



SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN WATERSHEDS TRUST, INC.  
*Sweet Water*

## **New Survey Shows Area Residents Concerned About the Future of River and Lakes**

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**Available for Comment:**

Jeff Martinka, Sweet Water executive director, will be available for comment January 25 after the breakfast briefing between 9:00-11:30am and after the noon Milwaukee Rotary Club luncheon presentation.

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin** – Sweet Water today announced the results of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin's survey of public opinion and knowledge concerning water resources. The survey found that while the public considers the water quality of our rivers and Lake Michigan to be satisfactory or better at this time, they also believe water quality in surface waters and groundwater will become a bigger problem in the coming decade.

According to the survey, the public believes the major sources of water pollution are sewer overflows and industrial wastes, even though the vast majority of water pollution today comes from nonpoint sources such as urban and rural runoff. Both sewer overflows and point sources of pollution have been dramatically reduced in recent decades, with overflows dropping to a fraction of pre-1994 levels.

Based on the survey results, the public feels that their actions do not have an impact water quality nor do they see a role for themselves in helping to protect our water resources. Actually, today the major source of pollution is non-point pollution – the result of a multitude of relatively small actions cumulatively multiplied across the watershed. They range from polluted runoff from parking lots and streets, to careless disposal of pet waste, to removal of natural buffers along our rivers, to excess use of salt for de-icing.

"The public needs to know that the cumulative actions of individuals *can* have a major impact in reducing non-point pollution," said Jeff Martinka, executive director of Sweet Water. "There are simple actions that we all can do that will help protect our rivers and Lake Michigan."

While the findings report that individuals are engaging in behaviors that have a positive impact on water quality and that they are willing to take additional actions to protect water quality, they do not equate these actions with helping to improve water quality.

"While these results show that we must reach out to residents in our area with information about their role in water quality improvements, we are very encouraged by the percentage of our neighbors willing to lend a hand in improving our rivers and lakes," said Steve Hiniker, executive director of 1,000 Friends of Wisconsin, a key partner in Sweet Water's efforts.

When queried about the importance of water to the economic vitality of our region, just 4% reported positively that water was important to economic vitality. The public does not connect water quality to the presence of water industries located in the Milwaukee area, area tourism, or the development along the Milwaukee riverfront.

Most respondents view the effectiveness of local government actions to protect water quality as at least somewhat effective. They view regulations to protect and restore wetlands, requiring natural vegetation along river and stream banks, prevention of erosion during construction, and efforts to remove or prevent invasive species as very effective in protecting water resources.

With the majority of the respondents reporting that environmental organizations are the most trustworthy source of information on water issues, these groups have an opportunity to improve residents understanding of the issues facing our water resources and the importance of their role in helping to protect our waters.

The survey, primarily funded by a Wisconsin Coastal Management Program grant with additional support from the Joyce Foundation and other partners, will inform 2011 public outreach efforts of Sweet Water and its partners, aiming to boost public understanding of issues facing our rivers and Lake Michigan and promote the positive impact residents can have in protecting our water resources. The survey received additional financial support from Sweet Water, American Rivers, and Badger Meter.

The survey was developed in partnership with the Public Policy Forum, which analyzed and summarized the data from 388 households from six counties across the Kinnickinnic, Menomonee, and Milwaukee River watersheds. The survey was administered by Advantage Research. Sweet Water and the Public Policy Forum will host a breakfast briefing on January 25<sup>th</sup> at the University Club to release the findings of the survey. Jeff Martinka of Sweet Water will also present the findings at the Milwaukee Rotary Club's luncheon that same day.

Sweet Water, the Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc., is a nonprofit organization created in 2008 as a partnership of local governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, academia, and neighbors working collectively to improve the water resources in the 1,100 square miles of Greater Milwaukee Watersheds. The five Sweet Water watersheds include the Kinnickinnic, Menomonee, Milwaukee, Oak, and Root.

For more information on Sweet Water, including the full copy of this report, visit [www.swwtwater.org](http://www.swwtwater.org) or contact Jeff Martinka, Executive Director, at 414-382-1766 or via [martinka@swwtwater.org](mailto:martinka@swwtwater.org).

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