

Lower Maitland Stewardship Group
Landowner Survey Summary & Report

Report prepared by Tara Lessard
on behalf of the
Lower Maitland Stewardship Group



July 2010

Background

The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group (LMSG) began in 1998 with informal meetings between interested community members to discuss issues and concerns relating to the Maitland Valley and surrounding area. It has evolved into an informal community-based organization with diverse representation. A core of individuals representing landowners, stakeholders, government agencies and non-government organizations has progressed into a group which actively promotes the maintenance and enhancement of the natural ecosystem features of the Lower Maitland River Valley (information from the LMSG website).

Approximately 270 people own property along the Lower Maitland River Valley between Auburn and Goderich (Figure 1). The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group is keenly interested in protecting this special area for future generations and recognizes that we must work cooperatively with landowners to achieve this goal. In the interest of learning more about landowner needs and viewpoints, the LMSG met with a number of Lower Maitland landowners in the summer and fall of 2009 to conduct a survey.

Funding for the implementation of this survey was secured through both the Huron Clean Water Project (community projects category) and through the Maitland Watershed Partnership.

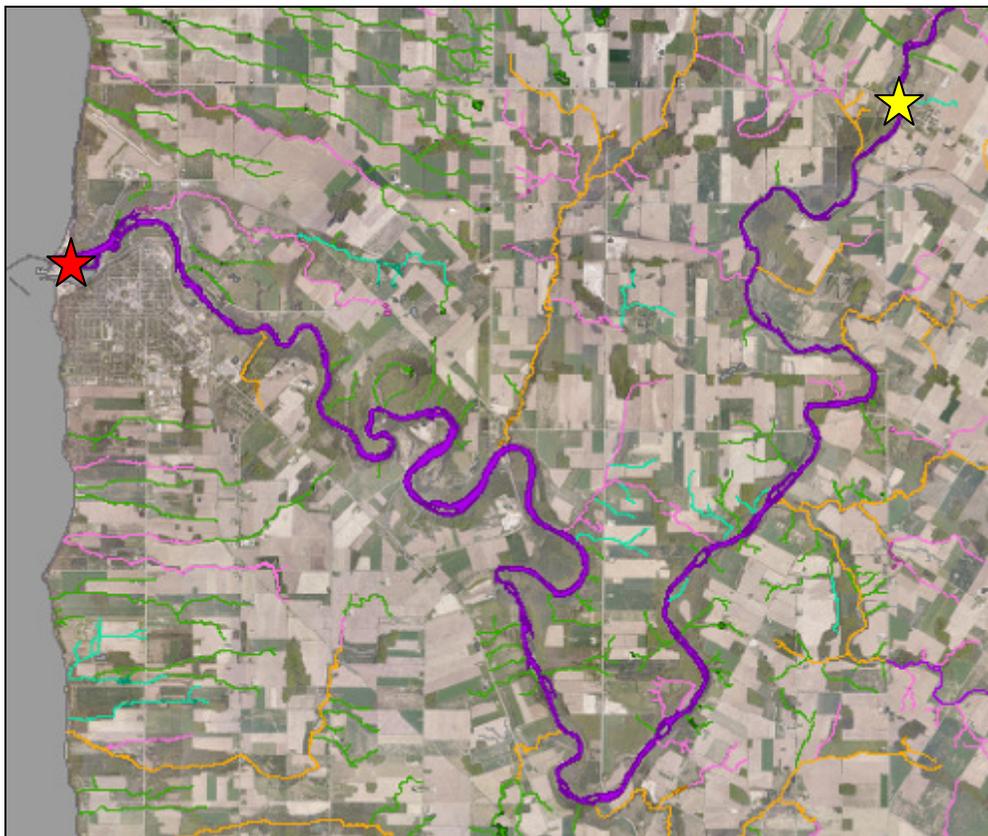


Figure 1. The project area is depicted above (from Goderich  to Auburn ). Those landowners with properties abutting the Lower Maitland River (depicted in purple) were contacted as part of the survey.

Objectives

The main goals of this survey were to:

- Determine what features of the valley are important to the landowners in the valley
- Find out what assistance or support the landowners might need to help implement stewardship activities on their properties
- Provide landowners with some information about stewardship projects and available funding opportunities

Methods

An initial contact letter was sent out to all approximately 270 landowners who own property along the Lower Maitland River (Contact Letter - Appendix 1). Some landowners contacted us to express interest in completing the survey, while others were given a follow-up phone call. In total, 50 landowners along the Lower Maitland River were surveyed. The majority of the surveys (31) were completed in person with a technician asking the questions, either at the landowner's home or at the MNR office in Clinton, 18 surveys were completed over the phone, and one survey was completed by the landowner and was sent in by mail (Survey Questions - Appendix 2).

Landowners were offered gifts for their participation in the survey. They were given a copy of the book, *Windings: A History of the Lower Maitland*, and they were also given a choice of either a copy of *Huron County: Ontario's West Coast* (a pictorial guide to Huron County) or a \$20 gift certificate for Pondsview Garden Center. These gifts were generally well-received by the participating landowners.

In order to get a good variation in landowner opinions, the 50 landowners that were surveyed represented a variety of different property types. The majority of the landowners (61%) owned some form of farm property, while the rest of the property types included some residential property (25%), vacant residential land not on water (12%), and vacant residential/recreational land on water (2%). See Appendix 3 for a more detailed description of the property types.

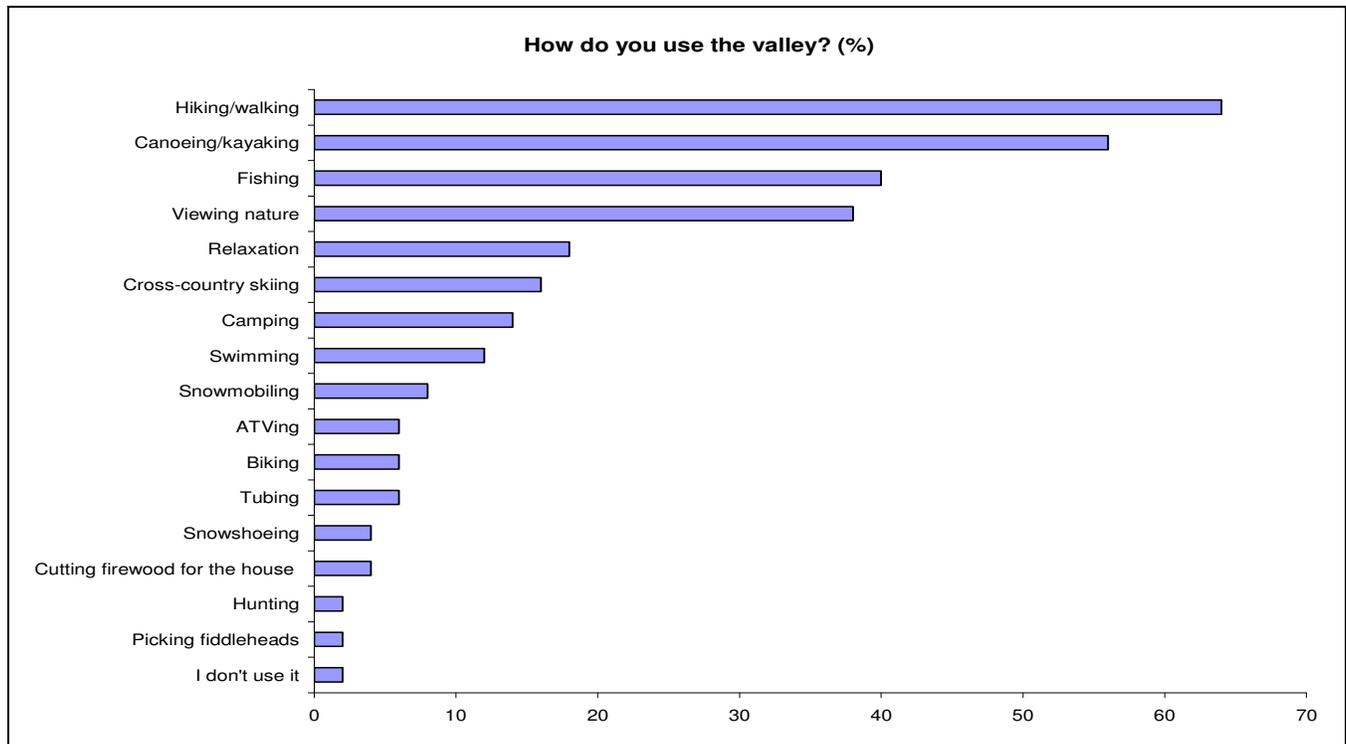
There was also some variety in the property sizes of the landowners who participated. Out of the 50 surveyed landowners, about half of them (23 individuals) had properties that were larger than 50 acres, while the rest (27) were smaller than 50 acres in size.

Results

The survey questions fell into one of the following categories – those pertaining to the entire Maitland River valley, those related to the landowners' specific property and those associated with the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group.

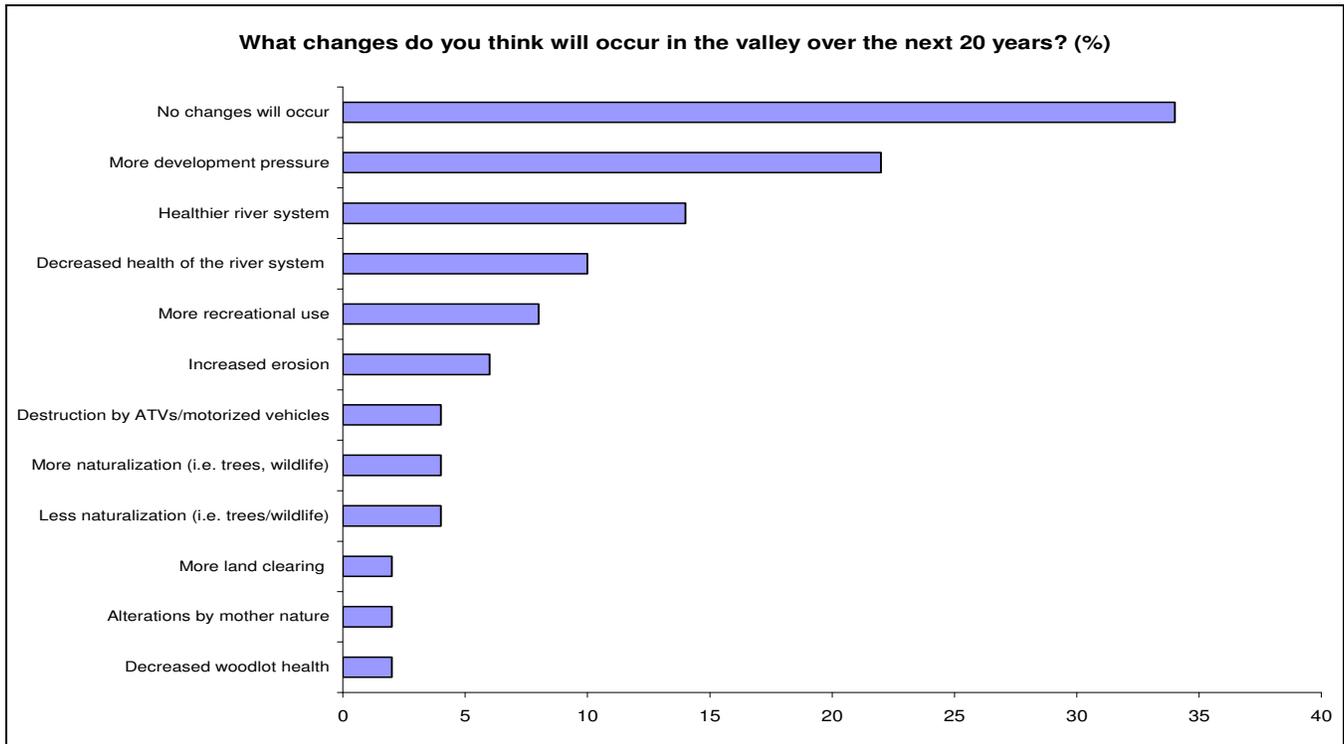
Results - Maitland River Valley Questions

The landowners of the Lower Maitland utilize the river valley in a variety of ways. The table below summarizes the various activities that they take part in throughout the valley. These percentages add up to more than 100% because some people cited more than one way in which they use the valley.

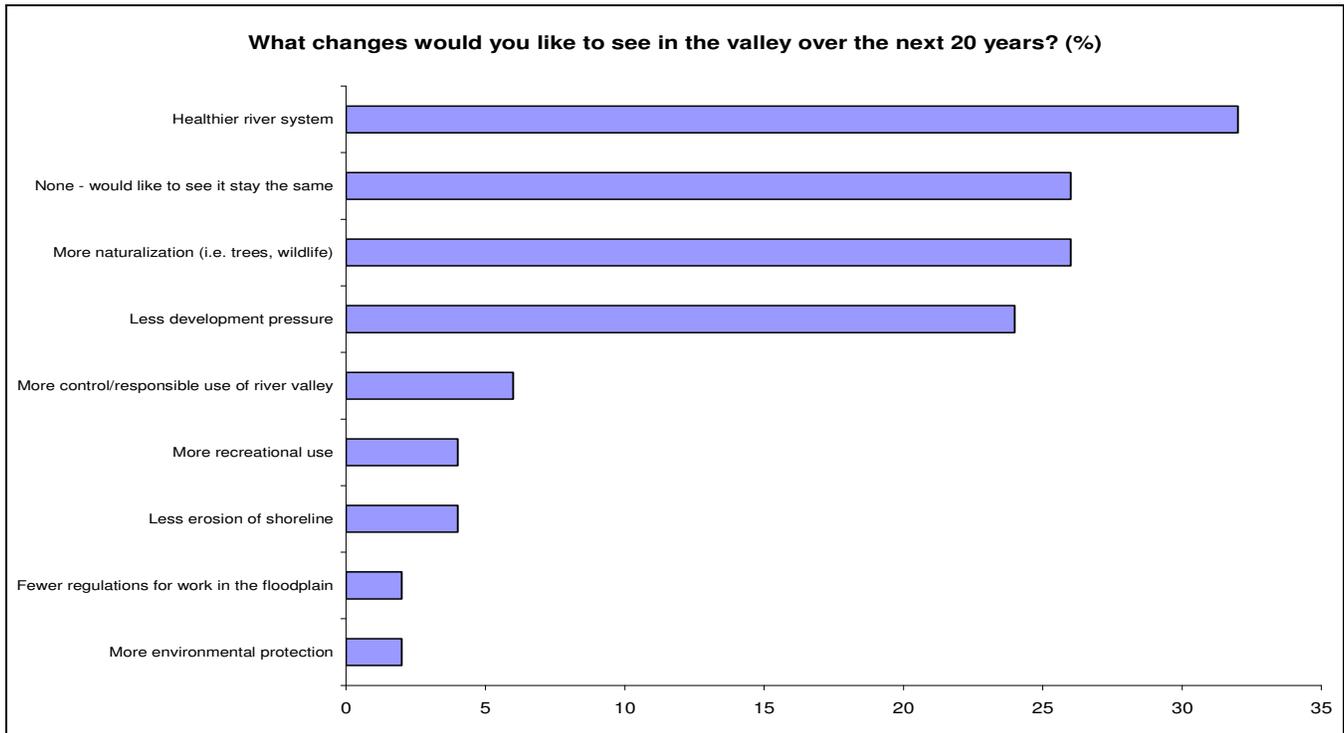


When asked what they appreciate about the valley the most, many of the landowners' answers were very similar. 96% of the landowners responded that they appreciate the nature/wildlife/beauty of the river, 40% value the fact that the valley is a quiet retreat, whereas another 4% value its uniqueness. Again, these percentages add up to more than 100% because some respondents identified more than one reason for appreciating the valley.

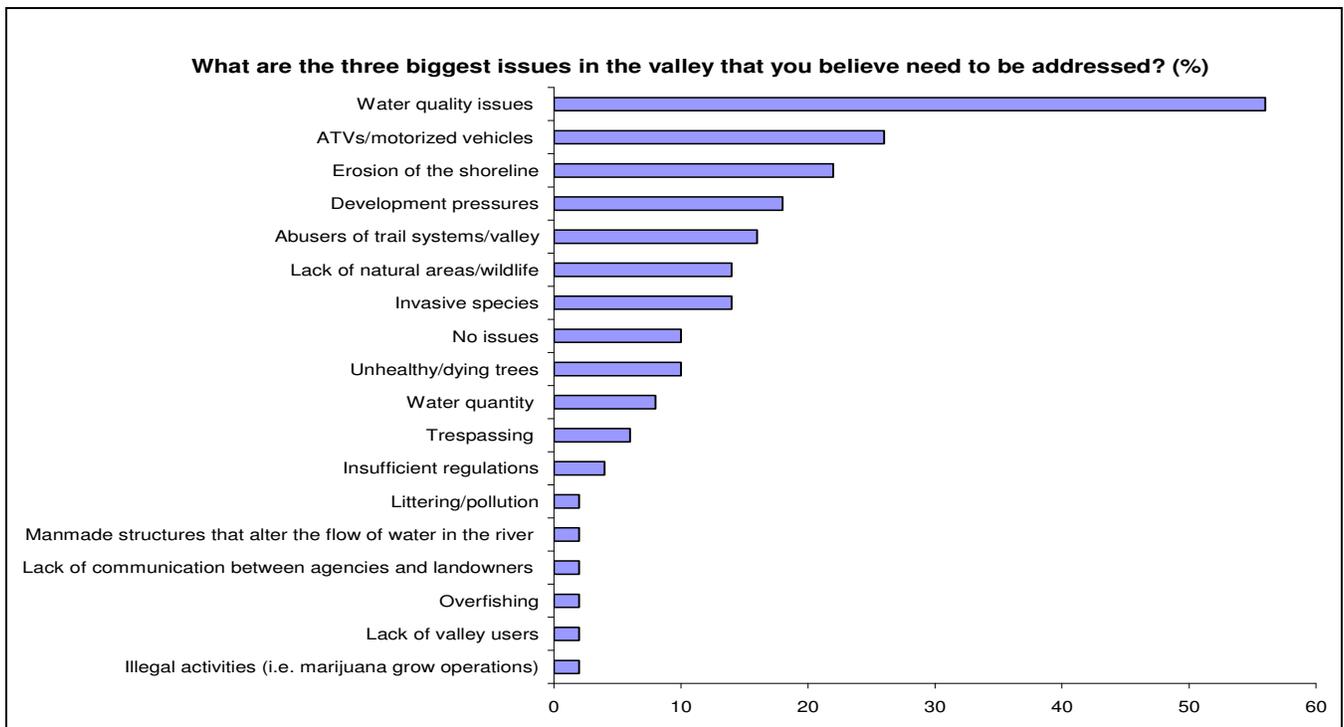
When asked what changes they thought *would occur* in the valley over the next 20 years, many landowners responded that they thought the valley would remain the same. However, most of the landowners predicted changes that would have a negative impact on the valley (i.e. more development pressure, decreased health of the river system, etc.). All of the answers are summarized below.



As expected, when asked what changes they *would like to see* in the valley over the next 20 years, many landowners responded that they would like to see it stay the same or see it improve (i.e. healthier river system, more naturalization, etc.). On the other hand, some landowners would also like to see more recreational use of the valley and fewer regulations for work in the floodplain. The answers are summarized below.

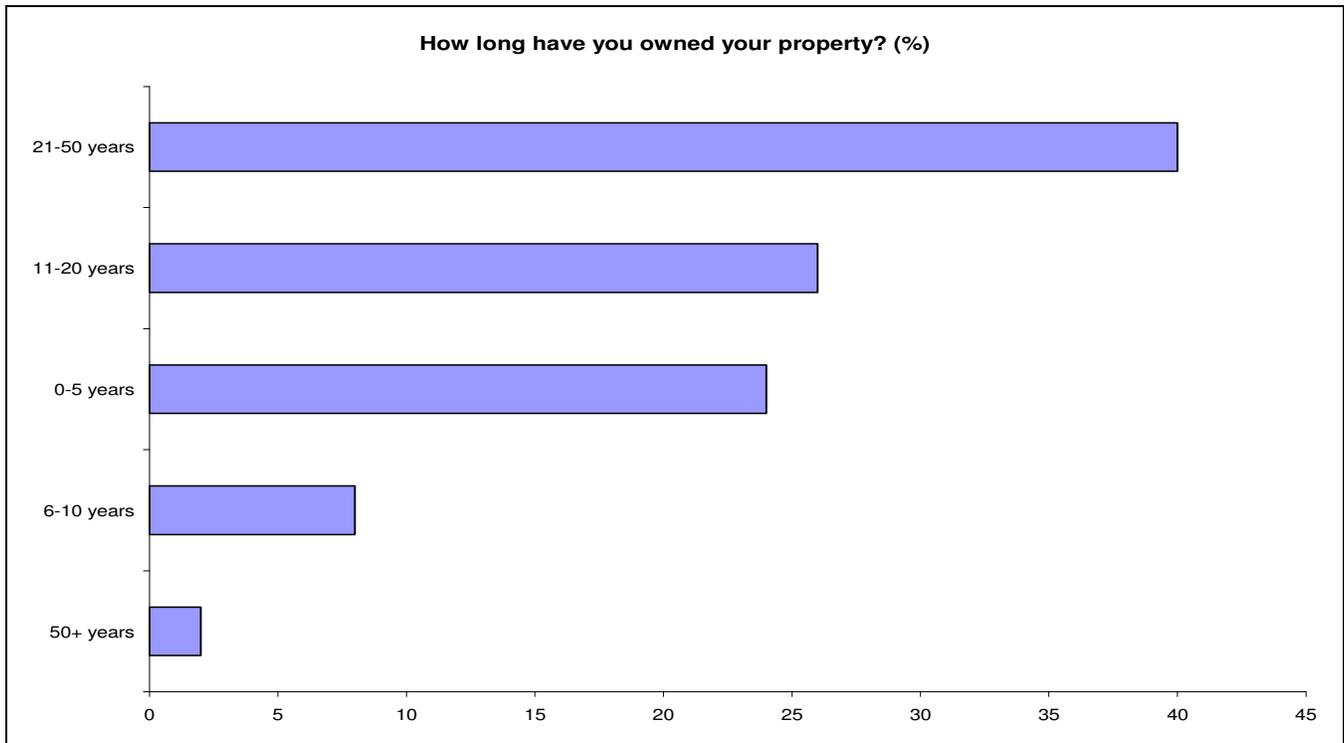


When the landowners were asked about what issues they felt needed to be addressed in the valley, by far the most popular answer was the water quality. And although all of the landowners responded to this question, many of them felt as though they were not adequately informed about the pertinent issues in the river valley that they should form an opinion. The answers are summarized below.



Results - Property Specific Questions

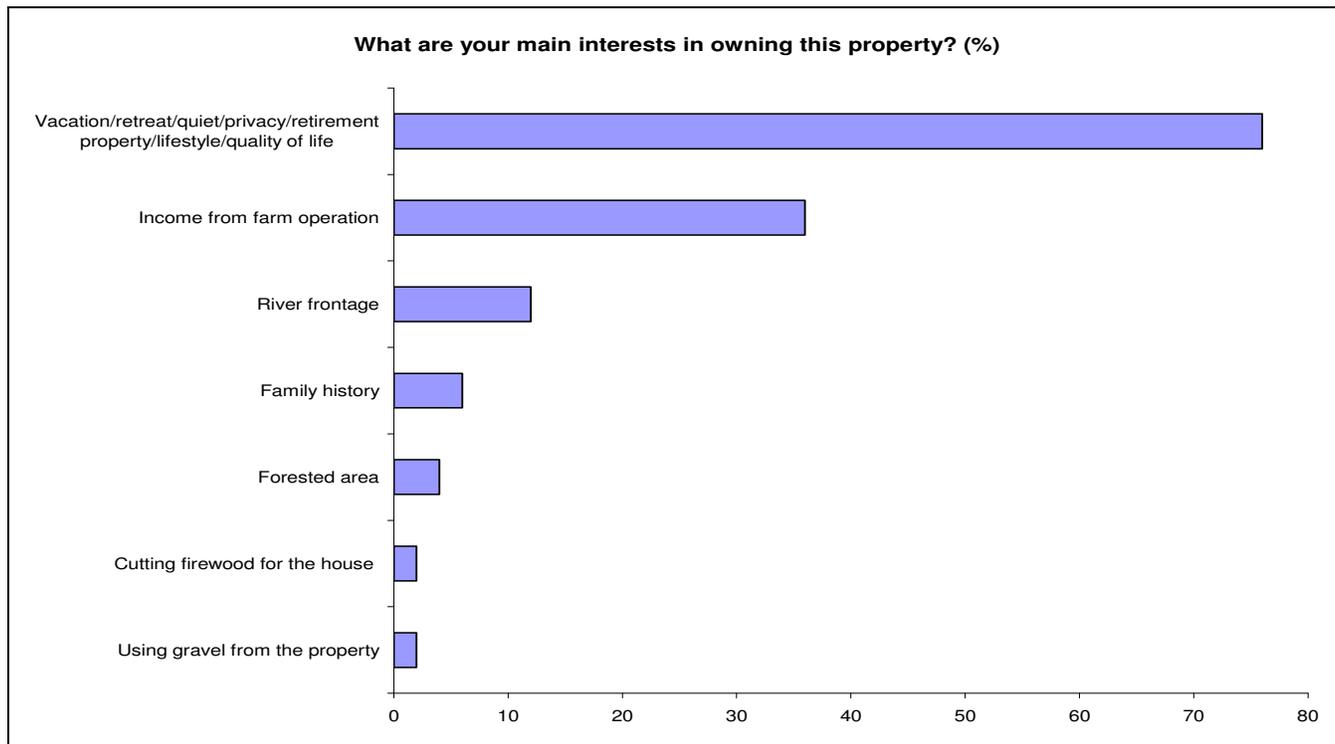
Most of the landowners in the valley, 40%, have owned their property for between 21 and 50 years. A complete breakdown of the duration of property ownership can be found below.



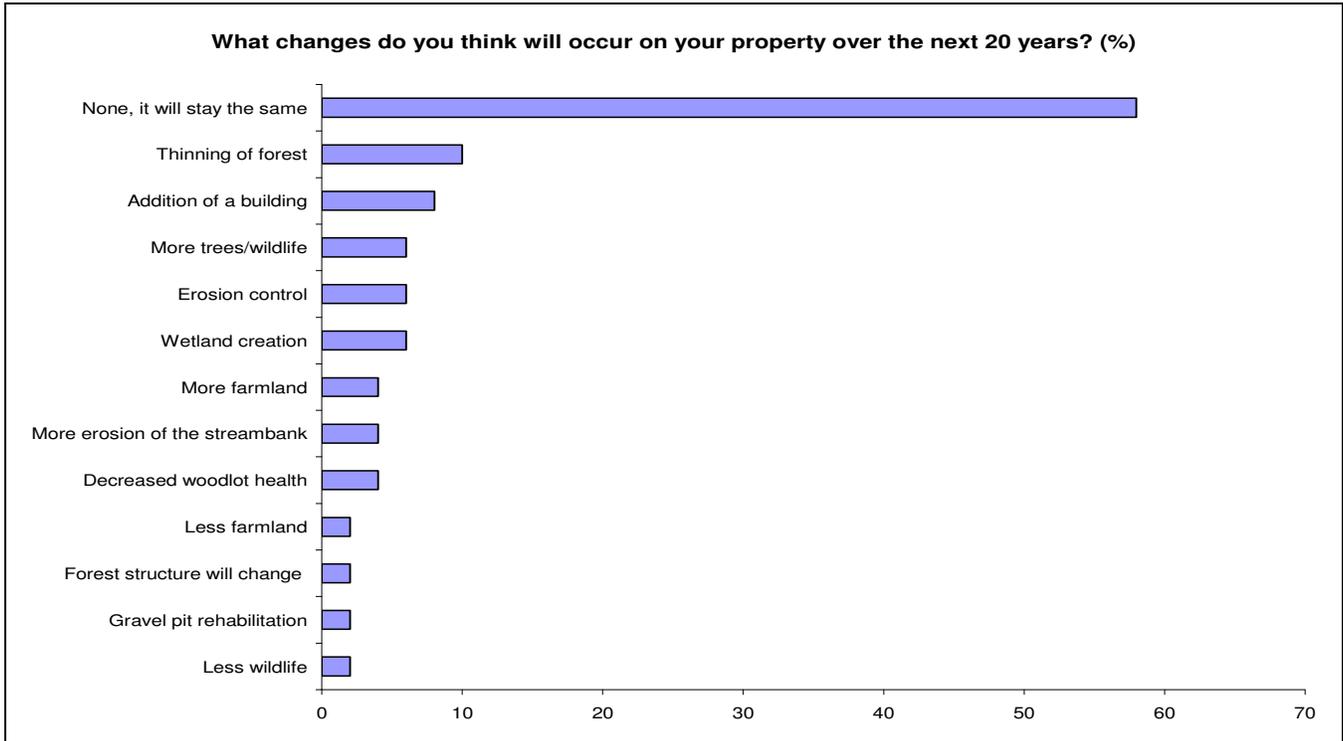
All 50 landowners that were surveyed have the intention of owning their property for as long as they are able to. Nineteen landowners (38%) definitely plan on passing their property onto family members, 26 (52%) landowners *may* pass their property onto family, whereas the rest (10%) have no plans of passing their property onto anyone.

Not all landowners were familiar with the Maitland River Valley before they purchased their property, although most were. Thirty-one (31) of the landowners (62%) grew up in the area or on the property that they currently own. Of the rest of the landowners who did not grow up in the area, 11 individuals (22%) were familiar with the area through visiting friends or family, or had visited it for recreational opportunities in the past. Of those who were not familiar with the river valley prior to acquiring the property, 5 people (10%) were simply looking for a property to purchase, and happened to come upon the one they currently own, whereas the other 3 landowners (6%) were looking specifically for a property on the water.

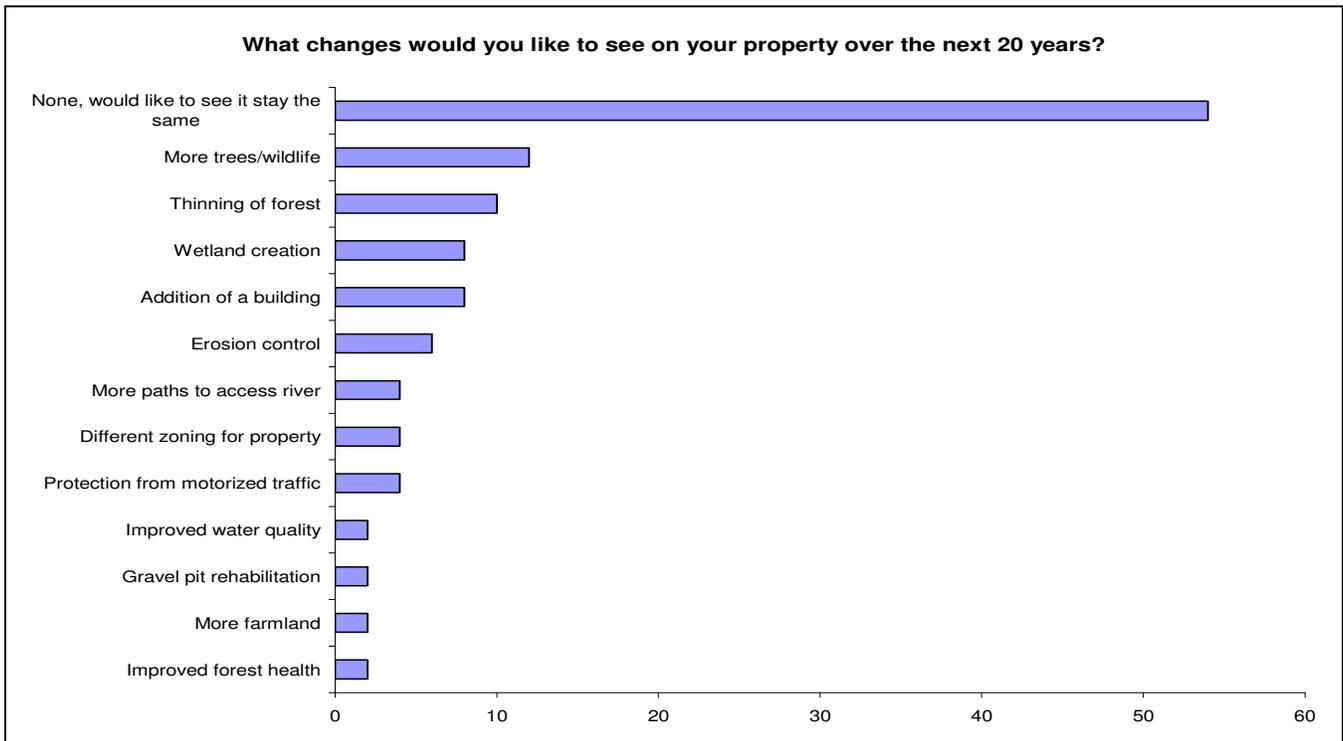
When asked what their main interests in owning their property were, most of the respondents (76% of the total sample) identified one of their main interests was for the quiet/privacy, or some form of that answer. Gaining income from the farming operation was also one of the landowners' main reasons for owning their property. All of the answers are summarized below.



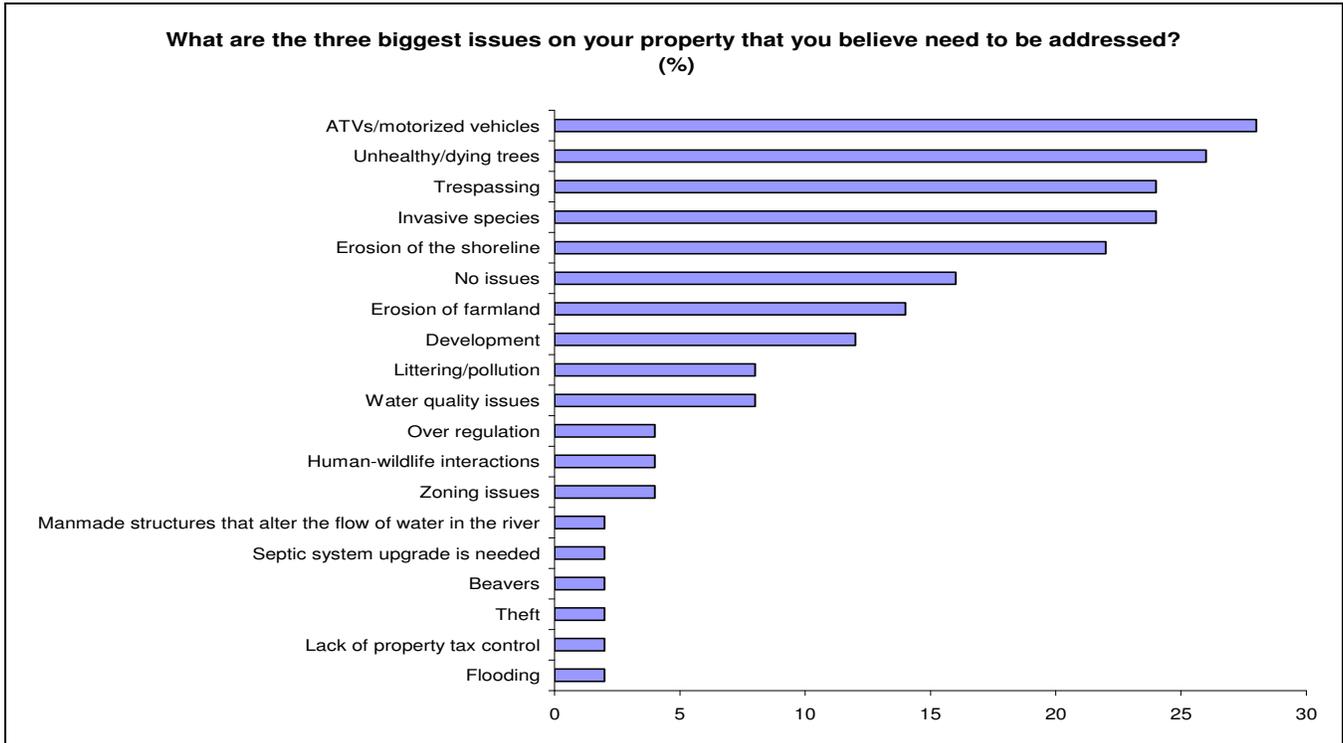
When asked what changes the landowners thought *would occur* on their property over the next 20 years, most (58%) said that it would likely stay the same, without any changes. The rest of the answers were varied, and are summarized below.



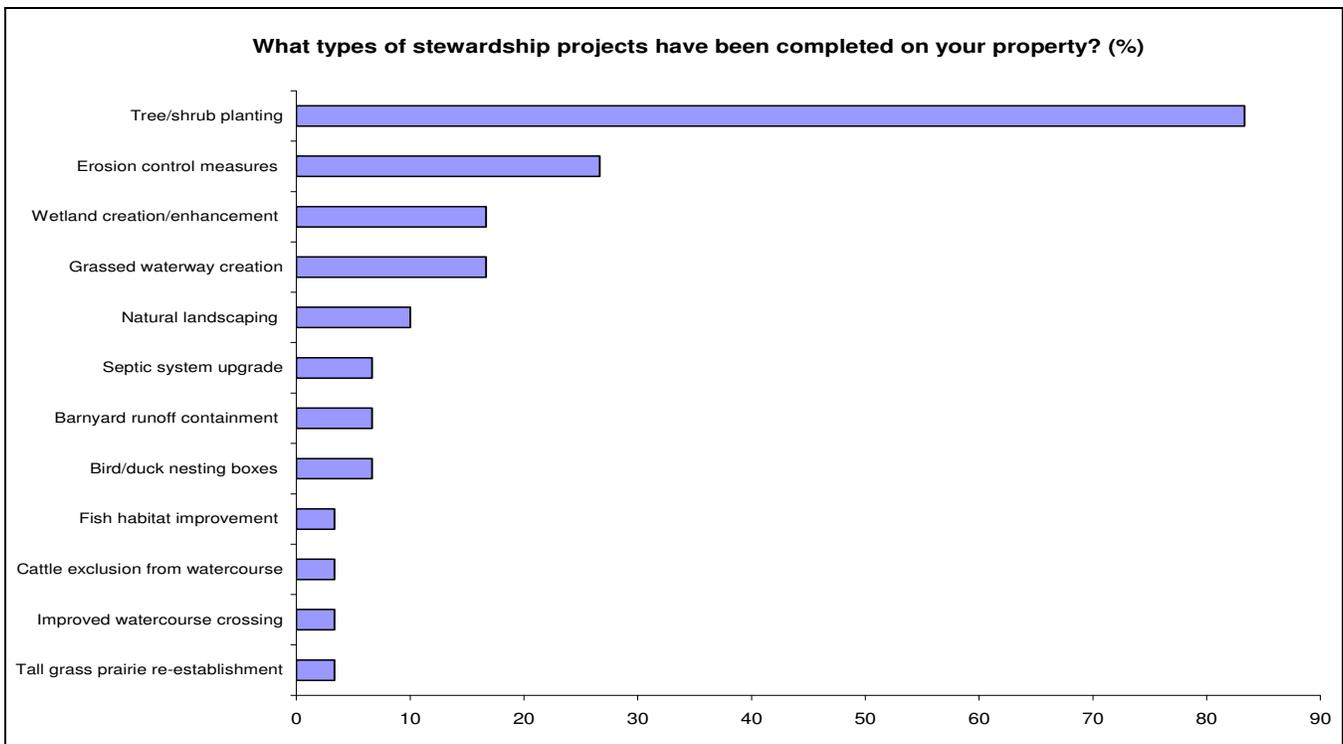
When asked what changes they *would like to see* on their property over the next 20 years, again most (54%) said they would like to see it stay as it is. All of the answers are summarized below.



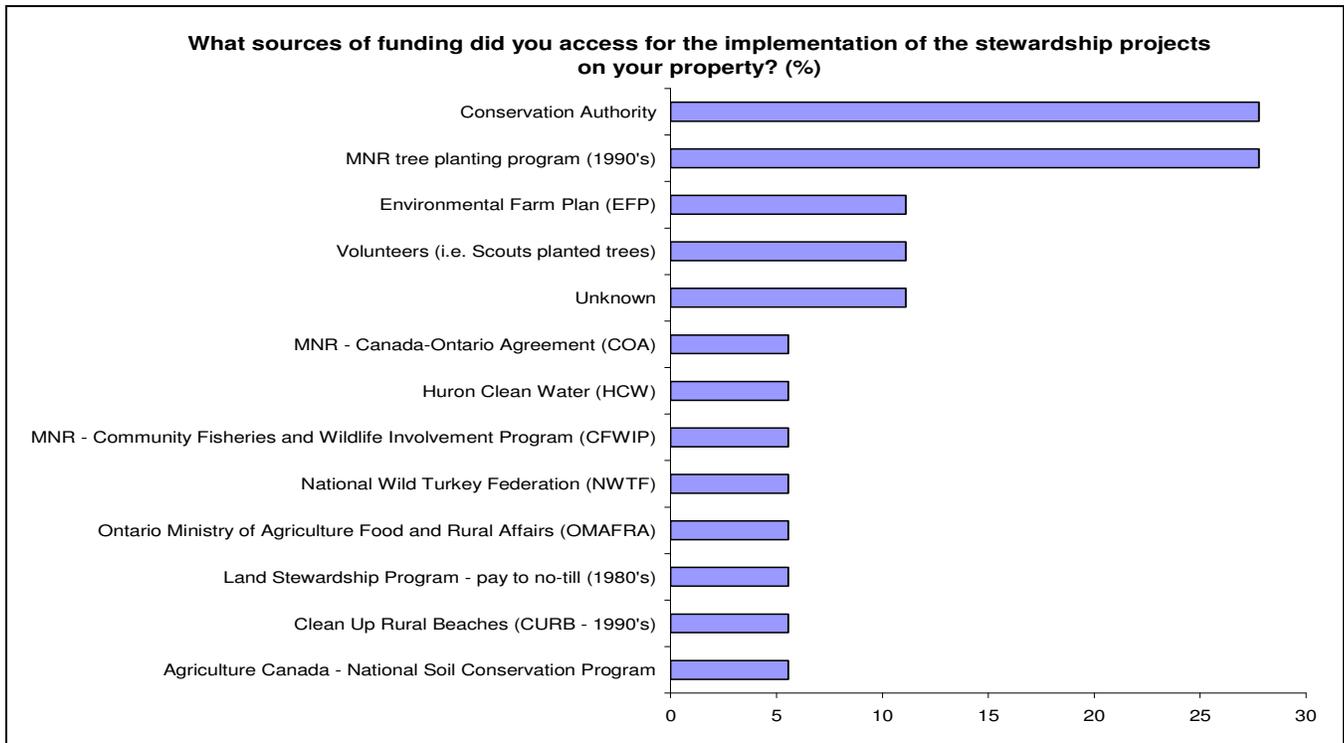
In terms of issues affecting their properties, many of the landowners that were surveyed (28%) mentioned they had been having problems with ATVs accessing their properties. Other pertinent issues included concerns over tree health, trespassing, invasive species and shoreline erosion. All of the property issues are summarized below.



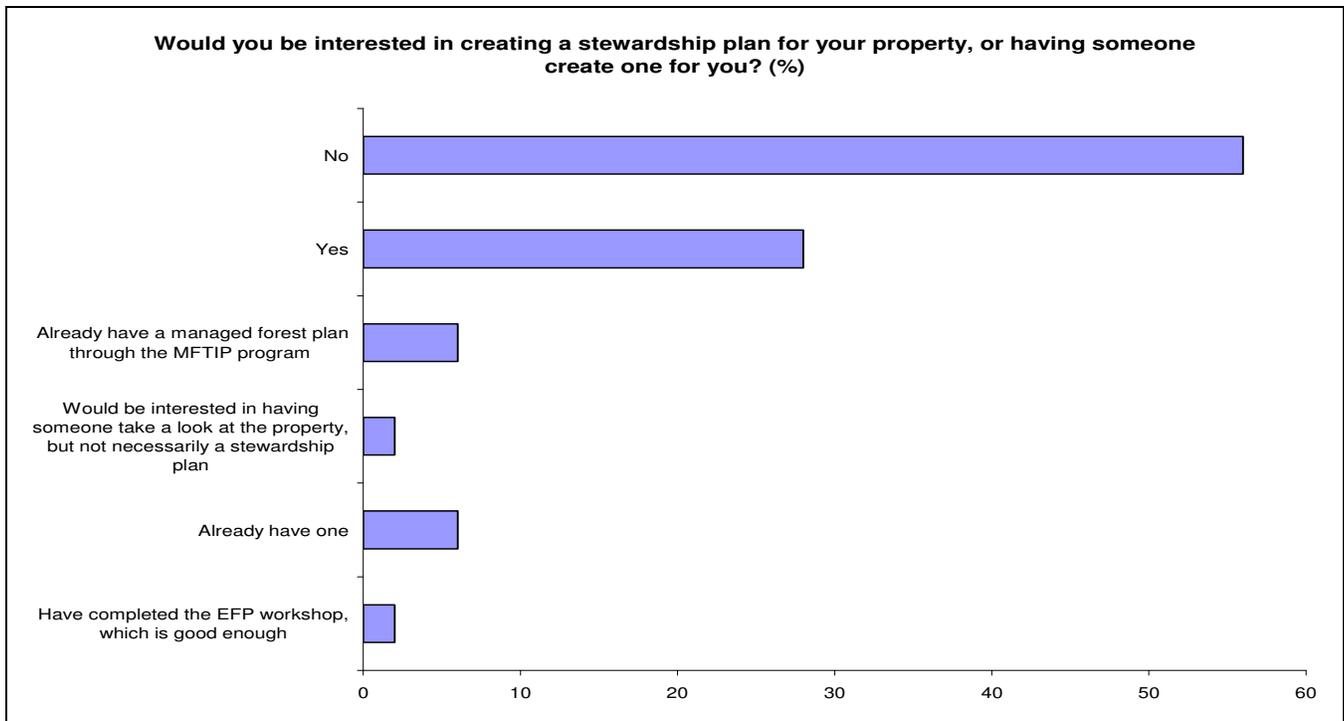
Of the 50 landowners who were surveyed, 30 of them (60%) had implemented some sort of stewardship project on their property already. Stewardship projects took on a variety of forms, although by far the most common type of stewardship project that had been completed was tree and shrub planting (83%). All of the stewardship project types are summarized below.



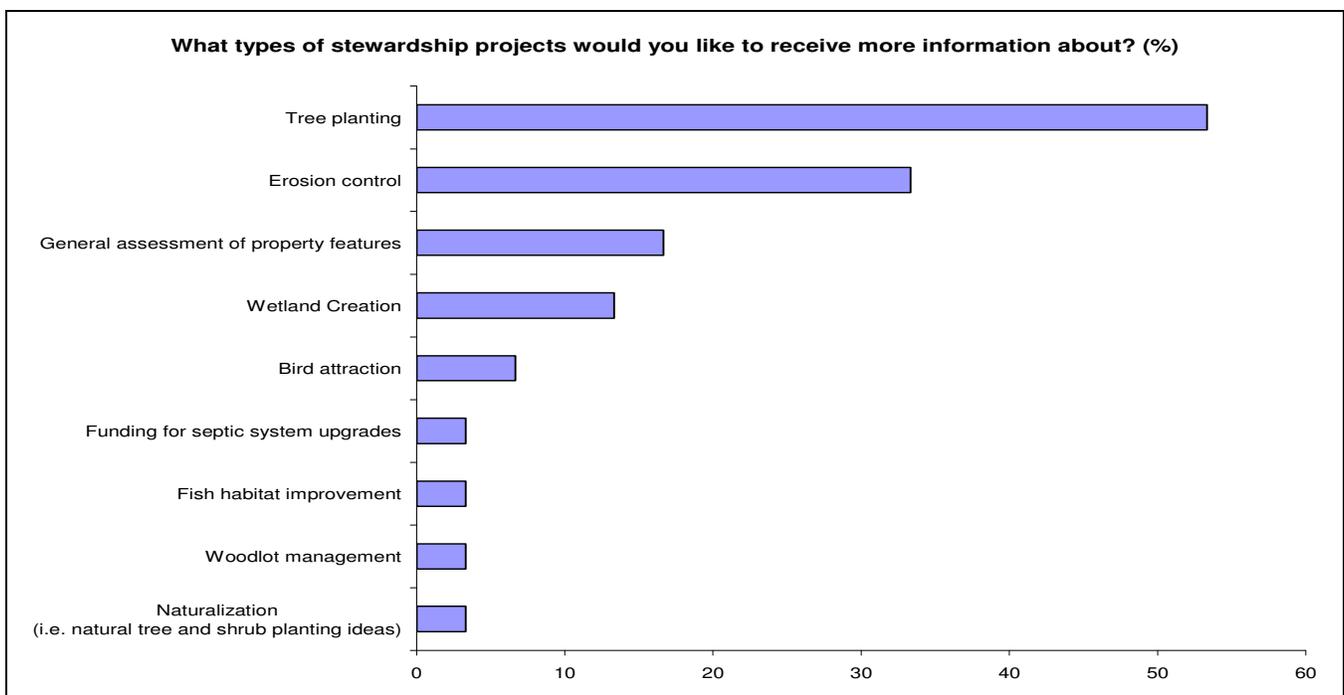
Of the 30 landowners who had completed one or more stewardship projects on their land, 6 individuals (20%) had all of their project costs paid for by various funding sources. 12 individuals (40%) had a portion of the project costs paid for, while another 12 individuals (40%) did not access any funding sources for the implementation of their stewardship projects. Of those who did access funding, the details of the funding sources that were accessed are outlined below.



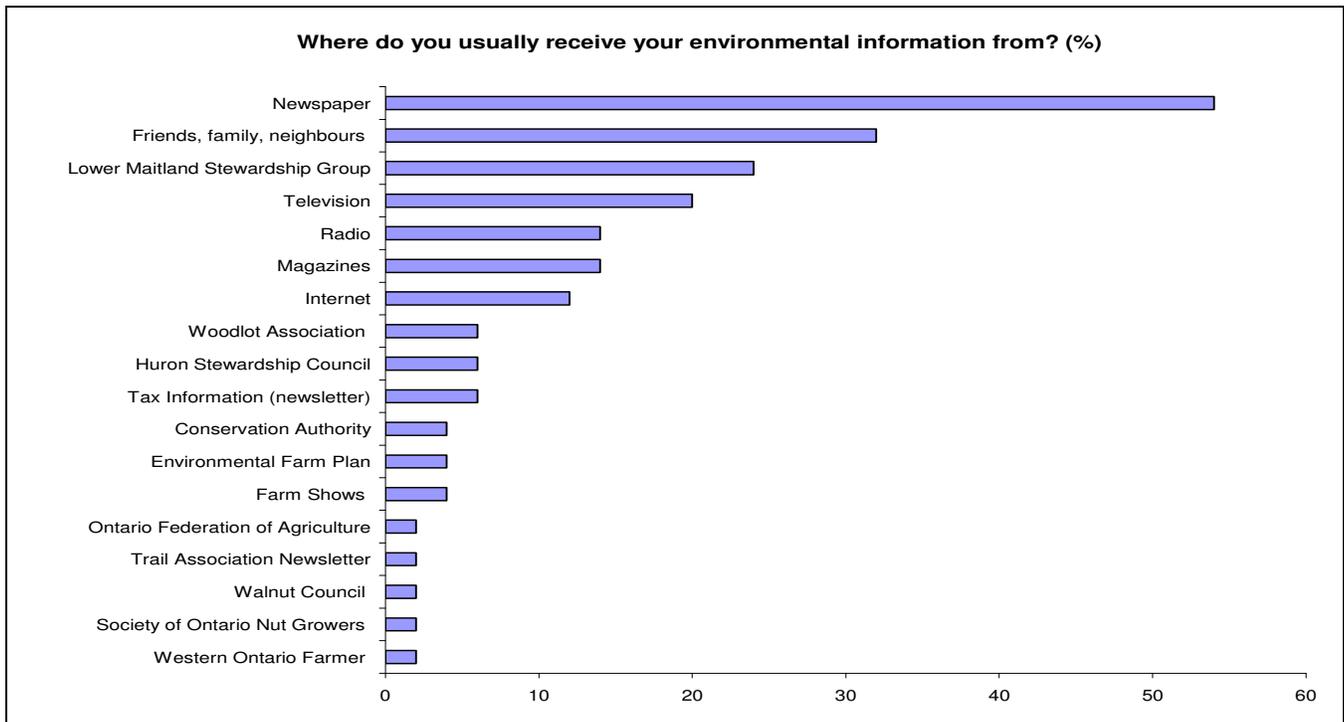
When asked if they would be interested in creating a stewardship plan for their property, or having someone create one for them, most landowners indicated they were not interested. When those who identified they were interested (28% of the total) were asked if they were willing to pay for the creation of a stewardship plan, most (71%) said that it depended on the cost, another 14% indicated that they would be willing to pay for one, 7% said no, they would not be willing to pay for a stewardship plan, and another 7% said that they would prefer to create a stewardship plan for themselves.



Most landowners (60%) indicated that they were interested in receiving information about stewardship projects for their land. Out of those landowners, the types of projects they were interested in are included in the table below.



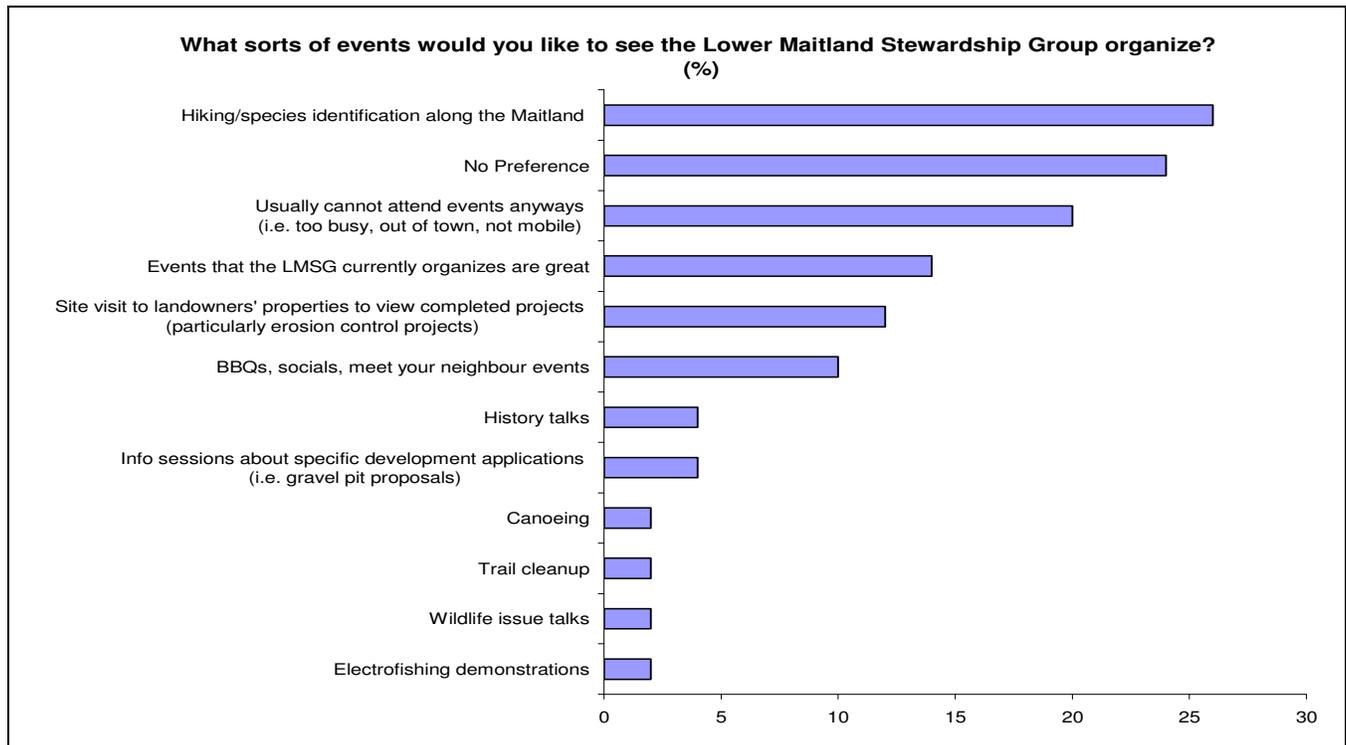
The landowners of the valley have access to a variety of information sources. Summarized below is where they access information about the environment.



Results – Lower Maitland Stewardship Group Questions

Most of the landowners (82%) had heard of the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group before they received correspondence about the survey.

The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group hosts a variety of events throughout the year. The most popular event that the landowners (26% of the total) indicated that they would like to see organized by the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group was hiking and species identification along the river. Many individuals (24%) indicated that they had no preference when it came to the types of events that the group organized and another subset of the landowners indicated that they usually cannot attend events anyways because they are too busy, out of town, not mobile, etc. Some individuals had some additional suggestions for the LMSG outings, including: more notice before events, bringing in kids or others who don't know about the river valley and teaching them about it, incorporating more hands-on activities, hikes in smaller groups. Below is a summary of the various events that the landowners of the Lower Maitland River would like to see the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group organize.



Conclusions & Recommendations

The survey was well-received by the landowners who participated, and it gave us, the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group, a good opportunity to identify some of the issues that are apparent in the valley.

Most landowners have a deep appreciation for the Maitland River Valley. The most popular activities that they conduct in the valley include hiking/walking and canoeing/kayaking. And although the landowners don't believe that the valley will change over the next 20 years, they would like to see an improvement to the river's water quality, as well as improvements to shoreline erosion. Many landowners are also concerned over the presence of and destruction caused by ATVs and other motorized vehicles in the valley.

All of the landowners also have a deep appreciation for the property that they own, whether they use it as recreation or as income from farming. Most have owned their properties for more than 20 years, and all landowners intend on owning their property for as long as they are able to. Most landowners would like to see their properties remain the same as they are over the next 20 years; however, some issues that are apparent on their properties include the presence of ATVs/motorized vehicles, unhealthy woodlots, and trespassing.

A group of local agencies (MNR, Conservation Authorities, etc.) has been assembled to discuss ATV issues in the area. This committee's mandate is to review concerns regarding ATV usage in Huron County, with emphasis on protecting sensitive natural areas, and to try to develop effective solutions to these issues that will satisfy government, environmental groups, private landowners, and ATV users. The eventual outcome of this committee will be a management plan that will help protect natural areas like the Lower Maitland River Valley.

Many landowners have completed some form of stewardship projects on their property, the most popular being tree planting. Some accessed outside funding sources for these projects, namely through the Conservation Authorities, the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environmental Farm Program. However, many landowners were not aware that funding programs existed, and that when combined, had the potential to fund 100% of their project expenses. More effort should be made by the local groups to promote the existence of such programs. This would entice more people to consider implementing projects where funding may be a concern.

Landowners are interested in learning more about stewardship projects, namely tree planting projects, remedies for erosion, and about the associated funding opportunities, although they are not interested in having a stewardship plan created for their property. Their main source of environmental information consists of the local newspaper. This is important for the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group and other agencies to note because if we/they are interested in getting public information to the locals, the newspaper would be an effective means of doing so.

Of those landowners who had a preference in terms of the types of outings that the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group organized, hiking, coupled with species identification along the Maitland River was the most popular, as well as visiting other properties to see completed stewardship projects, particularly erosion control. This feedback will help us plan future Lower Maitland Stewardship Group outings.

Appendix 1 – Initial Landowner Letter

Dear Landowner,

Re: Lower Maitland Stewardship Group – Landowner Contact Initiative

Approximately 270 people own property along the Lower Maitland River Valley between Auburn and Goderich. The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group (LMSG) is keenly interested in protecting this special area for future generations and recognizes that we must work cooperatively with landowners to achieve this goal. In the interest of learning more about landowner needs and viewpoints, the LMSG is hoping to meet with a number of Lower Maitland landowners this summer to conduct a survey. The main goals of the survey are to: 1) determine what features of the valley are important to you, the landowners; 2) what assistance or support you might need to help you implement stewardship activities, and; 3) provide you with information about some available stewardship and funding opportunities.

The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group began in 1998 with informal meetings between interested community members to discuss issues and concerns relating to the Maitland Valley and the surrounding area. It has evolved into an informal, community-based organization with diverse representation. The mission statement of the Lower Maitland Stewardship Group is: “to maintain and enhance natural ecosystem features of the Lower Maitland River Valley”. For more information about our group, you may wish to visit our website at <http://lmsg.huronstewardship.on.ca/>.

The LMSG has retained a technician to implement the survey, and they will be contacting a number of Lower Maitland landowners to try and arrange a meeting to discuss their property, their views about the valley and needs for stewardship assistance. The survey will be conducted throughout the summer of 2009. It should take approximately 30 minutes to complete, but this could vary.

We value your time and input. Landowners participating in the survey will receive a copy of Windings – A History of the Lower Maitland (while supplies last), plus their choice of one of the following gifts in appreciation for their assistance:

- \$20 gift certificate for trees at a local nursery, or;
- Huron County: Ontario's West Coast (a pictorial guide to Huron County)

All individual survey responses will be kept in strict confidence. The final report, summarizing the results of the survey will be available to all participants.

We will be contacting potential participants by phone during July and August to ask if you are willing to participate in the survey, but you can also contact me directly to express your interest in participating. In addition, if you wish to view a copy of the survey before a meeting date is established, you can review it by visiting our website at the above address. Then follow the “Landowner Survey” link under the “Menu” selection on the left hand side of the screen.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me using the contact information below.

Sincerely,

Steve Bowers
Stewardship Coordinator

Appendix 2 – Landowner Survey

Section 1: Landowner Information

Name: _____

Property Location: _____

Property Size: _____

How long have you owned your property? _____

How long do you plan on owning your property? _____

What are your main interests in owning this property? _____

Were you familiar with the river valley prior to acquiring your property? _____

Section 2: The Lower Maitland River Valley

How do you use the valley? _____

What do you appreciate about the valley the most? _____

What changes do you think will occur on your property over the next 20 years? _____

What changes would you like to see on your property over the next 20 years? _____

What changes do you think will occur in the valley over the next 20 years? _____

What changes would you like to see in the valley over the next 20 years? _____

What are the three biggest issues (problems/threats) on your property that you believe need to be addressed? _____

What are the three biggest issues (problems/threats) in the valley that you believe need to be addressed? _____

Section 3: Stewardship Opportunities

Have any stewardship projects been completed on your property already? _____

If so, what are the projects? _____

Did you receive any external funding assistance for those projects? If so, from where? _____

Would you be interested in creating a stewardship plan for your property, or having someone create one for you? If so, is this something you would be willing to pay for? _____

Where do you usually receive your environmental information from (i.e. tv, radio, newspaper, friends, etc.)? _____

Would you be interested in learning more about stewardship projects and available funding? If so, what types of projects would you like to receive information about? _____

What additional assistance might be most helpful to you in implementing stewardship projects (e.g. information, site visits by specialists, funding, other)? _____

Section 4: The Lower Maitland Stewardship Group

Had you heard of the LMSG before you received the letter about the survey? ____

What sorts of events would you like to see the LMSG organize? (refer to LMSG brochure)_____

Would you like to be added to our mailing list to be notified of upcoming LMSG events? _____

Section 5: Comments/Suggestions/Follow-Up Information

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!

Appendix 3 – Property Types

Table 1. Detailed description of property types. Note: All of the property types for each landowner were considered, allowing for the fractions (i.e. if one landowner owned 3 properties, each one was considered to be a third of his total ownership – about 0.33 out of 1)

Property Code	Description	Number of Landowners	Percent
100	Vacant Residential Land not on Water	6	12
110	Vacant Residential/ Recreational Land On Water	1	2
200	Farm Property without any buildings/structures	9.75	19.5
201	Farm with residence - with or without secondary structures; no farm outbuildings	.25	0.5
210	farm without buildings - with secondary structures; with farm outbuildings	1.5	3
211	Farm with residence - with or without secondary structures; with farm outbuildings	2.83	5.7
242	Managed forest property, seasonal residence, not on water	1	2
244	managed forest property, residence not on water	3	6
260	Vacant residential/commercial/industrial land owned by a non-farmer with a portion being farmed	1.5	3
261	Land owned by a non farmer improved with a non farm residence with a portion being farmed	9.63	19
262	Land owned by a farmer improved with a non farm residence with a portion being farmed	1	2
301	Single Family Detached(Not On Water)	3.5	7
313	Single Family Detached(On Water)	0.5	1
381	Mobile Home	0.5	1
391	Seasonal/Recreational Dwelling - first tier on water	7	14
392	Seasonal/Recreational Dwelling - Second Tier on Water	1	2
TOTALS		50	100