



BRUCE BEACH COTTAGERS' ASSOCIATION SHORELINE SURVEY, 2012

ERIN RESEARCH INC



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1 Introduction

The Bruce Beach Cottagers' Association (BBCA) undertook this survey to determine its members' views on the present state of the beach and how it should be managed to maximize the benefit to future generations.

BBCA commissioned ERIN Research to design and conduct the survey and to report results. The survey was implemented online and cottagers were given the opportunity to respond from August 21 to September 12, 2012.

The initial email announcing the survey was sent to all email addresses on the BBCA member list (which represents approximately 95% of the 261 cottages in BBCA). Three follow-up emails were sent at approximately one-week intervals to those who had not responded.

In all, 219 responses were received from 172 different cottages. One or several responses were therefore received from 66% of the 261 cottages on Bruce Beach.¹ Using the standard industry calculation, the margin of error for this survey is $\pm 4\%$, 19 times out of 20.

¹ In cases where two or more responses were received from a single cottage, those responses are weighted such that each cottage registers a single vote. If one respondent in the cottage answers "Yes" to a question and another answers "No", the results count a 1/2 "Yes" and a 1/2 "No" response for that cottage.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 95%** of members want the BBCA Executive to represent their views to governments and other groups
- 59%** want BBCA to reflect the majority opinion on issues but also to acknowledge minority views
- 55%** see today's water quality as good or very good, however **77%** feel that water quality has declined since they began cottaging at the Bruce Beach
- 66%** have found it necessary to limit swimming because of poor water quality
- 96%** voice concerns about algae washed up on the shore, but most find that that Huron-Kinloss does a good job cleaning it up
- 69%** would prefer less vegetation on the beach near their cottage
- 85%** feel that vegetation has become a problem only in recent decades
- 76%** disagree with the current Township policy on removal of beach grass (which appears to prohibits any type of removal²)
- 62%** of cottagers have removed American Beach grass from the beach near their cottage
- 86%** believe the Township should be involved in setting policy for removal of vegetation. A majority feel that cottagers and the BBCA should play a major role.

² The Huron-Kinloss policy on removal of beach grass is somewhat unclear at this point in time.

2 The role of the BBCA

Figure 1. Role of the BBCA: Beach and dunes

“Do you want the BBCA Executive to represent the views of cottagers on the issue of the beach and dunes to the Township of Huron-Kinloss and other relevant parties?”

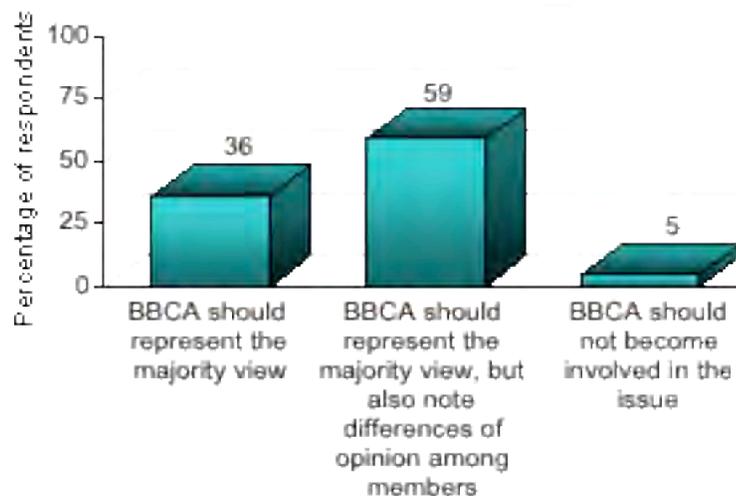
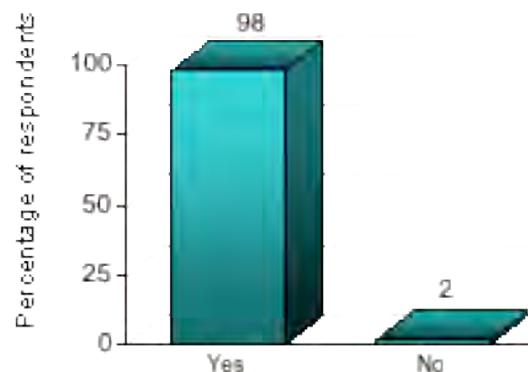


Figure 2. Role of the BBCA: Water quality

The BBCA Executive has worked with the Township and the province on water quality and to promote cleaning of the beach. Should it continue to do so?



3 Water quality

Water quality is relatively good, but considered to be worse than in the past.

Figure 3. Overall water quality today

Recognizing that conditions change day by day, how would you rate the overall quality of the water near your cottage this summer?

Average score = 6.1 / 10

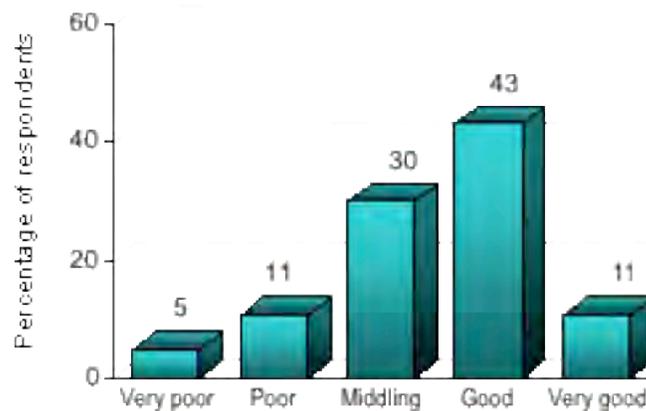


Figure 4. Change in water quality

How would you rate the overall water quality of the lake today, compared to when you began cottaging at Bruce Beach?

Average score = 2.3 / 10

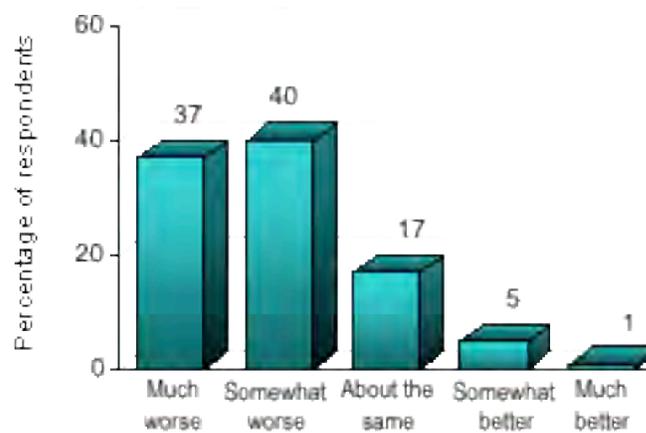


Figure 5. Township advisories on water quality

Over the past three years, Huron-Kinloss Township has posted advisories on several occasions warning people not to swim because of high bacterial content in the lake. Have there been times, in addition to these posted warnings, when you have been concerned about bacterial content in the lake?

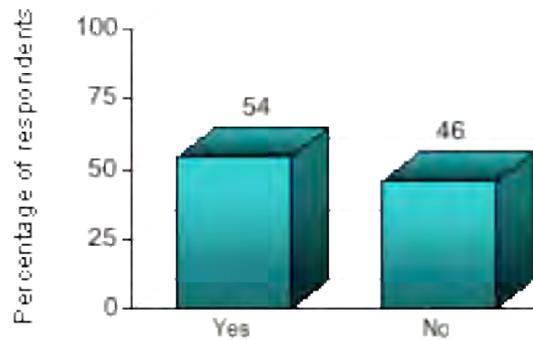
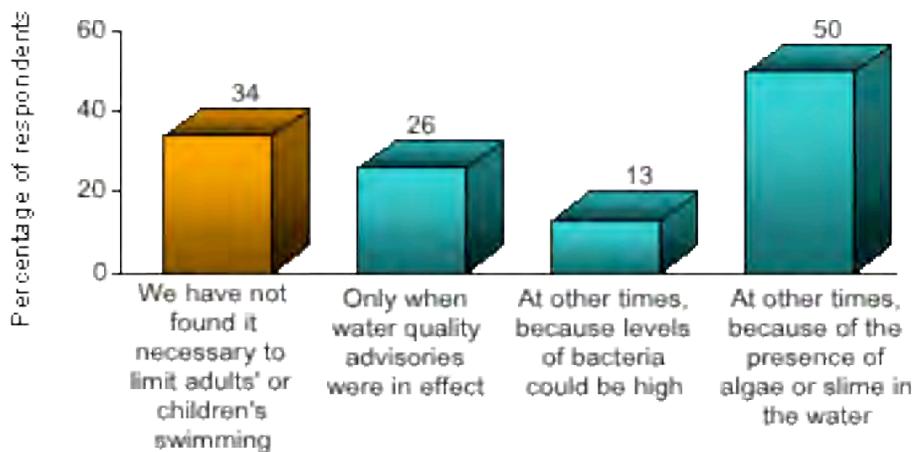


Figure 6. Impact of water quality on swimming

Over the past three years, have you or other family members limited your own or children's swimming due to the quality of the water?



Note: Percentages add to more than 100 as respondents could check more than one option.

4 Algae

Figure 7. Have you been concerned about...



Figure 8. Frequency of algae cleanup

The Township of Huron-Kinloss cleans algae from the beach during the summer. Is this cleaning done often enough?

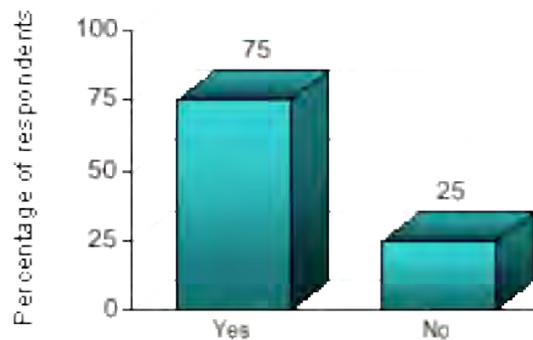
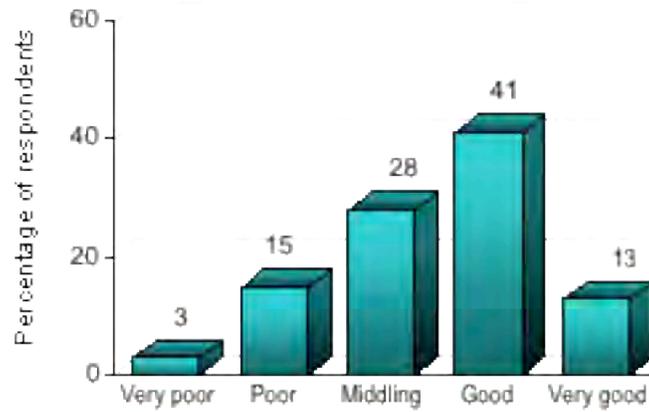


Figure 9. Overall quality of Huron-Kinloss Township cleanup

How good a job does the Township do in cleaning algae from the beach?
Average score = 6.2 / 10



5 Impacts on water quality

Introduction

Draft results from a water quality survey commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment in 2010 show that although Lake Huron in total has a low phosphate content overall (2-3 micrograms/litre) there are significantly higher loadings measurable along our shoreline, especially adjacent to creek mouths and drain areas. Photographic data and comparative studies with Inverhuron show higher algae problems in the Bruce Beach/Point Clark area. It is believed that there are three main causes; a) agricultural and Township drainage practices, b) higher loadings coming from cottage activity and c) marine habitat changes over time (Goby fish, zebra mussels, etc)

Figure 10. Impact of drainage practices on grass and other vegetation

In your opinion, do farm runoff and Township drainage practices contribute to the growth of grass and other vegetation on the beach?

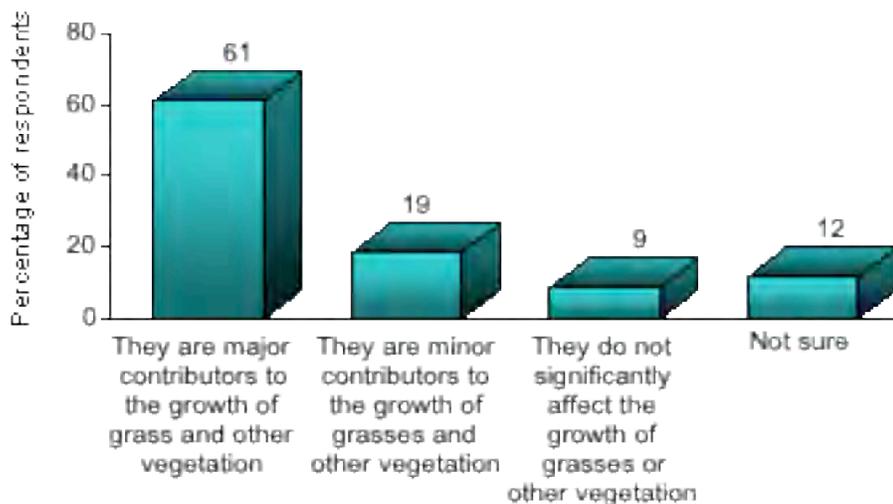


Figure 11. Impact of drainage practices on grass and other vegetation

In your opinion, do farm runoff and Township drainage practices contribute to the growth of algae in the lake?

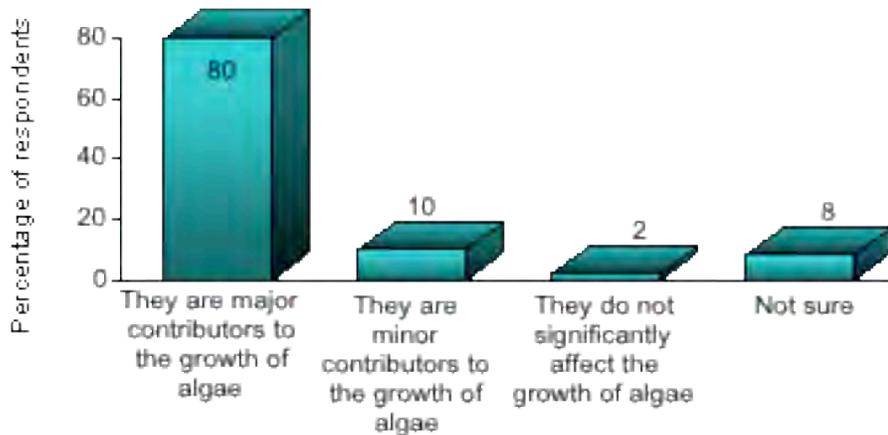
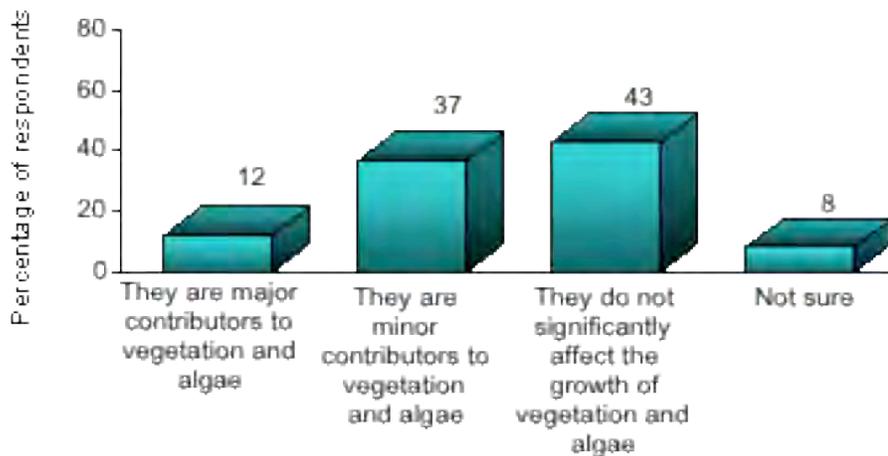


Figure 12. Impact of cottages on vegetation and algae

In your opinion, do cottage activities and poor septic systems along the beach contribute to the growth of vegetation on the beach and/or algae in the lake

?



6 Your septic system

Figure 13. Has your septic system been inspected in the past three years?

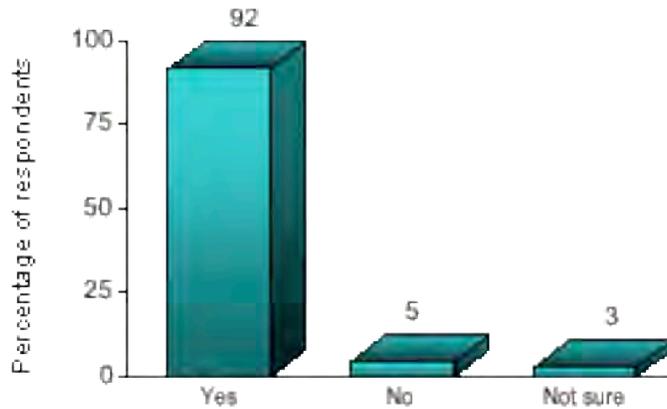
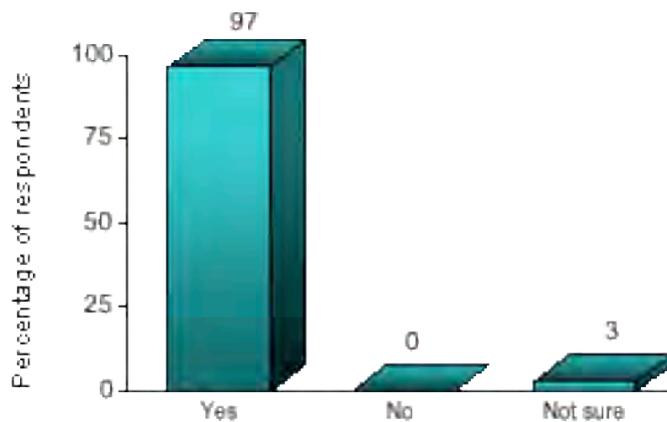


Figure 14. Is your septic system up to municipal standards?



7 Your beach

Figure 15. What is the division between bare sand and vegetation on the beach in front of your cottage?

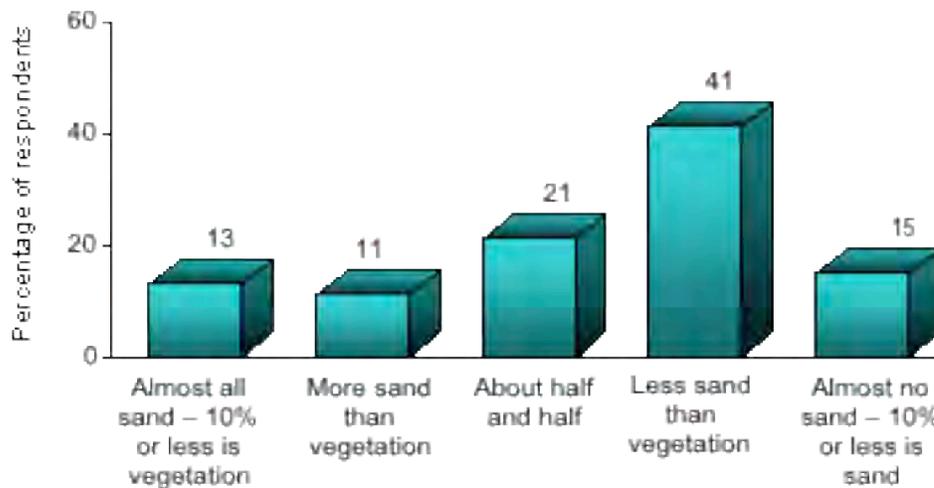


Figure 16. What proportion of the vegetation on your beach does each of these make up?

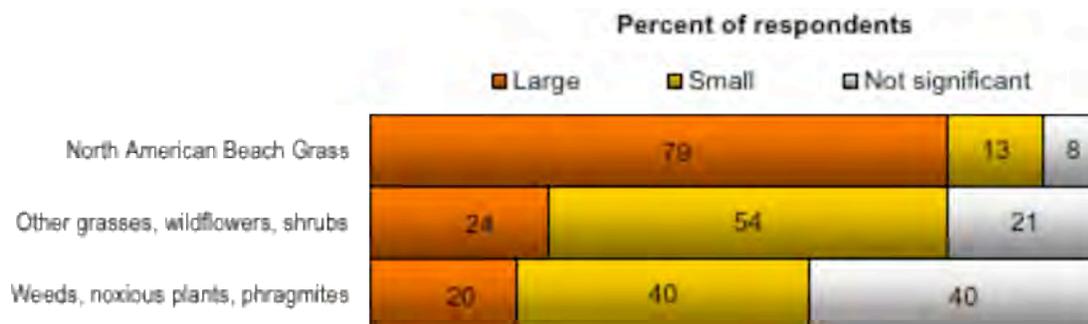


Figure 17. Which best describes your view of the beach in front of your cottage?

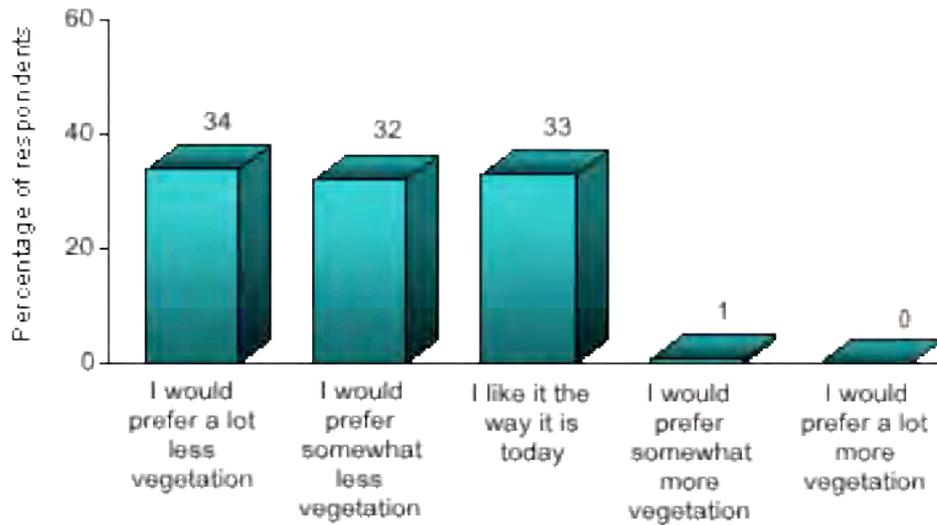


Figure 18. Changes in vegetation over time

Some people feel that the amount of vegetation on the beach has increased over time – that management of vegetation was not a problem in the past but became a problem at some point. What is your view?

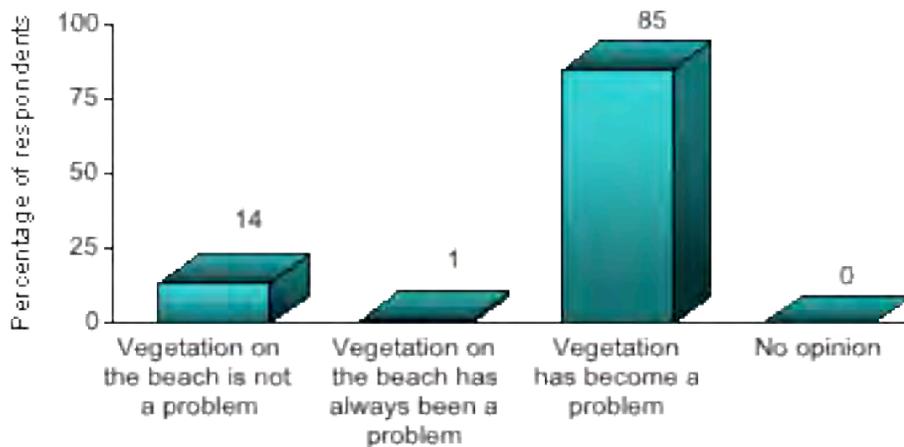
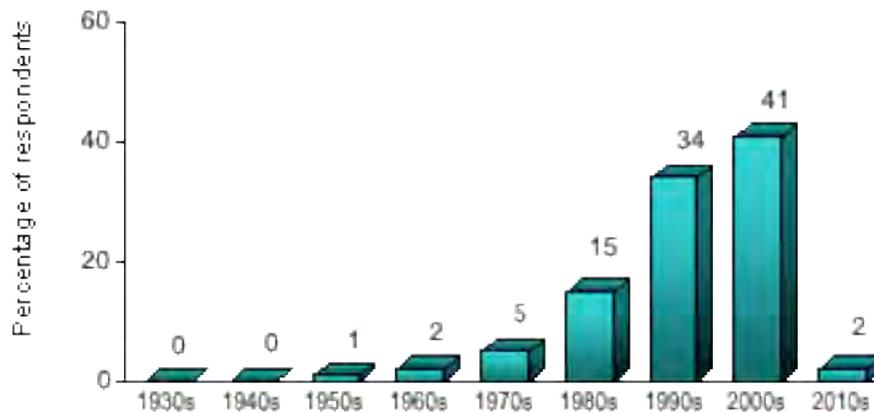


Figure 19. Changes in vegetation over time

The 85% of beachers who report that vegetation has changed indicated when they saw the change beginning.

Vegetation began to be a problem in about the...

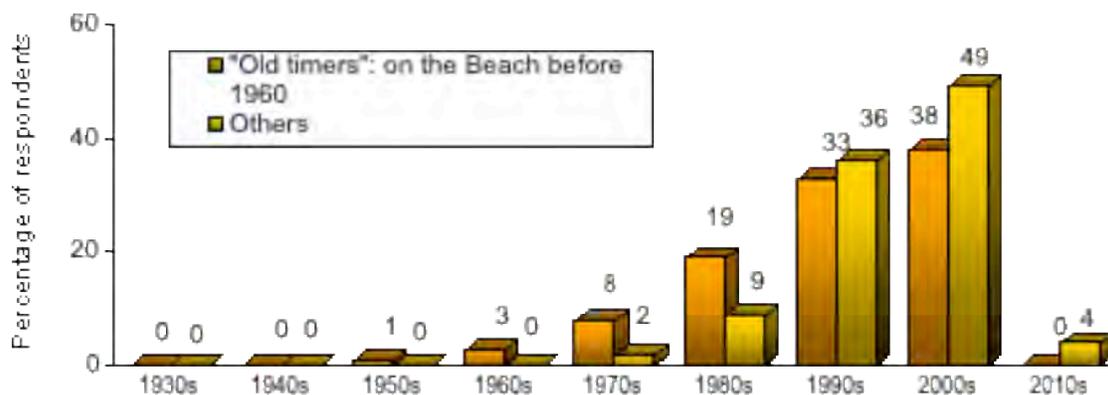


Younger respondents and those who came to the beach more recently cannot answer the earlier options, at least not from direct experience. Figure 20 compares perceptions of “old timers”, defined as those whose memory of the beach dates from the 1950s or before, with others.

Old timers make up one-quarter of respondents, and given their longer time line, they see the vegetation issue developing slightly earlier than others. The majority of both groups, however, see little change before the 1980s.

Figure 20. Changes in vegetation: perceptions of “old timers” and others

Vegetation began to be a problem in about the...



8 Management of vegetation on the beach

Figure 21. Removal of vegetation

Have you removed any vegetation from the beach near your cottage in the past 2-3 years?



Figure 22. Setting policy for vegetation

What role should each of these play in setting policies for managing vegetation on the beach?

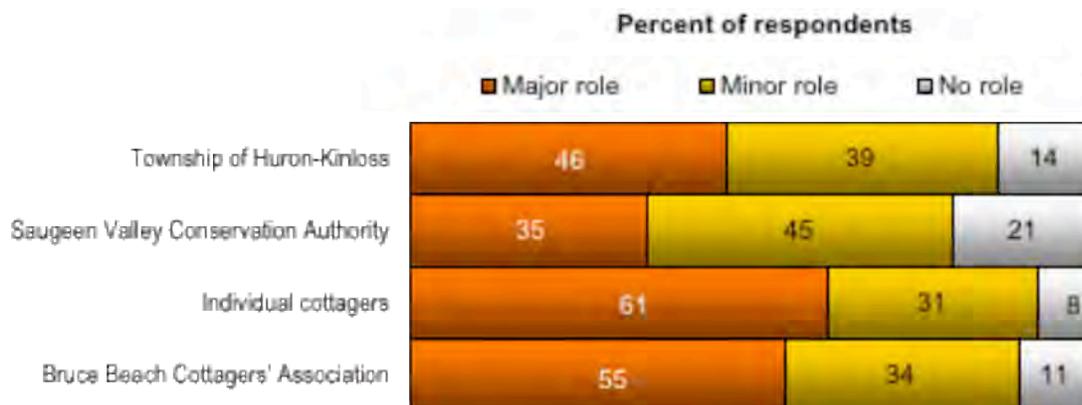


Figure 23. Strategies for managing vegetation

Following are four general ways of managing vegetation on the beach. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each.

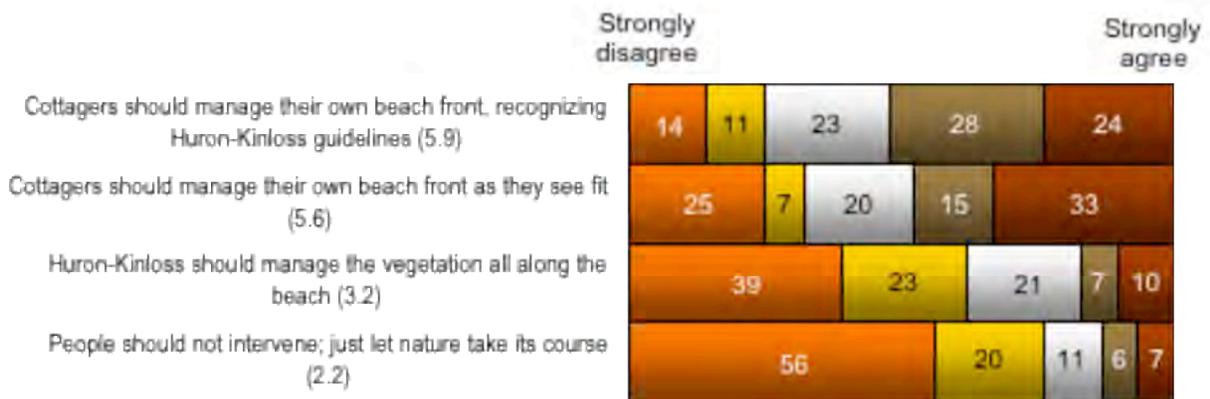


Figure 24. Of the four methods of managing vegetation, which do you consider the best?

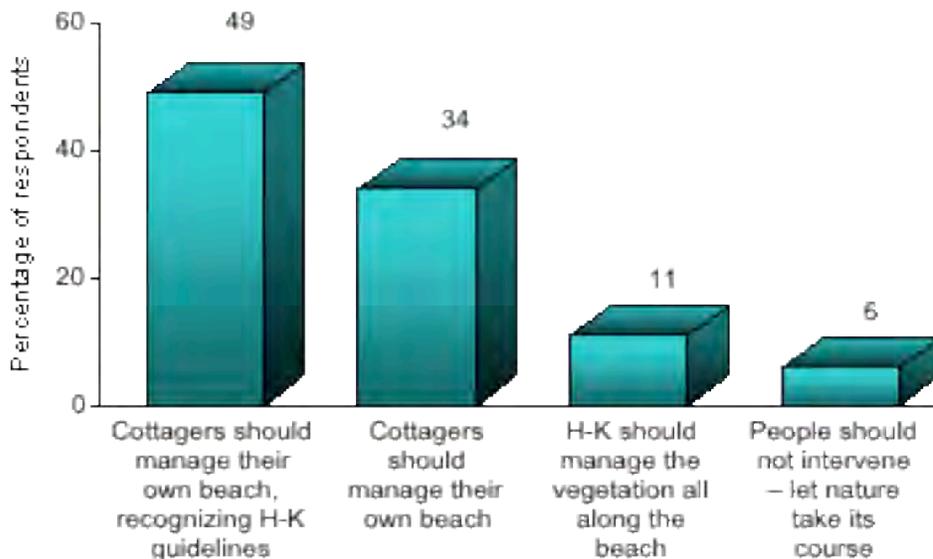
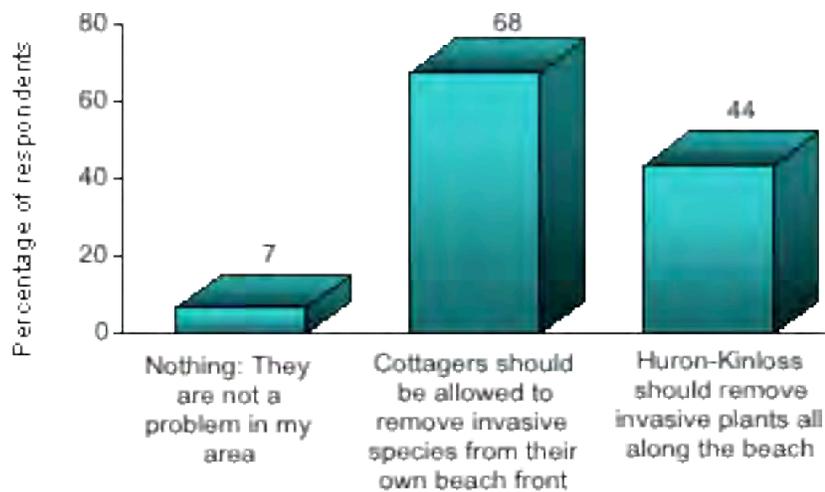


Figure 25. Invasive species

The vegetation on the beach consists mostly of native species. There are two groups of invasive species, a) *Phragmites*, which both the BBCA and the Township wish to eradicate, and b) smaller flowering plants such as Crown Vetch, Sweet White Clover and Spotted Knapweed. What should be done with group b), the invasive species other than *Phragmites*? Check all that apply.



Note: Percentages add to more than 100 as respondents could check multiple options.

Figure 26. Methods of controlling vegetation

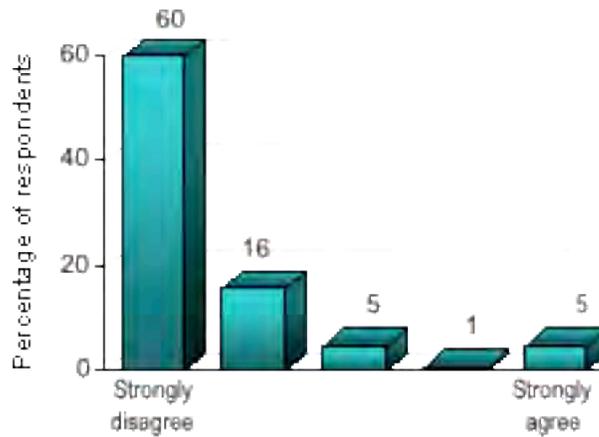
Which of the following methods of controlling vegetation do you think should be used? This applies to American Beach Grass and all other species except Phragmites, (which is controlled using herbicides).



Figure 27. Current Huron-Kinloss Township policy on removing vegetation

While the Township's policy is not entirely clear, it appears to prohibit cottagers from removing any vegetation or grass from the beach and dunes. Do you agree or disagree with this policy?

Average agreement = 2.4 / 10



9 Voting rights and responsibilities

Methodological note

This section drops the statistical weighting that reduced multiple responses from a single cottage to give “one cottage one vote”. This restriction is not relevant to municipal voting.

Three questions determined voter eligibility, i.e. persons who are Canadian citizens, who own property on the beach, or who are the spouse of a property owner. 73% of respondents are eligible voters.

Results in this section are based only on eligible voters.

Introductory statement in the survey:

Shorefront properties contribute approximately 70% of Huron-Kinloss's tax revenue, and cottagers potentially play a large role in the outcome of municipal elections.

Cottagers can vote in the Huron-Kinloss election if they are a *Canadian* citizen who owns all or part of a property in Huron-Kinloss, OR the spouse of a property owner.

If you are on the voter registry, you can vote electronically from any location. There is no need to appear in Huron-Kinloss

Figure 28. Thinking of your immediate family, did the owner(s) vote in the last election – held in October 2010?

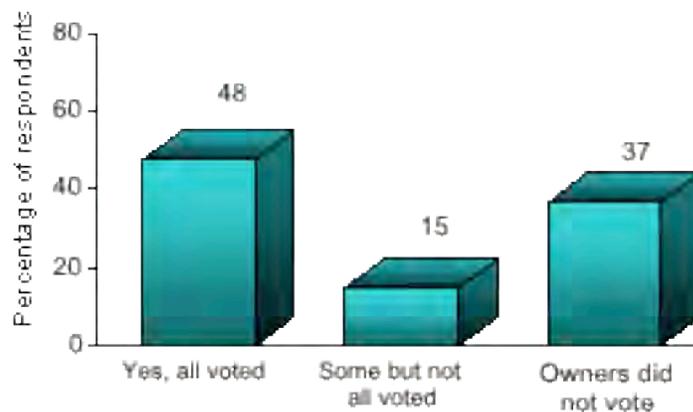


Figure 29. Still thinking of your immediate family, did spouse(s) of the owner(s) vote in the last election – held in October 2010?

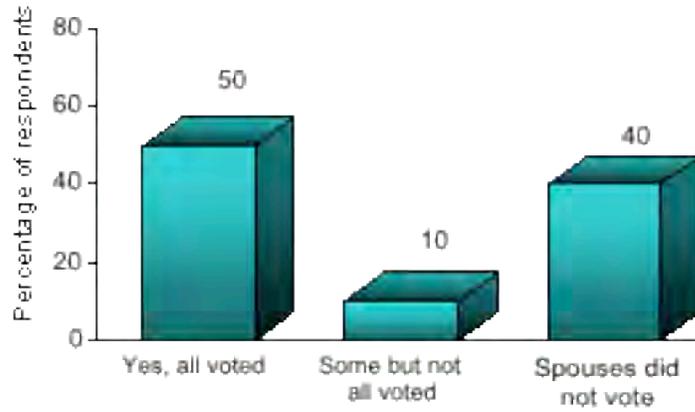
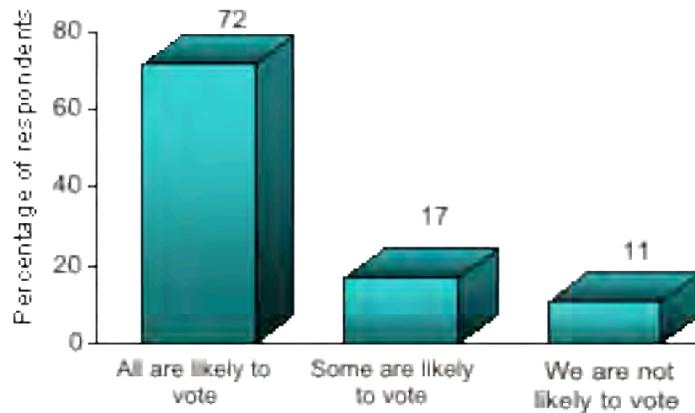


Figure 30. Are eligible voters in your immediate family likely to vote in the next election – to be held in October 2014?



10 About you

Figure 31. When did you start cottaging at Bruce Beach?

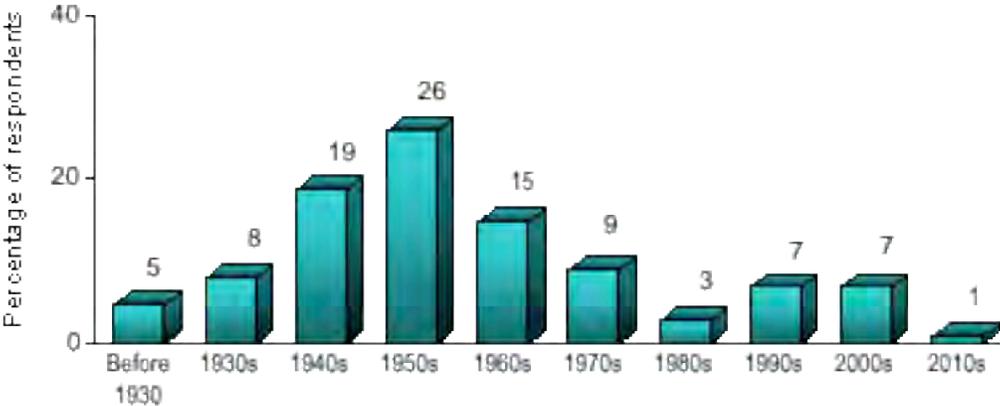
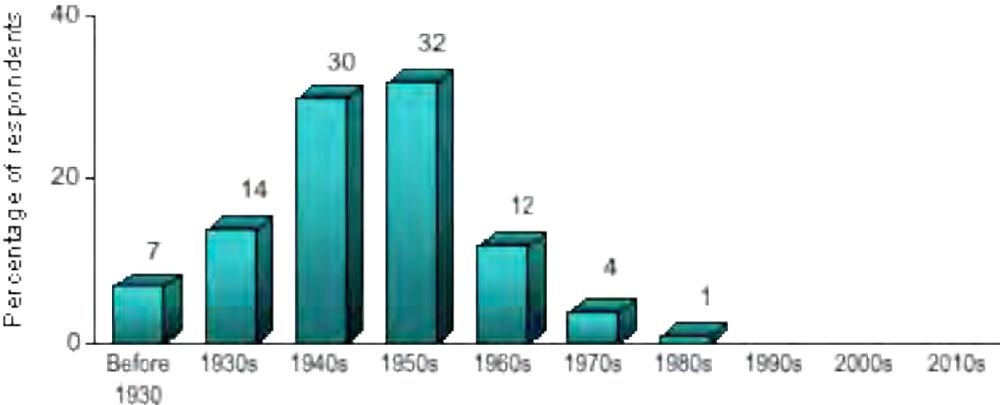


Figure 32. When were you born?



11 Comments

BBCA respondents were given the opportunity to write comments at the end of the survey and 97 of 217 cottagers did so.

A recurring theme expressed is a desire for more information on the central issues – the history of vegetation on the beach, the causes of plant growth in the water, the role of farm and municipal run-off, and the evolving positions of governments.

Comments fall into two main groups:

55% addressed managing vegetation on the beach. Of these, 5/6 favour some degree of intervention by cottagers while 1/6 argue that cottagers should not interfere with native species

45% raised other ideas, suggestions or concerns. Water quality was the most prominent of these issues

Illustrative comments follow

5 out of 6 cottagers who commented on management of vegetation stated that cottagers should have some freedom in management of the beach

A small number of these argued that beachers should have complete control over the beach near their cottage, but the large majority took a more nuanced position, such that a balance between sand and vegetation should be maintained, and that cottagers and government should cooperate in setting policy.

Illustrative comments

- I like the dunes and the native tall grasses on the beach but there should be a balance between vegetation and sand. This is where we need expert guidance that clearly articulates any issues that may arise for our community by either doing nothing or by intervening. Collaboration (amongst cottagers, the municipality and conservation / wildlife authorities) and respect for the impact of individual actions on the collective whole of BCC should be guiding principles.
- Based upon my memory and upon family photos dating to the 1920's, the vegetation is evanescent. It waxes and wanes in keeping with water levels, and this tendency has not changed over time... Does anyone recall what happened in 1986? Water levels set a record high. The beach grass and attendant dunes sacrificed themselves and kept the water from our cottage foundation. Then, as the water receded, we were left with a wide beach. Grass began to grow and dunes began to build and here we are. The grass and dunes will come and go. We believe that, aside from paths and small open spaces, we should allow nature to take its course. We also believe that our fellow cottagers should have wide latitude to manage their own beachfronts.
- Efforts made to clean up our beachfront (removing grass, weeds etc.) have not been done maliciously. We are trying to maintain the beach that was here in the 1940s when our family first arrived.
- I am extremely concerned with: 1) the source of the problem, namely farm runoff is contributing to all the above problems 2) the fact that the cottager is being actively prohibited from managing the property between the cottage and the water 3) there is a lack of regulation and enforcement by Huron-Kinloss Township and the province in controlling farm runoff onto the shores and into the water. These are serious, urgent matters that need to be addressed through action now for the ongoing safety and genuine enjoyment of Bruce Beach by current and future generations.
- Huron-Kinloss Township should only be involved in algae beach clean up because of the algae created by the farm run-off at the gulleys and rivers. Cottagers should be allowed to keep the beach in the condition it was in during the 1900-1990's.

- I am able to manage my beach front area. Many owners are unable or not willing to do so, so they need to be able to hire a contractor do their beach work. As far a policy, Huron-Kinloss really doesn't have a beach policy and there is such a variety of beach sizes and situations which makes this difficult. Also H-K view that the beaches have always had grass is clearly wrong and their view that the grass is important to maintain the beach is also wrong.
- I am concerned about the level of beach grass but not overly so because I currently manage it on my own property. However, we received warnings from the township this year. If these ever advanced to serious fines and policing such that I could no longer manage my own beach grass I would consider this a more serious problem.
- I understand that Huron-Kinloss means well, but they need to leave cottagers alone. We love the beach and the Lake and have demonstrated good stewardship for over 100 years.
- A balance should be found between total removal of all vegetation and doing nothing. I would like to see a balance of beach grass and sand in order to retain the beach sand from blowing away during the off season periods.

1 out of 6 cottagers who commented on management of vegetation stated that cottagers should play little role in management of the beach

These comments opposed to any intervention in the beach by cottagers, other than clearing a path from cottage to waterfront and controlling invasive species. Most of these argued that natural processes were the best form of management. A few stated that governments, either Huron-Kinloss or the province, should do as they saw fit.

Illustrative comments

- Cottagers should not be allowed to cut or dig out any of the natural grasses. Fines should be dramatically increased and collected. Huron-Kinloss should take a leading role in the elimination of blue green algae in the township. Huron-Kinloss should make a presentation at the club house and present their reasoning as to why cottagers should not cut or dig out any natural grasses.
- Cottagers should not be allowed to remove North American Beach Grass from their property, but should be allowed to remove invasive species in accordance with the township guidelines.
- There is a lack of comprehension of the ecological significance of the interface between water and land. There is an assumption that this critical interface serves the sole purpose of a cottager. Cottagers do NOT own the beach. I suggest that using the Bruce Beach History book there are numerous photos that show, save and except the woodlands, an extraordinary dune system which is now completely changed as a result of cottage building, tree planting etc. We must stop our obsession with manscaping our environment to serve our needs to the utter neglect and destruction of habitat, rare species etc. There are species at risk in this area and destruction of habitat would fall within the species at risk act - consequences included. We are not opposed to cottagers ensuring they have a path to the beach and appropriate access as necessary, but the heavy machinery and rototilling the beach is beyond reasonable.

Other ideas, suggestions or concerns

43 comments did not directly address management of vegetation on the beach. A majority of these voiced concerns with declining water quality and the need for action to limit the entry of pollutants into the lake. Farm runoff, exacerbated by tile drainage, is widely seen as the root cause of water quality problems. Other comments in this group described changes in the character of the beach over the years but did not take a position on the specific issue of managing vegetation. A few comments dealt with other issues entirely, such as the survey's request for old photographs.

Illustrative comments

- The Township should be encouraged to change their policy re Municipal Drains. Rather than finding ways to rush excess water from farm fields into the creeks, rivers, ditches and the lake the policy should be to use ponds, berms etc. to hold the water on the land as much as possible. This encouragement should be done by BBCA, Lurgan Beach CA, and Point Clark CA, if the others are interested in supporting the concept.
- Farm run off is the main reason we have the poor water quality and invasive plants on the beach. I am greatly disappointed that the local and federal government have not stepped in aggressively from stopping this problem. This all began when the farmers began tiling their fields.
- We received one of the outrageous yellow tickets and yet no beach grass has been removed in front of our cottage for at least 5 years. This type of communication is insulting and counter productive! It is very important for the people who patrol the beach to become knowledgeable about the different species on our beaches and to teach us what to do to control invasive species.
- Would like to be informed by print or BBCA website, the descriptions with pictures of the invasive plants that each individual cottager can control without penalty.
- Municipal Council needs to focus much more on a long term plan to reduce the contaminating effects of nutrients from farm run off. This should be an essential component of all surface water drainage systems, even if it means that farm properties, individually or collectively, need to set aside land for the purpose. This is required in other areas of land use planning. Farms should not be exempt. Loss of land to productivity is no longer a valid rationale: it is not in any other drainage plan situation. It is a normal cost of doing business in this age.