



PUBLIC OPINION POLL

DRINKING WATER IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Center
for Rural
Communities | NORTHLAND
COLLEGE

The Northland College Center for Rural Communities conducted a telephone public opinion poll on drinking water between May 5th and June 2nd of 2016. A random sample of households in Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, and Iron counties were selected to participate. Both landlines and cell phones were included in the sample. If homes had both landlines and cell phones only one number was selected before the sampling frame was produced. The final sample included 640 residents of the four county area in northern Wisconsin. The margin of error is +/- 3.8 at the 95% confidence level.

The poll included questions about respondent’s drinking water, responsibilities of the public sector in relation to drinking water, private ownership of water resources, and potential concerns about local water infrastructure. The results are summarized below. The survey data were weighted to reflect US Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2010-2014) figures of gender and education across the four county area of northern Wisconsin.

Contents

Water Source	2
Public Sector Responsibility	3
Role of Private Entities	4
Qualities of Public and Private Water Utilities	5
Concerns.....	6
Infrastructure Repair Costs	7
Values.....	8
Demographics	9
Contact.....	10

Water Source

1. In your home, what best describes the source of your tap water?

City or town water	31.8%
Private well	65.5%
Tribal water utility	1.1%
Other	1.1%
Unsure	0.5%

2. What is the source of your tap water?

Ground water	14.2%
Lake Superior	52.8%
Other/Multiple sources	3.8%
Unsure	29.1%

3. At your current residence, have you ever had your well water tested for contaminants?

Yes	76.7%
No	21.4%
Unsure	1.9%

4. How often do you test your well water?

At least two times per year	0.9%
Once per year	6.3%
Less than once per year	92.8%

5. At your current residence, have you ever searched for information on your tap water quality?

Yes	15.9%
No	83.8%
Unsure	0.4%

6. What types of water do you drink on a daily basis? You can choose more than one type.

Tap water	59.4%
Artesian well water	5.6%
Bottled water	7.5%
Other/Multiple Sources	27.6%

Public Sector Responsibility

All respondents were read the following statement prior to being asked about various responsibilities in regards to the public sector and drinking water: Now I would like to ask your opinion about the role of the public sector in relation to drinking water. There are a variety of agencies and entities in the public sector that provide services related to drinking water including publicly owned utilities, local city or town officials, and state and federal agencies. I will read you a list of statements about the role of these public sector entities. Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree that the public sector should be responsible for the following activities. Results are reported on a three-point scale of disagree, neutral, and agree.

7. The public sector should be responsible for...protecting drinking water sources from pollution.

Disagree	2.9%
Neutral	3.9%
Agree	92.2%
Don't Know	1.0%

8. The public sector should be responsible for...managing land use to minimize impact on water sources.

Disagree	7.9%
Neutral	9.4%
Agree	80.3%
Don't Know	2.4%

9. The public sector should be responsible for...placing limits on the use of water to prevent depletion of drinking water sources.

Disagree	17.3%
Neutral	13.0%
Agree	65.9%
Don't Know	3.8%

10. The public sector should be responsible for...protecting drinking water sources from acts and risks of terrorism.

Disagree	4.0%
Neutral	5.6%
Agree	87.8%
Don't Know	2.5%

11. The public sector should be responsible for...ensuring water is safe to drink.

Disagree	3.7%
Neutral	3.3%
Agree	92.3%
Don't Know	0.7%

12. The public sector should be responsible for... notifying the public of any changes in water quality or treatment methods.

Disagree	2.9%
Neutral	0.8%
Agree	95.9%
Don't Know	0.3%

13. The public sector should be responsible for... guaranteeing access to safe drinking water regardless of someone's ability to pay.

Disagree	7.0%
Neutral	6.7%
Agree	83.9%
Don't Know	2.3%

Role of Private Entities

All respondents were read the following statement prior to being asked about the various roles of private entities in relation to drinking water: We are also interested in understanding your opinion on the role of private entities in relation to drinking water. By private entities we mean for-profit businesses or corporations. I will read you a list of statements, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. Results are reported on a three-point scale of disagree, neutral, and disagree.

14. A private entity should be allowed to own and operate a water utility.

Disagree	41.7%
Neutral	12.6%
Agree	38.0%
Don't Know	7.7%

15. A private entity should be allowed to earn a profit from the supply of drinking water to households.

Disagree	55.8%
Neutral	11.4%
Agree	30.2%
Don't Know	2.6%

16. A private entity should be allowed to extract and sell water from Lake Superior or the aquifers, streams and rivers that feed it.

Disagree	76.5%
Neutral	8.9%
Agree	11.3%
Don't Know	3.3%

Qualities of Public and Private Water Utilities

All respondents were read the following statement prior to being asked about the various qualities of both private and public water utilities: Now I am going to read you a list of qualities associated with privately-owned water utilities and publicly-owned water utilities. Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements. Results are reported on a three-point scale of disagree, neutral, and agree.

17. Privately owned water utilities provide more efficient services than public utilities.

Disagree	40.9%
Neutral	22.2%
Agree	14.6%
Don't Know	22.3%

18. A privately owned water utility is more accountable to the people it serves than a publicly owned utility.

Disagree	56.4%
Neutral	14.3%
Agree	18.4%
Don't Know	10.9%

19. A privately owned water utility is more trustworthy than a publicly owned utility.

Disagree	58.9%
Neutral	17.3%
Agree	13.8%
Don't Know	10.1%

20. Privately owned water utilities are more transparent than publicly owned utilities.

Disagree	56.5%
Neutral	15.5%
Agree	17.3%
Don't Know	10.6%

Concerns

All respondents were read the following statement prior to being asked about the various concerns: Over the last few years, local, state, and national officials have been in conversations about public water systems; that is, the public infrastructure that treats and delivers water for human consumption. I will read you a list of common concerns related to public water systems.

21. When it comes to the public water system in your community would you say you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not at all concerned...about the age of your community's water system?

Not at all concerned	26.3%
Somewhat concerned	46.7%
Very concerned	24.7%
Unsure	2.3%

22. When it comes to the public water system in your community, would you say you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not at all concerned...about the cost of repairing or upgrading your community's water system?

Not at all concerned	18.5%
Somewhat concerned	46.1%
Very concerned	32.0%
Unsure	3.4%

23. When it comes to the public water system in your community, would you say you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not at all concerned...that your tap water is unsafe to drink?

Not at all concerned	45.9%
Somewhat concerned	19.4%
Very concerned	31.8%
Unsure	2.9%

24. When it comes to the public water system in your community, would you say you are very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not at all concerned...about your local leaders willingness to address any problems that might arise with your community's water system?

Not at all concerned	37.5%
Somewhat concerned	28.2%
Very concerned	29.5%
Unsure	4.8%

Infrastructure Repair Costs

25. If your community's public water infrastructure needs repair, the city should increase...

Water utility rates	22.2%
Taxes	8.7%
Both	29.6%
Neither	28.4%
Unsure	11.0%

Values

All respondents were read the following statement prior to being asked about their values in relation to drinking water: We are almost done, I appreciate your time. The next few questions are about your values related to drinking water. Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statements. Results are reported on a three-point scale of disagree, neutral, and agree.

26. Water is a human right, every person should have access to clean and safe drinking water.

Disagree	0.6%
Neutral	2.2%
Agree	97.0%
Don't Know	0.2%

27. We should protect and conserve water resources for future generations, even if that means we need to restrict our consumption or activities that harm the water.

Disagree	2.3%
Neutral	3.6%
Agree	93.5%
Don't Know	0.6%

Demographics*†

28. Gender

Male	40.2%
Female	59.7%

29. Age

18-24	0.3%
25-34	2.3%
35-44	7.9%
45-54	15.9%
55-59	11.0%
60-64	14.0%
65-74	32.4%
75-84	15.3%
85 and over	1.0%

30. Hispanic or Latino/a

Yes	0.8%
No	99.2%

31. Race

White	94.4%
Native American/ American Indian	2.3%
Asian	0.3%
Other	1.6%
Two or more races	1.5%

32. Education Level

Less than high school	0.2%
Some high school, no diploma	0.8%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	22.3%
Some college	18.4%
2-year degree	15.7%
4-year degree	24.7%
Graduate or professional degree	17.9%

33. Household Size	
1-2	74.7%
3-4	16.7%
5 or more	8.5%

34. Minors in Household	
1-2	74.2%
3-4	21.7%
5 or more	4.2%

35. Property Owners	
Own	93.0%
Rent	7.0%

36. Income	
Less than \$14,999	5.5%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	6.7%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	6.3%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	16.4%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	23.1%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	11.6%
\$100,000 or more	12.6%
Unsure	17.7%

*The demographics are unweighted and reflect the actual demographic make-up of the sample from the poll.

†Due to rounding error, some totals may not add up to exactly 100 percent.

Contact

For more information about the poll, contact Brandon Hofstedt, Faculty Director, Center for Rural Communities at crc@northland.edu.

The Center for Rural Communities applies research based solutions to social and economic challenges, partners with community members to build on local knowledge, and promotes the long-term health and vitality of rural communities in the north woods region. For more information, visit us at <https://www.northland.edu/sustain/crc/>