

White Pine Conservation District Resource Needs Assessment General Population Survey Results



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Executive Summary

In 2018, the White Pine Conservation District (WPCD), 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 WPCD was conducted by Jim Evans and includes the resource concerns gathered through focus groups composed of natural resource professionals and individuals who live or work in each watershed within White Pine County. 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 White Pine County 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 White Pine County in summer 2019 and fall 2020. Our study sample consists of 15 White Pine County residents who completed the online survey. These 15 respondents are representative of White Pine County'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 White Pine County.

The results show that water quantity, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat are the areas of greatest concern for residents of White Pine County.

- Water quantity is a top natural resource concern for respondents in White Pine County, with 67% of respondents listing it as a top three concern and 13% ranking it as their top concern. Respondent's water quality concerns are driven by worries about the security of future water supplies and drought.

- Water quality is also a top natural resource concern for respondents in White Pine County, with 67% of respondents listing it as a top three concern. Respondent's water quality concerns are driven by the quality of water in natural water bodies like lakes and rivers and drinking water.
- Air quality is another major resource concern in White Pine County, with 60% of respondents identifying air quality as a top three concern and 33% identifying air quality as their top concern. Respondents were particularly concerned with dust on windy days.
- Preserving wildlife habitat is also a major issue for respondents, with 73% listing it as a top three concern, and 27% listing it as their greatest concern.

The findings in this report support the findings in the RNA technical assessment for WPCD, which found that insufficient water, soil erosion, degraded plant conditions, and livestock production limitations were the major concerns identified by natural resources professional in WPCD (Evans 2019). The general population survey indicates that in addition to concerns about water scarcity, water and air are also significant concerns for residents in White Pine County.

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

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 WPCD.

- *Priority: Water Availability*
 - *Goal:* Ensure that water is available to meet demand in WPCD now and in the future.
 - *Programs:* Conservation programming 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 WPCD.
 - *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 WPCD.
 - *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 White Pine County Conservation District (WPCD), 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 White Pine County residents. The information acquired from this process will be used to help WPCD 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 White Pine County.

Survey Development

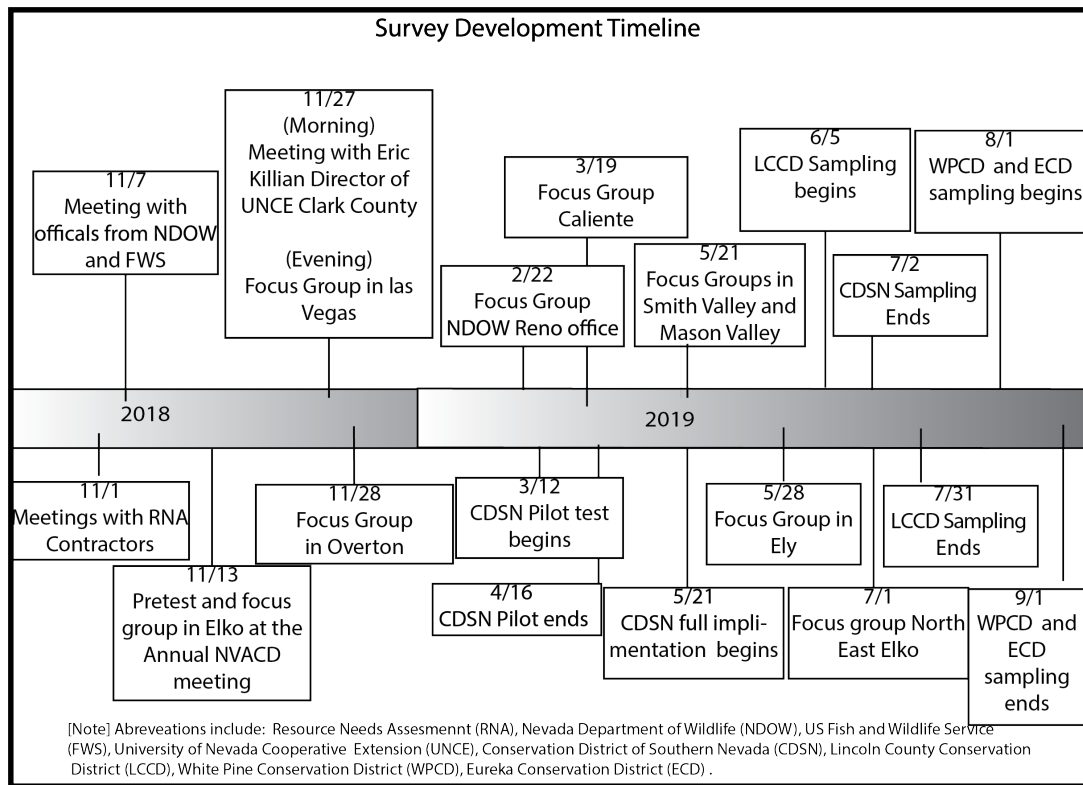
Collecting public opinion on resource concerns according to the SWAPA framework presents several challenges. The most significant challenge is removing the jargon from the technical descriptions of natural resource concerns so that the survey questions are clear and easy-to-understand for the general 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 White Pine County. 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. In April 2019, we conducted a focus group in Eli, 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 WPCD was 83%. That is, 83% of individuals who opened the survey completed it in its entirety.

Sampling

The survey was implemented in White Pine County in June and July 2019 and again in 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 15 completed surveys from a total population in White Pine County of around 10,000.

Sample Representation

This section compares the demographics of the WPCD survey sample with the population of White Pine County using data on sex, race, and age from the U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). All 15 respondents provided information on their sex. The proportion sex ratio in our sample population was not significantly different than that of White Pine County. 7 (46.67%) of the survey respondents were male while 8 (53.33%) were female. Our sample is majority white, with 14 (93.33%) of the respondents identifying as white (one respondent abstained from answering the question). According to the 2010 Census, 85% of White Pine County's population identifies as white (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The proportion of white respondents in our sample is not significantly different from 85%. The average age of our sample is 44, which is younger compared to the mean age of 51 for rural Nevada (ACS 2018). Overall, our sample is representative of the population of WPCD based on observable characteristics.

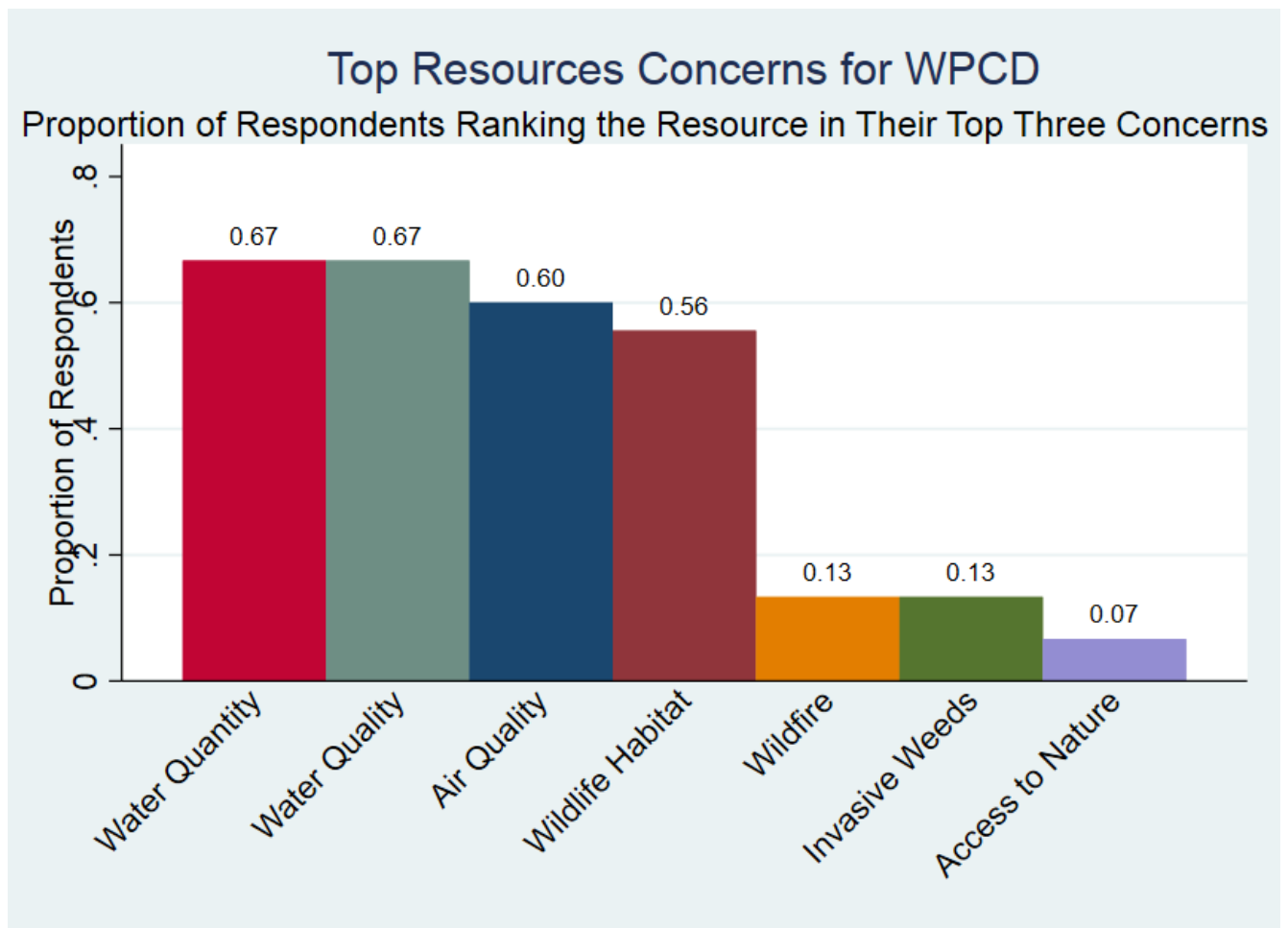
3. Resource Needs Assessment Results

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

Top Natural Resource Concerns

Figure 2 shows that water quantity, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat are the top ranked natural resource concerns in White Pine County. Wildfire, invasive weeds, 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 WPCD respondents prioritize water quantity, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat.

Figure 2: Top Resource Concerns for WPCD



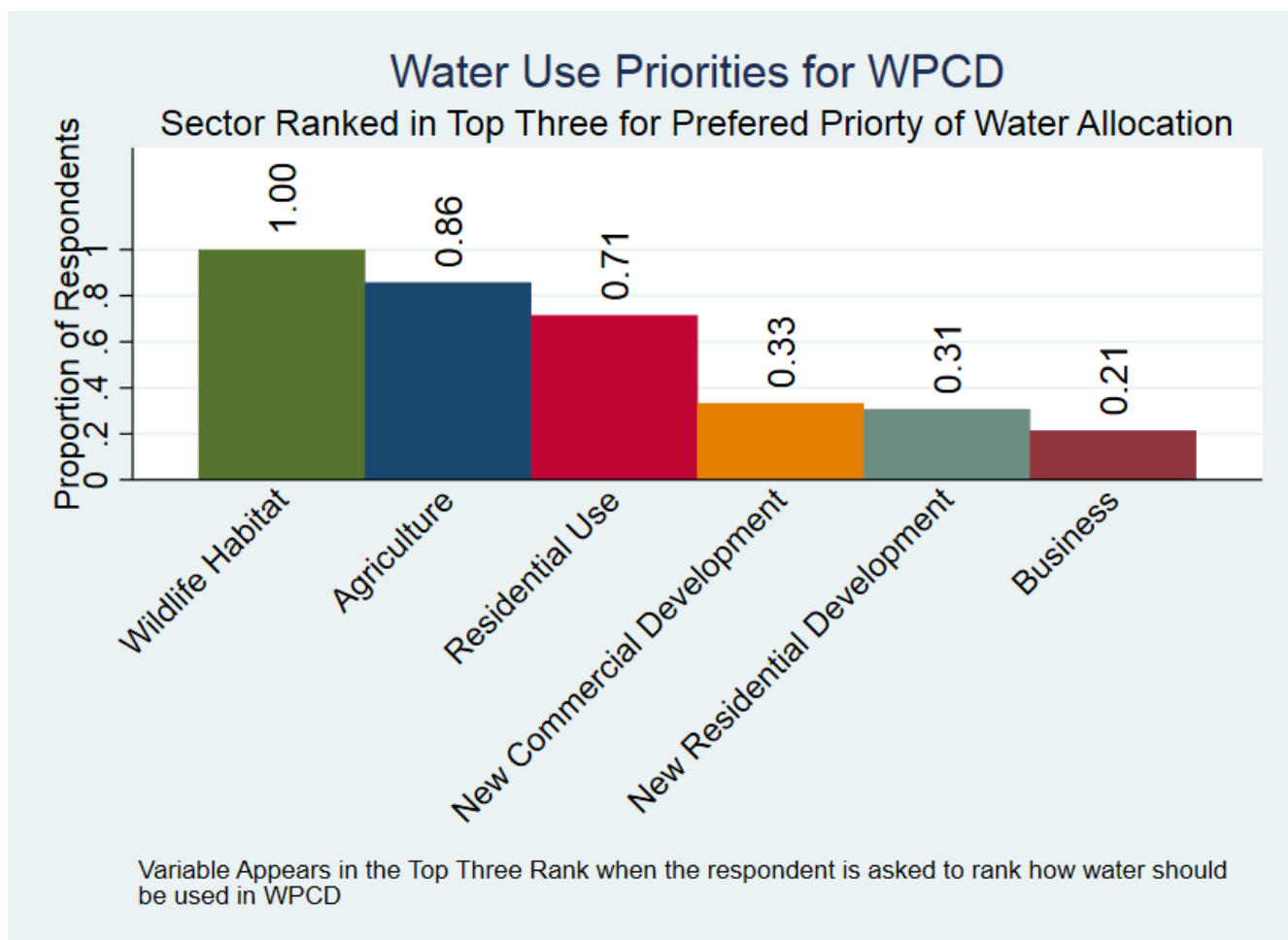
Top Ranked Concerns

Water Quantity

Water quantity is the one of the top resource concerns for respondents in WPCD, with 67% of respondents listing it as top three concern and 13% ranking it as their top concern. Respondents' concerns over water quantity are driven by concerns about the security of future water supplies and drought. Table 1 shows 93% of respondents identifying the security of future water supplies as a concern, while 80% of respondents were concerned about future drought.

Respondents were asked which water use activities should be prioritized given limited water supplies in White Pine County. Figure 3 shows that large majorities of respondents ranked wildlife habitat (100%), agriculture (86%), and residential use (71%) 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 WPCD



Water Quality

Water quality was also a top natural resource concern for respondents in White Pine County, with 100% of respondents listing it as a concern and 67% of respondents listing it as top three concern. Respondents expressed concern regarding the quality of water in natural water bodies like lakes and rivers (73%) and drinking water quality (67%).

Air Quality

Table 3 shows that air quality was ranked in the top three resource concerns by 73% of respondents, and that dust on windy days was a concern of most respondents (67%). With the next highest air quality concern being smoke from

wildfires at only 27%, this suggests that the air quality concerns are directly linked to dust issues in White Pine County in the minds of the respondents.

Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat

Table 4 shows that while concern for wildlife habitat was ranked as the top concern by only 27% of respondents, 73% of respondents ranked concern for wildlife habitat in their top three, more than any other issue. Concerns for issues such as inadequate shelter and cover for wildlife, threats to endangered species, and an abundance of rodents and pests were all noted by a majority of respondents.

Table 1: Water Quantity Concerns in the White Pine County Conservation District

Water Quantity Concerns in the White Pine Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Water Quantity		Top Ranked Concern	13%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	67%
		Identified as a concern	93%
SWAPA Category*	Survey Question		
Excessive Runoff, Flooding, or Ponding	Property damage from flash flood	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	33%
n/a	Security of water supplies		93%
	Drought		80%
		Observations	15
*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: Water Quality Concerns in the White Pine County Conservation District

Water Quality Concerns in the White Pine Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Water Quality		Top Ranked Concern	13%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	67%
		Identified as a concern	100%
SWAPA Category*	Survey Question		
n/a	Quality of drinking water	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	67%
	Quality of natural water bodies		73%
		Observations	15
*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: Air Quality Concerns in the White Pine County Conservation District

Air Quality Concerns in the White Pine Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Air Quality		Top Ranked Concern	33%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	60%
		Identified as a concern	73%
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	67%
Excessive Greenhouse gas, PM 2.5.	Industrial air pollution		7%
	Vehicle exhaust		7%
< PM 2.5, Reduced visibility	Wildfire smoke		27%
		Observations	15
*SWAPA Category refers to the category in the NRCS Resource Concerns Checklist that most closely corresponds to the question in the RNA survey.			

Table 4: Fish and Wildlife Concerns in the White Pine County Conservation District

Fish and Wildlife Concerns in the White Pine Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Fish and Wildlife		Top Ranked Concern	27%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	73%
		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	60%
Inadequate Cover/Shelter	Threats to wildlife habitat		67%
Imbalance Among and Within Populations	Abundance of rodents or pests		53%
		Observations	15
*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 WPCD respondents (7%). However, all respondents listed invasive weeds as a resource concern. In particular, nearly half of respondents were concerned with poor restoration efforts after wildfire (47%).

Soil Stability and Erosion

Table 6 shows that excessive dust was viewed as a significant concern by a majority of respondents (67%). Soil damage from flooding was also listed as a concern by nearly half of respondents (47%).

Table 5: Plant and Invasive Weed Concerns in the White Pine County Conservation District

Plant Concerns in the White Pine Conservation District			
Resource Concerns		Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Plants/Invasive weeds		Top Ranked Concern	7%
		Top Three Ranked Concern	13%
		Identified as a concern	100%
SWAPA Category*	Survey Question		
Wildfire Hazard	Poor restoration response after wildfire	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	47%
		Observations	15

*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: Soil Concerns in the White Pine County Conservation District

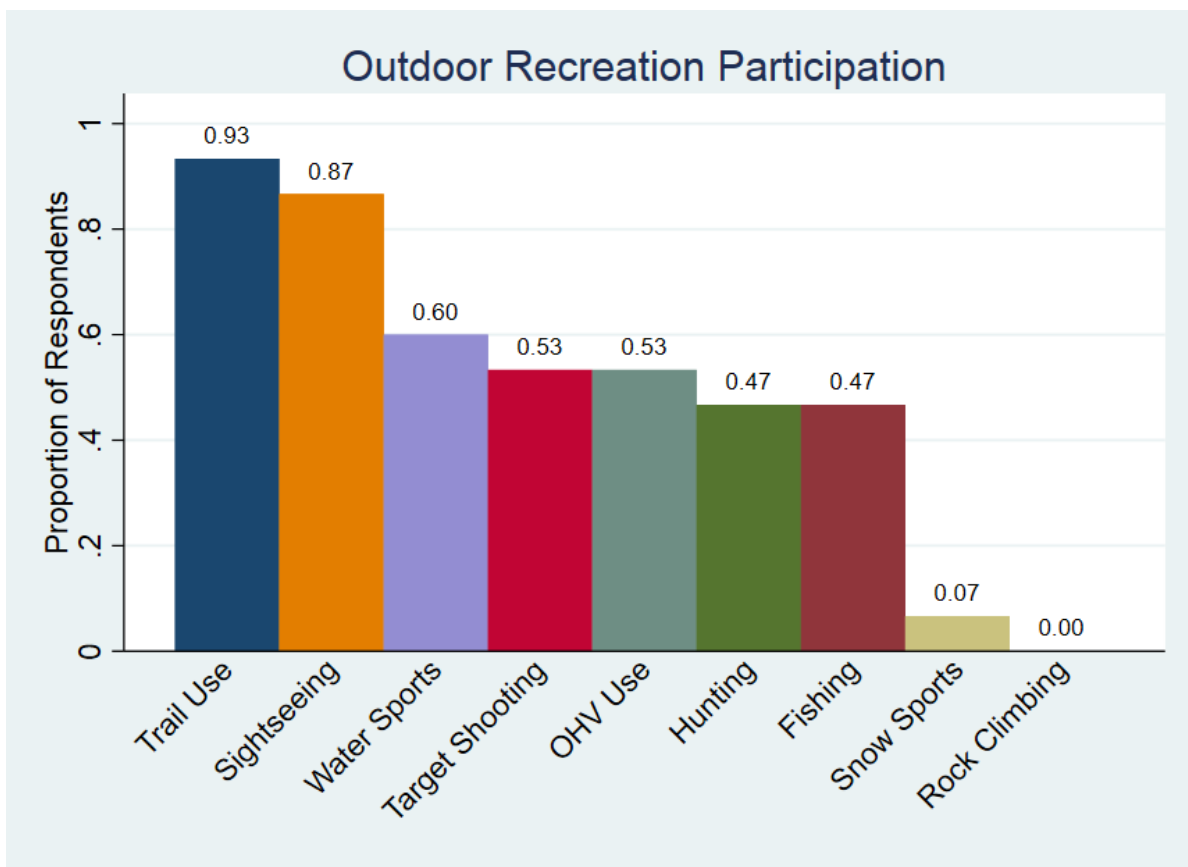
Soil Concerns in the White Pine Conservation District			
SWAPA Category*	Survey Question	Statistic	Category of respondent
			All Respondents
Wind erosions	Excessive Dust	Percent of respondents identifying category as a concern	67%
Sheet & rill erosion	Soild Damage from flooding		47%
		Observations	15

*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 White Pine County in the past year. Figure 4 reveals that non-motorized trail use (i.e., hiking, walking pets, mountain biking), sightseeing, water sports, target shooting, and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use are the most popular recreational activities, with a majority of respondents indicating that they participated in these activities in the past year. Hunting and fishing are also popular, with 47% of respondents having participated in the previous year.

Figure 4: Outdoor Recreation Participation

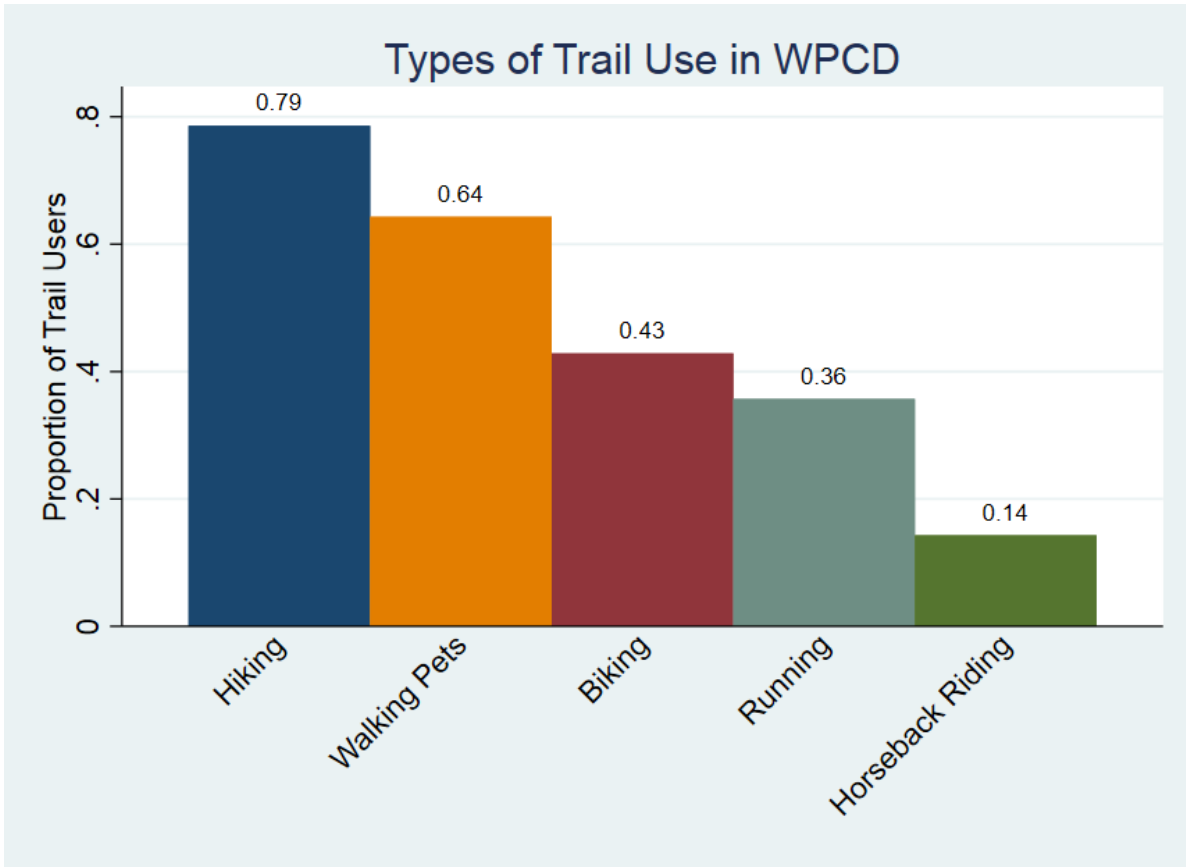


Trail Use

Figure 4 shows that non-motorized trail use is the most popular recreation activity among respondents, with 93% 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 White Pine County, followed by walking pets, biking, running, and horseback riding.

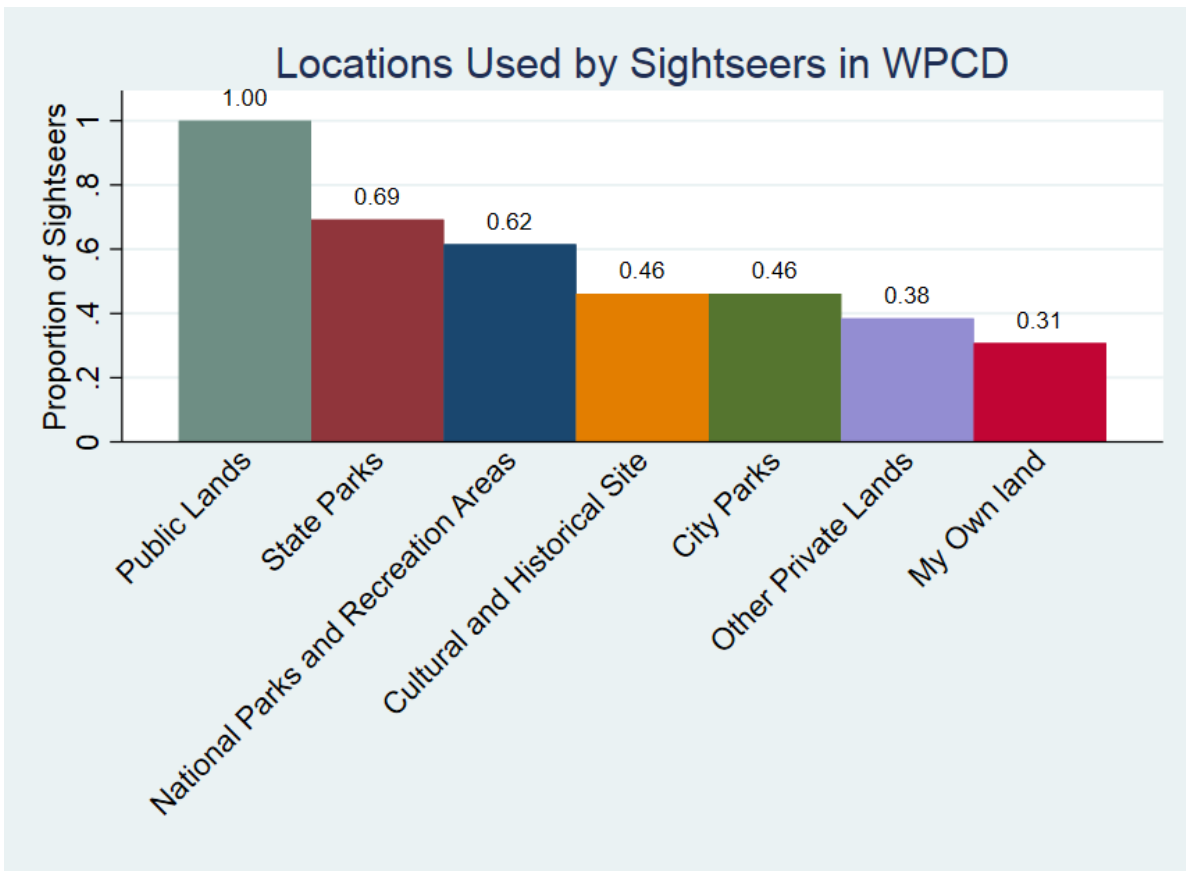
Figure 5: Types of Trail Use in WPCD



Sightseeing

Figure 4 shows that sightseeing is the second most popular activity for respondents in WPCD, with 87% of respondents reporting having participated in the previous year. Figure 6 indicates that public lands (BLM and USFS) and State Parks are the most popular sightseeing locations in White Pine County.

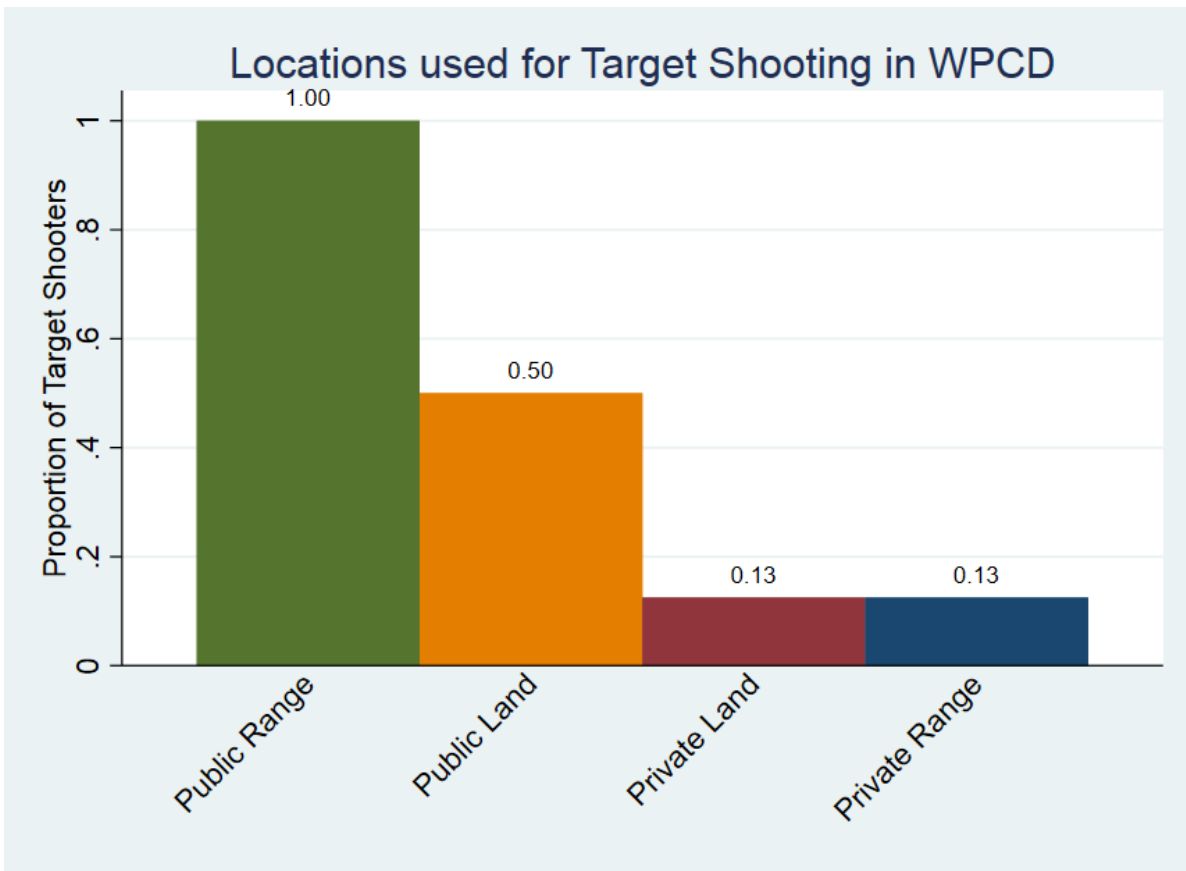
Figure 6: Locations Used by Sightseers in WPCD



Target Shooting

Figure 4 shows that target shooting is tied as the fourth most popular activity among respondents from WPCD, with 53% of respondents reporting having participated in the previous year. Figure 7 shows that public ranges and public land are the most used target shooting locations in WPCD followed by private land and private range.

Figure 7: Locations Used by Target Shooters in WPCD



5. White Pine Conservation District

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

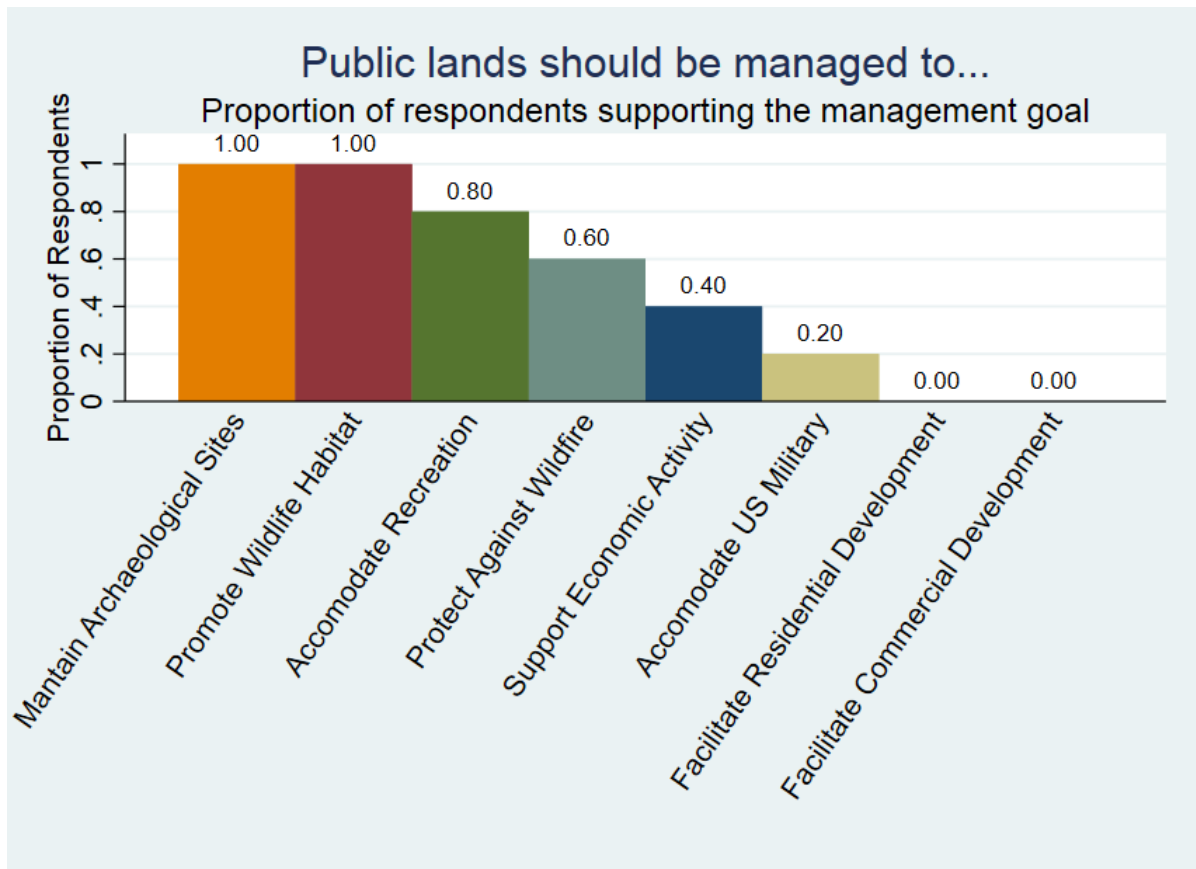
Public Awareness

The survey included questions about the respondents' awareness of WPCD and its activities. Only 47% of respondents reported knowing what WPCD does, which suggests that WPCD would benefit from a public relations campaign focused on raising awareness of the organizations mission and on-going activities. Further, the survey found that 47% of respondents reported knowing who works for the CD and 53% of respondents reported knowing how to contact the CD.

Public Lands

The majority of land in WPCD's jurisdiction is public land managed by the federal government. Figure 8 reports results on how respondents believe public lands in White Pine County should be managed. Figure 8 shows that a majority of respondents support managing public lands to maintain areas of archaeological importance (100%), promote wildlife habitat (100%), accommodate recreation (80%), and protect against wildfire (60%). There was less support for supporting economic activity (40%), or supporting the U.S. military (20%). There was no support for managing public lands to facilitate residential or commercial development. These results and indicate that general public in White Pine County favors managing public lands for multiple uses, including promoting wildlife and recreation, over a narrow focus on economic development.

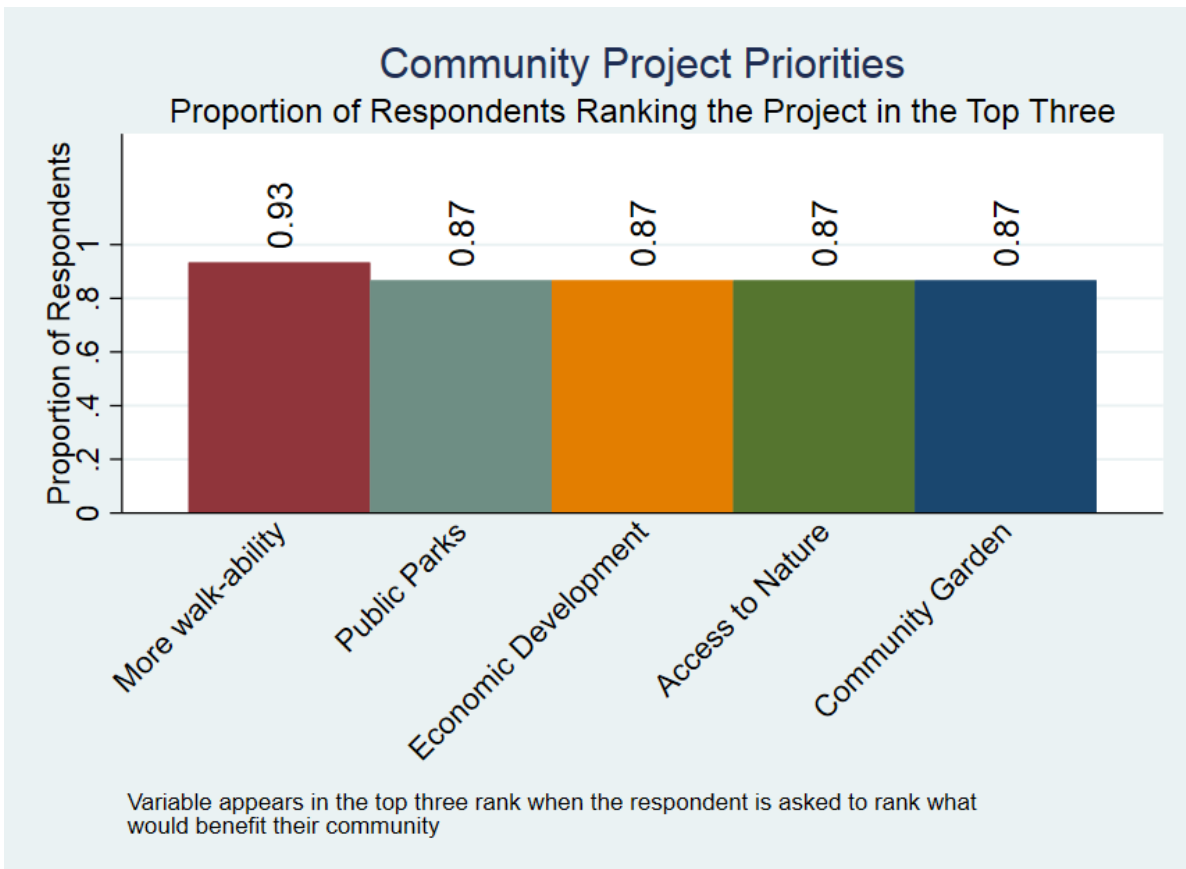
Figure 8: Public Lands Management Sentiment in WPCD



Community Projects

Figure 9 reports the results on respondents top three ranked community development goals. Figure 9 shows that while 93% of respondents ranked more walkability as their top three priorities, the most of any community development goal, support was spread very evenly across the five goals, with all goals ranked in the top three by at least 87% of respondents. These results indicate that there is a desire among White Pine County residents for community investment across a number of dimensions.

Figure 96: Community Project Priorities



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