



Opinions Regarding Minnesota's Water Resources

Analysis of the MPR News | APM Research Lab

2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans

on behalf of The Water Main

April 2018

Introduction

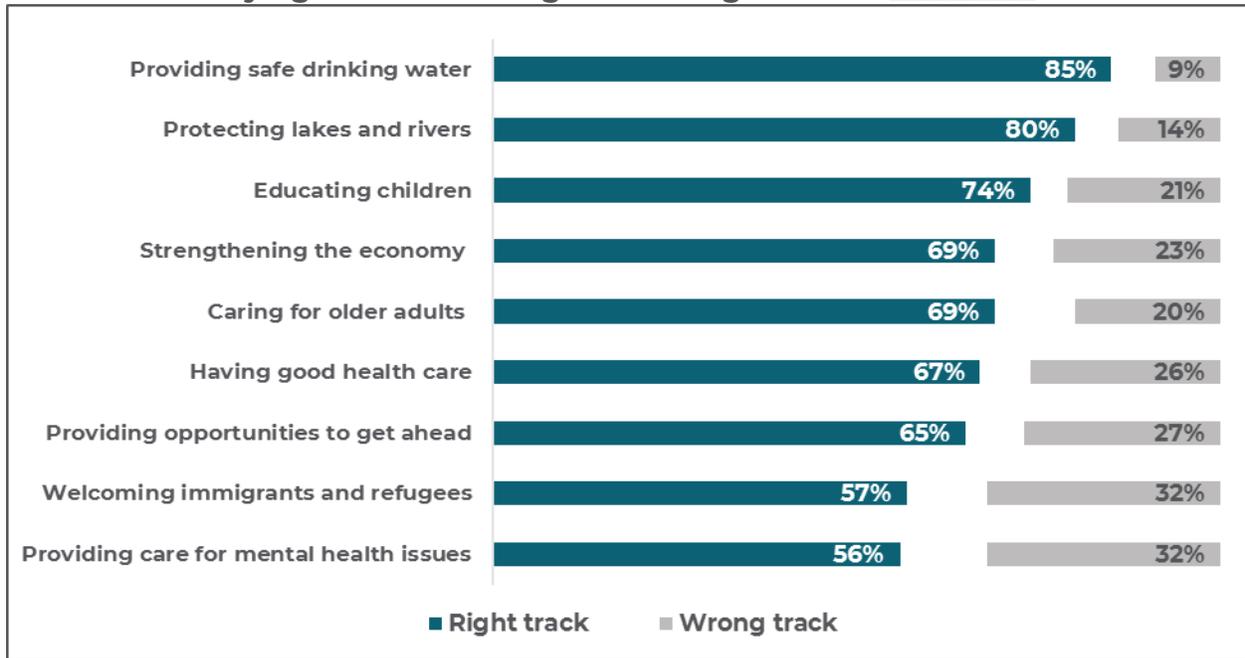
This brief summarizes both open-ended comments broadly related to water or the environment, as well as multiple-choice responses to two water-related questions in the 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans. The latter two questions fell within a series of questions regarding whether Minnesota is on the “right track” or “wrong track” regarding major public issues. Respondents were asked, “Thinking about the following topics, do you think Minnesota is generally on the right track or the wrong track when it comes to (INSERT ITEM FROM LIST BELOW)?”

- Educating children
- Having good health care
- Providing care for those facing mental health issues
- **Providing safe drinking water**
- **Protecting lakes and rivers for things like swimming, boating, and fishing**
- Welcoming immigrants and refugees
- Strengthening the economy
- Caring for older adults
- Providing opportunities for everyone to get ahead, regardless of their background

Overall findings

The answers to the two questions regarding *providing safe drinking water* and *protecting lakes and rivers for things like swimming, boating, and fishing* reveal insights about Minnesotans' views on the state's water resources. Of note, more Minnesotans said we were on the *right track* for providing safe drinking water (85%) and protecting lakes and rivers (80%) than for any other topic asked.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right or wrong track for _____



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Though the graph above shows a statewide picture, how Minnesotans felt about the direction of the state is going regarding the two water-related questions varied somewhat based upon where they live, as well as their educational attainment, income, and race. However, no meaningful differences in these two questions existed by gender nor by political affiliation.

Findings by region

See the *Technical Notes* at the end of this document for the definitions of geographic regions.

Across all regions, Minnesotans feel we are on the right track for both providing safe drinking water and protecting lakes and rivers for things like swimming, boating and fishing, with more about three-quarters or more of people in every region saying the state is on the *right track* for both issues.

Regarding responses about drinking water, the percentage of Twin Cities Suburb residents expressing *right track* is statistically tied with the St. Cloud Area, Rochester Area, and Duluth Area (when considering the margins of error), but meaningfully higher than all other regions.

Despite being geographically adjacent, Twin Cities Suburbs and the Minneapolis-St. Paul residents have among the most divergent opinions among the regions, with the latter central city residents being about 12 percentage points less optimistic about the direction of Minnesota in providing safe drinking water.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track for drinking water, by region



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Regarding responses about protecting lakes and rivers, the percentage of Duluth Area residents expressing *right track* is statistically tied with the Twin Cities Suburbs, St. Cloud Area, Minneapolis-St. Paul, and Northern Minnesota (when considering the margins of error), but meaningfully higher than all other regions.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track protecting lakes and rivers, by region



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

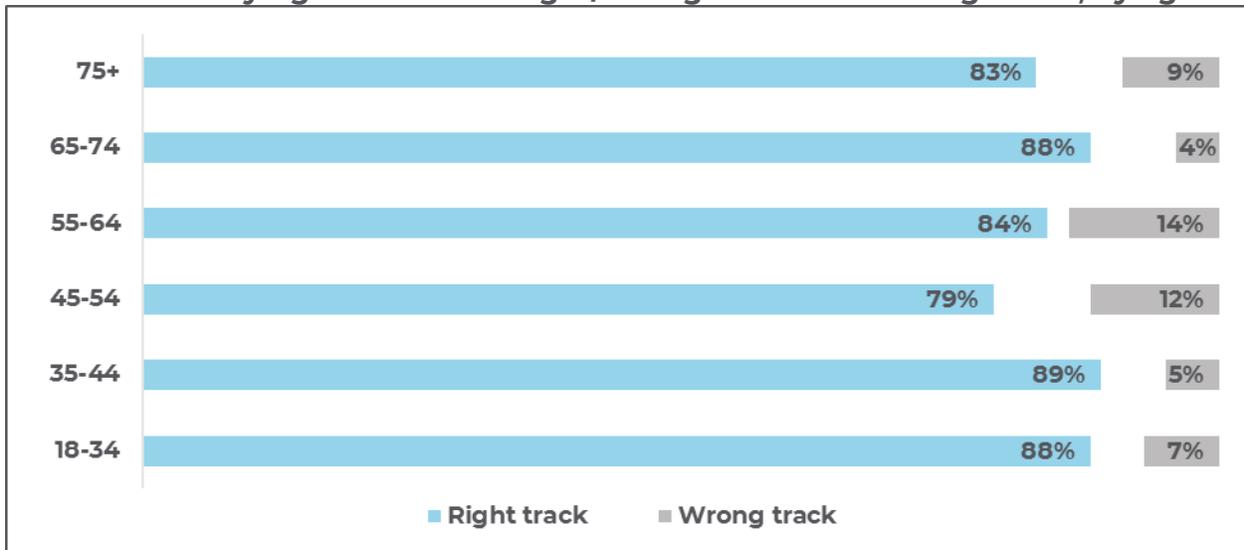
Findings by gender

There were no meaningful differences by gender for responses to either water question. In other words, as a group men and women hold similar opinions on these two questions.

Findings by age groups

More Minnesotans between age 18 and 44 (88-89%) feel Minnesota is on the *right track* for safe drinking water than those age 45-54 (79%). However, Minnesotans of all ages feel positive about the direction the state is going for this issue area overall.

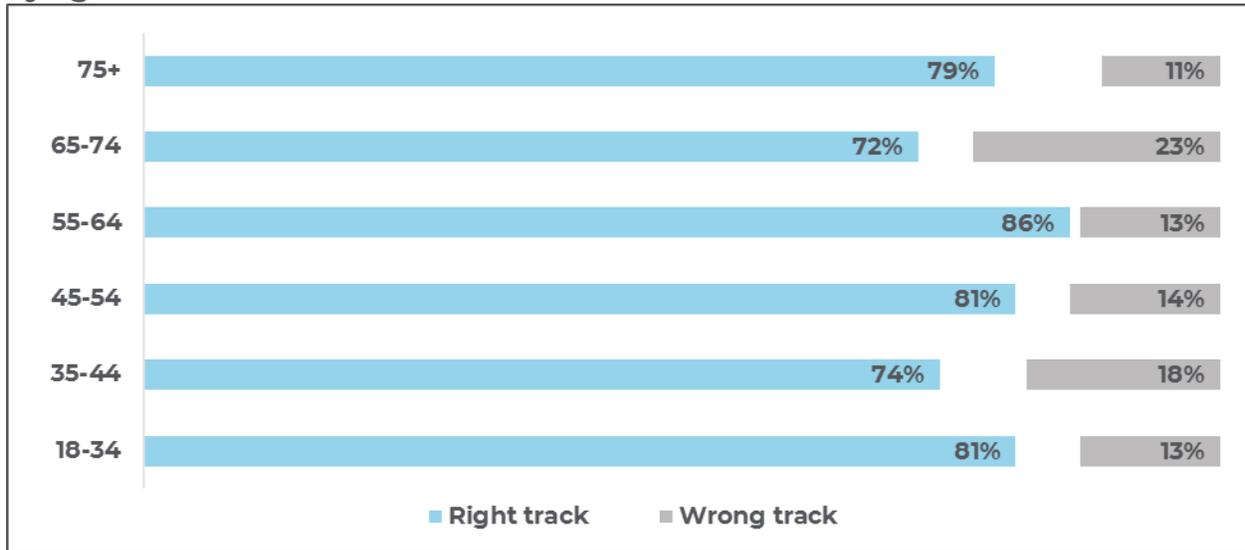
Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track for drinking water, by age



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Regarding protecting lakes and rivers, more Minnesotans age 55-64 said *right track* than those age 35-44 and age 65-74. However, a majority of all age groups approves of the direction the state is pursuing for protecting lakes and rivers.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track protecting lakes and rivers, by age

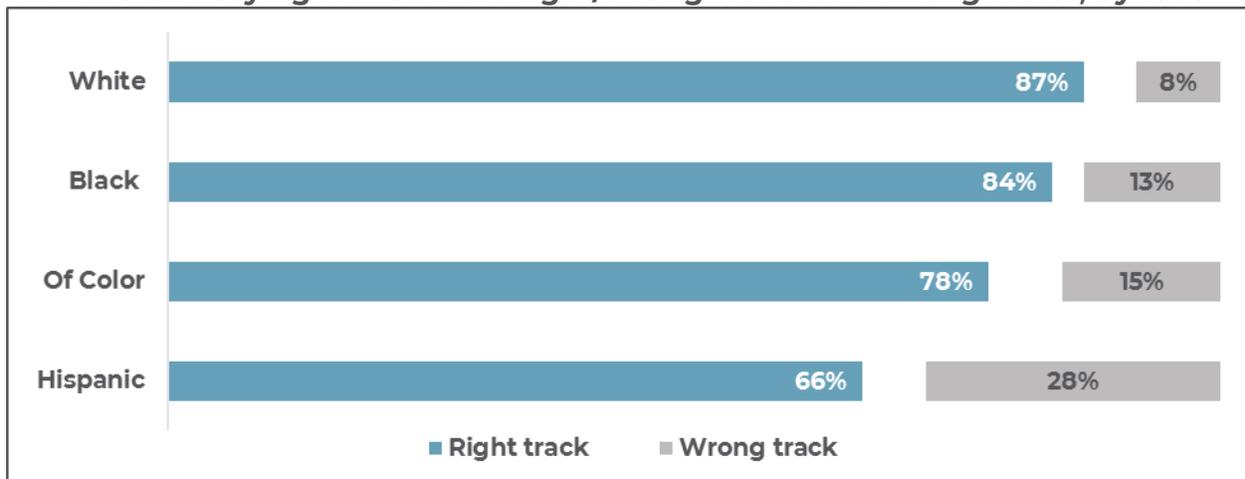


Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by race

When it comes to *providing safe drinking water*, non-Hispanic White Minnesotans are somewhat more likely to say Minnesota is on the *right track* (87%) than People of Color (78%). In addition, the share of Whites expressing *right track* is significantly more than the share of Hispanics saying so. The share of Black Minnesotans expressing right track was statistically tied with both White and Hispanic Minnesotans.

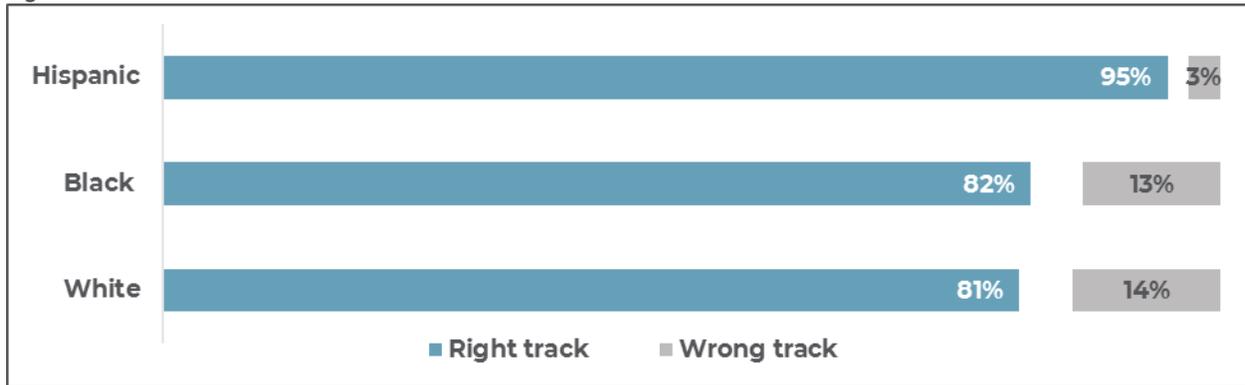
Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track for drinking water, by race



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Protecting lakes and rivers: The data show an overall acceptance, by race, of the direction Minnesota is pursuing regarding protecting lakes and rivers. However, Hispanics are the most likely to say the state is on the *right track*, with 95 percent saying so compared to 82 percent of Blacks and 81 percent of Whites. Note that while Hispanics are significantly higher than the other groups, those two are tied.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track protecting lakes and rivers, by race



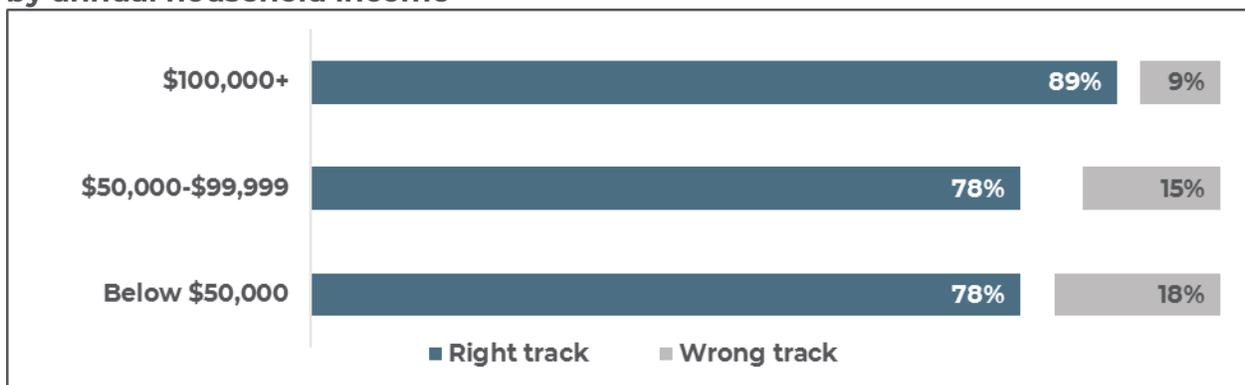
Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by income groups

The Ground Level Survey results were parsed by three broad groups of reported annual household income: below \$50,000; \$50,000-\$99,999; and \$100,000 or higher. No significant difference existed between these income groups for *right track* or *wrong track* for safe drinking water. However, there are meaningful differences by income for the other water-related question.

Eight in 10 Minnesotans making less than \$100,000 annually said Minnesota is on the *right track* for protecting lakes and rivers for things like swimming, boating, and fishing compared to those making \$100,000 or more annually (about 9 out of 10 Minnesotans). However, Minnesotans at all income levels feel the state is headed in the right direction for this issue area.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track protecting lakes and rivers, by annual household income

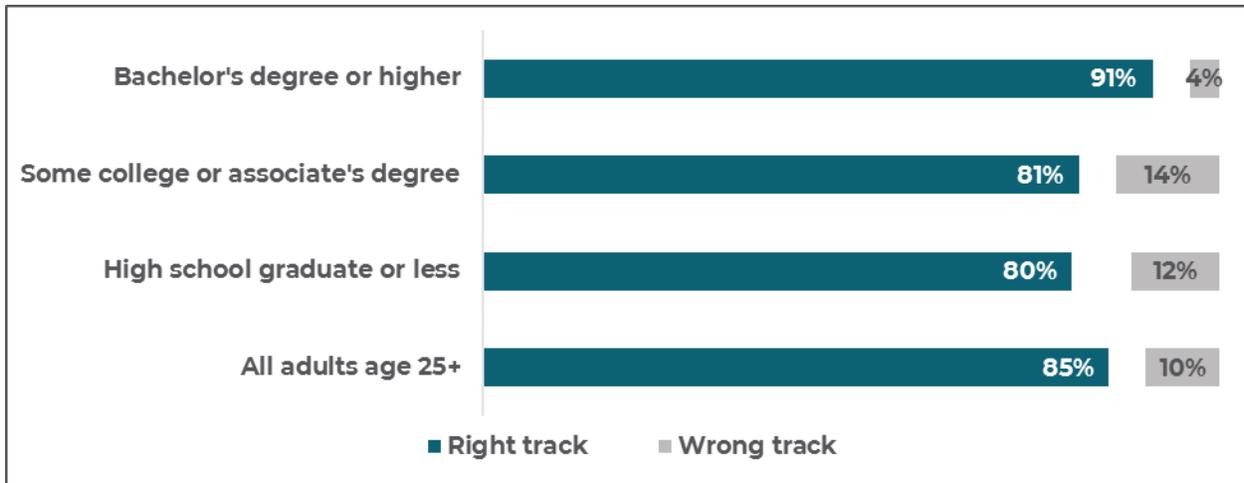


Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by education (age 25 and older only)

Overall, Minnesotans at all levels of educational attainment feel the state is on the right track for *providing safe drinking water*, though those with at least a bachelor’s degree feel the most favorably about the direction the state is going in, with 91 percent choosing “right track” compared to those with a high school degree or less education and those with some college or an associate’s degree (80% each).

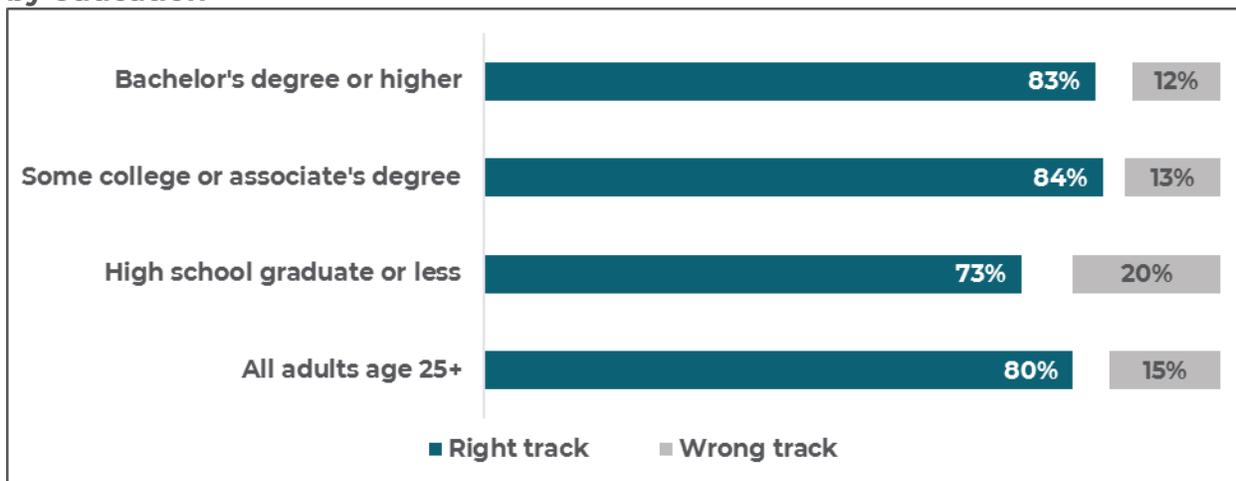
Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track for drinking water, by education



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Similar to responses regarding safe drinking water, there is general approval for the path Minnesota is pursuing protecting lakes and rivers, with at least three quarters of Minnesotans at each level of educational attainment saying *right track*. Yet, Minnesotans who have any college-level background (including associate’s or higher degrees) are even more likely to choose *right track* than those with a high school diploma or less formal education, for whom *right track* responses fell by about 10 percentage points.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track protecting lakes and rivers, by education

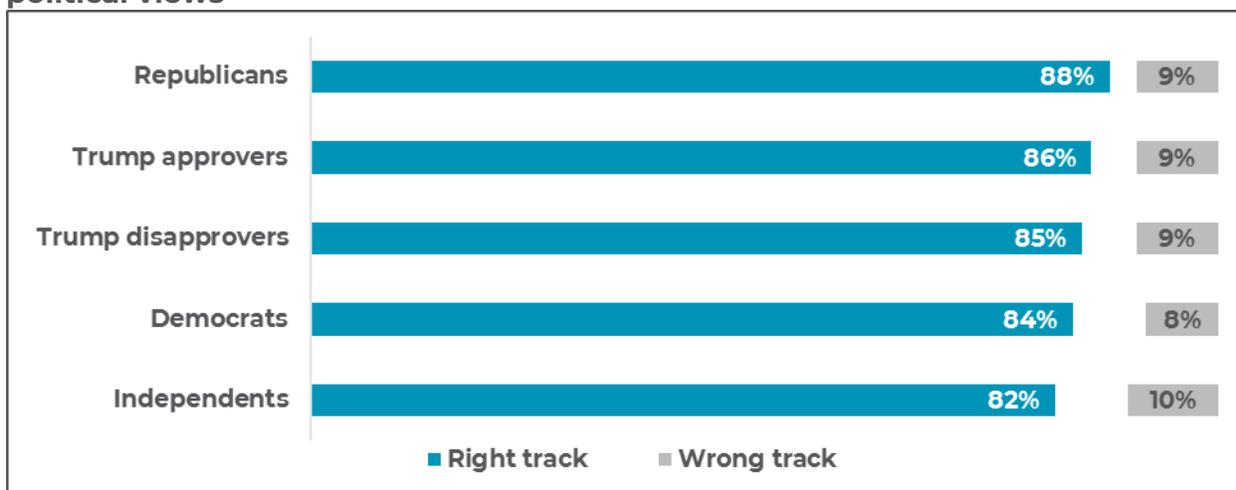


Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Findings by political views

Whereas many other topics on the Ground Level survey revealed deep partisan differences, the water-related questions were remarkably immune to political polarization. Neither question showed meaningful differences by political affiliation, nor whether Minnesotans approved or disapproved of President Trump’s actions at the time of the survey (i.e., the minor variation in percentages in the two graphs below are *not* statistically significant).

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track for drinking water, by political views



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Minnesotans saying we're on the right/wrong track protecting lakes and rivers, by political views



Source: MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans.

Open-ended responses related to water, environment, or water-related industries

In addition to these two multiple-choice water-related questions on the survey, the topic of water or the environment more broadly was mentioned during several questions which permitted open-ended responses. The verbatim responses to these questions appear below.

Q: If there is ONE thing that you would like to see changed in Minnesota to improve our state, what would that be?

ALL ENVIRONMENT-RELATED RESPONSES:

- *Mining reduction*
- *More attention to the environmental issues*
- *I would like to have a deposit for recyclables*
- *The land. Basically, keep it all the same. I'm tired of seeing everything get torn down just to see houses get built.*
- *Um no to Polymet, mining, and to keep the Boundary Waters in Lake Superior off limits to any national or international mining interests*
- *Stop geo engineering and weather modifications*
- *Stop mining and preserve the national land and also transportation*
- *Making sure the environment is going to be clean and healthy for future generations*
- *Pursue wind and solar alternative sources*
- *Increase emphasis on fighting aquatic and invasive species*

- *The oil pipeline needs to happen*
- *A lot less environmental stuff*
- *Stricter environmental regulations*
- *I love birds and nature, and I wish they wouldn't work up all the areas where they live*
- *More habitat for wildlife*
- *Attention to water quality*
- *Energy*
- *Strengthen the environment*
- *More emphasis on protecting the environment*
- *Leave nature, and stop building on top of it, and taking away habitats*
- *Better environmental policies, and more aggressive implementation on the policies*
- *Water quality*
- *Better regulations for mining*
- *Climate change worries me, and we haven't put enough time into that*
- *Moving more toward alternative energy, sun and wind*
- *Up in the city of Virginia, Minnesota, they are talking about opening mines, that would help northeast Minnesota get a lot of jobs for people*
- *Better water quality*
- *Put the environment as a priority*
- *Improve the environment*
- *Stronger environmental regulations*
- *Reopen the taconite mines*
- *Environment*
- *Better environmental protection laws*
- *Improve overall water quality*
- *Water quality*
- *Secure, clean water*
- *Open up mining in Minnesota for a lot of people, they need work*
- *Don't cut down trees, destroy natural habitat for our animals*
- *Protect water*
- *Protect boundary waters and natural resources because copper mining would be the worst thing our state could do, and mining is my industry, and the largest freshwater in the world too*
- *Focus on the environment*
- *Stricter environmental protection laws*
- *More emphasis on environmental issues*
- *Get rid of the pipelines*
- *Don't want some of the mineral mining going on*
- *I want to see things for our natural resources protected more. I am very concerned about our copper resources and our minerals. We have to do something about the fact that we lease our mineral rights and preserve our water.*
- *Hope to slow down global climate change (warming)*
- *Stricter environmental protection laws; cleaner water*
- *Conservationism comes first, people come second. People think we own the planet but*

we don't and if we don't take of it, we will be gone too.

- *Allow the mining exploration*
- *Better conservation policy and protection of the boundary water system*
- *Water quality*
- *Open the Boundary Water area for mining*
- *The wildlife*
- *The environment*
- *Better environment and recycling*
- *Do more things for pollution and picking up garbage. That kind of thing*
- *Continued stewardship of the environment*
- *More focus on water quality*
- *Working more on climate changes and our politicians getting along*
- *Ignore Donald Trump. I am an ecologist and believe in global warming*
- *Greater focus on environmental responsibility*
- *Anti-mining sentiment*
- *Huh, the only thing I'm worried the mining and the mining and the pipeline because of the water quality*
- *Nature protection*
- *More funds allocated to natural resources*
- *Convert to more green energy*
- *Awareness for climate change and the environment*
- *Habitat conservation*
- *More care of the environment*
- *Keep the miners out of the Boundary Waters*

Q: You indicated you think Minnesota is generally on the (wrong/right) track for “strengthening the economy.” Can you tell me why you feel that way?

RESPONSES RELATED TO THE ENVIRONMENT, OR SPECIFIC INDUSTRIES RELATED TO WATER RESOURCES SUCH AS FARMING OR MINING

Among those who said we are on the *right track* for strengthening the economy

- *The situation with the mining up in northern Minnesota, they are allowing people to take possession of their natural resources and move them in the right direction*
- *Businesses aren't doing well. It's supported by the farm economy, and it's doing very well.*
- *It just seems like in the last couple years they have done a decent job in my field, mining; they seem to have turned a corner. It seems like their policies have changed for the better and a lot of the mines in this area are doing good now - they're starting to reopen. This helps tens of thousands of people.*
- *Farmland and energy and more clean water*

- *I think that our govt. Has provided opportunities within the state and the roads and transportation.*
- *Network is sound, mining industry etc.*
- *I feel that way because of our strong agriculture impact in the Midwest*
- *We are gearing towards more solar and wind energy and I think that is a good direction*

Among those who said we are on the *wrong track* for strengthening the economy

- *Just basically the land. Everything was better 20 years ago when there were lakes to play in, fields and whatnot. Now it's just disappearing.*
- *Whole back mining is polluting and if we can't mine we don't have work*
- *I think they are not being helpful or friendly to the mining people in the state. Trying to destroy the economy instead of trying to help.*
- *Because we are in agriculture it has seen a huge down fall in the last 4 years. Agriculture has seen a 50% reduction across the board. All I have heard from city schools, county, state government is we want more money. Agriculture has to adjust for a 50% drop.*
- *Because of anti-mining, that's our biggest industry up here*

In addition, one survey respondent mentioned water when explaining his/her disapproval of President Trump, in response to the following question.

Q: Can you tell me the ONE main reason that you (approve/disapprove) of the way Donald Trump is handing his job as President?

- *Signing Obama out of law and allowed dumping in the water, climate agreement, and there is something wrong with him*

About the Ground Level Survey

The MPR News | APM Research Lab 2017 Ground Level Survey of Minnesotans was a representative sample of 1,654 Minnesotans age 18 and older. The survey has an overall margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points at the 90 percent confidence level. Data collection was conducted via telephone (42% landline, 58% cell phone), August 22 – September 14, 2017, by SSRS of Glenn Mills, Penn. For more details and analysis visit: bit.ly/GroundLevel.

Acknowledgments

Funding for the Ground Level was generously provided by the Blandin Foundation, the Bush Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and the Knight Foundation Donor Advised Fund at The Miami Foundation, as well as donors and members of Minnesota Public Radio. The survey was designed with input from several members of the Minnesota Public Radio Newsroom, including Nancy Cassutt, Mike Edgerly, Mike Mulcahy, and Bill Wareham. We would like to thank all the Minnesotans who took part in the survey.

About the Water Main

Water as a resource remains largely invisible in our public consciousness. The Water Main aims to change that. It is an effort from American Public Media to make sense of the central and complex role that water plays in our lives – from our economy, to our well-being, to our food, and even to our cultural and spiritual identities. The Water Main serves as a hub for reporting, research, personal stories, live events and digital experiences. In doing so, we aim to bring people together, move conversations forward and create meaningful connections that help sustain clean, abundant water for all.

Contact: Annie Baxter at abaxter@mpr.org | www.watermain.org

About the APM Research Lab: Bringing facts into focus

The APM Research Lab & Analyst Group is a division of American Public Media, intended to help the company accomplish ambitious goals related to informing the public by producing credible research- and analysis-based content. Mission: To foster an engaged democracy by inspiring curiosity, inquiry and discussion through fact-driven, credible research and analysis. Values: Independent, Useful, Informative, Non-partisan. Contact: info@apmresearchlab.org | apmresearchlab.org

Technical notes

Race group definitions: All race groups shown are non-Hispanic. Excepting the White group, all individual race groups contain multiracial persons.

Geographic regions definitions: The survey was conducted across Minnesota in eight regions—discrete geographies by which results are reported. Survey respondents were sorted into regions by disclosing their zip codes at the beginning of the survey. Each region’s geographic definition is discussed below:

1. **Duluth Area:** Consists of the following 11 residential U.S. Postal Service zip codes in or nearby the city of Duluth, in portions of St. Louis County: 55802, 55803, 55804, 55805, 55806, 55807, 55808, 55810, 55811, 55812, and 55814.

The Duluth Area stratum contains an estimated 117,100 residents (2% of the state population) and 47,400 households.

2. **Northern Minnesota:** Comprises 19 counties in northern Minnesota, excluding the embedded geography represented by the Duluth Area region. The counties are: Aitkin, Beltrami, Carlton, Clearwater, Cook, Hubbard, Itasca, Kittson, Koochiching, Lake, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomen, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake, Roseau, and St. Louis. The Northern Minnesota stratum contains an estimated 379,200 residents (7% of the state population) and 158,700 households.
3. **St. Cloud Area:** Consists of the following 8 residential USPS zip codes in or nearby the city of St. Cloud, located in portions of Stearns, Sherburne, and Benton counties in Central Minnesota: 56301, 56303, 56304, 56369, 56374, 56377, 56379, and 56387. The St. Cloud Area stratum contains an estimated 126,800 residents (2% of the state population) and 48,100 households.
4. **Central Minnesota:** Comprises 23 counties in central Minnesota, excluding the embedded geography represented by the St. Cloud Area region. The counties that represent this region are: Becker, Benton, Cass, Chisago, Clay, Crow Wing, Douglas, Grant, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Otter Tail, Pine, Pope, Sherburne, Stearns, Stevens, Todd, Traverse, Wadena, Wilkin, and Wright. The Central Minnesota stratum contains an estimated 834,800 residents (15% of the state population) and 321,300 households.
5. **Minneapolis-St. Paul:** Represented by the actual boundaries of the adjacent cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, which contain portions of Hennepin and Ramsey counties. The Minneapolis-St. Paul region contains an estimated 695,000 residents (13% of the state population) and 281,400 households.
6. **Twin Cities Suburbs:** Comprises seven counties home or adjacent to Minneapolis and St. Paul, excluding the Minneapolis-St. Paul region. The seven counties are Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott and Washington. The Twin Cities Suburbs region contains an estimated 2,257,100 residents (42% of the state population) and 868,800 households.
7. **Rochester Area:** Consists of the following four residential USPS zip codes in or nearby the city of Rochester, located in portions of Olmsted county in southern Minnesota: 55901, 55902, 55904, and 55906. The Rochester Area region contains an estimated 121,700 residents (2% of the state population) and 47,800 households.
8. **Southern Minnesota:** Comprises 38 counties located in southern Minnesota, excluding the Rochester Area stratum. The counties are Big Stone, Blue Earth, Brown, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Dodge, Faribault, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lac Qui Parle, Le Sueur, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Martin, Meeker, Mower, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles, Olmsted, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, Rice, Rock, Sibley, Steele, Swift, Wabasha, Waseca, Watonwan, Winona, and Yellow Medicine. The Southern Minnesota stratum contains an estimated 887,400 residents (16% of the state population) and 351,300 households.



A P M R E S E A R C H L A B
a p m r e s e a r c h l a b . o r g