

# Responsive Management



## **UNDERSTANDING THE GEORGIA PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF WATER ISSUES AND THE MOTIVATIONAL MESSAGES TO WHICH THEY WILL RESPOND**

### **Executive Summary**

**Conducted for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources**

**by Responsive Management**

**2003**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report summarizes the telephone survey results that are part of a larger study conducted for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Pollution Prevention Assistance Division (GDNR) to determine the public's perception of water quality and quantity, as well as the message themes to which they will respond in a water conservation campaign. Prior to the telephone survey, three pre-survey focus groups were conducted with the Georgia public to better understand Georgia residents' attitudes and opinions toward water resource issues in Georgia, Georgia residents' willingness to participate in water conservation measures, and incentives and barriers to water conservation in Georgia. The next phase of this study will be to conduct post-survey focus groups with the Georgia public to refine and test message themes.

## **IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCE/ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

- Water quality and quantity are perceived to be two of the most important “top-of-mind” natural resource/environmental issues facing Georgia. When asked to name the most important natural resource/environmental issues facing Georgia in an open-ended question, water quality and quantity were named the two most important issues. However, in a series of closed-ended questions, water quality was ranked the top issue followed by air quality and then water quantity.

## **WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY ISSUES**

### **Water Quality**

- Georgia's waterways are perceived to have problems, with an overwhelming majority being concerned about water quality and the effects poor water quality will have on drinking water and people's health.

### **Water Quantity and Water Use**

- Although water quantity was not perceived to be as much of a problem as water quality, it was, nonetheless, still perceived as a problem. People's concerns with water quantity related to its effects on humans more so than its effects on the environment. Also, although respondents thought that industry is a large user of water in Georgia, residential use was considered significant.

## **Overall Efforts to Conserve Water and Attitudes Toward Water Conservation**

- In general, respondents said that they make an effort to conserve water, said that they believe that their personal efforts make a difference, and said that they support the statewide water conservation effort. They also, in general, feel that water conservation is important, even when the state is not experiencing a drought. Their reasons for being concerned about water conservation related more to how conservation will affect them personally rather than how it may benefit the environment. Finally, those who disagreed that they can personally make a difference in water conservation felt that way because they do not believe that residential users use much water or they do not know what they can do to conserve water.

## Respondents' Willingness to Do Specific Water Conservation Efforts

- Respondents were asked whether or not they had *already* undertaken 13 specific water conservation actions. The top actions that respondents most commonly said they had *already* undertaken were to wash only full loads of clothes and dishes (75%), not let water run unnecessarily (65%), water the lawn infrequently (59%), and wash their car less frequently or not at all (59%).
- Respondents were also asked about their likelihood to undertake 13 specific actions to conserve water. Four actions had a majority saying that they would be *very or somewhat* likely to do that action: install water efficient hose nozzles for outside garden hoses (60%), install water efficient washing machines and dishwashers (56%), practice drought-resistant landscaping, known as xeriscaping (52%), and install a rain sensor on their irrigation system (52%). Also with fairly high percentages having said that they would be very or somewhat likely to do, although slightly less than a majority, were to install water saving devices in the toilet (46%), to install water efficient showerheads (44%), and to routinely check fixtures for leaks (43%). Note that these are the same top seven actions, although in different order, that respondents would be very likely to do. (Note that this analysis removed those who answered “not applicable” so that the results are among those who could take the action.)

## Respondents' Perception of Reasons Preventing Them from Conserving Water

- Respondents were asked about 17 factors that might prevent them from undertaking water conservation efforts. The top answer was that respondents did not receive feedback on whether their conservation efforts are effective (33% said that they strongly agree and 50% said that they strongly or moderately agree that this is a reason preventing them from conserving water). Another important answer was that the respondent did not think he/she was wasting water (28% said they strongly agree). The next most commonly given factors preventing the respondent from conserving water relate to the perception that residential users do not use enough water to make a difference: “I think businesses and commercial establishments use too much water (23% said they strongly agree that this prevents them from conserving water),” “I don’t think the state government itself is doing enough to conserve water (18%),” “I think that industry uses too much water (18%),” “I don’t think the state has an adequate statewide conservation plan in place (16%),” and “I think that institutional users use too much water (14%).”

## Incentives and Penalties to Encourage Conservation of Water

- Respondents were asked about 21 factors that would encourage them to conserve water. The health of their children (91%) and their own health (89%) were the two top items that would make respondents very likely to conserve water. The next item also related to the respondent personally: knowing a severe water supply crisis could happen during their lifetime (88%). The next three items are fairly altruistic: knowing they could help protect the quality of life for future generations (85%), knowing that water is a limited resource (85%), and knowing

that the health of the environment was at stake (84%). The final item that had a markedly higher percentage of respondents, relative to the rest of the items, saying it would be very likely to encourage them to conserve water directly related to them personally: knowing they could save money on their water bill.

### **Management of Water and State Efforts to Conserve Water**

- Respondents, for the most part, did not know which agency is primarily responsible for managing the water they use in Georgia, and they were split over whether the State is doing enough to conserve water in Georgia.

### **Water Conservation Tips in Water Bills**

- In general, water conservation tips in water bills are read at least sometimes by those who receive them.

### **MEMBERSHIP IN CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND/OR SPORTSMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS**

Overwhelming majorities of respondents (90% or more) were not members of a conservation, environmental, or sportsmen's organization. The National Rifle Association had the highest membership percentage (4% named the NRA as a sportsmen's organization to which they belonged). The Sierra Club had the highest membership percentage as a conservation or environmental organization (2% named the Sierra Club as an environmental organization to which they belonged).