

**COLUMBIA WETLANDS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA:
A RECREATION STRATEGY FOR THE DRY GULCH AREA**

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

JULY 2023



**TOGETHER
FOR WILDLIFE**



**BRITISH
COLUMBIA**



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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area (CWWMA) is within a landscape which holds very significant cultural and ecological values to Secwépemc speaking peoples and the Ktunaxa. It is acknowledged that the CWWMA, including the Dry Gulch recreation planning area, is within the territories of the Secwépemc First Nations, including Shuswap Band, and the Ktunaxa Nation.

The Province of British Columbia is working towards collaborative management of the area with the Secwépemc First Nations, including Shuswap Band, and the Ktunaxa Nation which will include management of the area to protect Indigenous values into the future.

1. INTRODUCTION



The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS), in collaboration with the Shuswap Band and Ktunaxa Nation, prepared a draft recreation strategy for the Dry Gulch area of the Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area (WMA). This proposed draft strategy was provided to the public and key stakeholders for review and opportunities for feedback were provided through an online survey, online mapping, and in-depth interviews with individuals and organizations representing key stakeholders. The purpose of the engagement was to better understand users of the study area, gather opinions on current and pressing issues and recreation impacts in the WMA, and receive feedback on the management actions that were proposed within the draft recreation strategy. The engagement process was designed and implemented in accordance with the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) best practices and core values (Figure 1).



CORE VALUES

IAP2 Federation's Core Values for Public Participation professionals define the expectations and aspirations of the public participation process. Processes based on the Core Values have been shown to be the most successful and respected.

1 Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.

2 Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.

3 Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision-makers.

4 Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.

5 Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.

6 Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.

7 Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Figure 1 IAP2 Core Values

Feedback received through all forms of engagement are summarized below and will be used to inform the preparation of future editions of the Recreation Strategy. When finalized, the strategy will identify the actions that the Ministry, First Nations, and partners may take to ensure recreation is sustainable and compatible with the needs of wildlife and the WMA's conservation mandate.

1.1 ABOUT THE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

The Dry Gulch portion of the Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area is designated as a Wildlife Management Area under the provincial Wildlife Act. WMAs are established for the primary purpose of conserving regionally to internationally significant wildlife, fish species and their habitats. In addition to wildlife values, the WMA also holds significant cultural, spiritual, and archaeological importance to the Shuswap Band and Ktunaxa Nation. Recreation can be a permitted use of a WMA where it is compatible with the conservation objectives of the WMA.

Though not its primary management intent, the WMA has become a desirable year-round outdoor recreation destination for both residents of, and visitors to, the region. The volume of recreational use within the Dry Gulch area has been increasing steadily over the past decade with visitation levels becoming particularly intense during the COVID-19 pandemic. While visitation has increased, so too has the diversity of authorized and unauthorized recreational activities that are occurring in the WMA. Given the growing recreational pressures and the potential for recreation to undesirably impact wildlife, fish, and their habitats, the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship and the Ministry of Forests (Ministries), in partnerships with the Shuswap Band, and Ktunaxa Nation are undertaking the development of a recreation strategy for the WMA. The strategy will identify the actions that the Ministries, First Nations, and partners may take to ensure recreation is compatible with the needs of wildlife and the WMA's conservation mandate.

2. ABOUT THE REVIEW PROCESS



Upon development of a draft Recreation Strategy, the Ministries implemented a public and stakeholder engagement process to solicit feedback on the draft Strategy. The draft Recreation Strategy, as well as an executive summary of it, were released to the public and stakeholders via the govTogetherBC website and through direct email to stakeholder organizations.

The engagement tactics included the following:

- Online public survey.
- Online interactive crowdsourcing map.
- Stakeholder interviews
- Stakeholder written submissions.

The engagement process was implemented in mid March 2023 and concluded in late April 2023. Participation in each of the engagement tactics was as follows:

 **359 respondents**
Online public survey

 **83 comments / points**
Online interactive crowdsourcing map

 **13 interviews
(17 individuals)**
Stakeholder interviews

 **5**
Written submissions

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



Key findings from the engagement process were as follows.

Recreational Use of the WMA & Recreation Impacts on WMA Values

1. A Very Popular, Desirable & Cherished Area for Recreation

While not the primary management intent, the Dry Gulch area has evolved into a highly desirable and popular area for short (1-2 hour), year-round, recreation outings. More than 90% of respondents to the online survey have visited the WMA to participate in recreation, and many of them recreate in the area frequently. 4% reported recreating in the area everyday, 21% reported recreating in the area multiple times per week, and 17% at least once per week during the warm months with similar patterns in the colder months. Walking/hiking and mountain biking are by far the most popular activities respondents participate in followed then by dog walking – off leash, and wildlife viewing. Visitors travel to the area for physical activity and to connect with and experience nature and, importantly, because it is close to home. Old Coach Trail and Deja View are, by far, the most popular trails used by respondents. In general, respondents are very satisfied with the quality of the recreation experience in the area. 90% rated their experience as 8 out of 10, with 54% rating the quality of the experience as 10 out of 10. Respondents are so satisfied with their experience that 83% are very likely to recommend visiting the WMA to their friends or relatives and 52% reported being extremely likely (10 out of 10) to recommend visiting the WMA.

2. Information About Recreating in the Area is Obtained by Friends / Family and Trail Applications

Friends and family (38%) are, by far, the most popular sources that visitors use to obtain information about recreating in the area. Trails based applications such as TrailForks (16%), All Trails (14%) and Strava (12%) are the next most popular sources of information. Interestingly, forty-four percent (44%) of respondents indicated that they do not use any sources of information to support their trip planning in the area.

3. Understanding of Recreation Impacts to Wildlife Varies

There are key differences in the understandings of the impact recreation can have on wildlife and habitat within the WMA. While 43% of survey respondents agree that recreation is resulting in undesirable impacts very few of these users are mountain bikers and dog walkers (activities that have the potential to significantly impact wildlife and habitat). Further, many recreationists indicated through comments (public survey and online mapping tool) that they do not believe they are causing an impact because they have not seen or encountered wildlife. However, evidence suggests that this lack of encountering or seeing wildlife could be a direct result of wildlife displacement and disbursement from prime habitat due to human use (e.g., recreation).

Proposed Management Actions Feedback

Analysis of the input received through the engagement process indicates that there is general support for most of the proposed management actions, but this support varies depending on how respondents reported using the WMA (e.g. mountain biking, dog on-leash, dog off leash, non-recreational). The results also identify some areas for improvements and amendments to other sections of the plan and some of the proposed management strategies and actions.

1. Establishing a sanction trail system (including trail sustainability)

All engagement method results suggest there is greater support than opposition for designating a sanctioned trail system but opinions vary based on interest of the respondent. The majority of engagement participants believe that this action is greatly needed while some feedback suggests this is not supported and should not be allowed as it is believed to be in direct conflict with the WMA's mission and purpose. Based on feedback members of the public, stakeholders, and community organizations have variable opinions on this proposed action.

2. Reclaim and or decommissions unsanctioned trails and recreation caused disturbances

There is general support for decommissioning certain trails that impact wildlife and habitat, yet that support is significantly reduced when considering the survey responses from dog walkers and mountain bikers. When combing the online mapping data, similar splits appear in that equal or near equal numbers of responses support management actions to decommission the recommended trails and others are strongly opposed.

3. Actively manage domestic dog walking

This proposed action is again varied in levels of support and user groups. Many dog walkers do not agree with proposed restrictions to dogs (e.g., no dogs in the north section) and yet many other respondents believe that even more restrictions should be placed on domestic dogs. This management action received the highest proportion of disagreements from online survey respondents; however, based on interview findings, many stakeholders and relevant local organizations were in support of the proposed dog management actions.

4. Provide basic visitor amenities and manage access points

Amenities such as bear proof garbage bins are highly supported in all levels of engagement. Outhouses are somewhat supported, and picnic tables are less supported. The general sentiment for not supporting certain amenities is the perceived notion that more amenities promote use and might result in increased recreational use.

5. Visitor education (awareness and communication)

There is significant support for this proposed action and a demonstrated need given that many survey respondents were unaware of WMA designation, impacts caused by recreation, and rules and regulation regarding motorized use in the area. Concerns were only raised in regards to who / how funding and resourcing will be obtained to ensure this action can be successful.

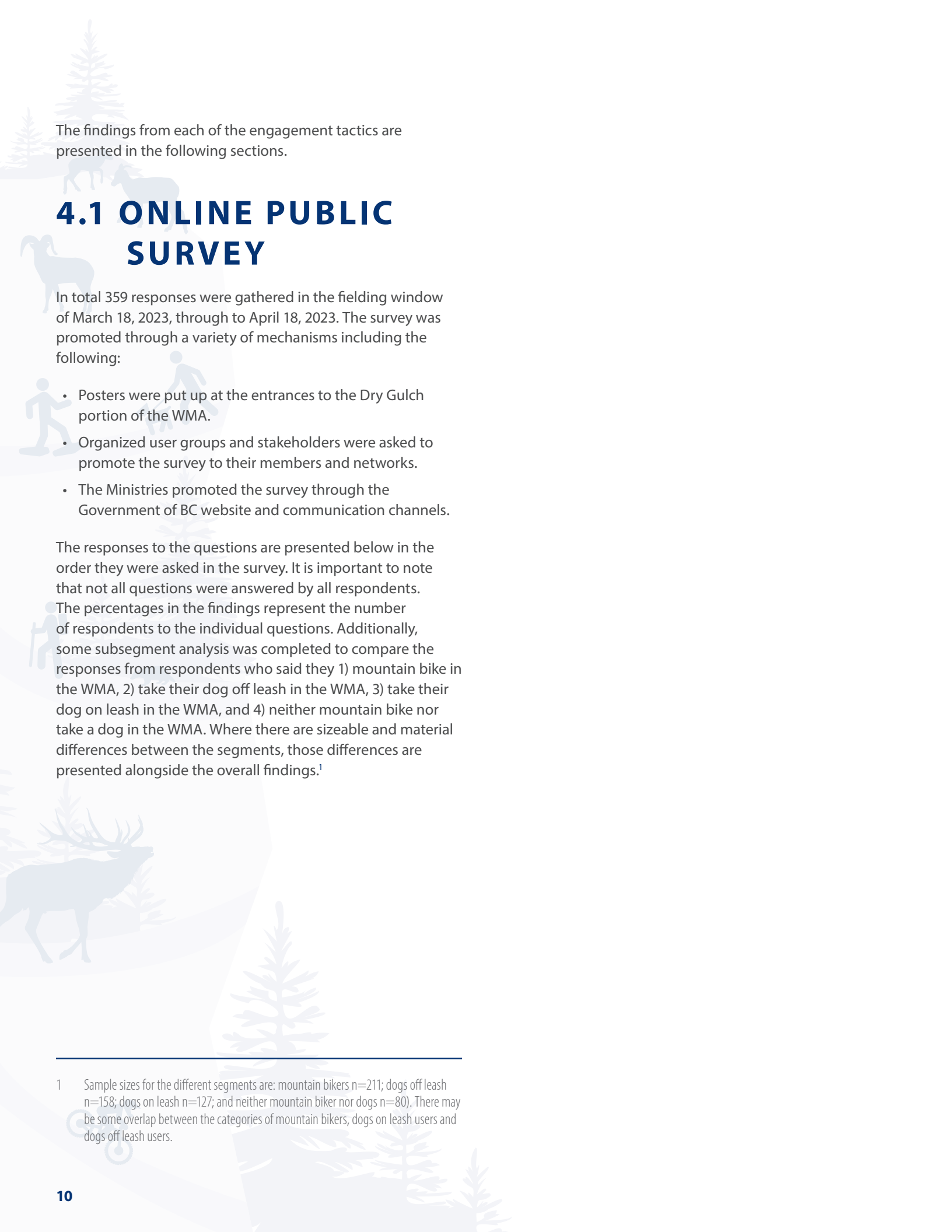
6. Enhance signage and wayfinding

Similar to education, this proposed action has widespread support.

7. Management support and plan implementation resourcing

The final proposed action was supported by all respondents and participants (with the exception of a very small subset of the respondents who desired no management actions whatsoever). This was noted as the most significant action to ensure success of all proposed management actions.

It is clear that there is general support for the proposed Draft Recreation Strategy, however, the support for certain proposed management actions can vary, often based on the interest of the respondent. Overwhelmingly, the results suggest that there is widespread support for the need for increased education and communication regarding the mission and purpose of the WMA, the significant negative impact unmanaged recreation can and is having on wildlife in the area, and the increase in recreation use of the area over the past few years (which is anticipated to stay high and possibly increase further without active management).



The findings from each of the engagement tactics are presented in the following sections.

4.1 ONLINE PUBLIC SURVEY

In total 359 responses were gathered in the fielding window of March 18, 2023, through to April 18, 2023. The survey was promoted through a variety of mechanisms including the following:

- Posters were put up at the entrances to the Dry Gulch portion of the WMA.
- Organized user groups and stakeholders were asked to promote the survey to their members and networks.
- The Ministries promoted the survey through the Government of BC website and communication channels.

The responses to the questions are presented below in the order they were asked in the survey. It is important to note that not all questions were answered by all respondents.

The percentages in the findings represent the number of respondents to the individual questions. Additionally, some subsegment analysis was completed to compare the responses from respondents who said they 1) mountain bike in the WMA, 2) take their dog off leash in the WMA, 3) take their dog on leash in the WMA, and 4) neither mountain bike nor take a dog in the WMA. Where there are sizeable and material differences between the segments, those differences are presented alongside the overall findings.¹

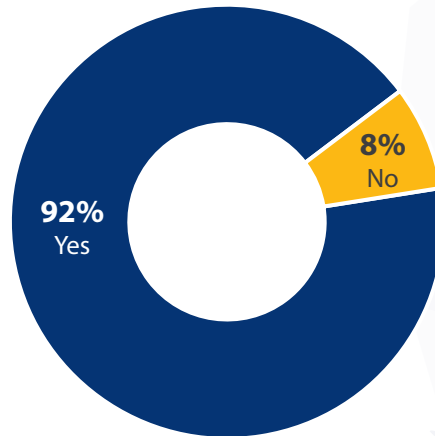
¹ Sample sizes for the different segments are: mountain bikers n=211; dogs off leash n=158; dogs on leash n=127; and neither mountain biker nor dogs n=80). There may be some overlap between the categories of mountain bikers, dogs on leash users and dogs off leash users.

4.1.1 Findings

1. Have you participated in a recreational activity in the Dry Gulch portion of the Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area?

To begin the survey, respondents were asked if they have participated in any recreation activity in the Dry Gulch portion of the Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area. As illustrated in the accompanying graph, almost all (92%) said they have.

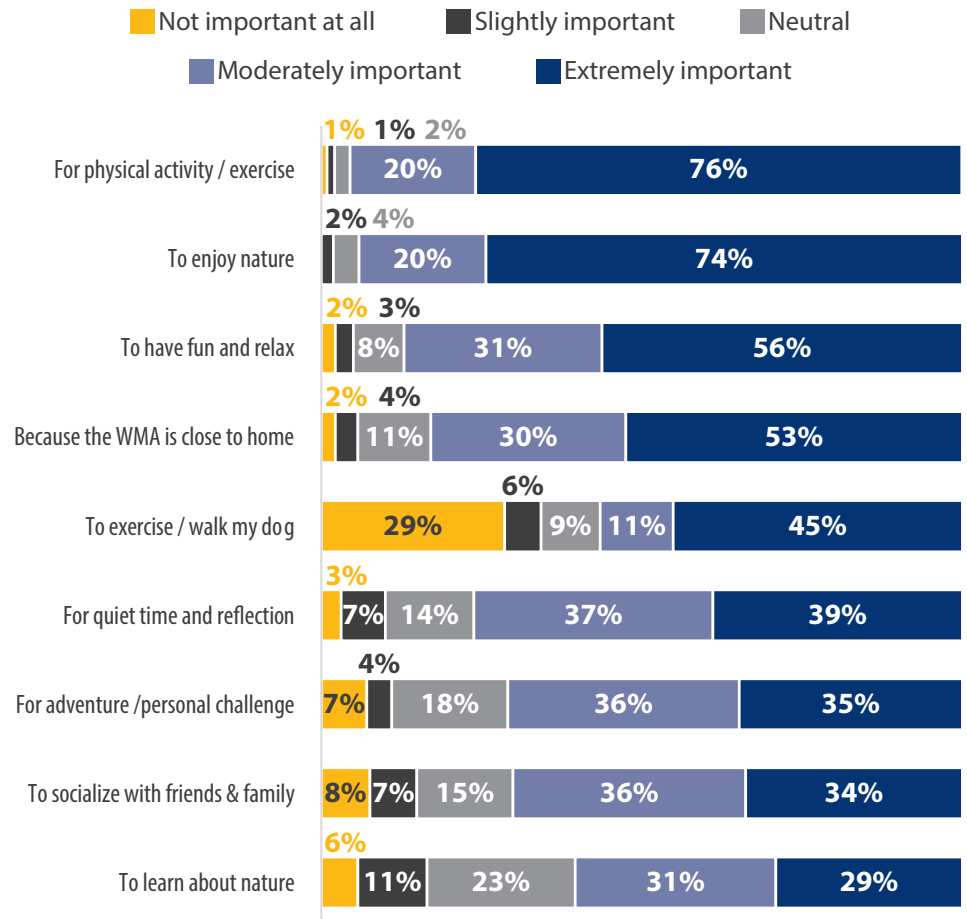
Graph 1: Have You Participated in a Recreational Activity in the Dry Gulch Portion of the Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area?



2. Thinking about why you choose to recreate in the WMA, please rate how important each of the following are to you?

Respondents who recreate in the WMA were then asked to indicate the importance of several motivations to their recreational activities. As illustrated, approximately three-quarters (76%) of respondents said that recreating for physical activity / exercise is extremely important. Similarly, 74% said to enjoy nature is extremely important. Just over one-quarter (29%) said learning about nature is extremely important. Refer to the graph for other responses.

Graph 2: Importance and Reasons for Participating in Recreation Activities at the WMA



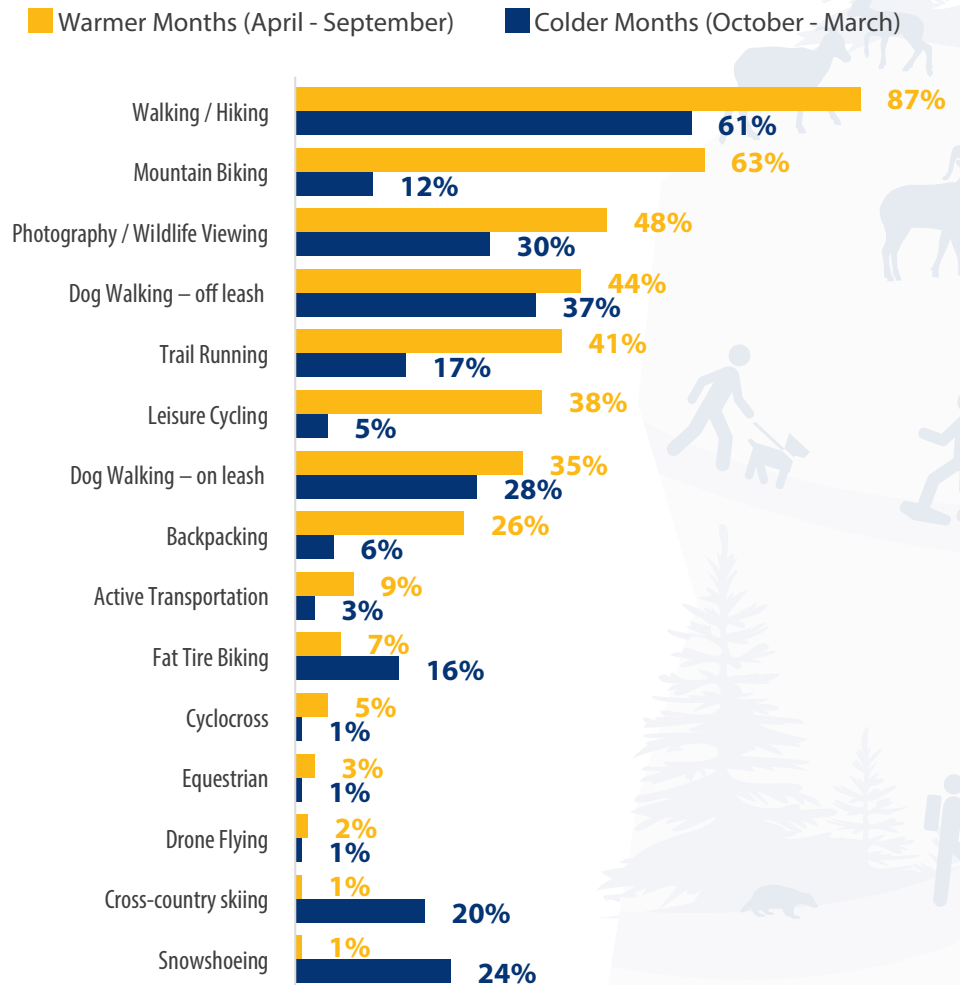
Subsegment Analysis

- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers were more likely to say it is extremely important to them to learn about nature when recreating in the WMA (51%) compared to dog on leash respondents (32%), dog off leash respondents (27%), and mountain bike respondents (20%).
- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers were more likely to say it is extremely important to them to have quiet time and reflection when recreating in the WMA (52%) compared to mountain bike respondents (32%).
- Respondents who are mountain bikers (84%), dog on leash users (76%), dog off leash users (75%) are more likely to say it is extremely important to recreate in the WMA for physical activity / exercise than respondents who are neither bikers or dog people (55%).
- Respondents who recreate with dogs off leash (75%) and on leash (66%) are more likely to say it is extremely important that they recreate in the WMA to exercise their dogs than mountain bikers (46%); and respondents who are neither bikers nor dog walkers (on and off leash) (7%).

3. Which of the following activities do you undertake in the WMA during a) the warmer months (April – September) and b) the colder months (October – March)?

Respondents who recreate in the WMA indicated which activities they undertook in the WMA in two separate periods of the year: warmer months (April – September) and colder months (October – March). As illustrated in the graph, walking / hiking and mountain biking are the two most popular activities in the warmer months (87% and 63% respectively). Considering the colder months, walking / hiking is the most popular activity (61%) with dog walking – off leash (37%) the next most popular. Fat biking, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing are the only activities that are more popular in the colder months than the warmer months.

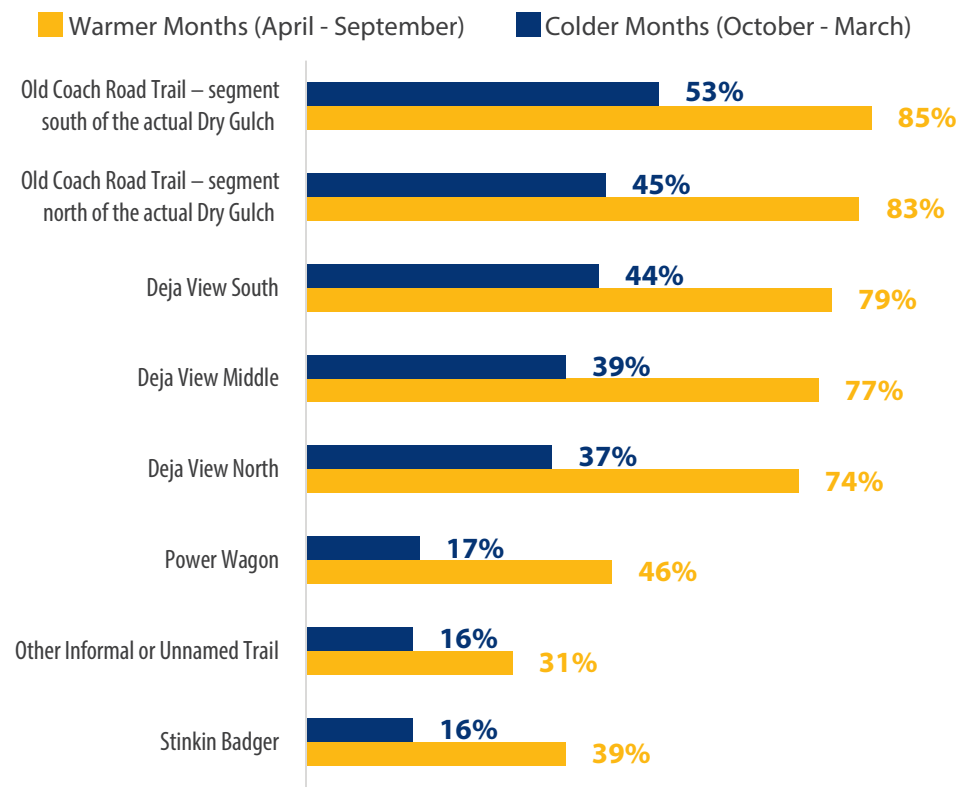
Graph 3: Activities Undertaken in the WMA by Season



4. When recreating in the WMA, which of the following trails do you use during a) the warmer months (April – September) and b) the colder months (October – March)?

The specific trails used by respondents were identified again according to warmer months (April – September) and colder months (October – March). As illustrated in the graph, the Old Coach Road Trail is the most popular trail in both warmer and colder months, however sections of the Deja View are also extremely popular.

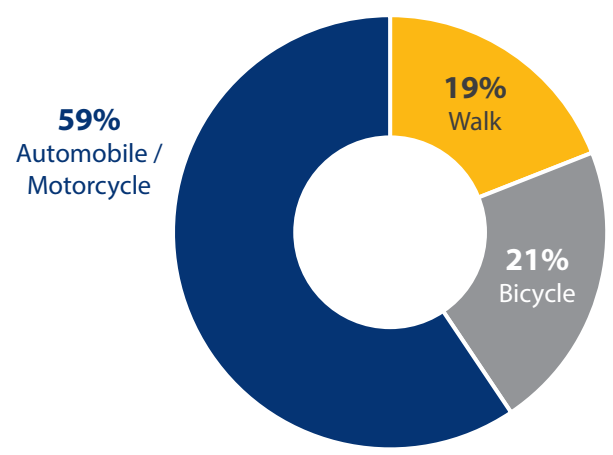
Graph 4: Trail Usage in the WMA by Season



5. Typically, what mode of transportation do you use to travel to the WMA?

The most common means of transportation to the WMA is automobile / motorcycle with over half (59%) traveling there using that means. Less than one-quarter (21%) use bicycle. See the adjacent graph for details.

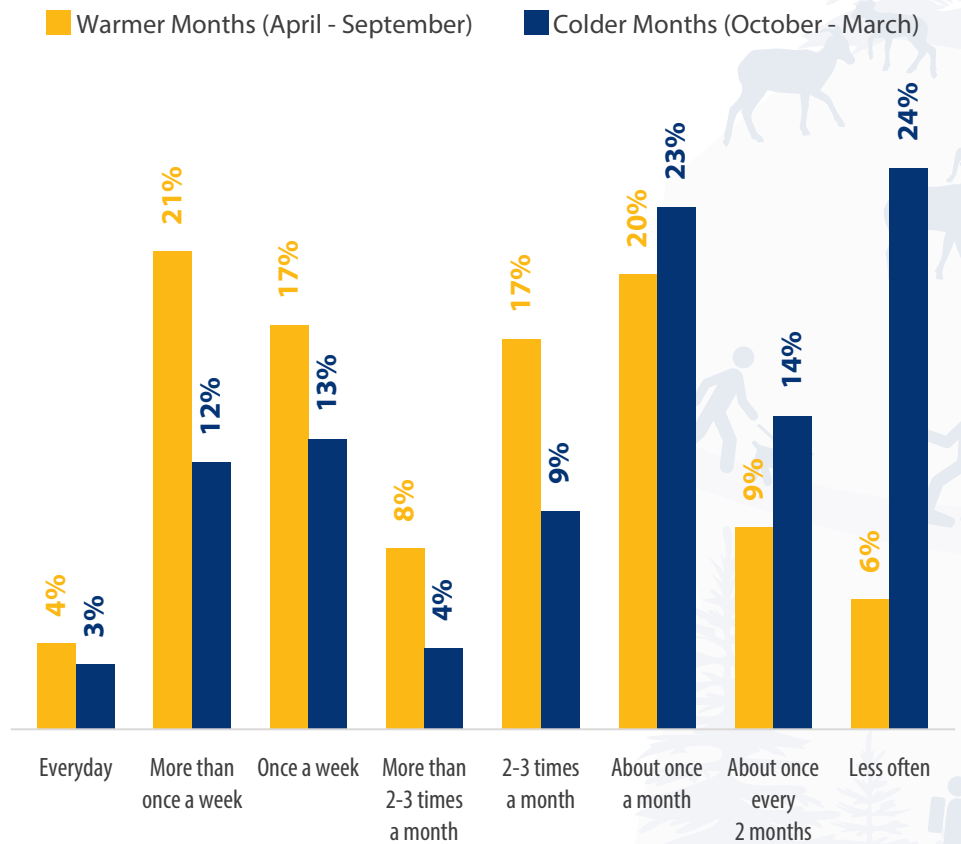
Graph 5: Modes of Transportation Used to Travel to the WMA



6. Thinking about the past year, which of the following best describes how often you recreate in the WMA during a) the warmer months (April – September) and b) the colder months (October – March)?

Respondents were asked the frequency of which they recreate in the WMA. As illustrated in the graph below, less than half (42%) recreate in the WMA at least once a week during the warmer months (April – September). Considering the colder months (October – March), about one-quarter (28%) recreate in the WMA at least weekly.

Graph 6: Frequency of Participating in Recreation at the WMA



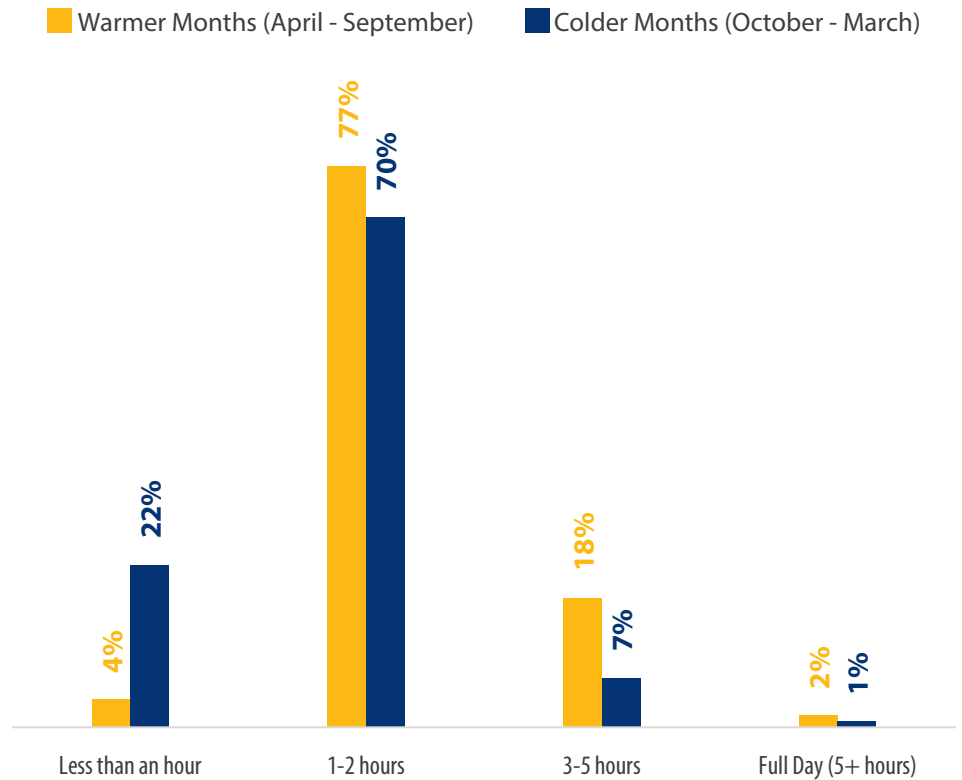
Subsegment Analysis

- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers visit the WMA less frequently in the warmer months (30% visit about once every 2 months or less often) compared to dog on leash respondents (7%), dog off leash respondents (8%), and mountain bike respondents (11%).
- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers (47%) and mountain bikers (41%) visit the WMA less frequently in the colder months (visit about once every 2 months or less often) compared to dog on leash respondents (25%), dog off leash respondents (8%), and mountain bike respondents (21%).

7. Typically, how long do your recreational trips to the WMA last?

Considering a typical recreational trip to the WMA, visits in the warmer months are longer. Almost all (95%) of respondents said a typical visit in the warmer months (April – September) are 1-5 hours. Approximately one-quarter (22%) of recreation trips are less than an hour in the colder months compared with 4% in warmer months.

Graph 7: Length of Recreational Trips to the WMA



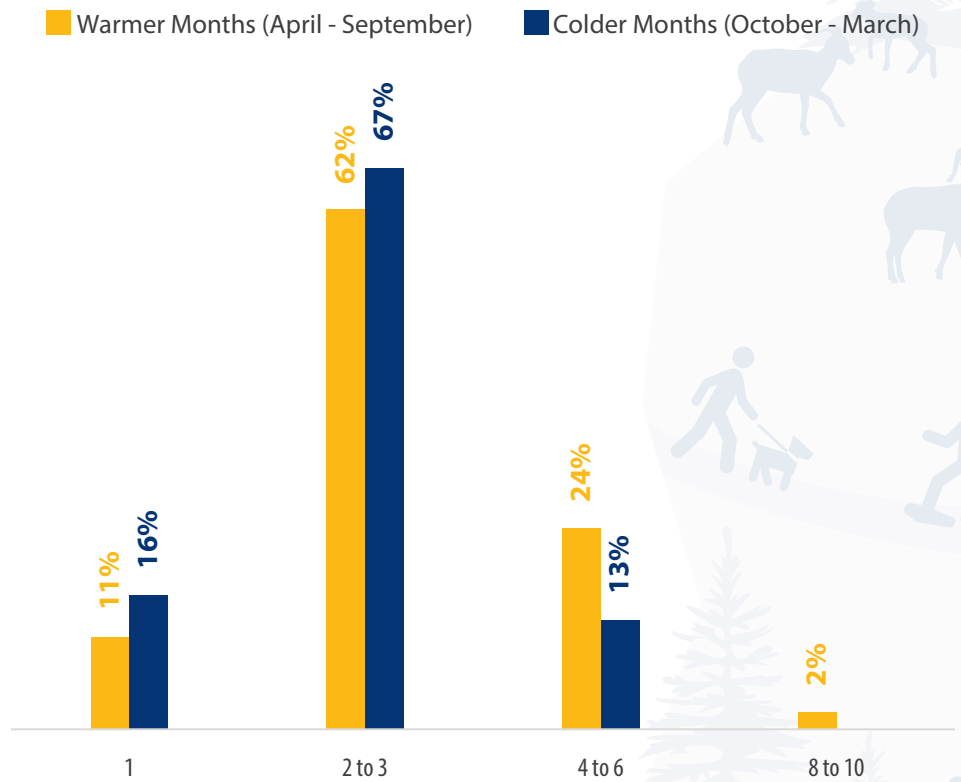
Subsegment Analysis

- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers have longer typical visits in the warmer months (44% are 3 hours or longer) compared to dog on leash respondents (15%), dog off leash respondents (14%), and mountain bike respondents (14%).
- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers have longer typical visits in the colder months (24% are 3 hours or longer) compared to dog on leash respondents (5%), dog off leash respondents (4%), and mountain bike respondents (4%).

8. When you recreate in the WMA, how many people are typically in your group during a) the warmer months (April – September) and b) the colder months (October – March)?

While some respondents recreate in the WMA by themselves, the most typical group size is 2 to 3 people, as illustrated in the graph below.

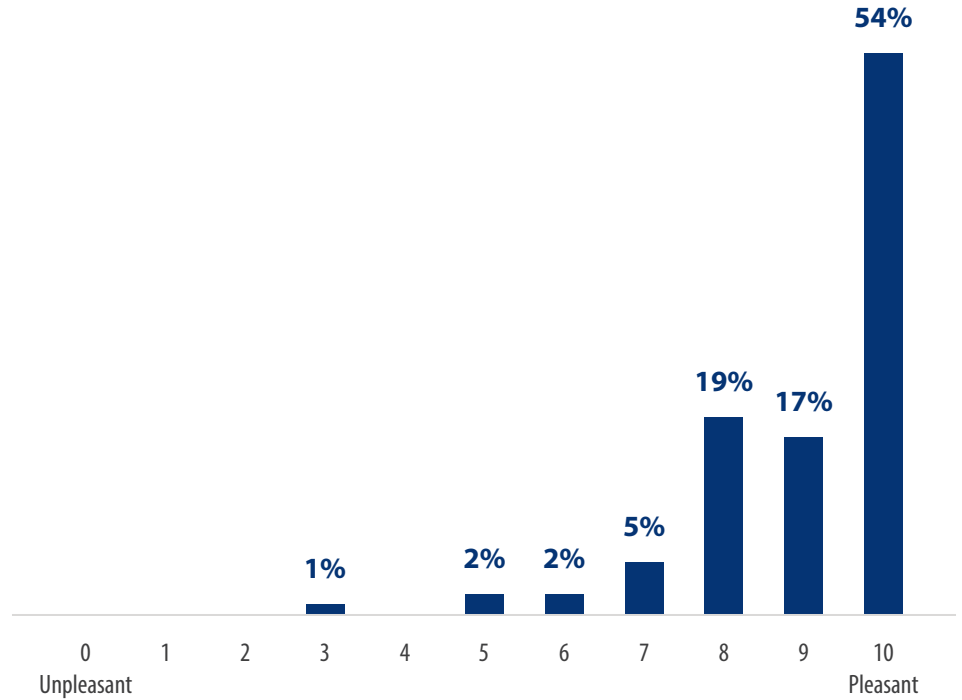
Graph 8: Average Group Size by Season



9. Thinking about your typical trips to the WMA, in general, how would you rate your experiences?

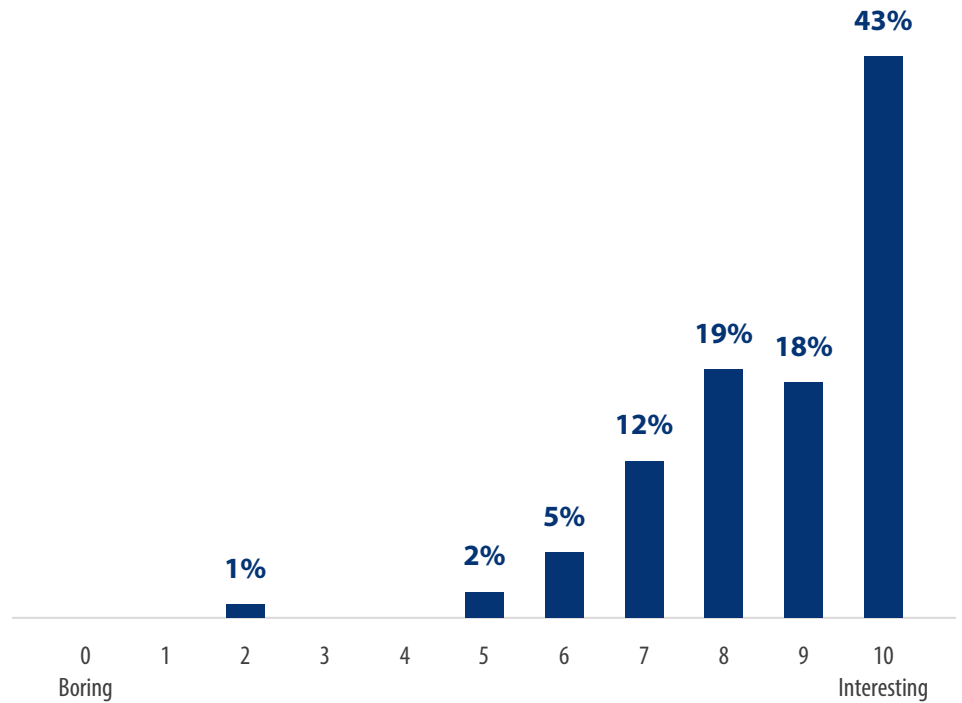
Typically, respondents rate their experiences highly. When asked to rate their typical trips between 0 (unpleasant) and 10 (pleasant) approximately half (54%) rated it a 10. A large majority (90%) rated a typical trip as an 8 or higher. The average score is a 9.1.

Graph 9: Overall Experience Levels at the WMA



When asked to rate the interest levels of their experiences in the WMA, almost half (43%) rated their experience as interesting. Over three-quarters (80%) rated their experiences an 8 or above. The average rating is 8.7.

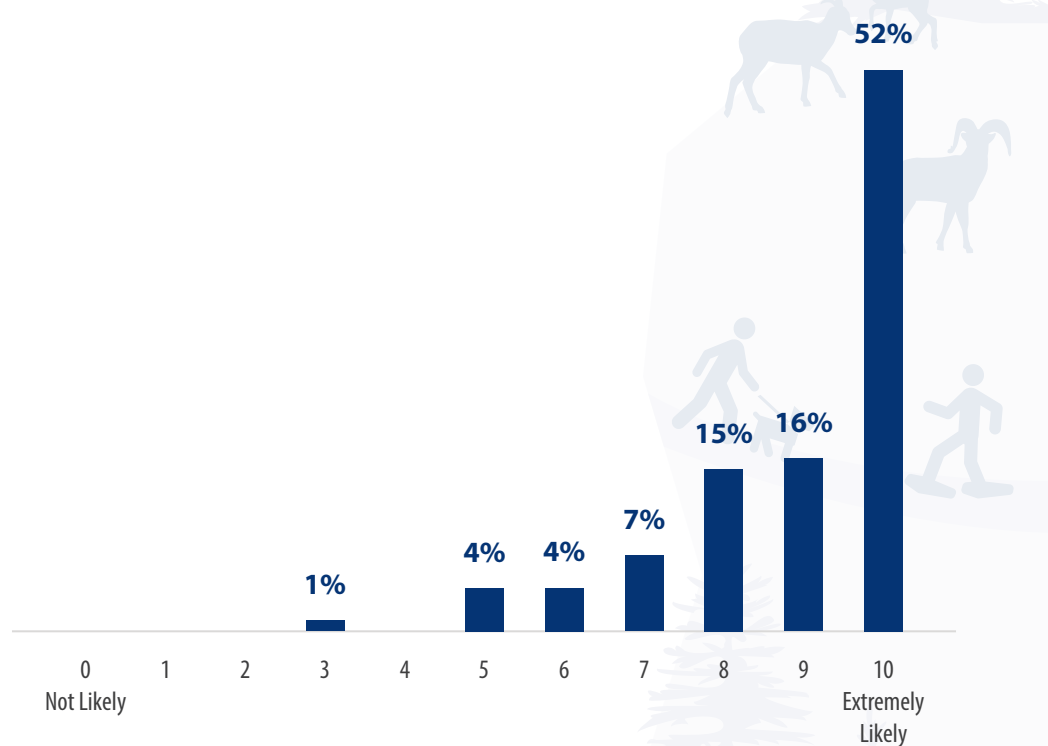
Graph 10: Interest Levels of Experiences in the WMA



10. How likely is it that you would recommend visiting the WMA to a friend or colleague?

Approximately half (52%) of respondents are extremely likely to recommend a visit to the WMA to a friend. On a scale of 0 (not likely) to 10 (extremely likely), over three-quarters (83%) identified their likeliness to recommend to a friend as an 8 or higher. The average score is 8.8.

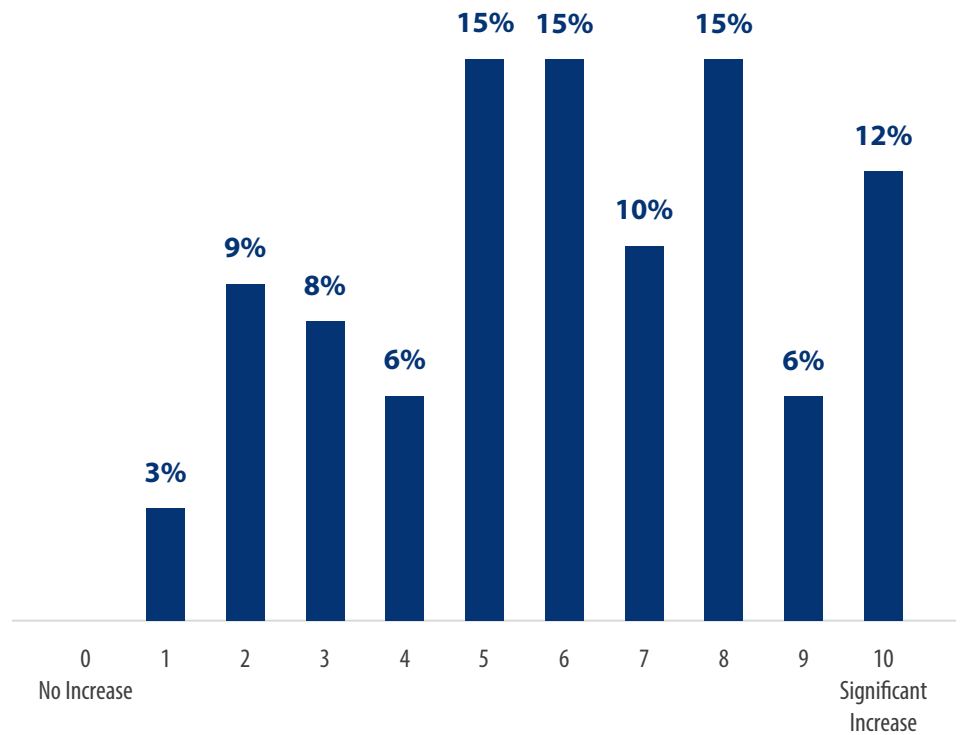
Graph 11: Likelihood of Recommending Visiting the WMA to a Friend



11. To what extent have your visits to the WMA increased your knowledge about the WMA's importance to wildlife, cultural values, and conservation issues?

On a scale from 0 (no increase) to 10 (significant increase), respondents were asked to what extent have their visits to the WMA increased their knowledge about the WMA's important to wildlife, cultural values, and conservation issues. As illustrated in the graph, one-third (33%) rated their increase in knowledge an 8 or higher. Approximately one-quarter (26%) of respondents rated their increase of knowledge 4 or less. **The average rating is 6.1.**

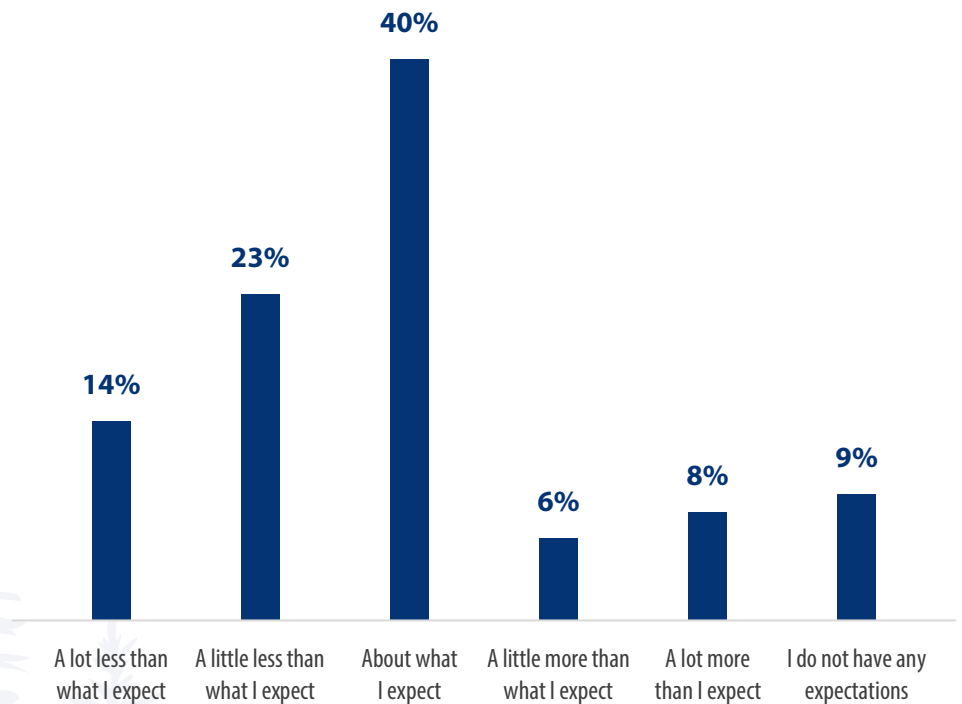
Graph 12: To What Extent Have Your Visits to the WMA Increased Your Knowledge About the WMA's Importance to Wildlife, Cultural Values and Conservation Issues?



12. How does the supply and quality of recreation infrastructure (e.g., trails, parking areas, signage, waste receptacles) in this site compare with what you expect in a WMA or other conservation focused areas?

Over one-third (40%) said the supply and quality of recreation infrastructure (e.g., trails, parking areas, signage, waster receptacles) in the WMA was what they were expecting. Fourteen percent (14%) said the infrastructure was more than then had expected. Refer to the graph for additional responses.

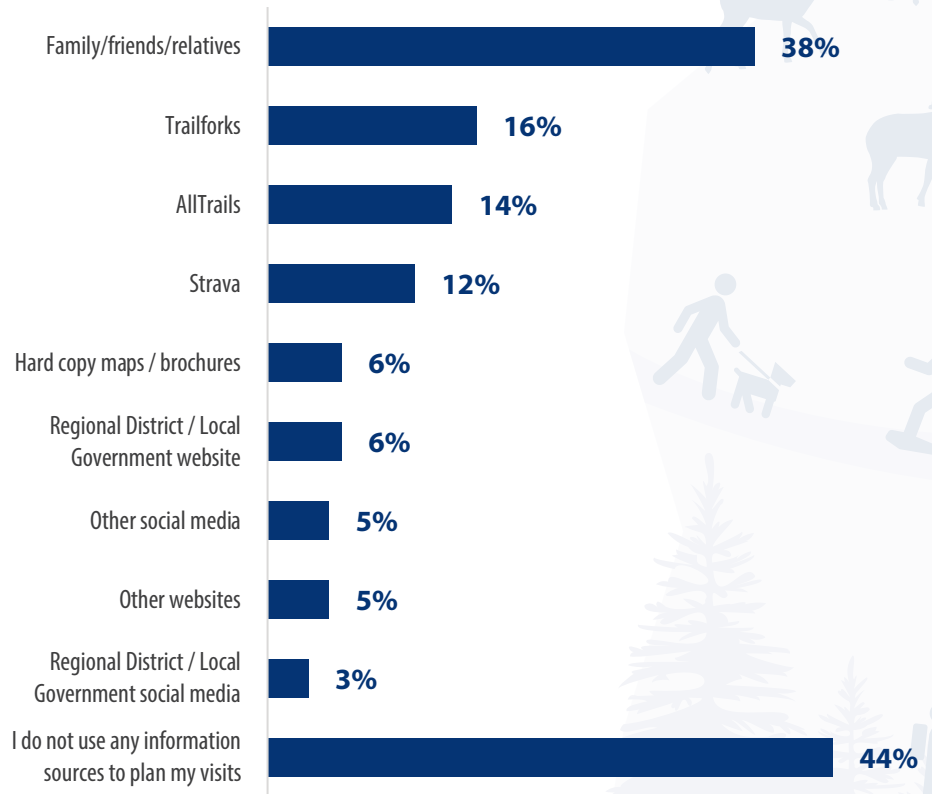
Graph 13: How Does the Supply and Quality of Recreation Infrastructure in the WMA Compare to Others



13. Which, if any, information sources have you used when planning your visit to the WMA?

Approximately one-third (38%) of respondents looked to their family / friends / relatives for information when planning their visit to the WMA. Less than half (44%) did not consult any information sources when planning their visits.

Graph 12: To What Extent Have Your Visits to the WMA Increased Your Knowledge About the WMA's Importance to Wildlife, Cultural Values and Conservation Issues?



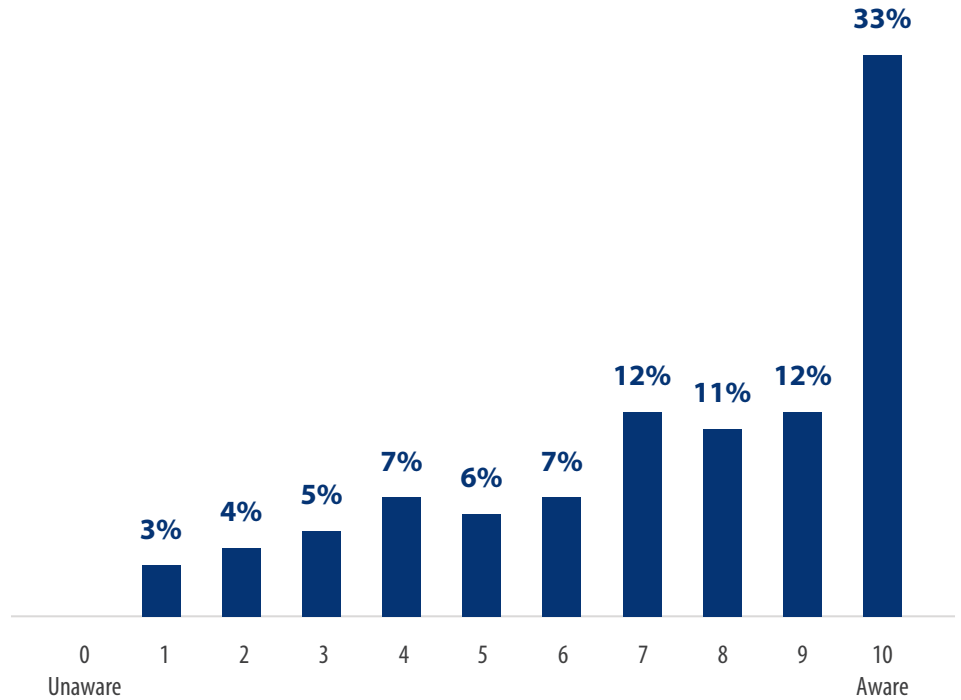
14. Before reading the draft Recreation Strategy to what extent were you aware of the following:

- a. The Dry Gulch area is a Wildlife Management Area?**
- b. Differences between the purpose of Wildlife Management Areas and other types of provincial Crown land such as Parks or Recreation Sites and Trails?**

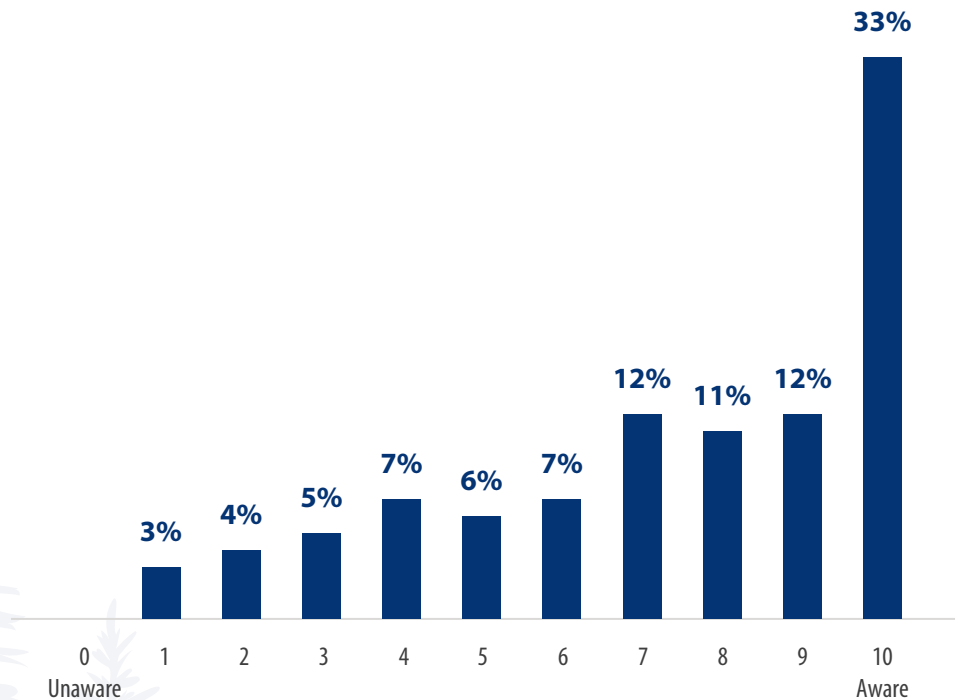
On a scale of 0 (unaware) and 10 (aware), only one-third (33%) of respondents said they were fully aware that the Dry Gulch area is a Wildlife Management Area prior to reviewing the draft strategy. The average rating was 7.4.

On a scale of 0 (unaware) and 10 (aware), less than one-quarter (19%) of respondents said they were fully aware of the differences in purpose of the WMA and other types of provincial Crown land such as Parks or Recreation Sites and Trails prior to reviewing the draft strategy. The average rating was 6.5.

Graph 15: Awareness Prior to Reading the Draft Strategy That the Dry Gulch Area is a WMA



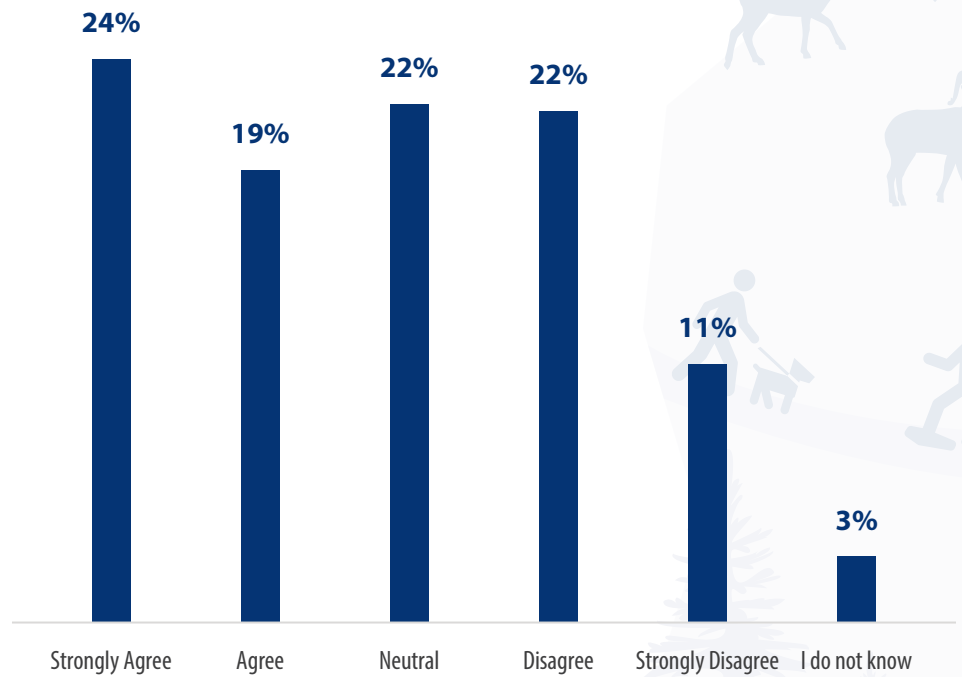
Graph 16: Awareness Prior to Reading the Draft Strategy of the Differences in Purpose of the WMA and Other Types of Provincial Crown Land



15. To what extent do you agree that the recreational use of the Wildlife Management Area is resulting in undesirable impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat and better recreation management is required?

While 43% of respondents agree that the recreational use of the WMA is resulting in undesirable impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat and that better recreation management is required, 33% disagree. This suggests that respondents are split in their understanding of the issues facing wildlife in the area.

Graph 17: Agreement with Recreational Use of the WMA Resulting in Undesirable Impacts on Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat



Subsegment Analysis

- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers are more likely to strongly agree (64%) that recreational use of the WMA is resulting in undesirable impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat and better recreation management is required compared to dog on leash respondents (15%), dog off leash respondents (10%), and mountain bike respondents (10%).

16. While recreating in the WMA, have you observed any wildlife species? If so, please specify which specie(s) and approximately where you observed them?

Two hundred twenty-five respondents said that they have observed wildlife species while recreating in the WMA. Of those, the most common wildlife species that people have observed include deer (121 respondents reported observing), various birds (96 respondents reported observing), and sheep (90 respondents reported observing). In addition, people reported observing Elk (38 observations), Bears (23 observations), Eagles (26 observations), Squirrels (20 observations), Coyotes (17 observations), Badgers (17 observations), and Bank Swallows (10 observations).

17. While recreating in the WMA, have you ever had an undesirable encounter with any wildlife? If so, please specify.

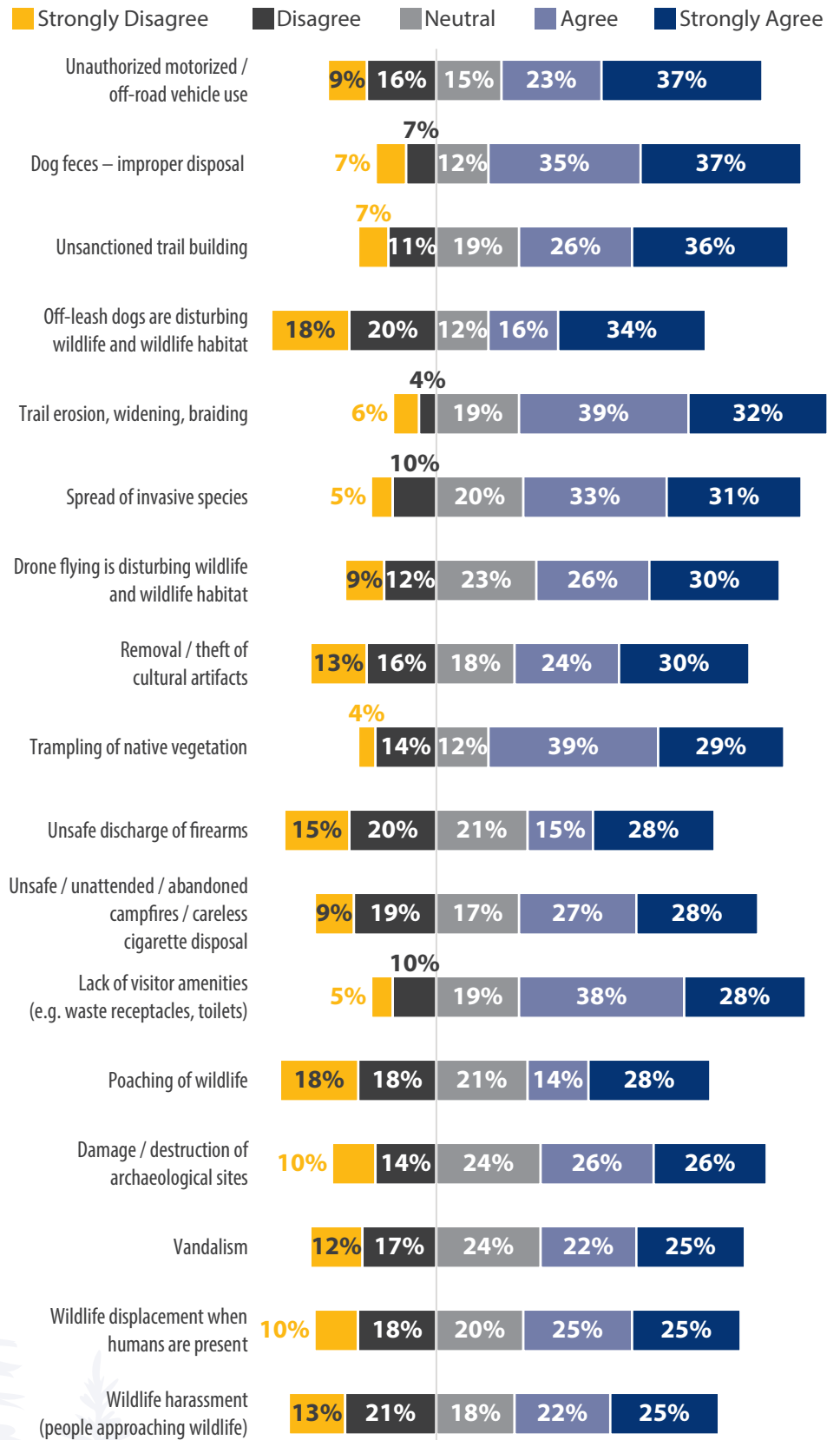
While recreating in the WMA only 5 respondents said they have had an undesirable encounter with wildlife, however of those respondents 3 of them were in fact referring to off-leash domestic dogs (not wildlife). The other two reports involved coyotes stalking and luring off-leash dogs.

18. From your experience in and knowledge of the Dry Gulch area, to what extent do you agree that the following management issues are a priority to address in the strategy?

Respondents were provided with a list of management issues and asked the extent to which they think each is a priority to address in the Recreation Strategy. As illustrated in the following graph, at least one-third strongly agree that the following issues should be a priority:

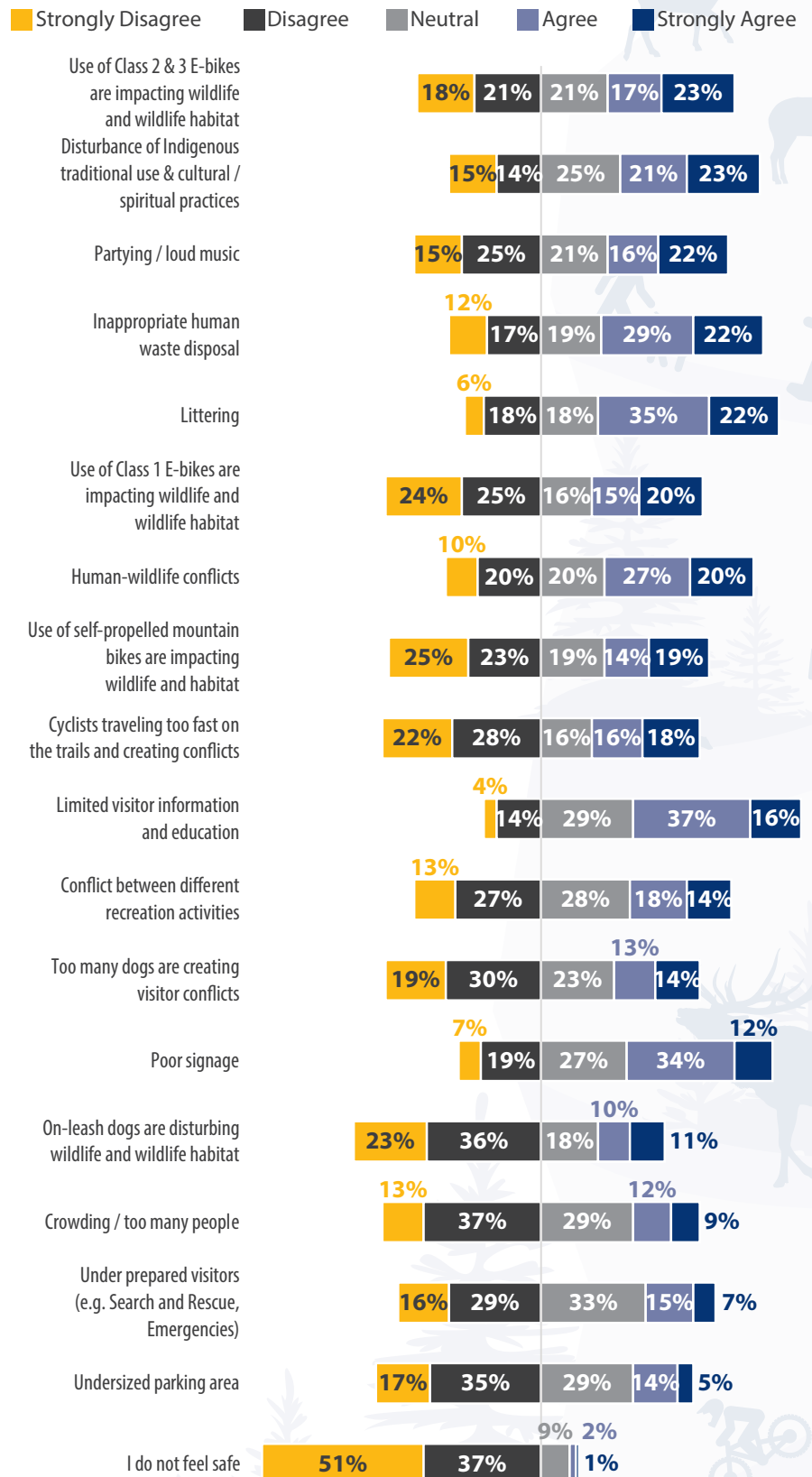
- Unauthorized motorized / off-road vehicle use (37% strongly agree)
- Dog feces – improper disposal (37%)
- Unsanctioned trail building (36%)
- Off-leash dogs are disturbing wildlife and wildlife habitat (34%)

Graph 18: Agreement With Management Issues That Should Be A Priority for the Strategy to Address



As illustrated in the following graph (a continuation of the previous one), 88% disagree that a feeling of being unsafe should be a priority.

Graph 18: Agreement With Management Issues That Should Be A Priority for the Strategy to Address
(Continued)



Subsegment Analysis

- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers are more likely to strongly agree that the following management issues are a priority to address in the strategy compared to compared to dog on leash respondents, dog off leash respondents, and mountain bike respondents.
 - » Wildlife harassment (people approaching wildlife) 43% vs 15-17%
 - » Human – wildlife conflicts 41% vs 9-11%
 - » Wildlife displacement when humans are present 66% vs 11-13%
 - » Trampling of native vegetation 66% vs 16-17%
 - » Spread of invasive species 62% vs 17-19%
 - » Unsanctioned trail building 67% vs 20-24%
 - » Trail erosion, widening, braiding 62% vs 16-23%
 - » Damage / destruction of archaeological sites 41% vs 13%
 - » Removal / theft of cultural artifacts 37% vs 16-17%
 - » Disturbance of Indigenous traditional use & cultural / spiritual practices 35% vs 11-12%
 - » On-leash dogs are disturbing wildlife and wildlife habitat 30% vs 1-7%
 - » Off-leash dogs are disturbing wildlife and wildlife habitat 77% vs 22% (mountain bikers), 13% dog on leash respondents, 6% dog off leash respondents
 - » Dog feces – improper disposal 66% vs 20-29%
 - » Too many dogs creating visitor conflicts 32% vs 3-10%
 - » Use of self propelled mountain bikes are impacting wildlife and wildlife habitat 53% vs 4-14%
 - » Use of Class 1 E-bikes are impacting wildlife and wildlife habitat 48% vs 6-14%
 - » Use of Class 2&3 E-bikes are impacting wildlife and wildlife habitat 48% vs 10-17%
 - » Cyclists traveling too fast on the trails and creating conflicts 43% vs 4-14%
 - » Crowding / too many people 22% vs 3-8%
 - » Conflict between different recreation activities 33% vs 3-10%

19. In your opinion, are there any recreation activities that are currently occurring in the WMA that you believe should NOT be permitted? If so, please tell us which activities and why these activities should not be permitted.

Respondents identified some recreation activities that are currently occurring in the WMA that they believe should not be permitted. The main categories of activities that respondents felt should not be permitted include mechanized/motorized recreation, off-leash dog use, mountain biking, drones, and equestrian use.

Overwhelming, respondents felt that motorized recreation should not be allowed in the area (Pursuant to section 7(4) of the Wildlife Act, a Regional Manager order was established over the WMA in 1997 and prohibits the use of motorized conveyances that are powered by a motor which exceeds a rating of 10 horsepower). This sentiment was felt by 1/3 (35%) of respondents and was largely focused on OHV/ATV and motorcycles (including dirt bikes), however, within this category about 13% of respondents also felt that Ebikes should not be permitted in the WMA as they travel at faster speeds and can cause user conflicts as well as potentially increased human wildlife conflict (this was the sentiment perceived by respondents).

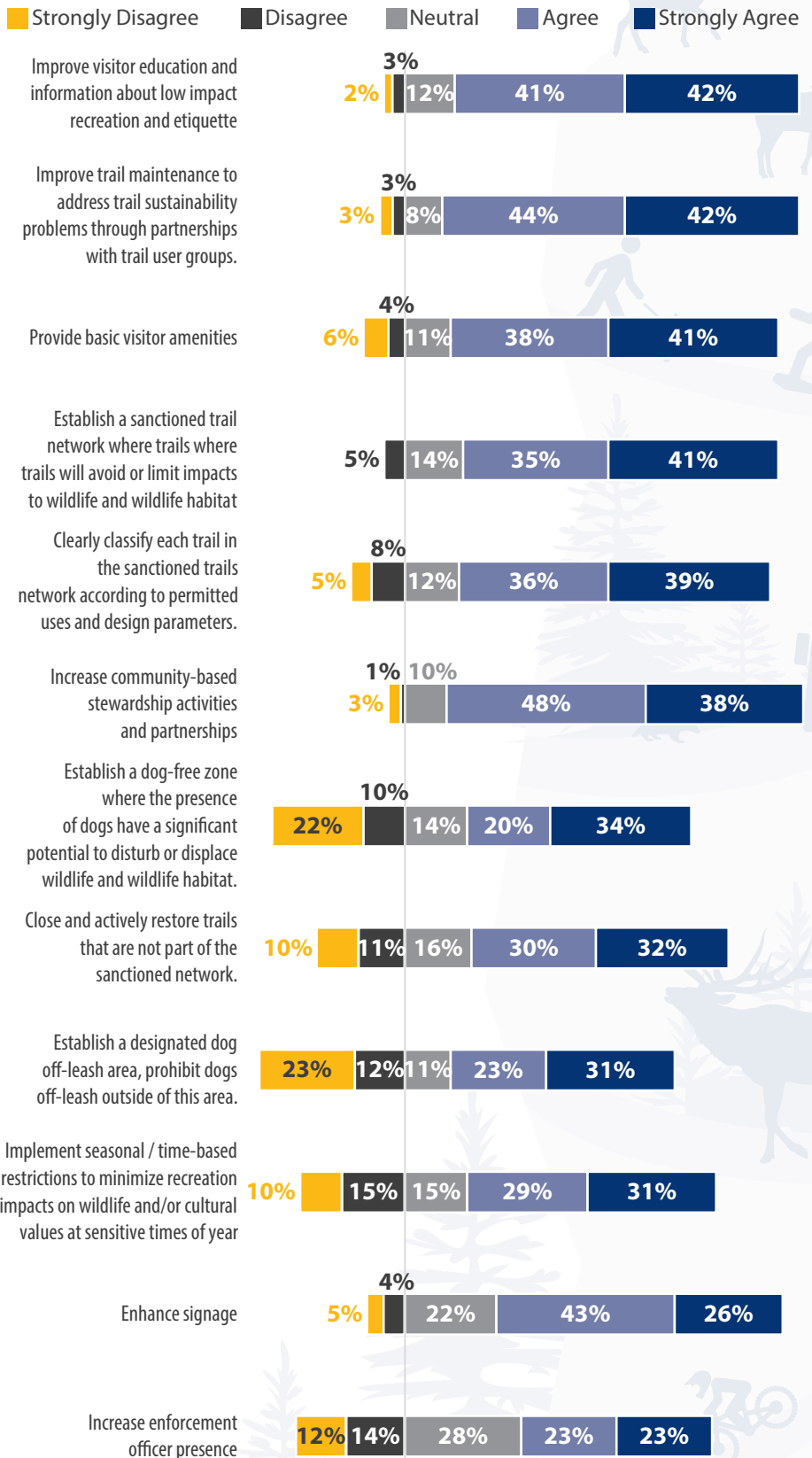
The second category that respondents felt was problematic and incompatible with the WMA was the prevalence of off-leash dogs. Approximately ¼ (25%) of all respondents commented that off-leash dogs were a significant concern both for wildlife and humans (some respondents indicated they had been approached or harassed by off-leash dogs). Additionally, some respondents indicated that dogs are less of a concern when they are on-leash.

Mountain biking was noted by some (7%) as an activity that should not be allowed in the area. Reasons for this include speed, unpredictability, spread of invasive species, increase risk of erosion, user conflicts with hikers and dog walkers, and the creation of unsanctioned trails. Drones were also felt to be problematic, although it is not clear how much drone activity is currently occurring in the area. While not nearly as prevalent as other potential incompatible recreation uses respondents did indicate that equestrian use (less than 1%) can be very damaging to trails (causing erosion and soil compaction) and creates user conflicts.

20. Thinking about the management actions that are proposed in the draft Recreation Strategy, to what extent do you agree that the following actions should be taken to improve the conservation of the WMA's ecological and cultural values through the improved management of recreation?

A series of management actions are proposed in the draft Recreation Strategy. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree that the different actions should be taken to improve the conservation of the WMA's ecological and cultural values. As illustrated in the graph, respondents agreed in greater proportions than disagreed with all actions. Except for an increase in enforcement presence, over half of respondents agreed with all management actions. See the graph.

Graph 20: Agreement with Actions That Should be Taken to Improve the Conservation of the WMA's Ecological and Cultural Values Through the Improved Management of Recreation



Subsegment Analysis

- Respondents who are neither mountain bikers nor dog walkers are more likely to strongly agree that the following management actions should be taken to improve the conservation of the WMA's ecological and cultural values through the improved management of recreation compared to dog on leash respondents, dog off leash respondents, and mountain bike respondents.
 - » Establishing a sanctioned trail network where trails will avoid or limit impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat 66% vs 26-35%
 - » Clearly classify each trail in the sanctioned trails network according to permitted uses and design parameters 60% vs 34% (mountain bike users), 30% (dog on leash users), 20% (dog off leash users)
 - » Close and actively restore trails that are not part of the sanctioned network 68% vs 17-21%
 - » Implement seasonal / temporal restrictions to minimize recreation impacts on wildlife and / or cultural values at sensitive times of the year 68% vs 14-24%
 - » Improve trail maintenance to address trail sustainability problems 50% vs 42% (mountain bike users), 26% (dog off leash users), 23% (dogs on leash users)
 - » Establish a designated dog off leash area, prohibit dogs off leash outside of this area 52% vs 27% (mountain bike users), 20% (dog on leash users), 10% (dog off leash users)
 - » Establish a dog free zone 74% vs 25% (mountain bike users), 14% (dog on leash users), 10% (dog off leash users)
 - » Improve visitor education and information 64% vs 26-37%
 - » Enhance signage 40% vs 14-24%
 - » Increasing enforcement officer presence 53% vs 12-14%

21. Are there any other management actions that have not been proposed in the draft Recreation Strategy that you feel should be implemented to avoid or minimize recreation impacts on wildlife and cultural values in the WMA? Briefly describe these.

Respondents were able to suggest any other management actions that they think should be implemented to avoid or minimize recreation impacts on wildlife and cultural values in the WMA. The most common theme among management actions related to dogs within the area. About 10% of respondents did not agree with the proposed actions, however, they were divided in their feedback and ideas. Some respondents felt that dogs should be allowed off-leash access throughout the WMA (11 comments), others (10 comments) felt that the north section closure was unreasonable, and dogs should be allowed in the area but kept on-leash (and maybe use seasonal closures for dogs as well). However, 10 respondents indicated that dogs should be allowed and kept on-leash, but management actions should increase waste disposal and enforcement off-leash rules. Finally, a small number of respondents (3 comments) felt that dogs do not belong in the WMA at all.

Other feedback included ensuring that there is a mechanism to support sanctioned and well-maintained trails in the area. Human need for physical activity and connection to nature is felt very strongly in the area and 9 comments were made regarding the need for more trails. In addition to reviewing and commenting on proposed management actions there were a subset of respondents (4%) who felt that no management strategy is needed and leaving the area as is would be more desirable.

4.1.2 About the Respondents

The following table describes the profile of the survey respondents.

Role and Interest in Dry Gulch Portion of WMA	
I recreate in the WMA on my own	95%
I am a concerned citizen, but I do not recreate in the WMA	3%
I am representing a formal recreation organization / club	2%
I represent an Environmental / Wildlife Organization	1%
I am an elected official (local, regional, provincial)	1%

Gender	
Male	37%
Female	57%
Two Spirited	0%
Prefer not to answer	1%
Other	4%

Indigenous Identity	
Yes	3%
No	97%

Age Category	
18-24	0%
25-34	9%
35-44	19%
45-54	22%
55-64	24%
65 -74	23%
75 and older	4%

Level of Education	
Elementary school	0%
High school	6%
College diploma, apprenticeship	25%
Some university	9%
University bachelor degree	32%
University graduate degree (Master, PhD, MD)	23%
Prefer not to answer	5%

Household Income	
Under \$50,000	7%
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	16%
\$75,000 to less than \$100,000	16%
\$100,000 to less than \$125,000	13%
\$125,000 to less than \$150,000	11%
More than \$150,000	16%
Prefer not to answer	22%

4.2 ONLINE INTERACTIVE CROWDSOURCE MAP

An online interactive map was available for people to add comments spatially related to the draft Recreation Strategy. The map was available from March 18, 2023 to April 18, 2023. In total eighty-three points were added to the map.

The map allowed people to add three different types of points:

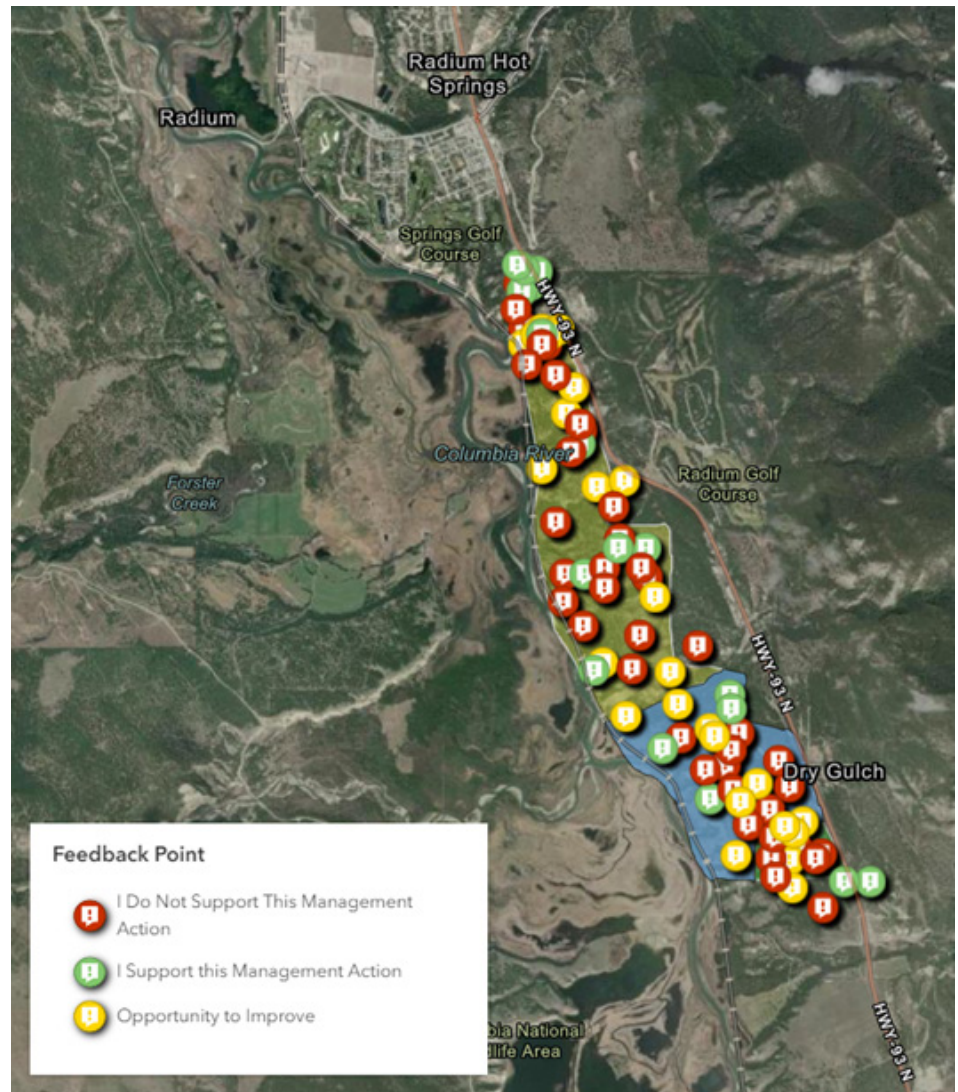
- Green dot to indicate support;
- Red dot to indicate they did not support something; and
- Yellow dot to identify an opportunity for improvement.

As well, people were able to react to points already on the map indicating whether they agreed or disagreed with the point. It is important to note that some points were “dropped” in an area with no feedback or description.

A further breakdown of the points according to where they were posted:

- Inside the dog free zone – 37 points
- Inside the on-leash dog area – 31 points
- Outside the WMA – 15 points

Within each of the three zones identified above the points have been analyzed according to whether the management action has been supported, not supported, or an opportunity to improve identified.



4.2.1 Inside the Dog Free Zone (north section of the study area)

The following indicates the number of points for each type (support, do not support, opportunity to improve). As well, the most prevalent types of comments have been noted along with those that received the most agrees or disagrees.

I Support This Management Action (6 points)

- A complete dog ban makes sense to avoid conflicts with wild animals – 1 comment (agrees – 15; disagrees – 2)
- Concerns about unnecessary trail braiding that results from connections – 1 comment (agrees – 7; disagrees – 1)
- Connections need to be well planned to avoid steep grades and prevent erosion – 1 comment (agrees – 6; disagrees – 0)

I Do Not Support This Management Action (19 points)

- Concerns expressed about loop systems that cause constant wildlife disturbances – 4 comments (agrees – 40; disagrees – 30)
- Several comments against connections and other trails and support for decommissioning – 5 comments (agrees – 26; disagrees – 12)
- The north area should be closed for biking and walking all year – 2 comments (agrees – 15; disagrees – 20)
- One comment suggested creating and sanctioning an advanced mountain biking trail. However, additional comments were made suggesting this closure would push more traffic lower creating conflict and accident potential – 1 comment (agrees – 12; disagrees – 6)
- Disagreement with restricting dogs in the north end. Some suggesting that on leash should be fine and others saying that off leash areas are needed and that there are other areas for wildlife to move to and that off leash dogs do not create issues – 5 comments (agrees – 3; disagrees – 7)
- Without effective enforcement the measures will not succeed – 1 comment (agrees – 9; disagrees – 1)

Opportunity to Improve (12 points)

- A few comments advocating for some sanctioned use because recreation has merit to human health and well being and there is little belief that wildlife disruption occurs – 3 comments (agrees – 19; disagrees – 22)
- Several concerns expressed about proposed connections further disrupting wildlife and impacted habitat – 3 comments (agrees – 13; disagrees – 6)
- Suggestion that a portion of the trail could be used for walking only and support people with disabilities – 1 comment (agrees – 10; disagrees – 8)
- In south portion, the loop causes constant wildlife disturbances, it needs to be straightened – 1 comment (agrees – 9; disagrees – 8)

4.2.2 Inside the On Leash Dog Area (middle and south section of the study area)

The following indicates the number of points for each type (support, do not support, opportunity to improve). As well, the most prevalent types of comments have been noted along with those that received the most agrees or disagrees.

I Support This Management Action (4 points)

- Agreement with decommissioning trails in the area and restoring it, including Stinking Badger – 2 comments (agrees – 14; disagrees – 8)

I Do Not Support This Management Action (16 points)

- Dogs should not be in conservation area, even if on leash as they often do not stay on leash – 3 comments (agrees – 21; disagrees – 11)
- Not supporting dog off leash area – 2 comments (agrees – 19; disagrees 10)
- The recreation strategy is not compatible with Wildlife Management Area and its priorities – 1 comment (agrees – 7; disagrees – 4)
- An area with a view is needed for dog walkers – 2 comments (agrees – 7; disagrees – 5)

Opportunity to Improve (11 points)

- Too many trails in the area; need to be decommissioned and restored – 2 comment (agrees – 25; disagrees – 1)
- Increased enforcement is needed regarding unsanctioned trail use and off leash dogs – 1 comment (agrees – 9; disagrees 1)
- Remediate the gravel pit, make use of it – 2 comments (agrees – 6; disagrees – 0)
- This is currently a recreation area and with needs growing, keeping the activity where it is may be better than having people go elsewhere – 1 comment (agrees - 5; disagrees – 6)

3.2.3 Outside the WMA*

The following indicates the number of points for each type (support, do not support, opportunity to improve). As well, the most prevalent types of comments have been noted along with those that received the most agrees or disagrees.

I Support This Management Action (7 points)

- Limiting access will limit impacts – 2 comments (agrees – 10; disagrees – 4)

I Do Not Support This Management Action (6 points)

- Connections would disrupt wildlife habitat – 2 comments (agrees – 13; disagrees – 6)
- This plan turns the protected area into a recreation area which is not compatible with the WMA – 1 comment (agrees – 10; disagrees 7)
- Decommissioning trails is too much, seasonal restrictions is a better option – 1 comment (agrees – 4; disagrees – 7)

Opportunity to Improve (1 points)

- Additional education signage needed to inform that area is a protected wildlife area – 1 comment (agrees – 12; disagrees – 0)

**Comments in this section (outside the WMA) may be misleading as respondents may not be aware that this section is outside the WMA boundaries.*

4.3 STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS & WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

The Ministries identified and prioritized stakeholders to be interviewed. In total, 21 individuals and organizations were contacted to participate in in-depth interviews. Key stakeholders included local conservation and environmental education organizations as well as other non-profit organizations working to support the Columbia Valley, Government of British Columbia representatives, municipal leaders and partners, municipal staff, and more. Of the 21 groups and individuals that we contacted 13 interviews were conducted via Zoom/Microsoft Teams with individuals and organizations that are familiar with the area and have spent time either recreating, researching, or supporting the WMA in various ways. 5 additional responses were received as written feedback. The following represents the main themes that came from those discussions and written feedback.

Recreation Destination Options

The study area (WMA) is a highly desirable recreation destination for locals and visitors alike. This area offers high quality viewpoints, a mix of trail experiences, and currently multiple recreational activities are occurring (irrespective of designated status). The area typically has an early spring melt and therefore is one of the first accessible areas for recreation in the warmer months. Not only is the area picturesque, but it is located in close proximity to the Town of Invermere and the Village of Radium Hot Springs, supporting a combined population of more than 5,000 people (in addition the Town of Golden is about 1 hour away).

Key Management Issues

Many respondents agreed on the identified management issues, however, it was pointed out repeatedly that the draft Recreation Strategy is missing detailed information on Bank Swallows and American Badger burrow sites. In addition, we heard continually that recreation and human use is increasing at an alarming rate in the area and many groups are concerned that recreation is causing undesirable impacts to wildlife, habitat, and ecological integrity across the study area. Many people were unaware of the sheer volume of unsanctioned trails within the WMA (current trail density impacts 97% of the study area) and noted that this was the focus of greatest concern.

Desired Resource Conditions (what does success look like)

Desired resource conditions were appreciated by stakeholders; however, a few key concerns were brought up. To begin with there was a shared sentiment that current baseline data is insufficient at this point in time to effectively measure and understand change. Without knowing what the current status and location of wildlife is it will be very challenging to use thresholds and triggers. Specifically, some examples of these concerns surround badger burrows and the lack of awareness or mapping of the location of these burrows within the WMA, additionally, there is little evidence and data on bank swallows in the current conditions (although they are known to be in the area).

Following the concerns regarding the desired resources conditions there were also concerns with the indicators, thresholds, and triggers. Again, a main theme was the lack of understanding for current levels of use and wildlife populations by species (how can a change or decreased be measured if there is not an accurate estimate of current populations). There was also feedback regarding the level of specificity within these statements as “significant increase” might be open to subjective interpretation.

Finally, with all the work that has been done outlining desired resource conditions, indicators, triggers, and thresholds there is a significant concern that without adequate funding and resources these are unable to be upheld and therefore unrealistic targets. Many respondents felt that some of the conditions are good or well intentioned but seem incompatible with even low levels of recreational use in the area. Stakeholders felt that more attention must be given to the mission and purpose (mandate) of a WMA when considering “allowing” or “supporting” recreation in the area. Simply put, stating that badger burrows will be free from disturbance or that ungulates will not be displaced from productive habitat appears to some to be incompatible with out significant education, behaviour modification, and possible enforcement and support.



Benefits of proposed Draft Recreation Strategy (including recommended management actions)

There was overall support and recognition of the need for this strategy and some significant positives were noted in the proposed management actions, these include:

1. Seasonal closure in the north section is a supported action.
2. Sanctioning Deja View and increasing the formal/sanctioned trail system is seen by some as a significant success and will likely increase support and compliance for the overall strategy and proposed actions.
3. Decommissioning trails is essential as the reduction of trail density and overall use is significantly needed.
4. Dogs on-leash only is supported.
5. Visitor education and improved wayfinding is highly supported and is considered the most important action for many stakeholders.
6. Widespread support and recognition of the importance of formal agreements with local clubs and both conservation and recreation organizations to ensure “buy-in” from users and locals.

Opportunities to Improve proposed Draft Recreation Strategy

There were numerous ideas presented by stakeholders that are worth mentioning, some of these recommendations are in direct contradiction of each other as stakeholders hold quite different views and opinions as to what are the best strategies moving forward.

1. Do not sanction any additional trails in the WMA or build additional infrastructure that promotes or increases recreational use as there may be a significant risk to setting precedents that are not in line with WMA values and mandates.
2. Consider closing the north end of the area entirely (no recreation at all north of the actual Dry Gulch gully) as this is important habitat for multiple species.
3. Consider rerouting Deja View to below old coach road in the north section of the area as there is already a limited amount of space/usable habitat for ungulates (specifically Big Horn Sheep). In addition, there should be significant consideration given to the possibility of a wildlife overpass and fence being installed along the highway in this section. This would provide even further rationale for re-routing Deja View in this section. Finally, comments were made in regards to the length of trail, considering reduce loops/viewpoints on the proposed sanctioned Deja View trail
4. Propose no dogs in the WMA at all. Dogs pose a threat to wildlife and their presence is in direct opposition to the mission and purpose of a WMA.
5. Concern regarding the dog restrictions. All stakeholders acknowledge the importance of managing domestic dogs and understand the wealth of data that suggests domestic dogs negatively impact wildlife. However, there was a shared sentiment that restricting dog use in the north section of the WMA will be challenging to enforce and would require significant education and management presence. A few participants suggested enforcing the seasonal closure for dogs and then allowing users/visitors to have dogs on-leash only during the “open” season.

6. Off-leash dog area needs to be reviewed and ensure that badger burrows have been properly mapped prior to any further proposed actions. There were also some concerns with the suitability and quality of the proposed off-leash dog area in terms of the visitor experience it would provide. Further engagement with local dog walkers was recommended (e.g. open houses, on site engagements and surveys).
7. Better communication and collaboration with partners and local government is recommended before moving forward (specifically the RDEK). Consider other existing policies and strategies such as the Columbia Valley Recreation Strategy.

Other

One respondent indicated that the draft Recreation Strategy failed to recognize that the study area is within an international recognized/designated Ramsar site through the Convention on Wetlands. This is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975. The convention's mission is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world".² This designation is critical to communicating the value and importance of wetlands and for wildlife conservation and habitat.

It is important to note that comments were made regarding the significant amount of tourist (non-local) use in the area. This is relevant to consider when deciding upon education, information, compliance, and enforcement strategies. Local recreation clubs can have influence over their membership and local conservation organizations can share education and information messages but there are additional considerations and challenges to reaching tourists/non-local visitors. The draft Strategy should be revised to take this into account.

² The Ramsar Convention Secretariat (2014). Retrieved from <https://www.ramsar.org/about/the-convention-on-wetlands-and-its-mission>

