

Pollution top concern for U.S. and Canadian citizens around Great Lakes

April 18 2014, by Greta Guest

With Earth Day approaching, a new Great Lakes survey by U.S. and Canadian researchers represents one of the largest attempts in recent decades to assess public views on a wide range of issues in the Great Lakes basin.

The survey of more than 1,000 Americans and Canadians in the region revealed:

- The vast majority of residents believe the lakes are in at least fair condition, but not necessarily improving.
- Residents expressed the most overall support for policies that directly reduce pollution, including rebuilding sewers and regulating the release of pharmaceuticals. Policies with the least support include enforcing restrictions on out-of-basin water diversions and increasing the cost of water to encourage conservation.
- Residents of Ontario are less supportive of additional wind development and more concerned about the potential negative impacts of [wind energy](#) than U.S. residents.
- Ontarians are about two times more likely than Americans to say they are unsure about whether oil or gas drilling via hydraulic fracturing should increase.
- Great Lakes residents from the U.S. and Canada overwhelmingly prefer the development of wind energy and other renewable sources to hydraulic fracturing, according to the survey conducted by three universities under the Great Lakes Policy

Research Network.

The research team, which includes faculty and graduate students from the University of Michigan, Ryerson University in Toronto and Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pa., presented the findings today at the Wilson Center's Canada Institute in Washington, D.C.

The Great Lakes hold 20 percent of the world's fresh water and the Great Lakes Basin land area includes eight U.S. states and one Canadian province, thousands of local governments and more than 40 tribes and First Nations, and is home to more than 33 million residents.

"The survey finds that water pollution remains the biggest environmental concern in the basin and that support varies markedly for different kinds of new energy options," said Barry Rabe, U-M professor of public policy and director of the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy.

"Renewable energy development has a broader base of support than do oil, gas and nuclear sources."

The findings are presented in three reports: one focusing on environmental issues, another on wind energy, and a third on [hydraulic fracturing](#), or fracking.

The survey also suggests that Ontarians are also somewhat conflicted.

"They are supportive of a stronger role for the federal government in Great Lakes management and are supportive of [renewable energy](#), but less so than Americans," said Christopher Gore, associate professor of politics and public administration at Ryerson.

For the last eight years, there has been a surge of wind energy development in the Great Lakes region, led largely by state and provincial renewable energy policy, said Sarah Mills, policy analyst at

the U-M Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy.

"While our report finds that residents support more wind energy, proximity plays a role," Mills said. "Residents in Ontario, where wind farms have been especially contentious, are less supportive of additional [wind energy development](#). People who live in rural areas close to wind farms are also more concerned about the negative impacts of wind than urban residents."

Another key difference between countries: Ontarians are twice as supportive as Americans who reside in the basin of phasing out coal-fired power plants.

"The health impacts of mercury released from coal plants have been of great concern in Ontario, where retiring coal-fired power plants has been a priority," Gore said.

The random telephone survey of 1,247 adults who reside in the basin was conducted Nov. 6-Dec. 5, 2013, and has a margin of error of 3 percent.

Provided by University of Michigan

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