



ALLIANCE FOR
**WATERSHED
EDUCATION**
OF THE DELAWARE RIVER

**Market Research among New Audiences
Conducted in 2020**

Basinwide Findings

Final Report



This work was made possible by the William Penn Foundation.



2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Objectives

This comprehensive study conducted for the Alliance for Watershed Education of the Delaware River (AWE), funded by the William Penn Foundation, is grounded in AWE's three goals:

Goal #1 - Create a larger and more inclusive constituency of people engaged at and near centers and their waterways as defined by center-level constituency goals.

Goal #2 - Increase and enhance constituent attitudes (e.g., self-efficacy, pride, and appreciation), knowledge, and intention to act to ensure a healthy Delaware River watershed.

Goal #3 – Collaborate, learn from one another, and deliver high-quality, inclusive watershed education programs that are sensitive to community priorities.

The market research was launched in the Fall of 2019 and conducted during 2020 to help AWE's 23 environmental education centers create a larger and more inclusive constituency through a focus on reaching and engaging new audiences.

This market research was designed to identify the demographics of the communities that surround AWE Centers, and better understand those nearby residents' attitudes, knowledge, and intention to act to help ensure a healthy Delaware River watershed.

Eleven AWE Centers became pilot participants and stakeholders to this research. This project has been structured to provide direct help to the those participating Centers, while offering guidance for all 23 Centers, encouraging collaborative and shared solutions that will help them engage new audiences all across the Alliance.

Research Method

This study was developed and conducted by OpinionWorks LLC, a social science-based market research organization based in Annapolis, Maryland, working in consultation with the Foundation and a project steering committee representing AWE and its Centers.

The project unfolded in three phases:

1. Project Planning and Demographic Analysis

OpinionWorks held foundational meetings in November 2019 with individual Centers who were considering becoming pilot participants in this research. These meetings explored the new audience segments that interested the Centers, and their capacity and commitment to applying the findings of the research. In the end, 11 Centers participated in this research pilot, grouped into seven local catchment areas: Camden and Pennsauken, NJ; Wilmington, DE; Southwest Philadelphia and nearby areas of Delaware County, PA; Trenton, NJ; the Roxborough and Manayunk neighborhoods of Philadelphia; Berks County, PA; and an area of the Poconos and Northwest New Jersey. Once the participating Centers were identified, OpinionWorks undertook a demographic analysis in each catchment area and explored the subject matter of interest to each participating Center, as well as the Alliance as a whole.

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2. Basinwide Survey

A comprehensive survey questionnaire was developed, and the survey was administered by telephone and online across the full Delaware River Basin, with oversamples in each of the catchment areas. The interviews were collected between February 21 and March 3, 2020, just prior to onset of the pandemic. The survey was reopened September 11-29, 2020 to bolster the sample size in each catchment area. Overall, 2,756 interviews were conducted, providing a very deep dataset. The questionnaire addressed a range of attitudes, perceptions, and activities related to water and the outdoors. Local questions of specific interest to the participating Centers were administered within each catchment area, as well.

3. Focus Groups

As the third step, a battery of 12 focus groups were conducted between October and December 2020, spread across the catchment areas and target audiences of interest. Ten focus groups were conducted in English, and two in Spanish. Ten of the groups focused exclusively on People of Color in the catchment areas. Given the limitations introduced by the pandemic, these focus groups were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform, a technique that ultimately lowered the barriers to participation by eliminating the need for transportation or childcare, and which opened a window into people's authentic lives and settings. Participants were grouped together for these two-hour facilitated sessions with others from their neighborhoods who had similar backgrounds, life experiences, and perspectives, which created a trusting environment and deep conversation. By delving deeply and patiently in these conversations, we reached the emotional and perceptive level that drives people's motivations and many of their decisions. The discussions were invaluable to exploring barriers to connecting with AWE Centers and the motivators that would encourage people to engage.

The results of this research are described in great detail in this report. This is a high-level summary of what we found.

Key Findings

Many people in the new audiences we interviewed do not think of themselves as environmentally motivated, but their values and priorities indicate that they are.

As a first step towards expanding their reach and becoming more inclusive, it was important for the AWE Centers to understand the context in which people are living, to make their outreach and programming relevant to people's real-life priorities. As this research unfolded during 2020, people's most pressing concerns shifted from availability of healthcare and the cost of living to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice. Through it all, people said they found great value in being outdoors. Though profound concern about COVID-19 often kept them *indoors*, people recognized the emotional benefits they gained from being outside. Especially in the most urban neighborhoods in this study, people wanted to find a way to connect with nature and were excited to find out they could often do that close to where they live.

Most people across the Basin described their own environmental sensitivity as average – hovering around a “3” on a 5-point scale. Among many of the People of Color in this study, particularly in more urbanized areas, environmentalism typically brings to mind someone “other” – usually described as Caucasian, affluent, highly educated and focused, overly observant and sometimes even judgmental. Notably, study participants said, their imagined environmentalist had difficulty relating to and

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communicating with normal people like them. While not universal, this disconnect was so common that it illuminated a key barrier to attracting new constituents to an environmental education center.

Despite this disconnect, in a variety of ways people expressed their own concern and love for the natural environment. Large majorities of the People of Color in this study, as well as some of the Caucasians who gave themselves low environmental scores, said it was important to them to be outside experiencing nature, said that being outdoors makes them feel happier, said they care about local waterways, and said they were more likely to vote for a candidate for public office who makes it a priority to fix water pollution. In fact, in the most urban neighborhoods of the catchment areas, numbers for those basic indicators of environmental concern trended much *higher* than the Basinwide average.

That disconnect from traditional environmentalism leads to one of the most important findings in this study. Most new constituents we interviewed are not looking at AWE Centers as a place for environmental education, but rather as an activity center. And they want to *feel and experience* something when they are there. *What* they want to feel is a connection to wildlife, the water, and nature.

When shown or told the types of programs and activities that AWE Centers offer, survey and focus group participants were often excited. The specifics varied by catchment area: people might just want to have access to trails where they can walk in nature, or they may respond to active pursuits like kayaking, or they may want a guided bird or tree identification walk, or they might have responded to free recreational activities that include the whole family.

Regardless of those specifics, we found the new audiences we interviewed to emphasize several key things consistently:

1. New audiences are looking for an *activity* first and foremost: Though some were looking for educational content, most people saw their engagement with an AWE Center as mainly an activity, a “thing to do,” like going to a playground or the movies. That meant they wanted to find information about activities quickly on the Centers’ websites and know the cost, time, and location right away, with as few clicks as possible.
2. New audiences want to share that experience with friends and loved ones: Though the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic overhung these discussions and made many people felt nervous about the health risks associated with coming out to a Center, when they could look past that they made clear that they wanted to share the experience with other people. They wanted to walk in nature with a friend. They wanted to paddle with a date. They wanted to make arts and crafts with their children (not just drop them off for a program). And they wanted to meet like-minded people.
3. New audiences want to imagine how it would feel to be there: Centers that could help people imagine what the activity would be like, and how it would *feel*, were the most successful at drawing them in and making them *want* to visit. People responded to images of *people* who were encountering wildlife or interacting with nature, and most of all having fun. They wanted to know what *they* would experience if they visited. Seeing images of people who looked like them and were their age made them much more likely to connect.

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Beyond the typical barriers to spending time in nature – lack of time, health limitations, and inhospitable weather – the new audiences in this study raised a specific and important additional set of concerns. These concerns centered on insensitivity and discrimination in ways large and small, bringing into focus a specific priority for Centers as they seek to engage new constituents.

At first blush, most participants said they would feel welcome at a nature center. But deeper focus group conversation revealed a series of concerns and disconnects. People looked at Centers' websites and Facebook pages and sometimes noted a lack of People of Color, or a lack of People of Color in teaching or leadership roles, or just a lack of people their age. People saw cultural content that they felt was clearly aimed at an audience of European heritage and wanted to see more content that was affirming of *their* heritage. It was striking how often AWE Centers projected images out into the community that focus group participants felt did not reflect them, or many other residents in their communities.

In some catchment areas, people expressed raw emotion about the more overt discrimination they experienced. Their experiences ranged from micro-aggressions – such as subtle looks that African-Americans might get when they are in places where people of another background do not expect to see them – to much more serious concerns. Gentrification pressure and anxiety ran high in some neighborhoods, causing long-time residents to feel that their own public spaces did not belong to them, or were only temporarily theirs until wealthier people pushed them out. At times, this anxiety lapsed into anger when people found out about the many activities of a nearby AWE Center, and they wondered why they had never been told about it.

We heard that the Centers need to respond to these pressures by extending a strong and explicit sense of welcome. Centers can begin by adjusting what is visible: imagery on their websites or public art at their properties. They can consider the mix of their programming to ensure that it matches the needs and tastes of nearby residents. They can adjust the composition of their own staffing and the key volunteers who will be in direct touch with the community, ensuring that they move toward reflecting the characteristics of the communities they are trying to engage. And, focus group participants said, the Centers can embark on the more long-term project of creatively seeking to engage the teachers, coaches, pastors, and other influential people who are the organic role models in these neighborhoods.

Water pollution is a serious concern among most people in the new audiences we interviewed. Confidence in the health of local waters is low, and many people feel personally impacted by water pollution. But optimism that the waters can be cleaned up is high. It is that combination of threat and optimism that offers potential to engage these new audiences in personal stewardship.

The perception of water quality in local rivers and streams is quite poor. On average, residents grade the health of the Delaware River as a C-minus on the traditional A to F scale, and the Schuylkill River fares even worse. What is more, only one resident in five sees the health of local waters as improving. More than half of residents said that water pollution “affects me personally,” and that number is higher in some catchment areas. These perceptions hamper the ability to engage people with local waters, because many people think it is unpleasant or unhealthy.

Confidence in the safety of tap water is low, but that does not translate into a desire to steward natural resources. People generally do not know, and typically have seldom thought about, the source of their drinking water. And they are often drinking bottled or filtered water anyway to alleviate their concerns

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about what comes out of the tap. Though a worthy initiative, improving knowledge about sources and protection of drinking water is not a key to building greater concern for the natural environment.

If that were not difficult enough, only about one in four people across the Basin agree with the statement, “My actions contribute to water pollution where I live.” About half of residents outright disagree that they are contributing to the problem, with the remainder unsure of their impact. When asked directly about the sources of pollution in the waters, they almost always focused on visible contaminants like floating trash or discoloration of the water.

Less-engaged audiences like the ones we interviewed for this project need to know about the progress in improving water quality, including restoration projects, community actions, legislative initiatives, and actual improvement in water quality readings – as a key to changing the narrative and encouraging people to interact more with the water.

But there is good news. Preventing pollution in local rivers and streams is a high personal priority for residents of the Delaware Basin, with over half saying it is an above-average or top priority for them personally. Optimism is extremely high that water pollution can be tackled, with three-quarters saying the pollution can be cleaned up. And most people we interviewed want to be engaged in helping to clean up, in their personal lives or through collective action. This optimism and willingness to take action offers promise for future efforts to foster personal stewardship and volunteerism.

For now, people’s optimism outstrips their knowledge of actions they can take to help, and the number who said they would know how to volunteer is even lower. Only about one in three across the catchment areas recognized the name of their local Center when it was mentioned to them. Groundwork needs to be done to raise the profile of AWE Centers who want to engage new audiences.

The new audiences that we interviewed in the focus groups are eager to connect with their local AWE Centers. Our recommendations, which are detailed at the end of this report, break down into several broad themes.

This project has focused on non-traditional audiences – new audiences – for outreach and engagement by the AWE Centers. The specific audience focus was determined by the demographics of each catchment area, and through discussion with the local Centers to determine which audience segments were a priority for them. That process resulted in a great deal of focus on Communities of Color, and on individuals who are not actively connecting with environmental education centers.

As a result of this work, our recommendations for the Centers fall into five major categories, which are discussed in detail at the end of the main body of this report and in the individual catchment area chapters.

1. Think Like an Activity Center, Not an Environmental Education Center: Browsing the Centers’ websites and social media feeds, focus group participants made clear they were looking for things to do. They wanted activities to do with their kids or partners, or even alone. They might weigh a Saturday spent at an AWE Center against other structured activities they might find (in non-COVID times) at a recreation center, a sports field, their church, or simply a trip to a neighborhood playground. Their first impulse was not necessarily to come and learn about the environment. They were looking for something *to do*. They often want to *be* in nature, but are not always seeking to be educated about it.

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The research left us with the impression that once that relationship was started informally, the Centers could open up a deeper, more meaningful conversation with these new constituents over time.

2. Give People a Quick Take on Cost and Timing of Activities: A trip to the Center's website is a practical exercise for most people we interviewed. Think of their visit to the website as transactional. In much the same way they would look for movie or concert tickets, they were looking on the Center's website for a quick take on the questions of when, where, and how much does it cost to participate in your activities. Often, Centers buried this information in calendars of events that were text-heavy or worse, requiring multiple clicks to navigate to different places on the website for individual pieces of information people wanted. Centers need to make the search for this kind of practical information front and center, hopefully a one-click experience.

3. Focus on People: These non-traditional audiences want to see images of *people* interacting with nature. They want to see people having fun. They want to know it will be a good experience visiting, based on seeing the experience of other people. In fact, that desire is probably not limited to the non-traditional audiences interviewed in this project, but is likely a principle that would guide outreach to nearly all audiences. We note that most Centers' Facebook feeds are doing a much better job of this than their websites, and some effort should be put into pulling those two platforms together so that the website has the same energy and dynamism as the Center's Facebook presence.

4. Reflect the Diversity of the Community: Perhaps this observation should go without saying. Reflecting diversity in Centers' outreach is vital. But some of the websites and Facebook feeds we visited were lacking in diversity. It is critically important that the people we are trying to reach see themselves reflected in the Centers' outreach. That is a signal to them that they will be welcome here, that people like them belong here. More importantly, it is vital that staff and key volunteers also reflect the diversity of the community. Rightfully so, people want some of the staff and volunteers who help interpret their experience to look like them, and to relate to their perspective and life experience. This concept of diversity is not just one of race and ethnicity, people said, but also extends to seeing people close to their own age.

5. Group Activities are the Most Rewarding for New Audiences: People reacted most warmly to activities like guided birding walks, paddles or bike rides where the equipment was provided, crafts they could do with their kids, and activities involving their dogs. Food is a big draw, people said. Make it fun. Make it free or low-cost. Allow them to share the experience with others.

In the end, we are not recommending that AWE Centers abandon their traditional programs. This research does not say that all of the people we interviewed will shy away from a more traditional environmental education program. Some will be interested in that. There is significant interest among new audiences in afterschool programs and summer camps, nature preschool and guided nature walks. And of course the Centers need to remain responsive to their long-time core constituents who value those programs. But if this research project is about attracting new audiences and opening a conversation with them, they have told us how to get things started. Once people have connected with the Center, there is an opportunity to pull them into the full array of environmental education programs and experiences.

It has been a privilege conducting this research for the Alliance for Watershed Education and its members. Our full report follows.

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DETAILED FINDINGS

The work of AWE’s Centers fits into a broader context of communities and people’s daily lives.

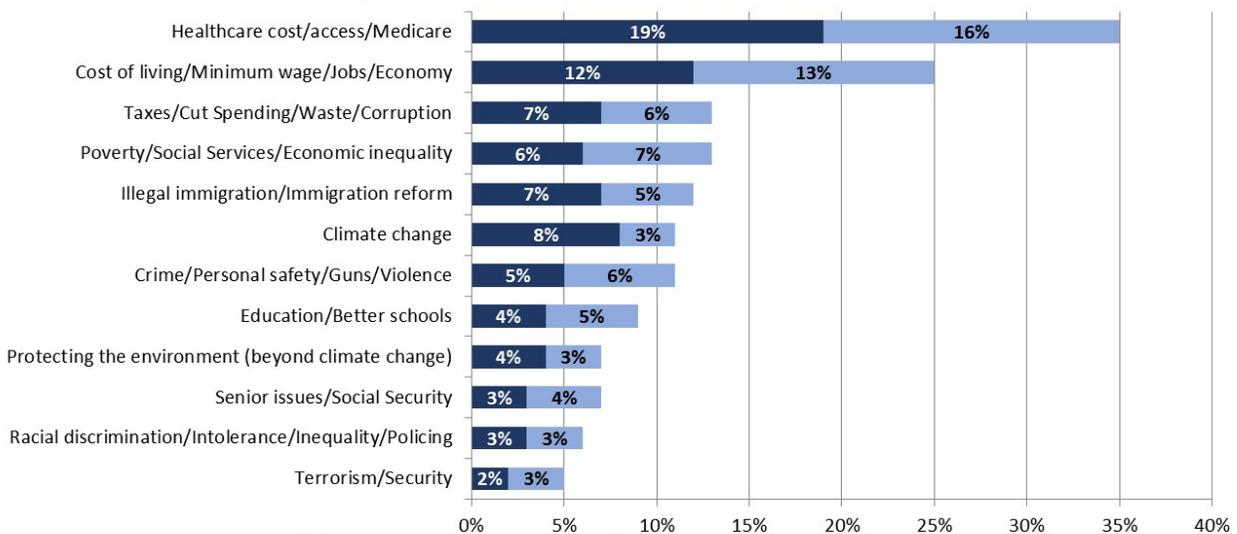
This representative survey of residents across the Delaware River Basin gives context to the issues and challenges that are on people’s minds, as member Centers of the Alliance for Watershed Education (AWE) seek to reach out to new audiences. It is always important for any organization engaged in public outreach and engagement to be focused on the daily context in which people are living, in order to make that outreach relevant and anchored their reality.

Survey respondents were asked for the top two issues or challenges that they would most like to see leaders do something about. The question was open-ended. Responses were captured verbatim and later categorized, as illustrated in the chart below.

Availability and access to healthcare was the number one issue or challenge for residents across the Basin, mentioned by over a third (35%) as their leading or second-most important concern. The cost of living, difficulties making ends meet, and the need for higher wages and better jobs was second at 24%. These two concerns eclipsed all others, Basinwide. (Note that numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.)

Most Important Issue or Challenge

1st and 2nd Issue Mentioned, Top 12 Issues



Think for a moment about the priorities that are most important to you.
Just based on your own opinion, what is the most important issue or challenge that you would most like to see our leaders do something about? ...And what is the second most important?

In the second tier were clustered five additional concerns, each garnering between 11 and 13%:

- Concern about the level of taxation, and the perception waste and corruption in government (13%)
- Poverty and the imperative to address economic inequities and help people who are in need (12%)
- Comments related to immigration, whether focused on border security and illegal immigration, or on the need for comprehensive immigration reform and a pathway to citizenship (12%)
- Climate change (11%)
- Crime, personal safety, availability of guns, and violence (11%)

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It is noteworthy that climate change (11%) and other environmental concerns (7%) ranked so high on this list of hot buttons, indicating that there is a large constituency of people across the Delaware Basin who are motivated by those issues.

The disruption of the pandemic and the death of George Floyd have introduced new priorities.

One should remember that the vast majority of survey responses were collected in February 2020, immediately prior to the onset of the pandemic, and prior to the outpouring of protest in the wake of the killing of George Floyd in May. For comparison, when the survey was reopened in September, COVID-19 jumped from 1% of responses in February to 30% in September, leading the list. Racial discrimination and intolerance jumped from 5% to 28%, and moved into second place. Here is how the percentage for the top seven challenges mentioned above, plus COVID-19 and racial justice, in February and September.

Most Important Issue or Challenge
1st and 2nd Issue Mentioned

	February 2020	September 2020
Healthcare cost/access/Medicare	36% (1 st)	22% (3 rd)
Cost of living/Minimum wage/Jobs/Economy	18% (2 nd)	21% (4 th)
Taxes/Cut Spending/Waste/Corruption	13% (3 rd)	5% (10 th)
Poverty/Social Services/Economic inequality	11%	11%
Illegal immigration/Immigration reform	12%	4%
Climate change	11%	9%
Crime/Personal safety/Guns/Violence	11%	9%
Racial discrimination/Intolerance/Policing	5% (13 th)	28% (2 nd)
COVID-19	1% (25 th)	30% (1 st)

In the catchment areas near the pilot Centers that were the focus of this study, some of these issues took on greater importance. Focus group discussion lends depth and color to people’s observations.

For many of the people we interviewed, the realities of their lives included personal or financial stress, health worries, or disappointment in the conditions of their communities, often vividly described. Here, a focus group participant described her exasperation with what she said were dirty and unacceptable conditions in her neighborhood in Wilmington:

“I don't know. Like the water by my house, it's dirty. Wilmington ain't clean at all. Well, because I live in the hood. But Wilmington's not clean. It's dirty. For instance, trash is supposed to be picked up yesterday. They did not pick up the trash at all on the East side. They didn't pick up the trash 'til later on today around give or take 9, 10:00. When they usually pick it up like 7:00 in the morning, on a Monday. And they didn't come pick up the trash. That's disgusting because all you smelt yesterday was trash.” – Wilmington Participant

A number of Trenton focus group participants expressed a wistful sense that the community of Trenton has gone downhill, not offering many interesting things to do, in contrast with years past.

“... don't get me started talking about Trenton. I've been here all my life. I don't like where I live. I don't like Trenton per se. There have been many attempts to bring Trenton back, because at one

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time it was a nice place. There were always places to go, things to do, different events and things. People would come to Trenton. Now, no one comes to Trenton.” – Trenton Participant

Looking at images on screen of The Watershed Institute and Tulpehaking Nature Center, a Latino focus group participant in Trenton could not believe that such beautiful places existed there, giving him hope. Participants in Camden and Wilmington offered very similar comments.

“Well, for me, for example, I am really surprised, because I didn't know that here in Trenton, we have places like this. They are really beautiful. Because a lot of people talk about Trenton, ‘I don't go to Trenton because it's really ugly.’ They think it's a bad place. The reality is that I think we have to explore.” – Latinx Trenton Participant

Many participants in the Southwest Philadelphia focus groups were unsettled by the simultaneous pressures of violence on the streets of their neighborhoods, and palpable gentrification pressure. The push towards gentrification that so many people are feeling there makes them visibly frustrated, impatient, and sometimes even angry. The Southwest Philadelphia groups were animated, as people wondered how best to respond to these pressures. Here is an exchange between two participants:

*“Some people don't want trees planted it because they think it will usher in gentrification.”
“Yes. I agree for sure. I think it's a two-way street and people know it too, that they don't want to invite white people to the neighborhoods. But it's a double-edged sword because People of Color deserve trees and they deserve to have nice neighborhoods and they should be able to do that without being afraid that someone else is going to come and take over because now that they have something nice.” – Southwest Philadelphia Participants*

In the midst of these pressures, one of the focus group participants described an excursion to the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum, and the sense of peace and relaxation she found there:

*“We went over, a friend of mine, me and him went to Tinicum and we went over by the river. It was sunny out, you see people riding their bikes and people in the water with their boots. It was just so relaxing, and watching the seagulls flying in the air. It was just really nice and it was relaxing and I missed it. I really missed it, you know? We had our mask on and everything, but just sitting there on the benches and watching the people and just enjoying the atmosphere. It was relaxing. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to just sit there and just enjoy that day.”
– Southwest Philadelphia Participant*

There is great potential to make a beneficial and lasting connection between the people interviewed for this study and the AWE Centers located near them. That is the subject of this report.

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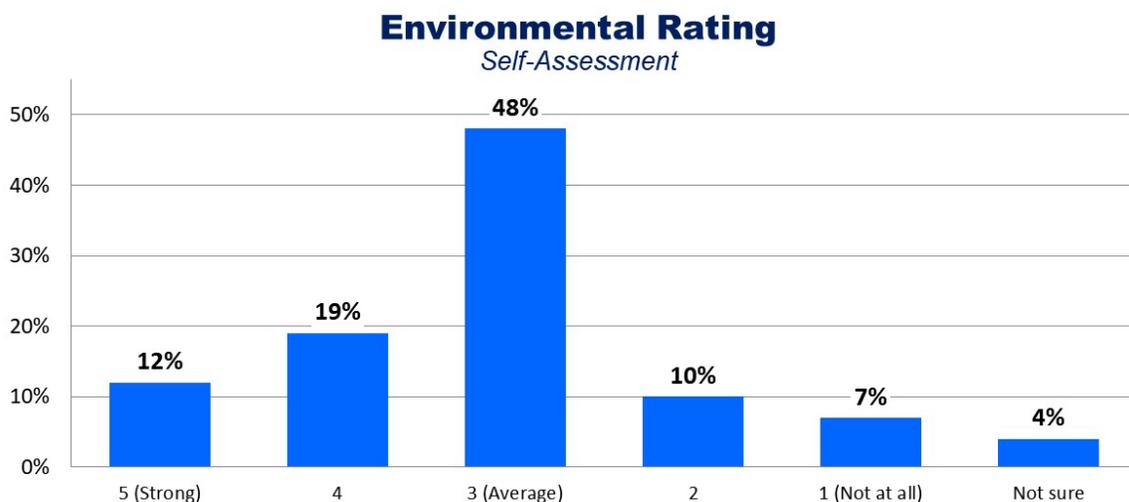
People's Own Sense of Environmentalism

Summary Finding: Most people in the Basin described their own environmental sensitivity as about average. But among many People of Color in this study, particularly in more urbanized areas, environmentalism typically brings to mind someone “other” – usually Caucasian, highly educated and focused, either buttoned down or disheveled. Notably, study participants said, the environmentalist has difficulty relating to and communicating with normal people like them.

Survey respondents were asked to rate their own sense of environmentalism on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being high and 1 low. In urbanized parts of the Basin, people were asked to give themselves a 5 if “you consider yourself to be a strong environmentalist, 3 is average, and 1 is not an environmentalist at all.” In more rural parts of the Basin, the word “conservationist” was used instead.

Environmental self-ratings form almost a bell curve, with the largest number of people, nearly half, putting themselves in the middle of the scale. There is a slight bulge on the left side of this curve, describing higher environmental sensitivity among the 30% who gave themselves a 4 or 5. (Note that numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.) About one in six (17%) rated themselves low on the scale, assigning themselves a 1 or 2.

The overall average score on this 5-point scale across the Basin is 3.18.



On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means you consider yourself to be a strong (segment based on geography): [environmentalist/conservationist], 3 is average, and 1 is not [an environmentalist/a conservationist] at all, where would you put yourself?

This self-assessment varies greatly among population subgroups:

- African-American and Latinx residents are much less likely than others to think of themselves as environmentalists or conservationists. Only 23% of African-American and 24% of Latinx residents gave themselves a 4 or 5 on this scale, compared to 33% of Whites and 42% of Asian residents.
- The number who rated themselves a 4 or 5 jumped up to 43% among people with post-graduate education, while it hovered near 30% for everyone else.
- Over half (53%) of agricultural families gave themselves a 4 or 5 on this scale.

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Among the seven catchment areas, Wilmington stood out as giving itself the lowest environmental ratings, with only 20% rating their own environmentalism as a 4 or 5, while 30% rated it a 1 or 2. This catchment area was concentrated near Wilmington's urban core, in low-income neighborhoods that are predominantly African-American. In focus group discussion, the moderator tossed out the question, if an environmentalist walked into the room, how would you describe them? This exchange gives the flavor of that discussion:

(Moderator): "What do they look like, what did your environmentalist in your head look like?"

(Participant): "Well, they're not Black. Is that good enough?" (Moderator): "That's fine with me.

You could be more explicit if you like." (Participant): "Well, I've never seen a Black environmentalist." – Wilmington Participant

People often see an environmentalist as someone they cannot easily relate to.

Many people's initial thought was that an environmentalist would be Caucasian. But whether Caucasian or of any race or ethnicity, what people tended to describe was someone other than themselves. As described in the focus groups, the persona of an environmentalist is typically highly educated, observant to the point of making people nervous, and often having difficulty communicating their ideas in ways that average people can understand. Here are typical comments:

"I mean, they can be any ethnicity, but unfortunately, I tend to see a lot of Caucasians as people who deal with environmental stuff, so I would have to say probably Caucasian, especially if they're from a government agency." – Camden Participant

"I see like kind of the hippie thing, people tying themselves to a tree." – Berks County Participant

*"They would have a notepad to write down the stuff that they observe in the environment."
– Wilmington Participant*

*"The first thing that popped into my head was that they would probably be wearing a suit, him or her. I don't know why, probably glasses as well. Probably a notebook or a binder type thing."
– Southwest Philadelphia Participant*

*"Suits. Business suits and ties. Shoes, nice expensive shoes. ...Credit cards in his wallet, no cash."
– Camden Participant*

"A man in his thirties with a cap on and like a uniform type, like the khaki-type uniform or like a military-type of uniform and...he's just like doing the right exact thing. ...Like a police officer of the land." – Stroudsburg-area Participant

"I feel judged sometimes in their presence." – Southwest Philadelphia Participant

The descriptions were often benevolent, with people ascribing good motives to the environmentalist. They just had trouble relating to them.

"A middle-aged woman, late forties, somebody that's not really too concerned with her appearance other than like slacks and a shirt. Somebody that gardens, somebody that walks around picking up trash, somebody that has extra water in their car for somebody that may need it. Somebody that plants." – Stroudsburg-area Participant

"Sandals, shaggy hair."

"A man with a white coat and glasses with a Petri glass."

"And a smile. A serene demeanor."

"Probably riding a bicycle, Teva style sandals."

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– Roxborough Participants

“When I think of an environmentalist, I think of someone who's very concerned about the environment and I think we should all be. But we can't do that at the expense of people's lives. We have to keep everything in a balance.” – Berks County Participant

“...environmentalists take it to a different extremity where...it's their duty. It's their responsibility. It's more of a job.” – Stroudsburg-area Participant

Later in the discussion, in an awakening, a young Latino participant realized that in fact, maybe “environmentalist” describes him, even though he believes there is a stigma associated with the word.

*“Honestly, after we just talked about it, I was getting to that point where I was like, wow, I do pick up a lot of trash. I do care a lot about the environment. I was like, maybe am an environmentalist. I never looked at myself like that because of all the stigmas that people have.”
– Stroudsburg-area Participant*

Ultimately, focus group participants described environmentalists in one of two camps:

- 1. The predominant view was that environmentalists were the “other,”** mostly White, and often described as “wearing a lab coat” or a “beekeeper suit” and often carrying a clipboard or petri dishes, and asking annoying or judgmental questions. People in this camp definitely felt that environmentalists had a hard time relating to ordinary people. Here is how one focus group participant described it, based on what she said was some experience watching environmental advocates try to communicate with the local community.

*“I'd say with their issue, ...they have a hard time translating some of the things into...making it more accessible for everyday people. Like the impact of pollution on Communities of Color.”
– Southwest Philadelphia Participant*

That participant went on to explain the importance of relating environmental priorities to the lives of everyday people.

*“So it's just really relating it to people's lives, and because the people who are doing the work don't match the people who they're trying to share the message with, there's a disconnect. ...(I)f you're worried about how you're going to eat, for you to think about, well, you shouldn't be throwing water bottles on the ground because they go into the water table and then there's pollution, you're, ‘What? That doesn't impact me.’ But it really does. So you have to make it real to people. It's one thing in theory and then another thing to make it real.”
– Southwest Philadelphia Participant*

- 2. The other camp included people who saw *themselves* as environmentally minded.** They seldom described themselves as an “environmentalist,” because that person, in their estimation, was always a step ahead of them and trying a little harder. But they felt their own intentions were good, and that there was no reason why an environmentalist could not be a Person of Color, a normal, mainstream person, just like them. Even so, in their descriptions there remained an element of the “other.”

“He's a very dark-skinned gentleman, he's got dreads, glasses round, maybe a beard and goatee, a buttoned-down shirt and some khakis...a book bag...(with) his clipboard and all of his other tools of the trade” – Trenton Participant

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“He would also have some type of notebook because he's going to take notes he's going to inquire to us. I would say he is a little older because environmentalists I always think have studied.” – Camden Participant

The Trenton participant quoted above went on to say that he would rather think of himself as an “enthusiast” for nature, rather than an “environmentalist,” because “I don't have the education to be an environmentalist.” Many people offered expressions like this. They want to feel connected to nature, but they feel somewhat disconnected from people who are experts about the environment, and do not always feel comfortable with them.

Asked what they would call themselves instead to describe their feelings about nature, people often offered action words, suggesting they wanted to get out there and experience nature:

*Adventurist
Outdoorsman
Naturalist
“Earthkeeper”
Enthusiast*

Seeing environmentalists as ultra-focused, serious, academic, perhaps overly inquisitive, focus group participants also wanted to describe their own sensitivity towards the natural world in a stepped-down way, using words like these to describe themselves:

*Nature conscious
Environmentally aware
Environmentally sensitive
Careful
Helpful
A person who cares
Courteous*

Role models are vital.

How does one help people, like the ones interviewed in this study, feel more connected to environmental priorities and actions? In various ways, study participants said people need to see themselves reflected. They need to see and come into contact with people who look like them and share their life experience, and who lift up environmental concerns as a personal priority. As one focus group participant pointed out, it all starts with role models:

(Participant): “A lot comes from your culture and your upbringing. If you don't have that influential matter, environment this and environment that, you're not going to have African-Americans in that. I think for me being African-American, you have to have some type of... Someone or something has to...”

(Moderator): “A role model in your family?”

(Participant): “Yes. And sometimes they don't even have to be in your family, it can be someone on the outside that's a role model. But if you don't have that...”

(Moderator): Like who?

(Participant): “For instance, a teacher. So like if you're in school and the teachers are talking and they don't talk about the environment as much, you're not going to think about it.”

– Wilmington Participant

2020

Implication: Centers participating in this research project may view the observation about role models as long-term or too abstract. After all, the job of creating and cultivating role models who are organic to a neighborhood may be beyond the reach of a Center. But Centers can begin by adjusting the composition of their own staffing and the key volunteers who will be in direct touch with the community, ensuring that they move toward reflecting the characteristics of the communities they are trying to engage. Programs can creatively seek to engage teachers, coaches, pastors, and other key influential people, building a relationship over time.

Making the Priority of Environmental Sustainability More Accessible to People

This discussion translates, as well, into an imperative to make it more accessible for low-income people and People of Color to live out their environmental aspirations. People may want to live a more sustainable life, but that may be difficult for them. A Philadelphia focus group participant pointed out that Communities of Color can feel disconnected from environmentalism because the sustainable choice is not always the affordable choice:

"I also think that as Communities of Color, there's an element of poverty and access. So I feel even if we care about the environment, we can't always afford to make the sustainable choice because we don't have the money to buy organic, we don't have the money to buy things that aren't wrapped in a Styrofoam or something... I feel part of reaching Communities of Color is making sustainable choices affordable so that... You're not going to fix poverty. Poverty is a huge thing. So you can either fix poverty or just make sustainable choices more affordable so that people without a lot of resources can afford...to buy the thing that doesn't harm the environment." – Southwest Philadelphia Participant

With her comment, this participant issued a challenge to environmental advocates to find ways to lower the bar for living a sustainable life, so that sustainability becomes accessible to people with limited resources. Programs and offerings must creatively engage people, and give them an easier on ramp. Just getting people to visit the Center is a good place to start, or bringing programs to them. More on that will be discussed later.

Despite any disconnect they may feel, people have a strong underlying connection to environmental priorities.

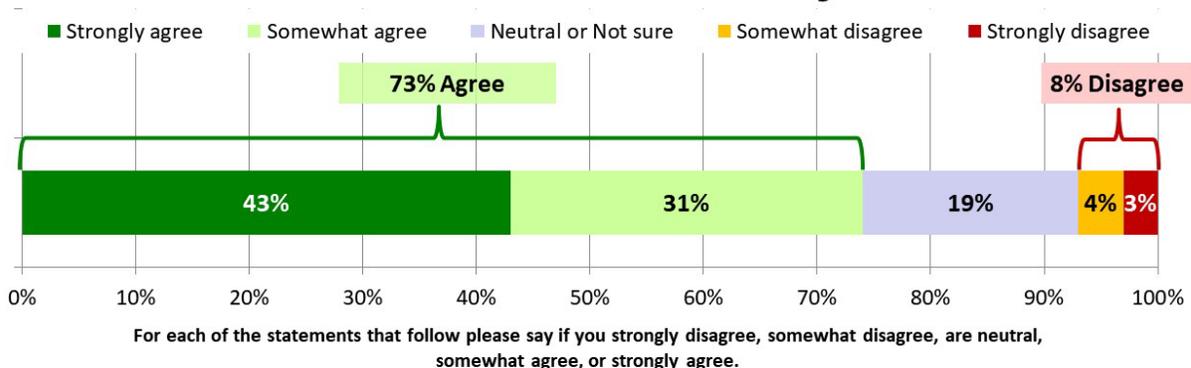
No matter how connected to or disconnected from environmentalism study participants felt, they expressed strong concern for the natural environment in other ways. Here are two specific examples drawn from the Basinwide survey.

(continued, next page)

2020

A large majority of residents agree with the statement, “I care about local waterways.” Almost three-quarters (73%) agree, and 43% agree *strongly*.

I care about local waterways.

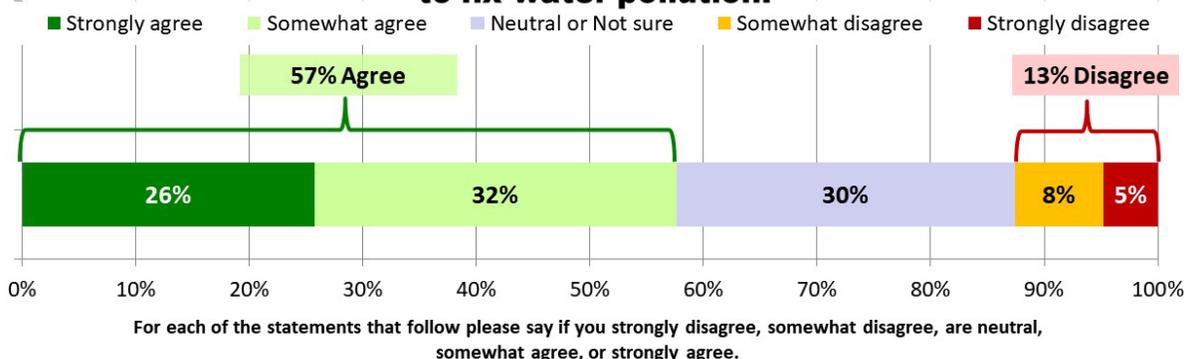


Across population subgroups, large majorities said they care about local waterways, almost no matter where you looked.

- Agreement is strong among African-American residents of the watershed (64%) and among Asian residents (68%), though somewhat lower among Latinx residents (50%).
- Across the seven catchment areas, the number who said they care about local waterways ranged from 67% in Camden and 69% in Southwest Philadelphia to 80% in Wilmington and 82% in Roxborough/Manayunk.

Residents across the Basin also indicated that water pollution is a voting issue for them. A 57% majority said, “I am more likely to vote for a candidate who makes it a priority to fix water pollution.” One-quarter (26%) strongly agree and 32% somewhat agree that environmental concerns would influence their vote. (Numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.)

I am more likely to vote for a candidate who makes it a priority to fix water pollution.



These population subgroups are of note:

- In some of the most urban neighborhoods in this study, agreement with this statement rose into the 70s (72% in Wilmington, 71% in Trenton).

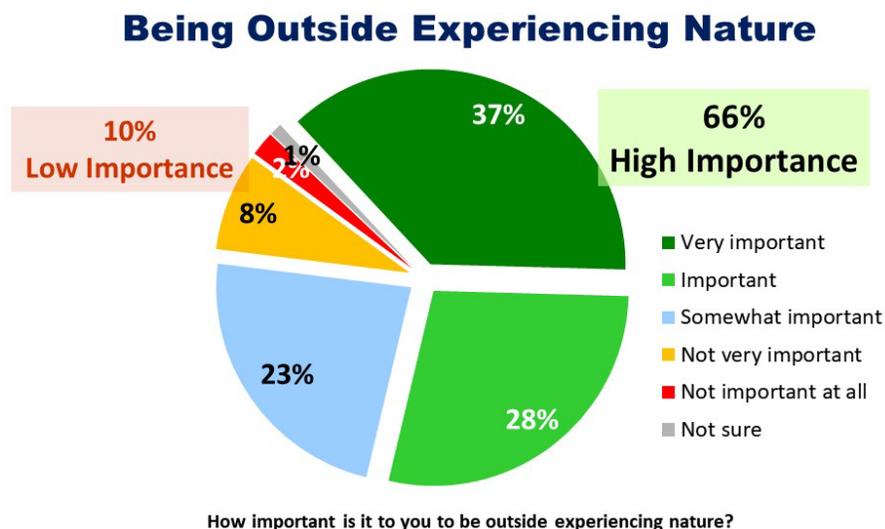
2020

- African-American residents (58%) and Whites (59%) are on par, while Latinx residents (46%) are somewhat less likely to be motivated by water pollution. Asian residents (66%) are somewhat more likely than others to agree.
- The highest frequency voters are more likely to view water pollution as a priority. Among these voters, agreement rises to 65%.

The Importance of Being Outdoors

Summary Finding: Despite being non-traditional audiences for many of the AWE Centers, people participating in this study strongly affirmed that they want to be outdoors connecting with nature. A leading benefit, they said, is improvement in their emotional well-being.

Most people in this study *want* to be outdoors. Two-thirds (66%) of people responding to the survey said it is important or *very* important to “be outside experiencing nature.” Only 10% of the survey sample said it is not very important to them, or not important at all. About one-quarter (23%) put themselves in the middle of the scale at “somewhat important.”



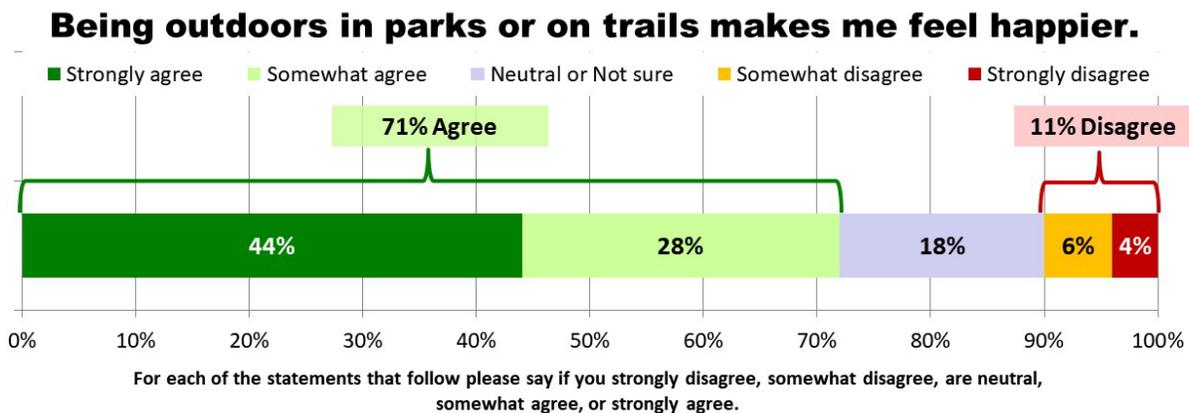
Being outside experiencing nature is important to people of all backgrounds.

- Sixty percent of African-Americans, 61% of Latinx residents, 61% of Asians, and 69% of Whites said it is important or very important to be outside experiencing nature.
- The number who said it is important or very important never dipped below 66% in any of the catchment areas.
- Importance of being outdoors is also consistent across age groups and education levels, with a slight bump up to 74% in the 35 to 44 age bracket, and 71% among the most educated.

People recognize an emotional benefit from being outdoors.

Why do people feel it is important to be outside? In one of the most striking findings in the survey, residents overwhelmingly agreed with the statement, “Being outdoors in parks or on trails makes me feel happier.” Seventy-one percent agreed with that statement, and 44% agreed strongly. People feel an emotional benefit from being outdoors.

2020



- Urban residents are equally or even more likely to agree with this statement (72%) compared to suburban (73%) or rural residents (69%).
- There are differences by race and ethnicity, however. White residents (77%) are most likely to agree with this statement, followed by Asians (64%), African-Americans (61%), and Latinx residents (54%). Nonetheless, all groups express an emotional benefit to being outdoors.

Focus group participants described this phenomenon. For some, it is profound, providing relief from stress or depression. Others simply describe feeling happy.

(Moderator): "When you've been inside for so long and you're outside in nature, what's the word that comes to mind?" (Participant): "Happiness, I guess. Like less stressful. You don't even think about stuff. Like when you take that first fresh breath of air, you don't even think about troubles and stuff like that. You just think like, 'Oh, I'm outside!'" – Camden Participant

"It makes me feel free." – Trenton Participant

"Sometimes I just go outside for a walk. Like, if I'm in the house and there's so much stress build up on me, I just go outside, take a walk." – Wilmington Participant

"And there is also an aspect of mental health, related to being in nature because it really helps me. I don't know what it is about being in nature that just changes my brain chemistry for the better. So sometimes I could be having a really bad day and just being in nature for a short period of time, watching a stream, hearing the water, can have a really good effect on me. I have depression. So that's very important for me." – Southwest Philadelphia Participant

There is also just a practical aspect to getting outdoors. Several parents and guardians of small children said they needed to be outdoors, just to have something to do. COVID presents a significant complication, however, as this grandmother explained:

"(Getting outdoors is) important for me because these kids are driving me crazy. I have custody of my granddaughter, so every day was kind of hard trying to find her something to do and her being in the house going stir crazy. It's really stressful, you know? Then I don't want to take her out because she's one of these little touchy-feely girls, and you know how you go shopping and she has to touch everything and you have to sanitize everything. So, it's real important for me. Like, I'm lost. It's really, really hard for me just to find her activities that I feel safe, that I know she won't bring anything home or catch anything. Every day is like, okay, well let me figure out

2020

*what I'm going to do tonight so we can have something to do tomorrow so you'll be busy to burn energy off, because she bounces off the walls.”
– Southwest Philadelphia Participant*

A Latino participant described an almost spiritual response to being outdoors, helping him feel grounded and connected.

“Going outside and really seeing nature and seeing the world for what it is, that's really important because it puts yourself on the ground and makes you grounded. It makes you know that you have a purpose, that you have a soul. And just seeing how beautiful the earth is and that we're all different human beings and that we need to do something to help ourselves essentially.” – Stroudsburg-area Participant

All of the participants in the Stroudsburg focus group had favorite trails and outdoor places where they liked to go to experience nature. Their experience was clearly very different from many of the urban residents we interviewed, who felt much more hemmed in, and sometimes not even aware of the opportunities near them to get outdoors and come into contact with nature. For another participant in the Stroudsburg group, being in the outdoors brought a sense of release, and an escape from the chaos of the world in 2020.

*“This year. I had to go outside because with all the negativity, with all the bad things on the news... And of course, it's on Facebook, it's everywhere. You can't escape it. So this year I had to find a way to create my own rainbow.”
– Stroudsburg-area Participant*

The survey documents what activities people are enjoying outdoors.

Many residents across the Delaware Basin are getting outdoors. The survey took a diagnostic of outdoor engagement across 12 activities, from camping to hunting, and from picnicking to birdwatching. The survey showed a strong level of engagement with a number of these activities.

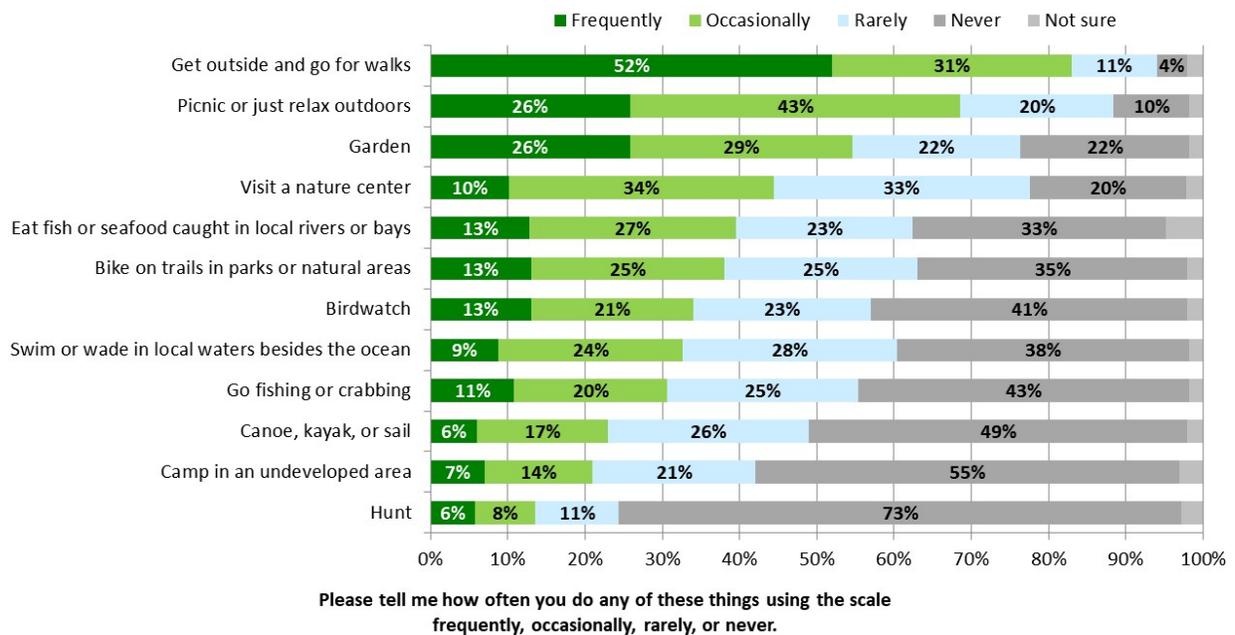
Respondents were asked to indicate their level of participation in each activity on the scale: “frequently, occasionally, rarely, or never.” This is a subjective scale, not counting the number of times someone had performed an activity, but rather measuring a sense of engagement with each activity. Though “frequently” for one person may be defined differently for one person vs. another, the point of this scale is to measure how connected people feel with each of these activities, and by extension the outdoors.

The chart below summarizes the responses. The most common activity is just going outside and going for walks. About half of the Basinwide survey sample (52%) said they do that frequently, and 31% go outside for walks occasionally.

Picnicking or just relaxing is the second most common activity, with about two-thirds doing that frequently or occasionally. Gardening follows next at 55%.

2020

Frequency of Outdoor Activities



Spending Time in the Outdoors: Barriers and Motivators

Summary Finding: People mentioned typical barriers like lack of time, inhospitable weather, and ailments. But many of the people participating in this study cited discrimination, both micro-aggressions and more overt acts, as a significant barrier to enjoying outdoor amenities. And the COVID-19 pandemic looms large over this conversation. Proactive efforts can overcome some of that, focused on activities that can be shared with people who are close to you.

Many people are spending time outdoors. But the size of the gray and light blue bars in the graphic above illustrates how many people across the Basin are not engaging in activities outside. It is important to know, what are the barriers for people to getting outdoors? What would motivate them to be more active outdoors?

The survey sample was randomly divided in half, and each half was asked one of these two open-ended questions:

“What has kept you from spending more time outdoors?”

“What would make you more interested in spending time outdoors?”

Responses were collected verbatim and have been categorized. In response to the first of these questions, three major barriers emerged:

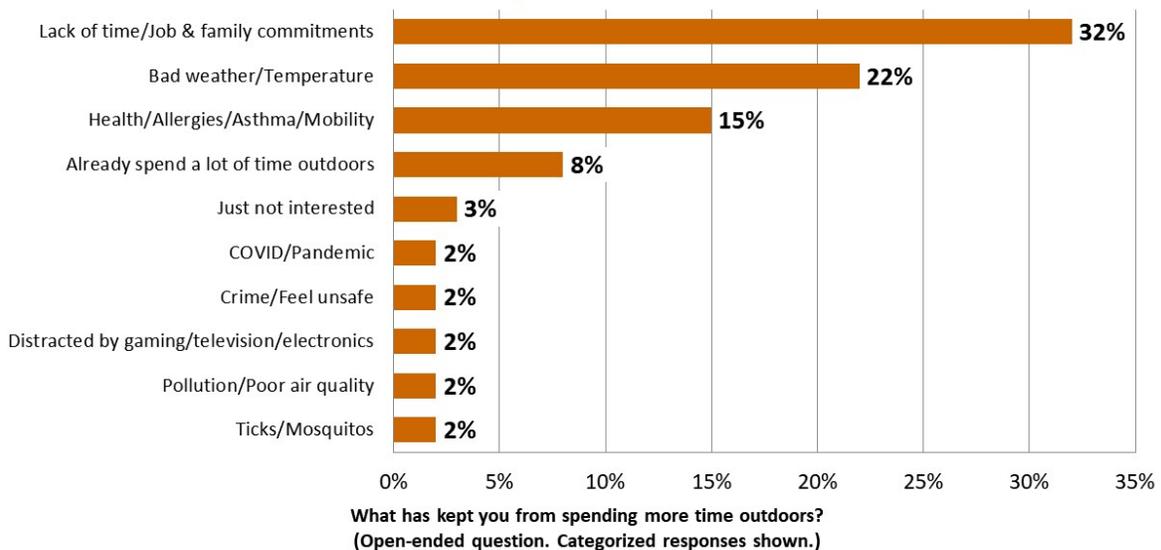
- The top response, mentioned by 32% of respondents, was a simple lack of time to be outdoors in the midst of a busy life. People mentioned their responsibilities to family, the demands of a job or school, and other daily commitments that they said made it difficult.
- Second, at 22%, was weather. People said inhospitable weather often kept them indoors.
- The third major concern, mentioned by 15%, were issues related to health, including allergies and other breathing problems, lack of mobility due to advanced age, and other health concerns.

2020

In addition, 8% said they already spend enough time, or a lot of time, outdoors, and 3% said they are just not interested. A variety of other factors registered in low single digits: lack of interest, concerns about coming not contact with COVID-19, worries about crime and personal safety, the distractions of digital devices and gaming, pollution, and worries about ticks and mosquitoes. Keep in mind that the vast majority of survey responses were collected before the onset of the pandemic in this region, which helps explain why COVID-19 ranked so low

Barriers to Spending More Time Outdoors

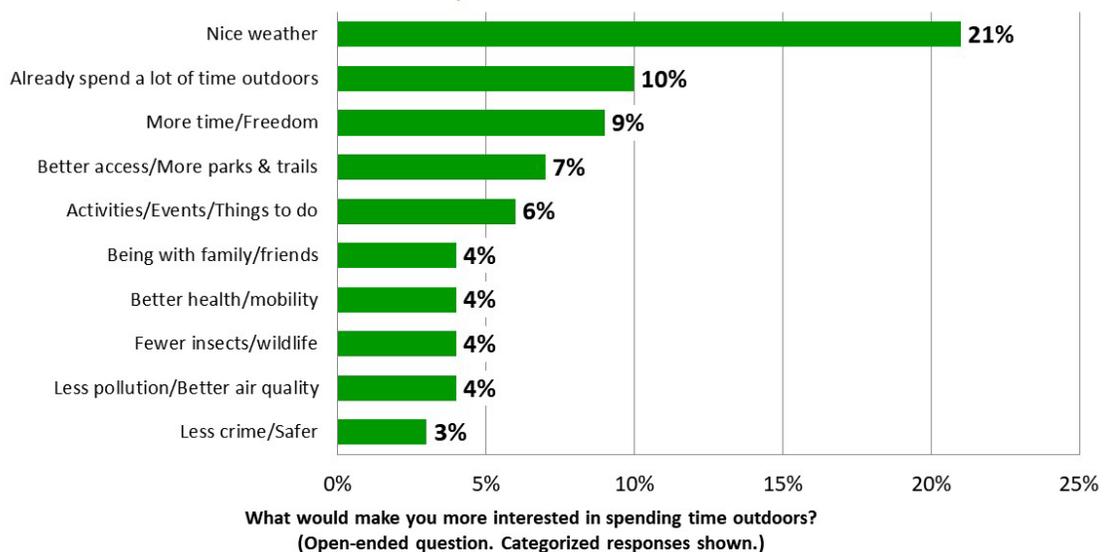
Top 10 Mentioned



The other half of the sample was asked a more forward-looking question about motivations, “What would make you more interested in spending time outdoors?”

Motivators to Spend More Time Outdoors

Top 10 Mentioned



2020

As in the barriers question, nice weather (21%) and finding more time in the day (9%) emerged in the top tier, as well as 10% who said they already spend a significant amount of time outdoors. This more proactive formulation of the question, though, brought different issues to light. Some of these give clues to amenities that would draw people out.

- Seven percent of survey respondents said they would spend more time outdoors if they had better access to parks and trails, if they were closer, or if there were more of them.
- Six percent volunteered that they would spend more time outdoors if there were more activities, events, and things to do outside.
- Four percent said they would spend more time outside in connection with family and friends, in other words, being outside would be more appealing if it involved being with people.

Beyond those big ideas, people mentioned their health, insects, pollution, crime, and other issues as illustrated above.

Micro-aggressions in outdoor spaces is a barrier unique to People of Color.

As participants in a Wilmington focus group looked at images of the Brandywine Valley on the First State website, they voiced the idea that they could not believe such a beautiful river valley was located so close to the neighborhoods they know in Wilmington. They had never seen this part of the Brandywine before. As the group scrolled through the website seeing images of nature and historic sites, several people expressed a desire to visit.

The sites they were viewing recognized the history of European settlers, and the moderator explored participants' feelings of welcome there.

(Moderator): Do you feel as non-white people, welcome to this place?

(Participant): No, I think people stare at you...making people uncomfortable.

(Moderator): You think people would stare at you?

(Participant): They want to know, why are you there?

(Moderator): Even though you're interested in going and you're there just like everybody else, yes? So you'd be afraid to go?

(Participant): I wouldn't be afraid, but when you go places that I guess normal African-Americans, don't go, people stare at you. They look at you, you think they're not looking at you, might try to tell you things like, 'Oh no, it's okay', but you'll see the stares.

(Moderator): How could a place like this location, like this First State Park, how could they make you feel more welcome? What would help?

(Participant): If there are people of your same kind

(Moderator): You're talking about pictures. Like having pictures of different people, different ethnicities.

(Participant): Yes, that too and then, the employees looking like you, not looking like another race.

(Moderator, affirming): Not all white people working. For diversity, different people of different ethnic background working.

– Wilmington Participant

2020

Another member of this focus group said People of Color do not want to see the history of European heritage reflected everywhere they go. They want to see their own history and culture reflected.

“As a Black person I don't want to go. I like history, but I wouldn't want...everywhere I go, I wouldn't want to go somewhere where everything that I learn about is the history of the White people that's been there.” – Wilmington Participant

Residents of Color can feel that opportunities to experience beautiful outdoor spaces are being intentionally kept from them. It is important to be sensitive to this and to be proactive with outreach.

This is a challenging observation, resulting from honest and blunt conversation in the focus groups. The most striking example of this stems from a focus group based in Southwest Philadelphia. Finding out from one member of the focus group about an array of interesting activities connected to the Cobbs Creek Environmental Education Center, focus group members were excited, but concerned that they had never heard about these opportunities. In a group where all participants were African-American, one attendee espoused the idea that influential people were intentionally *preventing* People of Color like her from knowing about these things. Looking at the Cobbs Creek Center's Facebook page, and seeing what it offered, she jumped into the conversation in frustration.

“I never heard of that. They said (referring to another focus group member) they've heard of it because of a family member told them, or a friend told them. A lot of Black areas don't know about it. A lot of Black people don't do a lot of things with their children because they don't know. They don't put the flyers out, like they said, to the children, in the schools. They don't post up advertisement in the neighborhoods. So they only let their people know about these things. This is my opinion. Their people.” – Southwest Philadelphia participant

Others in the group vehemently agreed with her. As they voiced agreement with her observation, she went on:

“Right. Yes. That's what I'm saying. They let the right people (know).” (Moderator): “Now, when you say ‘right people,’ you mean White people?” (Participant): “Exactly. Yes.” (Moderator): “It's okay. We can talk about this here, because if that's been the experience, we want to know.” (Participant): “Exactly. Right.” – Southwest Philadelphia participant

An older woman in this focus group later explained one reason for these kinds of feelings, stemming from an underlying racism that she has experienced in her own neighborhood since she was a child. Years ago, it was overt. Today, she feels it reflected in the pressures of gentrification.

“I've been around here for 55 years in the same house. Growing up, I married, went away, came back. Everything. Took care of my mother and father. And I tell you, it's nothing like it used to be. They never wanted to let us in this area. And they've always said, I can remember being chased by the White people out of here. And once us moving in, them not wanting us here. And now they don't want us here again. And they're trying to buy us out and selling it so high that we're not even wanting to be able to live here. And it's sad.” – Southwest Philadelphia Participant

Implication: Feelings like these are raw, and they are born of real-life experience. Centers must be sensitive to this and exert an overt welcome to help people who have experienced discrimination to know that they are welcome here.

2020

COVID-19 is having a big impact on the amount of time people spend outdoors.

As mentioned, the vast majority of survey interviews were collected in February and the first few days of March 2020, just days before the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the region and shut things down, introducing a sweeping new set of concerns and anxieties that shifted everyone's perspective and their daily activities.

When the focus groups convened in October and November 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was front and center. Concerns about the pandemic and its well-documented health affects animated the focus group discussions. Focus group participants said their concern about catching the virus was affecting how much time they were spending outdoors. That deep concern stems from the fact that other people, who would be in close proximity even outdoors, are not taking the proper precautions.

"There's people out there that are following the rules, using the mask...washing their hands. But then you see other people out there, and they're walking around with no mask on, like business as usual. I don't trust it. I don't trust being outside now because... everybody's not going to do the same thing that you're doing to make things safe for yourself and your family. ...You cannot trust other people because you're basically trusting somebody else with your life, and you can't do that." – Southwest Philadelphia Participant

In the other Southwest Philadelphia focus group, a participant who loves to get outdoors and walk described a seven-month ordeal recovering from COVID, which she believes she caught outdoors, walking in close proximity to other people. Worried that she is still vulnerable to the virus, she has developed a workaround, going out for walks when it is raining, so there are few other people around. She wishes there were more places to be outdoors where she could feel safe.

"I found that if it's raining, I have gear for that kind of weather and there's hardly anybody outside. So, I can do anything I want. So, just as long as it's not pouring crazy, I just put on my hiking boots, and I can go to the cemetery, I can go to the track. There's nobody there...I mean, the air is nice and fresh. I can take my mask down. But I would definitely, if there were more spaces, and... If everybody followed the masking rule and the social distancing rule, I'd be okay. When the bus people like to take their mask down, and leave them under their chin, and talk on their phone. That has happened to me almost every time I've gotten on public transportation. And I'm like, 'I can't do this anymore.'" – Southwest Philadelphia Participant

In response to these concerns, many people in the focus groups said they are trying to make their indoor spaces a sanctuary, so they do not have to spend time outdoors.

"You don't even want to travel, because breathing our air every second, you never know if you're breathing in COVID, so I think I would rather just stay inside and just buy some air purifier and just maintain trying to be safe, trying to live another day." – Camden Participant

"I'm cool. I just put a whole bunch of stuff in the house, so I don't really have to go outside for nothing else." – Wilmington Participant

But even the indoor spaces can feel confining and dangerous. Here is how a Dominican-American participant in Trenton described her concerns about COVID, as a person who was active and working 60 hours per week before the pandemic, and who now found herself confined to her house and not working, terrified of COVID:

2020

“When COVID first came, I had to be inside the house the whole day, every day, the whole day. I did not know what to do. I didn't even open the door of the house, because people were saying that if you open the door, COVID could come inside. Well to tell you that I fell into depression and my mother was visiting me from Santo Domingo. She got COVID here. ...I was so depressed that people would tell me that (the virus) sticks into your hair. Because I believed that COVID will stay in my hair, I would wash my hair, sometimes even two times a day. Most of my hair fell off, and now I'm trying to recover it with home remedies.” – Latinx Trenton Participant

COVID has created stress that is not health-related, as people struggle with their finances through this calamity, worry about eviction, and simply have to deal with the stress of having household members always at home, in close quarters. This round-robin in a Camden focus group suggests that the emotional impact is deep, and felt by many people.

(Moderator): “Has your attitude about being outdoors changed after COVID? Or has it been more or less the same?”

(Participant): “After COVID? Different.”

(Participant): “Yeah, everybody seems to be arguing a lot or being mad at each other.”

(Participant): “After COVID, a lot more people are getting evicted, a lot more people are stressing.”

(Participant): “Stress, yep.”

(Participant): “A lot more people are trying to figure out where to go, and now they're figuring out who their real friends are and who to trust, stuff like that.”

(Participant): “Mm-hmm (affirmative).”

(Participant): “So, a lot of people's emotions are getting in the mix. Arguing, fighting, everything.”
– Camden Participants

One is left with the impression that people are struggling deeply as a result of the pandemic, often worried about the presence of the virus in crowded situations outdoors, but desperately needing the respite that safe outdoor spaces could provide.

Perceptions of the Health of Local Waters

Summary Finding: The perception of the health of local waters is generally poor, and most people who see a trend in water quality think it is getting worse. That translates into a desire to clean up.

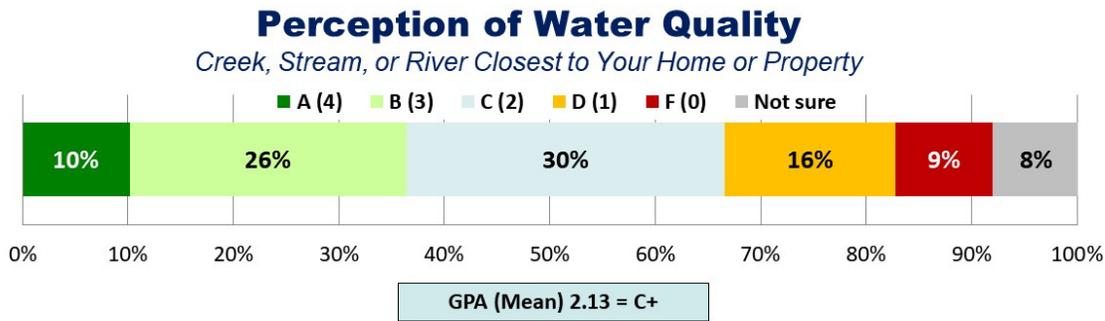
The 23 Environmental Education Centers that make up the Alliance for Watershed Education are connected to water. They bring people into contact with local waters and educate them. This research explored people's perceptions of those waters.

In the heavily populated core of the Basin, there are significant concerns about water quality, and those concerns extend well upstream.

Many residents of the Basin believe that local waters are not healthy today. On the survey, they were asked to grade the health of the creek, stream, or river closest to their home on a traditional A to F grading scale. Only 10% of residents across the Basin gave the water closest to them a grade of A, and only another 26% graded their local water a B. Meanwhile 30% gave the water a grade of C, and 25% gave it a very poor or failing grade of D or F.

2020

Converting these grades to a traditional 4-point grading scale, where A = 4 and F = 0, the average grade across the Basin is a mediocre 2.13, or C+.



If you were to grade the health of the creek, stream or river closest to your home or property on that A to F scale where "A" means it is extremely clean and healthy, and "F" means it is extremely polluted and unhealthy, what grade would you give it?

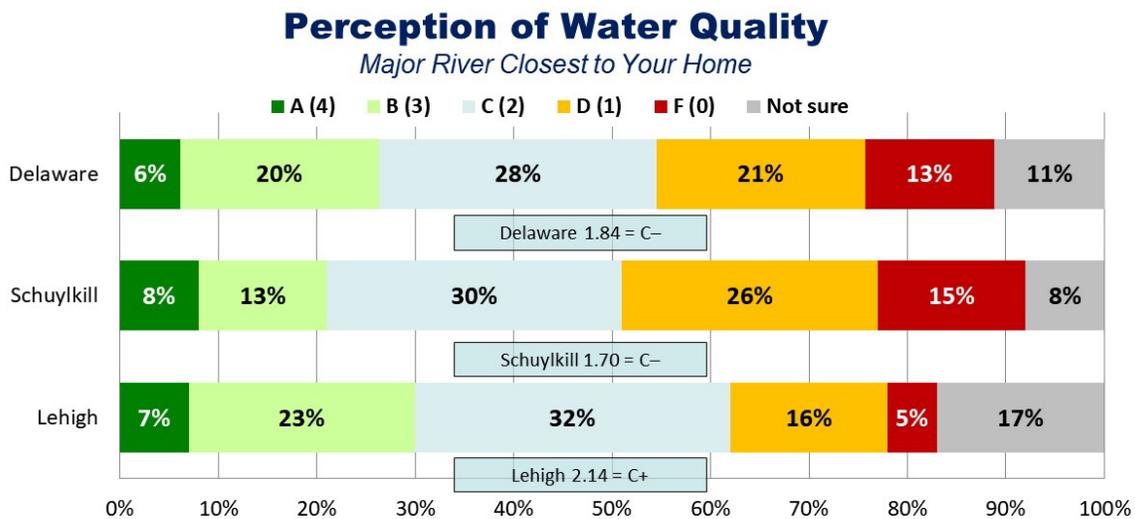
Grades are very low far downstream in Wilmington, Camden, and Philadelphia, averaging C-. Grades improve slightly in Trenton and in Berks County, and reach their highest level, equivalent to B- in the catchment area surrounding the Pocono Environmental Education Center.

Water Quality Grades by Catchment Area

On a Scale of 0 to 4

Camden	Wilmington	Southwest Philadelphia	Trenton	Roxborough/Manayunk	Berks County	Poconos Area
1.80	1.97	1.82	2.19	2.03	2.35	2.81

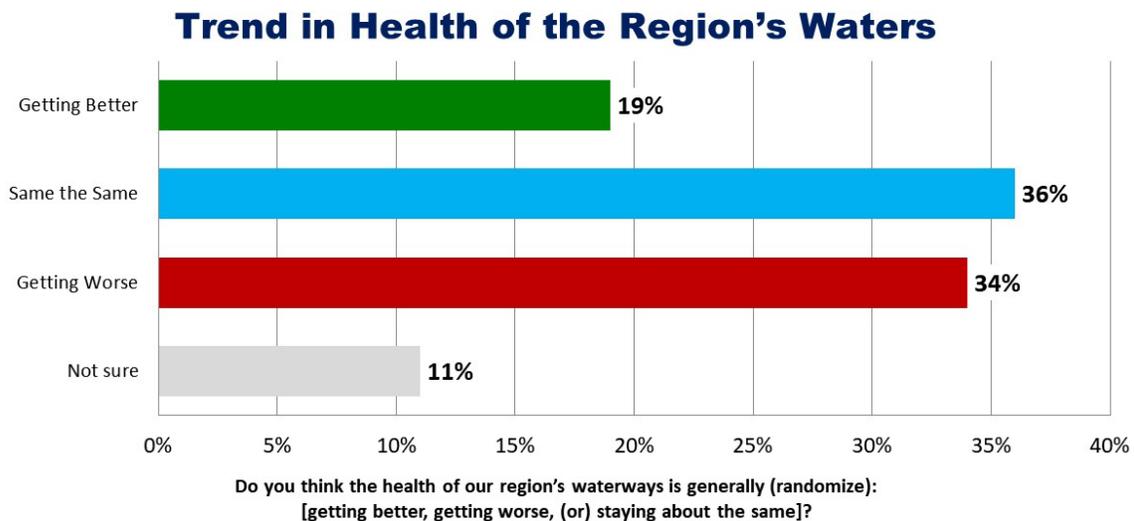
Residents graded the health of the major river closest to them, as well. The survey sample was segmented geographically, and respondents were asked about the closest major river, whether the Delaware, Schuylkill, or Lehigh. Grades for the Lehigh River were the best of the three, averaging 2.14 (equivalent to C+). The Delaware River only earned a grade of 1.84 (C-), and the Schuylkill came in even lower at 1.70 (C-). More than four out of ten residents who live near the Schuylkill River gave it a grade of D or F.



How would you grade the section of the (segment based on geography):
[Delaware/Schuylkill/Lehigh] River closest to your home on that same A to F scale

2020

Unfortunately, the perception of water quality is poor, and the balance of opinion is that water quality continues to get *worse*. Asked about the trendline they see in the health of the region’s waterways, almost twice as many (34%) see the region’s waters getting worse, as see them getting better (19%). About one-third (36%) see no change, and the remaining 11% are not sure.



This paints a picture of a public across the Delaware Basin who generally see the region’s waters, including the waters closest to them, as mediocre to poor quality and trending worse. The result is similar or worse in most of the catchment areas, including in Berks County, where the Schuylkill and adjoining waters are seen as getting worse by a factor of two-to-one. Even in the Poconos, people see a marginally negative trend.

Implication: This perception hampers the ability to engage people with local waters. Good news needs to be shared about progress in improving water quality, including restoration projects, community actions, legislative initiatives, and actual improvement in water quality readings – as a key to changing the narrative and encouraging people to want to be near water and in contact with it.

Naturally, focus group participants underlined this point with descriptions of the water that were sometimes literally colorful. These are urban Wilmington residents, riffing on the Delaware River:

“The Delaware River, it’s terrible. It’s brown. It’s dirty.”
“It’s green.”
“Smells funny.”
“Got bubbles. Stinks.”
– Wilmington Participants

Camden residents were equally appalled at the condition of the Delaware, perhaps exhibiting a morbid sense of humor at the river’s expense.

(Participant): “It’s just infested. You can’t even survive off of that water if there was like an invasion of zombies and stuff and you’re trying to survive, you can’t even drink that water to survive.”
(Moderator): “Colleen, what do you think of the Delaware River?”
(Participant): “It’s bad. People dump a lot of waste in there, they dump trash in there all the time... Probably no living fish or anything in there.”
– Camden Participants

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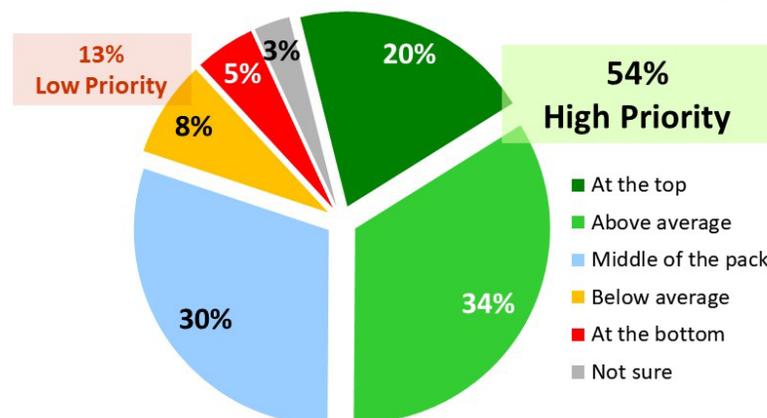
Comments a little further upstream in Trenton were not as colorful, but the perception of a polluted river remained, as well as the thought that no one was trying to clean it up.

“There's the Delaware River which separates New Jersey from Pennsylvania, but it's a stinky river. ... (T)here're some companies along the river that I know that dump waste into the river. ... To my knowledge, no one here is trying to be environmentally sound.” – Trenton Participant

Preventing pollution in local rivers and streams is a high priority for residents of the Delaware Basin.

Given these perceptions of poor water quality, one wonders if residents would think it is worthwhile – or even possible – to address pollution. In fact, it is a very high priority. A solid majority of residents rate pollution in local rivers and streams as an above-average or top-level personal priority, considering “all the issues and challenges facing the area today.” Thirty-four percent said preventing pollution in local rivers and streams is an above-average priority for them, and 20% said preventing water pollution is “at the top” of their personal priority list.

Water Pollution as a Personal Priority



If you were to consider all the issues and challenges facing the area today, where would preventing pollution in local rivers and streams rank on that priority list for you?

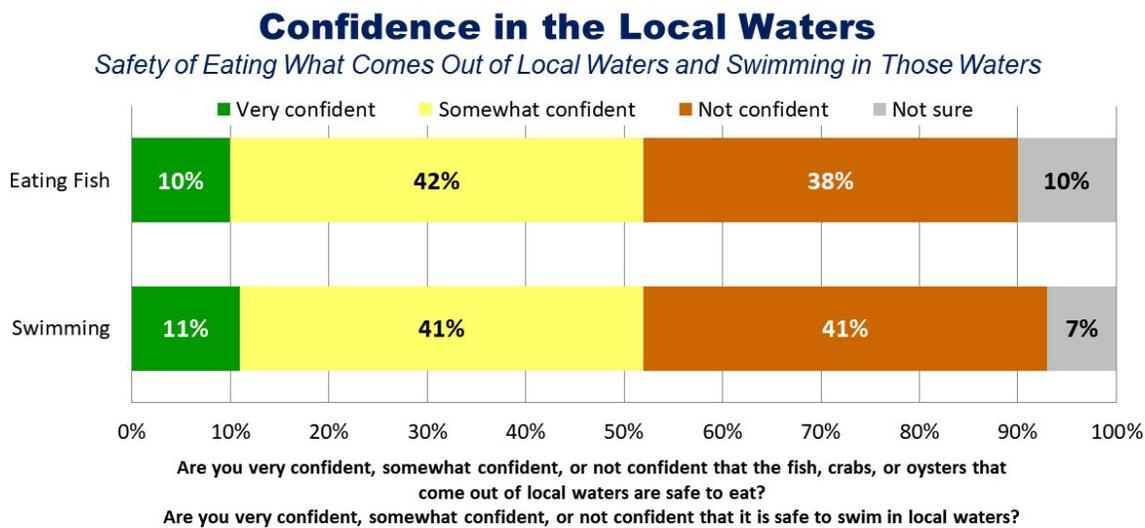
Preventing water pollution is an even higher priority in several of the catchment areas, with one-quarter of residents Wilmington, Southwest Philadelphia, Roxborough/Manayunk, Trenton, and the Poconos placing it at the top of their priority list. Camden follows just behind. It appears that water pollution is a motivating concern for many of the new audiences that the Centers are trying to reach.

(continued, next page)

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Confidence about eating fish or swimming in local waters is low.

Residents lack confidence about whether the fish, crabs, or oysters that come out of local waters are safe to eat. Similarly, they lack confidence that it is safe to swim in local waters. About four out of ten in both cases said they are “not confident” about the safety of swimming or eating fish, crabs, and oysters. Another four in ten said they were only “somewhat confident.” Setting aside those who said they were not sure how they felt, that left only about one in ten who said they were “very confident” about the safety of eating things that come out of local waters, or swimming in those waters.



The number who are “not confident” about swimming rises to 49% in Camden, 57% in Roxborough and Southwest Philadelphia, and to 65% in Wilmington.

When it comes to *what* is contaminating the water, people tend to focus on what they can see.

Asked in the focus groups what is causing the pollution in local waters, they tended to blame dumping and littering by individuals. Study participants focused on visible trash, in other words, things floating in the water, rather than unseen contaminants like chemicals. They decried the actions of individuals, directly throwing trash, as the major cause of water pollution. Here is an animated exchange from a Philadelphia focus group:

(Moderator): “What’s polluting the water?”

(Participant): “People.”

(Participant): “People.”

(Participant): “People pollute the water. Yeah. People, people throw crap in the water. They don’t have any regard. They don’t have any regard for the outdoors. They feel like, ‘Oh, it’s not mine so I can just throw this garbage here.’”

(Participant): “Right.”

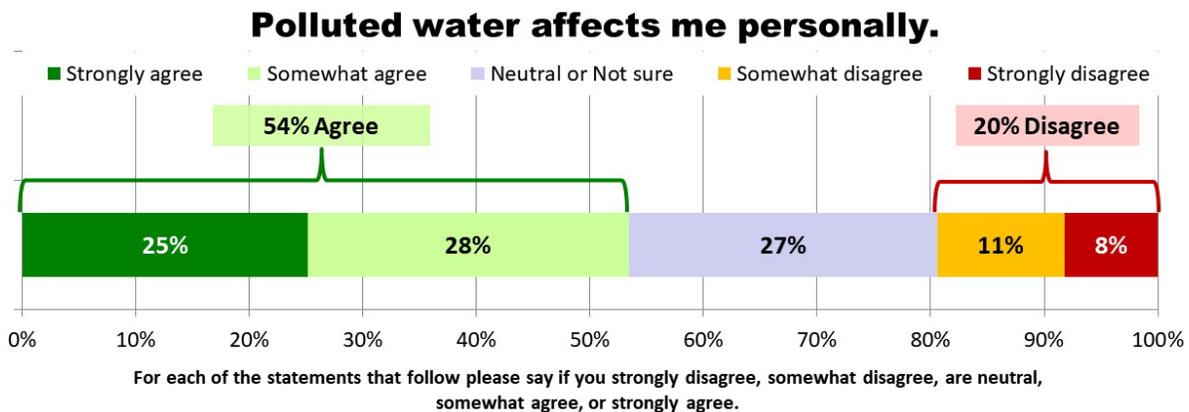
(Moderator): “What about if you think back 10 to 20 years, do you feel that the water is getting cleaner or dirtier or staying the same?...”

(Participant): “I don’t think the water is any better. It’s worse and it’s not getting any better because we don’t do anything to make things better. We talk about doing things and there may be a couple of different groups around, conservationists that have programs and are doing things, but I think the vast majority of people aren’t doing enough to make sure the waterways stay clean.” – Southwest Philadelphia Participants

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Water pollution is personal for many residents. Asking them why leads directly to drinking water.

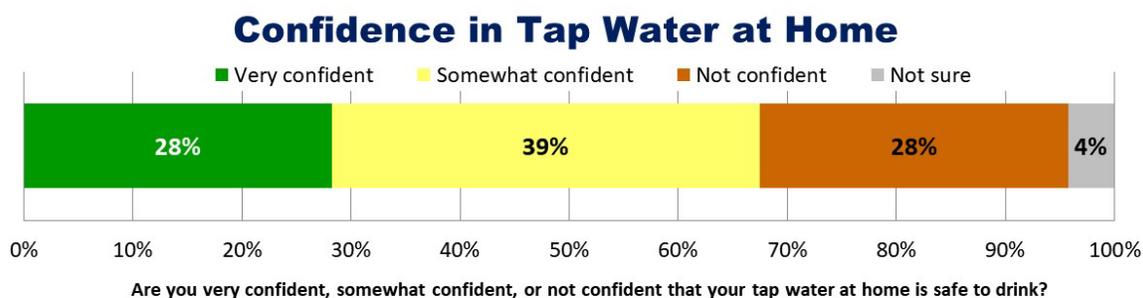
About half of residents surveyed across the Basin (54%) agreed with the statement, “Polluted water affects me personally.” One-quarter of residents (25%) agreed *strongly* with that statement.



Asked why water pollution felt personal to them, focus group discussion went immediately, almost without fail, to tap water. People described tap water with an odor they did not like, or that comes out of the tap brown. News of drinking water contamination from other parts of the country, caused by lead pipes, influences their perceptions. And this is not just an urban phenomenon. Participants in the Stroudsburg focus group who described excessively hard well water, (incorrectly) attributed that to water pollution, as well.

Confidence in tap water is low.

Basinwide, 28% are “not confident” about their tap water at home. Meanwhile, 28% are “very confident” leaving the remainder in the middle or unsure. Looking at the glass half full, so to speak, one could look at the 67% who are very or somewhat confident about their tap water. Equally valid, would be to consider the 67% who are not confident or only somewhat confident about what comes out of their tap.



Residents with well water are somewhat more confident than those on public water. Forty-one percent of survey participants with well water said they were “very confident” that it is safe to drink, compared to only 25% of residents with public water. The “not confident” number, which is 28% overall, rises to 35% in Southwest Philadelphia, 40% in Wilmington, and 49% in Trenton.

In the planning for this project, some staff at the participating Centers wondered if concerns about tap water would translate into a desire to take action. Yes, it does. Unfortunately, focus group participants have indeed taken action, but in the form of drinking bottled or filtered water rather than drinking out

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of the tap. Unpleasant or contaminated drinking water does not seem to motivate them directly to become better stewards of the environment. They do not make that link as the subject is being discussed in focus groups. Finding out that their drinking water comes out of the Delaware (in most locations) only made them less likely to drink it.

“Oh, I don't drink the water. I get water delivered to my house. Mm-mm (negative). No, no, no!”

– Wilmington Participant

That is not to say that it is impossible to motivate concern and action for the environment on the basis of drinking water. But it would take time and effort. Knowing where their tap water came from did not cause them to ask, “What can be done to clean it up?”

Implication: Confidence in the safety of tap water is low, but that does not translate into a desire to steward natural resources. People generally do not know, and typically have seldom thought about, the source of their drinking water. And they are often drinking bottled or filtered water anyway to alleviate their concerns about what comes out of the tap. Improving knowledge about sources and protection of drinking water is not a key to building greater concern about the natural environment.

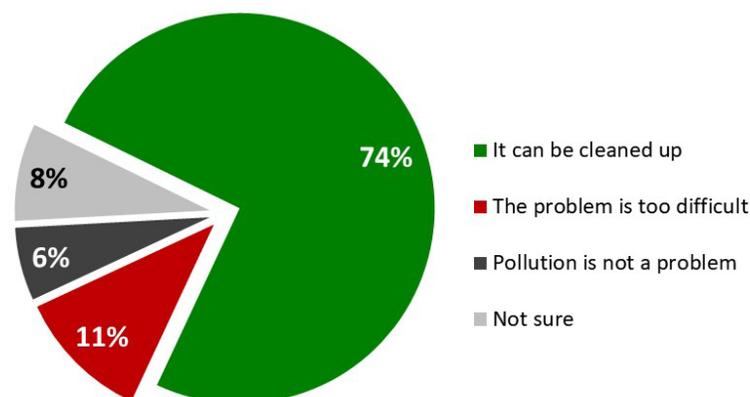
Optimism that Waters Can be Cleaned up, and Potential for Personal Stewardship

Summary Finding: There is great optimism that polluted waters can be cleaned up. But people's optimism outstrips their knowledge of how they can help, and the number who know how to volunteer is even lower. Work needs to be done to raise the profile of AWE Centers.

Despite deep concerns about water quality, there is widespread optimism that pollution in the region's waterways can be cleaned up.

About three-quarters (74%) of the Basin's residents believe that pollution in the region's waterways can be cleaned up. Only 11% think the problem is too difficult to tackle. The remainder either think that water pollution is not a problem in the region (6%), or they are just not sure (8%).

Optimism about Fixing Water Pollution



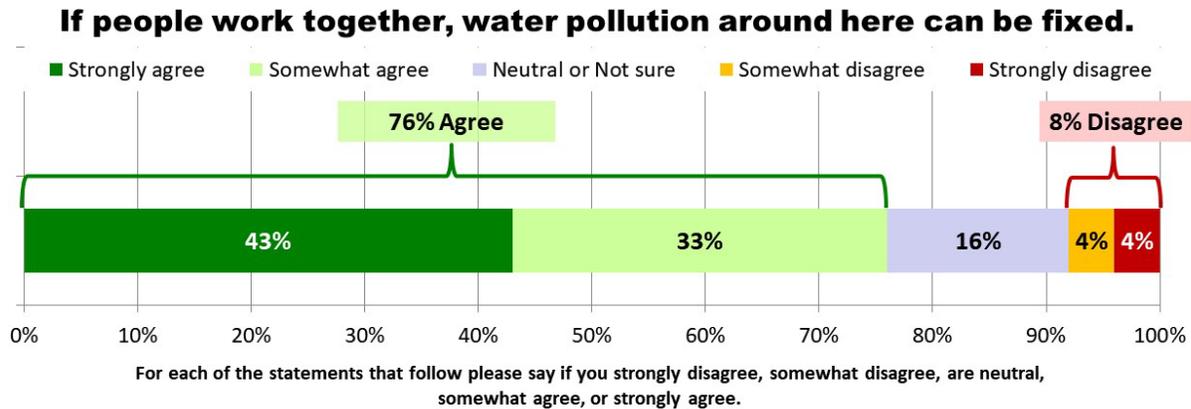
Do you think pollution is a problem in our region's waterways? If yes, do you think that pollution can be cleaned up, or is the problem too difficult?

That degree of optimism, despite the rather grim view of the health of local waters today, suggests that people could be engaged in stewardship. The task of cleaning up the water is not hopeless.

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This optimism has positive implications for personal and collective stewardship.

A similar three-quarters (76%) of respondents agree with the statement “If people work together, water pollution around here can be fixed.” More than four residents in ten (43%) *strongly* agree with that statement. Only 8% disagree.

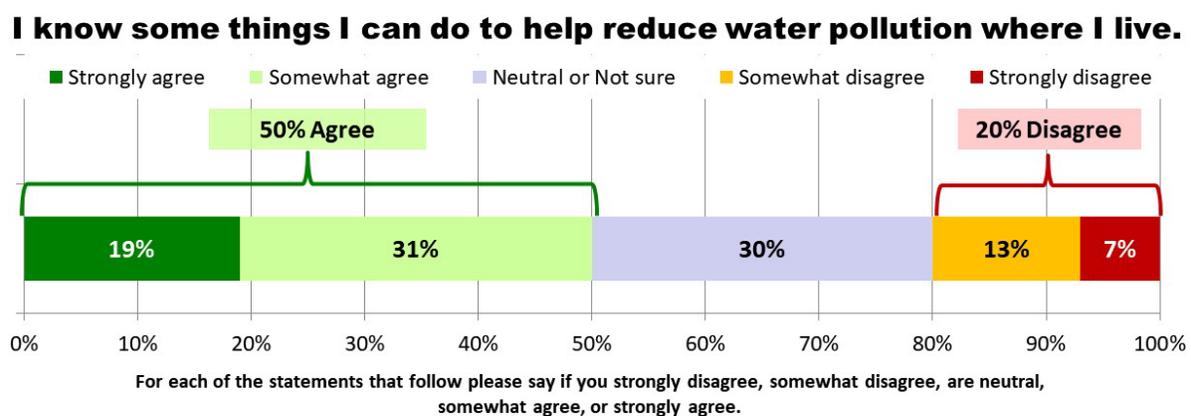


As a hopeful sign, this 76% number holds steady or trends even higher in some of the areas where water pollution concern is the highest – rising to 80% in Wilmington, 86% in Trenton, and 91% in Roxborough/Manayunk.

African-American residents offer widespread agreement with this statement at 72%, while Latinx residents are slightly less optimistic about the potential to solve water pollution at 62%.

People are less certain they know specific things they can do to help.

There is a knowledge gap, though. Intentions are good, as just noted, with strong optimism and a widespread feeling that if people work together, pollution can be fixed. But only 50% agree with the statement, “I know some things I can do to help reduce water pollution where I live.” Many people are non-committal on this question, with 30% classifying themselves as “neutral.” The remaining 20% disagree with the statement outright, admitting that they really do not know what they could do to help address water pollution.

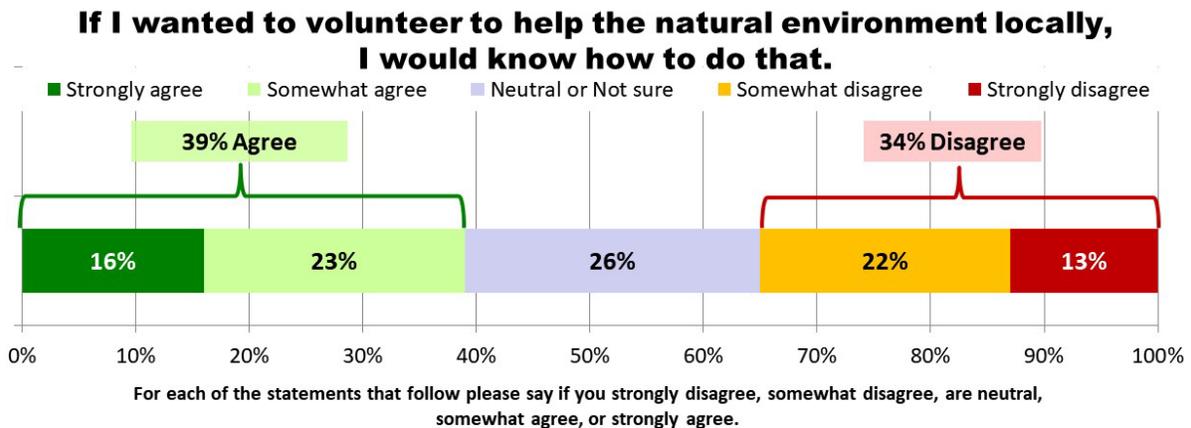


Once again, African-Americans hold close to the norm with 45% saying they know some things they can do, while Latinx residents are significantly lower at only 36%.

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Even fewer would know how to volunteer.

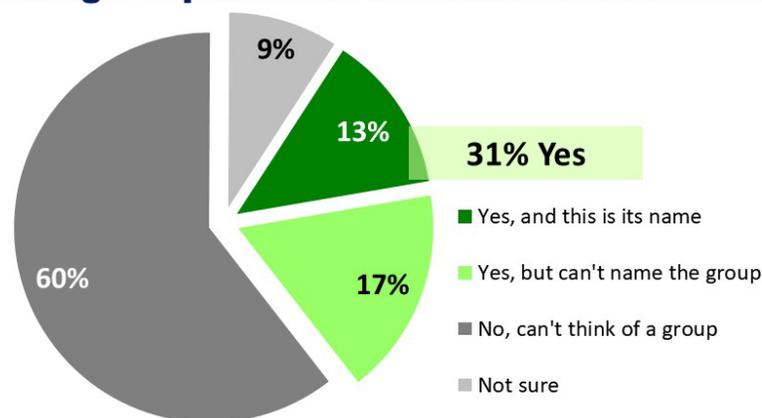
Meanwhile, an even smaller number (39%) agree with the statement, “If I wanted to volunteer to help the natural environment locally, I would know how to do that.” Nearly as many (34%) admit that they would not know how to volunteer, and another 26% chose the “neutral” option on this scale – meaning about six people in ten across the watershed really do not know how to volunteer to help the environment.



Specific awareness of local organizations working to educate people about the environment is even more limited.

Asked, “Can you think of at least one group in your own community that is working to educate people about the natural environment?” 31% of the public across the Basin said they could think of a local group. Within that group, about four in ten – amounting to 13% of the Basin’s residents overall – could actually name a group.

**Awareness of a Local Group
Educating People about the Natural Environment**



Can you think of at least one group in your own community that is working to educate people about the natural environment? If yes, can you name that group?

Within the seven catchment areas the percentage who said they can think of at least one environmental education group varies widely, from a low of 23% to a high of 51%. The norm across the Basin is 31%.

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As it is Basinwide, the ability in each catchment area to actually name a group is much lower than that, ranging from 11% to 34% – compared to a norm of 13% across the full watershed.

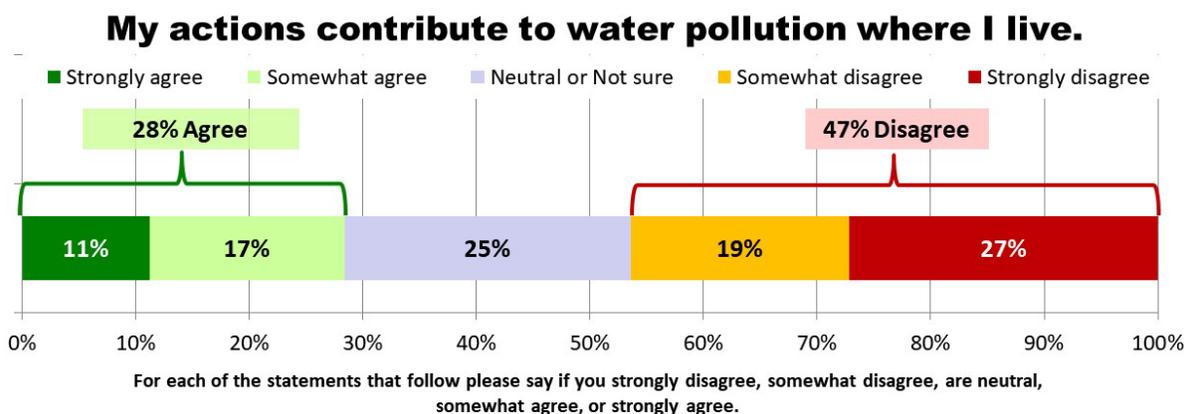
Awareness of the AWE Centers in their catchment areas was moderate, and varied widely.

Taking this one step further, survey respondents in each catchment area were asked outright if they had ever heard of the local Center(s) by name. When directly asked in this way and told the name of the local Center, an average of 33% said they recognized that organization. Across the 11 Centers participating in this research, awareness ranged from 14% to 60%, a wide spectrum.

The potential for stewardship action is limited by people’s feeling that they do not contribute to the problem. The is a strategic challenge for water quality advocates.

The potential to engage people in stewardship, and the optimism that people working together can tackle water pollution, are undermined by people’s belief that their own actions do not contribute to the problem of water pollution. Only about one-quarter (28%) of the public across the Delaware River Basin agree with the statement, “My actions contribute to water pollution where I live.”

Almost half of residents (47%) outright disagree with the proposition that they are contributing to water pollution – with 27% *strongly* disagreeing. The remaining 25% of the public said they are “neutral” about whether they are having a water quality impact or not, perhaps indicating that they do not know, or that they may feel they are offsetting their impacts with other actions.



On this question of personal responsibility for water pollution, there is a strong relationship with a person’s age. People under age 35 are much more likely to acknowledge they contribute to water pollution, though even in younger people it never reaches much past one-third of them. Outright disagreement reaches a majority at age 50, and reaches *two-thirds* in people over age 75.

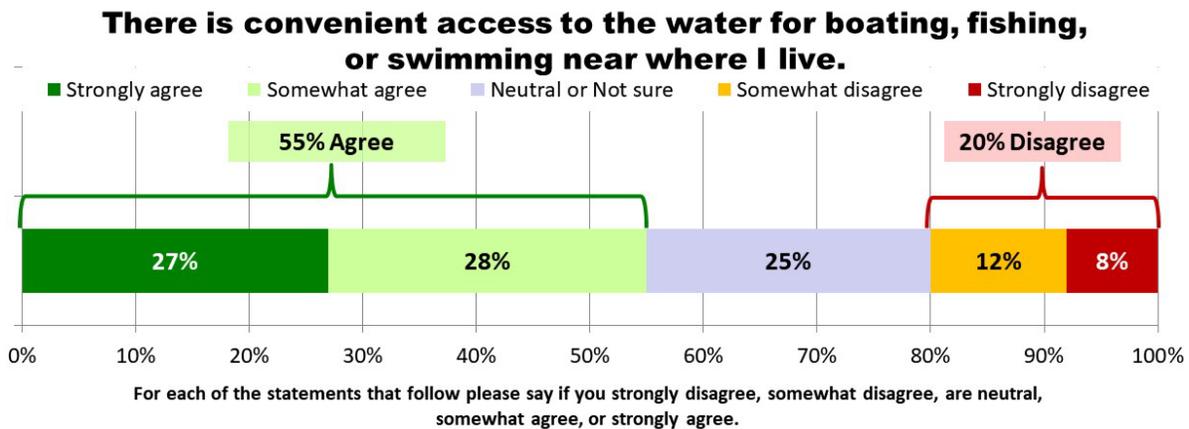
In terms of race and ethnicity, 35% of African-American and 40% of the Basin’s Asian residents acknowledge that their actions contribute to water pollution, compared to 30% of Latinx residents and only 26% of Whites. A 51% majority of White residents say they do not contribute to water pollution.

Implication: This stark realization – that almost three-quarters of the public across the Basin do not acknowledge their personal impact on water pollution – lifts up a strategic challenge for advocates and educators. How can we engage people meaningfully in stewardship in the midst of their busy, demanding lives, when they do not feel personal responsibility for the problem?

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Only a little more than half of the Basin’s residents feel they have convenient access to the water.

Basinwide, one in five residents (20%) indicated that they do not have “convenient access to the water for boating, fishing, or swimming near where I live.” Another 25% were non-committal, choosing the neutral/not sure option, leaving only 55% who feel they have convenient access.

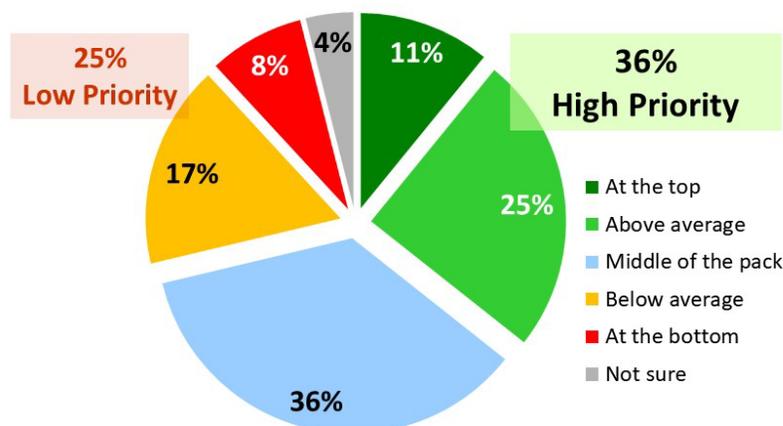


Residents of five of the seven catchment areas rated the convenience of their access to the water within a few percentage points of the Basinwide norm. Residents of the Cobbs Creek area of Southwest Philadelphia and nearby areas of Delaware County stood out, rating the convenience of water access almost 20 percentage points below the norm. Residents of the Poconos and nearby areas of northern New Jersey were more than 20 points above the norm.

Improving access to the water is a high personal priority for about one-third of residents.

Given significant concerns and negative perceptions about water pollution, not to mention other priorities in life, only about one-third (36%) of the Basin’s residents consider it an above average or top priority to give people more access to rivers and waterfront parks. Roughly another one-third (36%) would place the priority of better water access in the “middle of the pack” of all the issues and challenges facing the area today.

More Access to the Water as a Personal Priority



If you were to consider all the issues and challenges facing the area today, where would giving people more access to rivers and waterfront parks rank on that priority list for you?

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Significantly, residents of most catchment areas place a higher priority on improving water access, compared to their fellow residents elsewhere in the watershed. The 36% across the Basin rises as high as 51% in the catchment areas. Certainly, focus group discussion validated this finding, as urban residents talked about the importance of finding a respite outdoors and the calming effect of being near water.

Giving People More Access to Rivers and Waterfront Parks as a High Priority

Compared to the 36% Norm across the Delaware Basin

Camden	Wilmington	Southwest Philadelphia	Trenton	Roxborough/Manayunk	Berks County	Poconos Area
51%	40%	35%	43%	47%	33%	42%

(continued, next page)

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this research among new audiences, this report offers five broad recommendations to help Centers reach out and welcome people in their communities who have not traditionally been engaged with them:

1. Think Like an Activity Center, Not an Environmental Education Center

Browsing the Centers' websites and social media feeds, focus group participants made clear they were looking for things to do. They often want to *be* in nature, but are not always seeking to be educated about it. The research left us with the impression that once that relationship was started informally, the Centers could open up a deeper, more meaningful conversation with these new constituents over time.

2. Give People a Quick Take on Cost and Timing of Activities

A trip to the Center's website is a practical exercise for most people we interviewed. Think of their visit to the website as transactional. In much the same way they would look for movie or concert tickets, they were looking on the Center's website for a quick take on the questions of when, where, and how much does it cost to participate in your activities. Centers need to make the search for this kind of practical information front and center, hopefully a one-click experience.

3. Focus on People

These non-traditional audiences want to see images of people interacting with nature. They want to see people having fun. They want to know it will be a good experience visiting, based on seeing the experience of other people.

4. Reflect the Diversity of the Community

It is critically important that the people we are trying to reach see themselves reflected in the Centers' outreach. That is a signal to them that they will be welcome here, that people like them belong here. More importantly, it is vital that staff and key volunteers also reflect the diversity of the community.

5. Group Activities are the Most Rewarding for New Audiences

People reacted most warmly to activities like guided birding walks, paddles or bike rides where the equipment was provided, crafts they could do with their kids, and activities involving their dogs. Food is a big draw, people said. Make it fun. Make it free or low-cost. Allow them to share the experience with others.

Accompanying this report are seven local chapters, focused on each catchment area, with content relevant to the local AWE Centers operating there. These local chapters offer specific and practical tactics for local Centers to help them address the five broad recommendations outlined above. Some of the practical observations recurred across multiple catchment areas, or had implications for all Alliance Centers. Here are the tactics drawn from the local research that would benefit all or most Centers.

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Think Like an Activity Center and Give People a Quick Take on Cost and Timing of Activities:

1. The Casual Visitor: It is a core finding of this work that new audiences are often just looking for *activities*, for things to do. They want to be outdoors, but may not be looking for an environmental educational *program*. That has caused us to recommend focusing on spontaneous (this weekend's) activities more prominently, making it easier to find the critical details of an event, etc.
2. Close to You: Urban residents were often taken aback that Centers offer the opportunity to get out into natural settings close to where they live. As documented in this report, there is a strong motivation to get outdoors and a powerful emotional response to being out there. Urban residents often want a contrast with the crowded streets that surround them each day, and the Centers can provide that. Include your proximity as a key messaging point in outreach.
3. Feature the Nature Center Itself: We found that new audiences were often fascinated by the Centers' facilities and property. They wanted to know what went on inside Centers' physical buildings and to see pictures of what they might experience there, as well as images of the trails, natural play areas, and other outdoor amenities, too.
4. "The Places That We Mostly Visit": Latinx participants said outreach to their community should be channeled through the places they gather: churches, Hispanic markets, government offices, and (where they exist) the local Hispanic outreach center. While we heard this finding emphasized by Latinx study participants, this principle – organizing outreach through people's social networks – can certainly apply to other audiences, as well.
5. Use Community Calendars: Remembering that many people view a visit to an AWE Center as an activity comparable to going to a movie or visiting a playground, position your outreach in places and on platforms where activities-focused residents of the community will see them. This means connecting with local publications and websites that include community calendars, as well as resources such as local libraries and even community bulletin boards where people look for information.
6. Lean on Facebook and Instagram: Facebook has incredible reach. Its format encourages a focus on events and on people, and that is what these new audiences want to see. In addition, Facebook users explain that scrolling through their feed is how they want to receive information, and it gives the information immediacy, pushing it right into the phone in their hand.
7. Improve Websites: Many AWE Centers need to improve their websites. The website is a critical window into the Center's activities and offerings, and the leading way community residents are trying to find you. This is of utmost importance. Both the vibrancy and the usability of most Center websites need to be improved. In contrast, several Centers are doing a better job on their social media feeds expressing the vibrancy and immediacy of what goes on at the Center, suggesting that they already know how to bring that same emphasis to the content and design of their websites.
8. Include Traditional Outreach: Many people said they want materials *mailed* to them. They want door hangers and people standing outside the grocery store with information. These old-school, tactile, word-of-mouth methods are coming into their own once again, and are increasingly mentioned by people as an effective way to reach them and get them to pay attention.

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Focus on People and Reflect the Diversity of the Community:

9. Show the Faces of Diversity: Most AWE Centers need to show more *people* in your digital communications. And the faces Centers show should reflect the communities you are trying to reach. People want to imagine themselves having fun in your setting. They want to know that people who look like them belong there and are welcome there. Images of people help them make those connections. When Centers were effective in showing warm, colorful, close-up images of *people* enjoying their interactions with wildlife and nature, study participants reacted with excitement and a desire to go and experience that for themselves.
10. Curate *Authentic* Images of People: In debriefing these findings with the participating Centers, several expressed concern that they may not be able to demonstrate diversity authentically, or may not have the capacity to generate a library of people-images. But research participants expressed enthusiasm for sharing their experiences once they saw what was available to them at the Centers. They could be encouraged to share their own images with the Centers – as well as their own social networks – through the use of a unique hashtag and creative prompts such as selfie stations. Centers' staff or a key volunteer with photographic interest could be deputized to create these images, as well. This process would require the Center to commit staff or volunteer time to the effort of sorting through images, seeking permission, and posting them. But the payoff would be a much more vibrant, people-focused persona for the Center.
11. Be Community-Sensitive: Many Centers can do a better job recruiting and lifting up staff people, key volunteers, and activities reflective of Communities of Color. In addition to projecting an ethic of diversity, inclusion, and welcome out into the community, this effort could (and should) include a formalized and regularized effort to *listen* to the needs and preferences of nearby residents. AWE Fellows can help in this role, but efforts should occur year-round to engage in discussion with other community-based organizations, or form a community advisory board to help with this listening exercise.
12. Invest in Cultivating Community Ambassadors and Specifiers: In this work, we heard that word of mouth is critical. There is a grapevine in many neighborhoods, and the Centers need to ensure that they tap into it. In some AWE catchment areas, we heard about role models in the community – such as teachers, pastors, coaches, and others – who are People of Color and who could play a vital role in reaching the community. We also heard about peer specifiers, such as moms who influence other moms. There were focus group participants who felt *they* had a following and could influence their own networks. Engaging and leveraging these grassroots ambassadors and specifiers is a strategy that requires dedicated effort, but it would pay dividends in getting the word out in the community.
13. Make a Bilingual Commitment: Given the size of the Latinx population in several of the catchment areas, those Centers should make a more serious commitment to addressing the community in Spanish. That includes steps such as bilingual staff, a fully bilingual website, signage at the Centers in Spanish so that the visit experience is a good one, and outreach materials in Spanish. This is a big commitment, but gives the community something essential as they seek to connect with you.

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Group Activities are the Most Rewarding for New Audiences

14. Share the Experience: The specific preferences people have for paddles or guided walks or crafts with their children or activities with their dogs vary with local tastes, cultural affinities, and economic capacity. But what was in common among almost everyone we interviewed was a desire to share the experience with other people – friends, loved ones, or people they had not yet met who share common interests. This suggests that Centers offer an assortment of experiences that will bring people together, or allow them to be together with people they love. As we continue to emerge from the pandemic, it is likely that this tendency in people to come together and be together will only be enhanced.

Conclusion

We hope that this report provides good insight into the needs and preferences of new audiences, and a host of actionable findings. Accompanying this main report are individual chapters focused on the specific findings in each local catchment area. We suggest that users of this report consider those localized findings in the context of the broader themes discussed on the preceding pages.

As always, we stand by ready to provide additional interpretation as needed as the Alliance and its member Centers seek to apply the findings of this research.

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