

Nebraska Conservation and Environment Literacy and Awareness Survey



A report from the Nebraska Alliance for Conservation
and Environment Education



Quick Facts...

- 56% of respondents thought environmental protection was more important than economic development; only 29% of respondents felt economic development was more important than environmental protection.
- 73% of respondents felt that environmental protection and economic development can go hand-in-hand, as opposed to something between which they must choose.
- 89% of respondents thought the condition of the environment will play a role in the nation's economic future.
- 78% of respondents strongly or mostly agreed that companies should train their employees to solve environmental problems.
- 82% of respondents strongly or mostly agreed that government agencies should support environmental education.
- 94% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their community.
- 73% of respondents felt the quality of the public schools in their community were very good or fairly good.

In 2003, the Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education (NACEE) sponsored the first survey of environmental literacy and awareness in Nebraska. Funded by the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program through the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the survey results show that most Nebraskans are both knowledgeable about environmental issues and concerned about Nebraska's natural resources. The majority of respondents believe that environmental education should be taught in schools, that government agencies should support environmental education, and that environmental protection is more important than economic development.



METHODS

The survey was administered by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. It was modeled after the 2000 Roper-Starch National Report Card on Environmental Attitudes, Knowledge, and Behavior. Phone interviews with 606 randomly selected residents, aged 19 and older, were conducted in August and September, 2003. The number of individuals called in a particular

region of Nebraska was in direct proportion to the population of that area. A total of 60 questions were asked during the survey; 17 questions were demographic in nature, 30 questions referred to the individual's attitudes and behaviors towards the environment.

The ability of the survey to accurately reflect Nebraska's demographics was evaluated by comparing the characteristics of the survey respondents with the 2001 US Census population estimate for Nebraska. Weights were created to correct for any differences between the sample data and Nebraska's population. The margin of error for the survey was 1.7%-3.9%.

Who is NACEE...

The Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education, founded in 2001, is an organization devoted to promoting and strengthening environmental education efforts in Nebraska.

NACEE grew out of a merger between two previous groups: NEEA (Nebraska Environmental Education Association) and NOFEE (Nebraska Organizations for Environmental Education). By combining the strengths of these groups into one cohesive organization, NACEE has the broad-based membership it needs to be an active leader for environmental education in Nebraska.

A variety of organizations and individuals form NACEE's membership, including formal and non-formal educators, conservationists, government agencies, and nature centers. The strength of NACEE is in this diverse mix of talents, interests and knowledge.

For more information on NACEE, go to www.nacee.org

The Nebraska Environmental Literacy Survey is an invaluable tool for understanding how residents throughout the state view the environment and environmental education and protection. For this executive summary, the results have been divided into three sections: knowledge of environmental concepts, attitudes toward the environment, and the importance of education about Nebraska's natural resources.

KNOWLEDGE

When questioned about how much they felt they knew about the environment, 9.6 % of Nebraskans responded "a lot", 60% "a fair amount", 27.2% "only a little", and 3.2% "practically nothing". However, when questioned about specific environmental concepts, the respondents answered correctly the majority of times. In fact, at least 60% of participants responded correctly to six of eleven environmental concept questions.

ATTITUDES

When asked questions regarding their attitude about the environment and environmental issues, most participants responded positively. For example, 73% of respondents felt environmental protection and economic development could go hand-in-hand. When asked to choose between the two, 56% of respondents felt environmental protection was more important than economic development. Although 29% of respondents said economic development was more important than environmental protection, 89% of all respondents stated that the condition of the environment will play a role in the nation's economic future. Seventy-two percent of respondents believe technology will solve environmental problems.

BEHAVIORS

What people say and what they do are often different. Participants were asked eight questions about their day-to-day activities that deal with the environment. The results showed that Nebraskans frequently conserve water in their home and yard, and turn off lights and electrical appliances when not in use (63% and 88%, respectively). Over half of the respondents (56%) frequently recycle things such as newspapers, cans, and glass. Forty percent of participants frequently, and 47% sometimes purchase biodegradable or recyclable products. In addition, 47% of respondents frequently, and 40% sometimes try to cut-down on the amount of trash they create. Only 9% frequently use alternative forms of transportation (other than automobiles), and 13% frequently participate in volunteer clean-up days.



EDUCATION

Overall, Nebraskans are pleased with the quality of their community; 94% of participants were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their community as a whole. On a similar note, 73% of respondents felt the quality of their public schools was "fairly good" or "very good." *When asked specifically about education and the environment an astounding 98% of participants believed environmental education should be taught in schools.* In addition, 51% of respondents felt teaching students about the environment also taught students to respect other people and places. When asked if teaching environmental education could help children perform better in science, 38% responded "a great deal," and 47% responded "a moderate amount." Eighty-four percent of participants felt environmental education encourages students to participate in community service projects. Seventy percent of respondents believe environmental education will help children find jobs later in life.

Quick Facts...

- 10% of respondents felt they knew a lot about environmental issues; 60% felt they knew a fair amount; 27% only a little; and 3% practically nothing.
- 44% of respondents had an understanding of the term "biodiversity."
- 65% of respondents correctly chose motor vehicles as the leading source of carbon monoxide in our environment.
- 40% of respondents correctly chose the burning of fossil fuels as the leading source of electricity in the United States.
- Only 28% of respondents correctly chose surface runoff as the leading source of pollution to streams, rivers and oceans.
- 67% of respondents correctly choose "trees," as a renewable resource.
- 49% of respondents knew that ozone protects against harmful cancer-causing sunlight.
- 77% of respondents knew that batteries are a form of hazardous waste.
- 44% of respondents correctly chose "cleaning water" as the primary benefit of wetlands.

Quick Facts...

- 56% of respondents frequently, and 27% sometimes recycle newspapers, cans and glass.
- 41% of respondents frequently, and 38% sometimes avoid using chemicals in their lawn or garden.
- 40% of respondents frequently, and 47% sometimes buy biodegradable or recyclable products.
- 63% of respondents frequently, and 28% sometimes conserve water in their home and yard.
- 88% of respondents frequently, and 11% sometimes turn off lights and electrical appliances when not in use.
- 47% of respondents frequently, and 40% sometimes try to cut down on the amount of trash they create.
- 9% of respondents frequently, and 20% sometimes use other types of transportation instead of driving a car.
- 13% of respondents frequently, and 32% sometimes participate in a volunteer clean-up day.
- 47% of respondents say schools in their community have environmental education.
- 98% of respondents think environmental education should be taught in schools.

NEBRASKA vs. THE NATION

The results of the Nebraska Conservation and Environment Literacy and Awareness Survey were compared to the Ninth Annual National Report Card on Environmental Attitudes, Knowledge and Behavior completed by Roper Starch Worldwide. Some questions were worded slightly differently in the two studies, however the results are comparable.

Looking at the results we find that only 56% of Nebraskan respondents believed environmental protection is more important than economic development; nationally, 71% of respondents believed environmental protection is more important. However, 73% of Nebraskan respondents believed environmental protection and economic development can go hand-in-hand; only 63% of national respondents believed the two can mutually thrive.

When questioned about their knowledge of environmental issues, 60% of Nebraskan respondents and 59% of national respondents answered a "fair" amount. 10% of Nebraskans and 11% of national respondents answered "a lot." For specific questions about the environment, Nebraska and national participants were comparable in their responses with only a few exceptions. When asked what the U.S. currently does to dispose of nuclear waste, Nebraskan respondents accurately answered "store and monitor the waste" 72% of the time; compared to only 57% of national respondents. However, when asked about the primary benefit of wetlands, only 44% of Nebraskan respondents correctly answered "helps clean water before it enters lakes, streams, rivers, or oceans"; compared to 53% of national respondents.

As with environmental knowledge, Nebraska and national participants were similar with regards to environmental behaviors. The following chart further explains the difference between Nebraska and national reported behaviors.

Behavior	National	Nebraska
Turn off lights and electrical appliances when not in use.	85%	88%
Conserve water in your home and yard.	61%	63%
Recycle things such as newspapers, cans, and glass.	59%	56%
Try to cut down on the amount of garbage you create.	54%	47%
Buy biodegradable or recyclable products.	42%	40%
Avoid using chemicals in your yard or garden.	36%	41%
Use other types of transportation, instead of your car.	14%	9%
Participate in a volunteer cleanup day.	9%	14%

FOR THE FUTURE

This survey is an important measure of the current state of the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of Nebraskan residents. It shows where Nebraskans are knowledgeable and have environmentally sound behaviors; it also shows where more work needs to be done.

The Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environment Education (NACEE) has received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to develop an environmental education master plan for the state of Nebraska. Written and revised using input from a wide range of stakeholders, this document will guide Nebraska's efforts to improve citizen's knowledge, appreciation and concern for our natural world.

To view a copy of the complete literacy survey, please visit the NACEE Website www.nacee.org