

Sustainable Natural Resource Funding Advisory Committee

By Denise Schieffer, IA Trail Riders Association

Last year, the Sustainable Natural Resource Funding Advisory Committee conducted a survey that residents of the State of Iowa could fill out online. Additionally, the committee made random phone call surveys. The results are in a preliminary report, published January 2007, and available online at <http://www.iowadnr.com/sustainablefunding/files/prelimreport.pdf>. The reason this committee was put into place was to study natural resources, which was put into the categories of “Fish, Wildlife and Natural Areas”, “Soil and Water”, and “Parks and Trails”. The committee was mandated through HF 2797 to “identify and evaluate sustainable natural resource funding to support Iowa’s needs.” This report is interesting, and reading the entire report for outdoorsmen is recommended.

One piece of information that caught my attention as a horseman is that the groups selected to be represented on this advisory committee didn’t contain a horse group. Horseback riding ranked at the bottom of different recreational activities that the survey questioned. When compared to the activity of hiking/walking/jogging, in which 79% of the people surveyed participate, it is no wonder that the h/w/j group is listened to. Comparatively speaking, only 21% of those respondents participate in horseback riding. Bicycling constitutes 58% of the respondents.

One thing the people at the top of the chart have in common, is the ability to unite. Horse people need to work on this aspect.

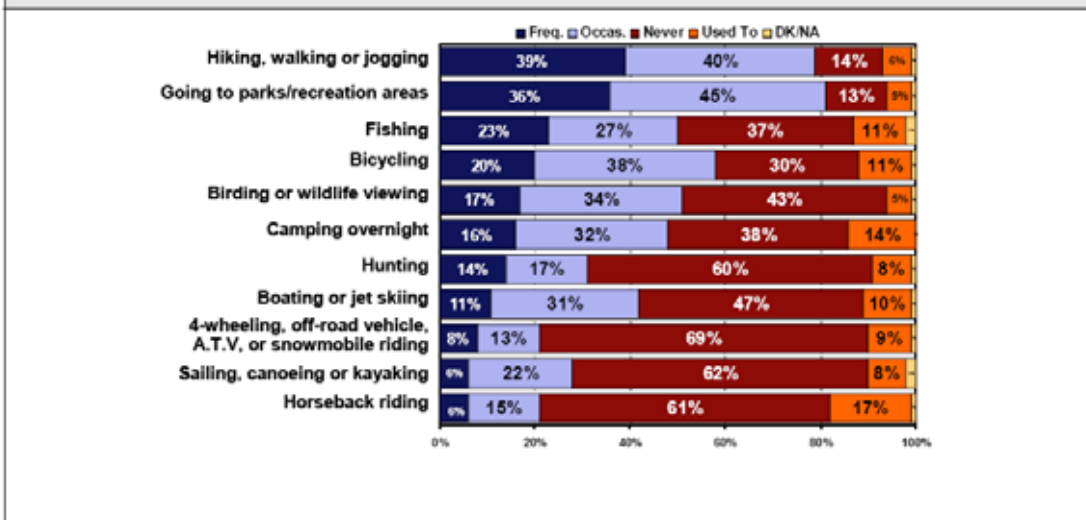
Of course, when asked about how important water quality in rivers and streams and protecting sources of drinking water, even I ranked this aspect higher than improving and expanding trails. How can one not be concerned about these areas and also with preserving and protecting the soil and wildlife? And also when compared to funding affordable health insurance and pollution of the water? The majority of Iowa residents support dedicating additional public funds to protect Iowa’s land, water, and wildlife, and most are willing to pay \$10-\$25 in additional taxes each year for that purpose.

The report recommends funding an additional \$35 million to the Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources for state preserves, the wildlife diversity program, state parks, public access, and trail improvements within state parks. An additional \$15 million for trails funding, which will permit the leveraging of additional dollars from federal resources and trails funding, should be directed at both maintenance of existing trails and the addition of new trails, marketing and trail linkages. In all, an additional \$150 million annually is suggested by the committee for various conservation-type funding.

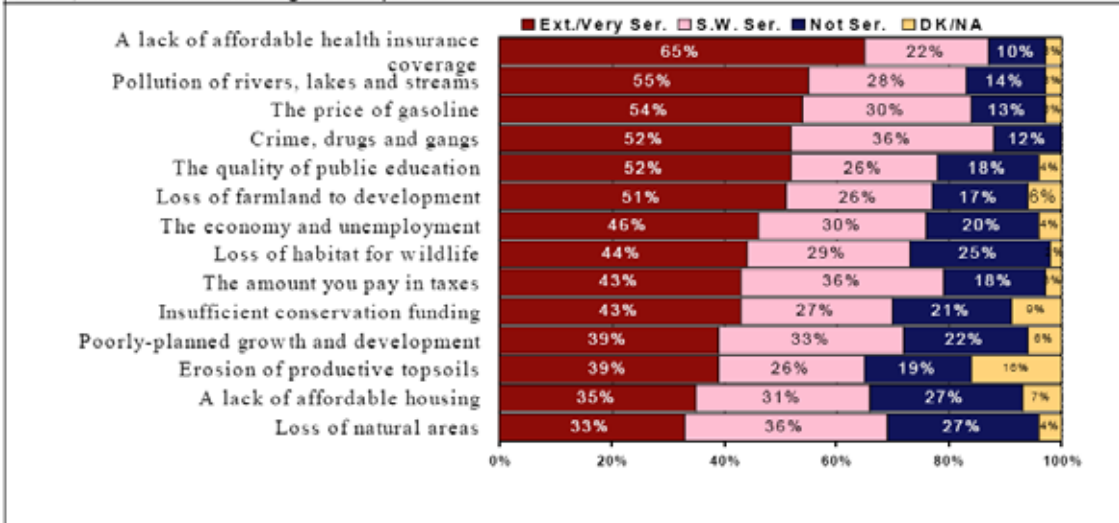
Where will the additional money come from? Possibly from gaming/gambling revenues, fractional sales tax increases that are constitutionally protected, dedicating a portion of the state lottery profits, tax incentives or credits for conservation and bonding. Almost three quarters of Iowans favor using a portion of the state lottery or a portion of revenue from Iowa casinos.

The Sustainable Natural Resource Funding Advisory Committee believes their work has just begun. This report is just preliminary and a first step toward insuring truly sustainable and adequate funding for natural resources in Iowa. However, further committee work needs to be sanctioned by both the Legislature and by the agencies and organizations represented on the committee, and needs to be reauthorized through a joint House and Senate resolution. Educating the citizens of Iowa on environmental needs and funding options will be a necessary next step following a final report submission. Public understanding and support is critical if any significant gains are to be made in the sustainable funding of natural resources in this state.

As noted in the table below, Iowans are engaged in a number of different recreational activities:



When respondents were read a list of issues, they were asked to rate what the seriousness of certain issues facing Iowa. The following is a summary of their responses. Voters rated pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams among their top concerns:



When read a list of projects that might be carried out if additional funding was available for natural resources in Iowa, respondents were asked how important each project was to them. Responses were rated "extremely important, very important, somewhat important, and not important."

| Project | TOTAL EXT./VERY | Ext. Imp. | Very Imp. | SW Imp. | Not Imp. |
|---|-----------------|-----------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Protecting water quality in rivers and streams | 82% | 46% | 36% | 15% | 2% |
| Protecting sources of drinking water | 81% | 47% | 33% | 14% | 4% |
| Protecting Iowa's soils | 76% | 36% | 40% | 19% | 4% |
| Preserving natural areas | 71% | 30% | 41% | 24% | 3% |
| Managing and protecting endangered and threatened species | 66% | 31% | 35% | 26% | 8% |
| Preserving working farmland | 64% | 31% | 33% | 24% | 7% |
| Protecting fish and wildlife habitat | 63% | 30% | 33% | 27% | 6% |
| Protecting forests | 60% | 28% | 33% | 32% | 6% |
| Providing quality environmental and conservation education opportunities for the public | 58% | 22% | 36% | 34% | 7% |
| Repairing, improving and/or expanding state and county parks | 55% | 18% | 36% | 33% | 10% |
| Conserving and/or restoring prairies and grasslands | 50% | 21% | 29% | 33% | 14% |
| Improving access for hunting and fishing | 45% | 20% | 26% | 35% | 19% |
| Providing grants to local governments and non-profits to preserve natural areas | 45% | 19% | 26% | 43% | 9% |
| Improving and expanding trails for hiking, biking, walking and horseback riding | 43% | 17% | 26% | 39% | 17% |
| Adding new public lands for outdoor recreation, fishing, and hunting | 41% | 14% | 27% | 34% | 21% |
| Improving and expanding off road vehicle trails | 24% | 6% | 18% | 25% | 46% |