

Resident Lake Survey – Little Elkhart Lake
January 2022

Summary

Question 1

There was a total of 39 responses (38% return rate). Two-Thirds of the respondents were riparian property owners and one-third were non-riparian property owners.

Question 2

All but one of the respondents use the lake during open water months. 33% use the lake lightly (1-5 days/month), 20% use it moderately (6-15 days/month), and 46% use it heavily (16-31 days/month).

Question 3

23% of the respondents do not use the lake during winter months. 56% use the lake lightly (1-5 days/month), 18% use it moderately (6-15 days/month), and 3% use it heavily (16-31 days/month).

Question 4

Top 4 activities on the lake are: #1 Canoeing, kayaking, paddleboard, pedal boat (80%), #2 Nature Viewing (64%), #3 Boating (59%) and #4 Open water fishing (59%). There was a close #5 Swimming at 54%.

Question 5

31% of the respondents have been using the lake for <10 years, 28% 11-20 years, 23% 21-40 and 18% >40 years. So, 69% of respondents have used the lake over a decade.

Question 6/7

Respondents rated their lake experience from unchanged to more enjoyable at 43% and less enjoyable at 57%. The main driver for the less enjoyable rating was excessive aquatic plant growth at 78%, followed by fishing deterioration at 8%.

Question 8

Top 3 concerns of residents are #1 Algae Growth (e.g. Chara) at 87%, #2 Excessive aquatic plant growth (85%) and #3 Aquatic Invasive Species (72%).

Question 9

Residents aware of Aquatic Invasive Species in LEL was at 59%. 41% not aware or unsure. More resident education in this area may be helpful.

Question 10

For the 59% that were aware of AIS in LEL, they were aware of our most common AIS, Eurasian water milfoil (84%), but less aware of two others: Curly leaf pondweed (52%) and Chinese mystery snail (16%).

Question 11

95% of respondents support active management of aquatic plants. The remaining 5% was unsure. No one responded that it was not needed.

Question 12

49% of respondents believe AIS plant growth negatively affects their use of the lake most or all of the time, followed by 31% sometimes, and 21% rarely/never.

Question 13

Residents rated the 3 most important elements of the aquatic plant management plan update to be: #1 Reduce extent and density of existing AIS (64%), #2 Prevent the spread of existing AIS (44%), followed by a 4-way tie at (41%) for #3– Study and understand current aquatic plant problems; Identify and explore new aquatic plant management strategies; seek grant funding for AIS management efforts; and Identify areas in need of annual management of navigational purposes.

Question 14

Respondents overall rate their lake experience: 59% very enjoyable; 26% Somewhat enjoyable; 7% neutral and 8% Very unpleasant.

Question 15

Sixteen riparian owners expressed interest in exploring limited dredging options around their pier at their own expense, with the necessary DNR permits.

Question 16

Nine respondents offered to help install the lake aeration system if needed during winter months. Nice to see this level of volunteerism.

General Comments

1. Nice if we restricted gas motors on lake, less pollution for environment
2. Are there alternatives to chemical killing of weeds? Not thrilled with the prospect of long terms effects of herbicides. Yet know weeds need to be controlled for navigation
3. Priority treatment is needed ASAP
4. LEL has a huge amount of potential but, the weed problem won't fix itself. I don't believe its destiny is to be a marsh in my life time. Thank you.
5. It would be helpful if property owners received specific information on AIS identification.
6. Need to better manage chara and water lilly growth in navigational channels from resident and public piers.