

Survey reveals Floridians value water, but not 'all in' on conservation

February 11 2014, by Mickie Anderson

Floridians value water, almost as much as they value money and their health—just don't ask them to time themselves in the shower.

An online survey of 516 Floridians found that interest in water ranked third in a list of public issues, just behind the economy and health care, but ahead of taxes and public education. Eighty-three percent of respondents considered water a highly or extremely important issue.

The survey respondents were selected to be a demographically representative sample of adult Floridians, said Alexa Lamm, the University of Florida assistant professor who led the survey for the Center for Public Issues Education, or PIE Center. Respondents completed the survey in December 2013.

The PIE Center is part of UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Lamm, a faculty member in the department of agricultural education and communication, is the center's associate director.

Jack Payne, UF's senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources, said it's important for a large research university where so much scientific work is being done on water to gauge how well the public understands issues associated with water supply and usage.

"We need educated voters at the voting booth, so it's always good to know the level of understanding our citizens have," he said. Many critical problems Florida will face in the future revolve around water, he

said, including supply, quality and sea-level rise.

The survey found that respondents would support some increases in their water utility bills, if the money would help ensure future [water supplies](#). To that end, 69 percent said they would support a 10 percent increase in water bills, if used for that purpose. Perhaps not surprising, support dropped as the bill-hike percentage increased. Only 7 percent of respondents said they would be willing to pay 50 percent more for water to help ensure its supply.

Michael Dukes, director of UF/IFAS' Center for Landscape Conservation and Ecology, said Florida's growing population will mean more pressure on state water supplies.

"I think we're going to have to come to a decision point on the use of high-quality drinking water – potable water – to maintain landscapes," he said.

But he noted current UF research working to help offset water problems, including studies on efficient irrigation, new ways to recapture water, and development of drought-tolerant turfgrass varieties. Residents are often now looking for ways to landscape with plants that are attractive and drought tolerant, he said.

As was true with last year's water survey, PIE Center officials learned that the public has varying amounts of tolerance for giving up creature comforts to enhance conservation.

For example, Lamm said, while 75 percent of survey respondents said they would wait until their dishwasher is full to turn it on, 47 percent said they would not put a timer in the bathroom to help remind them to shorten their shower.

She said the survey also found that Floridians reported low overall knowledge about some water-related current events, despite media coverage.

Only 31 percent of survey respondents were aware of last fall's decline in commercial oyster production in Apalachicola Bay, and only 26 percent knew that Florida officials filed a lawsuit in October over the state of Georgia's consumption of fresh water from a river that helps support Florida's oyster industry, she said.

The survey did find that Floridians support state government efforts to protect water, even if it means resolving disputes in court: 83 percent agreed that state government should protect water, while just 18 percent said it would be a waste of government money to fight legal battles over water rights.

The [survey](#) is part of a number of water-focused activities scheduled this month. The PIE Center will host a webinar with UF Water Institute Director Wendy Graham on Feb. 25 at 10 a.m. The Water Institute will host a [water](#) symposium next week focused on what organizers call "Water Supply Planning in a Non-Stationary World."

More information: The water survey, results and a link to register for the webinar can be found here: www.piecenter.com/water.

Provided by University of Florida

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