

**Long Island Sound
2024 Public Perceptions
Research Study
Representative Survey & Focus Groups**

Final Report



**LONG ISLAND SOUND
PARTNERSHIP**



www.OpinionWorks.com

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Long Island Sound 2024 Public Perceptions Research Study was developed and conducted for Connecticut Sea Grant and the Long Island Sound Study to assess residents' perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to the Sound.

This comprehensive study consisted of a representative survey of 3,709 residents of Connecticut and the portions of New York State within the Long Island Sound watershed, conducted between June and August 2024, and four focus groups held in October 2024 and January 2025 to better understand important issues that emerged from the survey. This research was developed and conducted in close collaboration with the sponsors by OpinionWorks of Annapolis, Maryland.

Taken together, these two research phases provide a thorough analysis of public perceptions of the Sound, residents' connections to the Sound and nearby waters, and their interest in and willingness to become more engaged with both the enjoyment and the restoration of Long Island Sound.

These are the major findings:

Positive General Impressions of the Sound

- Top-of-mind Impressions of Long Island Sound are overwhelmingly positive. Asked for three adjectives to describe the Sound, survey respondents offered words like "beautiful," "fun," "peaceful," and "relaxing," along with activity words like "fishing" and "swimming."
- There are emotional benefits to being near the Sound. Sixty percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement, "Being near Long Island Sound makes me feel peaceful and happier." Focus group participants shared happy memories and told stories of emotional release.
- Positive feelings about the Sound translate into caring for the Sound. Two-thirds of survey respondents agreed with the statement, "I care about Long Island Sound." An even larger number, about three-quarters, said they "care about the river, stream, or coastline...nearest to where I live."
- Respondents offered specific reasons why they appreciate the Sound: 61% said it provides recreational opportunities, 58% said it has a positive economic impact on the region, and 60% would call the Sound "a national treasure."
- Despite all these positive impressions, only one-third of survey respondents were even aware that they live in the Long Island Sound watershed, even though all of them do – suggesting that many residents' connections to the Sound could be much stronger.

Improved Perceptions of Water Quality

- The public is split on how they perceive the quality of the water in Long Island Sound, with 45% saying "excellent" or "good," and 41% saying "fair" or "poor." Perceptions of the Sound's water quality improve the further east one lives in both Connecticut and New York.
- More than one-quarter (29%) of residents see improvement in the Sound's water quality compared to five years ago, while slightly fewer (22%) think the water is getting worse – and the remainder seeing no change. While the difference in numbers is modest between those who perceive the water getting better vs. worse, it is significant that the overall trend tilts slightly positive. This positive trend became more pronounced in focus group discussion among participants who were

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long-time residents, especially those in the western end of the Sound, as they described a noticeable improvement in the health of the ecosystem over several decades.

- While 26% believe it is unhealthy to swim in the Sound and 25% believe it is unsafe to eat fish or shellfish from the Sound's waters, both of those numbers have improved significantly since the 2006 survey – down 12% and 16%, respectively.

Spending Time Outdoors

- The survey inventoried people's activities in the outdoors and near the Sound. It found that 66% hike or walk near the water, 54% birdwatch or observe wildlife, 46% swim or wade in natural waters, 29% fish or shellfish, 23% paddle, and 17% sail or powerboat. A significant share of this activity – about two-thirds of it according to the survey – happens on or near the Sound.
- When asked in a more open-ended way about their activities on or near the Sound, a great deal of respondent's answers focused on walks and other exercise, relaxing and meditating, or gathering with family and friends for picnics and barbecues.

Convenient Access to the Sound and Barriers to Access

- As a most basic indicator of residents' relationship with the water, 81% said they could picture in their mind "a stream, river, bay, or coastline close to where you live." Just under half the sample (46%) could both picture and name the water close to them, indicating a higher level of connection to the water. The ability to picture and name water correlates with many positive things, including a higher level of caring about the Sound, and a greater feeling that their individual actions could make a difference for the health of the Sound's waters.
- This leaves about one-fifth of the region's residents who *cannot picture in their mind any water near them*. These residents disproportionately have lower incomes and tend to live in more urbanized areas.
- Only two-thirds (68%) of watershed residents feel they "have convenient access to Long Island Sound or other waters near you." It is noteworthy that the question includes not just the Sound, but also "*other waters near you*," suggesting a total disconnect from the water for many residents. Higher household income and owning a car both correlate strongly with the sense that one has convenient access to the water.
- Most residents – six out of ten – consider it important to have convenient access to the water for outdoor activities, even when invited to "think about all the other things you could be doing with your time." Many of those who feel it is important said they do not have the convenient access that they want.
- Asked what prevents them from visiting the Sound, distance and lack of time topped the list. But the cost of parking or permit fees was the third-most common reason. Several focus group participants spoke with frustration about the high cost of visiting Sound beaches.
- While three-quarters of survey respondents said they "always" or "usually" "feel welcome and a sense of belonging" in parks or on trails near the water, 15% said they "only sometimes" or "never" do. The feeling of belonging is significantly lower among younger residents, those with lower incomes, and Black, Hispanic, or Asian residents. Asked why they do not feel welcome, these residents cited issues of accessibility, a feeling that parks and beaches are private and for residents only, safety, crowding, and subtle cues from other people who are there.

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Personal Priorities and Perceptions

- Protecting the natural environment ranks as a high priority for most residents of this region, with 62% ranking that “at the top” or “above average” when they “consider all of the issues and challenges facing this area today.”
- There is great uncertainty about whether “Rainwater that runs into the storm drains is treated before it is released into local rivers and streams.” Twenty-five percent agree with that statement, 24% disagree, and 51% are not sure about that.
- Most residents (53%) do recognize that “Nitrogen from lawn fertilizer and septic tanks is a major source of water pollution in Long Island Sound,” but almost four in ten are unsure.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) agree with the statement, “Natural habitats like wetlands and marshlands protect humans as well as wildlife.” Only 10% disagree with this thought, while 26% are not sure.
- About one-third (35%) agree with the statement, “My community has been increasingly affected by flooding over the last few years.”
- Regarding the problem of tobacco litter, only 16% of the public believe that “Over time, cigarette butts will break down into the soil naturally with no negative effects.” While most residents (52%) disagree that cigarette butts will break down, one-third of the public are unsure about that.

How Residents Assess the Value and Impact of Adopting Environmental Behaviors

- The overwhelming majority of residents of this watershed do not recognize the impact on the Sound’s water quality of their own actions. Only 16% answered “yes” when asked, “Do you think there is anything that you do now as part of your daily life that might hurt the quality of water in Long Island Sound?”
- When that 16% was asked for examples of what they do that might be harmful, the predominant focus was on littering, creating too much waste, not recycling enough, or using too much plastic – in other words, physical litter and trash.
- When asked a more positive, future-focused question, the “yes” response rose to 26%: “Do you think there is any change you could make in your daily life that might help to improve the quality of water in Long Island Sound?” Younger residents, those who are newer to the area, and those with lower household incomes are much more ready to think there are changes they could make which would help.
- When the 26% who could imagine making a change in their daily life were asked for an example of they could do, the major focus was once again on producing less trash, picking up litter, recycling more, and using less plastic. A share of the public also focused on volunteering and pursuing policy changes. Others mentioned conservation measures like using less water or energy, reducing chemical use, or driving less.
- Despite the low numbers just cited, almost three-quarters (73%) do agree in the abstract: “The actions of people on land have an impact on the health of Long Island Sound.”
- Somewhat fewer (56%) think water quality in the Sound would improve “a great deal” or “some” “...if most local residents changed their everyday behavior.” To be successful, public engagement efforts rely on a shared sense that individual action will add up to something and make a difference.

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- Another ingredient for successful public engagement is residents who feel confident they know something they can do to help. In this case, only 36% said they do. That leaves almost two-thirds of the public who are not sure how they would engage. Despite that, several focus group participants said that encouragement from community-based organizations, and even from friends, has bridged this gap and gotten them involved in volunteer efforts.

Measuring Current Adoption and Likely Future Adoption of Individual Stewardship Practices

- The Long Island Sound Public Perception Study makes a major contribution to the effort to encourage adoption of individual practices that would benefit the health of the Sound. The survey measured current levels of adoption and future likelihood of adopting 14 stewardship practices. Some of these actions are positive for the Sound, such as picking up and disposing of your dog's waste or picking up litter when you see it. Others are negative for the Sound, such as over-fertilizing your grass lawn or using chemical pesticides that could wash off into local waters.
- Taken together, these two measurements (current adoption and likelihood of future adoption) help practitioners know where to focus – ideally on behaviors that are not yet widely adopted but which show good promise of future adoption. The survey results provide that road map. Given the survey's large sample size, the segmented results provide helpful guidance to public outreach practitioners in local communities and among distinct population segments all across the watershed, so they can best respond to their local conditions.

Communicating with the Public

- The survey measured how much the public trusts information about water pollution and the environment from various sources. University scientists came out on top of the list. Local and state environmental organizations also ranked high.
- The survey also measured the frequency of usage of several sources of local information. Local TV and newspapers were most frequently used, followed closely by social media. These results vary by population characteristics, and communicators should refer to the detailed findings to match to the characteristics of their local audience.

Focus Group Feedback on Renaming the “Long Island Sound Study”

- We learned that LISS has a very low profile with the public, but study participants were very pleased to know that this effort exists. They were eager for more information about LISS and its work, and several expressed specific appreciation to the EPA for supporting this local work.
- We found a consensus among focus group participants that LISS should be renamed, because, as one participant explained, “From 1985, I think they have had enough time to ‘study.’ It implies that they are still trying to find out what the problem is and makes you question, what are they using the money for?”
- In considering naming options, participants gravitated towards options that gave a sense of mission and action. Those specifics are detailed in this report.

Long Island Sound emerges from this study with a positive image in the eyes of the vast majority of residents. The Sound is a source of recreation and emotional uplift for many residents, even while access to the Sound is not as convenient as some want. Though perceptions of water quality are mixed,

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many people see it as improving, especially in the more densely populated western end of the Sound. While most residents understand that the actions of people on the land affect the health of the Sound's waters, there is more work to do to encourage them that their actions will add up and make a positive difference.

This study offers great promise and guidance for engaging residents more closely with the Sound, increasing their enjoyment and usage of the Sound, and participating in its restoration and protection. Detailed results follow.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND & OVERVIEW

Study Purpose

The Long Island Sound 2024 Public Perception Study was developed and conducted among residents of the Sound watershed for Connecticut Sea Grant and the Long Island Sound Study. This research was designed to assess residents' perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to the Sound. It served three objectives:

1. Update understandings from a previous survey conducted in 2006 to address factors impacting people's enjoyment of Long Island Sound and their willingness to adopt beneficial behaviors and practices to enhance the health of the Sound.
2. Investigate emerging issues, such as resilience, plastic pollution and marine debris, barriers to accessing the Sound, and barriers to adopting helpful practices.
3. Provide perceptions data to help inform an update to the Public Engagement and Knowledge target in the draft Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP).

Project Design and Oversight

The study design and technical aspects of this research were coordinated by OpinionWorks, an independent research organization based in Annapolis, Maryland.

A large stakeholder group was convened by Connecticut Sea Grant to advise this project. These individuals participated actively throughout the 20-month process of planning and conducting the perceptions research:

Connecticut Sea Grant - *Nancy Balcom (lead), Margaret Cozens*

New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission - *Robert Burg, Anya Grondalski*

Citizens Advisory Committee, Long Island Sound Partnership - *Holly Drinkuth, Nancy Seligson*

Connecticut National Estuarine Research Reserve - *Larissa Graham*

Citizens Campaign for the Environment - *Maureen Murphy, Francine Gordon*

New York Sea Grant - *Jimena Perez-Viscasillas, Lillit Genovesi*

The Nature Conservancy - *Diana Nguyen*

Drawing on past research and the collective priorities of the stakeholder group, a comprehensive survey instrument was developed. The questionnaire addressed these topics:

- Outdoor activities, focused on activities on or near the Sound
- Access to the Sound, and sense of welcome and belonging
- Personal priorities related to the natural environment
- Impressions of Long Island Sound
- Perceptions of water quality and safety of seafood and swimming
- Barriers to visiting the Sound
- Perceptions of the impact of one's own actions on the health of local waters and the Sound
- Awareness of and attitudes about contaminants
- Adoption and likelihood of future adoption of individual practices that help or hurt the Sound
- Trusted sources of information
- Classification questions for sample balancing and segmentation

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Research Method

This research was conducted in two phases:

1. **A representative general population survey** was conducted between June 20 and August 25, 2024, among a random sampling of 3,709 residents of Connecticut and the portions of New York State within the Long Island Sound watershed.

This large sample size allows for high confidence in the survey findings, both for the region as a whole and for a wide range of geographic, demographic, and lifestyle subgroups. This survey sample produces a margin of sampling error of no more than $\pm 1.6\%$ at the 95% confidence level, meaning that if every adult resident of the region had been interviewed, the actual results could be expected to fall within that margin at least 95% of the time.

People respond to different types of outreach. Surveys are no exception. To maximize the survey's representation of all segments of the region's population, interviews were collected through multiple means:

- 2,715 residents were reached through online consumer panels, which is a method of reaching a broad cross-section of the public that has signed up to take periodic surveys online about a wide variety of topics in exchange for a small incentive.
- 283 were reached by telephone, with the survey administered by live operators who reached residents on both wireless and landline phones.
- 476 responded to a texted link which took them to the survey online.
- 235 responded to a mailed survey packet, either returning a hard copy of the survey form postage-paid, or going online to SoundSurvey.org to complete the survey online.

Ninety percent of the survey responses were collected in English, and 10% in Spanish.

Throughout the interviewing process, attention was paid to ensuring that the survey sample tracked with the population characteristics of the region for geographic distribution, as well as gender, race or ethnicity, age, and educational attainment. After the survey interviews were collected, statistical weights were applied to bring the final survey sample into close alignment with the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

The full survey questionnaire and aggregate results are found in Section 2 of this report. Segmented results for a wide variety of geographic and other subgroups are found in Section 3.

2. **Four focus groups** were conducted in October 2024 and January 2025 to better understand several specific issues addressed by the quantitative survey, segmented as follows:
 - A. Have a moderate to poor connection to the Sound, as measured by few or no activities on or near the Sound and a poor feeling of connection to the Sound
 - B. Strongly connected to the Sound, as measured by frequent activities on or near the Sound and a strong feeling of connection to the Sound
 - C. Desire a connection to the Sound but experiencing barriers that prevent them from spending time there
 - D. Spend moderate or more time outdoors; conducted in Spanish

Through this qualitative technique, residents were gathered in groups of about six participants to talk in-depth about their impressions related to their feelings of connection to the Sound, the health

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of the Sound, attitudes about individual behaviors that could help improve the health of the Sound, and the public profile and potential renaming of the Long Island Sound Study.

These structured conversations, lasting about 120 minutes, were held virtually on the Zoom platform. They were facilitated by a professional moderator, following a pre-determined discussion guide to help ensure that topics were fully addressed. Participants were compensated with a \$100 stipend as a thank you for their time and the effort to attend.

Though most of analysis in this report is based on the survey, where helpful, observations from the focus groups are included in the narrative to help illustrate the findings more fully. The moderator's discussion guide and full transcripts are found in Section 4 of this report.

Personal Characteristics of the Survey Audience

The table below shows the breakdown of the survey sample by geography and other factors.

State	
Connecticut	52%
New York	48%
County (Connecticut)	
Fairfield	18%
Hartford	23%
Litchfield	7%
Middlesex	14%
New Haven	25%
New London	6%
Tolland	3%
Windham	3%
County (New York)	
Bronx	40%
Nassau	7%
Queens	19%
Suffolk	7%
Westchester	7%
Age	
Less than 25	13%
25 to 34	17%
35 to 44	16%
45 to 54	17%
55 to 64	17%
65 or more	21%
Gender Identity	
Male	48%
Female	49%
Another gender category	2%
Prefer not to say	2%

Race or Ethnicity	
African-American or Black	15%
Asian or Pacific Islander	8%
Hispanic or Latino	21%
Middle Eastern or North African	2%
Mixed race or Multi-racial	4%
Native American or Alaska Native	2%
White	56%
Something else	1%
Not sure or prefer not to say	3%
Education	
Less than 12 th grade	5%
High school diploma or GED	31%
Attended some college, no degree	16%
Associate (2-year) degree	8%
Bachelor's (4-year) degree	21%
Post-graduate degree	17%
Not sure or prefer not to say	2%
Housing	
Single-family house	50%
Townhouse, rowhouse, or duplex	7%
Apartment or condo	36%
Mobile home	2%
Other	2%
Not sure or prefer not to say	3%
Total Family Income	
Less than \$25,000	18%
25 to less than \$50,000	21%
50 to less than \$75,000	16%
75 to less than \$100,000	12%
100 to less than \$150,000	12%
\$150,000 or more	13%
Not sure or prefer not to say	9%

DETAILED PUBLIC PERCEPTION STUDY FINDINGS

The First Three words That Come to Mind

Though people's impressions are predominantly positive, some more negative words do appear. "Dirty" and "polluted" are visible in the word cloud, as is "crowded."

Words That Come to Mind to Describe Long Island Sound



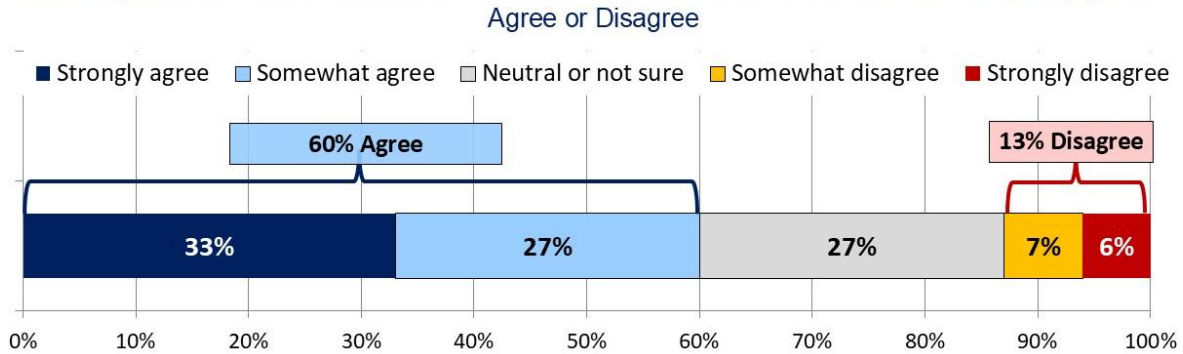
9. What three adjectives first come to your mind when you think about Long Island Sound.

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Emotional Benefit of Being Near the Sound

As suggested by the word cloud, one of the positive effects of being near the Sound is emotional. Sixty percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement, “Being near Long Island Sound makes me feel peaceful and happier.” Many people (27%) felt “neutral or not sure” about this statement, while only 13% disagreed that there is an emotional benefit.

Being Near the Sound Makes Me Feel Peaceful & Happier



10E. Being near Long Island Sound makes me feel peaceful and happier.

These focus group comments illustrate the emotional benefit for people from various walks of life.

“When you work a lot, you want to clear your mind and go out with the family, (and) a visit to the beach is not a bad idea.” – Euscaterly (The Bronx, NY)

“I have really good memories associated with the Sound. ...Just doing swimming and having outings with my family at the beach. And it's a strong connection, a sense of pride and joy that I live by the Sound. So it's a beautiful thing.” – Heather (East Northport, NY)

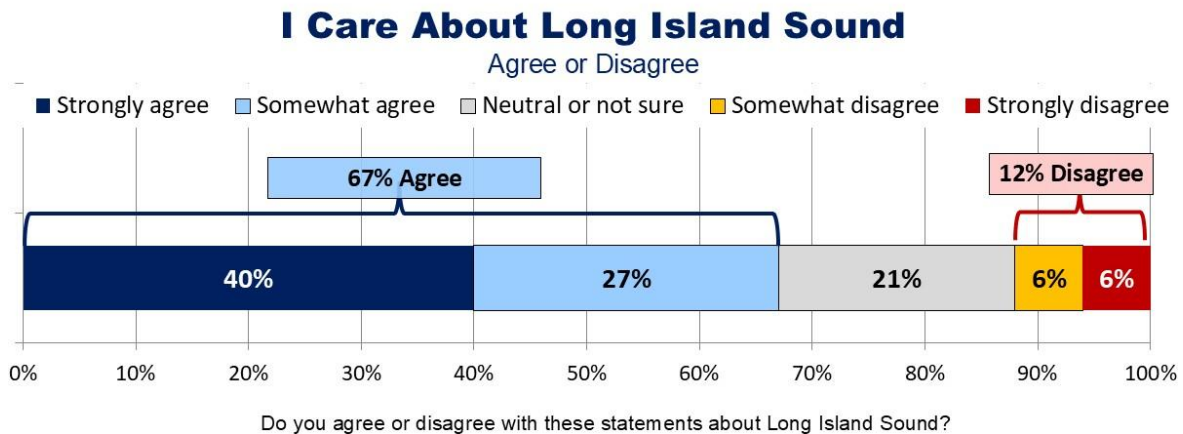
“I have always loved the beach, any body of water, but I really like the sound of water...It sounds really beautiful. And when I do go, I use it to relax and also to take my grandchildren, because they like to play in the sand and all that.” – Nancy (Norwalk, CT)

“Yeah, I really enjoy the water because it brings people in my community together as well. They do activities at the beach. Sometimes I go to cry, it's more of a therapy. I go talk to my loved ones and look at the clouds and just enjoy the water and the waves and everything.” – Zenida (Bridgeport, CT)

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"I care about Long Island Sound."

Positive feelings about the Sound translate into caring for the Sound. Two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents agreed with the statement, "I care about Long Island Sound." Forty percent agreed *strongly* with that statement. Very few disagreed – only 12%.



10F. I care about Long Island Sound.

The survey indicates that caring for the Sound rises the longer one lives in the area, and is also higher among older residents. More affluent residents are somewhat more likely than others to say they care about the Sound. Despite these differences, there is no population subgroup within the survey sample where less than 50% said they care about the Sound.

It struck one of the focus group members, as she looked around at her fellow participants and listened to the conversation, how much they all appreciated the Sound in their own ways, even though they came from different backgrounds and points of view:

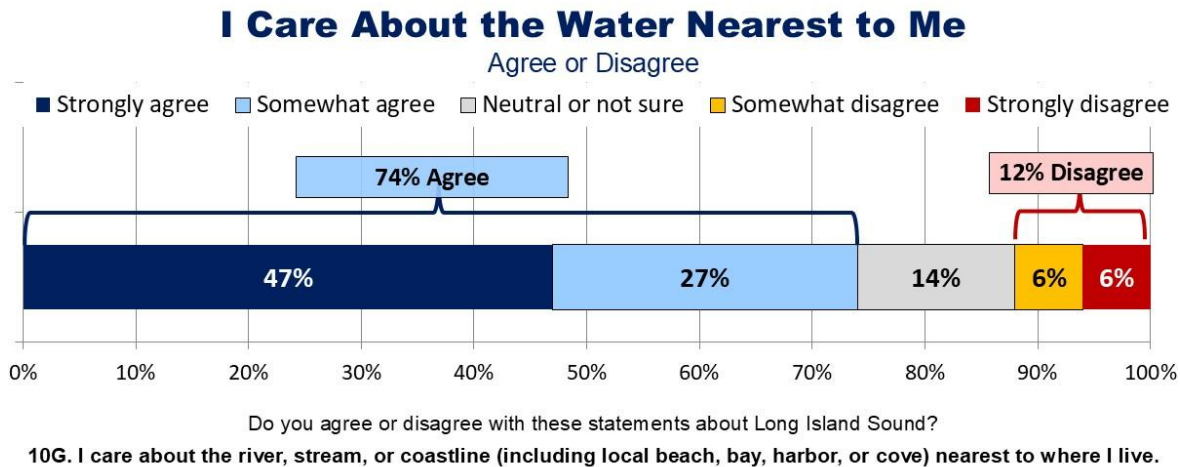
"I think that this experience shows that we all come from different backgrounds and the Sound is a far-reaching thing. It's a far-reaching body of water... we all enjoy it. And we might not see eye-to-eye on everything, but I think there's a lot of common ground that we can find when talking about things we love like the Sound." – Brina (East Marion, NY)

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Caring about Rivers, Streams, and Coastlines Closer to Where People Live

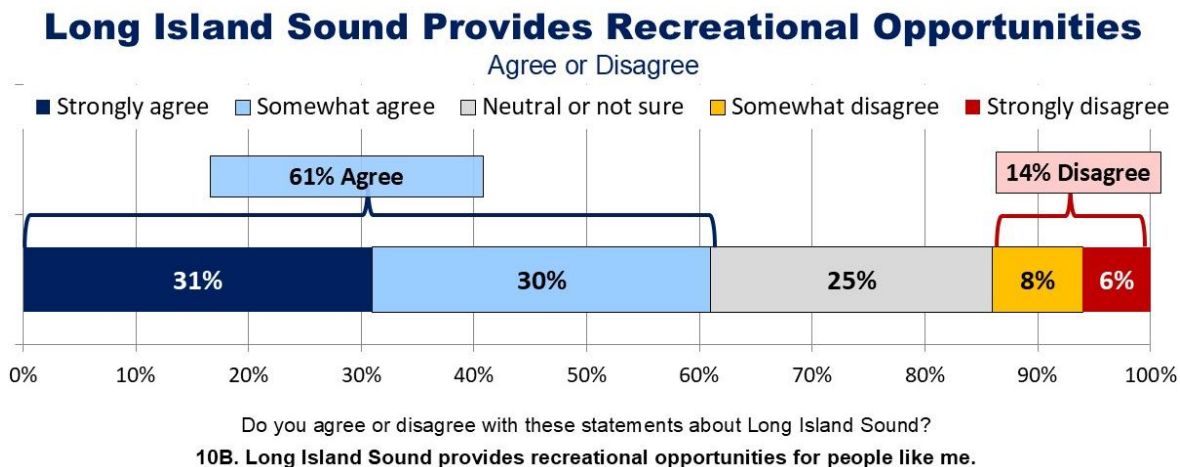
As strong as the emotional connection is to the Sound, even stronger is the connection to “the river, stream, or coastline (including local beach, bay, harbor, or cove) nearest to where I live.” Three-quarters (74%) said they care about that closest water. Nearly half (47%) said *strongly* that they care.

This result is typical, as proximity and familiarity often breed a deeper level of caring. It does suggest that emphasizing the interconnectedness of local waters and the Sound could lead to more relevance and more caring for the Sound.



The Sound as a Source of Recreational Opportunities

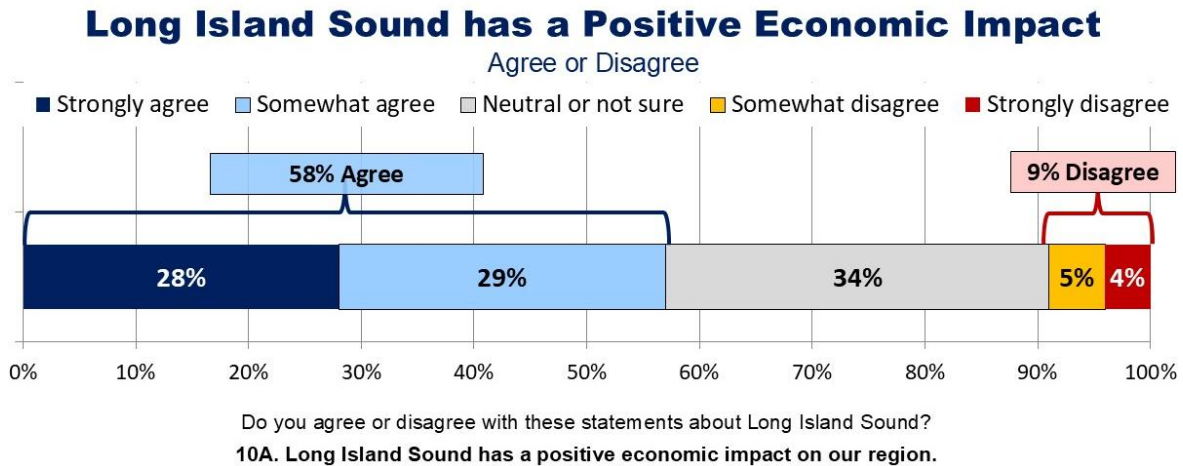
A 61% majority of survey respondents agreed with the statement, “Long Island Sound provides recreational opportunities for people like me.” Only 14% disagreed, while one-quarter of residents (25%) felt “neutral or not sure” about this statement.



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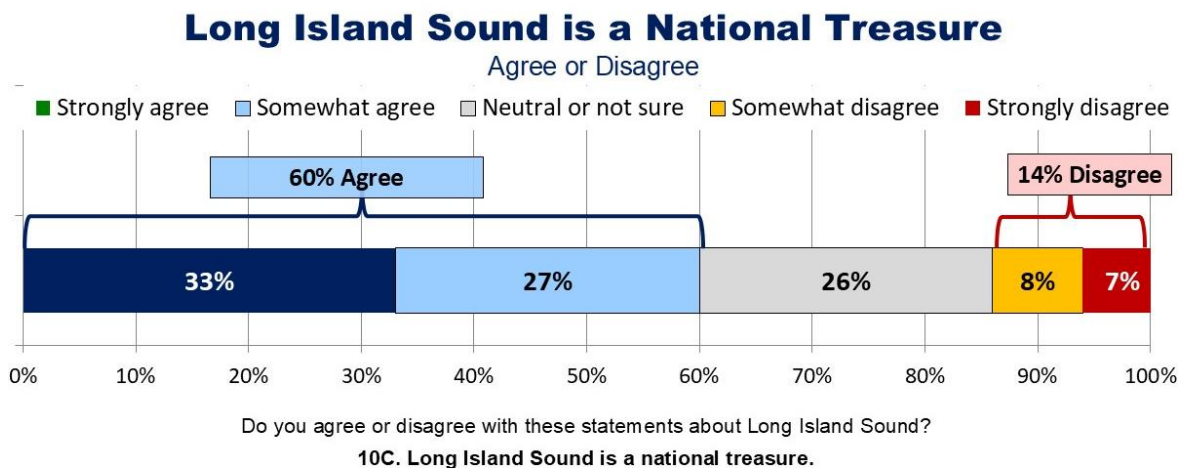
A Sense of Positive Economic Impact

Almost six in ten residents (58%) agreed with the statement, “Long Island Sound has a positive economic impact on our region.” Only about one in ten (9%) disagreed. A large number (34%) said they felt “neutral or not sure” about this statement, suggesting that there is an opportunity to educate the public about the Sound’s positive economic impact.



Long Island Sound as a “National Treasure”

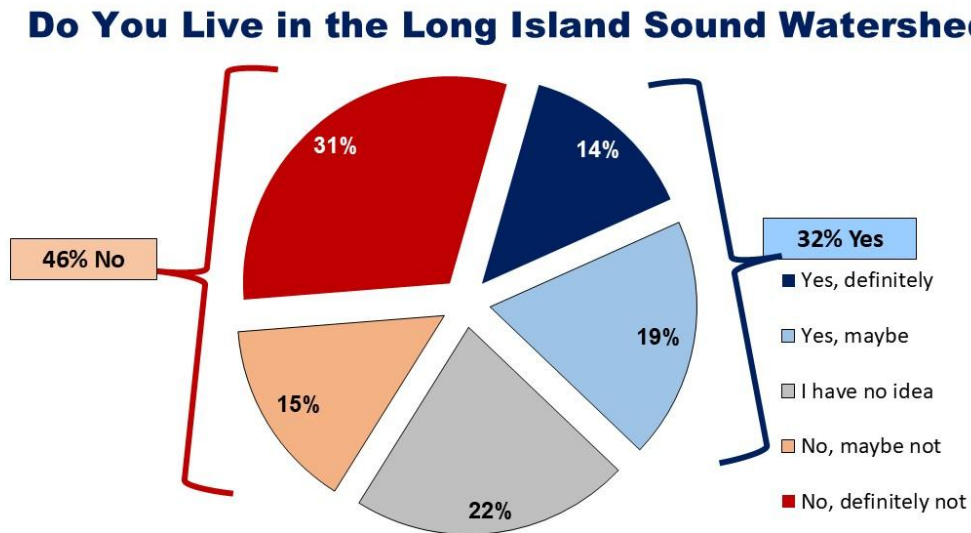
There was solid agreement with the bold statement, “Long Island Sound is a national treasure.” Sixty percent agreed, while only 14% disagreed, with the remainder “neutral or not sure.” Like many other findings on the survey, this result tracked with age and tenure (older and longer-term residents more likely to view the Sound as a national treasure), affluence (more affluent residents somewhat more likely), and geographic proximity to the Sound.



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Low Awareness That Residents Actually Live in the Long Island Sound Watershed

Though residents' impressions of the Sound are mostly positive, there is evidence in this research that some people view the Sound as distant or not connected to them. When asked, "As far as you know, do you live in the Long Island Sound watershed?" only about one-third (32%) said yes. Fewer than half of those (14%) said they "definitely" live in the watershed. Almost half (46%) asserted that they do not.



8. As far as you know, do you live in the Long Island Sound watershed?

The 32% number regionwide rises into the 40s for residents who live closer to the water, but never higher than the 48% in Middlesex County, CT, as the table below indicates:

Do You Live in Long Island Sound Watershed?

	Connecticut						New York				
	All CT	Fairfield	New Haven	Middlesex	New London	Upland	All NY	Westchester	Bronx/Queens	Nassau	Suffolk
Yes, definitely	15%	17%	18%	29%	13%	8%	12%	14%	8%	20%	19%
Yes, maybe	19%	24%	20%	19%	28%	14%	18%	19%	17%	21%	23%
Total Yes	34%	41%	38%	48%	42%	21%	30%	33%	25%	41%	42%
No	43%	33%	34%	33%	31%	61%	48%	50%	57%	23%	28%
I have no idea	23%	26%	28%	19%	27%	18%	21%	17%	19%	36%	30%

Of course, average residents are not hydrologists. They may not understand or even think about the movement of water through their communities or know what a "watershed" is. Nonetheless, this finding suggests that, for many people, the relationship with the Sound may be more psychic or emotional, rather than physical, as some of the following questions illustrate.

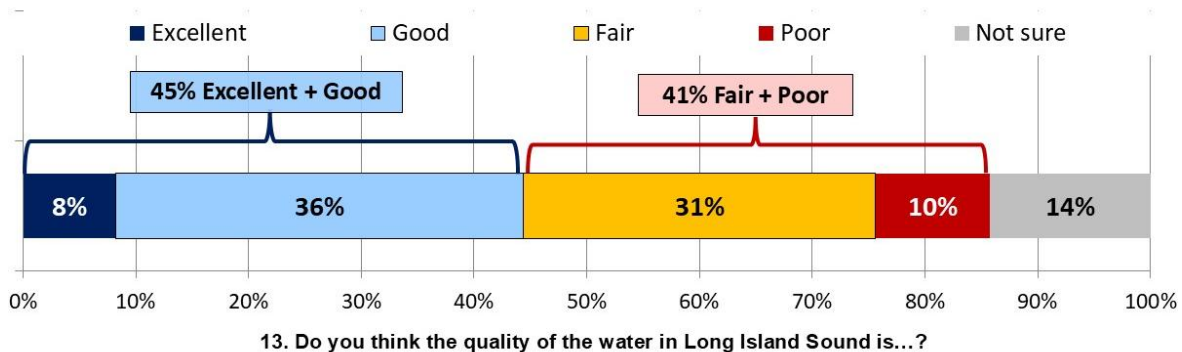
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Perceptions of Water Quality

Impressions of the Condition of the Sound

Respondents were asked to comment on “the quality of the water in Long Island Sound,” using the scale “excellent, good, fair, or poor.” The public is almost evenly split, with 45% saying the water quality is “excellent” or “good,” while 41% said it is only “fair” or “poor.” Fourteen percent said they were not sure.

Impressions of the Quality of Water in Long Island Sound



Geographically, perceptions of the Sound’s water quality improve from west to east in both states. Only 39% in Westchester County and 41% in Fairfield County consider the Sound’s water quality “excellent” or “good,” compared to 57% in both Suffolk and New London Counties.

Perception of Water Quality in Long Island Sound

	Connecticut						New York				
	All CT	Fairfield	New Haven	Middle-sex	New London	Upland	All NY	West-chester	Bronx/Queens	Nassau	Suffolk
Excellent + Good	43%	41%	40%	49%	57%	40%	47%	39%	46%	45%	57%
Fair + Poor	44%	49%	45%	46%	29%	44%	38%	45%	36%	47%	34%
Not sure	13%	10%	14%	5%	14%	16%	15%	16%	17%	7%	9%

In the focus groups, residents in the western end of the Sound expressed impressions like these:

“I just think of pollution because of how dirty it could be and all the plastic in there and all the stuff.”
– Paola (Stamford, CT)

“A lot of the sewage waste overflows and it goes right into the Long Island Sound. They're planning on upgrading (sewage treatment), but that is something we think about with the pollution and the toxins.” – Zenida (Bridgeport, CT)

“I went to a beach called Orchard Beach and it's really ugly. Super-dirty. I wouldn't recommend it to anyone. Maybe people go and swim there, but it's really dirty.” – Euscaterly (The Bronx, NY)

Moving further east, people’s experience with the Sound is completely different. Long-time residents described swimming in the Sound’s waters from an early age and spending time on its beaches. That creates very positive impressions of the Sound and its waters.

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"I grew up in this little peninsula on the north shore of Long Island... I lived on the Sound my entire life. I had birthday parties on the beach. And we're trying to keep the same connection with my son. So we spend all of our time on the weekends at the beach in the summer, and he does swimming lessons in the water." – Jacqui, East Northport, NY)

"I have really good memories associated with the Sound...just doing swimming and having outings with my family at the beach. And it's a strong connection, a sense of pride and joy that I live by the Sound. So it's a beautiful thing." – Heather (Rocky Point, NY)

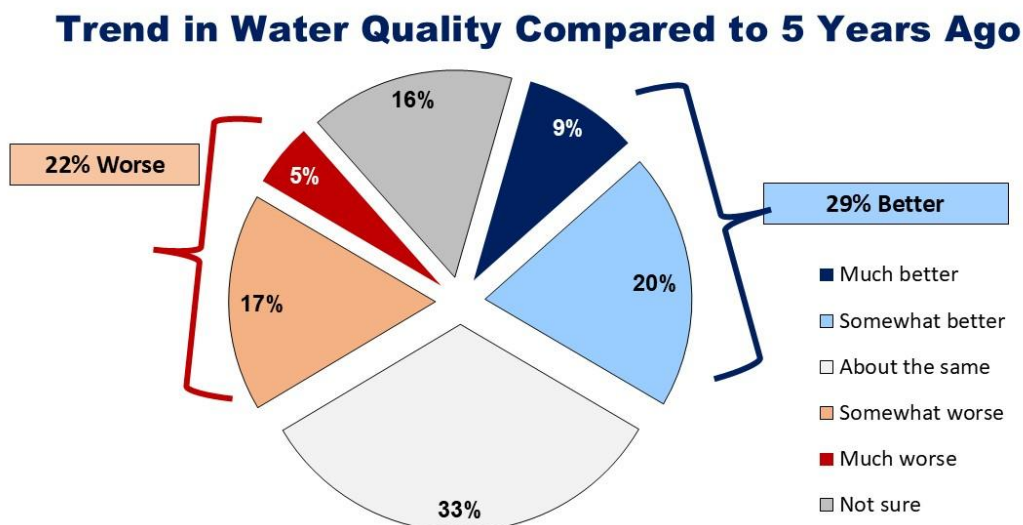
Residents like Michelle explained that they take cues about water quality from the condition of the beaches and surrounding lands.

"I feel like it depends on where you go. You can kind of tell by how the beach area is, how clean it is. That shows me how clean the water is... So if I go in New York, I'm definitely not getting in the water. New Haven has clean beaches in my eyes and Rhode Island, because those are places that people go to." – Michelle (Hartford, CT)

Perceiving a Trend in Water Quality

Residents of the watershed are divided over whether the quality of the water in Long Island Sound is has become better, worse, or stayed the same compared to five years ago. About half perceive a change in water quality one way or the other. Those who see the water as getting better (29%) have a slight edge over those who see it trending worse (22%) – but there is clearly no consensus.

The other half of survey respondents said the water is either "about the same" as it was five years ago (33%), or they are not sure (16%).



14. Compared to five years ago, do you think the quality of the water in Long Island Sound is...?

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Breaking out the survey responses geographically, residents at the western end of the Sound are more likely to perceive an improvement in water quality compared to those further east – with Middlesex County offering an exception to that pattern. Residents of the Bronx and Queens are 15 percentage points more likely to perceive an improvement in water quality compared to Suffolk County residents, and those living in Fairfield County are 13 points more than to say the water is getting better than residents of New London County.

Perception of Water Quality in Long Island Sound

	Connecticut						New York				
	All CT	Fairfield	New Haven	Middle-sex	New London	Upland	All NY	West-chester	Bronx/Queens	Nassau	Suffolk
Better	30%	34%	31%	39%	21%	24%	29%	27%	33%	27%	18%
Same	32%	31%	29%	35%	38%	33%	34%	31%	31%	36%	46%
Worse	23%	24%	27%	11%	25%	25%	21%	22%	19%	27%	25%
Better v. Worse	+ 7%	+ 10%	+ 4%	+ 28%	– 4%	– 1%	+ 8%	+ 5%	+ 14%	---	– 7%
Not sure	15%	11%	13%	16%	16%	18%	16%	20%	18%	10%	11%

The focus groups underlined the observation that many long-term residents who are familiar with the western end of the Sound have noticed a significant difference. This focus group participant was a charter boat captain who has been on the Sound for decades:

“The Sound is much, much, much, much, much cleaner than even as little as 20 years ago. Completely different animal. I mean, we have mussels growing. The mussels disappeared 30 years ago... The western part of the Sound is loaded with mussels now all over the place. That tells you we have a healthy (ecosystem)... They wouldn't be here otherwise. ...Maybe the no dredging in the Sound has (helped)... I don't know, but the fish are bountiful for the most part. The water is clean.”
– Rob (City Island, The Bronx, NY)

“When I was younger in Bridgeport...they kept having to close (the beaches) for toxins in the water. But now we don't get those alerts. We don't get our beaches closed down. They do a lot more water treatment work around the beaches to make sure it's safe for us to swim. So, I got to say, Bridgeport is stepping up in that area, and it is a lot better compared to what it used to be.”
– Zenida (Bridgeport, CT)

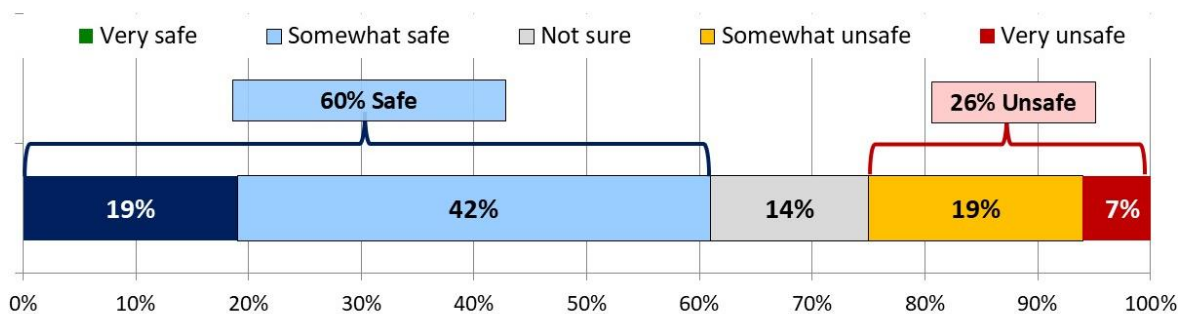
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Water That is Safe for Swimming

From a more practical standpoint, survey respondents were asked to rate the health of the water in the Sound for swimming. They were asked, “From a public health perspective, how safe do you think it is for adults and children to swim in Long Island Sound?” Sixty percent said they view the water as “very safe” or “somewhat safe” for swimming, while 26% believe it is “somewhat unsafe” or “very unsafe.”

While 26% remains a significant share of the public who feel the Sound’s waters are unsafe from a public health perspective, that number represents a significant decline from the approximately 38% who felt that way in 2006. (Note that it is difficult to make a direct comparison with the 2006 survey result as the geography was slightly different and directly comparable numbers are not readily available.)

Safe or Unsafe to Swim in Long Island Sound



11. From a public health perspective, how safe do you think it is for adults and children to swim in Long Island Sound?

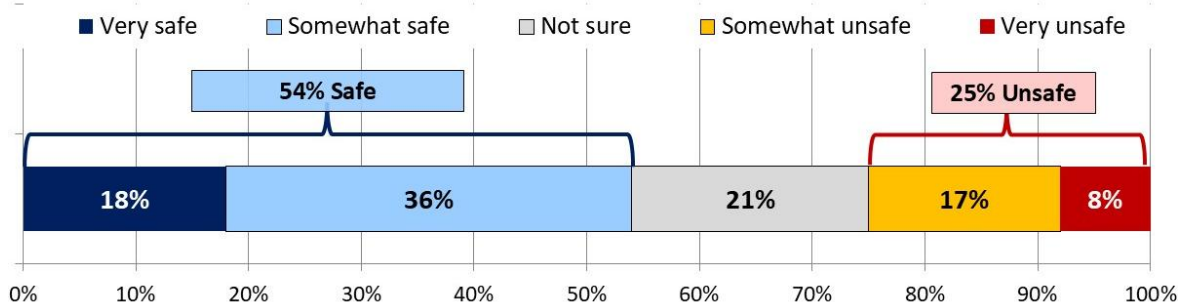
2006: Unsafe = 38%
2024: Unsafe = 26%

Perceived Safety of Eating Fish and Shellfish from the Sound

Similarly, impressions of whether it is safe to eat fish and shellfish from the Sound appear to have improved since 2006. In the 2024 survey, 54% of residents said they felt it is safe to eat fish and shellfish from Long Island Sound, while 25% believe it is unsafe. The remaining 21% were not sure.

The “unsafe” number was much higher in 2006, standing at about 41% of those surveyed.

Safe or Unsafe to Eat Fish From Long Island Sound



12. How safe is it to eat fish and shellfish from Long Island Sound?

2006: Unsafe = 41%
2024: Unsafe = 25%

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Spending Time Outdoors

Long Island Sound Watershed Residents' Activities in the Outdoors

The survey measured residents' contact with the outdoors through six activities that people could participate in near or on the water. Respondents rated how often they undertook these activities on the scale "frequently, occasionally, rarely, or never." This is a perceptions study, so we have intentionally used a subjective scale, which is intended to measure how *connected people feel* to these activities, rather than asking objectively if they take part once a week, once a month, etc.

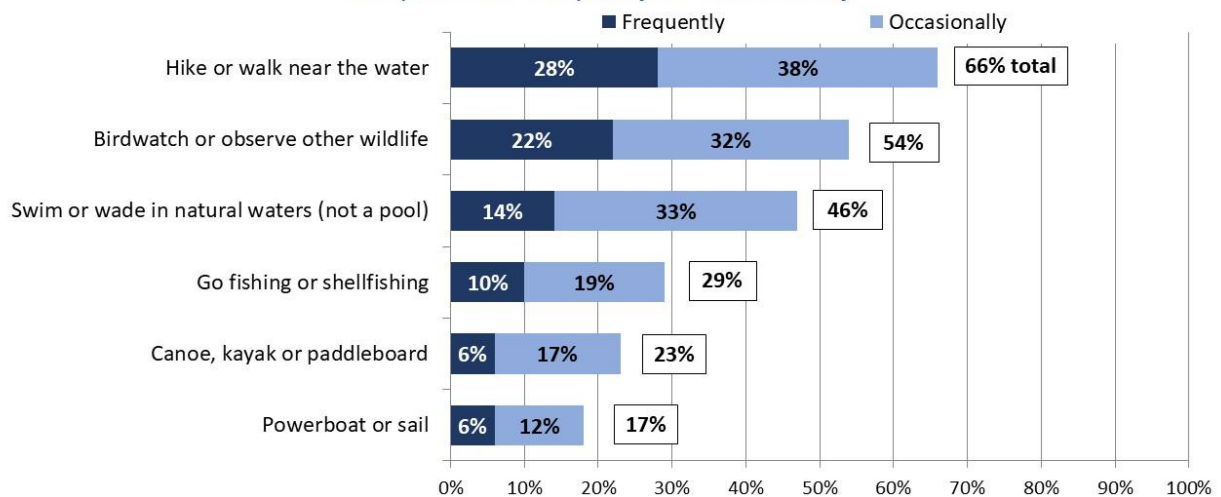
The chart below shows the top two points on the scale (frequently and occasionally), which, taken together, give a rough approximation of the share of the public that takes part in these activities. This is not just interesting to know. From a public outreach perspective, this measurement offers the opportunity to reach people who connect to these activities through affinity groups, clubs, publications, retailers, community center programs, etc. In the Segmented Survey Results appendix to this report (Section 3), all of the questions on the survey have been segmented for people who frequently birdwatch, fish, paddle, etc., to help find meaningful relationships in the data and clues for guiding future public outreach.

Based on the survey:

- The most widely adopted activity is hiking or walking near the water, which 66% of survey respondents said they do frequently or occasionally.
- More than half (54%) said they birdwatch or observe other wildlife.
- Nearly half (46%) swim or wade in natural waters.
- More than one-quarter (29%) go fishing or shellfishing.
- About one-quarter (23%) paddle.
- Seventeen percent powerboat or sail.

Participation in Outdoor Activities

Responses of "Frequently" or "Occasionally"

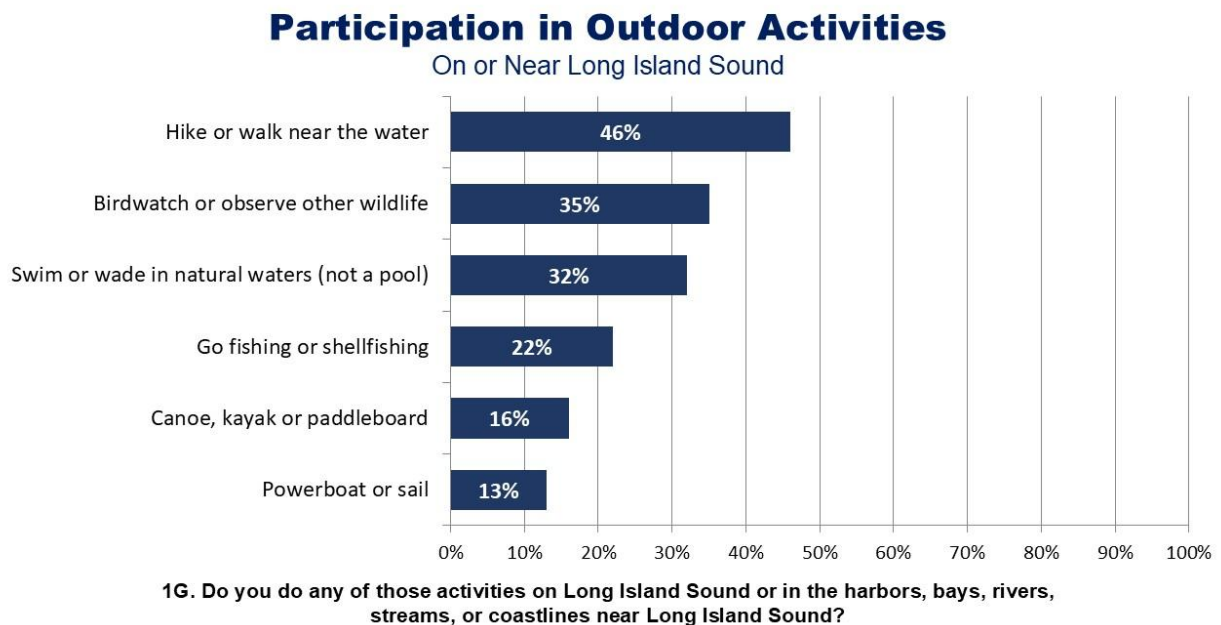


1. How often do you do any of these things? (Frequently, Occasionally, Rarely, Never)

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Separately, respondents were asked, “Do you do any of those activities on Long Island Sound or in the harbors, bays, rivers, streams, or coastlines near Long Island Sound?” Once again, the leading activity is hiking or walking near the water, with the others following in the same sequence: birdwatching, swimming or wading in natural waters, fishing or shellfishing, paddling, and boating.

Comparing this question to the previous one, about two-thirds of residents who hike or walk near the water do it near the Sound: (66% said they hike or walk near the water frequently or occasionally, and 46% said they do that near the Sound). That ratio of about two-thirds – comparing the percentage of the public who do these activities anywhere to those who do them near the Sound – is relatively consistent across all these activities.



Other Outdoor Activities on or Near the Sound

For a fuller understanding of how people interact with the Sound and its connecting waters, the survey asked, “Do you do any other activities on Long Island Sound or in the harbors, bays, rivers, streams, or coastlines near Long Island Sound?” This question was open-ended with responses captured verbatim and later categorized for analysis, as shown in the chart on the following page.

Note that activities *near* the water were mentioned much more frequently than more active pursuits *on* or *in* the water. Also note that although respondents were invited to list “any other activities,” some people repeated items that were already in the six-item list in the immediately preceding question.

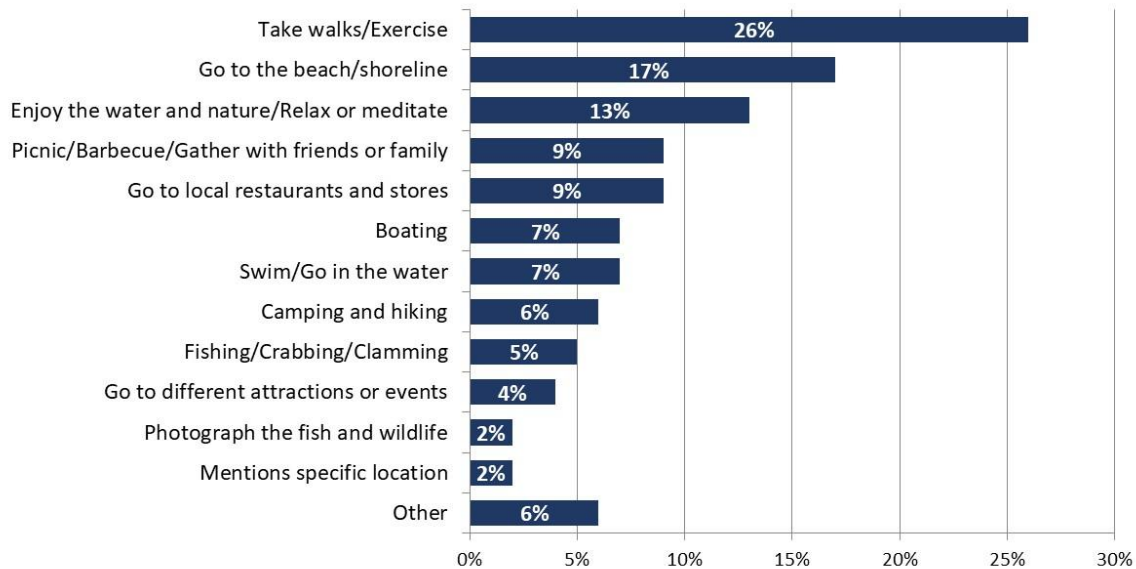
Here is a summary of the responses:

- The most common “other” activity was taking walks or exercising near the water, mentioned by 26%.
- Second-most-often mentioned was visiting a beach or shoreline (17%).
- Next was just relaxing and enjoying the water or meditating (13%)
- Nine percent said they like to picnic, barbecue, or just gather with friends near the Sound or local waters.

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- Nine percent go to restaurants and stores near the water.
- Boating, swimming, camping, and fishing followed, as shown below.

Other Activities in the Sound or Nearby Waters



1H. Do you do any other activities on Long Island Sound or in the harbors, bays, rivers, streams, or coastlines near Long Island Sound? (Open-ended. Categorized responses shown.)

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Convenient Access to the Sound and Barriers to Access

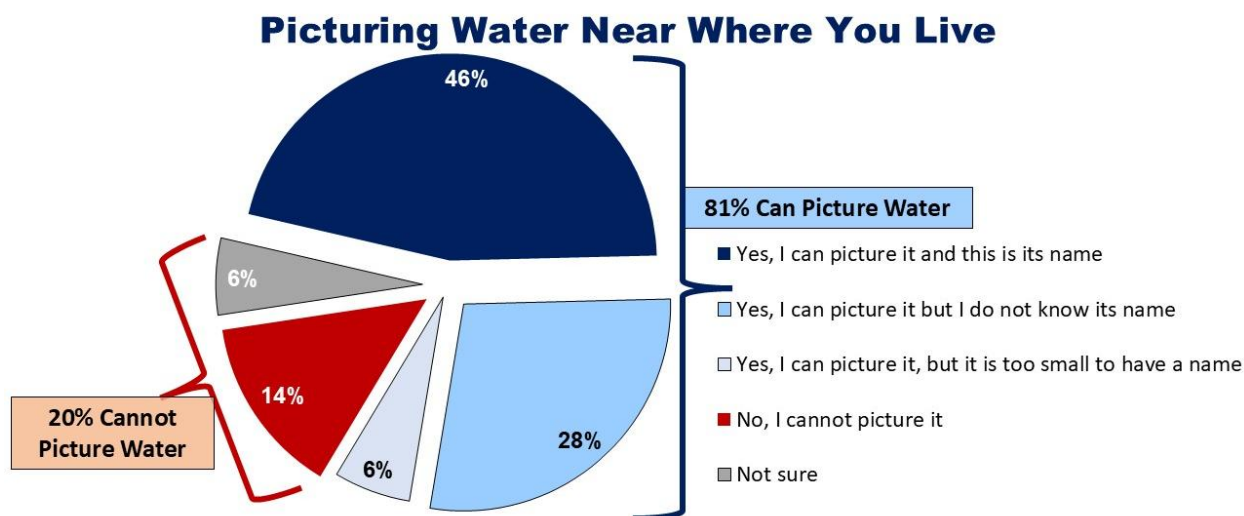
The Ability to Picture Water Near Where You Live

As a most basic indicator of residents' relationship with the water, survey respondents were asked the simple question, "Can you picture in your mind a stream, river, bay, or coastline close to where you live?" If they said yes, they were asked if they could name the water.

Roughly four out of five survey respondents (81%) said they could picture water near where they live, broken out like this:

- Just under half the sample (46%) could both picture and name the water close to them. (Note: We did not check to ensure they named their local water accurately.)
- More than one-quarter (28%) could picture the water but did not know its name.
- Another 6% could picture the water, but said it was too small to have a name.

That leaves one-fifth (20%) who could not picture water near where they live.



5. Can you picture in your mind a stream, river, bay, or coastline close to where you live? If yes, what is its name?
(Numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.)

People who cannot name the water near them, or even picture it in their minds, are disproportionately lower-income, as shown in this table.

Ability to Picture and Name Nearby Water

	Household Income					
	< \$25,000	\$25,000-49,999	\$50,000-74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-149,999	\$150,000+
Can picture & name it	26%	41%	49%	49%	58%	68%
Can picture, can't name	34%	29%	29%	30%	26%	20%
Too small to have a name	8%	7%	8%	7%	6%	2%
All who can picture water	68%	77%	86%	87%	90%	90%
Cannot picture or not sure	32%	23%	14%	13%	10%	10%

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There is significant variance geographically in people's ability to picture and name water, with people in more urbanized communities much less able to do so.

Ability to Picture and Name Nearby Water

	Connecticut						New York				
	All CT	Fairfield	New Haven	Middle-sex	New London	Upland	All NY	Westchester	Bronx/Queens	Nassau	Suffolk
Can picture & name it	51%	49%	44%	76%	62%	46%	41%	51%	31%	46%	66%
Can picture, can't name	26%	29%	29%	10%	22%	28%	30%	22%	34%	38%	18%
Too small to have a name	6%	6%	7%	5%	3%	8%	6%	7%	6%	5%	4%
All who can picture water	83%	84%	80%	91%	87%	82%	77%	80%	72%	89%	88%
Cannot picture or not sure	16%	15%	21%	9%	13%	18%	23%	20%	28%	11%	12%

Why is the ability to picture water important? Residents' ability to picture and name the water closest to them correlates with many positive things. For example, people who can picture and name nearby water are more likely to say they care about Long Island Sound – about twice as likely as those who cannot picture water at all. This pattern holds for other key issues measured on the survey, such as the importance one places on having access to the water for outdoor activities, people's feeling that their individual actions could make a difference for the health of the Sound's waters, or even awareness that they live in the Long Island Sound watershed.

Here is the breakdown of caring about Long Island Sound among people who can and cannot picture water near them:

Relationship between Ability to Picture and Name Nearby Water and Caring about Long Island Sound

Level of Agreement with the Statement: "I care about Long Island Sound."

Care about Long Island Sound	Ability to Picture and Name Nearby Water					
	Can picture & name	Can picture, Can't name	Too small to have a name	All who can picture water	Cannot picture water	Not sure
Strongly agree	54%	34%	25%	45%	18%	21%
Somewhat agree	27%	30%	32%	28%	24%	20%
Total Agree	81%	64%	57%	73%	42%	41%
Neutral or not sure	11%	22%	27%	16%	42%	45%
Somewhat disagree	4%	7%	12%	6%	9%	6%
Strongly disagree	5%	6%	5%	5%	7%	8%
Total Disagree	9%	14%	17%	11%	16%	14%

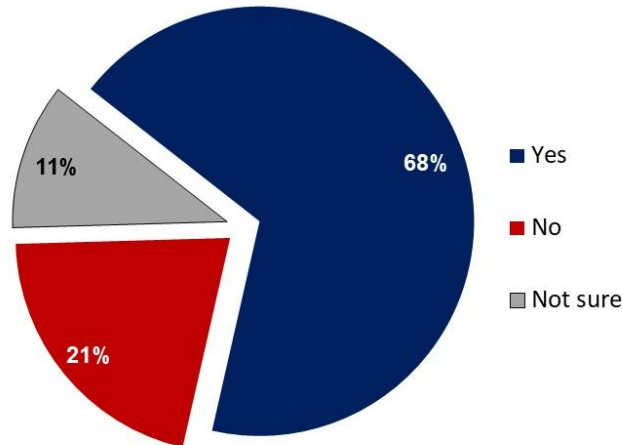
We do not know if this is a causal link or if it is just correlation, but this finding does suggest that bringing people in contact with their nearby water may open up a window to the wider world of the Sound. Details like these for a wide range of population subgroups can be found in the Segmented Survey Results tables in the Section 3 appendix to this report.

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Convenient Access to Long Island Sound

Only two-thirds (68%) of watershed residents feel they “have convenient access to Long Island Sound or other waters near you.” One-fifth of residents (21%) feel they *do not* have convenient access, while the remaining 11% are not sure. It is noteworthy that the question includes not just the Sound, but also “*other waters near you*,” suggesting a total disconnect from the water for many residents.

Have Convenient Access to the Sound or Other Waters?



2. Do you feel like you have convenient access to Long Island Sound or other waters near you?

As shown in the table below, there is a strong correlation between higher incomes and having more convenient access to the water. Transportation is also an issue, with vehicle owners 27 points more likely to feel they have convenient access, compared to people who do not have a personal vehicle.

Have Convenient Access to the Sound or Other Waters Near You

	Household Income						Own a Car	
	< \$25,000	\$25,000-49,999	\$50,000-74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-149,999	\$150,000+	Yes	No
Yes	55%	67%	73%	71%	79%	82%	77%	50%
No	31%	21%	18%	21%	15%	11%	15%	32%
Not sure	14%	12%	9%	8%	6%	7%	8%	18%

There is also a relationship with geography. Residents of the Bronx and Queens are least likely to say they have convenient access to the Sound or other local waters, with residents of Westchester County and the four non-coastal counties in Connecticut reporting only slightly more convenient access. In contrast, people who live further east in both New York and Connecticut reported much more convenient access to the water, in the 70s and higher.

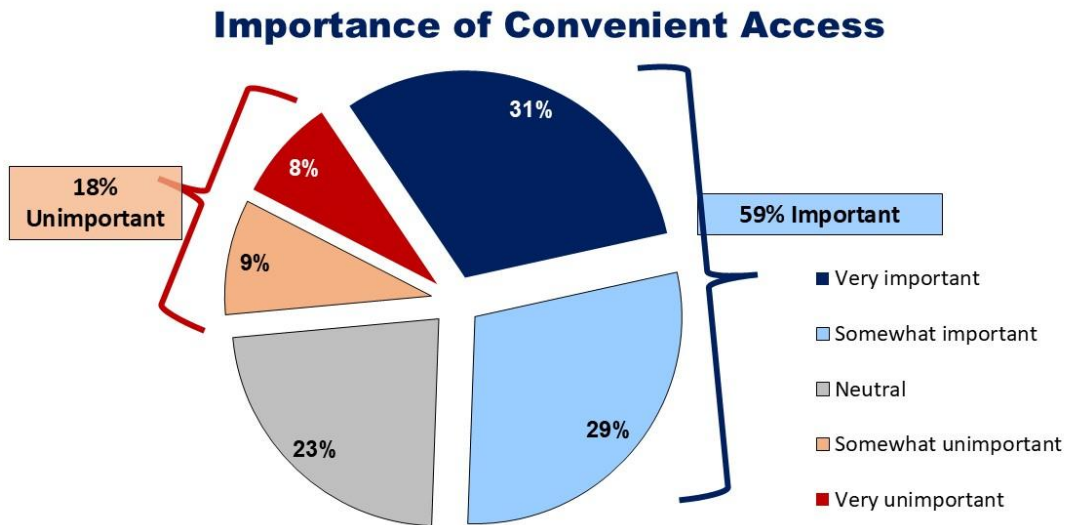
Have Convenient Access to the Sound or Other Waters Near You

	Connecticut						New York				
	All CT	Fairfield	New Haven	Middle-sex	New London	Upland	All NY	Westchester	Bronx/Queens	Nassau	Suffolk
Yes	70%	78%	72%	83%	77%	60%	65%	63%	56%	85%	92%
No	19%	15%	16%	11%	17%	27%	22%	27%	27%	8%	6%
Not sure	11%	7%	12%	6%	6%	14%	12%	10%	16%	7%	2%

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The Importance Residents Place on Having Convenient Access to the Water

Most residents consider it important to have convenient access to the water for outdoor activities, even when invited to “think about all the other things you could be doing with your time.” Six out of ten residents (59%) feel that having convenient access to the water for outdoor activities is “very important” or “somewhat important.”



3. When you think about all the other things you could be doing with your time, how important is it to you to have convenient access to the water for outdoor activities?
(Numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.)

In the focus group discussions, people expressed the importance of convenient access for themselves, but also for others. A number of people mentioned the economic barrier of high entrance fees, in addition to other access issues such as lack of proximity or transportation.

“Sometimes I feel, I don't know, sad, angered for people who can't experience it, because it's \$80 to go to a town beach for one day, and people are building and building privately along all the beaches. So if you weren't lucky enough to be born next to Long Island Sound, you may have a hard time enjoying it.” – Alan (Westbrook, CT)

*“It's a (long) way and that doesn't allow people to get there. It's asking a lot of money from people like us, who don't have as much as they do. And yes, it costs a lot, like \$50 per person...”
– Felipe (New Milford, CT)*

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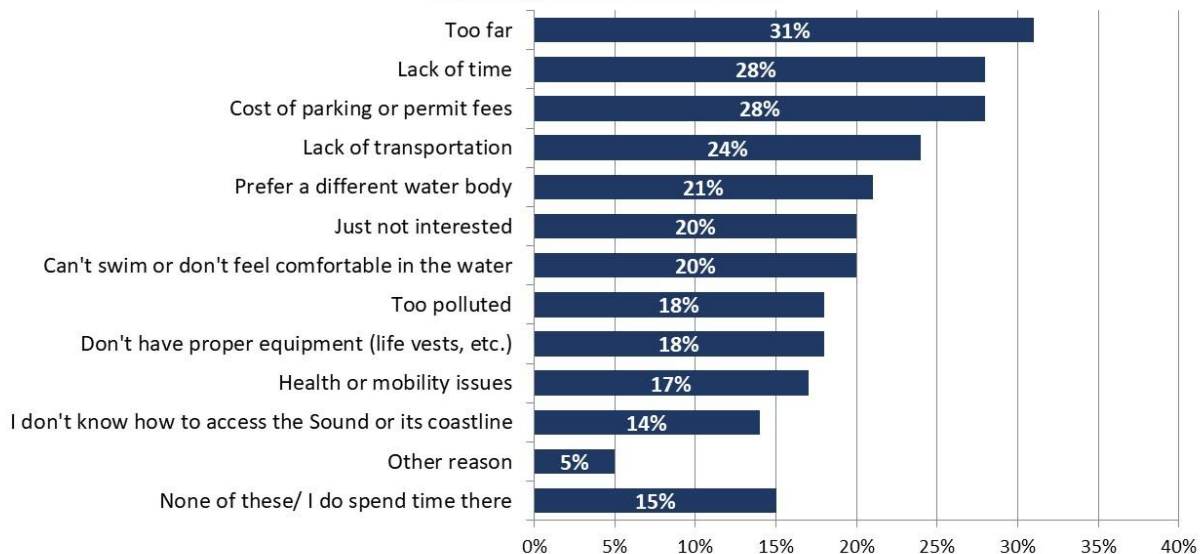
An Assessment of Barriers to Visiting the Sound

To explore barriers to visiting the Sound, survey respondents were presented with a list of possible “reasons why people might not visit Long Island Sound” and were invited to choose any that applied to them.

- The biggest barrier was distance, with 31% indicating the Sound was too far for them.
- Another leading reason was lack of time, mentioned by 28%.
- A major issue is the cost of visiting the Sound, whether in parking or permit fees (28%).
- Lack of transportation is a barrier for one-quarter of residents (24%).
- Some people do not have an interest in visiting, with 21% saying they prefer a different body of water, and 20% saying they are just not interested.
- Twenty percent said they cannot swim or do not feel comfortable in the water.
- Pollution in the water deters 18%.
- Eighteen percent do not have the equipment they might need, such as life vests.
- Health or mobility issues are a barrier for 17%.
- Fourteen percent said they do not know how to access the Sound or its coastline.

Reasons People Do Not Visit Long Island Sound

Choosing Reasons from a List

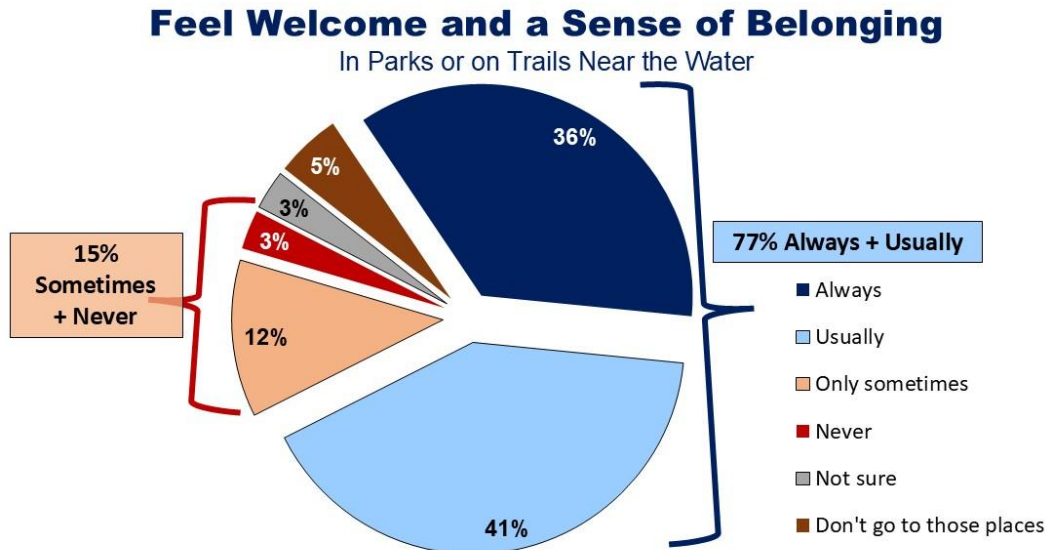


15. Here are some reasons why people might not visit Long Island Sound. Mark any that apply to you.

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Feeling a Sense of Welcome and Belonging

The survey briefly explored residents' feelings of welcome and belonging in public spaces near the water. Respondents were asked, "If you are in parks or on trails near the water, do you feel welcome and a sense of belonging there?" Three-quarters of the public (77%) said they "always" or "usually" feel that sense. Another 8% said they "don't go to those places" or they are not sure. That leaves 15% of residents who "only sometimes" or "never" feel welcome or like they belong.



4. If you are in parks or on trails near the water, do you feel welcome and a sense of belonging there?

People who have lower household incomes are much less likely than their more affluent neighbors to say they "always" or "usually" feel welcome in these public spaces near the water.

Feel Welcome and a Sense of Belonging

	Household Income					
	< \$25,000	\$25,000-49,999	\$50,000-74,999	\$75,000-99,999	\$100,000-149,999	\$150,000+
Always + Usually	68%	73%	79%	82%	85%	87%
Sometimes + Never	23%	18%	13%	11%	9%	8%
Not sure or don't go to those places	9%	9%	7%	7%	6%	5%

Demographically, younger residents are more likely to say they do not feel welcome in these spaces, as are residents who are Black, Hispanic, or Asian.

Feel Welcome and a Sense of Belonging

	Age						Race or Ethnicity			
	<25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Black	Hispanic	Asian	White
Always + Usually	69%	76%	78%	80%	76%	79%	72%	72%	73%	83%
Sometimes + Never	24%	16%	13%	14%	14%	10%	17%	20%	19%	9%
Not sure or don't go to those places	8%	9%	8%	5%	10%	11%	11%	8%	8%	7%

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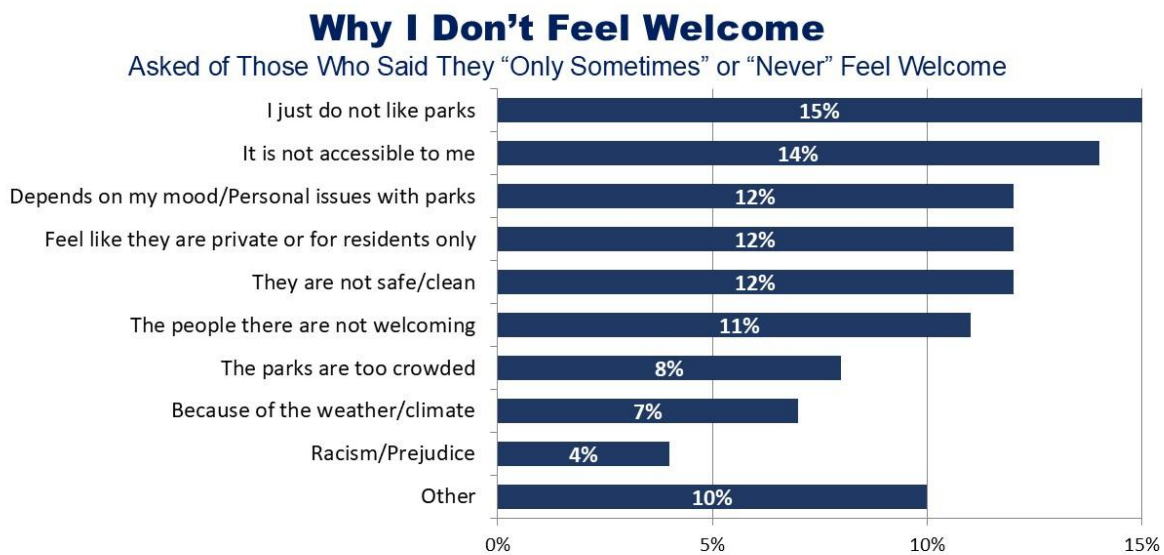
Why Some Residents Do Not Feel Welcome

People who said they only sometimes or never feel welcome were asked why they feel that way. The question was open-ended, and responses have been aggregated into categories as shown below.

Some said they just do not like parks (15%), or that it depends on how they are feeling that day (12%).

Others had more specific comments:

- 14% feel that parks or trails are not accessible to them.
- 12% said those spaces feel private or for residents only.
- 12% said the parks and trails do not feel safe and clean.
- 11% said the people in those spaces are not welcoming to them.
- Smaller numbers mentioned other concerns, such as overcrowding, weather, or prejudice.



4A. Please briefly describe why you said you {never/only sometimes} feel welcome and a sense of belonging in parks or on trails near the water? (Open-ended. Categorized responses shown.)

Lynette, a resident of the Bronx who holds position on the board of her coop and seldom visits the water explained her discomfort this way:

"It's an undercurrent. I think it's not very overt, but it's like there's no sense of belonging for me there. I'm aware that I don't live there." – Lynette (The Bronx, NY)

She can see the water from her building but cannot get there because it is fenced off. When she goes elsewhere, she feels a subtle discomfort. Her comment was not unique. The issue of welcome and sense of belonging in these spaces is complex and bears more investigation.

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Personal Priorities and Perceptions

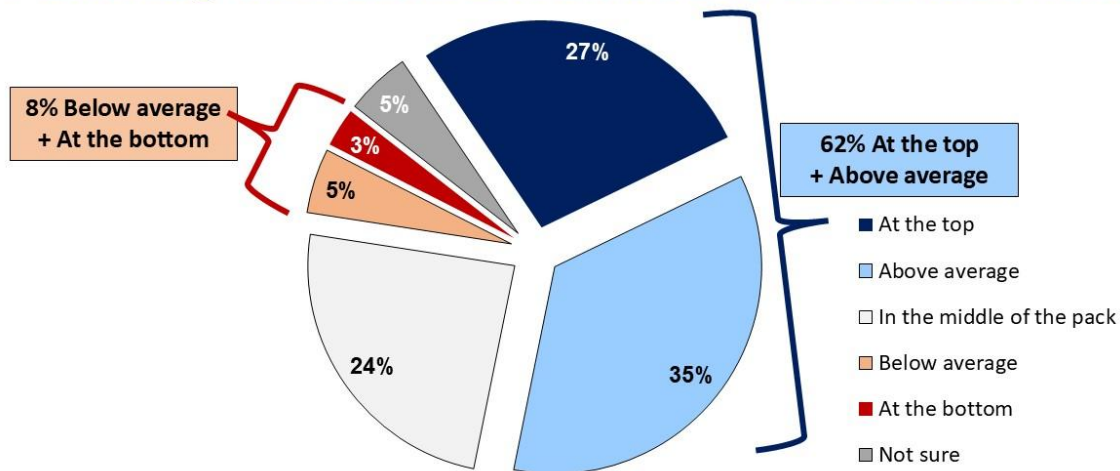
The survey explored a range of attitudes and perceptions of the public that are relevant to the work of protecting and creating connections to Long Island Sound.

Where Protecting the Natural Environment Ranks on Residents' Personal Priority List

Protecting the natural environment ranks as a high priority for most residents of this region. When asked, "If you were to consider all the issues and challenges facing this area today, where would protecting the natural environment rank on that priority list for you?" one-quarter (27%) said they place it "at the top." Another 35% consider the natural environment an "above average" priority.

Many others (24%) consider this priority to be "in the middle of the pack." Very few – only 8% - consider protecting the natural environment to be "below average" or "at the bottom" of their list of priorities.

Protecting the Natural Environment as a Personal Priority

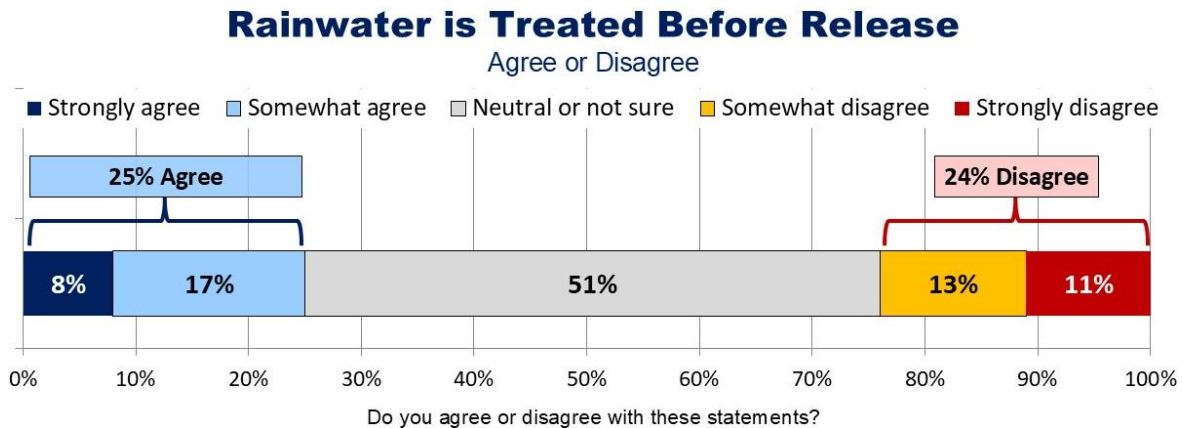


6. If you were to consider all the issues and challenges facing this area today, where would protecting the natural environment rank on that priority list for you?

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Uncertainty about whether Rainwater is Treated before Being Released into Local Waters

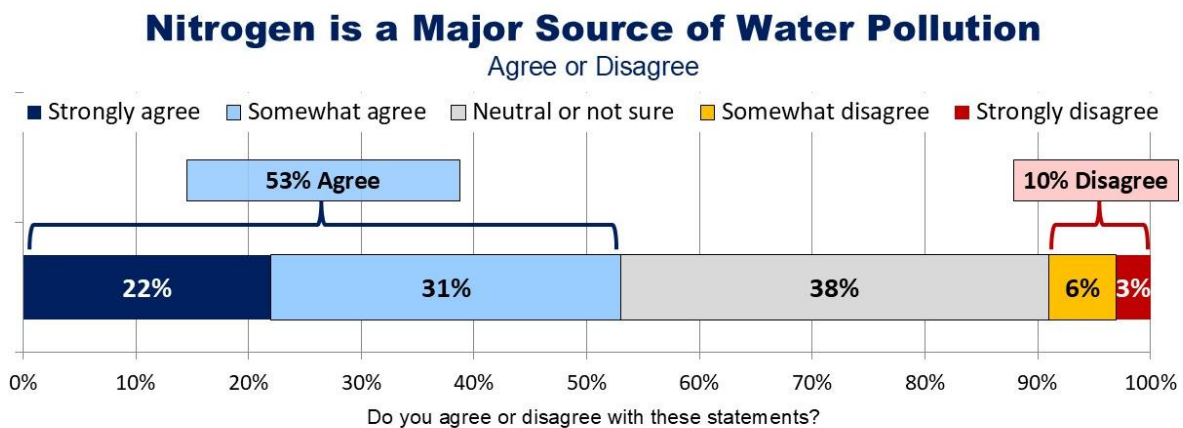
There is great uncertainty about whether “Rainwater that runs into the storm drains is treated before it is released into local rivers and streams.” Twenty-five percent agree with that statement, 24% disagree, and 51% are not sure about it. Note that there are only very minor fluctuations in this number based on geography, so there is little evidence in the survey that people are more aware in areas that have combined sewers.



19B. Rainwater that runs into the storm drains is treated before it is released into local rivers and streams.

Nitrogen as a Major Source of Water Pollution

Many residents do recognize that “Nitrogen from lawn fertilizer and septic tanks is a major source of water pollution in Long Island Sound.” Fifty-three percent agree with this statement, while only 10% disagree. But the 38% who are neutral or not sure signals that there is more public education needed on this matter.

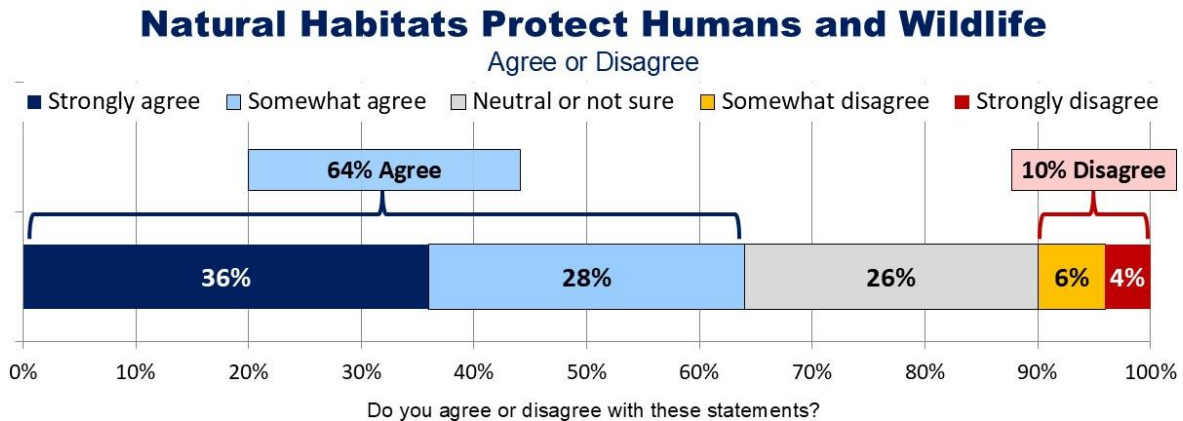


19C. Nitrogen from lawn fertilizer and septic tanks is a major source of water pollution in Long Island Sound.

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Natural Habitats Protect Humans

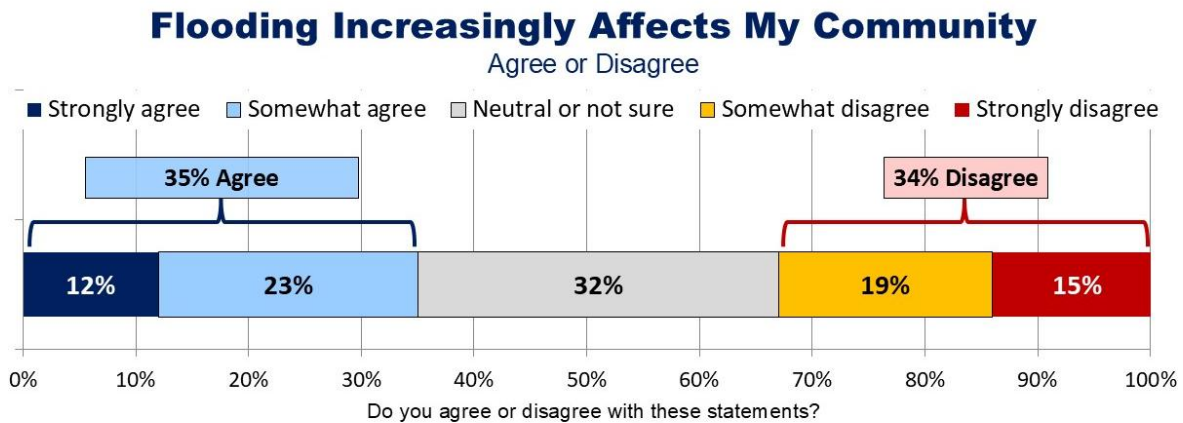
Compared to some of the other issues in this series, residents are more prone to see the benefits of natural habitats. Nearly two-thirds (64%) agree with the statement, “Natural habitats like wetlands and marshlands protect humans as well as wildlife.” Only 10% disagree with this thought, while 26% remain “neutral or not sure.”



19D. Natural habitats like wetlands and marshlands protect humans as well as wildlife.

One-Third See an Increase in Flooding

About one-third of residents (35%) agreed with the statement, “My community has been increasingly affected by flooding over the last few years.” Another one-third (34%) disagree, leaving a final third (32%) who are neutral or not sure.



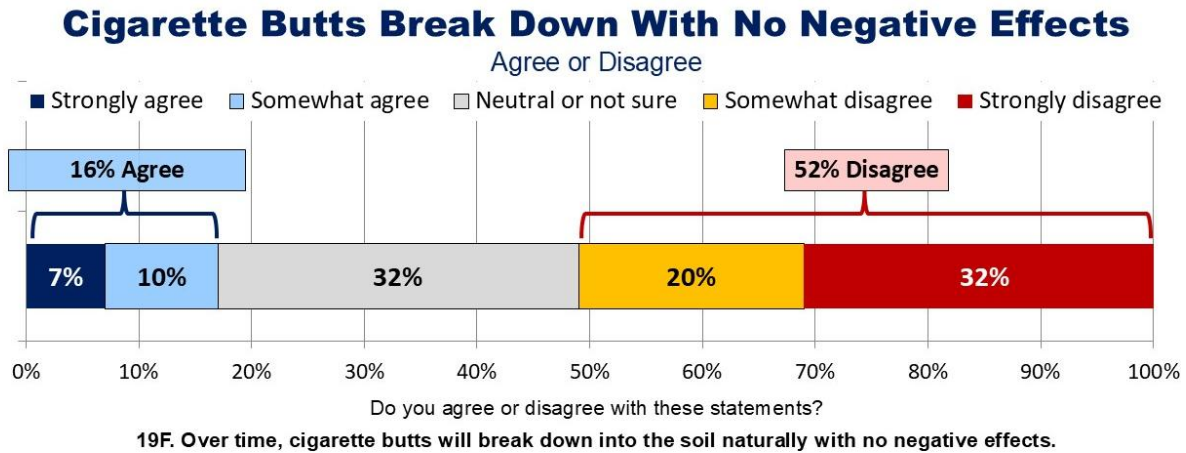
19E. My community has been increasingly affected by flooding over the last few years.

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Do Cigarette Butts Break Down?

Thinking about the problem of tobacco litter, there is significant awareness that cigarette butts have negative impacts on the environment. Only 16% of survey respondents agree with the statement, “Over time, cigarette butts will break down into the soil naturally with no negative effects.” A 52% majority of the public disagree with this statement, thereby affirming that cigarette butts leave a lasting impact.

That leaves 32% who are neutral or not sure about the impact of cigarette butts, identifying the need for additional public education on this topic.



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How Residents Assess the Value and Impact of Adopting Environmental Behaviors

Part of the mission of this research project is understanding whether and how individuals can be engaged in actions that benefit Long Island Sound and the surrounding lands and connected waters. Key issues are:

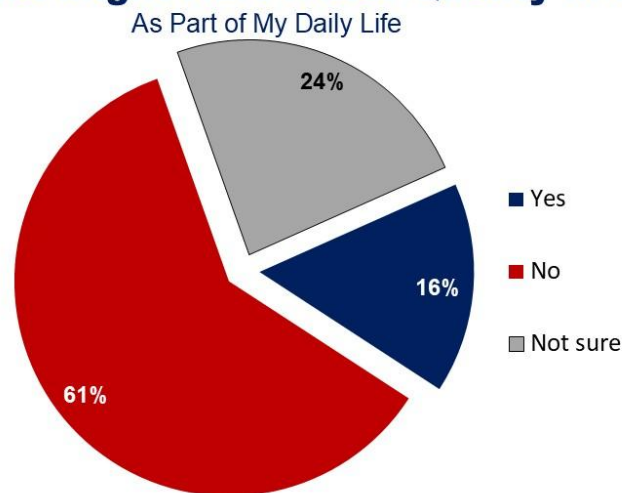
- People's awareness of small actions they are presently taking that might be harmful,
- Actions they could take in the future that might be helpful,
- Their sense that individual actions can make a difference for the Sound, and
- Whether they know anything they could do that might help.

Do Residents Recognize Their Impact on Water Quality?

As a starting point for this discussion about individual behavior, the survey sample was split in half and respondents were asked mirror-image questions. The first of these looked at people's current behavior: "Do you think there is anything that you do now as part of your daily life that might hurt the quality of water in Long Island Sound?" Only one resident in six (16%) said yes.

More than six in ten (61%) asserted that there is nothing they are doing that might harm water quality. One-quarter (24%) said they were not sure.

I Do Things That Might Hurt Water Quality in the Sound



(Asked of random ½ of sample, Group A): 16. Do you think there is anything that you do now as part of your daily life that might hurt the quality of water in Long Island Sound?

Many focus group participants were quick to point the finger at industry that is often visible from waterfront parks and beaches. Many also insisted there is an important role for government in cleaning up and protecting the Sound's waters, because the problem is big and will require a collective approach.

That said, most focus group participants accepted some personal responsibility, even if they did not fully know what to do about it.

"Not all the blame can be laid at the feet of the government or big business. We as citizens also contribute, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly." – Nancy (Norwich, CT)

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“We are the ones who damage everything. We make a mess. We throw things away. And you don’t realize: ‘No, that’s nothing. it’s just a bit of rubbish.’ And then you throw one away and then another one. After a while, they accumulate, and you are the one who damages everything.”

– Euscatery (The Bronx, NY)

What Do Residents Say They Are Doing to Harm Water Quality?

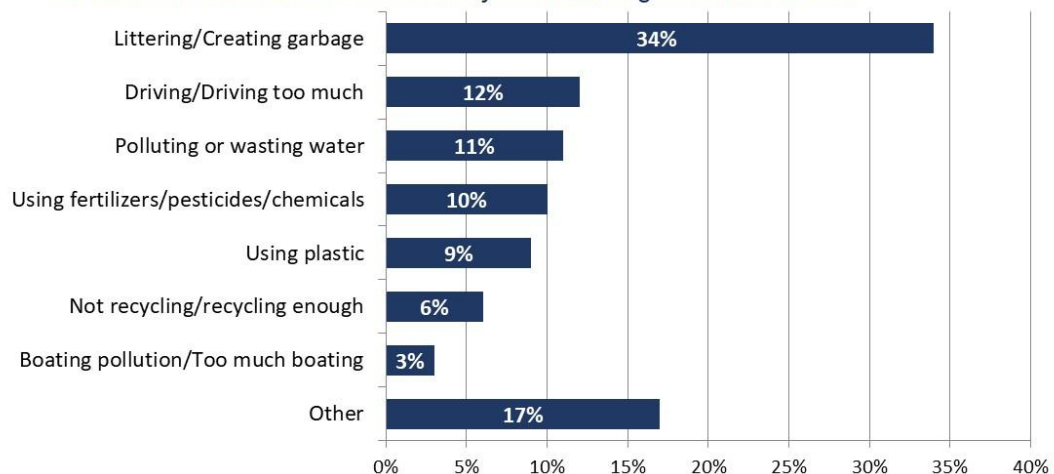
The 16% of respondents who acknowledged that their actions might be hurting water quality were asked for an example of something harmful they do. Their responses were collected verbatim and have been categorized as shown below.

The most common response by far, mentioned by 34% of these residents, was littering or creating too much garbage and trash. Other responses related to visible trash also made the list: using plastics (9%) and not recycling or not recycling *enough* (6%). Contributing litter, trash, and waste is by far the leading theme on this list.

Driving (12%) and boating (3%) were mentioned. Some referred generally to polluting or wasting water (11%). Ten percent referred specifically to their use of fertilizer, pesticides, or chemicals. Other people (17%) gave much more individualized responses.

Things People Say They Do That Might Hurt Water Quality

Asked of Those Who Think Their Daily Activities Might Hurt the Sound



16A. What is an example of something you do that might hurt the quality of water in Long Island Sound?
(Open-ended. Categorized responses shown.)

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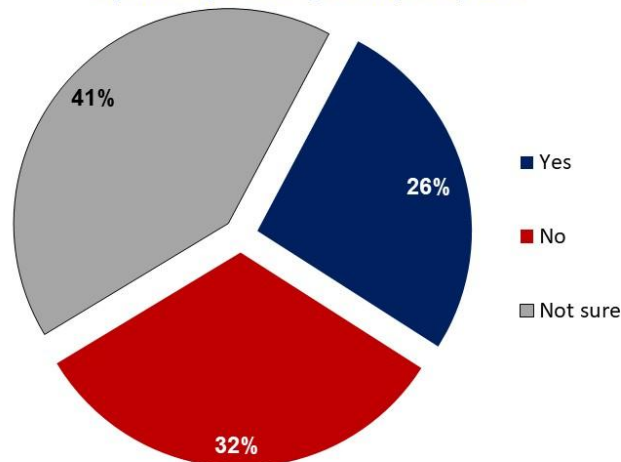
Could Residents Make a Change That Might Improve Water Quality?

The other half of the survey sample was asked a more aspirational question, with a focus on *future* action: “Do you think there is any change you could make in your daily life that might help to improve the quality of water in Long Island Sound?” With this more positive framing, 26% said yes – compared to the 16% who recognized their actions may be actively harming water quality.

That said, almost three-quarters of the public are not ready to be engaged in personal actions. That number includes one-third (32%) who do not believe there is anything they could change in their daily life that might help the Sound’s water quality, and a sizable 41% who are just not sure.

I Could Help Improve the Quality of Water in the Sound

By Making a Change in My Daily Life



(Asked of random ½ of sample, Group B): 17. Do you think there is any change you could make in your daily life that might help to improve the quality of water in Long Island Sound?

When thinking about engaging the public to adopt individual practices that might benefit the Sound, it is helpful to know where to start. Who might be more prone to believe that they could make a beneficial change in their daily habits? The survey identifies a strong relationship with age, with younger residents, as well as those who have moved to the region more recently, as much more prone to believe they could help make a difference.

Believe That Making a Change in Your Own Daily Life Might Help Improve the Sound

	Age						Years Living in This Area				
	<25	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	<5	5-9	10-19	20-39	40+
Yes	39%	32%	32%	27%	21%	15%	34%	33%	33%	23%	19%
No	34%	27%	30%	29%	32%	39%	27%	21%	36%	36%	39%
Not sure	27%	41%	39%	44%	47%	46%	39%	46%	32%	41%	42%

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People in lower- and middle-income households are more likely than more affluent people to think they could make a change that would help the Sound's waters.

Believe That Making a Change in Your Own Daily Life Might Help Improve the Sound

	Household Income					
	< \$25,000	\$25,000-49,999	\$50,000-74,999	\$75,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-149,999	\$150,000+
Yes	33%	28%	31%	20%	23%	23%
No	31%	31%	33%	38%	32%	39%
Not sure	36%	41%	36%	42%	44%	38%

This finding does not suggest that public outreach staff and volunteers should refrain from working with older or more affluent people, or those who have lived in their communities a long time. But it does offer clues about where some efforts might begin as practitioners seek to engage the public in their efforts.

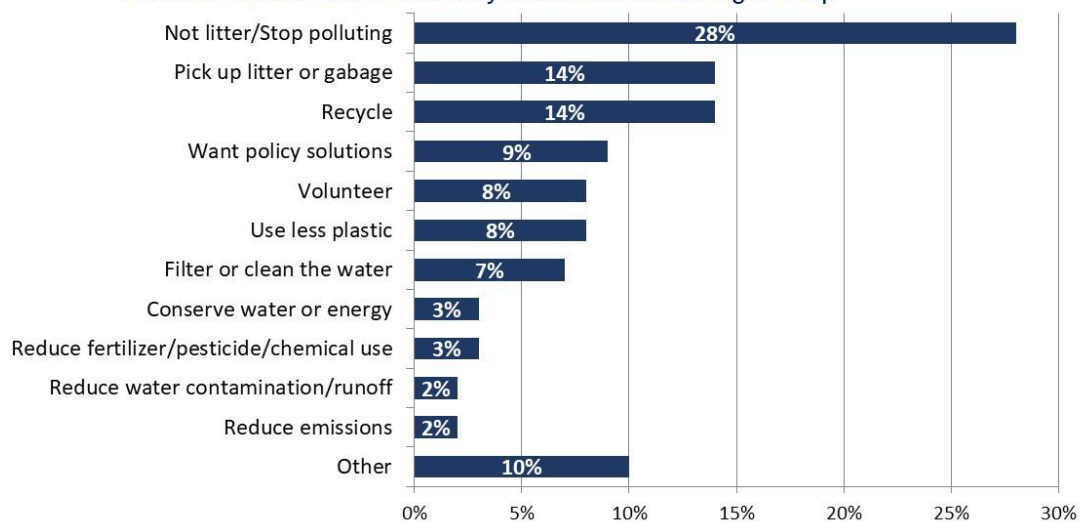
What Do Residents Say They Could Change That Might Improve Water Quality?

The 26% who believe that there is a change they could make in their daily lives to improve water quality were asked for an example of what they might do. Once again, reducing visible trash dominated the list. Twenty-eight percent of these residents said they could stop or refrain from littering or polluting, 14% said they could pick up litter when they see it, 14% said they could begin recycling or recycle more, 14% said they could begin recycling or recycle more, and 8% said they could use less plastic.

This question generated other possible actions, as well. Some people suggested that they could pursue policy solutions (9%) or they could volunteer (8%). Seven percent felt that filtering their water would help. Smaller numbers suggested conserving water, limiting chemical usage, or other actions.

Things People Say They Could Do to Improve Water Quality

Asked of Those Who Think They Could Do Something to Help



17A. What is an example of something you could change that might help improve the quality of water in Long Island Sound? (Open-ended. Categorized responses shown.)

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People think about visible trash first – particularly residents who are less connected to local waters. This was borne out in the focus group segment least connected to the Sound when the moderator asked, “What are things that we could do as individuals to help preserve Long Island Sound?” Participants responded in rapid succession:

“Definitely recycling.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Using trash bins.”

“Yeah.”

A focus group participant from New Haven explained this logic, which included an understanding that trash on the land washes into waterways and the Sound:

“I believe a lot of the trash in the ocean, which the waves bring back onto the beach, are actually brought over into the ocean from inland when rainwater overruns and carries trash from inland all the way through the sewers into the ocean. So if you keep your trash a little longer so that when you get to a trash bin, you dump it, it'll go a long way to protecting the Long Island Sound.”

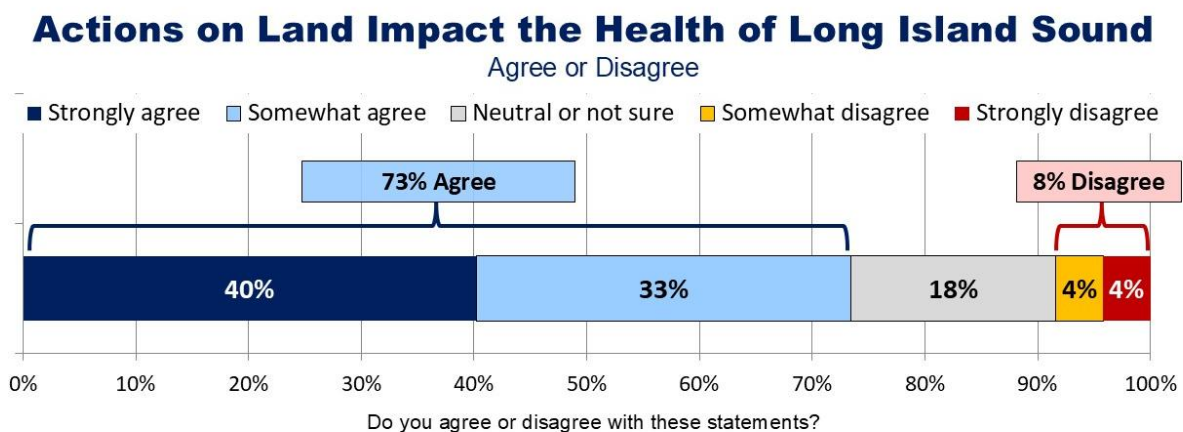
– Kwabena (New Haven, CT)

Focus group participants who were more intimately connected to the Sound, and particularly those who lived further east, were more likely to mention contaminants like “herbicides because of invasive plant growth,” “bacteria levels,” and “sewage treatment plants (that) inevitably overflow” because of more frequent flooding events in recent years. They also exhibited a much greater level of knowledge about nonprofit and government efforts to clean up, incentive programs that are available, and how they might plug in as individuals.

Part of the learning here is that for people who live in more urbanized communities in the western part of the watershed where trash on the ground can be a concern, addressing visible trash on the shoreline and in the water may be the most effective initial way to engage residents. As they become more active and engaged, individuals may become more interested in learning what they can do to help reduce chemical runoff, excess nutrients, and other contamination problems.

Understanding That Actions on the Land Affect the Health of the Water

There is a good understanding that “The actions of people on land have an impact on the health of Long Island Sound.” Seventy-three percent agree with that statement, while only 8% disagree.



19A. The actions of people on land have an impact on the health of Long Island Sound.

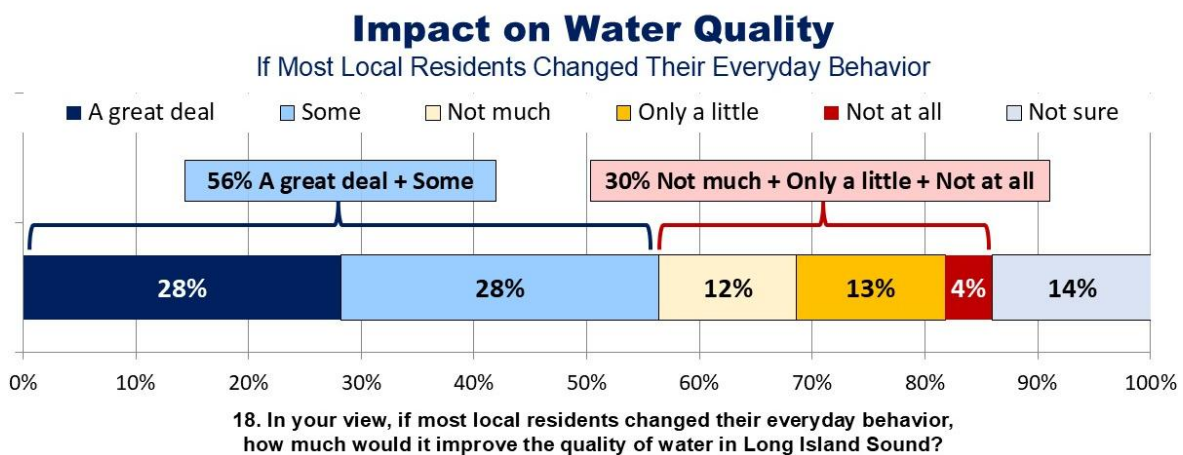
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If Most Residents Changed Their Everyday Behavior, Would It Impact Water Quality?

Though respondents acknowledged a connection between people's actions on land and the health of the Sound, there are limits to how much they believe that individual actions will add up to real impact. While 73% believe the actions of people on land have an impact on the health of the Sound, somewhat fewer (56%) think water quality in the Sound would improve "a great deal" or "some" "...if most local residents changed their everyday behavior."

Thirty percent think those actions would improve the Sound "not much," "only a little," or "not at all," and 14% are not sure.

The importance here is that it is harder to motivate people to action if they believe their actions will not add up to much. Behavior change and public engagement efforts rely on a shared sense that individual action will make a difference. Future engagement efforts must be mindful that the public needs to hear good news of the progress their collective efforts are making.



A focus group participant explained how this works in her world. She could, for example, pick up trash in her neighborhood, but it would be discouraging if others were not helping and the trash just started piling up again.

"If I'm at the beach and it's clean and there's a little trash. Yeah...absolutely (I'll pick it up.)"
(Continuing, and contrasting that with more abundant trash in her neighborhood): *"You do it so much, the results keep happening. It's just like you get tired. If you're the only one doing it, you get tired of doing it. Even when you try to make awareness to it, people just, they get enthusiastic for a week, it stays clean for a week and then they forget about it, and then it goes right back to the floor."*
– Zenida (Bridgeport, CT)

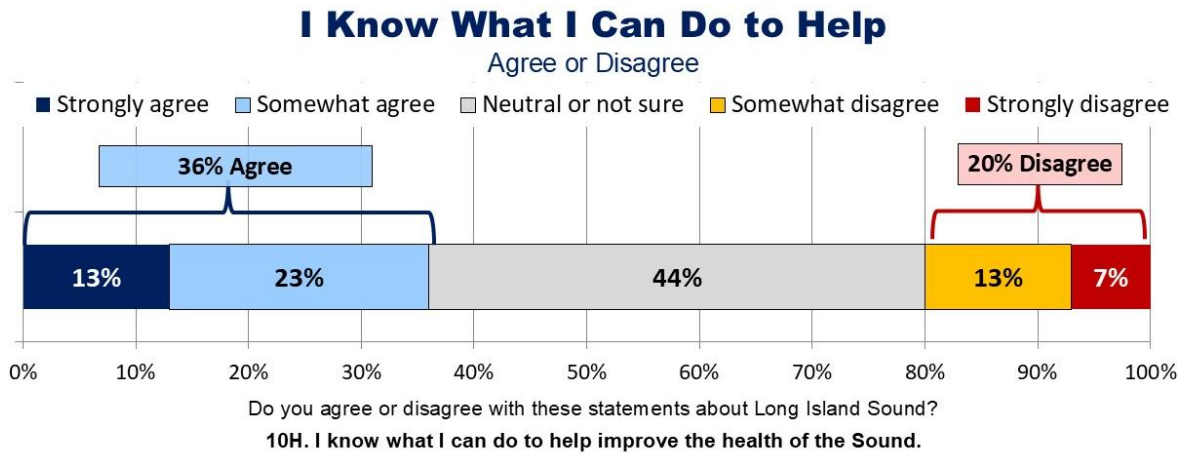
"Having trash on the sand, it just doesn't look right to me. I would have to pick it up if I saw it, but if I saw it anywhere else, I feel like if I were to pick it up, maybe I don't know if it would make me a better person, but I feel like it's not going to help anything. It's not going to amount to anything."
– Kenneth (Stamford, CT)

Zenida and Kenneth, and others in similar situations, need to know they are part of something bigger, and that the effort will be sustained over time and will have visible impact. Their example relates to picking up litter, but it could be extended to any number of other actions we might ask the public to take.

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Few People Know What They Can Do to Help

Another ingredient for successful public engagement is residents who feel confident they know something they can do to help. In this case, do people know what they can do to help improve the health of the Sound? Only 36% said they do. That leaves almost two-thirds of the public who are not sure how they would engage.



Encouragement from community-based organizations, and even from friends, can help bridge this gap. People do not necessarily need to know what to do if there is an activity and they can just join in. As these focus group participants described, there is a snowball effect when people see their friends volunteering. This is the principle of social diffusion.

"I feel if people see other people do things, they want to get in on the trend or get in on everything so they could say they're a part of it... I have a friend who she actually volunteers at the beach to clean up, and because she started doing it, my other friends started doing it. So I feel people love doing things once they see that other people start doing it." – Paola (Stamford, CT)

"if you see me picking up my rubbish, you might say, 'Look your side is clean. Let me do the same so it doesn't get messy.' And then everyone sees that action and everyone starts doing the same. That's how you start." – Euscaterly (The Bronx, NY)

"That's how I move. I can't tell anybody how to live their life, but if I could choose to live my life in a certain way, then maybe it leads by example. So usually when you're in a room of everybody doing one thing, you tend to follow along with that one thing. So that's what I try to do, just engage people to do something possible." – Zenida (Bridgeport, CT)

People seem to understand the concept intuitively. People want to get involve in joint efforts like this.

"If somebody will go out there and clean up, clean along the shore. Just clean. If we have a group of people together every day, we walk around after work or after whatever we do and we clean up, I guess the more people that will see us doing that every day, they would want to be involved too." – Shannon (The Bronx, NY)

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Measuring Current Adoption and Likely Future Adoption of Individual Stewardship Practices

The Long Island Sound Public Perception Study has made a major contribution to the effort to encourage adoption of individual practices that would benefit the health of the Sound. The survey measured current levels of adoption and future likelihood of adopting 14 stewardship practices. Some of these actions are positive for the Sound, such as picking up and disposing of your dog's waste or picking up litter when you see it. Others are negative for the Sound, such as over-fertilizing your grass lawn or using chemical pesticides that could wash off into local waters.

If the public voluntarily adopts behaviors that are healthy for the Sound, and refrains from actions that are harmful, that can have a measurable impact on water quality. All 14 practices are measured on two levels:

1. **Measuring the current level of behavioral adoption** helps public outreach professionals and community-based organizations know which practices need the most attention – in other words, positive actions that could be much more widely adopted, or negative ones that could be significantly decreased.
2. **Measuring how likely people are to adopt these practices in the future** helps practitioners know which ones are most prone to change, and therefore would be a productive focus of future outreach.

Taken together, these two measurements help practitioners know where to focus – ideally on behaviors that are not yet widely adopted but which show good promise of future adoption. The survey results provide that road map.

Furthermore, with its large sample size, the survey offers the opportunity to segment the results from smaller geographic areas so users can know the conditions in their own communities. The survey also provides segmented data for specialized audiences that may be of interest, for example, apartment dwellers or younger residents.

These are the 14 practices that were measured. Note again that some of these are actions that are helpful to the Sound and its connecting waters, and some are negative practices where the goal is minimizing them.

- (Asked of all respondents): Recycling cans and bottles
- (Those with a yard or property): Using chemical pesticides in or around your home to control mosquitos and ticks
- (Those with a yard or property): Using herbicide to control weeds in your yard
- (All): Volunteering in your community to help clean up or beautify a neighborhood park, beach, or garden.
- (Those with a yard or property): Connecting a rain barrel to your downspouts and using the water between rainstorms.
- (Those with a yard or property): Creating a rain garden, which is an area that has been dug out and planted with water-loving native plants to capture and quickly absorb excess rainwater.
- (Those with a grass lawn): Reducing the size of your lawn and replacing the grass with native or pollinator plants.
- (Homeowners with septic): Upgrading your septic system with the latest advanced technology.
- (All): Tossing food wrappers, cups, or cigarette butts on the ground when you are not near a trash can

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- (All): Picking up litter when you see it
- (All): Using a refillable water bottle instead of disposable plastic water bottles
- (Those with a vehicle): Washing your car in a paved driveway or street
- (Those with a dog): Picking up your dog's waste and disposing of it in the trash
- (Those with a grass lawn): Frequency of lawn fertilization

Adoption of Daily Practices Related to Litter and Waste

Four positive behaviors related to litter and waste were tested on a five-point scale ranging from "very frequently" or "always" to "never." For purposes of this exercise, people giving responses in the top three categories of this scale ("sometimes" or more) are considered to be practicing the behavior. Those who answered "seldom" or "never" are thought of as an "opportunity" group that could be practicing the behavior more consistently.

- Dog waste: The survey indicates that 67% of dog owners "always," 12% "usually," and 8% "sometimes" pick up after their pets and dispose of the waste in the trash.
- Recycling: 55% "very frequently," 19% "frequently," and 13% "sometimes" recycle cans and bottles.
- Refillable water bottles: 35% always, 26% usually, and 21% sometimes "use a refillable water bottle instead of disposable plastic water bottles."
- Picking up litter: 22% always, 25% usually, and 32% sometimes pick up litter when they see it.



In the last two years, have you...? (Very frequently, Frequently, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

B1. Recycled cans and bottles

Do you typically...? (Always, Usually, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

B10. Pick up litter when you see it

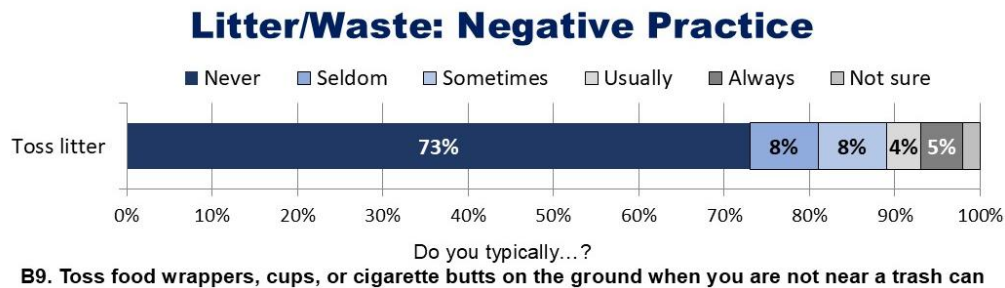
B11. Use a refillable water bottle instead of disposable plastic water bottles

B13. (Those with a dog): Pick up your dog's waste and dispose of it in the trash

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One negative behavior related to litter and waste was tested: tossing “food wrappers, cups, or cigarette butts on the ground when you are not near a trash can.” People giving responses of “sometimes” or more often are considered to be part of the opportunity group, who could be exhibiting this negative behavior less often.

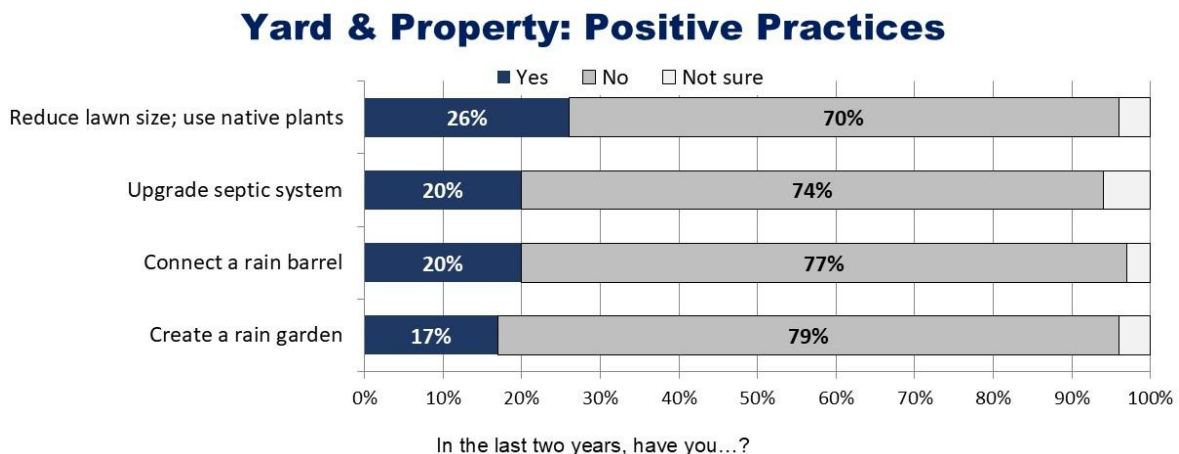
- Tossing litter: 73% said they never toss litter on the ground and 8% said they seldom do. That leaves an opportunity group of 19% who said they “sometimes,” “usually,” or “always” toss things on the ground when they are not near a trash can, or said they were “not sure” if they do.



Practices Related to Yard and Property

There are four positive practices related to yard and property. These are by their nature infrequent or even one-time practices, so they were measured on a yes/no scale. Based on the survey measurement, all four of these practices offer large opportunity groups of 74% or more.

- Replaced lawn: 26% of people with grass lawns have reduced the size of their lawns and replaced the grass with native or pollinator plants.
- Septic: 20% of homeowners with septic systems said they have upgraded their system with the latest advanced technology.
- Rain barrel: 20% of people with a yard or property have connected a rain barrel to their downspouts.
- Rain garden: 17% said they have created a rain garden.



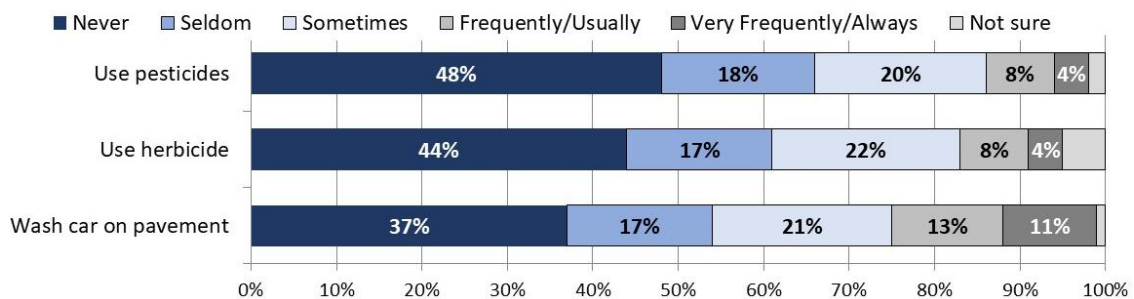
- B5. (Those with a yard or property): Connected a rain barrel to your downspouts and used the water between rainstorms
- B6. (Those with a yard or property): Created a rain garden, which is an area that has been dug out and planted with water-loving native plants to capture and quickly absorb excess rainwater.
- B7. (Those with a grass lawn): Reduced the size of your lawn and replaced the grass with native or pollinator plants.
- B8. (Homeowners with septic): Upgraded your septic system with the latest advanced technology.

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Three negative practices related to yard and property were measured. These are things that people may do regularly, so they were measured on a five-point frequently scale ranging from “always” to “never,” or from “very frequently” to “never.”

- Pesticides: 48% of survey respondents with a yard or property said they “never” use chemical pesticides, and 18% said they “seldom” do, leaving an opportunity group of 34% who use chemical pesticide “sometimes” or more often, or were not sure.
- Herbicide: 44% never use herbicide in their yards and 17% seldom do, creating an opportunity group of 39%.
- Car washing on pavement: 37% of people who own a vehicle never wash it on a paved street or driveway and 17% seldom do, leaving an opportunity group of 46%.

Yard & Property: Negative Practices



In the last two years, have you...? (Very frequently, Frequently, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

B2. (Those with a yard or property): Used chemical pesticides in or around your home to control mosquitos and ticks.

B3. (Those with a yard or property): Used herbicide to control weeds in your yard.

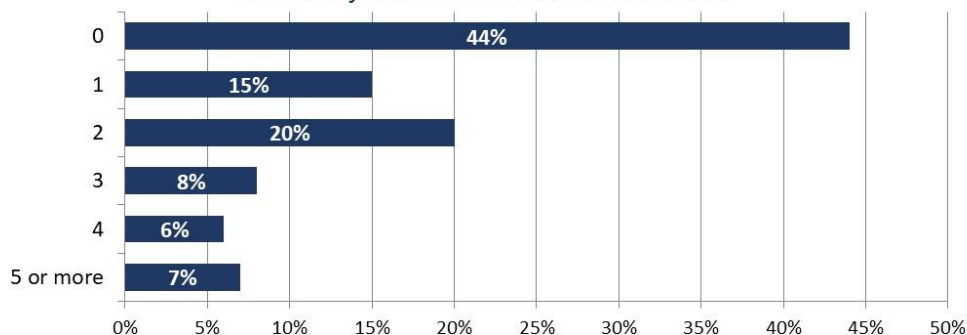
Do you typically...? (Always, Usually, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

B12. (Those with a vehicle): Wash your car in a paved driveway or street.

One more yard and garden practice was measured. Though lawn fertilizing on its own is not a negative practice because a healthy stand of turf grass helps prevent erosion, *over-fertilizing* is negative because the excess nutrients can wash off into local waterways. One measure of this is the number of times per year that people fertilize their grass lawns. As shown in the chart below, 56% of people with grass lawns fertilize them, and 41% fertilize them two or more times per year. For purposes of the survey, those multiple fertilizers (two times or more per year) are considered the opportunity group who could reduce the amount of fertilizer they apply.

Lawn Fertilizing

How Many Times a Year Lawn is Fertilized

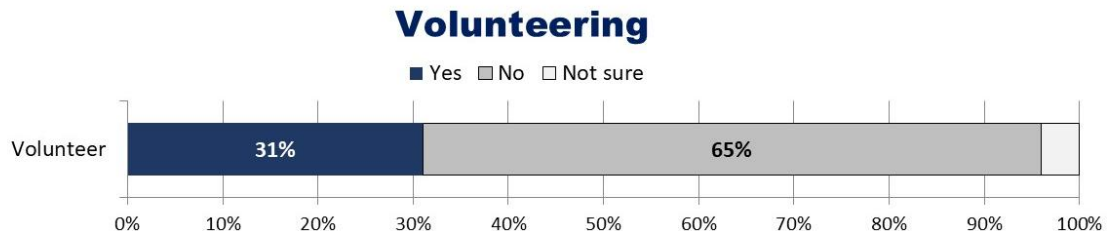


B14. (Those with a grass lawn): How many times a year is your lawn fertilized? Just give it your best guess.

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Volunteering

Volunteerism was also measured as a positive practice. Respondents were asked if in the past two years they had “Volunteered in your community to help clean up or beautify a neighborhood park, beach, or garden.” Close to one-third (31%) of residents said they have volunteered, leaving an opportunity group of 69% (those who said no, or who were not sure).



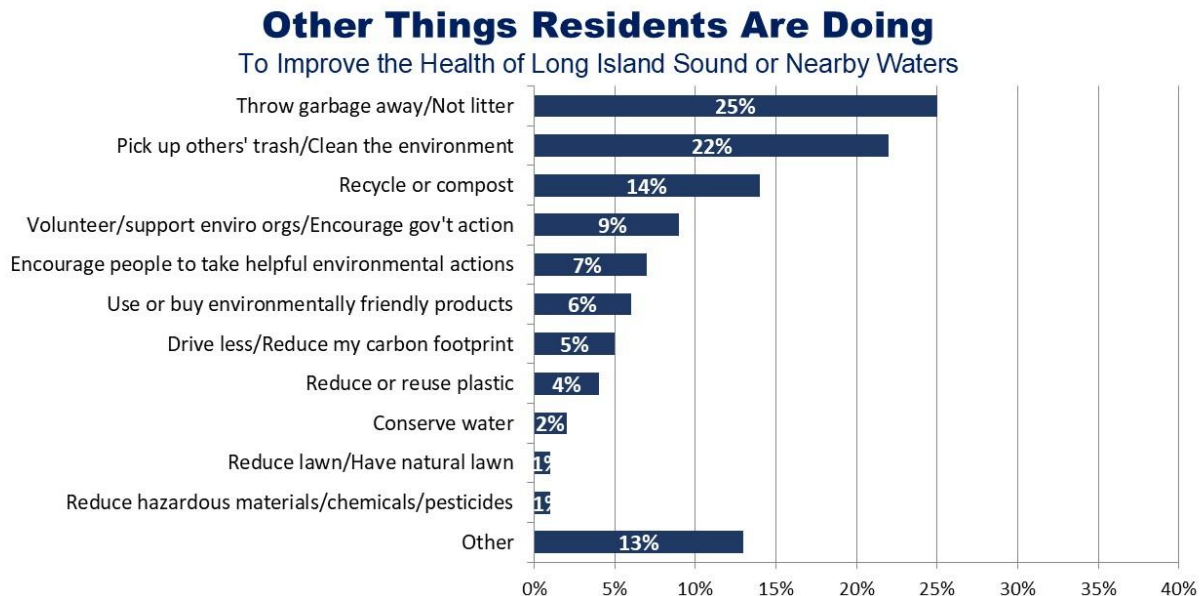
In the last two years, have you...?

B4. Volunteered in your community to help clean up or beautify a neighborhood park, beach, or garden.

Other Things People Are Doing to Help Improve the Health of Local Waters

After assessing their participation in that list of 14 practices, both positive and negative, survey respondents were asked the open-ended question, “Is there anything else you are doing to help improve the health of Long Island Sound or any nearby waters?” Survey participants offered verbatim responses, which have been summarized into categories as shown below. Note that people could mention more than one action they are taking.

- The three top categories relate to properly handling physical trash and litter: throwing garbage away and not littering (mentioned by 25%), picking up other people’s trash and litter (22%), and recycling or composting (14%).



B15. Is there anything else you are doing to help improve the health of Long Island Sound or any nearby waters?
(Open-ended. Categorized responses shown.)

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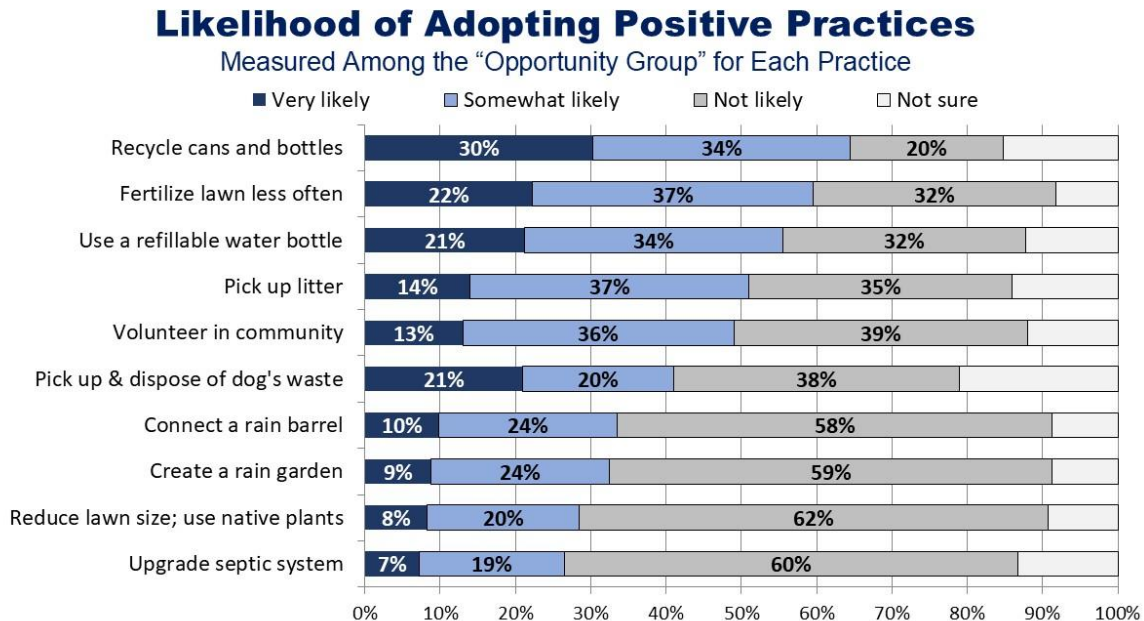
- The next two categories relate to volunteerism or advocacy: volunteering for or supporting environmental organizations or encouraging governmental action on behalf of the environment (9%), and encouraging other people to take helpful environmental actions (7%).
- People also mentioned buying environmentally friendly products (6%), driving less and reducing their carbon footprint (4%), conserving water (2%), plus other lower-frequency responses.

Likelihood of Adoption of These Practices

After measuring the current level of adoption of each of these practices, the second half of this exercise was to assess the likelihood that people in the “opportunity group” for each practice would adopt positive actions or discontinue negative ones in the future. As a reminder, the opportunity group for positive practices like picking up after their dogs are the people who are not yet doing it. For negative actions like using chemical pesticides, the opportunity group are those who are regularly doing the negative practice.

The chart below shows the likelihood of adoption of the 10 positive practices, in a rough descending order from most to least likely. Each of these is measured among its own opportunity group on a three-point scale: “very likely, somewhat likely, or not likely.”

As an example, “looking ahead over the next year or so,” 30% of people who are not regularly recycling bottles and cans said they are “very likely” to begin doing so, and 34% said they are “somewhat likely.” This is the behavior on the list most prone to change. Fertilizing less often, using a refillable water bottle, and picking up litter are also high on the list.



Looking ahead over the next year or so, is it very likely, somewhat likely, or not likely that you will do each of these things?

A practice that appears lower on the list is not impossible to change, and effort to (for example) connect rain barrels should not be abandoned. This survey only measures broad, top-of-mind likelihood and does not take into account interventions like incentive programs or expert assistance. For each practice

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on this list that practitioners hope to impact, further dedicated research should be conducted to assess barriers to adopting the practice, and incentives and interventions that could help.

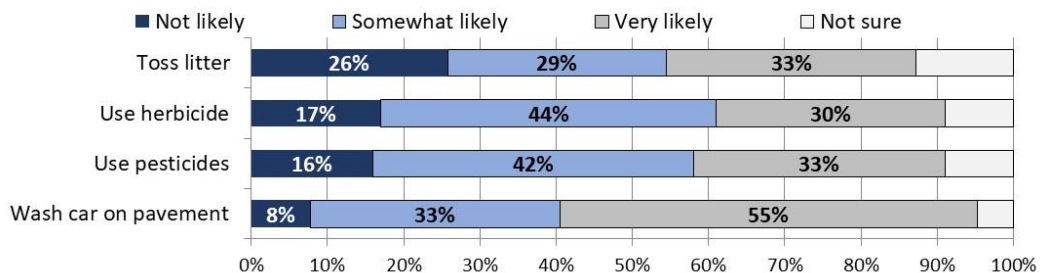
Also note that subgroups of the overall population may be more prone than others to adopt individual practices. Detailed subgroup data for every behavior are found in Segmented Survey Results, Section 3 of this report.

A similar exercise was undertaken for the four negative practices measured on the survey. Here we are looking for the number of people who said they are “not likely” to continue the negative practice as they look ahead over the next year or so. Please note that it was not said or even suggested in the survey that these are viewed as negative practices. Both positive and negative behaviors were asked in tandem in the survey questionnaire without comment or judgment, in an effort to avoid introducing a social desirability bias and affecting the results.

Among these four practices, littering behavior appears to be the most prone to change, and car washing on pavement the least prone.

Likelihood of Continuing Negative Practices

Measured Among the “Opportunity Group” for Each Practice



Looking ahead over the next year or so, is it very likely, somewhat likely, or not likely that you will do each of these things?

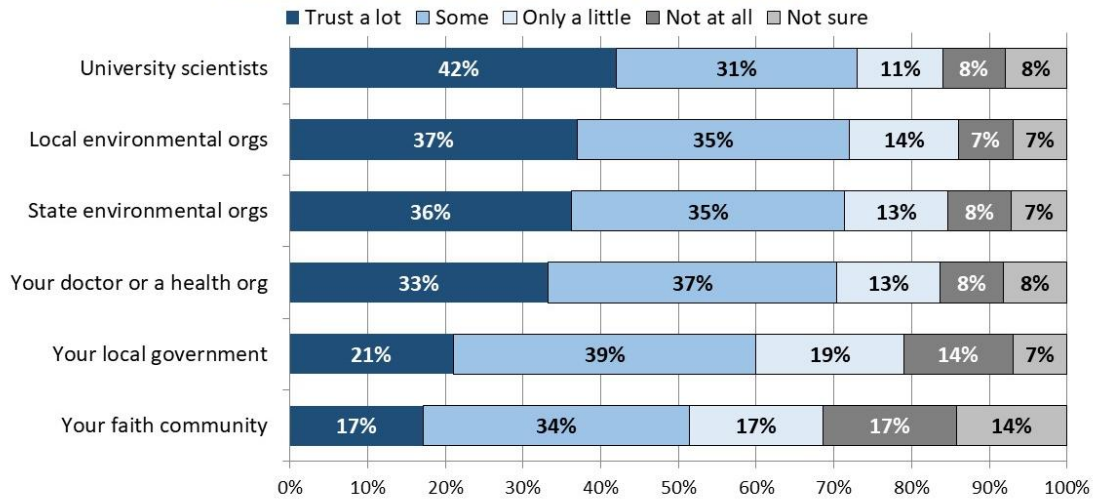
Communicating with the Public

In closing out the survey, two questions were asked to help guide communications with the public on the topic of water pollution and the environment. The first question measured how much the public trusts information on these topics that comes from various sources: one’s faith community, local environmental organizations, local government, one’s doctor or a health organization, university scientists, and state environmental agencies. The scale was: “trust a lot, some, only a little, or not at all.”

- On this list, university scientists ranked at the top, with 42% trusting them “a lot,” and 31% trusting them “some.”
- Next were local environmental organizations (37% “a lot” + 35% “some”) and state environmental organizations (36% “a lot” + 35% “some”).
- Health providers, local government, and faith community followed, as shown below.

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Trusted Sources of Information

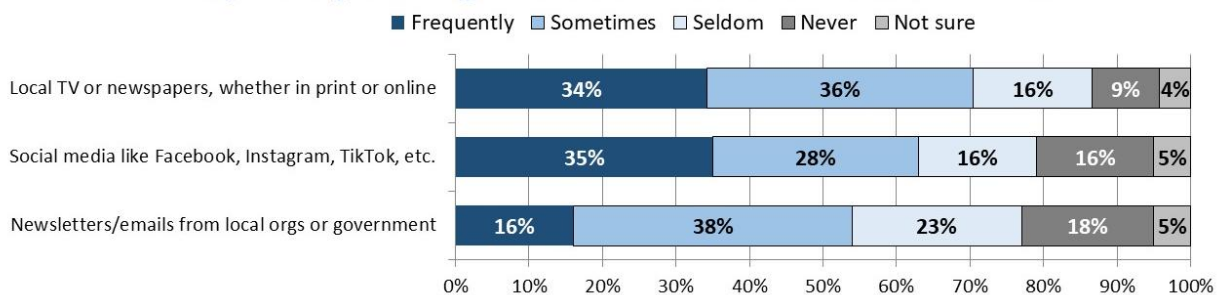


20. How much would you trust information about water pollution and the environment that comes from each of these sources?

Frequency of use of three sources of “local information” were tested, as a guide to what information channels may be most productive in future outreach.

- Among these three options, people were most likely to say they rely on “local TV or newspapers, whether in print or online;” 34% of survey respondents said they do so “frequently,” and 36% said “sometimes.”
- Almost as many said they rely on “social media like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, etc.,” with 35% saying “frequently” and 28% “sometimes.”
- On this list, the least-used information source is “newsletters or emails from local organizations or government;” 16% said they use those “frequently” for local information, and 38% use them “sometimes.”

Frequency Using Sources of Local Information



21. Here are several ways of getting local information. How often do you use each one?

On both the question of trust and frequency of usage of local information sources, preferences and habits vary by population subgroup. Readers who are developing a communications strategy should refer to the Segmented Survey Results in the Section 3 appendix to this report to match to the characteristics of their local audience.

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Focus Group Feedback on Renaming the “Long Island Sound Study”

The focus groups explored a possible renaming of the Long Island Sound Study.

Consensus That Long Island Sound Study (LISS) Should Be Renamed

Focus group participants had not heard of LISS, with the exception of one who felt that perhaps she had. They were presented with a brief description, and nearly all were pleased to know that this type of a collaborative partnership of high-level stakeholders existed:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), New York State, and Connecticut formed the Long Island Sound Study (LISS) in 1985. It is a partnership made up of federal and state agencies, non-profit groups, universities, concerned organizations, and individuals dedicated to restoring and protecting the Sound.

LISS developed and manages a coordinated plan to restore and protect Long Island Sound.

As a starting point, several participants expressed appreciation for the EPA’s role in supporting this mission. As one said:

“I think it's a good thing. Somebody has to speak for (the Sound), and I like what the EPA does or what the EPA stands for overall. Having that on a more local level...I think it's a good thing.”

– Lynette (The Bronx, NY)

For a number of participants, the description made them interested to know more: What is LISS doing to restore and protect the Sound? How much of an impact is it having? How much taxpayer money is being spent in this effort? As context for these questions, a number of focus group participants, especially those living in the western part of the watershed, said they have seen improvements in the condition of the Sound over the last couple decades or so.

“I think they’re doing something good. I’ve never heard of them, but maybe that’s because I haven’t looked into stuff like this before.” – Paola (Stamford, CT; not very connected to the Sound)

*“I’m curious as to what the coordinated plan to restore and protect the Long Island Sound is.”
(Continuing, several minutes later): “The one thing I will say about this program is that I think it’s really interesting that everyone on this conversation seems to be pretty well-versed in the Long Island Sound and surrounding areas and not a single one of us had heard of this organization.”*

– Jacqui (East Northport, NY; feels strongly connected to the Sound)

The consensus was, in light of its mission, LISS does need to be renamed. One participant put it this way:

“From 1985, I think they have had enough time to ‘study.’ It implies that they are still trying to find out what the problem is and makes you question, what are they using the money for?”

– Kenneth (Stamford, CT)

Five options for a new name.

Participants were offered these five naming options:

- Long Island Sound Estuary Partnership (LISEP)
- Long Island Sound Estuary Program (LISEP)
- Long Island Sound Restoration Initiative (LISRI)
- Long Island Sound Restoration Program (LISRP)
- Long Island Sound Restoration Partnership (LISRP)

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They were asked what each of the words meant to them, and how well they contributed to a successful name. We encouraged them to focus on the five candidate names, but allowed them to suggest adjustments if they felt inclined to do so. While there was not a consensus for a new name, participants across the three groups offered a great deal of consistency in their reactions and ample guidance for the renaming effort.

People had clear reactions to key words in the naming options.

- The word “Initiative” jumped out first, in all three groups. Participants said that word felt proactive and positive, conveying action. They described it as appealing and inviting.
- As discussion unfolded, participants placed much more focus on the word “Restoration.” They found it to be a purpose-filled word and connected to what they hoped would happen with the Sound. It conveys not just action, but mission.
- However, some participants in the segment of people most connected to the Sound felt that “restoration” was too limited a concept – that the Sound needs to be appreciated, protected, promoted, etc., and not just restored. This was a minority view, only expressed by the most connected people.
- The word “Partnership” was attractive to some, because they felt it described what the project is, bringing together various stakeholders. They felt it is a good description of the “how” of the project, but it may lack the sense of animation and mission that was conveyed by other words. This is how one focus group participant, who was particularly struck by the concept of “partnership,” expressed her view:

“I thought the most impressive thing in that earlier slide was how many organizations are involved. That piqued my interest. So I like partnership for that reason because there’s so many groups involved.” – Catherine (Middletown, CT; referring to the description of LISS on the previous page)

- “Program” is straightforward and had few advocates. Some liked it for its simplicity, though.
- “Estuary” suffered from people’s lack of understanding of what an estuary is. It felt unhelpful to them to have a name that featured a word people do not understand. Furthermore, one savvy participant, who did understand the word, said it is unneeded because it is redundant; Long Island Sound *is* an estuary, so we should not waste valuable space in the name expressing that concept twice.

Several naming principles shaped the discussion.

- Five words is just too long, participants said. An organizational name should be kept to four words – was the consensus in one of the groups. A long name is “intimidating” and unrelatable, one person said. While not so specific, the other two groups espoused a similar idea, saying the shorter the name, the better.
- “Long Island Sound Restoration” was the suggestion of multiple people.
- “Long Island Sound Partnership” resonated with several – and was a near-consensus choice in one group. Participants had no hesitation about the acronym “LISP.”
- In two of the three groups, as discussion progressed, people gravitated towards dropping “Long Island” and just going with “The Sound Initiative,” “The Sound Restoration Initiative,” or “The Sound Partnership.” (Note that if LISS went this direction, it could include “Long Island” in a tagline.)

While there was no single consensus choice, there was good direction, and several viable possibilities, emerging from the focus group discussion.

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CONCLUSION

Long Island Sound emerges from this study with a positive image in the eyes of the vast majority of residents. The Sound is a source of recreation and emotional uplift for many residents, even while access to the Sound is not as convenient as some would like. Though perceptions of water quality are mixed, many people see it as improving, especially in the more densely populated western end of the Sound. While most residents understand that the actions of people on the land affect the health of the Sound's waters, there is more work to do to encourage them that their actions will add up and make a positive difference.

People who know the Sound best view it as precious and important. We heard their stories throughout this research. Here is one story that sums up this feeling:

"My grandparents bought a bungalow on the water in 1952... So I am fully connected to the Long Island Sound. I grew up in that house. I lived on the Sound my entire life... And when I was in college, my college roommate came to visit, and she was from Yonkers. And she got to my house, and she pulled in and she went, 'Oh my God, you live where I vacation.' And I was like, 'I know. It's a beautiful place to live.' And then we watched the sunset, and she was like, 'Seriously, I can't believe you live here.' And so, there's a point of pride with the Long Island Sound for me. All of my memories are connected to it. All of my memories of my family are connected to it. It's just... It's unique."

– Jacqui (East Northport, NY)

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct this important, comprehensive research for Connecticut Sea Grant and the Long Island Sound Study. We commend it to you and remain available to assist with further interpretation as you and your partners apply it to your work restoring and protecting the Sound.

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