

Possibilities of Place: Awareness and Perceptions of the White Lake and Muskegon Lake Areas of Concern

2016 AOC Conference

Overview



In Spring and Summer 2014, Avenue ISR conducted extensive research to determine fundamental attitudes toward Muskegon Lake and White Lake, two of the Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOCs)

The results of this research has been used to inform investments, communications and other initiatives to strengthen the AOCs and their communities.

Study Objectives

Determine answers to the following

1. To what extent are potential visitors aware of Muskegon Lake and White Lake at all relative to other destinations in Michigan?
2. What are the positive and negative associations with the two lakes, relative to other destinations for both community members and prospective visitors to the area?
3. To what extent do current perceptions and associations “ladder up” to decision making – recreational uses, choosing to live here, starting a business?
4. To what extent are these audiences aware of the status of White Lake and Muskegon Lake as Areas of Concern and aware of the progress that’s been made?
5. To what extent are residents willing to take personal action to achieve continuing improvement of the AOCs?

Research findings derived from qualitative and quantitative methods.

Qualitative Research (28 in-person interviews with community members and leaders; group conversations with the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership and White Lake Public Advisory Council; literature review of related studies)

Objectives:

- Understand general impressions of the AOCs
- Identify important stakeholder groups
- Establish hypotheses and open questions for quantitative research

Quantitative Research (428 responses to Muskegon Lake Community Survey; 163 responses to White Lake Community Survey; 445 responses to Prospective Visitor Survey)

7. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about White Lake and the White Lake area?

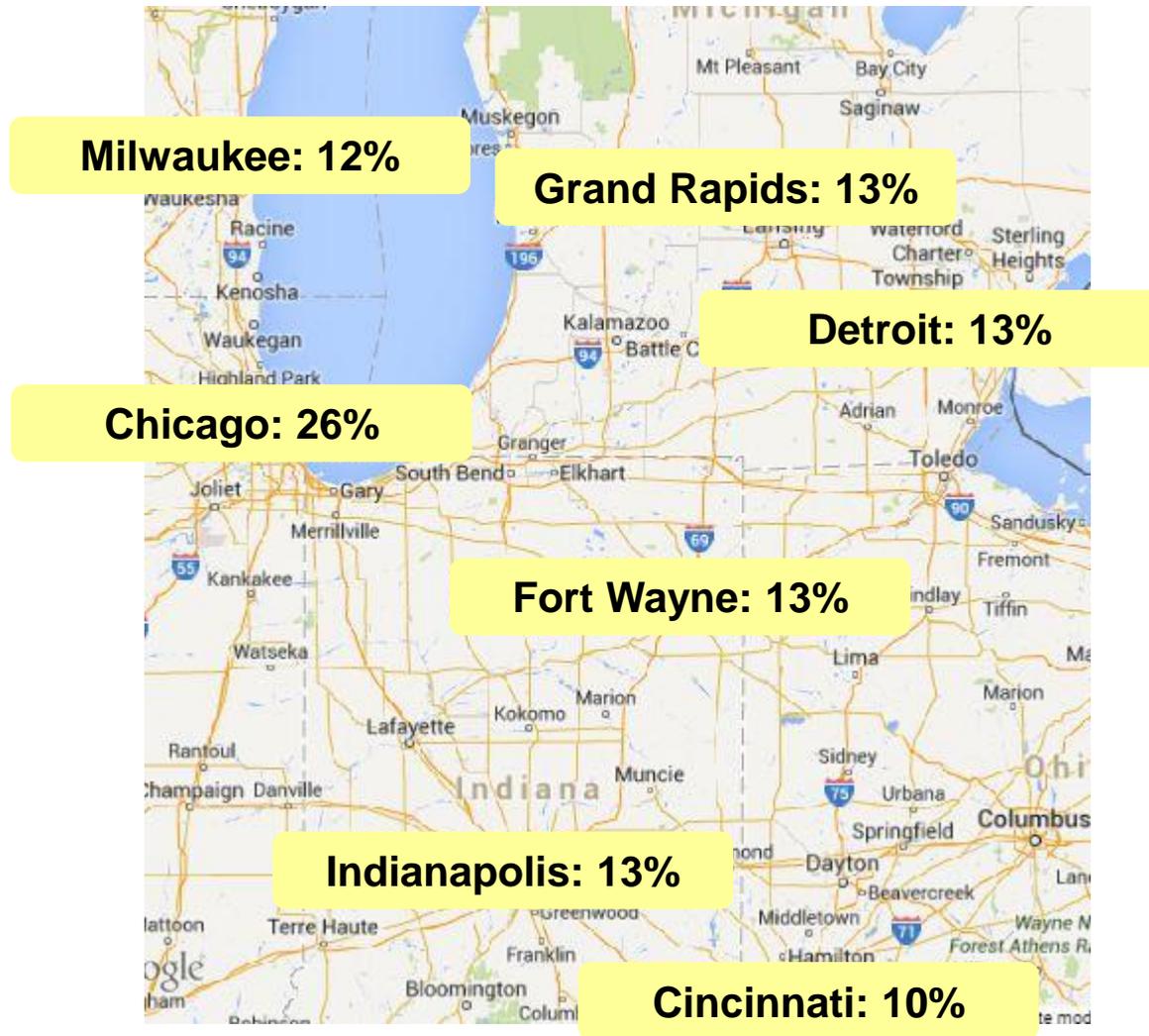
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Not familiar
Good place to live	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good place to start or own a business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good lake for catching fish	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good place to visit for a vacation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good lake for sailing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good lake for swimming	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Objectives:

- Develop in-depth understanding across a range of stakeholder groups
- Test perceptions and attitudes toward AOCs
- Provide deep support for strategic decisions

Survey Participants: Prospective Visitors

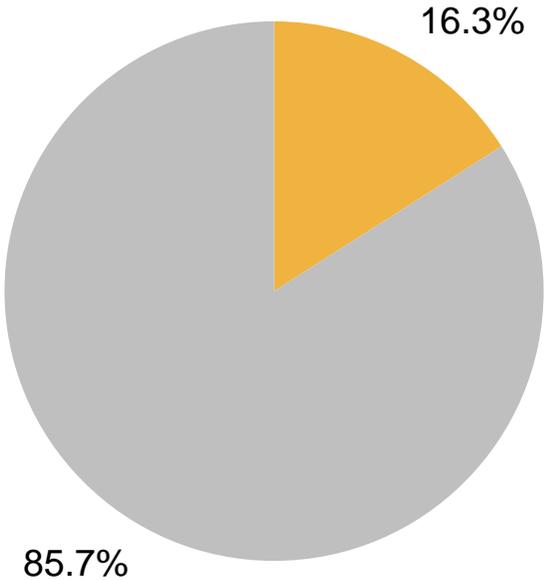
Prospective Visitor Survey Statistics (445 Respondents)



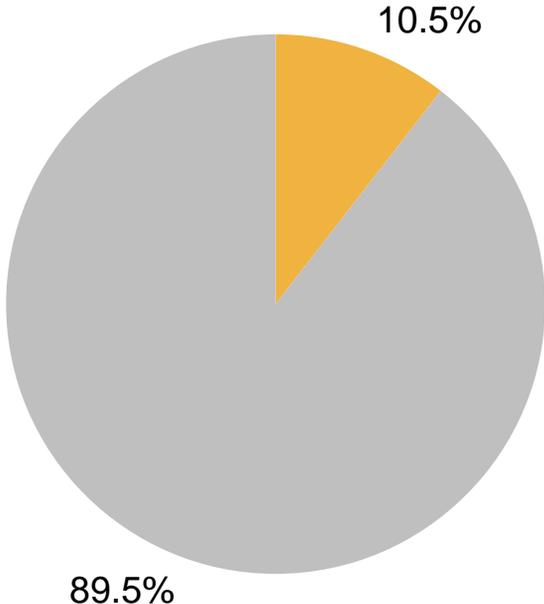
The vast majority of respondents from seven upper Midwestern cities are not familiar with either Muskegon Lake or White Lake at all.

With which of the following bodies of water in Michigan are you at least somewhat familiar?

Muskegon Lake

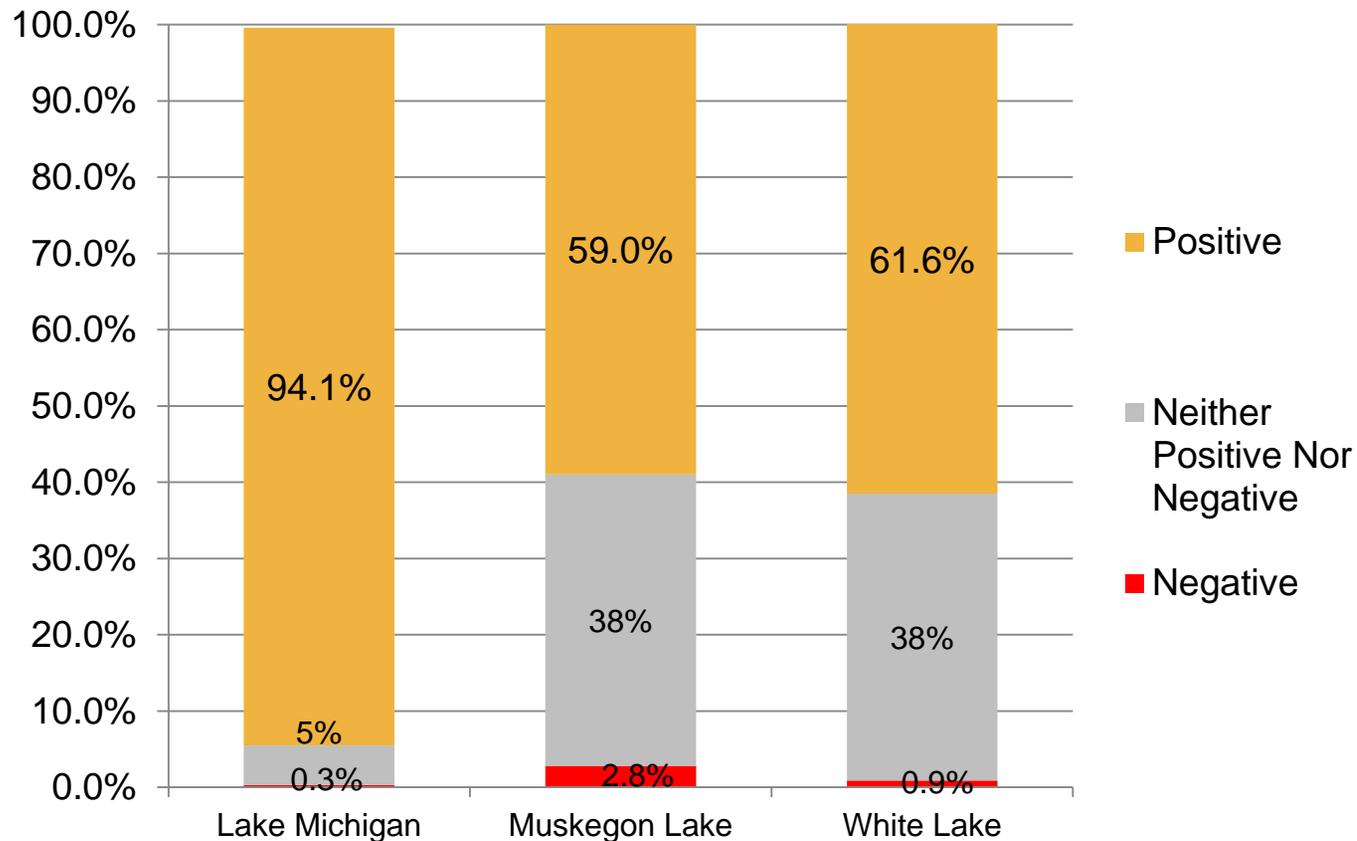


White Lake



Almost all potential visitors to the area have a positive opinion of Muskegon Lake and White Lake or have no strong opinion either way.

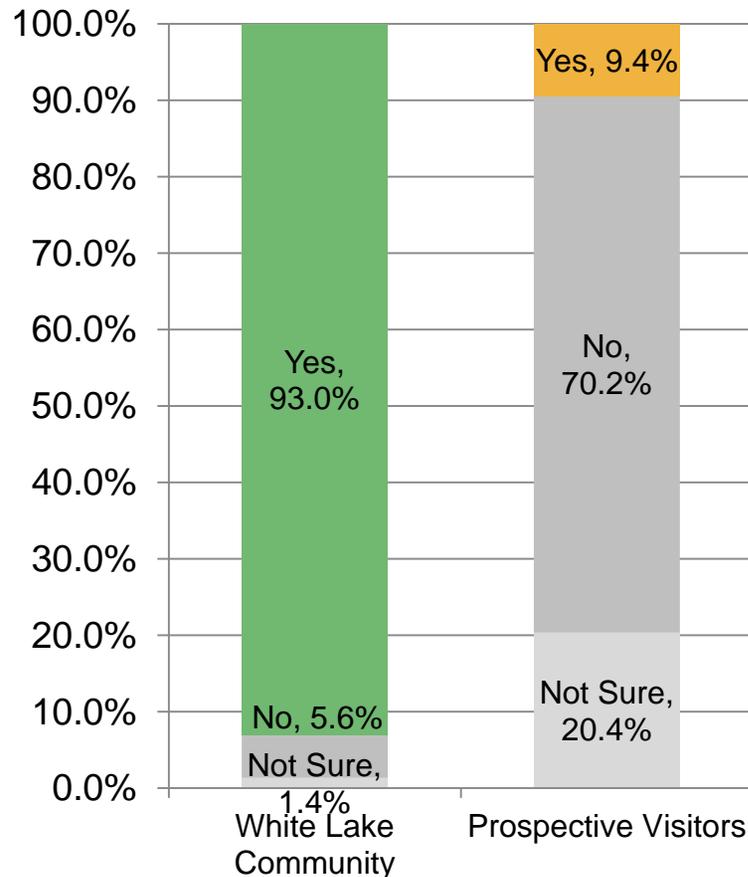
What is your overall opinion of the following bodies of water? [Top 2 Box – Very Positive or Somewhat Positive – for those who indicated they are familiar with these lakes]



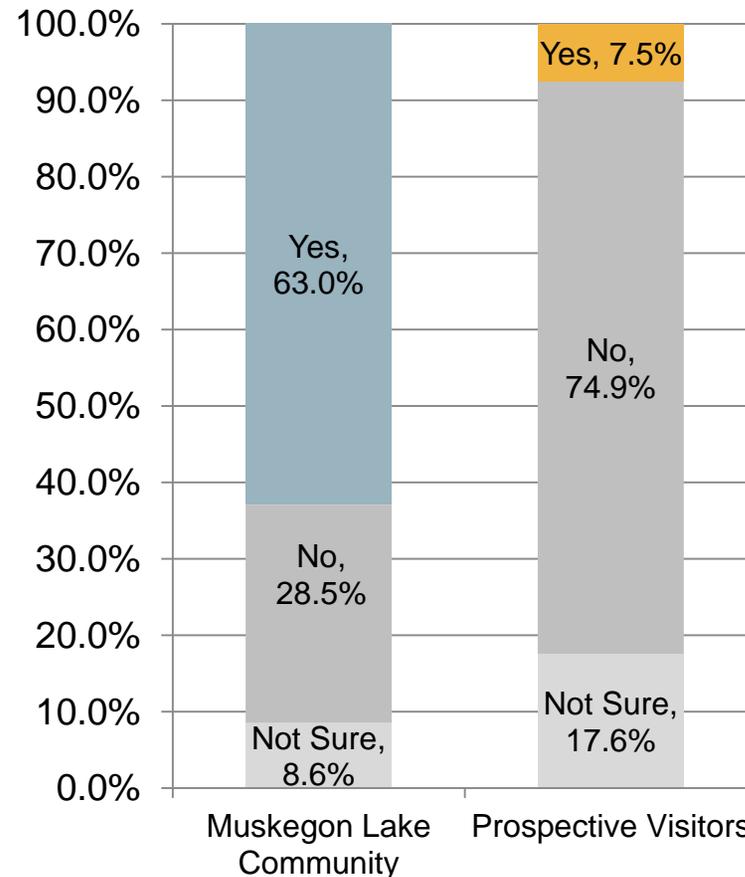
In contrast to to community members, the vast majority of those prospective visitors do not know that White Lake and Muskegon Lake are AOCs.

- Strong majorities in both White Lake and Muskegon Lake communities are aware of their status as AOCs

Were you aware that White Lake was listed as an "Area of Concern" by state and federal agencies in 1985?



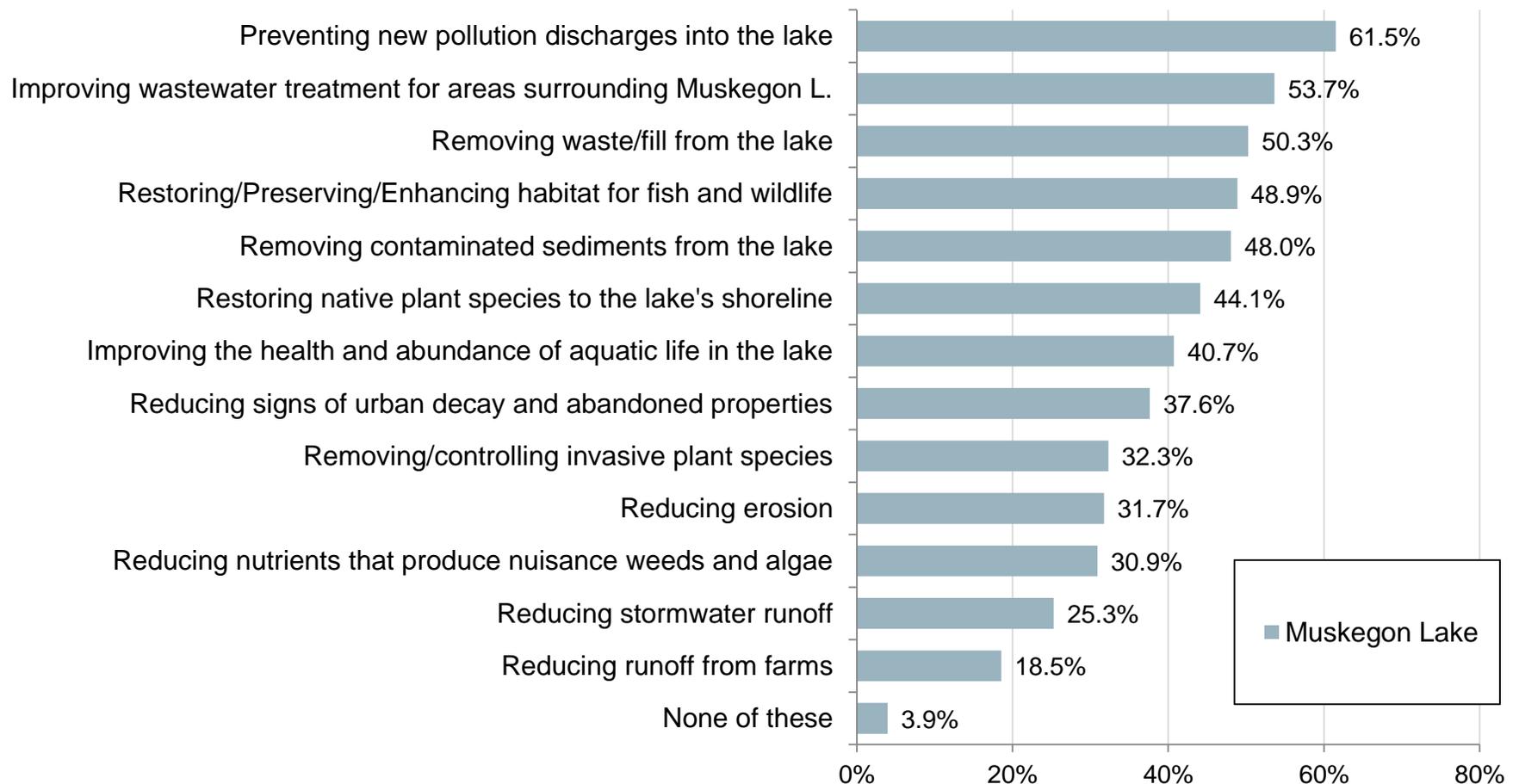
Were you aware that Muskegon Lake was listed as an "Area of Concern" by state and federal agencies in 1985?



Most of the cleanup efforts undertaken by national, state and local partners are widely recognized in the Muskegon Lake community.

- Community members believe they have seen substantial progress across a range of activities and outcomes

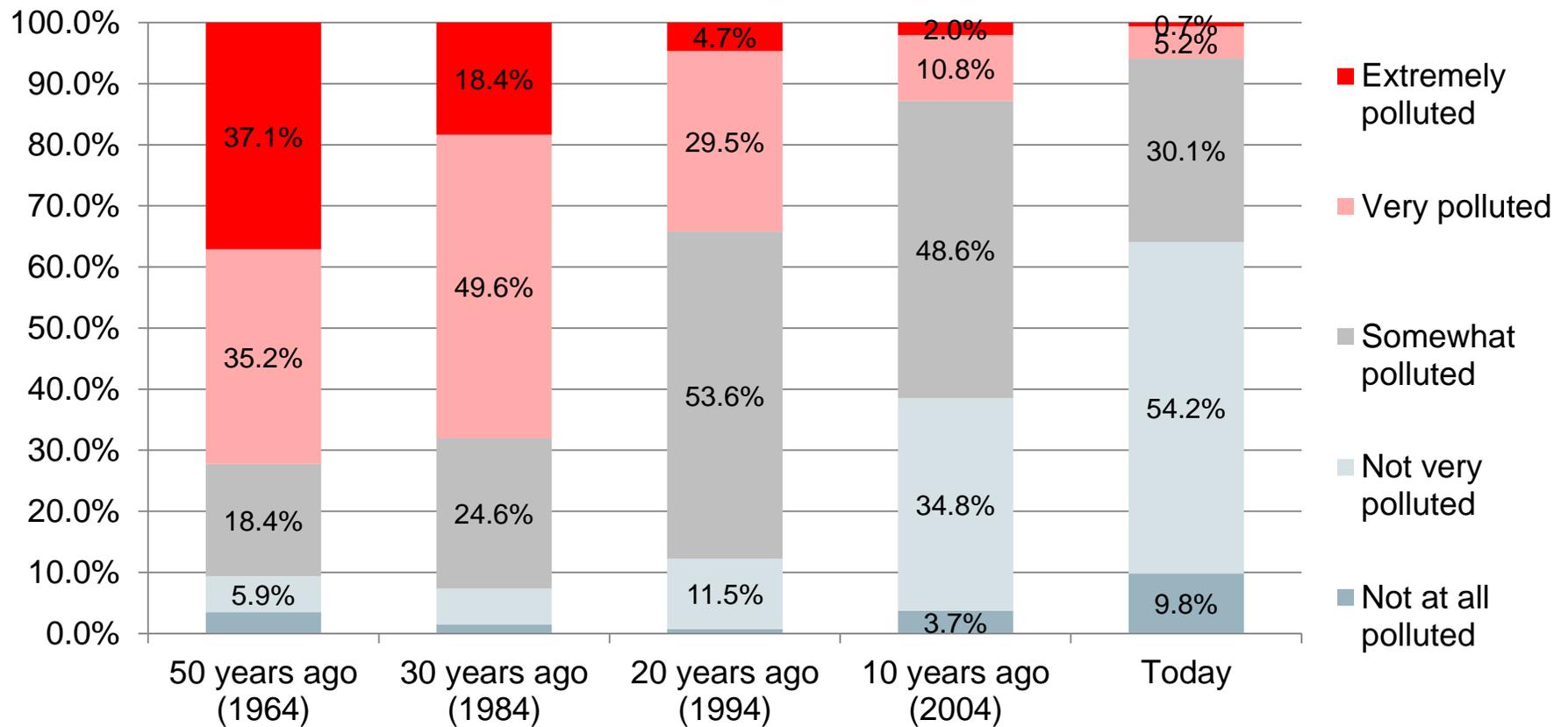
In the past 30 years, which of the following areas (if any) have seen substantial progress?



Muskegon Lake community members have seen substantial progress in reducing overall pollution in Muskegon Lake since 1984 and before.

- Today, just under 6% believe Muskegon Lake is still “extremely” or “very” polluted

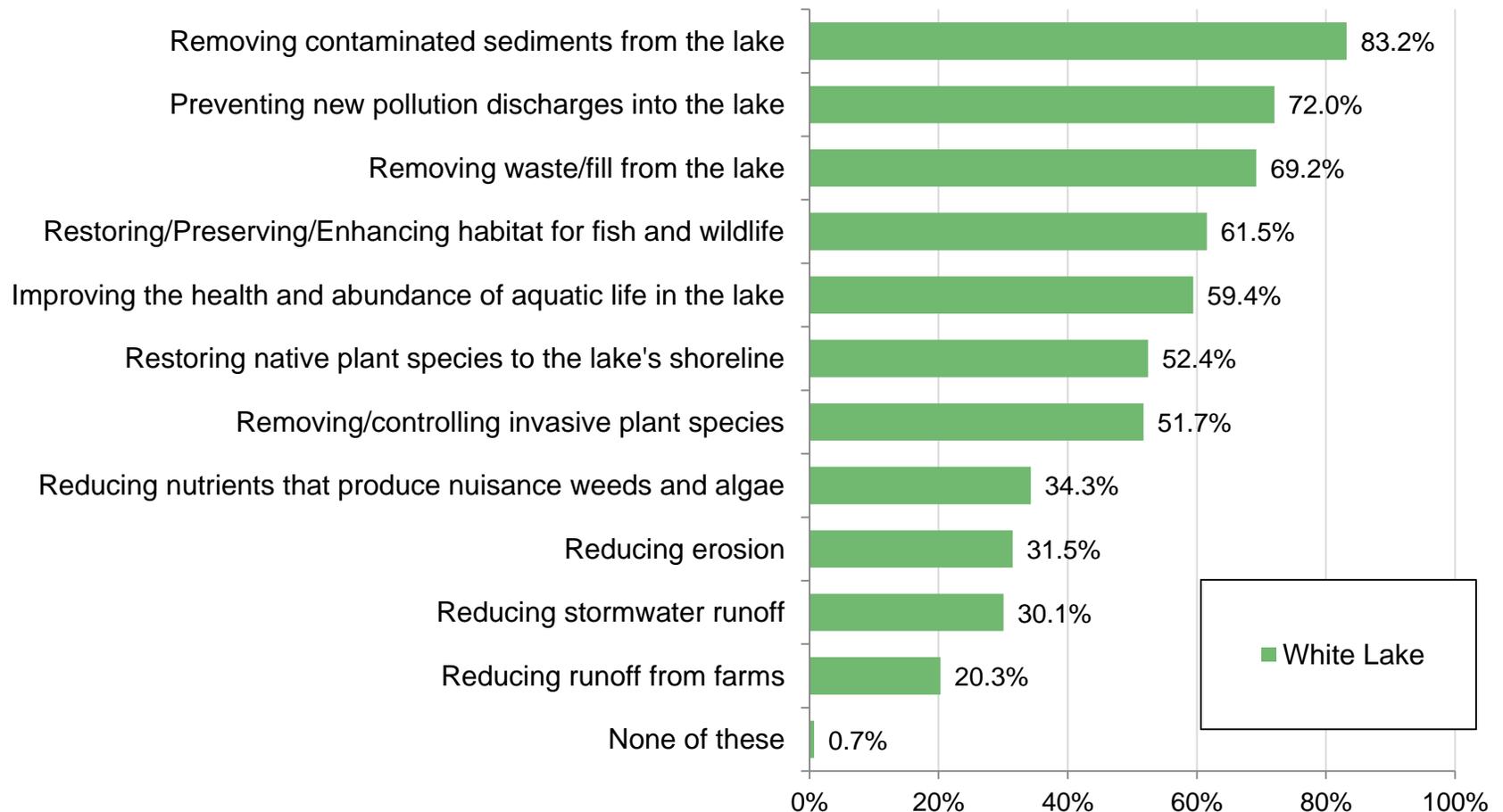
How polluted (if at all) was Muskegon Lake in the past? How polluted (if at all) is it today?



Most of the cleanup efforts undertaken by national, state and local partners are widely recognized in the White Lake community.

- Even more so in the White Lake area, community members believe they have seen substantial progress across a range of activities and outcomes

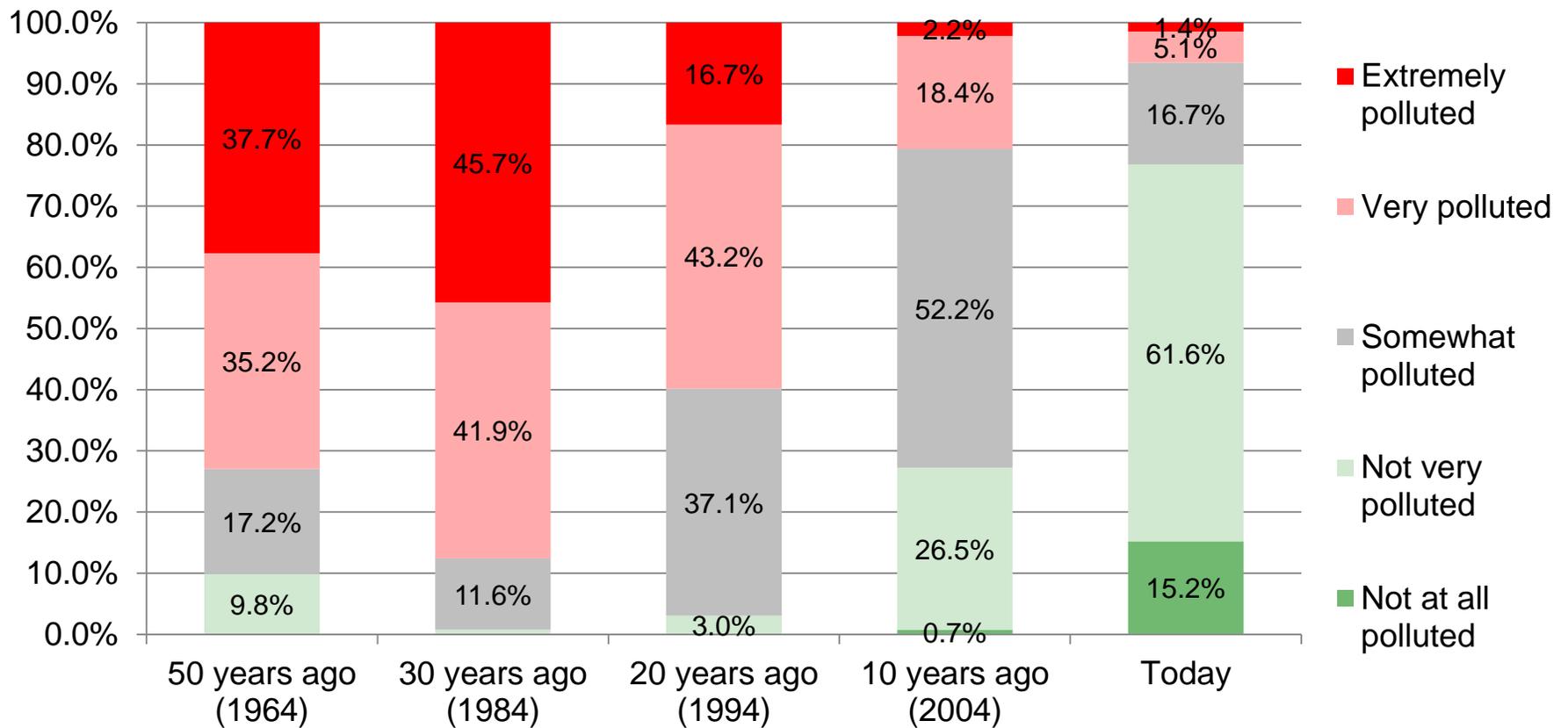
In the past 30 years, which of the following areas (if any) have seen substantial progress?



White Lake community members have seen substantial progress in reducing pollution in White Lake since 1984.

- Nearly 88% of community members would say that White Lake was “very polluted” or “extremely polluted” in 1984; by contrast only 6.5% believe White Lake is “very polluted” or “extremely polluted” today

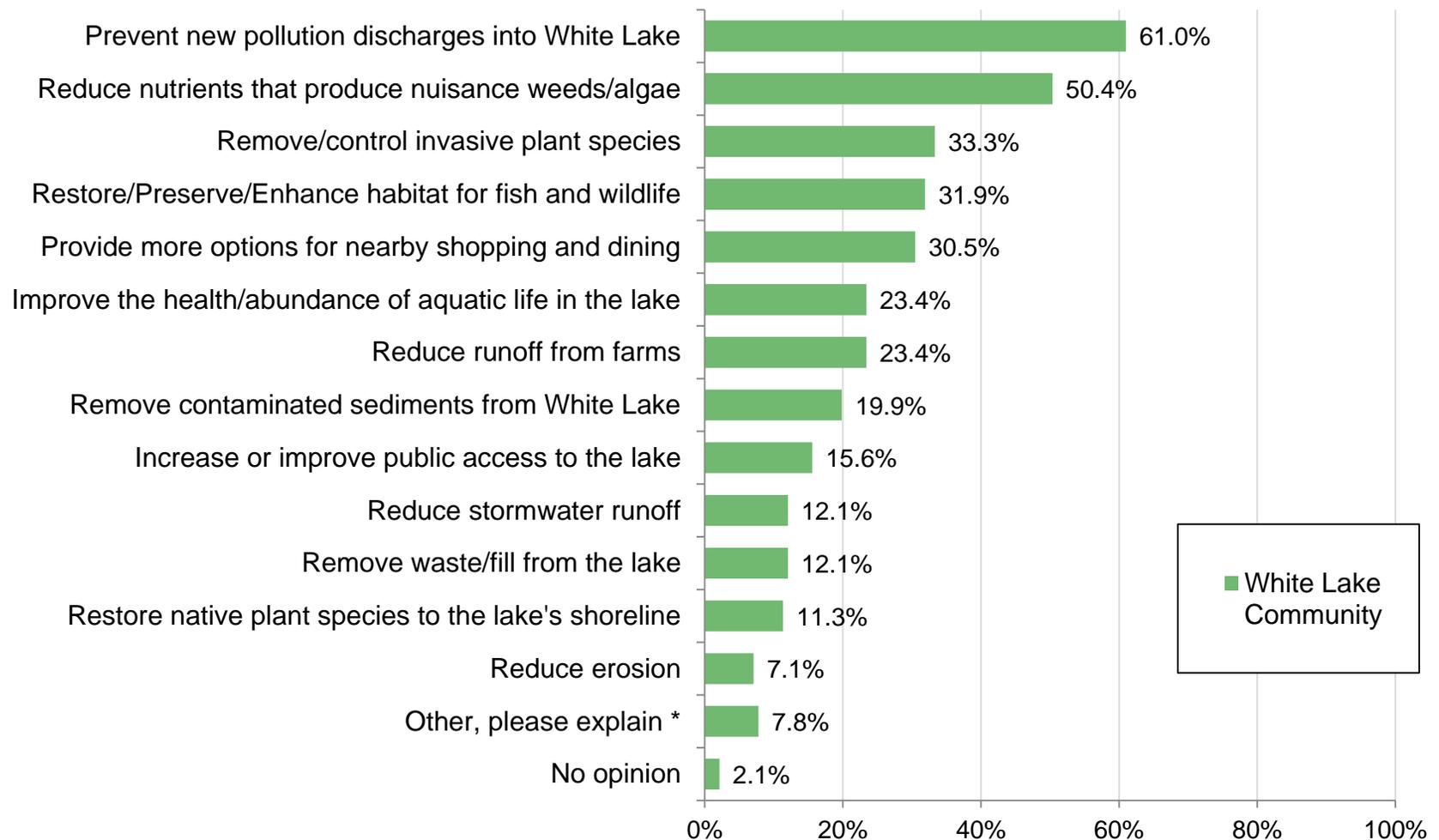
How polluted (if at all) was White Lake in the past? How polluted (if at all) is it today?



White Lake community members are most concerned about preventing new pollution discharges into White Lake and reducing nutrient loading.

- Other priorities fairly quickly fall off

What should be the three biggest priorities for White Lake today? (select up to 3)

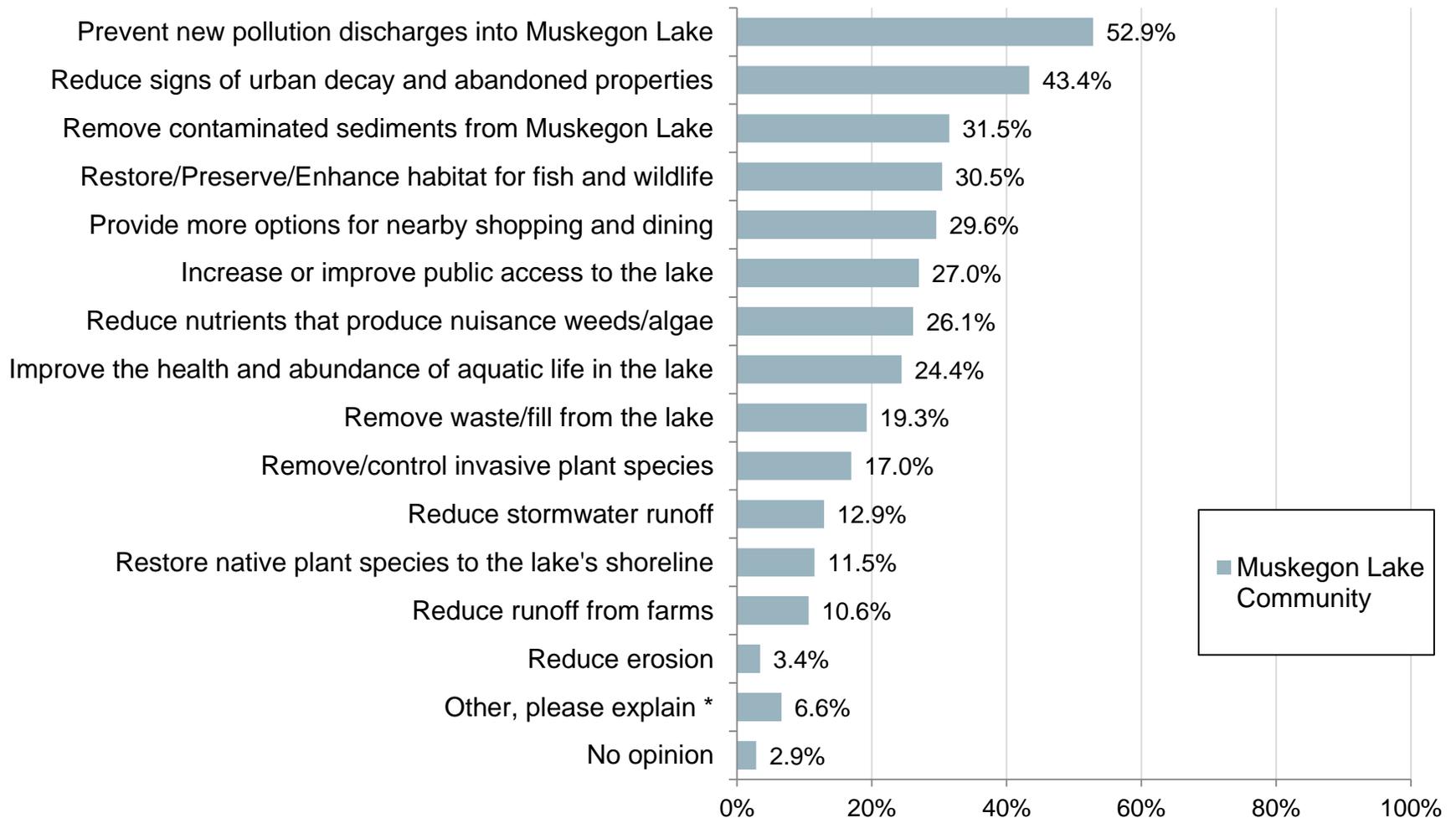


* Other: Weed control, business development of the lakeshore and community

Muskegon Lake community members are most concerned about preventing new pollution discharges into the lake and reducing signs of urban decay.

- Other priorities fairly quickly fall off

What should be the three biggest priorities for Muskegon Lake today? (select up to 3)



* Other: Redevelop Sappi site for mixed use, improve connections between lake front and city

Overall Project Implications

Takeaways

1. For many prospective visitors (and new residents and entrepreneurs), there is an opportunity to start with a clean slate.
2. The focus of ongoing communications and engagement efforts about Areas of Concern should focus on community members.
3. Community members may be very aware of the status and progress of Areas of Concern.
4. They are likely to believe that progress on clean-up directly translates to improved quality of life and health.
5. Even when Areas of Concern are on the verge of de-listing, community members believe there is still work to do, both in terms of cleanup and in terms of lakeshore access and amenities.
6. Community members are willing to do some hands on work to help with ongoing cleanup efforts.

Use This Information To:

- Celebrate success and bring focus to the good work of PACs and communities
- Develop strategic and action plans
- Develop communication plans

Thank You!

