Smith Valley Conservation District
Resource Needs Assessment
General Population Survey Results

University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

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Clark County Cooperative Extension

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USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Nevada Department of Wildlife

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many people that contributed their time to improve the contents of the survey, organize focus groups, and ensure the success of the project. These individuals include Malieka Bordigioni, Inga Tissier, Maggie Orr, Rick Orr, Christiana Manville, and the participants of the focus group in Smith Valley, Nevada in May 2019.

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Executive Summary

In 2018, the Smith Valley Conservation District (SVCD), along with seven other Nevada conservation districts, began a resource needs assessment (RNA) initiative. The goal of a RNA is to catalog the resource issues within a conservation district in order to assist the conservation district board in setting conservation priorities.

The RNA process has two parts: a technical assessment portion and a public input portion. The technical assessment for SVCD includes the resource concerns gathered through focus groups composed of natural resource professionals and individuals who live or work in each watershed within Smith Valley. The public input portion of the RNA is the focus of this document. We present the methods and results of the general population survey used to measure the resource concerns of a wide swath of Smith Valley residents. Both parts of the RNA process adopt the classification protocol of the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) *Resource Concerns Checklist* planning tool. This planning tool groups resource concerns into five major categories: soil, water, air, plants, and animals and is generally referred to as SWAPA.

The survey instrument was implemented in Smith Valley in summer 2019 and fall 2020. Our study sample consists of 11 Smith Valley residents who completed the online survey. These 11 respondents are representative of Smith Valley's demographics based on observable characteristics reported in the U.S. Census.

This document presents the results from the general population survey. The general population survey was designed so that the questions and modules correspond to the resource concerns on the *Resource Concerns Checklist* planning tool. This correspondence allows the survey results to be used in conjunction with the NRCS *Resource Concerns Checklist* planning tool in landscape level conservation planning in Smith Valley.

The results show that water quantity, water quality, and invasive weeds are the areas of greatest concern for residents of Smith Valley.

- Air quality is the top resource concern in Smith Valley, with 82% of respondents identifying air quality as a top three concern and 9% identifying air quality as their top concern. Respondents were particularly concerned with wildfire smoke.
- Water quality is also a top natural resource concern for respondents in Smith Valley, with 82% of respondents listing it as top three concern.

Respondent's water quality concerns are driven by the quality of water in natural water bodies like lakes and rivers.

- Water quantity is another major natural resource concern for respondents in Smith Valley, with 64% of respondents listing it as a top three concern. Respondent's water quality concerns are driven by worries about the security of future water supplies and drought.

The findings in this report support the findings in the RNA technical assessment for MVCD, which identified irrigation water efficiency, sediments in surface water, soil erosion in stream banks, wildfire hazard in the wildland-urban interface, and noxious and invasive weeds as the major natural resource concerns for Smith Valley (Smith Valley Conservation District 2019). The general population survey indicates that in addition to concerns about water scarcity and water quality, air quality is also a significant concern residents of Smith Valley.

In addition to the RNA questions, the survey also contained questions on the respondents' outdoor recreation activities in Smith Valley, as well as questions related to SVCD's current activities. Results indicate that the majority of residents in Smith Valley participated in some form of outdoor activity in the past year, with sightseeing and non-motorized trail use (i.e., hiking, walking pets, mountain biking) as the most popular activities. Results also indicate that there is very high public awareness of SVCD and its mission among the general public in Smith Valley.

Conservation Action Plan Development

The NRCS defines locally-led conservation as a process where community stakeholders are involved in natural resource planning, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of results (NRCS, 2010). The planning phase of the NRCS process has two parts: 1. Performing an RNA to gather public input from a range of stakeholders; and 2. Using input from the RNA to develop a conservation action plan (CAP) that identifies priorities, sets goals, and identifies government and nongovernment programs to achieve these goals. This section summarizes the major implications of this document (the public-input portion of the RNA) for the development of a CAP for SVCD.

- *Priority*: Water Availability
    - *Goal*: Ensure that water is available to meet demand in SVCD now and in the future.
    - *Programs*: Conservation programing to increase efficiency of irrigation systems and increase the availability of water on public lands for livestock and wildlife.
- *Priority*: Water Quality
    - *Goal*: Improve quality of lakes and rivers in SVCD.
    - *Programs*: Results indicate that programs to address invasive aquatic weeds would have substantial public support.
- *Priority*: Invasive weeds
    - *Goal*: Reduce prevalence of invasive weeds within SVCD.
    - *Program(s)*: Results indicate broad support for programming targeted at removing invasive plants and noxious weeds, improving soil stability, and improving forage quality for livestock.
- *Priority*: Feral Horses
    - *Goal(s)*: Limit the impact of feral horses on wildlife habitat and rangeland health.
    - *Program(s)*: Work with the Bureau of Land Management to set management policy for feral horse herds that limit their negative impacts by reducing herd size in sensitive areas
- *Priority*: Recreational Areas
    - *Goal(s)*: Increase the numbers of recreational trails for motorized and non-motorized users.

- *Program(s)*: Increase public awareness of existing trail systems. Develop new recreation trails.

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1. Introduction

Overview

Nevada Association of Conservation Districts (NVACD) and the Smith Valley Conservation District (SVCD), along with six other Nevada CDs, partnered with researchers at the University of Nevada, Reno to develop and conduct a general population survey to measure the natural resource concerns of Smith Valley residents. The information acquired from this process will be used to help SVCD set conservation priorities to ensure their conservation programming addresses the most important issues to their constituency.

Background

This section provides background on the role of the RNA process in locally-led conservation.

Natural Resources Conservation Service and SWAPA

After the dust bowl of the 1930s, it was apparent that farm-level soil conservation was key to preventing wind erosion. In response to the dust bowl, the Soil Conservation Service, later renamed Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), was established. The mission of the NRCS "is to provide resources to farmers and landowners to aid them with conservation. Ensuring productive lands in harmony with a healthy environment is our priority" (NRCS, 2020).

NRCS relies on the SWAPA natural resource planning tool for their conservation work. Farmers, in conjunction with NRCS agents, can use this planning tool to determine the resource concerns on their property and develop a conservation plan to address each concern. Ray Dotson, NRCS State Conservationist for Nevada, describes SWAPA as foundational to the mission and vision of NRCS. (Dotson, personal Communications, 2019).

Conservation Districts and Locally-Led Conservation

Locally-led conservation is defined as "a process used by local people to assess their natural resource conditions and needs, set goals, identify programs and other resources to solve those needs, develop proposals and recommendations,

implement solutions, and measure their success" (NRCS, 2014). Among other functions, CDs are responsible for assisting NRCS to ensure that NRCS programs within the CD reflect locally-determined conservation objectives. The CD board works with NRCS to ensure the funding they provide is tailored to address the top resource concerns within the district (Dotson, personal Communications, 2019). To determine what the top resource concerns are the CD conducts a resource needs assessment (RNA).

Resource Needs Assessment

RNA typically have two parts. The first is a technical assessment, which is performed by conservation specialists who meet with natural resource professionals to discuss the most important resource concerns in the CD. This component is effective for understanding the state of natural resources from the point of view of those individuals who work with them daily. In Nevada, many CDs take the same boundaries as the county and, as a result, include urban, agricultural, and public lands. Because the technical assessment tends to focus on the natural resource professionals, they can miss the resource concerns of many of the constituents they are elected to represent.

The second component of the RNA, *public input*, attempts to capture the resource concerns of the general public in a CD. The public input portion of the CD-level RNA is the analog of the client objective in a farm-level RNA. For example, a farm-level client objective may include goals such as increase crop yield or limit loss of topsoil. The client objective allows NRCS to address the specific concerns of each land-manager. Since locally-led conservation is targeted at landscape-level rather than parcel-level conservation, it is challenging to assess the "client" objective because the client is the entire community. In order to incorporate the client objective for landscape-level conservation, the CD-level RNA must involve a process where all stakeholders in the CD have an opportunity to express their resource concerns.

Traditionally, NRCS has relied on CDs and the formal Local Work Group and State Technical Advisory Committee process to ensure that local priorities are reflected in NRCS programming and spending or in other conservation programs. In regions where this process is not functioning as intended, or for organizations other than NRCS are interested in landscape-level conservation, a more direct method to obtain stakeholder input is through a general population survey. CDSN, along with a

handful of other Nevada CDs, have elected to use the general-population survey describe in the document to measure the resource concerns held by the general public.

2. Survey Development & Implementation

This section describes the development and implementation of the survey instrument. This section also analyzes whether the survey sample is representative of the general population in Smith Valley.

Survey Development

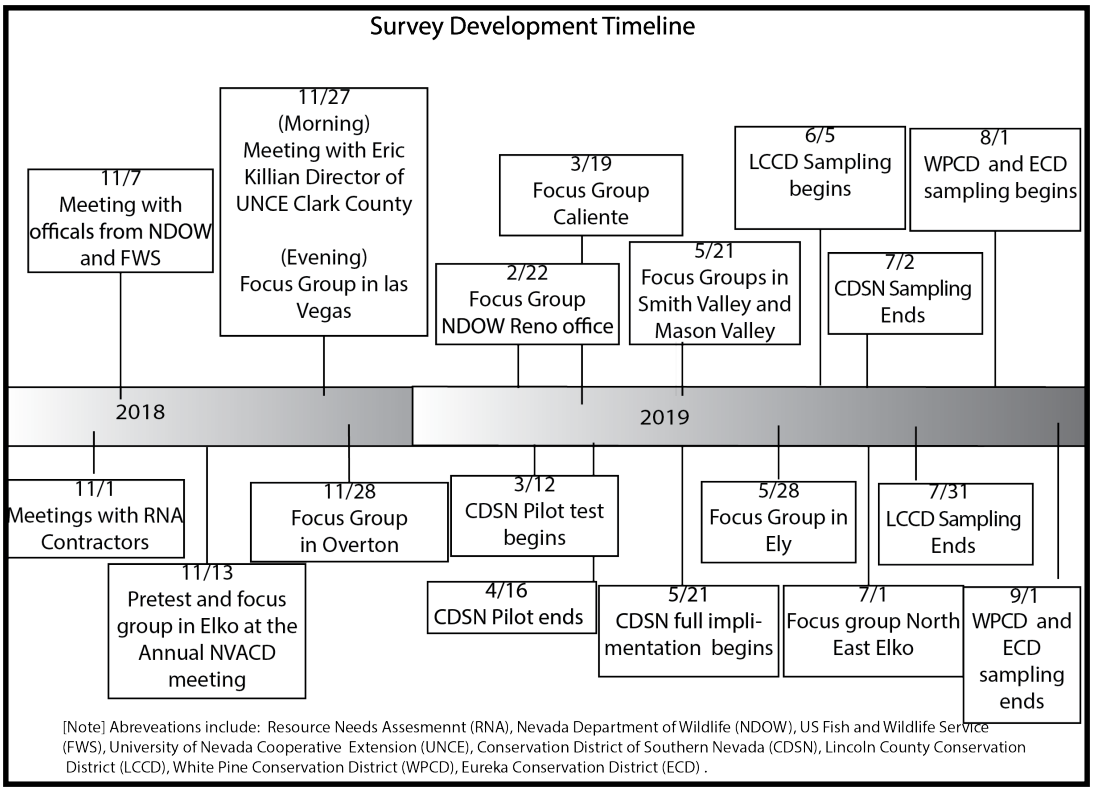
Collecting public opinion on resource concerns according to the SWAPA framework presents several challenges. The most significant challenge is removing the jargon from the technical descriptions of natural resource concerns so that the survey questions are clear and easy-to-understand for the general public. Additional challenges include low response rates and non-representative sampling, which are not unique to this project, but are problems that arise in survey work in general. This section discusses the survey development and how these challenges were overcome.

The SWAPA planning tool includes sentences such as, “Classic gully management is adequate to stop the progression of head cutting and widening and offsite impacts are minimized by vegetation and/or structures” (NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist). A general-population survey instrument that uses phrases directly from SWAPA would likely confuse respondents and result in a low completion rate. To ensure that the language of our survey was understandable to the general public, we subjected the survey instrument to intensive focus group testing. We conducted focus groups with natural resource professionals, CD board members, and the general public. The focus group participants took the survey and provided feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the instrument. Not only did we ensure the language could be understood by the public at large, we were also able to confirm the interpretation of the question did not vary among different groups.

We conducted seven focus groups before implementation in Smith Valley. The first focus group was conducted at the Nevada Association of Conservation Districts annual meeting in November of 2018. The participants were a mix of natural resource professionals, and CD board members from around Nevada. On February 22, 2019 a focus group was conducted at the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) offices in Reno and was attended by NDOW employees. On March 19th,

2019 we conducted a focus group in Caliente, Nevada, which was attended by the general public, natural resource professionals, and agricultural producers. Figure 1 shows the general developmental and implementation efforts.

Figure 1: Survey Development Timeline



The focus group protocols were as follows:

1. Introduce the research and its importance.
2. Split the participants into smaller groups, no more than six. Each group will have a moderator taking notes. The moderator attempts to divide participants into groups composed of participants with similar propensity to speak. If groups are not formed in this way, discussion will often be dominated by one or two voices. The ideal groups will have equal input from all members.
3. Begin the survey. During the course of the survey the moderators encouraged the participants to vocalize their thoughts, ask clarifying questions, and state their objections to question appearance or content. Participants are even encouraged to have relevant conversation within the

group. Observing how a question is explained by another participant gives the designer a better idea of how the question is being perceived. Moderators then record participant responses and ask if certain questions are confusing based on the visual cues (e.g. squinting or pausing).

4. Once all surveys are completed, the debrief session begins, which is the time for overall feedback including initial reactions. In addition, the moderators ask the participants the following questions:
    a. In your opinion, was anything missing?
    b. Was there anything that would have made you put the survey down and not complete it?
    c. Was the wording ever confusing?
    d. Would you complete the survey if you were at home?

The moderators remained silent during the focus groups. Remaining silent allows the survey designer to view the nature of survey takers without being influenced by explanations from the researchers.

The four focus groups helped us find and remedy numerous faults in the survey instrument and aided in improvements. Our efforts proved successful, as the survey completion rate for SVCD was 73%. That is, 73% of individuals who opened the survey completed it in its entirety.

Sampling

The survey was implemented in Smith Valley in summer 2019 and fall 2020. The survey was implemented using “snowball sampling” (Baker, 2013). Snowball sampling relies on a hand full of “recruiters” who are known and trusted in the community to recruit community member to take the survey.

Each recruiter was given an instruction and sheet with information about the purpose of the survey and contact information for the researchers, as well as a list of frequently asked questions. Recruiters were also given a stack of invitation cards to distribute to members of the community. Each invitation card had a link to the online survey instrument, a unique password to access the survey, and contact information for the researchers. The recruiter personally invited community members to take the survey and explained the importance of their participation.

This implementation strategy produced 11 completed surveys from a total population in Smith Valley of just over 5,000.

Sample Representation

This section compares the demographics of the SVCD survey sample with the population of Smith Valley using data on sex, race, and age from the U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). All 11 respondents provided information on their sex. The proportion sex ratio in our sample population was not significantly different than that of Smith Valley. 5 (45.45%) of the survey respondents were male while 6 (54.55%) were female. All 11 respondents in our sample are white. According to the 2010 Census, 100% of Smith Valley's population identifies as white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The average age of our sample is 62, which is older compared to the mean age of 51 for rural Nevada (ACS 2018). Overall, our sample is representative of the population of SVCD based on observable characteristics.

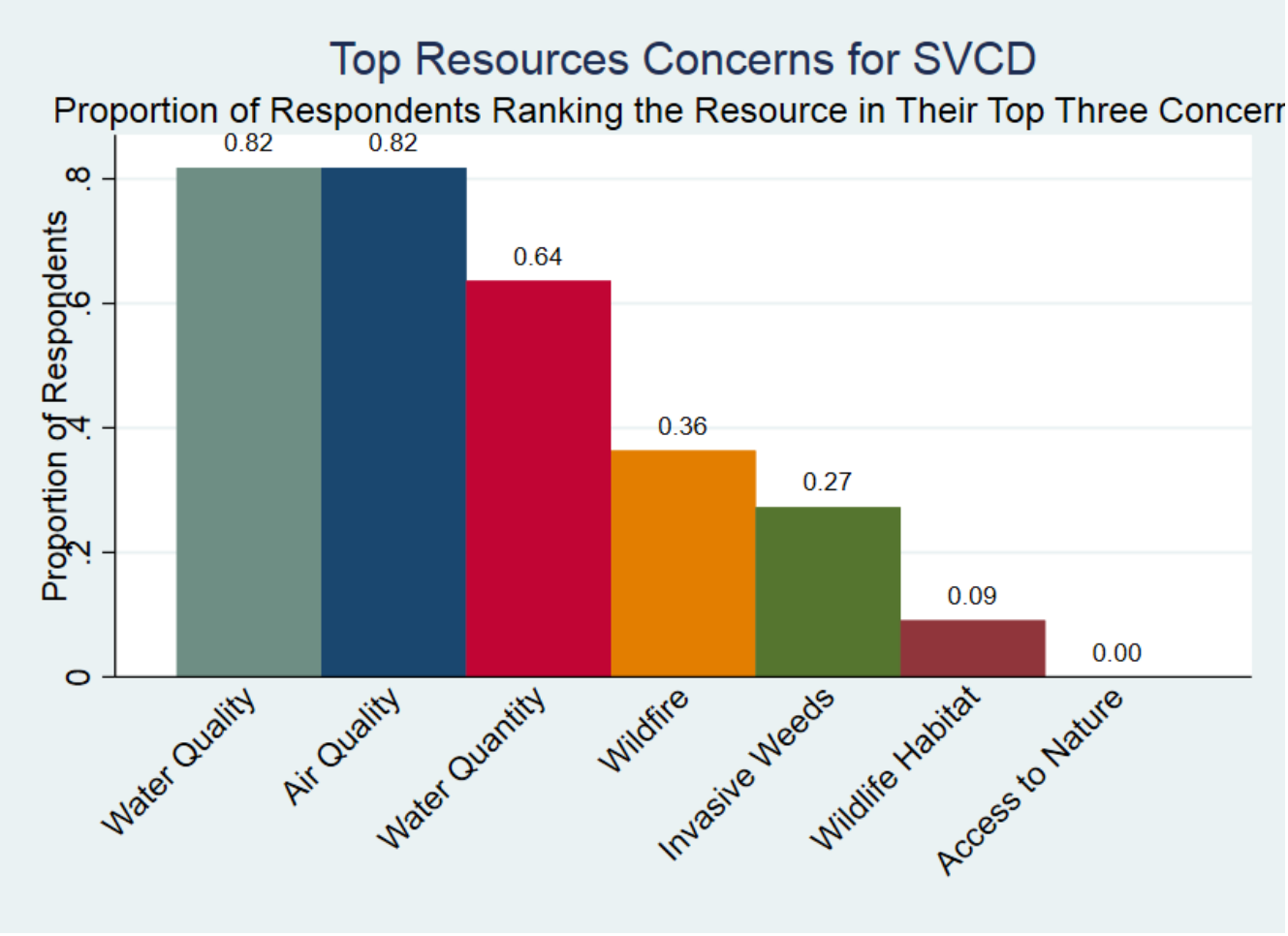
3. Resource Needs Assessment Results

This section presents the survey results on major resource concerns in SVCD, as well on the level of concern for each SWAPA category.

Top Natural Resource Concerns

Figure 2 shows that water quality, air quality, and water quantity are the top ranked natural resource concerns in Smith Valley. Wildfire, invasive weeds, wildlife habitat, and access to nature are the remaining resource concerns, in order of descending concern. These results do not suggest that respondents are unconcerned with the previously mentioned issues, but rather, when forced to make a tradeoff between resource issues SVCD respondents prioritize water quality, air quality, and water quantity.

Figure 2: Top Resource Concerns for SVCD



Top Ranked Concerns

Water Quality

Water quality was a top natural resource concern for respondents in Smith Valley, with 82% of respondents listing it as a top 3 concern and 45% of respondents listing it as their main concern. Respondents expressed concern regarding the quality of water in natural water bodies like lakes and rivers (45%) and drinking water quality (60%).

Air Quality

Table 2 shows that air quality was also a top natural resource concern, being ranked in the top three resource concerns by 82% of respondents. Table 2 shows that smoke from wildfires was a concern of most respondents (91%), with the next highest air quality concern being dust on windy days at only 36%, this suggests that the air quality concerns are directly linked to wildfire smoke issues in Smith Valley in the minds of the respondents.

Water Quantity

Water quantity is a significant resource concerns for respondents in SVCD, with 64% of respondents listing it as top three concern, and 36% of respondents listing it as their top concern. Respondents' concerns over water quantity are driven by concerns about the security of future water supplies and drought. Table 3 shows 91% of respondents identifying the security of future water supplies as a concern, while 82% of respondents were concerned about future drought.

Respondents were asked which water use activities should be prioritized given limited water supplies in Smith Valley. Figure 3 shows that large majorities of respondents ranked residential use (100%), agriculture (100%), and wildlife habitat (89%) as a top three water use priority. Other water use priorities such as new commercial and residential use and business needs were seen as lower priorities by the majority of respondents.

Figure 3: Water Use Priorities for SVCD

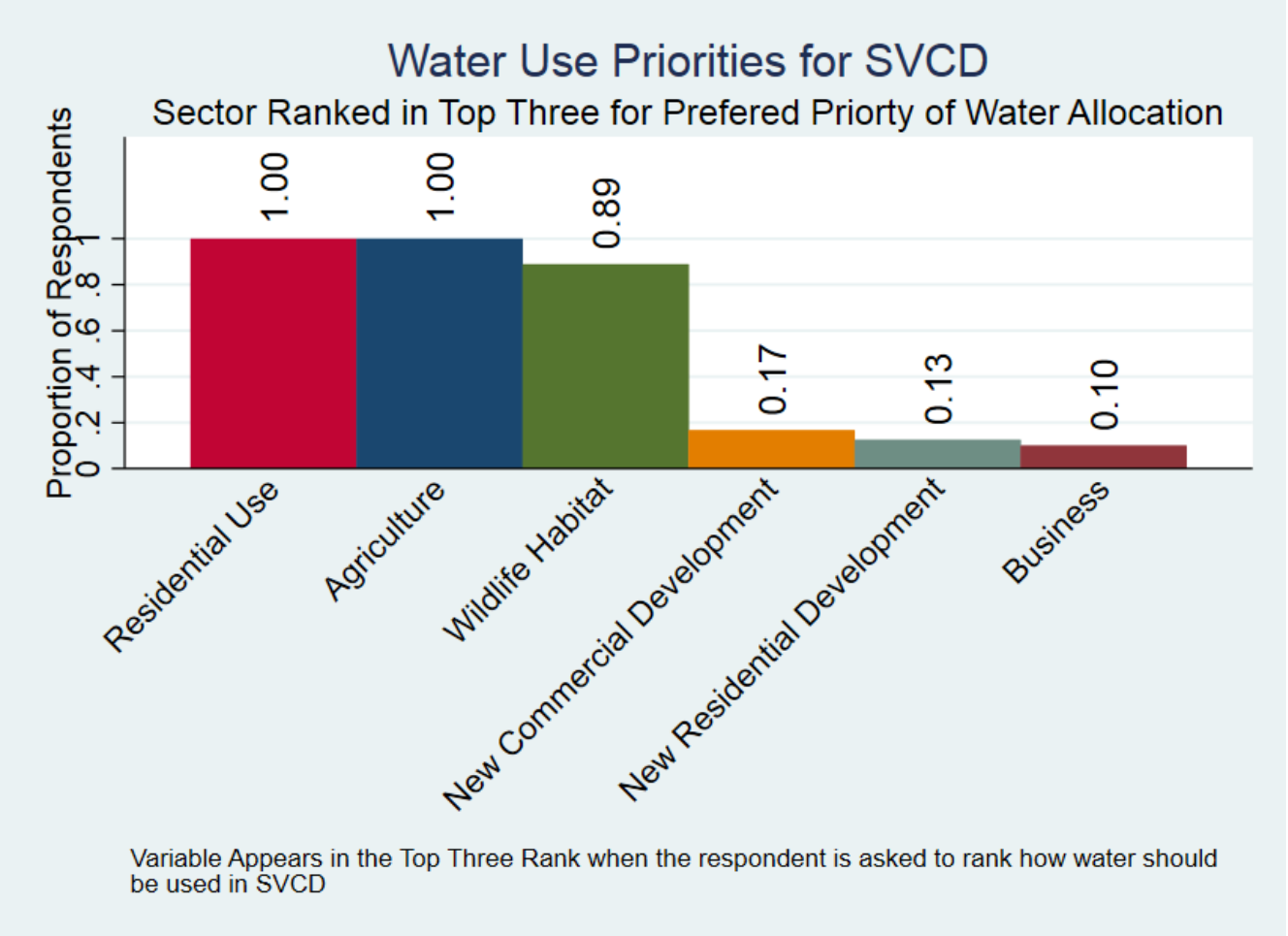


Table 1: Water Quality Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District

Water Quality Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent All Respondents
Water Qualtity		Top Ranked Concern	45%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	82%
		Identified as a concern	91%
SWAPA Category*	**Survey Question**		
n/a	Quality of drinking water	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	60%
	Quality of natural water bodies		45%
		Observations	11
*SWAPA Category refers to the category in the NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist that most closely corresponds to the question in the RNA survey.			

Table 2: Air Quality Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District

Air Quality Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent All Respondents
Air Quality		Top Ranked Concern	9%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	82%
		Identified as a concern	91%
SWAPA Category*	**Survey Question**		
Particulate matter less than 10 micrometers in diameter (PM 10)	Dust on windy days	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	36%
Excessive Greenhouse gas, PM 2.5.	Industrial air pollution		0%
	Vehicle exhaust		0%
< PM 2.5, Reduced visibility	Wildfire smoke		91%
		Observations	11
*SWAPA Category refers to the category in the NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist that most closely corresponds to the question in the RNA survey.			

Table 3: Water Quantity Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District

Water Quantity Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent All Respondents
Water Quantity		Top Ranked Concern	36%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	64%
		Identified as a concern	91%
SWAPA Category*	**Survey Question**		
Excessive Runoff, Flooding, or Ponding	Property damage from flash flood	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	18%
n/a	Security of water supplies		91%
	Drought		82%
		Observations	11

*SWAPA Category refers to the category in the NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist that most closely corresponds to the question in the RNA survey.

Other Resource Concerns

Plants and Invasive Weeds

Invasive weeds were not often ranked as a top 3 resource issue by SVCD respondents (27%). However, all respondents listed invasive weeds as a resource concern. In particular, many respondents were concerned with poor restoration efforts after wildfire (73%).

Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat

Table 5 shows that concern for wildlife habitat was reported by all respondents. Particularly, 73% of respondents indicated concern for inadequate cover and shelter for wildlife.

Soil Stability and Erosion

Table 6 shows that excessive dust was viewed as a significant concern by some respondents (36%). Soil damage from flooding was not a concern of most respondents (9%).

Table 4: Plant and Invasive Weed Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District

Plant Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Plants/Invasive weeds		Top Ranked Concern	9%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	27%
		Identified as a concern	100%
SWAPA Category*	**Survey Question**		
Wildfire Hazard	Poor restoration response after wildfire	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	73%
		Observations	11

*SWAPA Category refers to the category in the NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist that most closely corresponds to the question in the RNA survey.

Table 1: Fish and Wildlife Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District

Fish and Wildlife Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Fish and Wildlife		Top Ranked Concern	0%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	9%
		Identified as a concern	100%
SWAPA Category*	**Survey Question**		
Threatened and Endangered Fish and Wildlife Species	Threats to at risk or endangered species	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	36%
Inadequate Cover/Shelter	Threats to wildlife habitat		73%
Imbalance Among and Within Populations	Abundance of rodents or pests		36%
		Observations	11

*SWAPA Category refers to the category in the NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist that most closely corresponds to the question in the RNA survey.

Table 2: Soil Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District

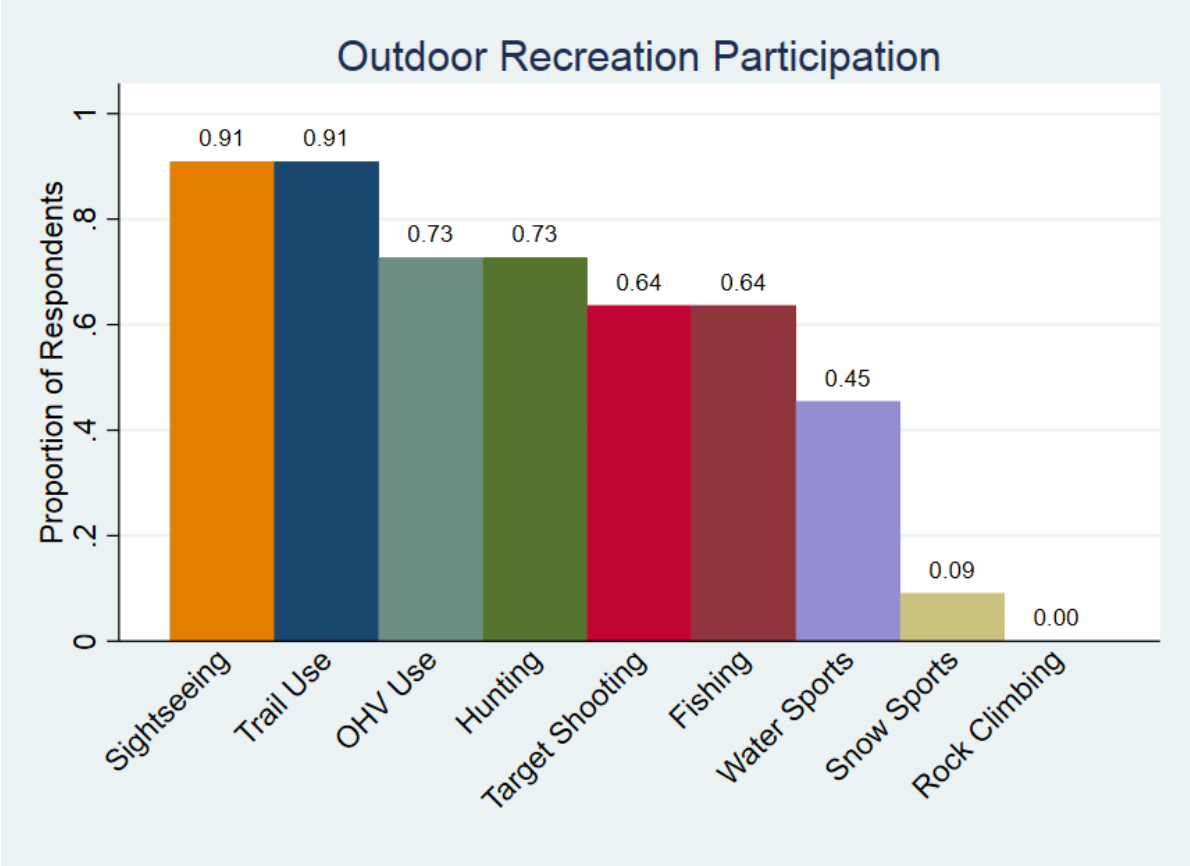
Soil Concerns in the Smith Valley Conservation District			
SWAPA Category*	**Survey Question**	Statistic	Category of respondent All Respondents
Wind erosions	Excessive Dust	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	36%
Sheet & rill erosion	Soild Damage from flooding		9%
		Observations	11

*SWAPA Category refers to the category in the NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist that most closely corresponds to the question in the RNA survey.

4. Recreation

In addition to the natural resource related questions, the survey included questions regarding recreation activities. This section presents the results of these questions. Figure 4 below shows the proportion of respondents that participate in each outdoor recreation activity in Smith Valley in the past year. Figure 4 reveals that sightseeing, non-motorized trail use (i.e., hiking, walking pets, mountain biking), off-highway vehicle (OHV) use, hunting, target shooting, and fishing are the most popular recreational activities, with a majority of respondents indicating that they participated in these activities in the past year. Water sports are also popular, with 45% of respondents having participated in the previous year.

Figure 4: Outdoor Recreation Participation

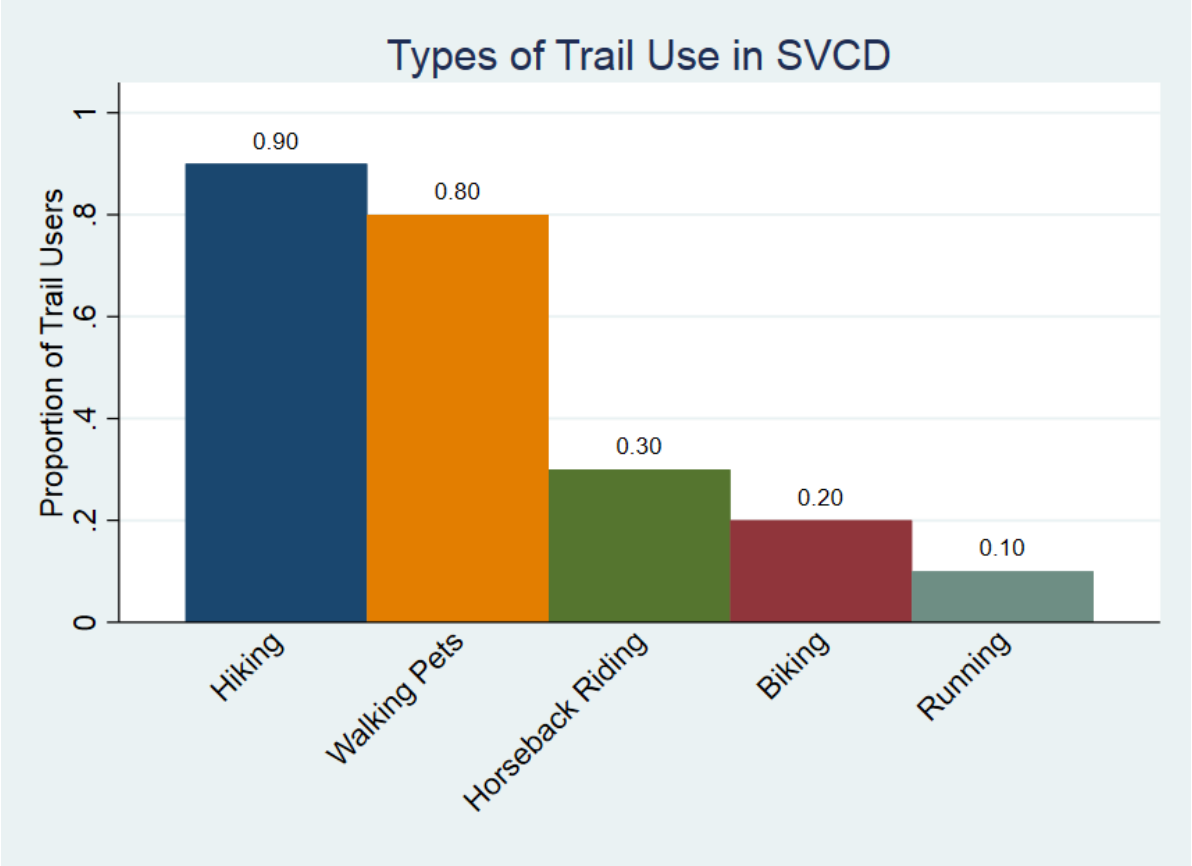


Trail Use

Figure 4 shows that non-motorized trail use is one of the most popular recreation activities among respondents, with 91% of respondents

reporting having participated in the previous year. Figure 5 shows that of the type of trail use, hiking is the most popular trail use activity in Smith Valley, followed by walking pets, horseback riding, biking, and running.

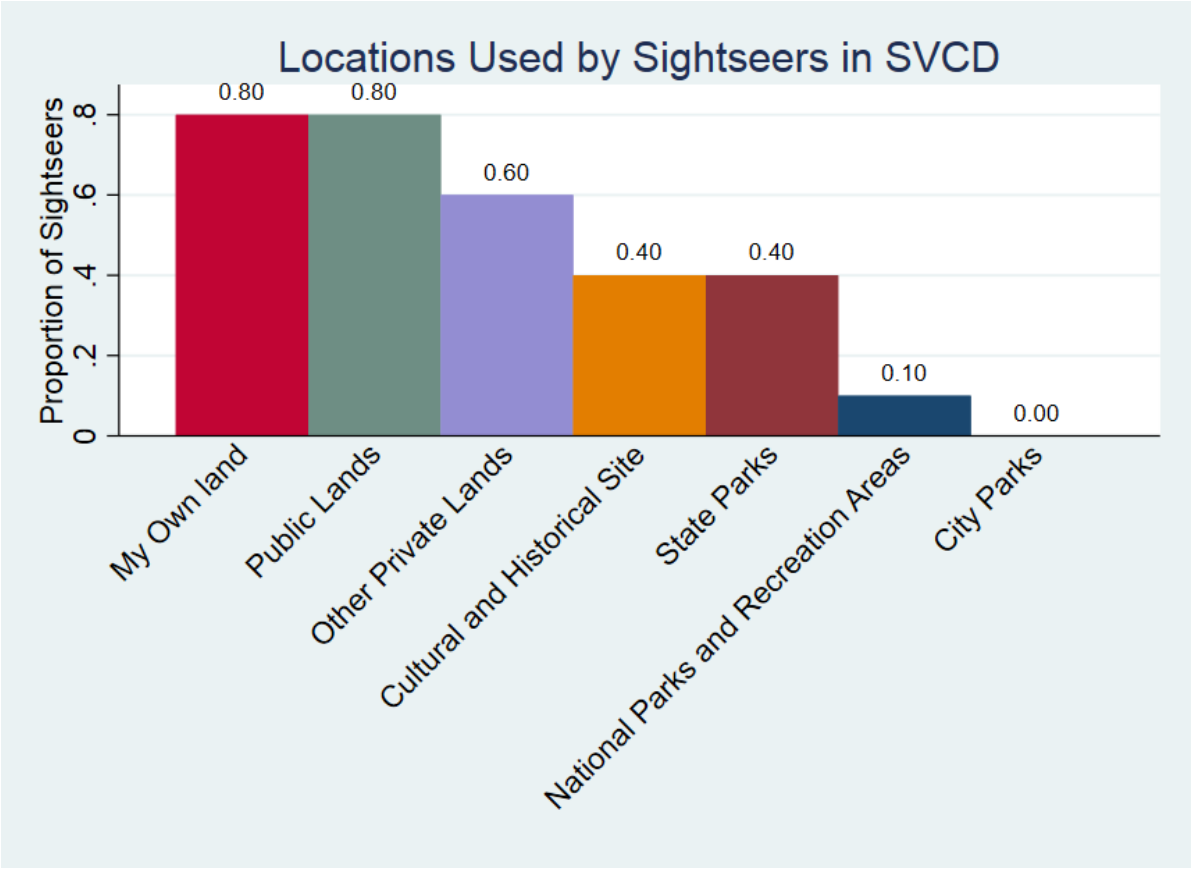
Figure 5: Types of Trail Use in SVCD



Sightseeing

Figure 4 shows that sightseeing is one of the most popular activities for respondents in SVCD, with 91% of respondents reporting having participated in the previous year. Figure 6 indicates that public lands (BLM and USFS) and personally owned lands are the most popular sightseeing locations in Smith Valley.

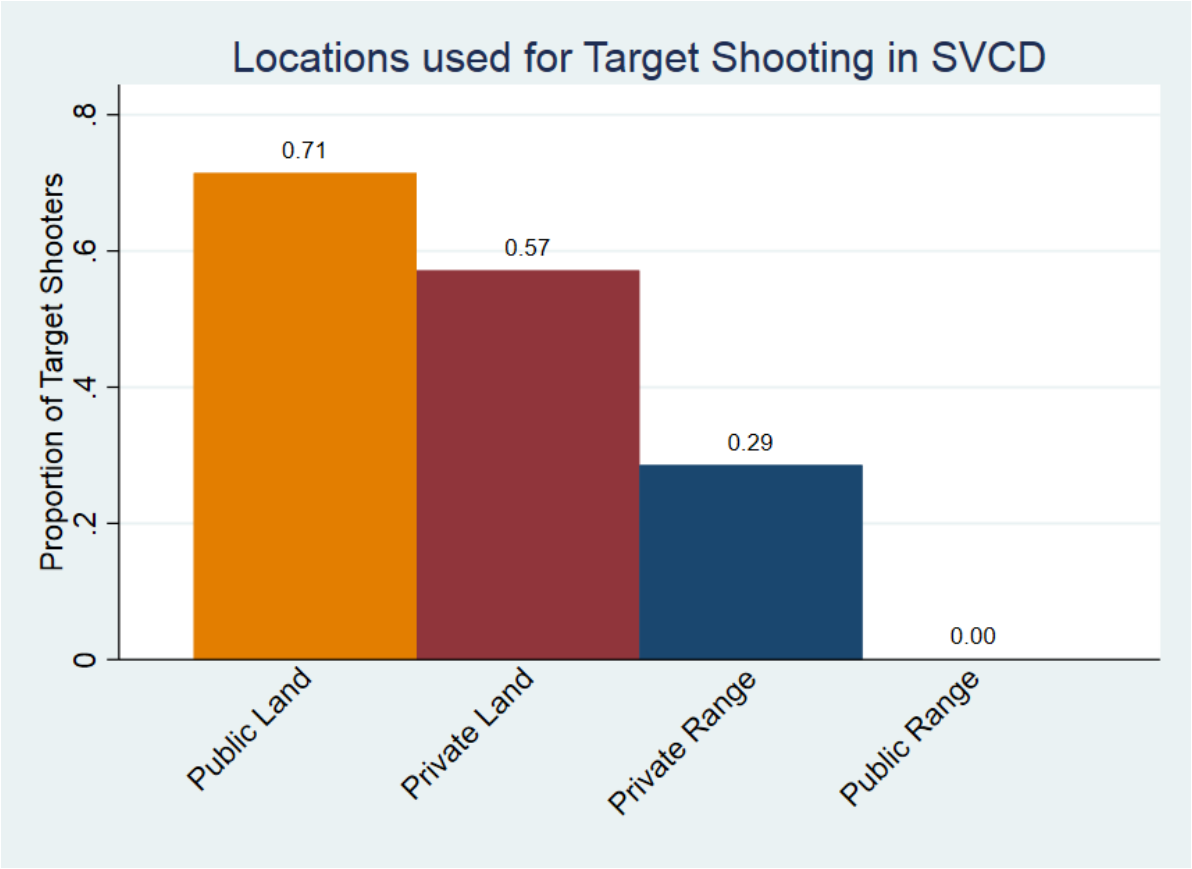
Figure 6: Locations Used by Sightseers in SVCD



Target Shooting

Figure 4 shows that target shooting is tied as the fifth most popular activity among respondents from SVCD, with 64% of respondents reporting having participated in the previous year. Figure 7 shows that public land and private land are the most used target shooting locations in SVCD followed by private ranges.

Figure 7: Locations Used by Target Shooters in SVCD



5. Smith Valley Conservation District

This section describes the results from questions regarding SVCD and some of its current activities. These questions include focus on public awareness of SVCD's activities, public sentiment on public lands management priorities, which is important given the extent of public lands in Smith Valley, and the community development priorities for SVCD.

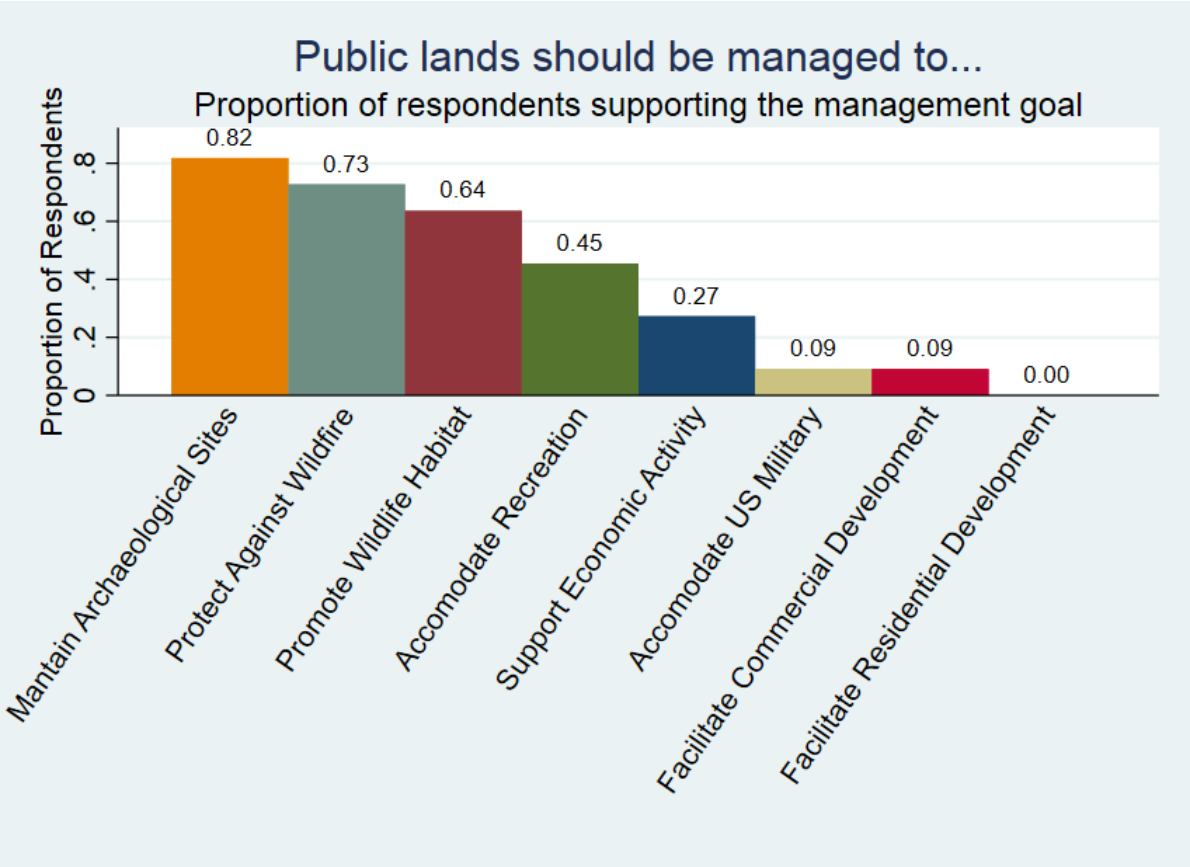
Public Awareness

The survey included questions about the respondents' awareness of SVCD and its activities. All respondents reported knowing what SVCD does. Further, the survey found that 91% of respondents reported knowing who works for the CD and 100% of respondents reported knowing how to contact the CD.

Public Lands

Figure 8 reports results on how respondents believe public lands in Smith Valley should be managed. Figure 8 shows that a majority of respondents support managing public lands to maintain areas of archaeological importance (82%), protect against wildfire (73%), and promote wildlife habitat (64%). There was less support for managing public lands to accommodate recreation (45%), support economic activity (27%), support the U.S. military (9%), or to support new commercial (9%) or residential (0%) real estate development. These results and indicate that general public in Smith Valley favors managing public lands for multiple uses, including promoting wildlife and protecting against wildfire, over a narrow focus on economic development.

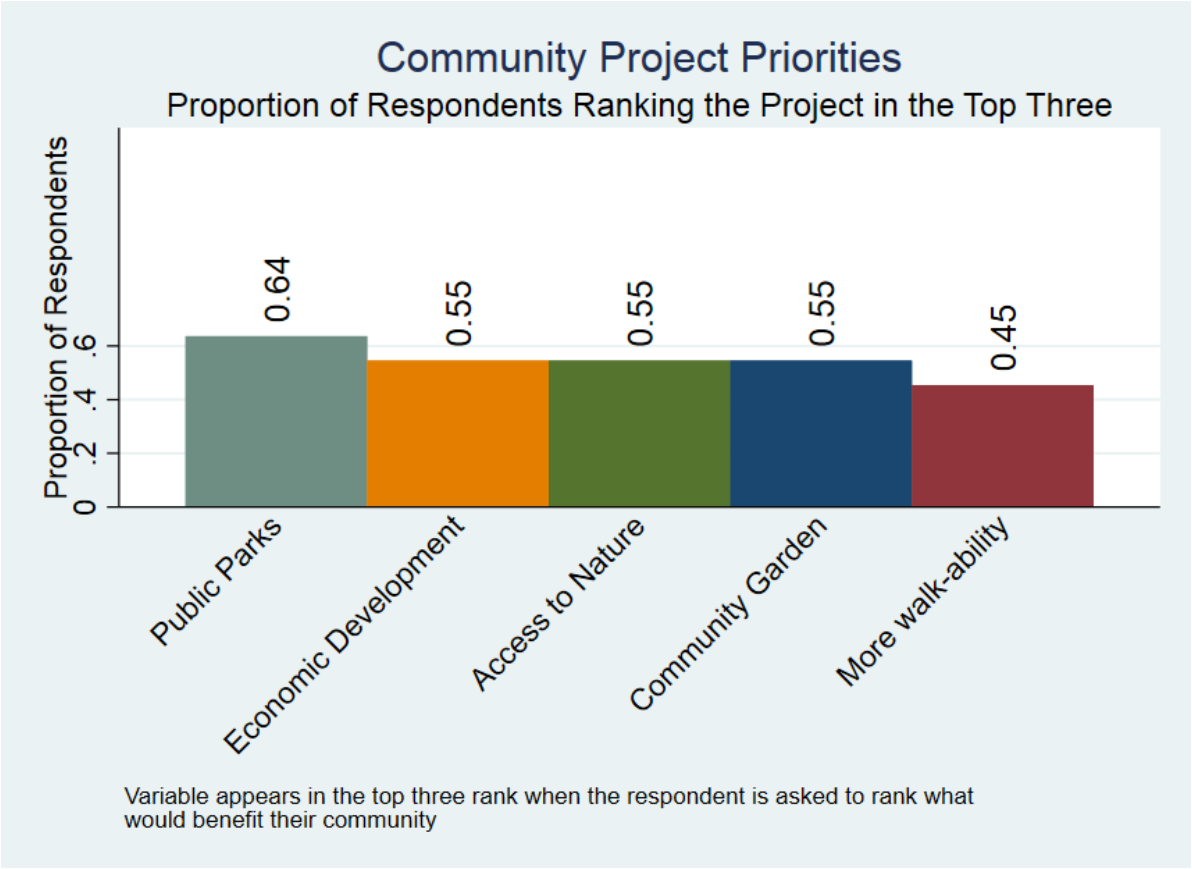
Figure 8: Public Lands Management Sentiment in SVCD



Community Projects

Figure 9 reports the results on respondents top three ranked community development goals. Figure 9 shows that while 64% of respondents ranked public parks as their top three priorities, the most of any community development goal, support was spread pretty evenly across the five goals, with all goals ranked in the top three by at least 45% or respondents. These results indicate that there is a desire among Smith Valley residents for community investment across a number of dimensions.

Figure 96: Community Project Priorities



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