

## Growing Greener in SW Michigan - OVERVIEW

### Survey Goals

The overall Growing Greener in Southwest Michigan Goal is to develop a regional green infrastructure program in southwest Michigan which provides a shared, multi-jurisdictional vision and a framework for conservation, land management, and growth and development decisions in SW Michigan. Specifically this project will:

- Utilize a “collaborative approach” involving as many citizens and stakeholders as possible.
- Educate and build support for a green infrastructure vision for southwest Michigan.
- Ensure that a verifiable and defensible public input process is used in the development of a green infrastructure vision for southwest Michigan.
- Create a green infrastructure vision that is based on a scientific and community based approach.
- Provide a green infrastructure vision (maps and information) that can be used in local, regional and state plans and policies.

### Methodology

Reason: to better understand the general public’s perspectives on conservation and recreation in their communities.

- Led by: Michigan State University, Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resources Studies in collaboration with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) and the National Parks Service’s Rivers, Trail and Conservation Assistance Program (NPS RTCA).
- Surveys Mailed: June 2008, to 1,000 randomly selected 1,000 households in each of the three counties (Berrien, Cass and Van Buren).
- Procedure: Included a first mailing of an eight-page questionnaire (appendix B), a personalized letter (appendix C) and a business reply envelope; a postcard was mailed (appendix D) one week after the first mailing; and a second mailing three weeks after the initial mailing (appendix E).
- Response rate: 30% with 859 completed, usable questionnaires.

County	Sample size	Bad addresses	Refused	Returned	Response rate
Berrien	1,000	32	19	276	28.5%
Cass	1,000	25	13	301	30.9%
Van Buren	1,000	28	6	282	29.0%
Total	3,000	85	38	859	29.5%

## Significant Findings (from Surveyors)

### Deep Community Roots

Most respondents held deep roots in the community. Almost nine out of ten were full time residents. Half of the respondents lived in their current home over 35 years. Almost half lived in the area as a child and another 21 percent remember visiting the area as a youth. Only one-third of the respondents had not grown up or visited the area as a youth. Respondents were primarily White, but Blacks, American Indians and Hispanics participated as well.

	Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	Total
1 – 5 years	8.2%	9.3%	7.7%	8.3%
6 – 15 years	10.8	15.2	17.0	13.1
16 – 35 years	29.5	25.3	32.1	29.4
Over 35 years	51.5	50.2	43.2	49.2

### Home Proximity to Green Space

Almost nine out of ten homeowners could list a public green or open space by their home with most answers truly being a public place. Over three-quarters indicated they visit or use this public place near their home. Respondents also gave high marks (87% agreed) to the availability of green and open spaces and water resources in their community enhancing their quality of life.

Water and air quality were rated as the most important benefits of green and open spaces. Other highly rated benefits included providing for healthy living and quality of life (anthropocentric) and providing habitat for a high quality or diversity of plant and animal species (biocentric).

### Nearest Public Green Space or Open Space to Home

	Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	Total Mentions
Parks & recreation including golf	183	164	134	481
Water bodies/beaches	52	45	61	158
Trails/greenways	7	11	45	63
Farmland	10	27	25	62
Own property/home	8	18	19	45
Wood landscapes	5	8	6	19
Other	0	0	1	1

	Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
Less than ½ mile	34.2%	34.1%	34.9%	34.5%
½ mile to less than 1 mile	22.4	7.4	12.7	17.3
1-4 miles	34.5	31.1	31.2	33.2
Over 4 miles	8.9	27.4	21.2	15.0

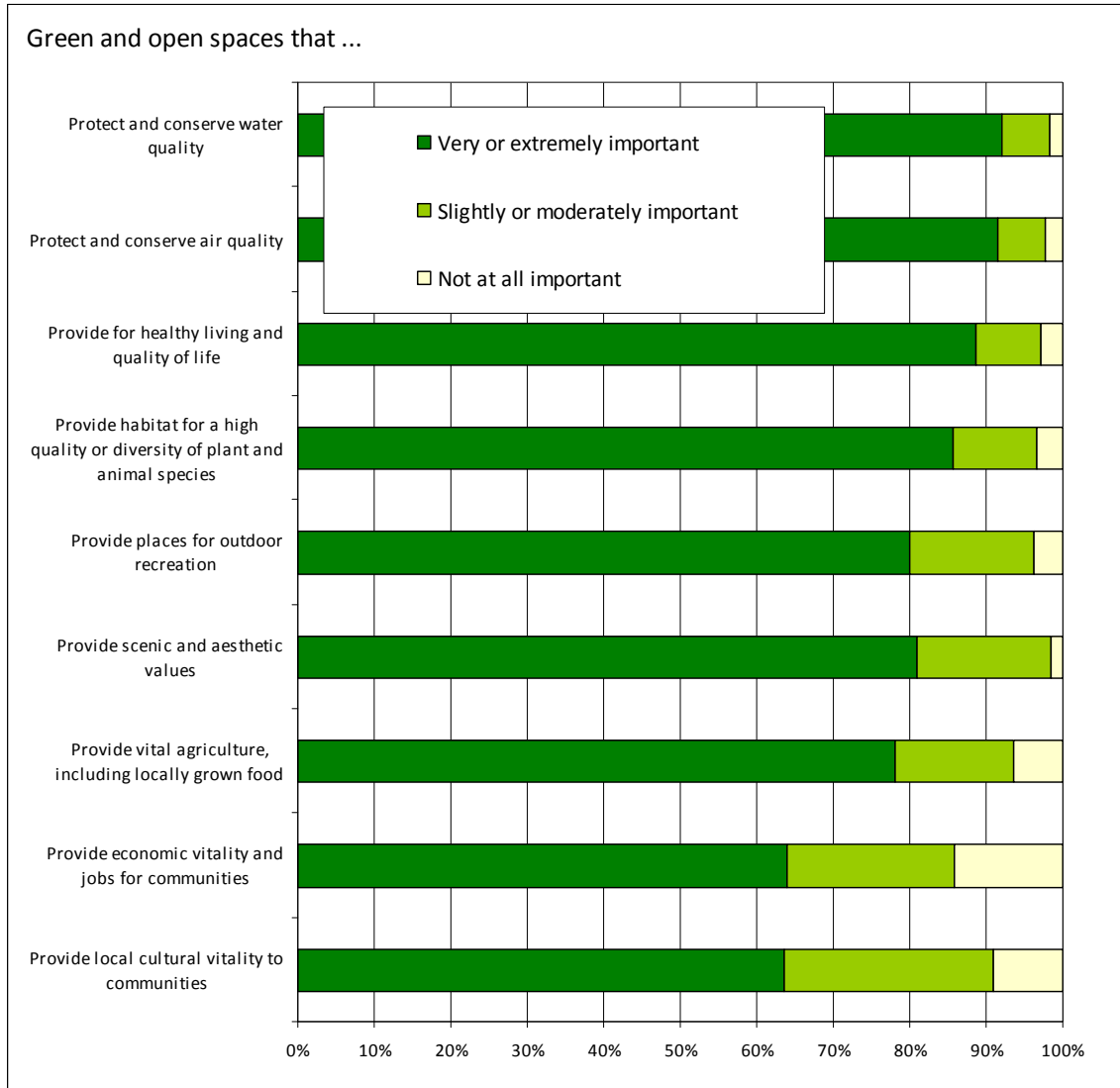
**Preservation – Urban v. Rural**

Homeowners in the Berrien, Cass and Van Buren region place equal and strong importance on natural resources in urban (highly populated areas) and rural (low populated areas). Specifically, nine out of ten agreed or strongly agreed with the importance of natural resources in the region. Conservation of publicly owned or managed resources garnered greater importance than conservation on privately owned resources.

		Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
Natural resources in <b>highly populated areas (urban)</b> are important to conserve.	Strongly disagree	1.2%	1.7%	1.8%	1.4%
	Somewhat disagree	1.6	1.4	1.4	1.7
	Neither agree nor disagree	5.1	8.7	8.7	6.5
	Agree	33.7	33.7	32.2	32.9
	Strongly agree	58.4	54.5	55.8	57.5
Natural resources in <b>low populated areas (rural)</b> are important to conserve.	Strongly disagree	1.6	1.0	1.4	1.4
	Somewhat disagree	0.8	0.7	1.1	2.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	7.4	6.6	6.9	7.2
	Agree	36.3	37.4	41.3	37.3
	Strongly agree	53.9	54.3	49.3	53.4
Conservation areas should be public resources or <b>publicly owned.</b>	Strongly disagree	3.9	4.9	5.1	4.7
	Somewhat disagree	9.4	11.2	9.1	9.4
	Neither agree nor disagree	28.0	34.0	26.2	28.7
	Agree	28.7	25.6	29.8	28.4
	Strongly agree	29.9	24.2	29.8	28.8
Conservation areas should be <b>privately owned.</b>	Strongly disagree	24.7	19.4	29.7	25.0
	Somewhat disagree	24.3	20.8	21.6	22.6
	Neither agree nor disagree	41.0	47.3	35.2	40.9
	Agree	6.4	8.5	11.4	8.3
	Strongly agree	3.6	3.9	2.2	3.2

### Specific Conservation Efforts

Support for conservation efforts and programs were strongly supported. Locally produced food and farmer’s markets for the sale of agricultural products were most highly supported. Recycling was rated 3<sup>rd</sup> in support. Next, water resources and its associated landscapes such as Lake Michigan, sand dunes, inland lakes, and rivers were supported at high levels.



### General Importance of green and open space areas and water resources in the county

		Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
Green and open space area	Yes	78.0%	62.5%	66.2%	72.5%
	No	22.0	37.5	33.8	27.5
Water resources	Yes	89.8	86.3	82.7	87.5
	No	10.2	13.7	17.3	12.4

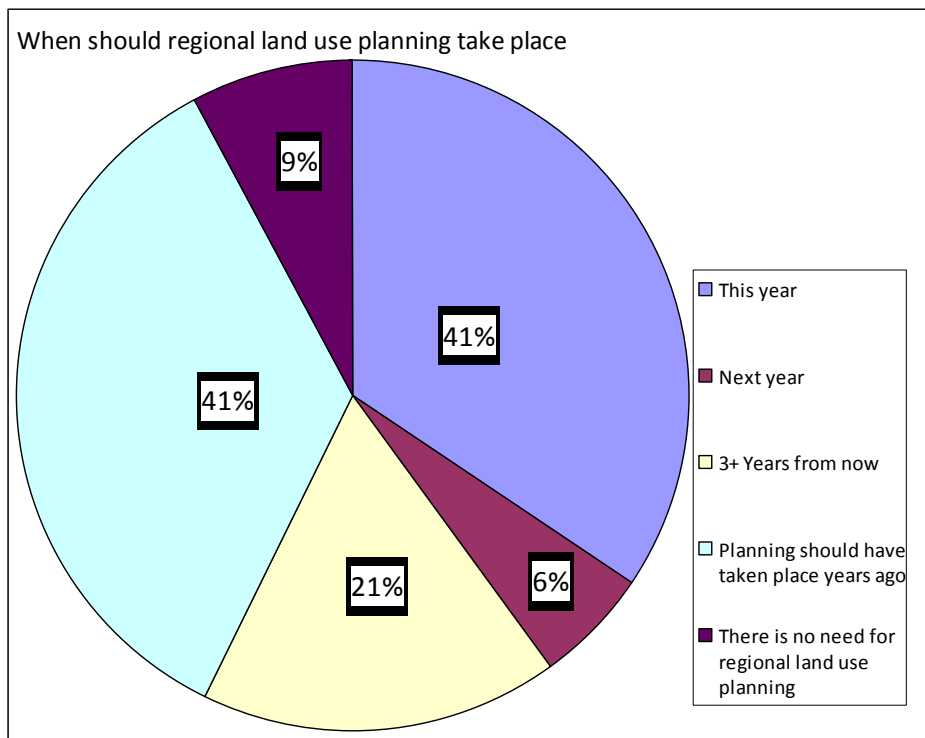
### Quality/Quantity of Green Resources

The public’s perception of quality and quantity changes in green and open spaces and water resources were generally positive. For water resources, over half felt the quality and quantity of water resources stayed the same over the past five years. One-quarter of homeowners felt water quality had decreased, but almost twenty percent felt water quality had improved. For green and open spaces, almost half felt the quality and quantity of land-based resources stayed the same. Slightly more than one-third felt the quantity of green and open spaces had decreased in the past five years.

		Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
Quality of green and open spaces	Increased	24.2%	14.6%	15.5%	27.7%
	Decreased	25.7	31.3	34.5	29.0
	Stayed the same	50.1	54.2	50.0	48.0
Quantity of green and open spaces	Increased	17.6	7.0	9.6	13.5
	Decreased	33.4	39.4	43.4	37.1
	Stayed the same	49.0	53.5	47.0	49.4
Quality of water resources	Increased	21.5	15.1	11.4	17.7
	Decreased	25.7	28.1	31.2	27.1
	Stayed the same	52.7	56.8	57.4	55.1
Quantity of water resources	Increased	10.9	6.4	6.7	9.0
	Decreased	22.3	24.3	26.7	23.2
	Stayed the same	66.8	69.3	66.7	67.8

### Importance of Land Use Planning

Four out of ten homeowners saw the lost opportunity that conservation and smarter land use planning should have taken place years ago, whereas a similar number said now is a good time to start. Less than ten percent did not see a need for regional land use planning.



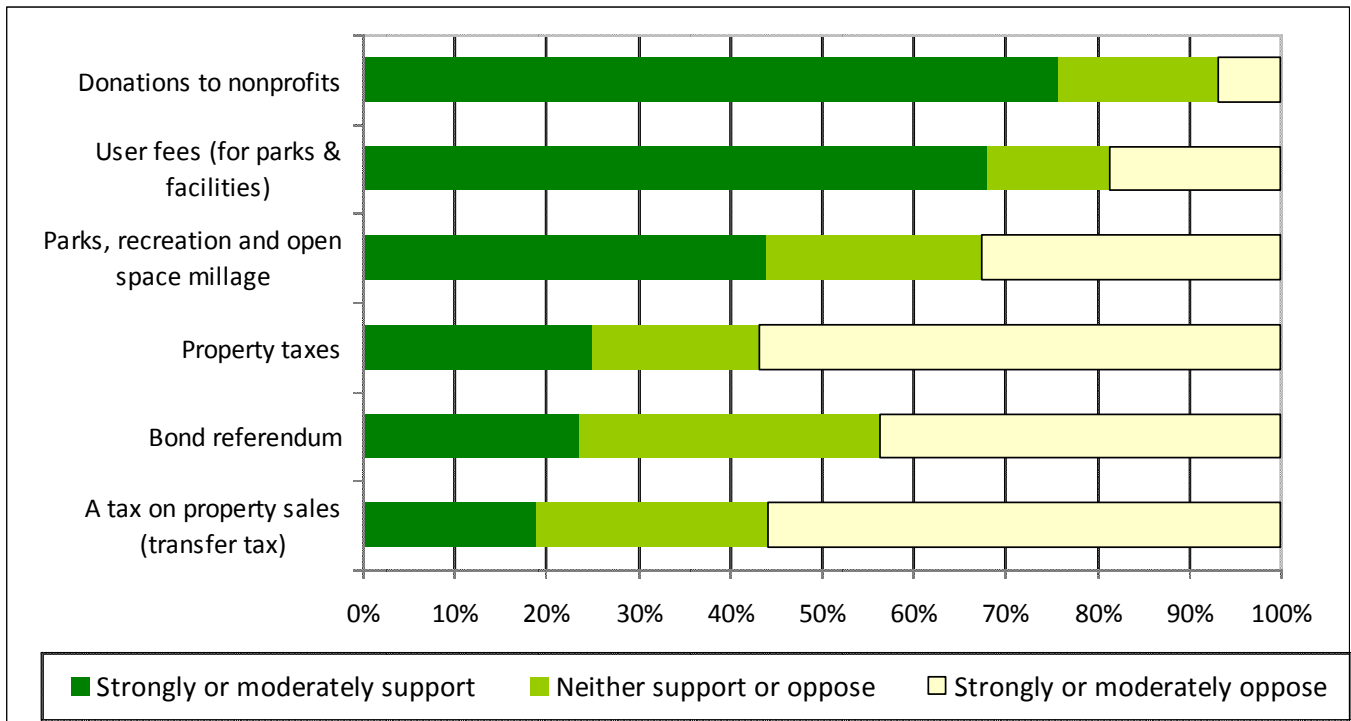
### Financial Support for Conservation Efforts

Personal or household financial support for greater conservation efforts was at the over \$25 a year level. Less than 20 percent were unwilling to pay anything. Homeowners were most supportive of additional funding from donations to nonprofits and park user fees.

Question 14: What funding sources would you support or oppose for raising this money you checked above?

	Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	Total
\$0/year	18.7%	14.9%	17.6%	18.0
\$1-5/year	10.9	14.2	14.8	12.2
\$6-10/year	11.3	8.6	13.3	11.3
\$11-15/year	8.7	7.1	7.4	8.1
\$16-25/year	26.1	22.4	18.8	22.9
More than \$25/year	24.3	32.8	28.1	27.4

Question 15: What funding sources would you support or oppose for raising this money you checked above?



### Government Role in Conservation

Homeowners preferred that many levels of government (local, county) and interested groups (land conservancies, nonprofits, citizen volunteer groups) should be involved in conservation planning and efforts. Eight of ten respondents agreed all these mentioned groups should be involved in conservation and work together. One-third agreed that current levels of community and public participation in conservation was adequate.

		Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
I feel my <b>community's</b> public input process for conservation and land use planning is adequate	Strongly disagree	8.1%	11.2%	12.7%	9.8%
	Somewhat disagree	21.8	23.5	22.0	22.3
	Neither agree nor disagree	32.7	41.9	31.0	33.7
	Somewhat agree	29.0	18.1	28.4	26.7
	Strongly agree	8.5	5.4	6.0	7.5
My <b>local government</b> should be primarily involved in conservation	Strongly disagree	2.8	4.0	4.9	3.7
	Somewhat disagree	8.9	13.0	10.3	10.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	26.7	29.6	24.0	25.8
	Somewhat agree	38.1	33.6	40.7	38.5
	Strongly agree	23.5	19.9	20.2	21.8
My <b>county government</b> should be primarily involved in conservation	Strongly disagree	2.8	3.3	4.9	3.8
	Somewhat disagree	7.7	8.4	8.4	7.8
	Neither agree nor disagree	26.0	25.5	22.8	24.9
	Somewhat agree	38.2	38.2	38.8	38.7
	Strongly agree	25.2	24.7	25.1	24.9
<b>Citizen volunteer groups</b> should be primarily involved in conservation	Strongly disagree	3.6	2.2	2.6	3.0
	Somewhat disagree	4.8	6.1	6.0	5.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	31.9	32.5	27.9	31.1
	Somewhat agree	37.9	39.4	41.5	39.0
	Strongly agree	21.8	19.9	21.9	21.4
<b>Land conservancy</b> or other <b>nonprofit organizations</b> should be primarily involved in conservation	Strongly disagree	2.9	2.2	3.4	2.8
	Somewhat disagree	5.3	7.6	4.2	6.0
	Neither agree nor disagree	29.0	25.7	22.1	26.2
	Somewhat agree	37.6	41.7	43.1	39.6
	Strongly agree	25.3	22.8	27.1	25.4
<b>All of the above</b> should be primarily involved in conservation	Strongly disagree	2.4	1.4	4.5	2.9
	Somewhat disagree	2.4	2.8	4.9	3.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	16.2	17.0	17.7	16.3
	Somewhat agree	31.6	38.3	29.1	32.4
	Strongly agree	47.4	40.4	43.8	45.1

### Types of Open-Ended Comments about the need for Conservation

	Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	Total Mentions
Sprawl	55	47	48	150
Quality/quantity of environmental resources	41	47	35	123
Human behavior	27	24	38	89
Leadership/political process	25	31	17	84
Pollution	15	29	28	72
Cost/expense	11	16	20	47
Other (e.g., wildlife is running rapid; little is done on a consistent basis, not fully appreciated, etc.)	17	15	12	44

### Barriers to Physical Activity

Multiple responses allowed.	Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
No barriers keep me from participating in outdoor physical activity	60.6%	52.9%	50.5%	56.9%
I have no sidewalks or trails near my home	18.6	28.6	22.2	21.3
I don't have time	20.7	24.8	18.1	20.4
I have no one to exercise with	10.7	13.6	10.1	11.0
Health problems prohibit me from outdoor activity	9.6	11.4	13.1	10.9
It is not convenient for me	9.1	14.3	12.6	10.7
There are no public outdoor places near my home	6.3	12.9	11.1	8.4
I don't feel safe outdoors	4.9	7.9	7.0	5.9
Outdoor physical activity isn't something I like	3.7	2.1	2.5	3.0
I lack transportation to outdoor facilities	0.9	1.4	1.0	1.0

Level of Public Access

		Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	Total
Lake Michigan	Too much	1.1%	3.5%	1.0%	1.5%
	Adequate	61.5	61.3	56.9	59.9
	Some more needed	23.0	25.4	26.8	24.9
	Much more needed	14.4	9.9	15.3	13.7
Inland lakes	Too much	0.4	8.3	3.8	2.6
	Adequate	52.6	49.3	53.6	52.0
	Some more needed	32.7	26.4	30.1	31.3
	Much more needed	14.3	16.0	12.4	14.1
Rivers	Too much	0.4	2.8	1.0	1.0
	Adequate	60.0	62.2	54.5	58.5
	Some more needed	29.9	24.5	31.4	29.9
	Much more needed	9.6	10.5	13.2	10.5
Beaches	Too much	0.4	3.5	1.0	1.0
	Adequate	59.0	55.6	53.6	56.8
	Some more needed	24.1	26.1	29.7	26.4
	Much more needed	16.4	14.8	15.8	15.9

### Amount of Resources/Assets in the County

		Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
Campgrounds	Too much	1.1%	3.5%	1.0%	1.5%
	Adequate	63.7	65.2	67.8	64.7
	Some more need	30.4	24.1	24.4	28.3
	Much more needed	4.8	7.1	6.8	5.5
Historical/cultural attractions	Too much	0.0	0.7	1.0	0.3
	Adequate	51.6	50.7	52.0	51.7
	Some more need	38.3	40.7	38.0	38.4
	Much more needed	10.1	7.9	9.0	9.6
Biking trails	Too much	0.9	0.7	1.5	0.9
	Adequate	31.1	30.0	48.5	35.3
	Some more need	48.1	45.0	37.5	44.4
	Much more needed	19.9	24.3	12.5	19.4
Mountain biking trails	Too much	1.7	1.5	3.2	2.0
	Adequate	47.3	49.2	59.5	50.4
	Some more need	38.2	34.8	29.7	35.6
	Much more needed	12.8	14.4	7.6	11.9
Hiking trails	Too much	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.3
	Adequate	36.4	40.7	49.2	40.6
	Some more need	47.8	40.7	38.2	43.9
	Much more needed	15.7	18.6	11.6	15.2
Horse (equestrian) trails	Too much	1.0	1.4	2.7	1.3
	Adequate	61.6	54.3	56.4	59.0
	Some more need	29.8	34.1	34.0	31.7
	Much more needed	7.6	10.1	6.9	8.0
Cross country ski trails	Too much	0.5	1.5	1.5	0.9
	Adequate	59.1	54.7	54.1	56.8
	Some more need	34.1	35.0	33.5	34.4
	Much more needed	6.3	8.8	10.8	8.0
Snowmobile trails	Too much	11.1	11.4	14.9	12.6
	Adequate	65.0	65.7	64.4	64.4
	Some more need	19.0	15.0	17.3	17.9
	Much more needed	4.9	7.9	3.5	5.1
Off road vehicle trails	Too much	16.0	16.1	21.0	17.7
	Adequate	56.1	54.7	56.9	55.7
	Some more need	21.6	19.0	16.4	19.7
	Much more needed	6.3	10.2	5.6	6.9
Hunting land	Too much	11.5	9.4	6.6	9.9
	Adequate	56.4	56.1	61.9	57.6
	Some more need	21.5	18.7	20.8	20.6
	Much more needed	10.6	15.8	10.7	11.9
Open and green spaces	Too much	0.4	0.7	2.0	0.8
	Adequate	36.1	36.4	38.7	36.6
	Some more need	41.6	38.6	43.1	41.8
	Much more needed	21.8	24.3	16.2	20.7

		Berrien	Cass	Van Buren	W Total
Agricultural lands	Too much	2.0%	2.1%	1.0%	1.7%
	Adequate	56.6	59.4	58.5	57.5
	Some more need	24.6	22.4	28.5	24.9
	Much more needed	16.8	16.1	12.0	15.9
Public parks	Too much	0.4	0.7	2.5	0.8
	Adequate	53.2	49.7	47.3	51.0
	Some more need	34.5	38.6	39.9	36.4
	Much more needed	11.8	11.0	10.3	11.7
Protected natural areas	Too much	0.4	2.1	1.5	0.9
	Adequate	44.0	37.1	37.4	41.5
	Some more need	34.9	37.1	41.4	36.9
	Much more needed	20.7	23.6	19.7	20.6
Piers for fishing	Too much	0.9	0.7	2.0	1.0
	Adequate	62.3	48.2	57.7	59.0
	Some more need	28.7	36.9	31.1	30.7
	Much more needed	8.1	14.2	9.2	9.3
Playgrounds	Too much	0.9	1.4	1.0	0.9
	Adequate	62.0	53.5	62.4	60.7
	Some more need	28.0	37.3	30.2	30.3
	Much more needed	9.1	7.7	6.4	8.1
Lake Michigan beaches	Too much	0.4	1.4	1.0	0.7
	Adequate	60.7	61.4	55.2	59.0
	Some more need	27.5	27.1	29.6	28.3
	Much more needed	11.4	10.0	14.3	12.0
Ball fields (soccer, baseball, etc.)	Too much	2.5	2.1	2.5	2.3
	Adequate	73.9	71.3	72.1	73.0
	Some more need	18.9	20.3	21.4	19.9
	Much more needed	4.7	6.3	4.0	4.8
Golf courses	Too much	18.3	16.9	19.6	18.5
	Adequate	72.9	73.9	72.1	72.8
	Some more need	7.6	7.7	7.8	7.5
	Much more needed	1.1	1.4	0.5	1.2
Canoe/kayak launches	Too much	1.1	1.4	1.5	1.2
	Adequate	57.0	59.6	54.1	56.9
	Some more need	35.7	30.5	36.2	35.0
	Much more needed	6.1	8.5	8.2	6.9
Skateboarding parks	Too much	8.1	9.5	8.3	8.4
	Adequate	69.7	64.2	68.2	68.8
	Some more need	19.1	21.9	18.8	19.2
	Much more needed	3.1	4.4	4.7	3.7

## Surveyors' Conclusions and Recommendations

As a final summary to the mail survey, the following key findings are:

- Residents have appreciation and attachment to many natural areas, open spaces, parks, and rural landscapes in the Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren area. These places and landscapes have long been part of the area's rich agriculture and natural resource history. Residents expressed deep concern for the loss of these legacies brought on by residential and commercial development, and sale of farmland and declining quality of air, water, and resources for animals, birds, fish and other resource dependent wildlife.
- Most residents indicated that both the quality and quantity of green and open spaces and water resources in the region had "stayed the same" over the past five years rather than decreasing. About one-quarter of respondents saw an increase in the quality of green and open spaces and 13% saw an increase in quantity. Less than 10% saw water resources improving in quantity and 18% saw improvement in quality. Four out of ten residents saw "the quantity of green and open spaces" decreasing over the past five years.
- Support exists for increased conservation efforts in the near future. Most residents indicated that conservation planning at a regional level should have occurred in the past or it should start now. A great number of respondents were willing to pay some amount to fund conservation. The largest group of respondents supported the highest level suggested (over \$25 per year) or \$16-\$25 per year. Donations to nonprofits or use fees (for parks & facilities) that would be invested in conservation efforts were supported over park, recreation and open space millage and various types of taxes. Residents also expressed that many levels of governments and interest groups/organizations should be involved in conservation. Seven out of ten respondents felt that collaborations and partnerships between government, citizen volunteer groups and land conservancies and other non-profits was the best route for enhanced conservation efforts.

Finally, based on study results, the following recommendations for action are made:

- Consider the community needs analysis on a regular basis and maintain continuous review to identify changes in attitudes and approaches, particularly toward identified sites of conservation and recreation importance.
- Identify short and long-term goals and priorities for municipal and nonprofit conservation and recreation organizations based on the responses provided in this study.
- Ensure the incorporation of conservation and recreation issues into municipal planning processes and public outreach efforts.
- Enhance marketing and communication of conservation and recreation issues by municipal and nonprofit conservation and recreation organizations.
- Use public and private resources and partnerships to craft a broad, unifying conservation and recreation vision for the Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren region that concerned citizens will value and that diverse communities and organizations can buy into.
- Brand agricultural conservation and local food production and distribution, so residents and visitors are aware of the significance of this industry.
- Move toward more recycling and energy efficient programs that reduce the human impact on green and open spaces (littering), water (fuel discharge), and air (carbon emission).
- Market non-motorized transportation using trails and bike pathways. Continue to add trails and make connections to places where people live, work, and play.