New Jersey Opinions on the State of Our Water Systems, the Environment and Infrastructure

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Conducted for

Jersey Water Works

New Jersey Future

Conducted by New Jersey Future in consultation with Associate Professor Rachael Shwom, Rutgers University

Data collection:

Nov. 14 to Nov. 24, 2017

JERSEY WATER WORKS
Smart infrastructure. Strong communities.

NEW JERSEY FUTURE

Executive Summary

Jersey Water Works and New Jersey Future conducted a representative online survey of 1,175 residents in New Jersey, including an oversample of respondents who live in communities with combined-sewer overflows (CSOs). The survey was fielded by Qualtrics between Nov. 14 and Nov. 24, 2017. The goal of this survey was to get a baseline assessment of what New Jerseyans know and don't know about the state of our water systems and what their concerns and priorities are about water, the environment, and infrastructure. The survey will be reissued in November 2018 to measure whether these attitudes have changed, in order to understand the impact Jersey Water Works is making on public opinion and to assess New Jersey Future's effectiveness at educating stakeholders in the CSO communities in which it works.

Residents' Priorities and Concerns

New Jerseyans' highest environmental concern is the quality of their drinking water, and they want elected officials to prioritize water infrastructure improvements and investments, according to the survey. A wide majority -- 78 percent -- said that ensuring all people have safe drinking water should be a top priority for our governor and Legislature. Improving the quality of our lakes and rivers and investing in repairing leaky pipes and our infrastructure was also rated a top priority by more than half of respondents.

Residents' Awareness and Knowledge

But while concern about water quality runs high, awareness and knowledge about underlying water issues and infrastructure is low. Nearly 1 in 5 say they didn't know what shape our water infrastructure is in and fewer than 1 in 10 New Jerseyans said they were "very knowledgeable" about water infrastructure issues like combined-sewer overflows, green infrastructure and stormwater runoff. When provided with information about the state's water infrastructure, respondents were more cognizant of problems and supportive of potential solutions like green infrastructure.

Detailed Findings

Clean Drinking Water is a Priority

Results from the survey reflect what other surveys have shown: Clean drinking water is a top issue of concern for New Jerseyans. When asked about a number of environmental issues, 40 percent said protecting our drinking water is the most important concern, rating it nearly twice as high a concern as cleaning up toxic spills and waste sites (21 percent).

When asked to rank the importance of water issues for New Jersey's governor and Legislature, 78 percent said ensuring that all people have safe drinking water should be a top priority, and another 14 percent said it is important. Removing lead from drinking water in schools and removing lead from drinking water in homes were each ranked a top priority by more than three-quarters of New Jerseyans.

Table 1: How would you rank these priorities for the governor of New Jersey and legislature?

	Top priority	Important	Low priority	Should not be done
Make sure all people have safe drinking water	78%	14%	2%	4%
Remove lead from drinking water in schools	76%	14%	3%	4%
Remove lead from drinking water in homes	77%	13%	3%	4%
Invest in repairing old leaky pipes and other water infrastructure	56%	34%	4%	3%
Take steps to reduce flooding	39%	44%	10%	3%
Lower the price of water	32%	41%	19%	4%
Help low income people pay their water bills	38%	34%	17%	7%
Improve the quality of water in our lakes, rivers and oceans	52%	34%	8%	3%

Concerns about the Quality of Our Water

More than a half of New Jerseyans are concerned about the **quality of their drinking water**, with 33 percent saying they have a "great deal" of concern and another 22 percent saying they have "a lot" of concern. Twenty percent say they have "moderate" concern, while 23 percent say they have little or no concern at all.

About half of the respondents rated the drinking water that comes out of their faucet as "fair" or "poor" (51 percent), and another 34 percent rated it as "good." Just 1 in 10 rated their water as "excellent."

When asked about whom they trust the "most" for information about the cleanliness of their drinking water, government institutions ranked low: few trust local (12 percent), state (11 percent), or the federal government (13 percent) for information on whether their drinking water is clean or not. Another 24 percent trust their water utility or company the most, while 28 percent said they didn't trust any of these groups.

The perception of the **quality and cleanliness of New Jersey's waterways** is somewhat mixed:

- Slightly more than half perceive the rivers in New Jersey as somewhat (40 percent) or very polluted (16 percent); about a third see them as "somewhat" clean, and only 3 percent said they're "very" clean.
- About half perceive the lakes in New Jersey as "somewhat" (38 percent) or "very" polluted (11 percent). Another 38 percent say our lakes are "somewhat" clean.
- And half perceive the ocean waters along the coast of New Jersey as "somewhat" (36 percent) or "very" polluted (14 percent), with 39 percent saying they are "somewhat" clean.

New Jersey's Infrastructure Is Not Perceived to Be in Good Shape

In terms of infrastructure, New Jerseyans are more critical of the condition of roads and bridges in the state than the condition of our pipes and sewers, but nearly 1 in 5 say they didn't know the condition of our water infrastructure. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) said our roads and bridges were in very bad shape, compared to approximately an eighth (12 percent) who said our water infrastructure was in very bad shape. Despite all the news headlines about NJ Transit's recent woes, the state's transportation infrastructure got slightly higher marks, with over half saying it was in very or somewhat good shape.

Table 2: How would you rank the shape of New Jersey's infrastructure?

Condition of our:	Very good shape	Somewhat good shape	Somewhat bad shape	Very bad shape	Don't know
Roads and bridges	4%	29%	42%	23%	3%
Water infrastructure (such as sewers and pipes)	3%	30%	38%	12%	18%
Public transportation (such as trains and buses)	8%	46%	30%	9%	7%

We Are Unfamiliar with Water Infrastructure Issues

Results from the survey found an absence of knowledge about water infrastructure issues among New Jersey residents. Concerning lead in school drinking water, fewer than 1 in 4 have heard a great deal (8 percent) or a lot (15 percent). A full 16 percent say they have not heard of the lead in school drinking water issues, while another 26 percent said they have only heard a little.

When asked about other water infrastructure issues and policies in the state, there was a lack of familiarity with combined-sewer overflows, stormwater runoff issues, green infrastructure, and stormwater utilities. Fewer than 1 in 10 New Jerseyans said they were "very knowledgeable" about any of these terms or issues, and at least a third had never heard about combined-sewer overflows or stormwater utilities.

Table 3: How would you rank your knowledge of these issues?

	Very knowledgeable	Somewhat knowledgeable	I heard the term but can't explain	Never heard the term before
Stormwater runoff	8%	40%	36%	16%
Green infrastructure	7%	30%	43%	20%
Combined-sewer overflows	6%	21%	35%	38%
Stormwater utility	6%	21%	40%	33%

Knowledge Boosts Recognition of Problem and Support for Solutions

Respondents were given definitions of all four of these terms, and when the unfamiliar issues were explained, they were more likely to recognize the problems and show support for the solutions.

When stormwater runoff was defined and then respondents were asked what kind of a problem this was locally, 16 percent said it caused a "great deal" of problems, and another 21 percent said it caused "a lot" of problems.

After being provided with the definition of a combined-sewer overflow, 45 percent of people who live in CSO communities said it was a major problem in the area where they lived, and 33 percent said it was a minor problem.

After providing the definition of green infrastructure, 47 percent would "strongly" support green infrastructure projects near where they lived, and another 35 percent said they would "somewhat" support it.

New Jerseyans see investment in our water infrastructure as a means for economic growth: 63 percent agreed with the statement that increased government spending on water infrastructure, like fixing pipes and water mains, will create jobs in New Jersey, compared to about 37 percent agreed with the statement that said cutting back on government spending will generate economic growth.

Survey Methodology

The questionnaire for this survey was written by New Jersey Future staff in consultation with Rutgers University Associate Professor Rachael Shwom, and with technical assistance from Allison Kopicki and guidance from the Jersey Water Works Community Engagement Committee.

A number of questions were asked in prior New Jersey statewide polls and were included for the purpose of measuring trends. The survey was fielded online from Nov. 14 to Nov. 24, 2017, and has a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points. A representative online panel sample of New Jersey residents over the age of 18 years was purchased from Qualtrics. From that sample, 558 respondents were drawn randomly. An additional 617 survey respondents were oversampled through additional online recruitment from 21 cities that have combined sewer overflow systems (Ridgefield Park, Fort Lee, Hackensack, Camden, Gloucester City, Elizabeth, Perth Amboy, North Bergen, Guttenberg, West New York, Hoboken, Union City, Weehawken, Bayonne, Paterson, Jersey City, Newark, Harrison, North Bergen, Kearny, and East Newark). Young females were over-represented in the sample; to correct this, a statistical technique known as "weighting" was used. The weighting procedure compares New Jersey population figures for age and gender based on Census data with those of the sample. When there is significant difference between these two figures, the sample is weighted so they reflect more accurately the population of the state. For example, if Census figures show 39 percent of New Jerseyans 18 years and older have a high school education, and the sample consists of 32 percent with a high school education, each respondent in this category would be counted as 1.21 persons to adjust for this difference.

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Questionnaire

Baseline survey questions were fielded online from Nov. 14 to Nov. 24, 2017.

Q1. Which of the following do you think is the most important environmental concern facing New Jersey?

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions that lead to climate change	15%
Protecting our drinking water	40%
Cleaning up toxic spills and waste sites	21%
Creating more open space and parks	8%
Protecting endangered species	3%
Don't know	10%
Something else	3%

Q2. Here are some of the priorities that the governor of New Jersey and the legislature might have concerning water issues in the state. Please indicate how important you think each action should be:

	Should not be done	Low priority	Important, but not top priority	Top priority	Don't know
Make sure all people have safe drinking water	4%	2%	14%	78%	4%
Remove lead from drinking water in schools	4%	3%	17%	76%	4%
Remove lead from drinking water in homes	4%	3%	13%	77%	4%
Invest in repairing old leaky pipes and other water infrastructure	4%	3%	34%	56%	4%
Take steps to reduce flooding	3%	10%	44%	39%	4%
Lower the price of water	4%	19%	41%	35%	5%
Help low income people pay their water bills	7%	17%	34%	38%	5%
Improve the quality of water in our lakes and oceans	3%	8%	34%	52%	4%

Q3. Thinking about your family's health, how much do you personally worry about the quality of the water you drink?

A great deal	33%
A lot	22%
A moderate amount	20%
A little	12%
Not at all	11%
Don't know	2%

Q4. How would you rate the drinking water that comes out of your faucet?

Excellent	10%
Good	34%
Fair	34%
Poor	17%
Don't know	6%

Q5. As best you can tell, rivers in New Jersey are:

Very clean	3%
Somewhat clean	34%
Somewhat polluted	40%
Very polluted	16%
Don't know	8%

Q6. As best you can tell, lakes in New Jersey are:

Very clean	5%
Somewhat clean	38%
Somewhat polluted	38%
Very polluted	11%
Don't know	8%

Q7. As best you can tell, ocean waters along the coast of New Jersey are:

Very clean	4%
Somewhat clean	39%
Somewhat polluted	36%
Very polluted	14%
Don't know	7%

Q8. To the best of your knowledge, in what shape are the roads and bridges in New Jersey?

Very good shape	4%
Somewhat good shape	29%
Somewhat bad shape	42%
Very bad shape	23%
Don't know	3%

Q9. To the best of your knowledge, in what shape is the water infrastructure (such as pipes and sewers) in New Jersey?

Very good shape	3%
Somewhat good shape	30%
Somewhat bad shape	38%
Very bad shape	12%
Don't know	18%

Q10. To the best of your knowledge, in what shape is public transportation (such as trains and buses) in New Jersey?

Very good shape	8%
Somewhat good shape	46%
Somewhat bad shape	30%
Very bad shape	9%
Don't know	7%

Q11. How much have you heard or read about unsafe levels of lead found in some school water supplies in New Jersey?

A great deal	8%
A lot	15%
A moderate amount	29%
A little	26%
None at all	16%
Don't know	6%

Q12. For each of the following terms, please include how knowledgeable you feel about each one:

	Very knowledgeable	Somewhat knowledgeable	I've heard the term but couldn't explain	I've heard this term before
Stormwater runoff	8%	40%	36&	16%
Green infrastructure	7%	30%	43%	20%
Combined-sewer overflow, or CSO	6%	21%	35%	38%

Q13. As you may know, stormwater runoff, is rainfall that flows across the surface of the ground. It is created when rain falls on roads, driveways, parking lots, rooftops and other paved surfaces that do not allow water to soak into the ground. Stormwater runoff can pick up trash, chemicals, dirt, and other pollutants and flow into a stormwater sewer system or directly to rivers and coastal waters. Higher flows resulting from heavy rains also can cause erosion and flooding, damaging property and blocking roads. Knowing the definition of **stormwater runoff,** how much of a problem do you think this is in the area where you live?

A great deal	16%
A lot	21%
A moderate amount	38%
A little	19%
None at all	6%

Q14. You may have also heard that combined sewer systems are underground pipes that are designed to collect both stormwater runoff and wastewater and sewage from our homes in the same pipe. During heavy rainfall, the wastewater volume can be too much for the sewer system or treatment plant. The extra wastewater can run directly into nearby streams, rivers, or other water bodies and sometimes even flood neighborhoods. These overflows, called **combined sewer overflows** (CSOs), contain not only storm water but also untreated human waste, toxic materials, and debris. Knowing the definition of **combined sewer overflows** (or CSOs), how much of a problem do you think this is in the area where you live?

A major problem	36%
A minor problem	36%
Not a problem at all	14%
Don't know	14%

Q15. As you may also know, green infrastructure is a way to manage rainfall and stormwater runoff that protects, restores, or imitates the natural water cycle. Green infrastructure uses plants, grasses, trees, and soils to soak up water, offer protection from flooding and filter trash and chemicals from the water. Rain barrels that collect water to be used later are also an example. Knowing the definition of **green infrastructure**, would you support or oppose green infrastructure projects in the area where you live?

Strongly support	47%
Somewhat support	35%
Somewhat oppose	6%
Strongly oppose	2%
Don't know	10%

Q16. From the following list, who do you trust the most for information on whether your drinking water is clean or not?

Your local government	12%
The New Jersey state government	11%
The U.S. federal government	13%
The water company or utility	24%
None of these	28%
Other	3%
Don't know	9%

Q17. From the following list, who do you trust the most to fix the water systems and ensure drinking water is clean?

Your local government	13%
The New Jersey state government	21%
The U.S. federal government	12%
The water company or utility	31%
None of these	15%
Other	2%
Don't know	8%

Q18. We'd like to ask you some questions about how you pay for your water and its cost. Which of the following best describes how you pay for your water:

I pay a monthly or quarterly water bill to a government-run water utility	12%
I pay a monthly or quarterly water bill to my town or city	28%
I pay a monthly or quarterly water bill to a private sector water utility (such as American Water, or Suez)	20%
My water bill is paid by my landlord or the building's owner and included in my rent	26%
I am connected to a well and don't pay for my water.	6%
Something else	3%
Don't know	6%

Q18A. [Asked of those who answered 1-3 in Q 19 N = 719] How would you describe the cost of your bill?

Too costly	41.6%
About right	56.6%
Too low	1.8%
Total	100%

Q19. Which of the following statements come closest to your opinion? [ROTATED]

Increased government spending on water infrastructure, like fixing pipes and water mains, will create jobs in New Jersey	63%
Cutting back on government spending will generate economic growth for the state	37%

Q20. How often do you vote?

In every election	43%
Most elections	23%
Some elections	10%
The occasional election	6%
I don't vote	8%
I'm not registered	8%
Don't know	2%

Q21. If a local group that supported clean drinking water and fixing water infrastructure provided an opportunity for you to engage, how likely would you be to participate in the following activities?

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not very likely	Not at all likely	Don't know
Join an online group (like Facebook)	17%	26%	19%	29%	9%
Attend a meeting or event for a water group	10%	31%	26%	24%	9%
Display a sign or a sticker supporting the group	15%	32%	22%	23%	8%
Write a letter to public official	12%	32%	24%	24%	8%

Q22. If you have seen or heard about broken water infrastructure or combined sewer overflows (CSOs) - where have you learned about these issues? Please check all that apply.

Public meetings	9%
Flyers or signs	10%
Text alerts	8%
Water utility bill	13%
Email	11%
Local municipality website	9%
Water company website	8%
Facebook or Twitter	15%
Television	28%
Newspaper	19%
Radio	9%
Telephone call	3%

Q23. How would you like to receive information about important water issues in your area, such as flooding or broken water main breaks? Please check all that apply.

Flyers or signs	17%
Text alerts	24%
Water utility bill	28%
Email	38%
Local municipality website	18%
Water company website	15%
Facebook or Twitter	16%
Telephone call	13%
Television	32%
Newspaper	21%
Radio	14%

Q24. Are you

Male	48%
Female	52%

Q25. How old are you?

18-34	27%
35-50	31%
51-64	25%
65+	18%

Q26. What is the highest grade of school you completed?

Not a high school graduate	2%
High school	28%
Some college	30%
4 year college degree	24%
Post-graduate work or degree	16%

Q27. Are you currently:

Registered to vote in my current place of residence	79%
Not registered to vote in my current place of residence	19%
Don’t know	3%

Q28. Are you:

White	62%
Latino or Hispanic	15%
Black	13%
Native American	1%
Asian	7%
Other	3%

About New Jersey Future: Founded in 1987, New Jersey Future is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes sensible growth, redevelopment and infrastructure investments to foster vibrant cities and towns, protect natural lands and waterways, enhance transportation choices, provide access to safe, affordable and aging-friendly neighborhoods and fuel a strong economy. The organization does this through original research, innovative policy development, coalition-building, advocacy, and hands-on strategic assistance.

About Jersey Water Works: Jersey Water Works is a collaborative working to transform New Jersey's inadequate water infrastructure through sustainable, cost-effective solutions that provide communities with clean water and waterways; healthier, safer neighborhoods; local jobs; flood and climate resilience; and economic growth.