

RIVER ACCESS STRATEGY

RIVER USAGE AND ATTITUDES
BASELINE ONLINE SURVEY
SUMMARY REPORT

JUNE 2014





BACKGROUND

The North Saskatchewan River Valley is one of North America's largest urban parks, and stewardship of this resource is vitally important to Edmonton. Access to the river and its valley is key to fully experiencing Edmonton's quality of life. Within Edmonton's city limits, the banks of the North Saskatchewan River include many parks, natural areas, trails and infrastructure, including boating facilities, launches and docks. In order to enhance the enjoyment of the river by existing and future users, the City is developing a ten-year River Access Strategy. This strategy will balance environmental stewardship with encouraging a broader appreciation for activities on the river. The strategy will define locations, regulations and design guidelines for waterside infrastructure and amenities for use by the public and our partner groups.

In order to inform the River Access Strategy, and as a part of public consultation, the City of Edmonton conducted a survey to gain an understanding of river use and attitudes towards access to the North Saskatchewan River. The survey was available online at edmonton.ca/riveraccessstrategy from April 17 to May 31, 2014. Surveys were also available at public consultation events held during this time including the: Strathcona Farmers Market, Downtown Market, North Saskatchewan Riverkeeper and River Day events. Media coverage included articles in the Metro News, the Edmonton Journal and radio/audio interviews on 630 CHED and CBC. These draft principles were tested through this survey and at the same time were tested with external and internal stakeholders.

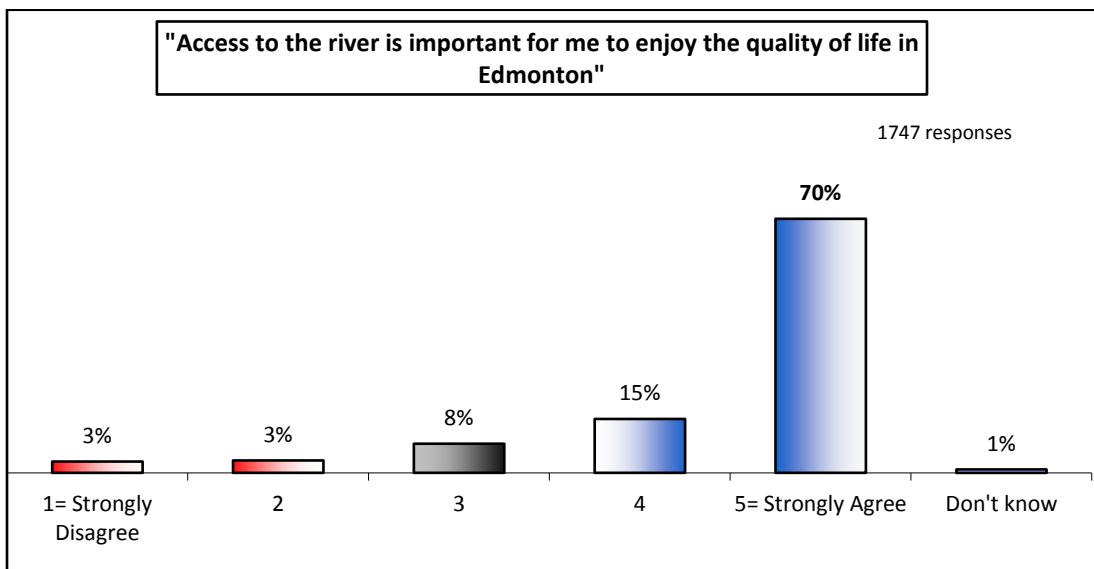
**Note: As online surveys are self-select and are not random samples, no margin of error can be reported. In general, you are dealing with a more engaged audience for an online survey.*

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

There were a total of 1,930 responses received for the survey. From the online survey, there were three areas that respondents felt strongest about.

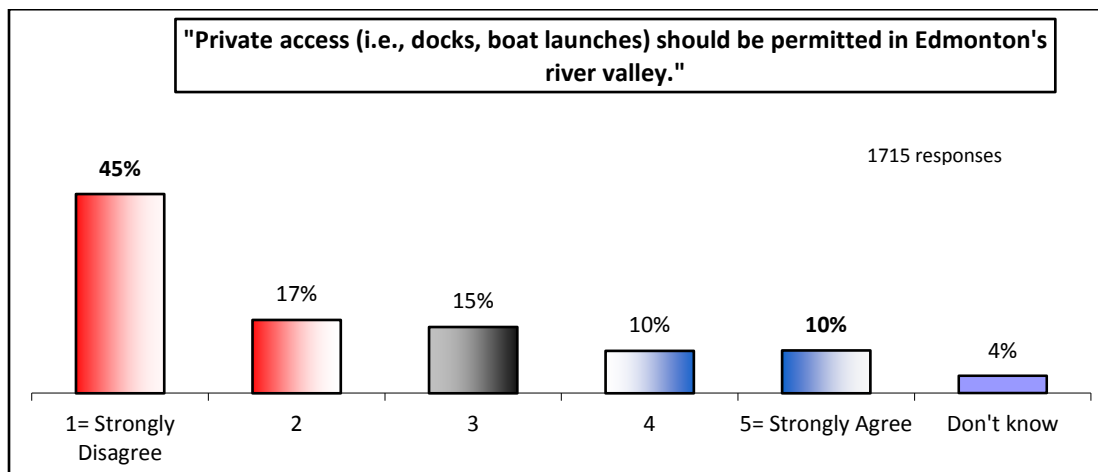
Access to the River

85% agreed that "Access to the river is important for me to enjoy the quality of life in Edmonton" (70% gave a rating of "5=Strongly Agree", and 15% gave a rating of "4").



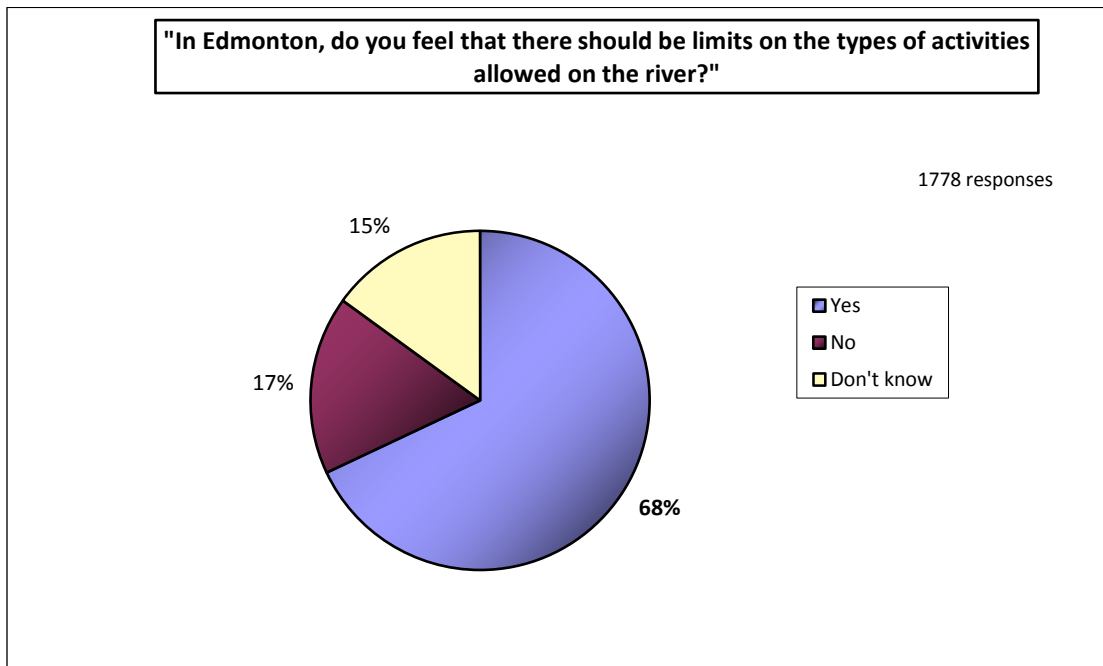
Private Access

62% disagreed that "Private access (i.e., docks, boat launches) should be permitted in Edmonton's river valley" (45% gave a rating of "1=Strongly Disagree", and 17% gave a rating of "2").



Limits on the Types of Activities Allowed on the River

68% said "Yes" to "In Edmonton, do you feel that there should be limits on the types of activities allowed on the river?"



Other results included:

- **Frequent Use of the River Valley:** Almost half of the respondents (48%) indicated that they visited the river valley more than once a week, 15% said they visited two to three times a month, and 12% visited once a week.
- **Method of Transport to the River Valley:** The three most frequently mentioned ways of getting to the river valley were by: walking (60%), driving (57%) and bicycling (44%). [Note: Multiple mentions were allowed]
- **River-Based Activities:** When asked to indicate the river-based activities, in Edmonton, that they participated in during the last year:
 - Over one third (35%) said they did not participate in any river-based activities
 - Of those that did participate, the most frequently mentioned activities were: [Note: Multiple mentions were allowed]
 - Non-motorized boating such as canoeing, kayaking, etc. (29%)
 - Taking a dog to the river for a swim (25%)
 - River stewardship such as river monitoring, river valley clean up, wildlife observation or school field trips (18%)

Respondents were asked for their opinions about various statements:

- **Amenities:** 60% agreed that “More amenities should be developed that support river-based activities in Edmonton (e.g., docks, boat launches, washrooms)”
36% gave a rating of “5=Strongly Agree” and 24% gave a rating of “4”
- **Access to River-Based Activities as a Priority:** Over half (54%) agreed that “Access to river-based activities (e.g., canoeing, boating) should be a priority for Edmonton”
28% gave a rating of “4” and 26% gave a rating of “5=Strongly Agree”
An additional 25% gave a neutral rating of “3”
- **Safety of the River:** More than half (54%) agreed that “In Edmonton, I feel that the river is safe to use”
29% gave a rating of “4” and 25% gave a rating of “5=Strongly Agree”
An additional 21% gave a neutral rating of “3”
- **Preservation of the River Valley:** Half of the respondents (50%) agreed that “Edmonton’s river valley should be preserved in its natural state (i.e., there should be no further development)” .
33% gave a rating of “5=Strongly Agree”, 17% gave a rating of “4”
An additional 18% gave a neutral rating of “3”

Less agreement/disagreement was indicated with the following statements:

- **Information About the River:** 41% disagreed that “I know where to go to get information about river-based activities in Edmonton”
25% gave a rating of “2” and 16% gave a rating of “1=Strongly Disagree”
An additional 23% giving a neutral rating of “3”
- **Adequate Opportunities for River Access:** 40% agreed that “There are adequate opportunities for river access in Edmonton”
21% gave a rating of “5=Strongly Agree” and 19% gave a rating of “4”
An additional 21% gave a neutral rating of “3”

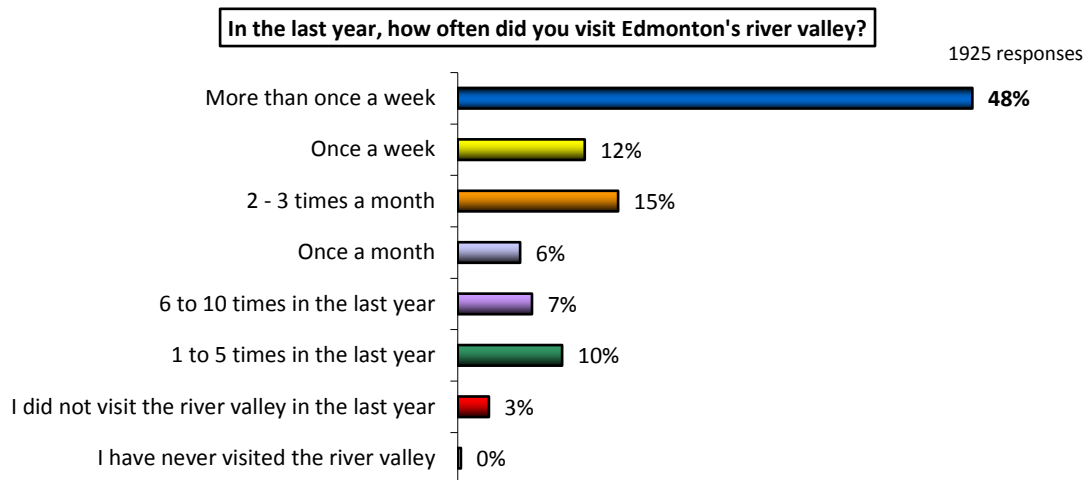
Sources of Information About River-Based Activities: When respondents were asked to indicate where they go to get information about river-based activities in Edmonton, the most frequently mentioned sources were: the City of Edmonton website, edmonton.ca (59%), word of mouth (55%), online search other than the City of Edmonton website (40%), and social media (26%).

More Use of the River: When asked if they would make more use of the river for recreational purposes if additional amenities such as docks, boat launches, etc., were provided in Edmonton, 45% said “Yes”, 35% said “No”, and 20% said “Don’t know” .

SURVEY RESULTS

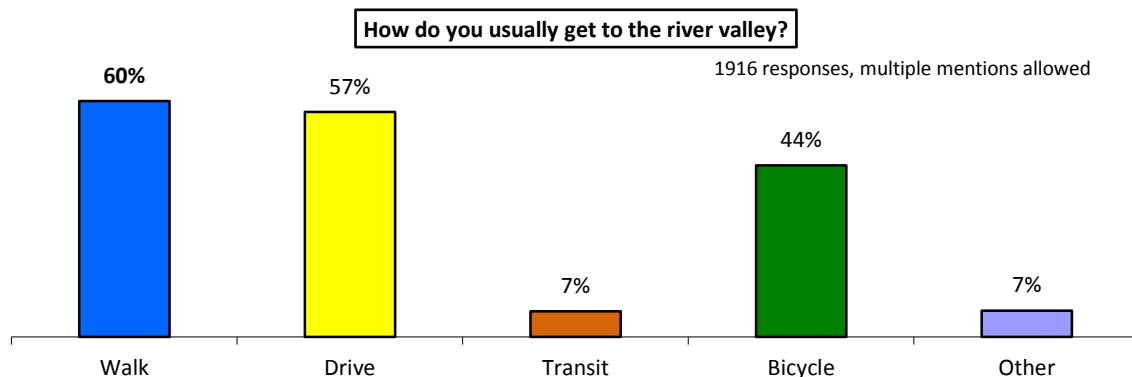
Q1. Frequency of Visitation to Edmonton's River Valley

Almost half of the respondents (48%) to the online survey reported that they visited Edmonton's river valley more than once a week.



Q2. Transportation to the River Valley

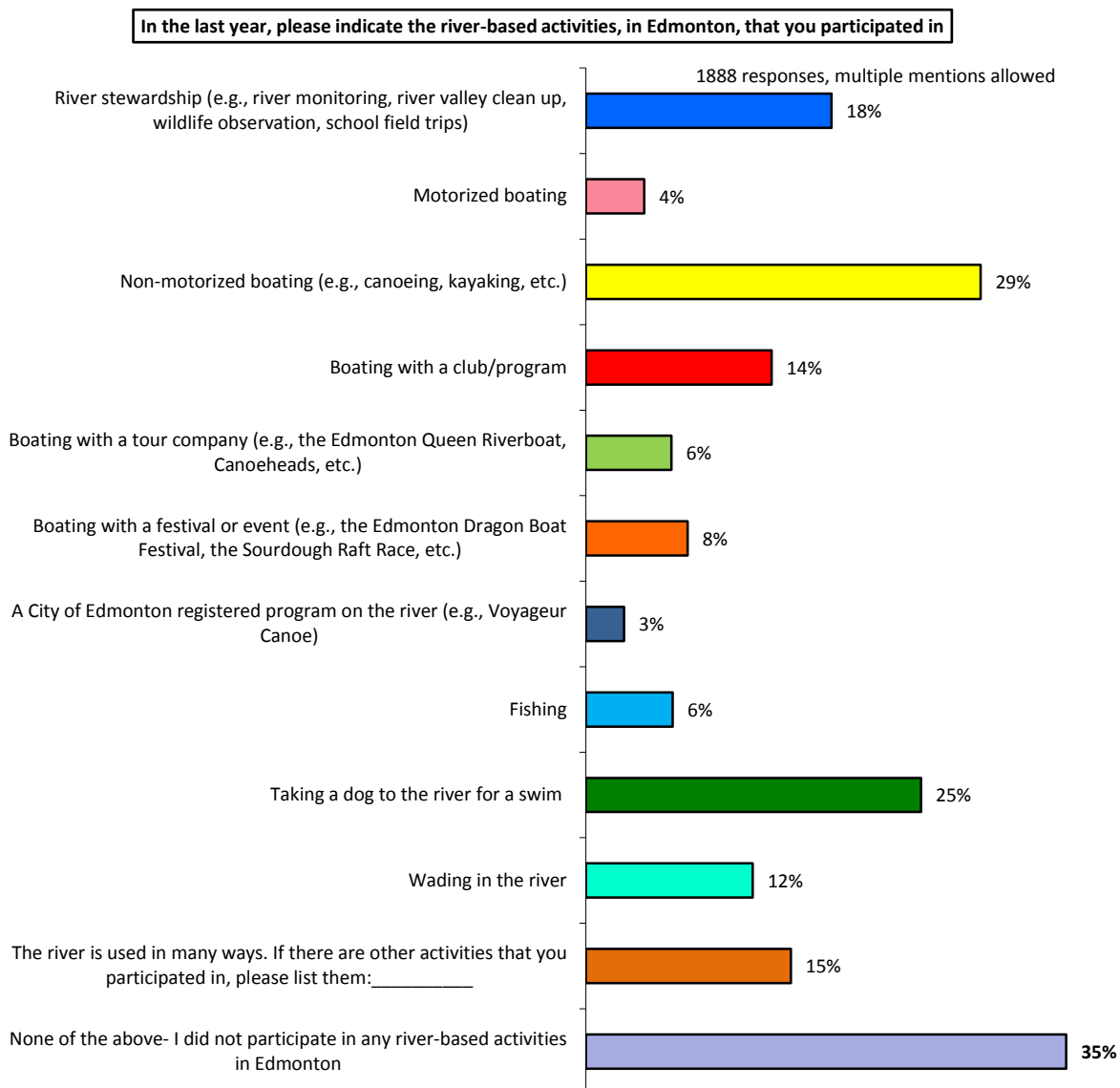
Respondents most frequently walked (60%), drove (57%) and rode their bicycle (44%) to get to the river valley. Under the "other" category, running or jogging was the most frequently mentioned method of getting to the river valley.



Q3. River-Based Activities

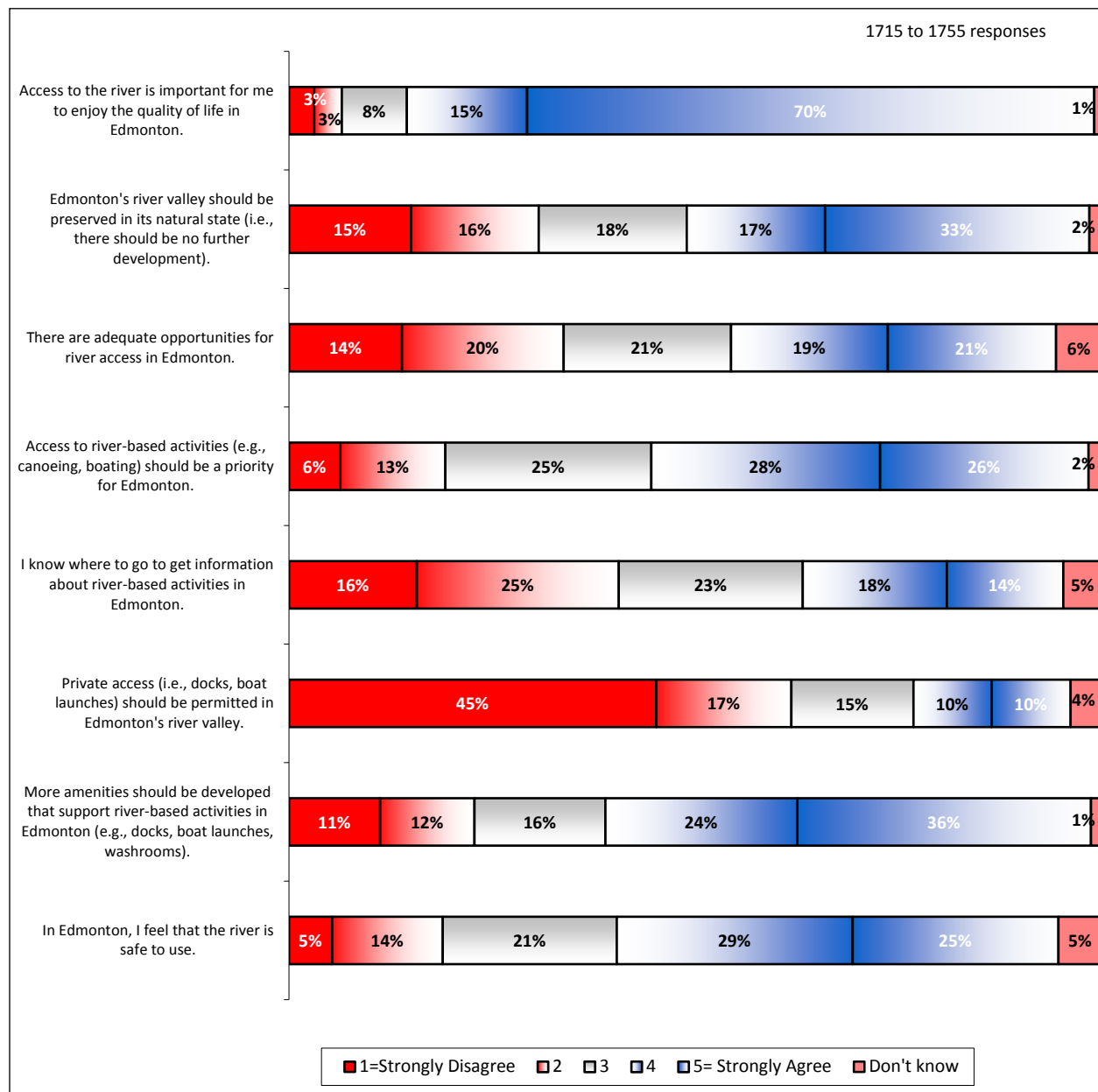
In the past year, over one third of respondents (35%) said that they did not participate in any of the indicated river-based activities. Of those that did participate, respondents most frequently indicated participation in non-motorized boating such as canoeing/kayaking (29%), taking a dog to the river for a swim (25%), or river stewardship (18%).

For “other activities”, respondents also mentioned: walking/hiking, biking, bird/wildlife viewing, boating (general), running/jogging, relaxation, observation, picnicking, rock skipping, photography, dog walking, cross-country skiing, nature appreciation and swimming.



Q4. Opinions About the River

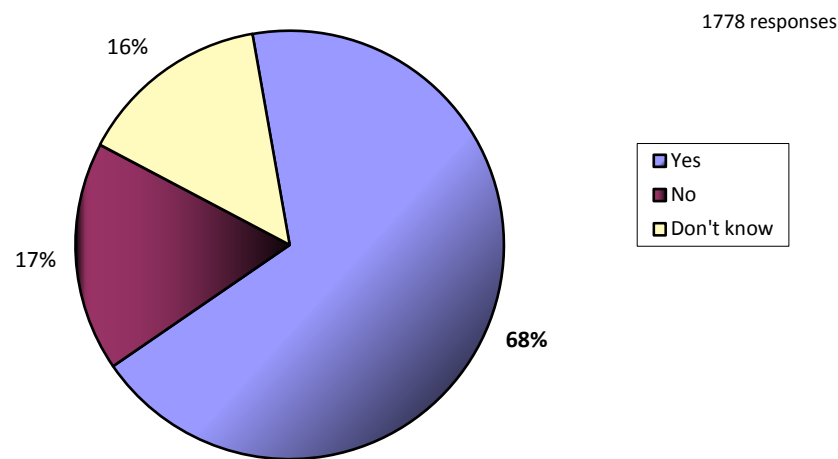
Survey respondents were asked for their opinions on various statements about access to the river, the river valley, river-based activities, private access, amenities and river safety. Respondents gave the strongest level of agreement to the statement "Access to the river is important for me to enjoy the quality of life in Edmonton" (70% gave a rating of "5=Strongly Agree", and an additional 15% gave a rating of "4") and the strongest level of disagreement to "Private access (i.e., docks, boat launches) should be permitted in Edmonton's river valley" (45% gave a rating of "1=Strongly Disagree" and 17% gave a rating of "2").



Q5. Limits on the Types of Activities Allowed on the River

Just less than seven in ten respondents (68%) felt that there should be limits on the type of activities allowed on the river.

In Edmonton, do you feel that there should be limits on the types of activities allowed on the river?



Types of limitations suggested by participants include:

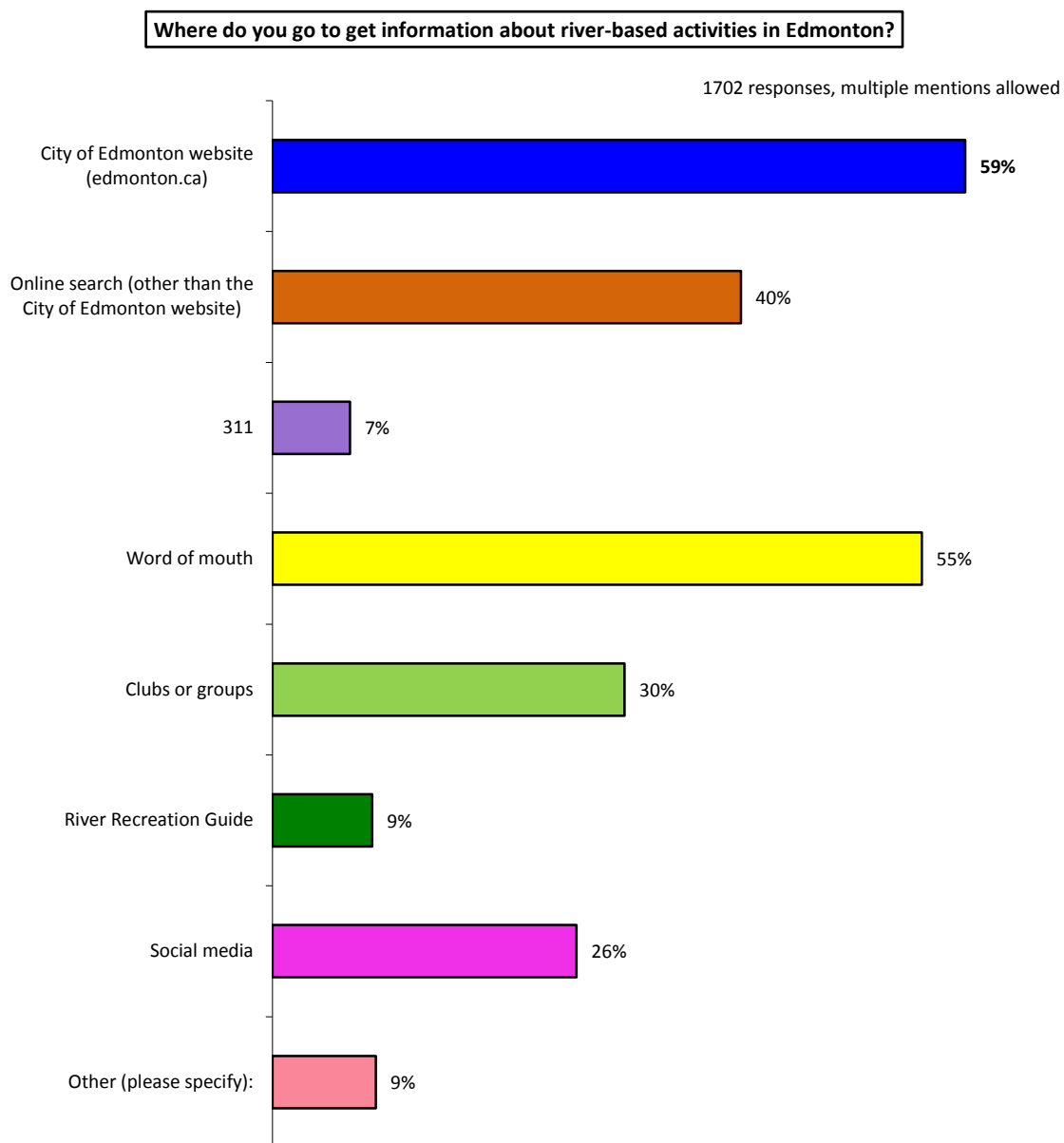
- Motorized boats/watercraft: limit or do not allow (exceptions given by some were for emergency rescue and for the Edmonton Queen Riverboat)
- Ecological/environmental protection
- Noise
- Safety

Additional comments included:

- Adding amenities/development in and around the river (including: docks, boat launches, viewpoints, bridges, trails, year round activities, restaurants, coffee shops, cafés, boardwalks/river walks, washrooms, canoe/kayak rentals, a market, a beach, parking, storage, sporting facilities, a canal, Rossdale area development, and signage)
- Emphasizing non-motorized activities (some gave exceptions of emergency rescue and the Edmonton Queen Riverboat)
- More monitoring/police enforcement

Q6. Sources of Information About Edmonton River-Based Activities

The two most frequently used information sources that respondents go to for information about river-based activities in Edmonton was the City of Edmonton website (59%) and word of mouth (55%). This was followed by online searches other than the City of Edmonton website (40%), clubs or groups (30%) and social media (26%).

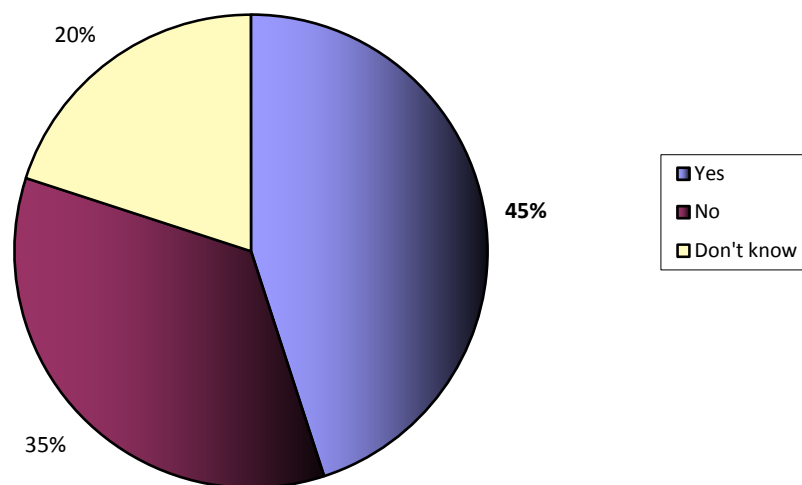


Q7. More Use of the River for Recreational Purposes if Additional Amenities were Provided

When asked if they would make more use of the river for recreational purposes if additional amenities such as docks, boat launches, etc. were provided in Edmonton, 45% said “yes”, 35% said “no”, and an additional 20% said “don’t know”.

Would you make more use of the river for recreational purposes if additional amenities such as docks, boat launches, etc., were provided in Edmonton?

1737 responses



Comments included:

- Development/other amenities including: rentals for canoes, kayaks, boats, bikes, fishing gear, cross-country skis, snowshoes, etc.; washrooms; parking; restaurants; cafés; picnic areas/sites; coffee shops/tea houses; more activities/opportunities in general; walking/hiking/biking trails; shuttle service and one-way options for using the river
- Access for non-motorized activities
- That access is already good
- Keep in its natural state/no further development
- Offering more access points (docks and boat launches, take-off and landing sites)
- Improving and maintaining accesses
- Noise concerns
- Safety concerns
- Access for disability/mobility/seniors/strollers

Q8. Additional Comments and Suggestions About River Access in Edmonton

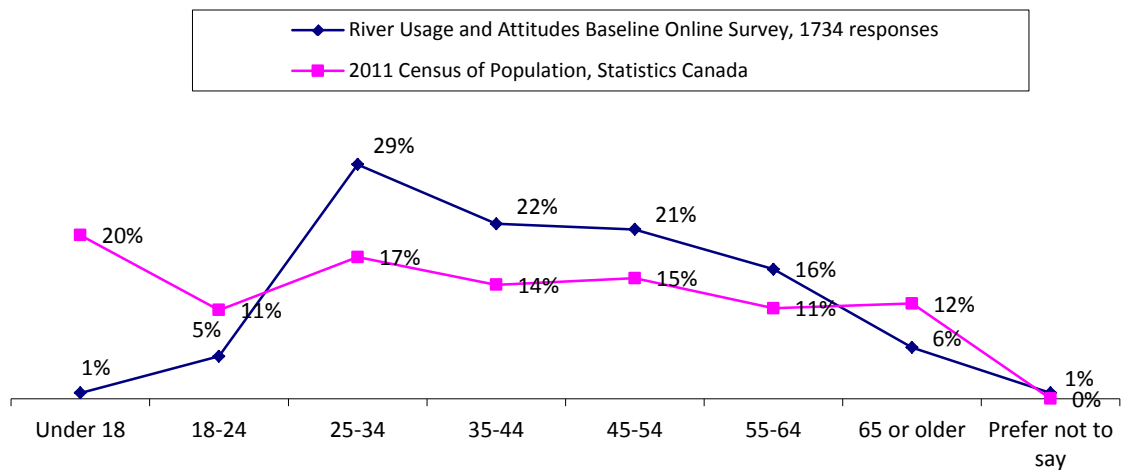
There were 691 additional comments and suggestions that were provided on the survey. Some of the themes from the comments included:

- Allowing for some development with new amenities (e.g., washrooms, picnic tables, food stands, cafés/restaurants, boat launches and docks, shuttles, boat rentals, equipment rentals, a beach, walking bridges, parking and bus terminals)
- The current river valley system should be preserved (i.e., protecting the green space)
- Better maintenance and enforcement of the river and the river valley (i.e., make it accessible for all ages/capabilities and in all seasons, install better signage/maps/wayfinding, clean up the river and the river valley, have park rangers for dealing with coyotes, irresponsible dog owners, illegal camping and safety)
- Location/club specific comments (e.g., from the Edmonton Dragon Boat Club, Edmonton Rowing Club, etc., and for locations such as Dawson Park, Louise McKinney Park, etc.)
- Limit the use of motor/power boats/watercraft (with concerns to noise and safety with other users)
- More public communications and education (regarding: river safety, water quality, riverside activities and events, history, environment, respectful water use, etc.)
- More extensive development (e.g., such as Paris, Milan, Prague, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Calgary, etc.)

DEMOGRAPHICS

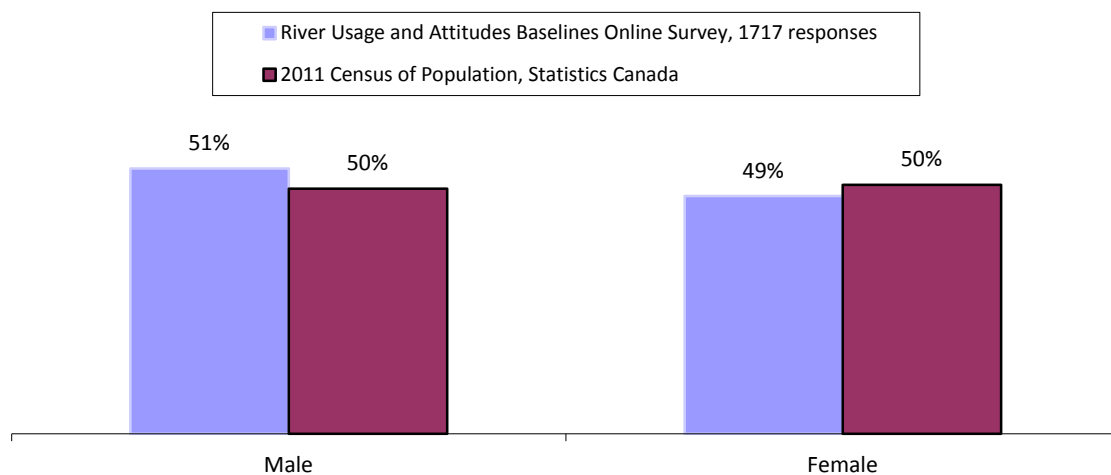
Age

From the River Usage and Attitudes Baseline Online Survey, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 25 to 54 years old (29% were 25-34, 22% were 35-44, and 21% were 45-54).



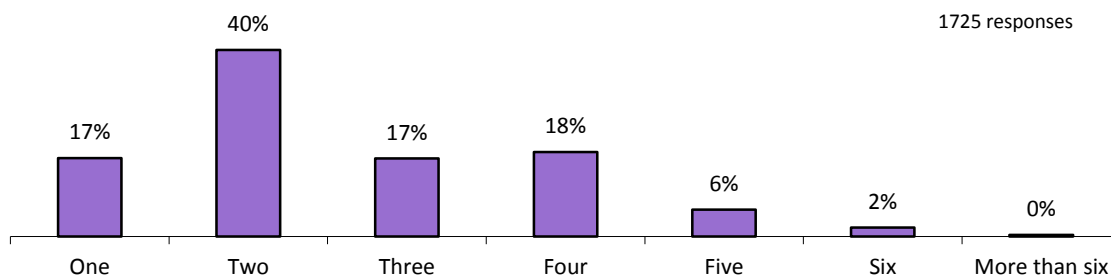
Gender

There was a fairly equal response from males (51%) and females (49%).



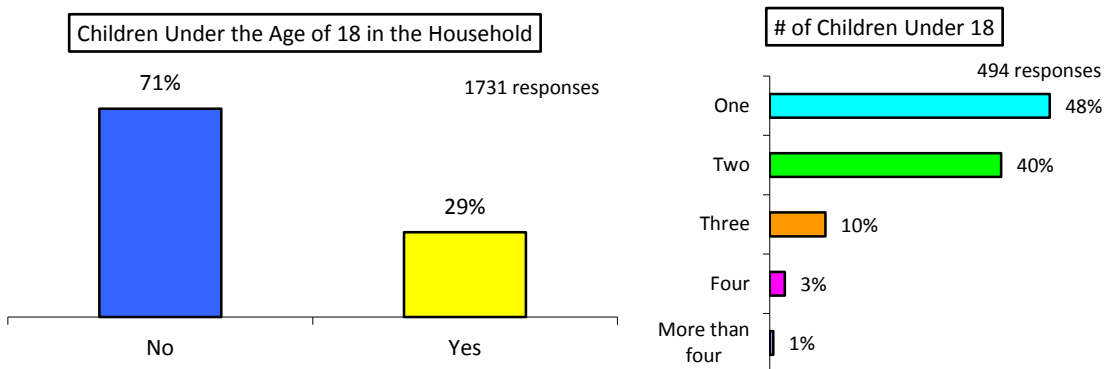
Number of People in the Household

The most frequently mentioned number of people in the household was two people (40%).



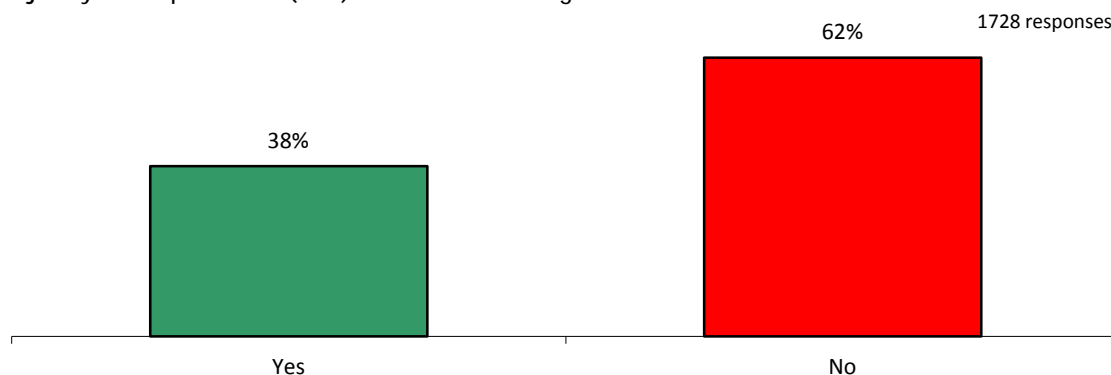
Children Under the Age of 18 in the Household

The majority of the respondents (71%) do not have children under the age of 18 in the household. Of those that do, almost half (48%) have one child under 18, and a further 38% have two children.



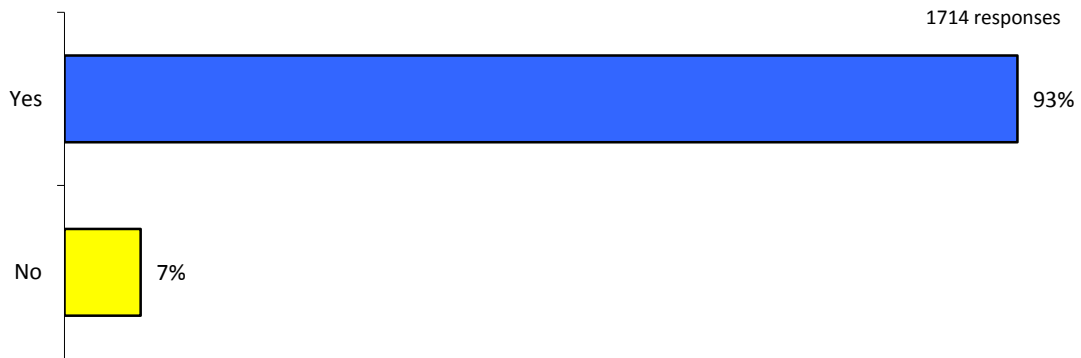
Dog Ownership

The majority of respondents (62%) did not own a dog.



Residents of Edmonton

The vast majority of respondents (93%) were residents of Edmonton.



Proximity to the River Valley

Almost three-quarters of the respondents (73%) live under 5 km away from the river valley (37% live under 1 km away, and 36% live between 1 and 5 km away).

