



Opinion Research
Strategic Communication

Detroit Area Residents and Environmentalism

Report of a Public Opinion Survey Conducted for the Detroit Zoological Society and Partner Organizations

July 2015

Introduction

The Detroit Zoological Society asked Belden Russonello Strategists to conduct public opinion research among residents of the Detroit area, to establish a benchmark of their environmental attitudes and behavior.

The survey was conducted among adults, ages 18 and older who currently reside in the four-county area of Michigan that includes Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw, and Wayne. Data were collected online using the Harris Poll Online panel and three other commercial panels, and the survey was fielded June 10 to 24, 2015. Figures for education, age by gender, race/ethnicity, household income and county were weighted, where necessary, to ensure representativeness of the population of adults age 18 and older, to conform to US Census data for the four-county area.

The following report includes an executive summary and detailed findings. Appendices include the topline questionnaire with response totals, tables showing the demographic cross tabulations, and a full methodology.

Executive summary

The 2015 survey describes a population in the four counties around Detroit that has a middling personal commitment to environmental concerns, but nonetheless is very supportive of public policies to protect the environment.

- **Pro-green attitudes outpace green lifestyles.** Most residents agree that individual actions play an important role in protecting the environment, and fully half feel that way strongly. A large majority say that they have an impact on the quality of the waterways around them, and most people report making some effort to practice environmentally friendly living at home—for instance, by recycling and turning off the lights when they leave a room.
- Yet very few area residents take steps beyond these, for instance, by routinely carpooling or riding a bike to work or school or choosing their diets with the environment in mind.

The survey shows broad support for more pro-green policies, although environmental issues will not necessarily dictate voting habits. Few are willing to assert firmly that they would oppose a political candidate on the basis of his or her anti-environmental positions alone. Yet very high majorities feel stronger environmental regulation is needed, and most disagree with the notion that excessive environmental regulations are hurting the economy. At least four-fifths of residents support expanding bottle-return requirements, reducing the amount of packaging manufacturers use, and requiring conservation education in K-12 schools.

- **Most area residents spend some free time in nature.** People living in and around Detroit tend to go to parks, lakes, zoos and aquariums at least some of the time. A strong majority has been to a lake or an outdoor recreation area more than once in the past two years, and slightly fewer have been to a zoo or an aquarium. Zoo attendance and outdoor leisure activities are most common among parents, residents in their 30s, and residents in households making at least \$75,000 a year.

- **Across the board, members of the Detroit Zoo are more environmentally friendly.** Most have contributed to a conservation group in the past two years, and they are likely to get involved in political and environmental campaigns — whereas the general population is not. Zoo members are also likelier to let environmental issues dictate their choice for a political candidate, with three-quarters of members saying they would vote against a candidate solely based on his or her anti-environmental views.
- **Political affiliation makes a big difference in environmental views.** While differences in age, income and other variables show up on some questions, the one constant is party identification. Democrats repeatedly show more green views and behaviors throughout the survey – followed by independents; and Republicans are the most reluctant to endorse environmental stands.

Detailed Findings

A. Attitudes

Personal role: Most residents of Detroit and its surrounding counties who took part in the survey believe in the importance of environmental stewardship, and think that the little things in one's daily routine matter to the environment.

- When presented with the statement, "In the grand scheme of things, turning off the lights and/or recycling is not that important to protecting the environment," 76% disagree (43% strongly, and 34% somewhat). Yet many feel only mildly concerned about that role. For example, 90% agree that as a member of society, it is important "to do my part to protect the environment," but only 50% feel that way strongly.
- Seventy-eight percent agree that "My actions impact the water quality in our lakes, rivers and streams," but only 37% agree strongly with this statement, and two in ten (22%) disagree.
- Thinking about food, most say they would choose organic food if the cost were the same: 46% feel that way strongly, and 33% somewhat.

Personal impact: Most area residents in the study see a direct link between the environment and their own well-being.

- Seventy-seven percent of respondents disagree with the statement, "I do not think that air or water pollution is a threat to my health and/or my family's health" (47% strongly disagree, 30% somewhat). Only eight percent strongly agree and 15% agree somewhat with this idea.

The importance of regulation: A great majority is in agreement that stronger environmental regulation is needed.

- Eighty-one percent say that the statement "We need strong environmental regulations to stop companies from producing pollution and greenhouse gases" represents their own view; 45% agree strongly and 36% somewhat.
- When a similar question is asked in the negative, and without mention of pollution and greenhouse gases, support for regulation remains — but at a lower level: 63% disagree

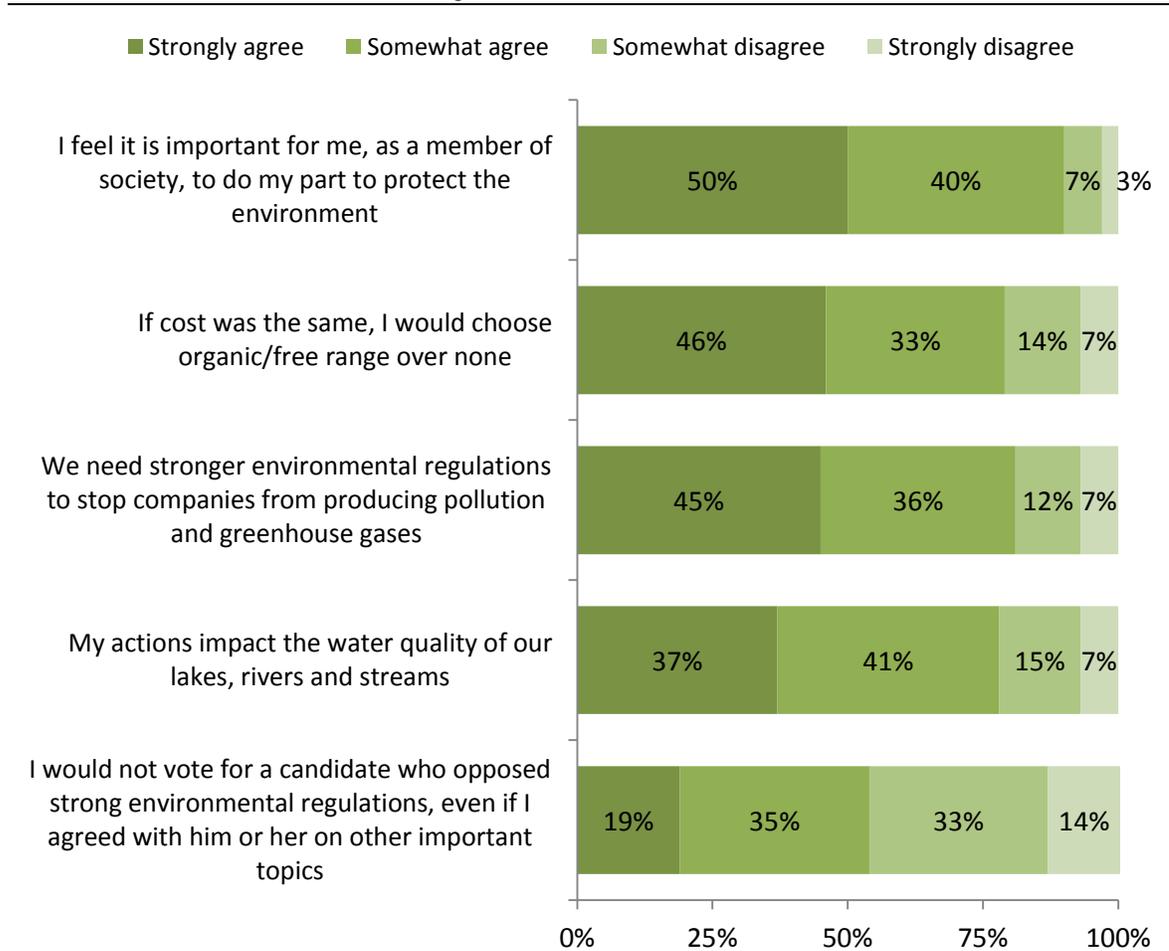
that “We have too many environmental regulations that are hurting the economy” (40% disagree somewhat, 23% strongly), while 37% agree (14% strongly, 23% somewhat).

In spite of wide support for strong regulations, environmental concerns will not necessarily outweigh other issues when it comes to choosing candidates for elective office.

- Presented with the statement, “I would not vote for a candidate who opposed strong environmental regulations, even if I agreed with him or her on other important topics,” most respondents take middle positions: 35% agree somewhat and 33% disagree somewhat. Only small numbers feel passionately about the environmentalism of candidates, with 19% strongly agreeing and 14% strongly disagreeing.

Chart 1: Agreement with Pro-Green Attitudes

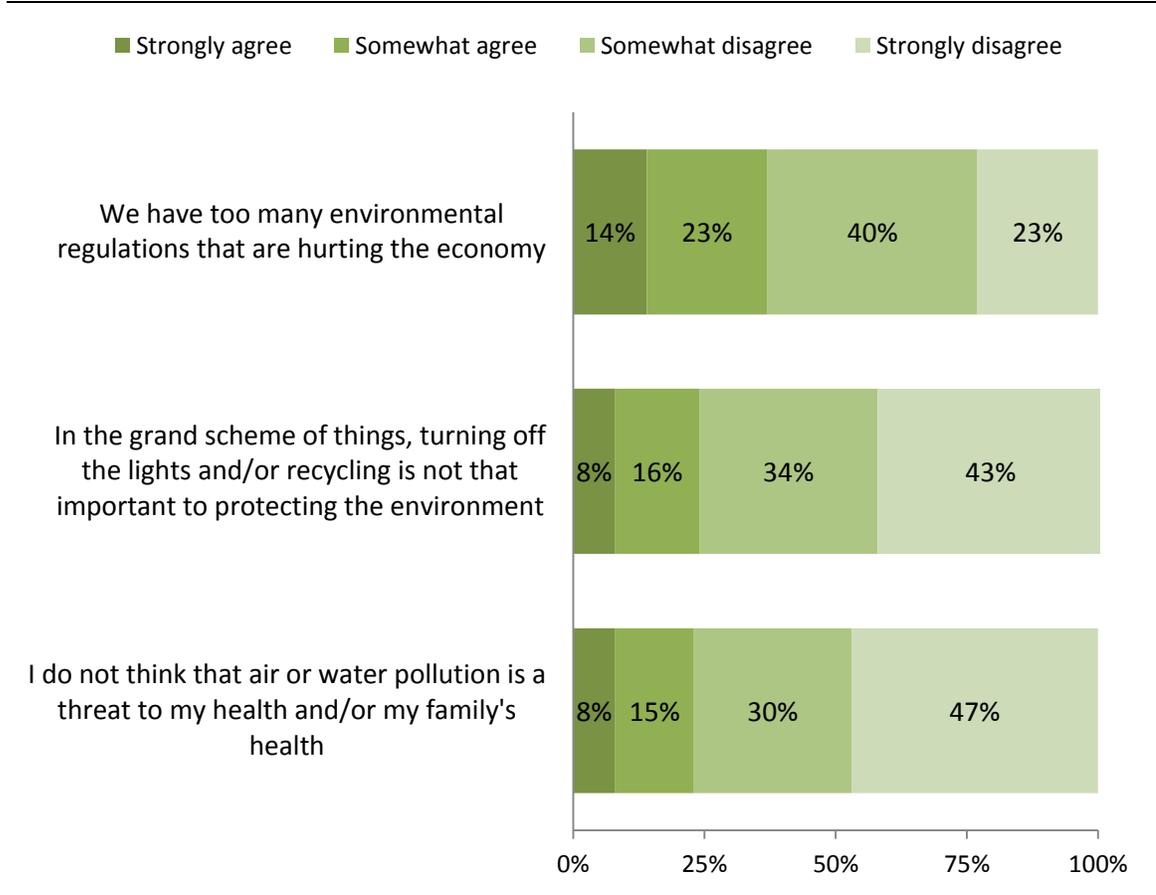
Among all adults in Detroit area



Q7,8,11,12,13. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with these statements.

Chart 2: Disagreement with Non-Green Attitudes

Among all adults in Detroit area



Q6,9,10. Please indicate if you agree or disagree with these statements.

Demographic subgroups’ attitudes

There are noteworthy differences on all of the pro-green questions depending on party identification, with Democrats more likely to agree with the pro-green statements by 10 or more percentage points. These differences are most striking on the question of voting for a candidate. Fully 64% of Democrats and 50% of independents agreed they would not vote for the candidate who opposed strong environmental standards, but only 38% of Republicans agreed.

Party identification continues to be important when it comes to the assertion that we have too many environmental regulations: 68% of Democrats and 5% of independents disagree, but only 46% of Republicans disagree. Indeed, a majority (54%) of Republicans agree there are too many regulations.

While education does not make a good deal of difference on most of these issues, it does on the issue of the threat of air and water. Eighty-two percent of residents with post graduate degrees compared to 70% of those with a high school education or less feel that air and water pollution are a threat to their own or their family's health.

DZS members' attitudes

When asked how they feel about the statement, "In the grand scheme of things, turning off the lights and/or recycling is not that important to protecting the environment," zoo members tend to agree more than other people: 35% agree with that statement—the highest number among any demographic— while 65% disagree (compared to 76% of all area residents).

B. Behavior

We asked survey respondents about how often they engage in 13 types of activities and behaviors related to the environment and conservation. The most common steps the area residents said they take include energy conservation at home and recycling products.

Most common:

- A notable majority of respondents say they reliably engage in two behaviors: turning out lights when leaving a room (78% most of the time) and recycling at home (60%). Recycling most of the time is more common among white residents (67%) than African Americans (37%), and reaches a high point with area residents with incomes over \$75,000 (74%).
- About half of the area residents say that most of the time they also adjust the thermostat to save energy (55%) – and this behavior grows with age: only 37% of 18-29 year olds report turning the thermostat down most of the time, a figure that increases to 61% among those aged 50 and older.
- Forty-three percent of adults in the four-county region say they usually save and reuse plastic food and drink containers.
- Thirty-seven percent say they unplug or turn off electronics such as computers most of the time when not in use. Forty-six percent of residents with post-grad educations do this, compared to 32% with a high school education or less.

Less common: We found other less common environment-friendly behaviors.

- About one in four (26%) say they take a reusable bag to the grocery or other stores most of the time.
- Fourteen percent report buying clothes for themselves or other family members most of the time in second-hand shops, a behavior that is associated with income. If we take the figures for buying clothes second hand most *and* some of the time (41% overall), we find this behavior among 54% of residents with incomes under \$25,000, and only 28% of those with incomes of \$75,000 and more.
- Twelve percent of area residents report shopping mostly at farmer's markets rather than larger grocery stores and 10% buy organic foods most of the time.
- Some of the least common behaviors are those that might save on gas consumption: When asked about how they get to school or work, two-thirds of area residents say that

they *never* carpool (67%), take public transit (72%) or ride a bike or walk (67%). Under one in ten do each of these most of the time. Fully 71% of residents with no children under 18 (and thus less opportunity to take children to school) never carpool.

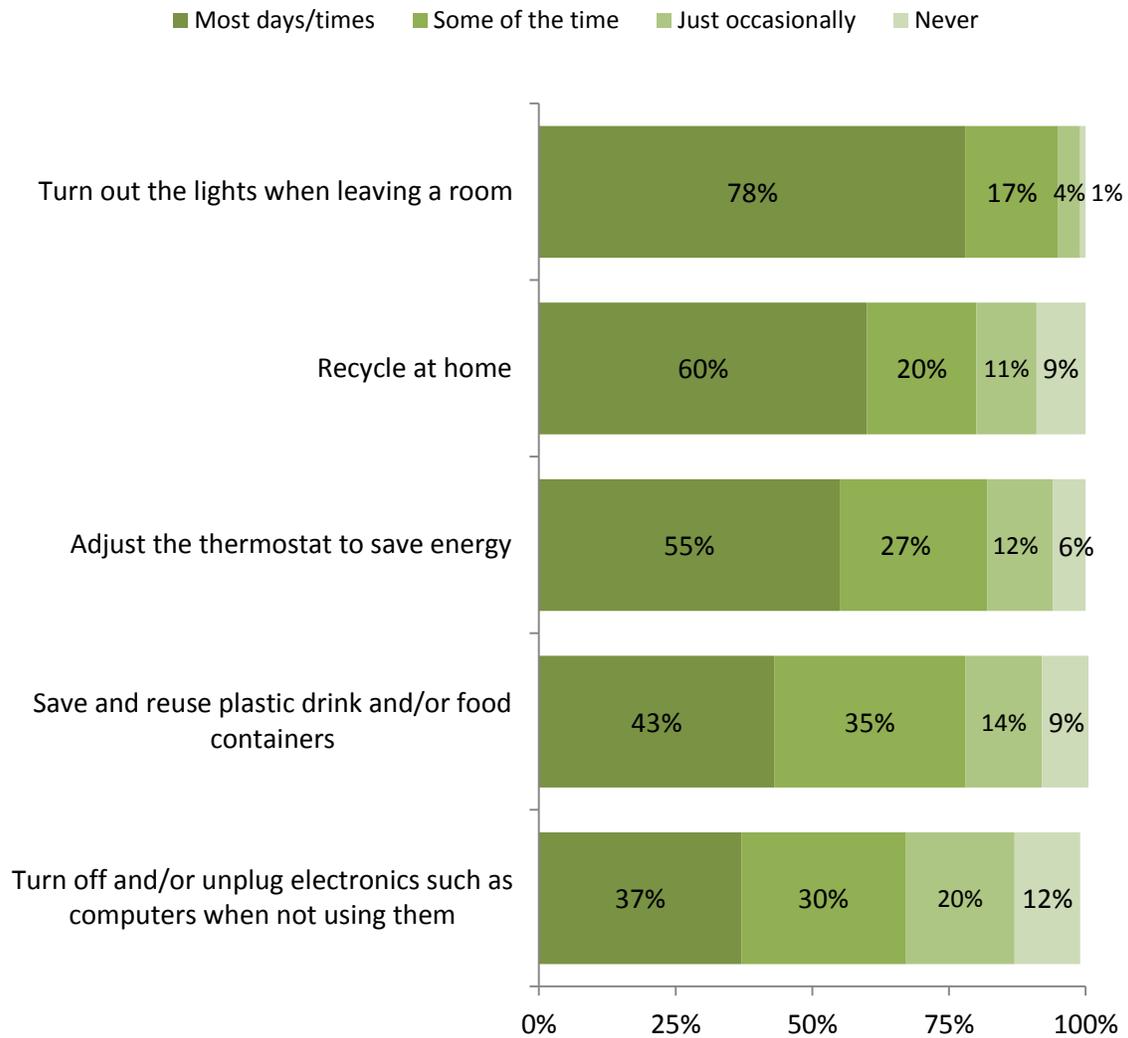
- Eighty-three percent eat meat for lunch or dinner at least some of the time; 17% say they do so only occasionally (13%) or never (4%).

DZS members' behavior

- DZS members are attentive to the environment in their everyday lives. They show the greatest likelihood to recycle at home or work (92% do so at least sometimes), and reuse plastic cups and food containers (95% at least sometimes).
- Detroit zoo members are especially conscientious consumers. They score highest of all the survey's demographics on preferring organic food (90% would buy organic if money were no object), and buying organic produce (69% do so most or some of the time). Sixty-eight percent of zoo members shop at farmers markets—and when they buy their groceries, 73% of zoo members take a reusable bag with them most or some of the time.
- The members' transportation habits are markedly greener than those of the general population. No other demographic is likelier to commute without a car: 38% of zoo members get to work or school on foot or on a bike at least some of the time. And carpooling is most common among zoo members, 47% of whom participate in carpools. Zoo members are also among the most likely to use public transportation, with 32% using that method on their commute some or most of the time.

Chart 3: Common Practices

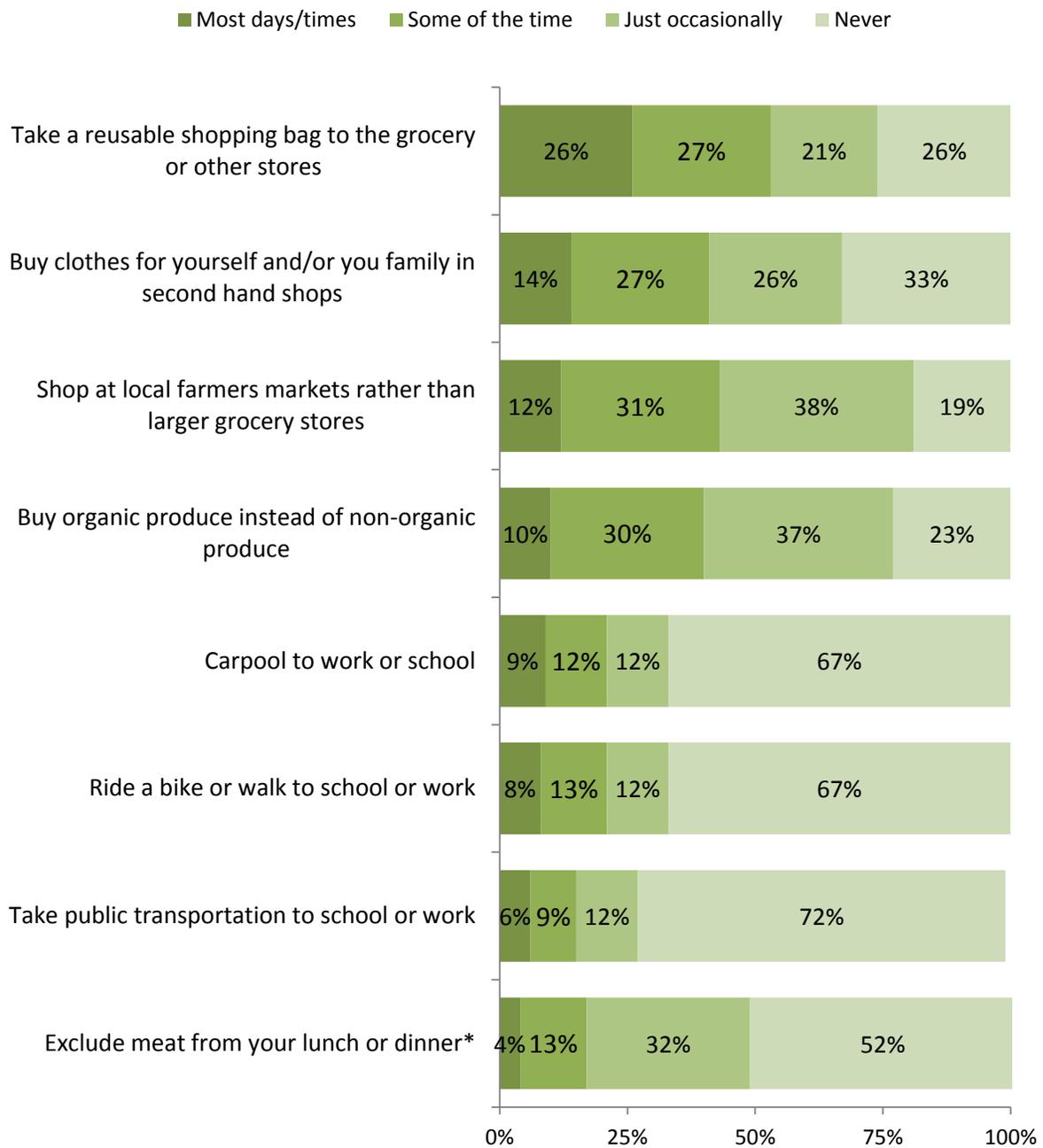
Among all adults in Detroit area



Q14,15,19,20,22,24. Please indicate how often you do each of the following.

Chart 4: Less Common Practices

Among all adults in Detroit area



Q16,17,18,21,23,25,26. Please indicate how often you do each of the following.

*The wording of this item asked how often respondents “include meat in your lunch or dinner.” For the purposes of analysis, we changed the wording to reflect how often respondents “exclude meat from your lunch or dinner.”

C. Engagement with conservation and experiencing nature

According to the survey, fewer than half of residents of the Detroit area have proactively contributed to preserving the environment in the three ways that we probed. On the other hand, most have taken some time to experience nature or wildlife in the past few two years, as reflected in two other questions.

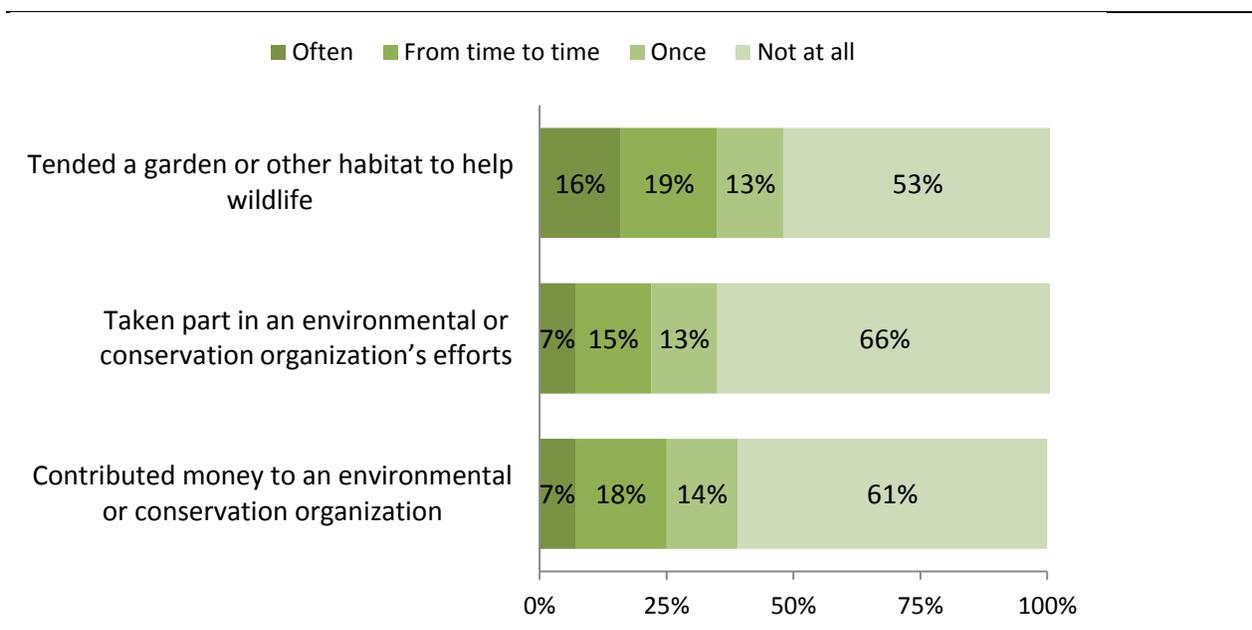
- Thirty-five percent say they have tended a garden in order to help wildlife at some point in the past couple of years (16% report doing so often, and 19% from time to time).

Smaller numbers of Detroit area residents contribute money or time toward a conservation or environmental organization’s efforts.

- Only around two in ten (22%) say they have taken part in such an organization’s efforts (7% often, 15% from time to time).
- One-quarter (25%) have made a donation to an environmental group in the past two years (7% often, 18% from time to time). Making contributions is most common among residents with incomes of at least \$75,000 (40% reported doing so often or from time to time) and those with post graduate educations (34%).

Chart 5: Green Engagement in the Last Year or Two

Among all adults in Detroit area



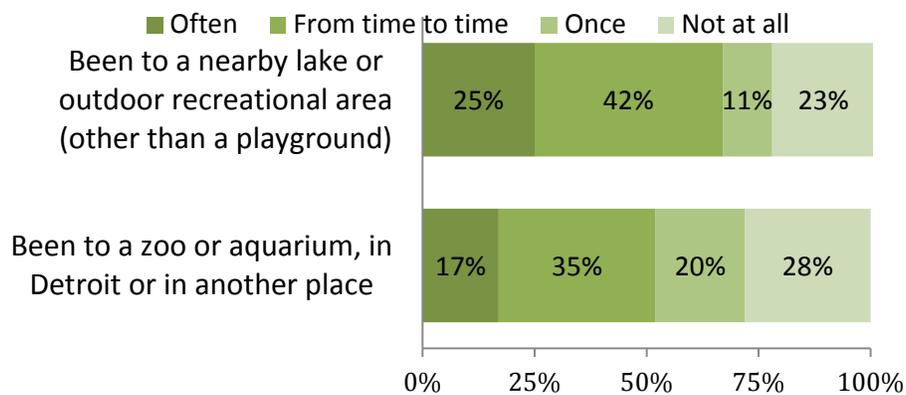
Q27, 28, 32. Please indicate if you have done each of the following in the past year or two.

Although a majority of respondents do not report engaging proactively in conservation efforts directly, most have some exposure to natural areas and/or animals.

- Many have been to a lake or other outdoor recreational area (not including playgrounds): 25% have gone often, 42% from time to time, and 11% just once in the past couple years. A quarter (23%) has not done so at all. The two most likely groups to spend time in these areas are parents (34% often) and those making more than \$75,000 a year (33% often). There is a marked racial disparity, with 28% of white residents going often, compared to 16% of African Americans.
- Though slightly fewer area residents (17%) say they have been frequently to zoos and aquariums, 35% have visited such a facility from time to time, and 20% have done so once in the past two years. Twenty-eight percent have not been to a zoo or aquarium in that time frame. Unsurprisingly, zoo/aquarium attendance is most common among people with children under 11 (35% often) and ages 11 to 17 (28%).

Chart 6: Experiencing Nature in the Last Year or Two

Among all adults in Detroit area



Q30,31. Please indicate if you have done each of the following in the past year or two.

E. Policies

While their level of engagement with the environment varies widely, Detroit area residents are ideologically in favor of strong environmental regulations, according to the survey participants.

- A wide majority (82%) supports expanding bottle-return requirements to encompass all bottled beverages, including water, with 55% expressing strong support and 27% supporting the measure somewhat. Support for this decreases with age, with 61% of those aged 18 to 29 supporting it strongly, compared to half (50%) of those over age 50.
- Eighty-six percent support requiring all public schools to implement recycling programs; half of respondents (51%) support this strongly.
- Eighty percent of area residents in the survey support requiring everyone – homeowners, renters and businesses -- to separate garbage and recyclable materials, including 44% who support such regulation strongly. Affluent residents are markedly more likely to feel this way, with 85% of those earning over \$75,000 a year supporting overall – including 54% strongly supporting such a requirement.

Although all the counties come down in favor of putting this requirement on business and individuals, enthusiasm is strongest in Oakland and Washtenaw Counties (51% strongly), compared to Wayne and Macomb Counties (40%).

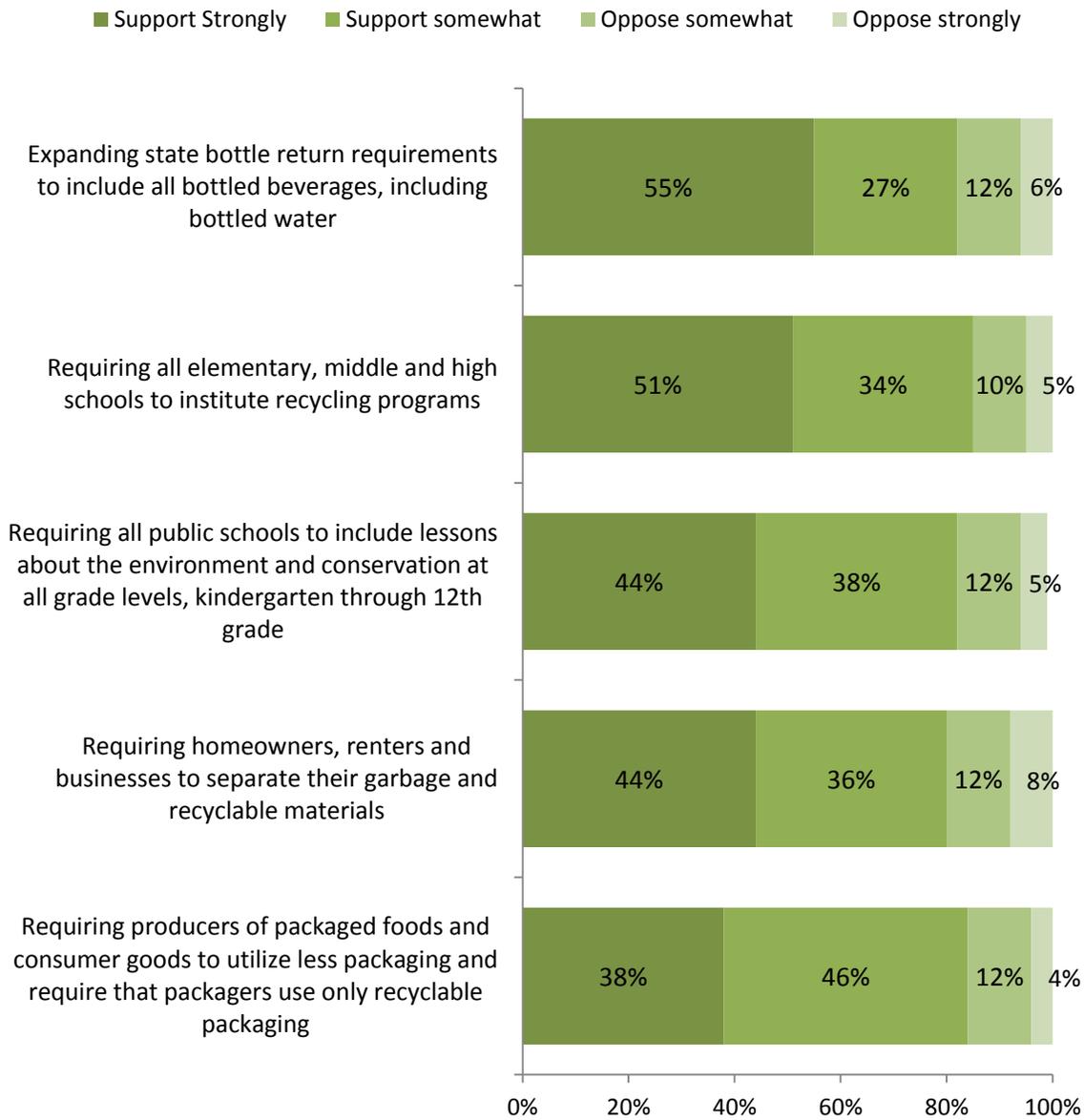
- Even more (85%) say that producers of food and consumer goods should be required to take steps to minimize the packaging they use or use recyclable materials. Support on this issue is slightly less resolute, however: 38% espouse the view strongly and 46% somewhat. Forty-five percent of those between 18 and 29 and 43% of those in their thirties support this requirement strongly, compared to 32% of those 50 and over. Democrats are more likely to support it, with 45% strongly backing the requirement, whereas only about one-third of Republicans (35%) and independents (33%) support the idea strongly.

Looking ahead to future generations, most area residents want conservation to be a guaranteed part of the K-12 curriculum.

- Eighty-two percent believe that public schools should be required to teach lessons about the environment and conservation at all grade levels, with 44% feeling that way strongly and 38% somewhat. About half of Democrats (52%) strongly believe in requiring conservation to be part of the curriculum, as do 45% of independents and only 30% of Republicans.

Chart 7: Support for environmental/conservation measures

Among all adults in Detroit area



Q1-5. Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following.

DZS members' views on policies and activism

- Zoo members stand out most in their support for pro-environment policy—and their willingness to get directly involved. They scored the highest on all five questions that gauged enthusiasm for environment-friendly policy. Ninety-seven percent of members support requiring schools to recycle. Ninety-six percent support making conservation a part of every public school student's curriculum. And support was at 93% for three initiatives: expanding state bottle-return requirements; requiring manufacturers to cut down on their use of packaging; and requiring homeowners, renters and businesses to recycle.
- DZS members could be a political organizer's target demographic. Seventy-two percent reported contributing to an environmental or conservation organization in the past two years—about twice the general population's number—and 29% reported giving often, which is four times the overall population's number. Sixty-three percent had taken part in a conservation group's efforts in the past two years, versus 34% of all area residents. And 42% of members said they volunteer for political candidates or parties somewhat regularly, compared to just 18% of all residents. Three-quarters (74%) of zoo members said that they would not vote for an otherwise attractive candidate if they disapproved of her/his environmental policies. And 38% felt this way strongly, much more than any other demographic.