardship Advisory Board
- Larimer County: Open Lands Advisory Board
- Larimer County: Rural Land Use Board
- Larimer County: Agricultural Advisory Board
- Larimer County Planning Commission
- Larimer County Environmental Advisory Board
- Larimer County: Parks Advisory Board
- City of Fort Collins: Land Conservation & Stewardship Board
- Town of Windsor Town Board
- Town of Windsor Parks, Recreation & Culture Board
- Northern Colorado Regional Managers

- Thompson Valley Rotary Club
- Lions Club – Windsor and Berthoud
- Overland Sertoma Club
- Loveland Sertoma Club
- Optimists Club – Windsor
- Foothills Rotary
- Leadership Loveland
- Fort Collins Board of Realtors
- Estes Park Association for Responsible Development

Nonprofit, Outdoor Recreation, and Environmental Advocacy Groups

- Legacy Land Trust Advisory Board and Project Identification Team
- The Nature Conservancy
- High Plains Environmental Center
- Laramie Foothills Advisory Group
- Overland Mountain Biking Club
- Loveland Fishing Club
- Estes Park Equestrian Club
- Larimer County Horseman's Association
- North Poudre Irrigation Company
- Poudre Wilderness Volunteers

Other Local Presentations:

- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Estes Park
- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Berthoud
- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Fort Collins
- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Loveland
- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Red Feather Lakes
- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Laporte
- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Livermore
- Citizen Commissioner Meeting - Wellington
- Open House - Wellington

Business and Community Groups

- Kiwanis Club – Windsor
- Kiwanis Club – Fort Collins



REGIONAL EVENTS

Two regional events were held in Loveland and Fort Collins to reach county-wide audiences.

The Our Lands – Our Future Kick-off Event was held at the New Belgium Brewery in Fort Collins on September 12, 2012 and attracted 127 participants. As the first opportunity for public engagement in the process, the kick-off meeting served to:

- Explain the project goals and planning process
- Launch the first survey and collect as many responses as possible
- Learn where attendees perceive gaps in the current systems and services
- Provide a platform for each partner agency to reach their constituencies regarding local issues of importance
- Give Advisory Board members an opportunity to network and communicate about the study
- Attract the participation of specific stakeholders that may not traditionally attend public meetings.

A regional Recreation and Conservation Choices Event was held at The Fountains in Loveland on March 6, 2013 and attracted 60 participants. The Choices Event served to:

- Launch the mapping website and demonstrate its use
- Share the 1st round of survey results
- Advertise the 2nd open-link survey and collect as many responses as possible
- Present relevant financial background on acquisition and stewardship constraints and choices

REACHING UNDER-REPRESENTED COMMUNITIES

While the study equitably represented the County’s diverse geographic communities and demographics, some unique segments of the population were not optimally reached as is often the case in regional planning processes. In particular, Hispanics, low-income households, and 18-24 year olds did not regularly participate in activities and surveys in proportion to the County’s demographic profile. The project team conducted focus groups and interviews with leaders from these audiences so that future engagement strategies could better target these audiences in order to solicit feedback as well as generate interest in ideas for the outreach events. Key findings included:

Build an informal network of leaders of each community. Each under-served or under-represented community already has established trusted civic, religious, and social service leaders and providers who help satisfy their everyday needs (i.e., Salvation Army for homeless individuals and families). Necessary communication with and potential relationships with these providers should be identified early on, so that partners can strategically approach the appropriate leaders at the appropriate time in each planning process. Leaders are often focused on local issues (i.e.,

“We’re doing a huge grassroots public outreach for this study. Each of our partner agencies has committed to doing [small group] meetings, and there is a place on our website where residents can request meetings with us. We’re really making an effort to go out into the community, and the feedback is very exciting.

- Kerri Rollins, Larimer County Open Lands Program Manager, quoted in The Coloradoan, September 13, 2012



homelessness in a specific geographic area), therefore a county-wide network may be more difficult to maintain than relationships with programs already in place that serve defined districts.

Build on critical needs. Despite the economic, ecosystem services, and quality of life benefits presented in later chapters, natural areas and environmental education cannot compete with life sustaining needs such as basic transportation, nutrition, and family and neighborhood safety. For example, one focus group participant asked: “If I can’t get to Safeway, why would I ever consider going to Soapstone?”, suggesting that support for open space programs would be strengthened by local governments that first satisfy basic needs for transportation, housing, and safety. One critical need that continues to rise in importance and urgency is health. A recent survey of parents found that their top concern was “Not enough exercise” for their children. Growing in importance from similar polls conducted between 2007 through 2011, adults now see “lack of exercise” and “childhood obesity” for U.S. children as the health problems of greatest concern – a trend that is true specifically for white and Hispanic parents¹⁶. The childhood obesity rate over the past three decades has more than doubled for preschool 2 to 5 year-olds and 12 to 19 year-olds, and it has more than tripled for children ages 6 to 11 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Obesity is of great concern for minority populations: 20% of Mexican-American girls ages 12 to 19 are obese, and

22% of Mexican-American boys are overweight or obese. (Journal of the American Medical Association, 2008). Programs would benefit from correlating safe, accessible parks, open space and trails to health concerns, especially the healthy kids movement. Also exercise has other benefits besides prevention of obesity—such as better attention and learning in school and improved sense of well-being – that can again be linked to open space objectives. This bolsters the response from prior citizen outreach regarding the need to provide open space.

Build on a common purpose. Representatives from social programs serving under-represented communities are less interested in supporting our outreach on issues directly related to conservation and recreation issues. Highlighting how Our Lands-Our Future complements and expands their mission can open the door to cooperation. For example, the CORE Center in north Fort Collins has a three-fold mission, two of them being 1) public safety and personal well-being, and 2) educational opportunities. Both of these goals would be accomplished in tandem with natural area goals. Focus group participants also emphasized phraseology as an important consideration in approaching other programs and parents: “safe, healthy play” and “outdoor education” being more attractive than programs centered on “obesity prevention.”



OUR LANDS – OUR FUTURE SURVEY RESULTS

More than a decade has passed since the last county-wide open lands survey, so the project team conducted two surveys through the survey firm RRC, one in 2012 and a follow-up survey in 2013. The survey program was designed to probe usage characteristics of parks, trails and other facilities, community values with respect to natural areas, satisfaction with current facilities, the importance of various natural area features, views on natural area and trail management, and communication. This feedback and subsequent analysis were designed to assist the partner agencies in future planning and policy formulation efforts.

Findings were organized around the following subject areas:

- **About individuals and their household.** Outlines respondent demographics, such as the location of residence and years spent living in Larimer County, and size and make-up of the household.
- **Use of natural areas / nature-based facilities.** Explores the frequency of visits to county-wide natural areas, the location of these visits, and reasons that inhibit use of natural areas. This section also provides an in-depth look at the activities commonly participated in by respondents, children in the household, and the household overall.
- **Values placed on natural areas.** This section investigates attitudes regarding conservation/acquisition and recreation in the County. Respondents were asked about funding allocation and preferred sources of funding.
- **Communication.** Presents results on current and preferred methods of receiving information about County-wide natural areas. Respondent familiarity with natural areas and nature-based opportunities in the County is also examined.
- **Then and Now: Comparing survey results.** A brief comparison of the similarities and differences regarding the natural areas of Larimer County, between a similar survey taken in 2001 and the current survey.
- **Suggestions and comments (open-ended responses).** Respondents had many opportunities to express opinions, including elaborating on “other” items not listed within survey questions, voicing additional comments or suggestions regarding methods to obtain additional funding, commenting on land conservation priorities, and other considerations related to natural areas important to them.

The complete survey results can be found in Appendix A. The methods and major findings are summarized below.

2012 Survey Methods

The first survey was conducted using three methods: 1) a mail-back survey, 2) an online invitation-only survey to further stimulate response from those residents already within the defined random sample and 3) an open link online survey for members of the public who were not part of the random sample. A total of 7,500 surveys were mailed to a random sample of Larimer County residents in August 2012, with 7,250 being delivered after subtracting undeliverable mail. The final sample size for this statistically valid survey was 922, resulting in a response rate of 12.7% and a margin of error of approximately +/- 3.4% points¹⁷. Results from the open link survey generated an additional 1,248 responses. As responses to the open-link version of the questionnaire are “self-selected” and not a part of the randomly selected sample of residents, results from the open-link questionnaire are kept separate from the mail and invitation web versions of the survey for the overall analysis. Unless stated otherwise, the analysis below focuses primarily on surveys received via the first two methods.

This statistically valid survey represents Larimer County’s demographics. As to be expected, the respondent profile differed slightly from Larimer County’s census profile. The sample was slightly more female (53% of survey respondents, compared to 50.4% according to the census), educated (nearly all of the respondents obtained a high school diploma or higher, compared to 93.9% of Larimer County), and likely to own a home (86% of the sample, compared to 67% of the County). There was also less Hispanic and Latino representation among survey respondents (2% of survey respondents, compared to 10.8% of the County, according to census data). Additionally, as is typical among data collection efforts of this kind, the sample skewed toward older respondents. Approximately 31% of respondents were age 65 or older, whereas 12.3% of the Larimer County population is in this cohort. For this reason, the underlying tabular data for the random sample responses were weighted by age according to commonly accepted practices to ensure appropriate representation of Larimer County residents across different demographic cohorts in the overall sample. Through this weighting, the resulting analysis reflects the conclusions and opinions of the underlying population, improving the slight discrepancies between the respondent profile and census data. Results can also be categorized by municipality or geographic area of the county.

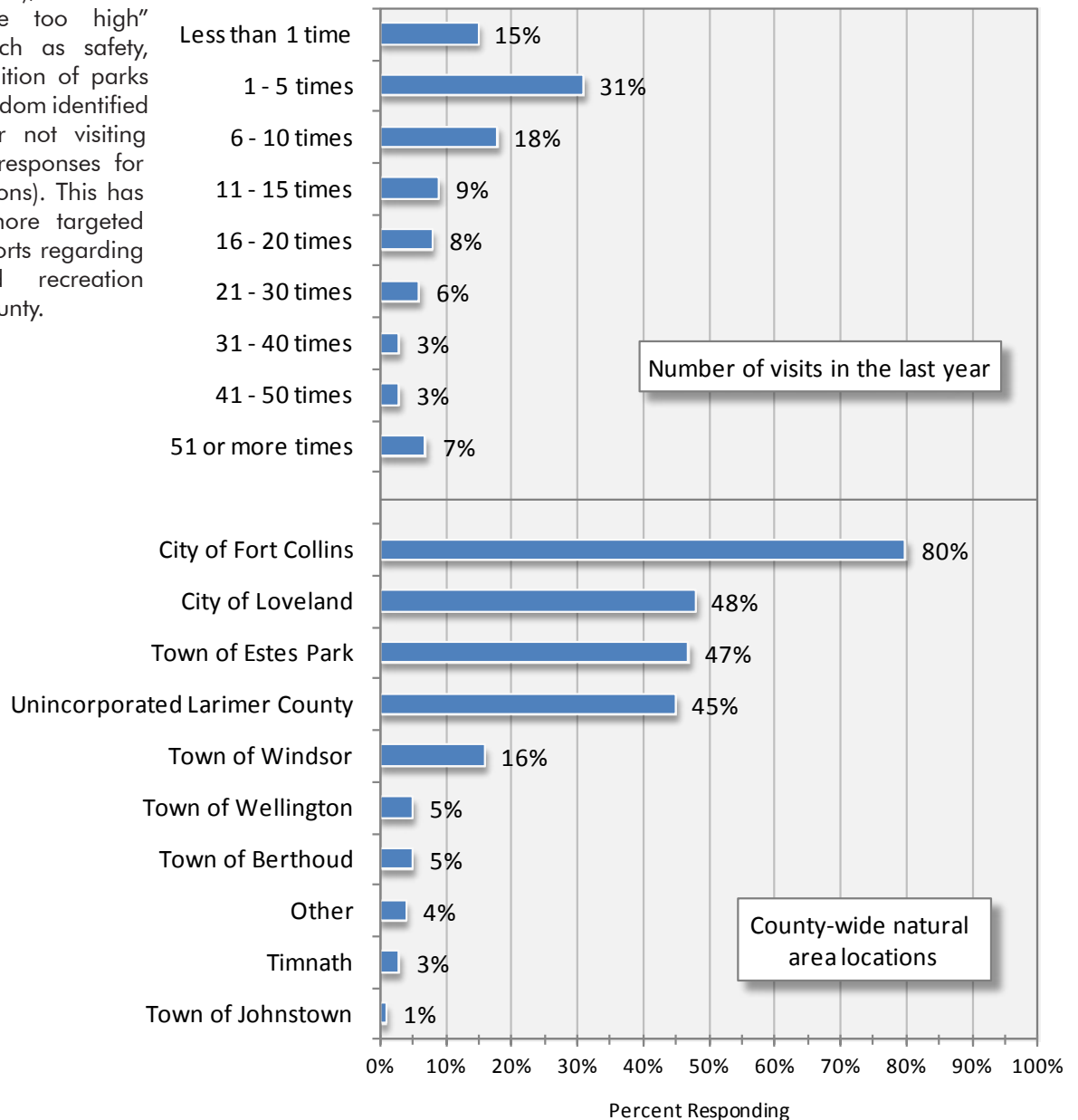


2012 Survey Findings

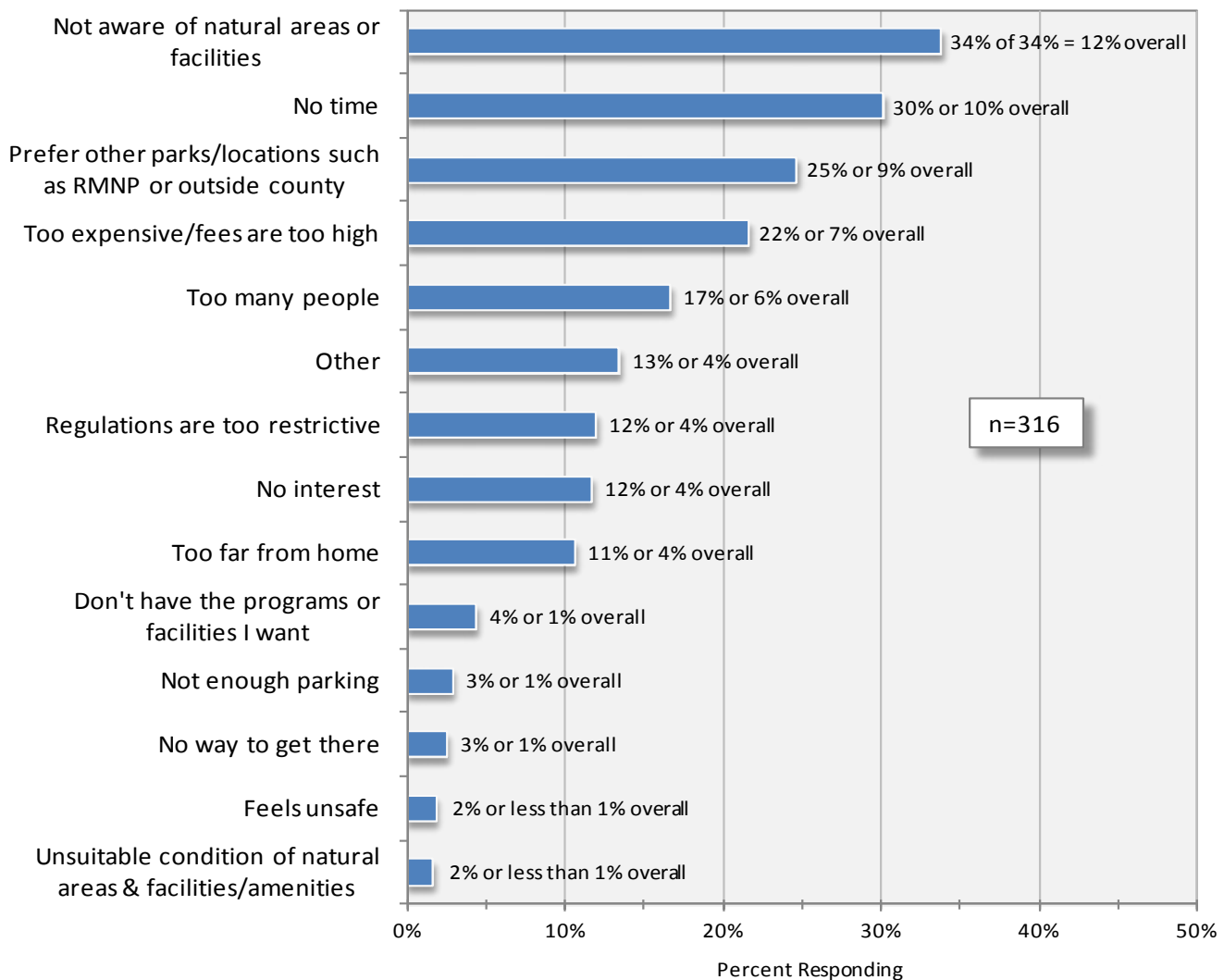
While Larimer County contains a considerable amount of Federal and State conserved land, much of which is open to the public, recreation on municipal and county lands remains very popular. Residents in all of Larimer County’s municipalities regularly visit natural areas and open spaces in the county. The average number of visits per year to natural areas or nature-based facilities was 20.1 visits per person. Results suggest that about 80% of County residents visited the natural areas of the City of Fort Collins, while a near-even distribution of residents also visited Loveland (48%), Estes Park (47%), and unincorporated Larimer County (45%) in the past 12 months. These findings suggest a strong relationship between residents and County-wide natural areas.

One purpose of the study was to understand in greater detail the reasons that County-wide natural areas are not used. While nearly three-quarters of all respondents visited at least one natural area or nature-based facility in the County within the past year, about 316 respondents (34% of sample) identified reasons that inhibited use or more frequent use of these areas. “Not aware of parks, programs, and facilities” (34%) was the most identified reason for not visiting, followed by lack of time (30%), “prefer other parks and locations” (25%), and “too expensive/fees are too high” (22%). Factors such as safety, parking, and condition of parks and facilities are seldom identified as the reason for not visiting (less than 5% of responses for each of these reasons). This has implications for more targeted communication efforts regarding the nature-based recreation available in the County.

How many times in the last 12 months have you visited a local natural area and where?



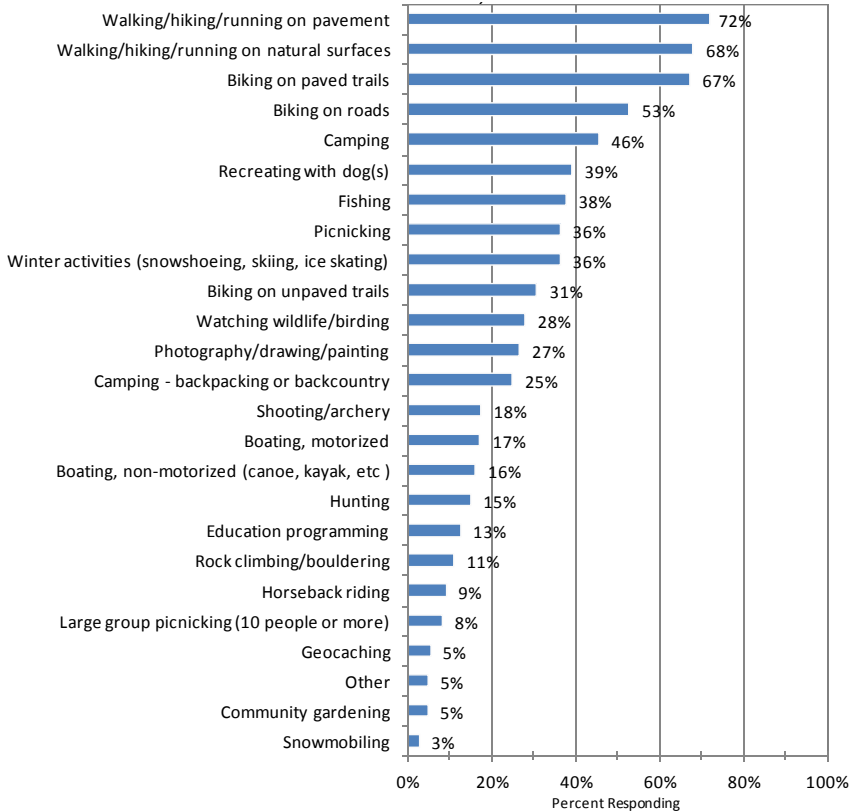
If you don't use natural areas or nature-based facilities in Larimer County, what are the reasons?



Walking, hiking, running, and biking on either pavement or natural surfaces are the most common activities engaged in by respondents, children in their household, and the household overall. Satisfaction with these activities in Larimer County is generally high, except for biking on roads, which received lower ratings than most other activities. Although no question the survey dealt with roadway conditions, findings may suggest dissatisfaction with safety or road shoulders. This finding substantiates a 2011 City of Fort Collins survey, which found that visitors enjoy a variety of activities in the natural areas, but hiking is the most popular activity. In the 2011 City of Fort Collins survey, hiking (71% of respondents), biking (55%) and dog walking (44%) were the most frequently mentioned activities at natural areas. Other population activities included relaxing/doing nothing (42%), wildlife viewing (39%), commuting/passing through (30%), running/jogging (29%), fishing (21%), picnicking (20%) and photography/art (20%).¹⁸

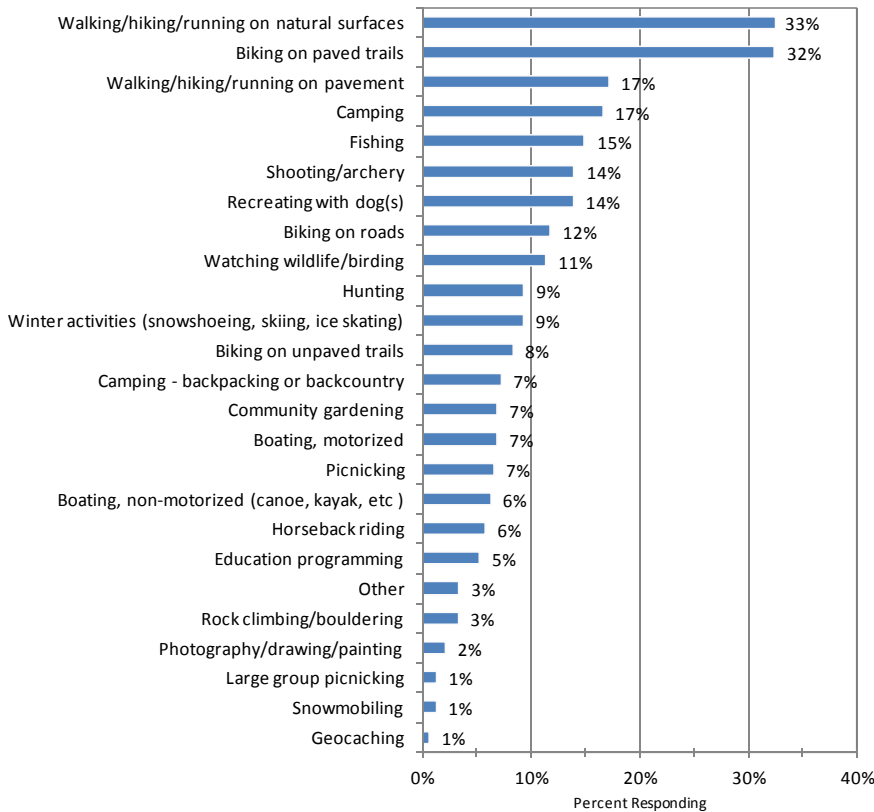


Do any members of your household participate in the following activities in Larimer County?

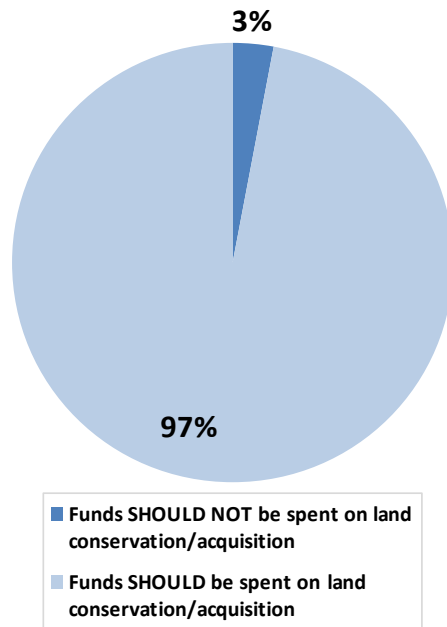


Frequent walking, hiking, running, and biking activity emerges in other parts of the survey as well. Respondents plan to increase their participation in these activities within the next year, and would like to see more land or facilities provided for walking/hiking/running on natural surfaces and pavement, and biking on paved trails. As far as recreational development is concerned, walking/running/hiking and biking on paved trails may be a priority for future expansion. Although slightly less popular, camping and fishing were also identified by respondents as activities they would like to increase their participation in and for which they would like to see more land or facilities provided. Increasing opportunities to engage in these activities may also be worthwhile.

For which of the following activities would you most like to see more land or facilities provided?

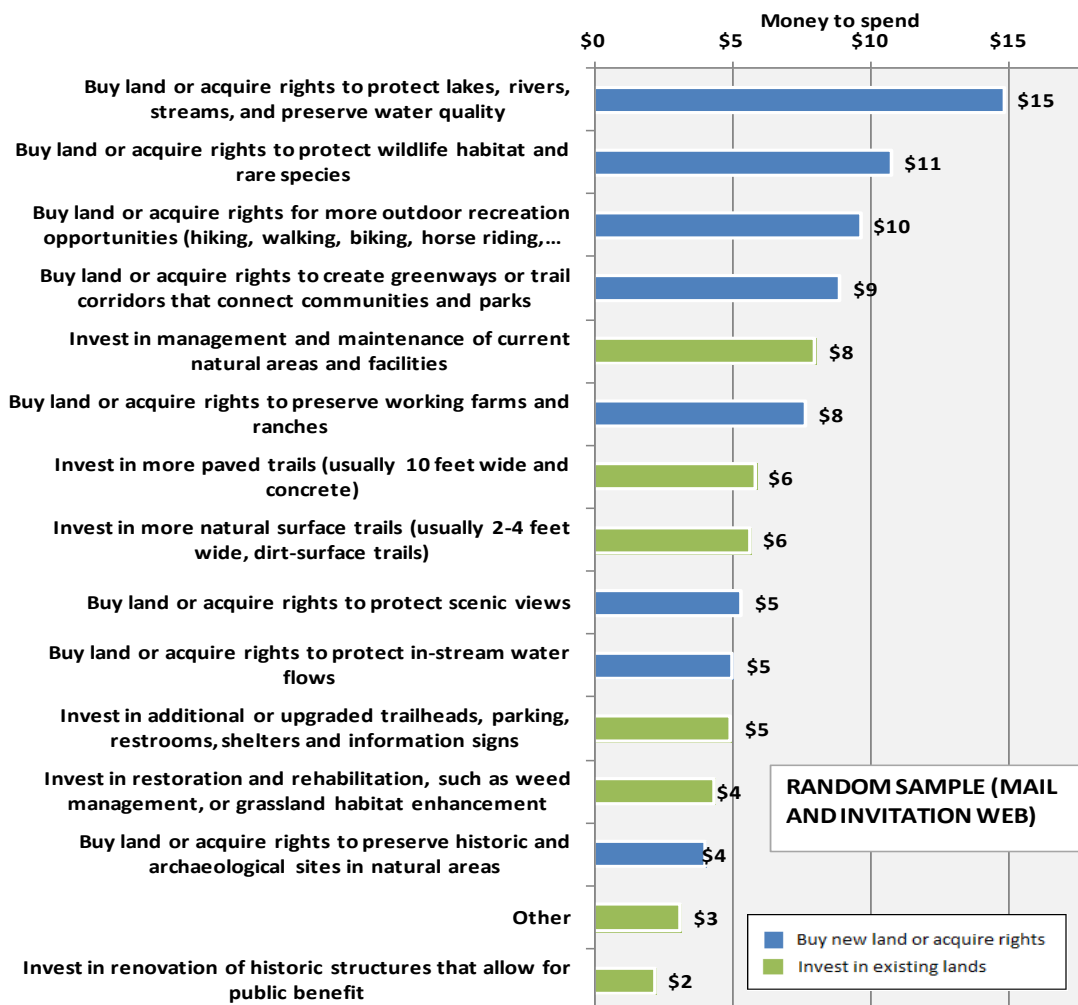


How would you allocate \$100 in public funds?



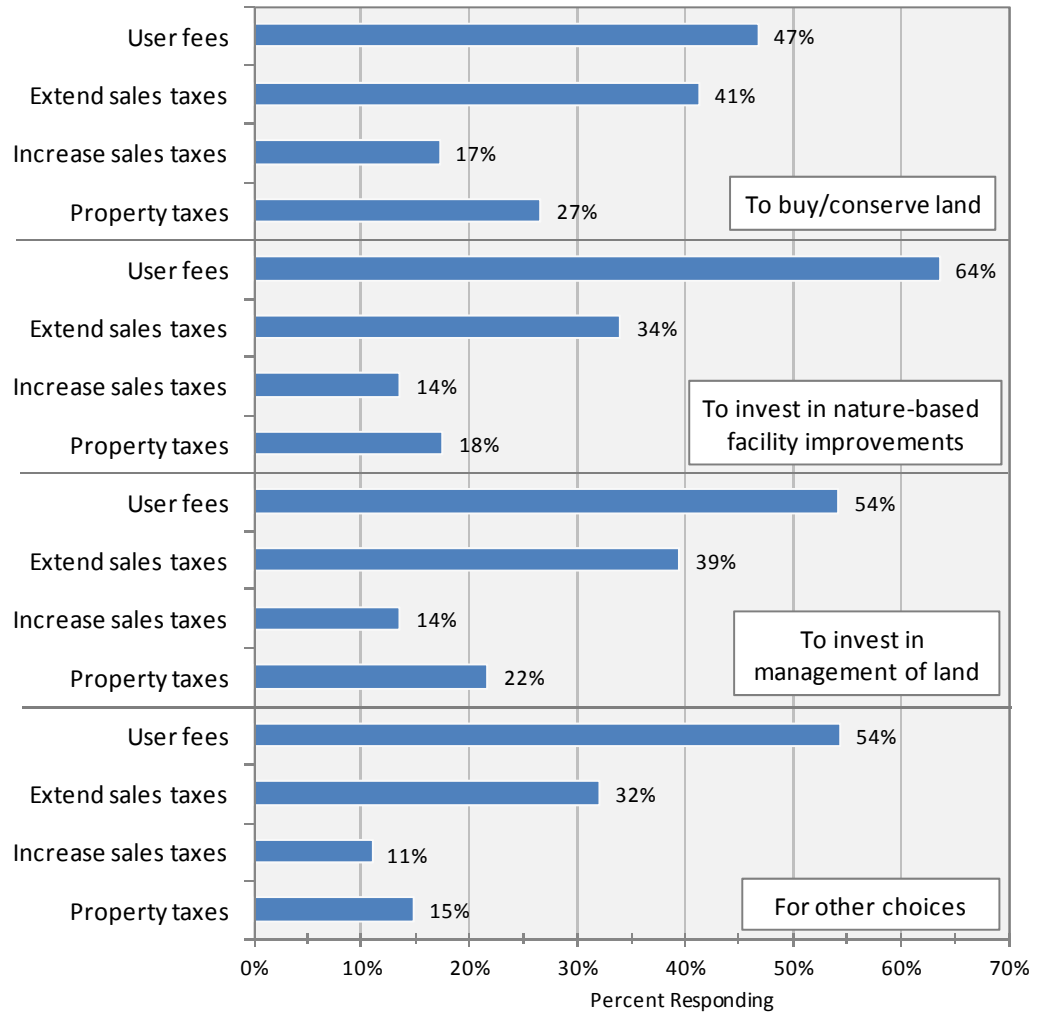
A vast majority of respondents support the use of public funds for land conservation/acquisition. When asked how they would allocate funds toward a variety of categories, most respondents demonstrated broad support for a variety of goals related to land conservation/acquisition over investing in current management or infrastructure. Only about 3% of respondents indicated that public funds should not be spent toward this purpose.

As illustrated below, the responses provide an overall prioritization of investments. In general, two-thirds of respondents favored buying land or acquiring rights over investing in existing lands. However, all categories received some degree of financial support. For each category/choice below, no more than 2 percent of respondents opted to allocate the full \$100 to that particular choice, and a strong majority of respondents spread the \$100 over a large number of choices. This indicates significant support from respondents for allocating dollars to a broad set of purposes.

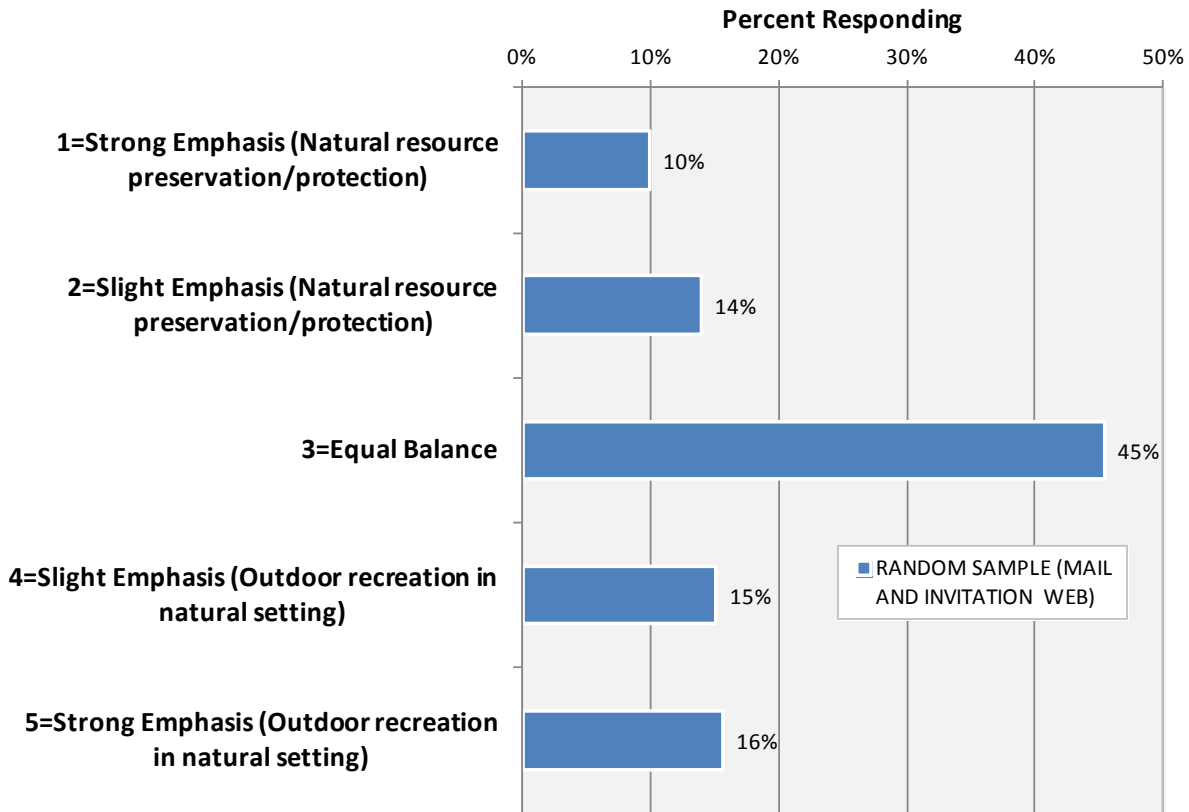


Respondents are most in favor of implementing user fees as a way to obtain funding for land conservation/acquisition, followed by extending sales taxes. Respondents are least in favor of increasing sales taxes for funding these projects. Although user fees are the most popular option, roughly 7% of the sample indicated fees deterred them from using County-wide natural areas. While this percentage is relatively low, it does point to some potential conflicts between funding feasibility, use, and public preferences. In the majority of properties where user fees are currently charged in Larimer County, user fees are inadequate to cover the total costs and supplemental tax dollars are necessary.

How should local government agencies obtain funding for the following activities?



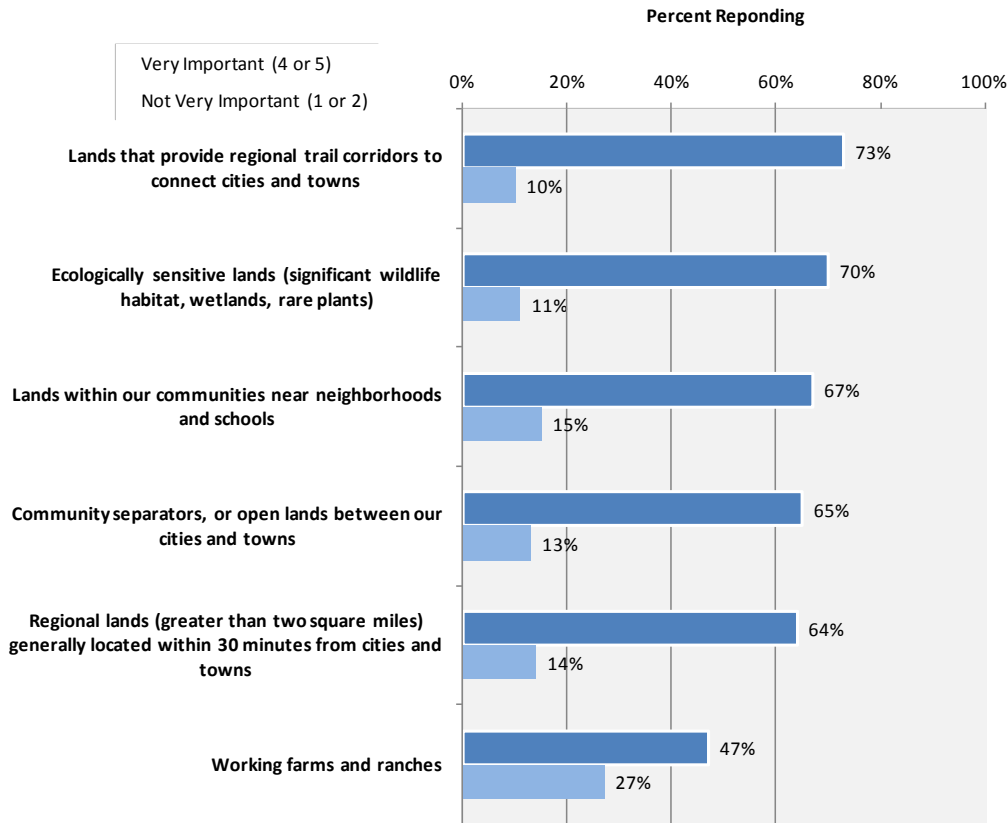
What emphasis would you like to see Larimer County and our cities and towns pursue?



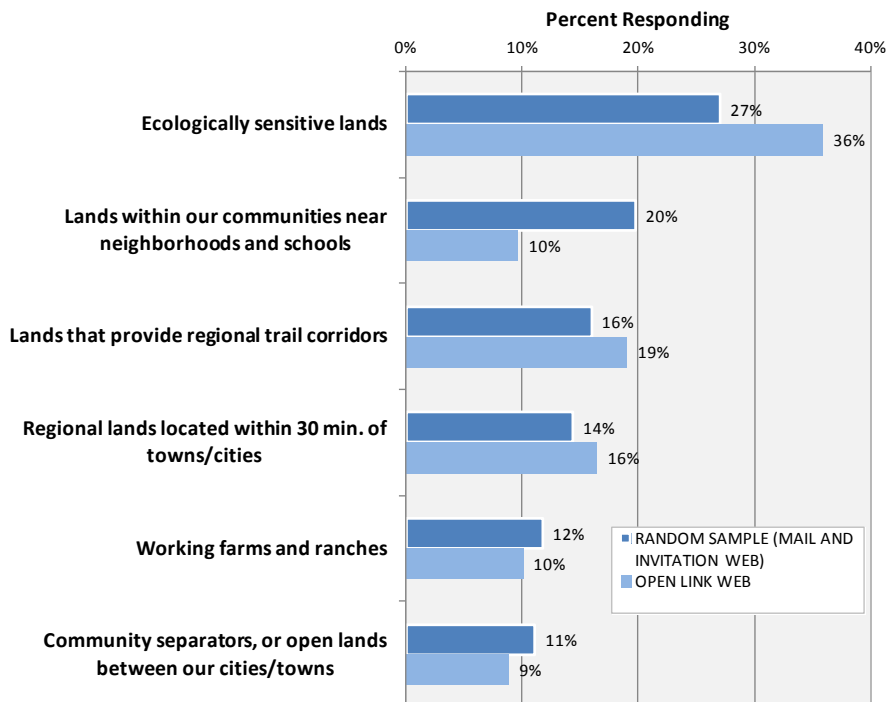
In response to a question that asked respondents to place themselves on a scale where “strong emphasis on resource conservation and protection” was at one end, and “strong emphasis on outdoor recreation” was at the other end, residents prefer an “equal balance” in prioritization toward preservation and recreation, rather than favoring one over the other.



Rate the importance to acquire or conserve the following open space types

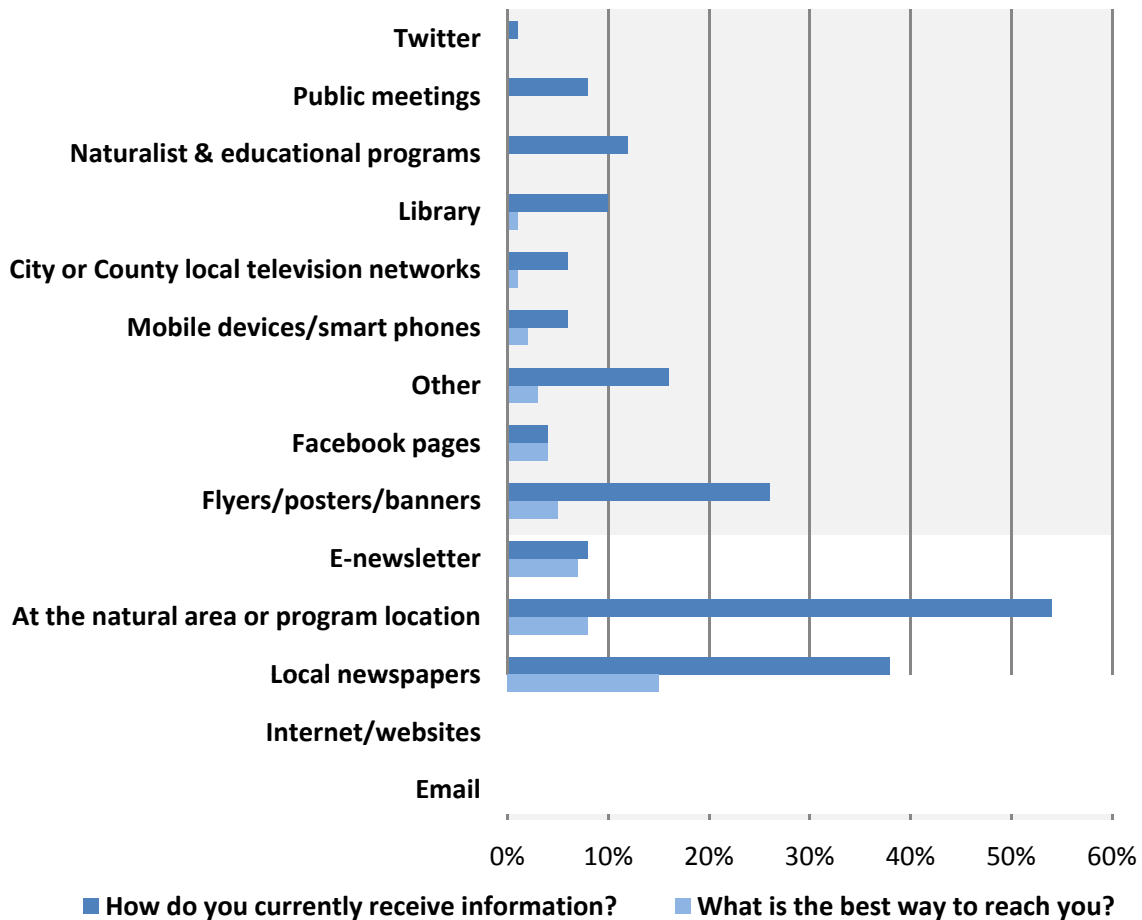


Which do you consider to be the single most important priority?



In measuring community priorities regarding land acquisition and conservation for six different categories of lands found throughout Larimer County, “lands that provide regional trail corridors to connect to cities and towns” were rated as the most important (73%), while working farms and ranches were rated as relatively less important (47%). However, in all categories approximately half of respondents or more called the land preservation choice either a “4” or “5” on the five-point scale. Also, it should be noted that the statistical margin of error is $\pm 3.4\%$. In other words, there are relatively slight differences placed on the top five categories of land preservation. An additional question asked which of the six land categories respondents consider to be the single most important priority, in order to understand community attitudes in greater detail. Different priorities emerge once the respondents identified the most important among these categories. “Ecologically sensitive lands” are considered the most important (27%), followed by lands near neighborhoods and schools (20%).





Over half of respondents indicated they were “not at all” or “somewhat” familiar with County-wide natural areas. These findings point to potential improvements that can be made in regards to communication efforts. The most common method for receiving information about County-wide natural areas or nature-based recreation is at the natural area or program location. Consequently, respondents who are currently unaware of these areas are not effectively receiving information that could increase their familiarity or use of County-wide areas. Encouragingly, however, significantly more respondents are familiar with these areas now than they were when surveyed back in 2001.

Roughly 10% of respondents receive information via email, and yet it is the most preferred method of contact. This poses a potential opportunity for the County to explore future communication, and at a lower cost to the County.

In 2001, only 13% of respondents indicated they were familiar or very familiar with the natural areas of Larimer County. The 2012 survey had 46% of respondents say they were familiar or very familiar with the county's open lands.



2013 Follow Up Survey Methods

Respondents to the Larimer County Open Lands Survey 2012 were asked if they wished to participate in a follow up survey to be distributed in early 2013. The purpose of the follow up survey was to gather additional information concerning planning and funding for open lands, land conservation, and an assessment of user experiences. Surveys were mailed to participants that provided emails and expressed a willingness to participate. In addition an “open link” version of the survey was again created and publicized. This version of the survey provided an opportunity for a broad cross section of County residents to participate in the follow-up survey.

The follow-up survey was web-based. It collected 324 responses from the original sample of participants (termed the Invitation respondents) and 344 from the open link respondents. Unlike the random sample of respondents to the 2012 Survey, the follow-up survey was based on randomly sampled respondents who expressed a willingness to participate in the Our Lands – Our Future study. Therefore the methods allowed for greater self-selection than the first survey. Based on this consideration, the follow up sample was not reweighted to more closely represent the age profile of the underlying County residents. As a result, the responses that have been analyzed and presented in this report should be used with some caution

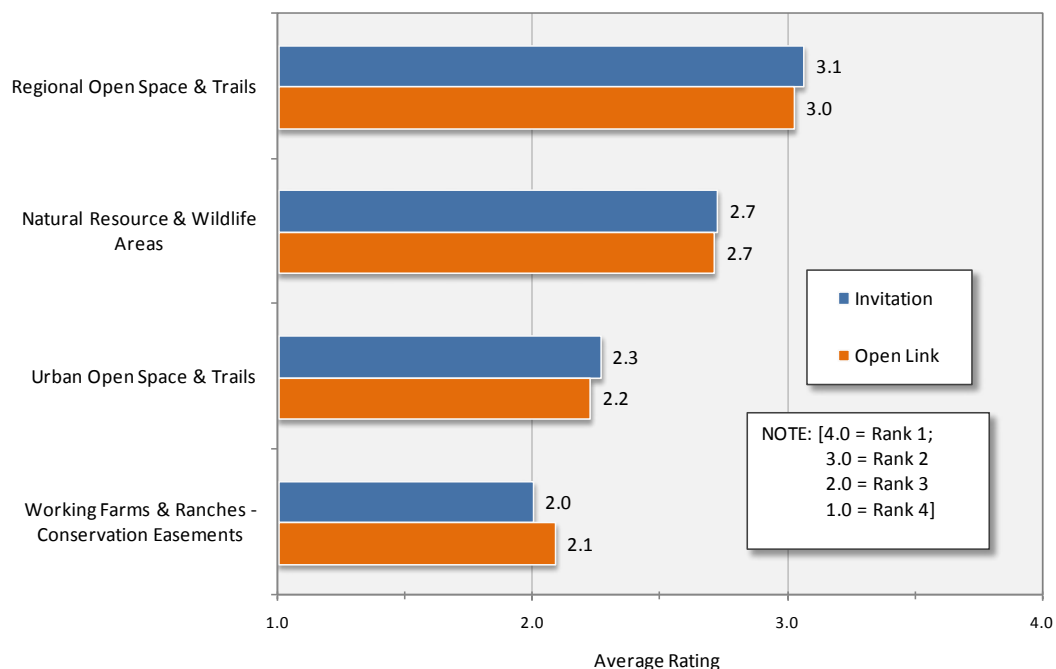
– they were not randomly obtained and they have not been reweighted. Nevertheless, the survey results present a tool for examining local opinions and evaluating relative preferences for various options presented in the survey.

Results from the re-sampled respondents and open-link respondents are, for the most part, similar, which indicates that there are widely held opinions on most of the topics measured through this survey. Respondents were provided with background information about the Larimer County Open Lands Program and the Help Preserve Open Spaces Tax prior to answering the survey questions.

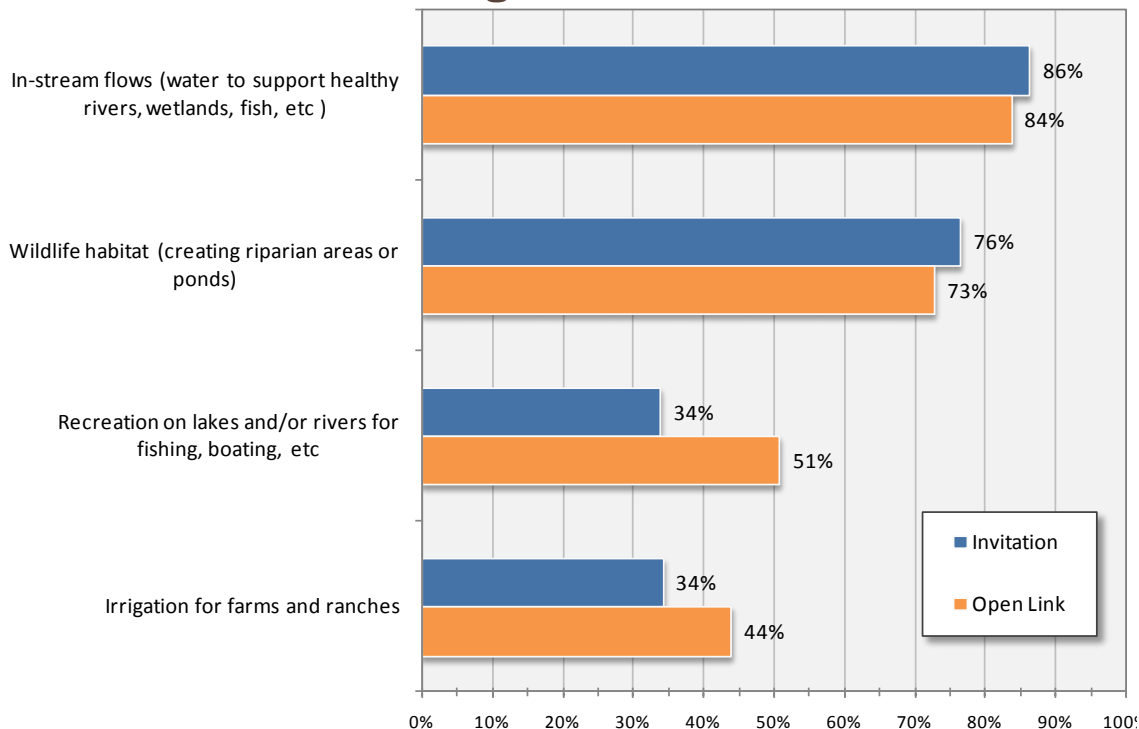
2013 Follow Up Survey Findings

The survey evaluated land conservation priorities between four types of open space and the results show a clear ranking of importance. Among the four choices presented, regional open space and trails was considered the most important, followed by natural resource and wildlife areas, urban open space and trails, followed by working farms and ranches (conservation easements). It is important to remember that these results do not suggest that there is weak support for the lower rated categories, rather, the ratings are relative to one another and show that relative to the other choices, regional open space and trails was highest ranked. Some differences by community exist among the rankings and these differences are probed further within Appendix A.

Average Rating of Land Conservation Options

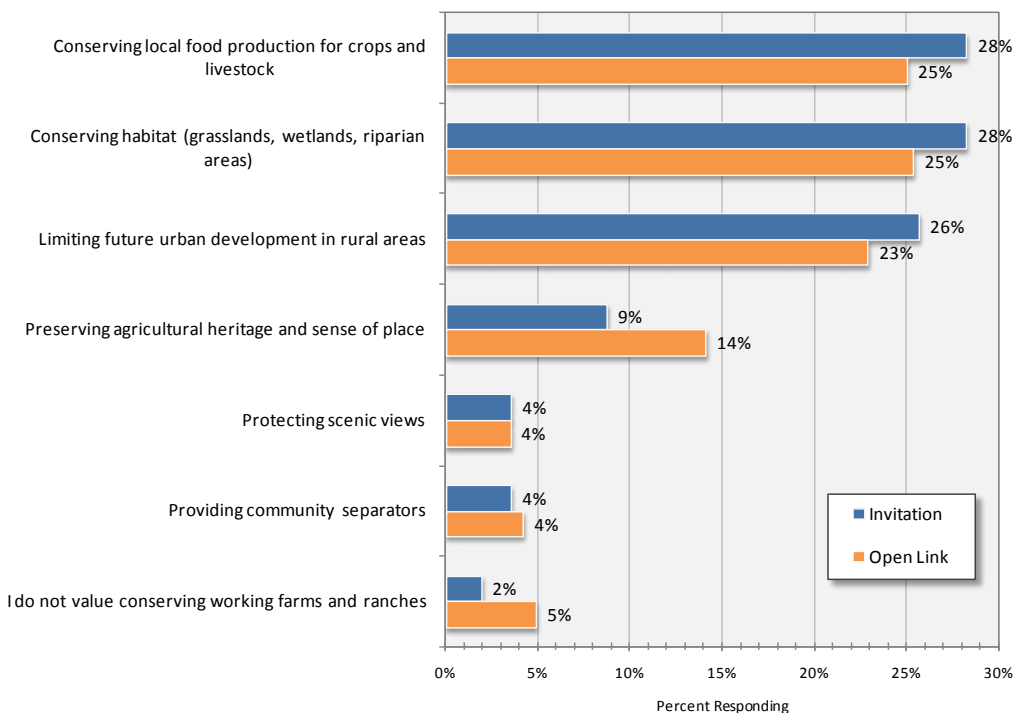


Water Rights Preferences



When asked about preferences for the use of water rights, most of the respondents indicated in-stream flows (water to support healthy rivers, wetlands, fish, etc.) as an important use. Another large block identified wildlife habitat (creating riparian areas or ponds) as important. Although recreation on lakes and/or rivers for fishing, boating, etc., and irrigation for farms and ranches gathered relatively less support, between 34% and 51% of respondents indicated these water rights as important.

Most Important Aspect of Conservation for Working Farms and Ranches





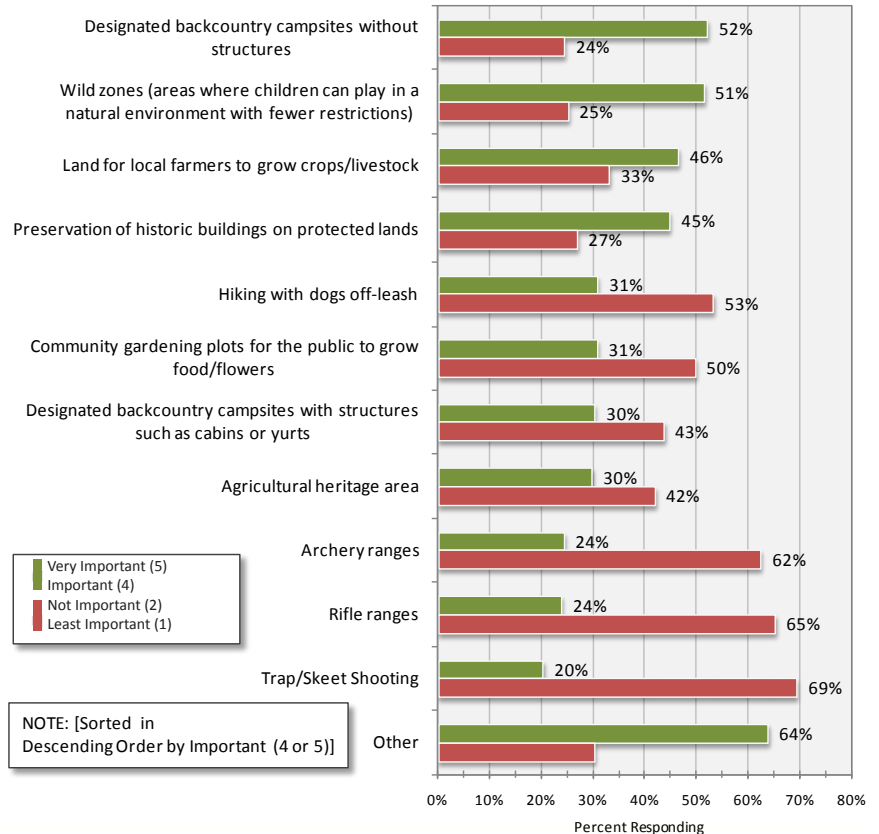
Open-ended survey questions generated over 100 pages of input on potential activities.

This question probed preferred conservation values for working farms and ranches. There was roughly equal importance expressed for: conserving local food production for crops and livestock, conserving habitat (grasslands, wetlands, riparian areas), and limiting future urban development in rural areas.

The importance of various land uses and recreational activities supported by open space tax dollars was rated. The questions contained in the survey addressed new categories of land uses and recreational activities that were not addressed in the 2012 survey. A number of these uses had come up in public meetings and in the open comment section of the 2012 survey. The project partners and Advisory Board desired to use the follow-up survey to understand relative priorities. Designated backcountry campsites (without facilities) was the most identified choice, followed by “wild zones” (where children can play in a natural environment with few restrictions). Archery, rifle ranges and trap/skeet shooting received least support overall, but all categories that were measured received at least 20% of respondents giving the land use/activity a 4 or 5. These results were probed by community and by age of respondent and not surprisingly there are differences. The shooting and archery uses receive relatively greater ratings of importance among residents of less urban towns and the unincorporated County.

Open Space Tax Dollars Activity Preferences for New Recreation Uses on Open Space

All Respondents



The 2012 and 2013 survey concluded with several open-ended questions, shown on the right under the “Other” category. Over 100 pages of input were received – reiterating trail and other activities document in the first survey (see word graphic above) - a strong indication of the depth of attention and interest in open space and natural areas in Larimer County.

CONCLUSION AND CHOICES

Our Lands - Our Future was driven by public and stakeholder input. Throughout the process, feedback came to the partner agencies and members of the advisory boards through a series of regional and local events and presentations and an interactive mapping website. Two county-wide surveys provided critical information in determining community values, satisfaction levels, needs, and priorities for the Partner Agencies’ planning efforts with respect to land conservation and outdoor recreational opportunities.

It is clear that protection and proper management of open lands and natural areas is seen as one of – if not the single - most important concern facing Larimer County. Residents are concerned about conserving opens spaces, maintaining them properly, and about development that is steadily encroaching into areas that currently afford recreational, wildlife habitat, and working farm and ranch services.

As expected, some notable differences existed between geographic areas of the County. As local master plans and policies are updated, the partners and their respective advisory boards should fine-tune their understanding of local preferences in context with county-wide values so that both are achieved. Additional, targeted outreach may be necessary for groups that are traditionally under-represented (namely lower income families, Hispanics, and young adults (ages 18-24).

CHAPTER ENDNOTES

- 1 Larimer County. 2012. Plug In To Nature.
- 2 Gilliland, David L. 2013. Analysis of Larimer County 2013 Citizen Survey, dated May 21, 2013.
- 3 Larimer County. 2012. Plug In To Nature.
- 4 Gilliland, David L. 2013. Analysis of Larimer County 2013 Citizen Survey, dated May 21, 2013.
- 5 City of Fort Collins. 2012. Quality of Life Survey.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Larimer County. 2012. Plug In To Nature.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 National Research Center and ICMA. (2011). Benchmark Report: Town of Windsor, CO. The National Citizen Survey.
- 12 City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, 2011. Fort Collins Natural Areas Resident Survey Report of Results.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Larimer County. 2012. Plug In To Nature. Finding also corroborated at the state level by the 2013 Conservation in the West Poll conducted by The Colorado College State of the Rockies Project.
- 16 C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital National Poll on Children’s Health. 2013. Top 10 Child Health Concerns in the U.S. Accessed at <http://mottnpch.org/blog/2012-08-29/exercise-obesity-and-smoking-top-year%E2%80%99s-list-child-health-concerns>
- 17 For the total random sample size of 922 margin of error is +/- 3.4% calculated for questions at 50% response (if the response for a particular question is “50%”—the standard way to generalize margin of error is to state the larger margin, which occurs for responses at 50%). Note that the margin of error is different for every single question response on the survey depending on the resultant sample sizes, proportion of responses, and number of answer categories for each question. Comparison of differences in the data between various segments, therefore, should take into consideration these factors. As a general comment, it is sometimes more appropriate to focus attention on the general trends and patterns in the data rather than on the individual pages.
- 18 City of Fort Collins Natural Areas Program, 2011. Fort Collins Natural Areas Resident Survey Report of Results.

