

Checkerboard Partnership Community Survey Report

6/8/2021

Introduction

The Checkerboard Partnership is a group of individuals representing community organizations, residents and government entities working together to find solutions to permanently protect 27,000 acres of privately owned forest in the Central Cascades. To better understand the priorities and desires of the community for these forested lands, the Checkerboard Partnership implemented a survey. The community defined for this survey is Kittitas County.

The survey was made available on-line and as a paper questionnaire located at several community businesses. The survey was conducted between September 7th, 2020 to November 6th, 2020 and consisted of 12 questions.

In the first question, participants were asked to identify if they are full-time residents, part-time residents, college students, or weekend visitors to the county. Before analysis of the results, community members were defined as full-time resident, part-time resident, and college student and non-residents as weekend visitors or other. The survey results for these two groups are illustrated in figures below. We are most interested in responses from Kittitas County community members as we look into implementing long-term management of these lands.

Who Took the Survey

The survey received 674 responses: 424 of respondents were community members and 250 were non-residents. Respondents were majority male for both residents and non-residents: 421 respondents identified as male versus 205 as female; 2 identified as non-binary, and 44 did not report their gender. The most abundant age group for both residents and non-residents was age group 45-54.

Respondent reported residency

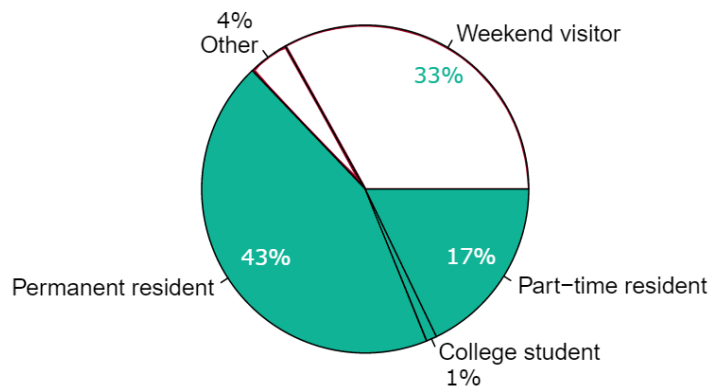


Figure 1 Pie chart illustrating residents (teal) vs. non-residents (white)

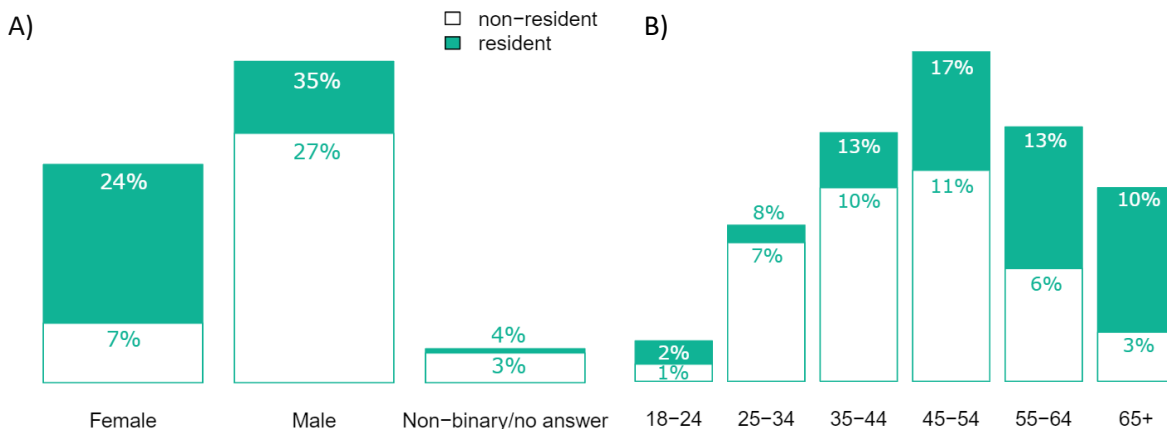


Figure 2 A) Bar chart showing respondent gender-identity breakdown. B) Bar chart showing respondent age bracket breakdown. Percentages of all respondents (non-resident and resident) are given.

What Area Did Respondents Value?

Respondents were asked to rank the Cle Elum Ridge, Cabin Creek, and the Taneum on a scale of no value (0) to highly value (5). Non-residents scores were higher on average than residents (i.e., non-residents were more likely to list areas as highly valued or valued than residents). Cle Elum Ridge was the most valued area by residents and non-residents alike (i.e., it was listed as “highly valued” the most frequently), followed by the Taneum and then Cabin Creek.

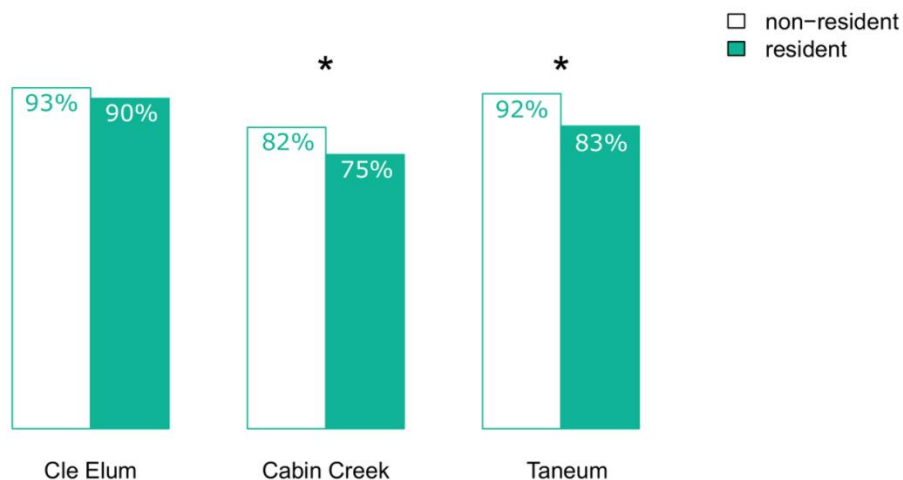


Figure 3 Bar chart illustrating what percent of non-resident (white) and resident (teal) respondents 'valued' or 'highly valued' each location. * indicates that the difference in percentages between resident and non-resident is significant ($p < 0.10$)

Why Do They Value These Forests?

The Checkerboard Partnership is committed to ensuring these lands serve community needs and interests, so we sought out a sense of the community’s values for the landscape. Reasons community members and visitors value these forests is because various features draw them there. Residents and non-residents agree that recreation is the largest draw (selected by 611 respondents). For residents, the

second most commonly selected draw was access to lands (373 respondents overall, 273 of which were residents), and third was landscape/views (372 respondents overall, 264 if which were residents). For non-residents, the second most commonly selected draw was landscape/views and third was access. No respondents selected traditional uses. A commonly listed draw in the write-in option was off-road vehicles (including bikes, motorcycles, and all-terrain vehicles) so these are also summarized in the bar chart under “ORV” (off-road vehicle).

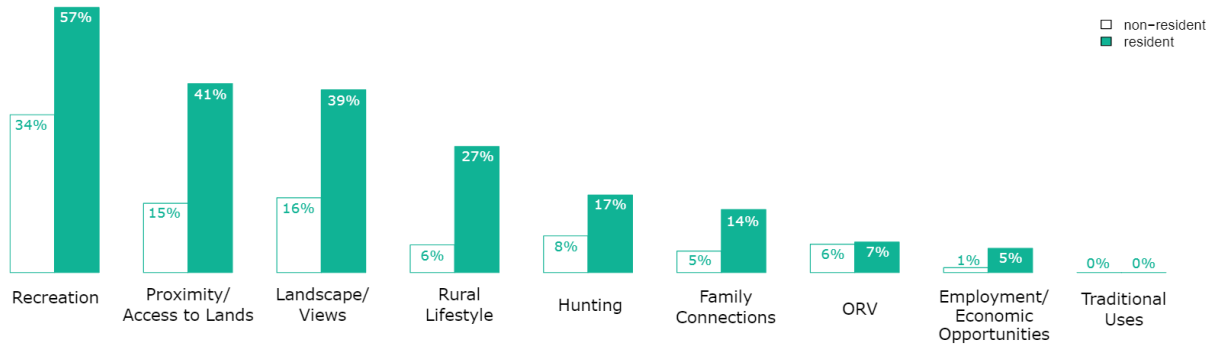


Figure 4 Bar chart showing what percent of respondents are a non-resident (white) or resident (teal) and drawn to the area by each feature

Another reason community members and visitors value these forests is because of the benefits they provide. Scores for some of the benefits differed in residents versus non-residents, and although future use received the highest scores across both residents and non-residents, the order of other benefits differed. Resident scores for habitat were the second highest while recreation was the second highest for non-residents. Habitat fell in 4th place for visitors as access took a higher rank. Non-residents significantly value local economies more than residents, along with recreation and access.

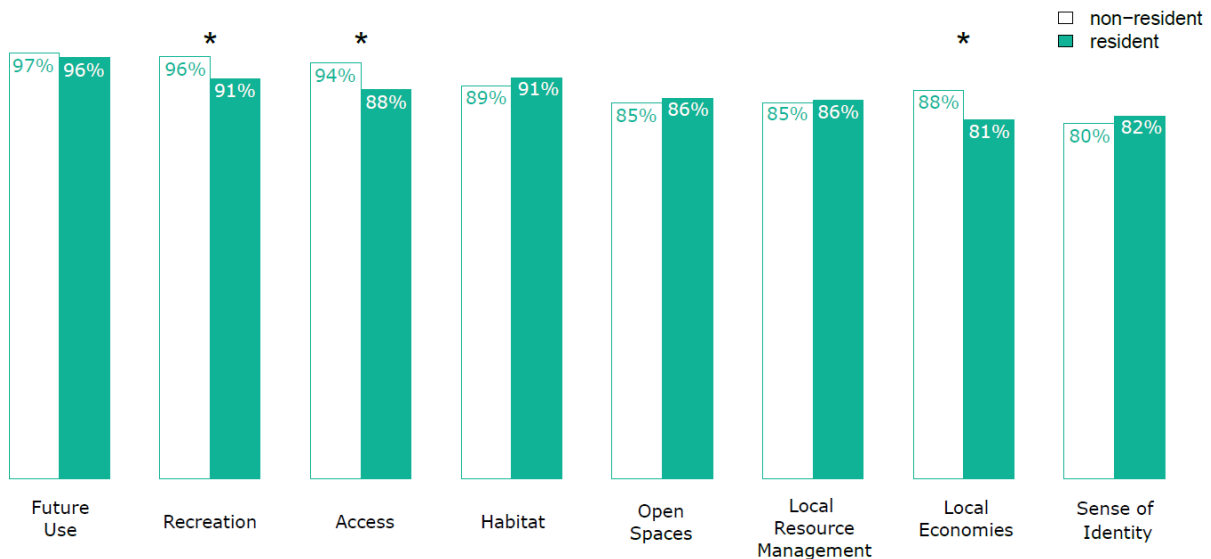


Figure 5 Bar chart showing what percent of respondents are a non-resident (white) or resident (teal) and found each benefit important. * indicates that the difference in values between resident and non-resident is significant

Why Should These Areas Be Protected?

With an ever-increasing number of people coming to the region to recreate, the county faces various associated issues. The top three most frequently listed issues by survey participants, for both residents and non-residents, were fire/forest health, increased recreational pressure, and access. Access was listed more frequently among non-residents than residents. Listed issues differed somewhat in residents versus non-residents. Climate change (ranked 4th overall), for example, was listed more frequently among residents than non-residents. This may reflect residents' concerns about wildfires, droughts, and other recently experienced phenomena linked to climate change.

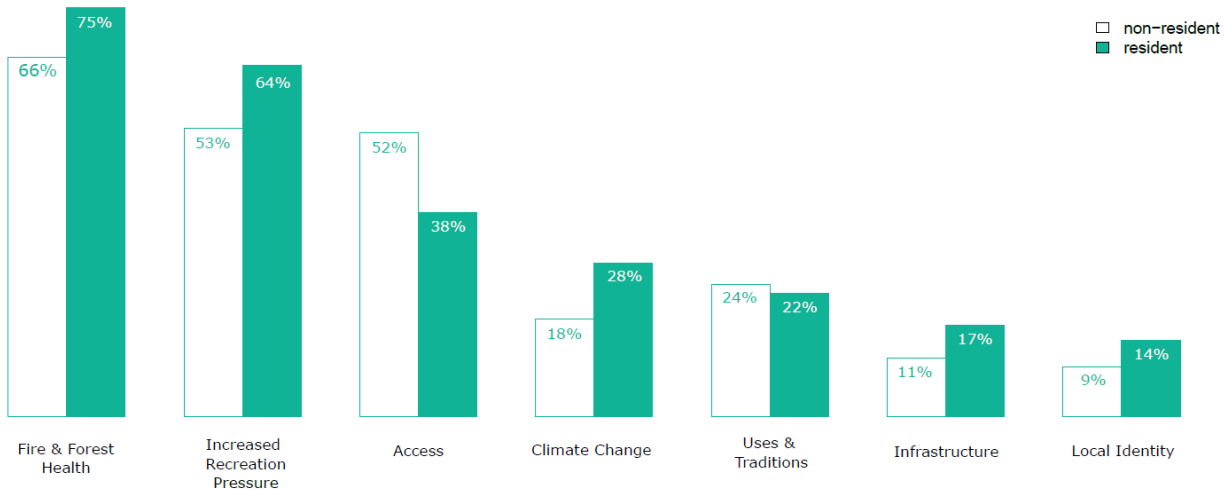


Figure 6 Bar chart illustrating the percentage of non-resident (white) or resident (teal) respondents that listed each problem as a top issue facing Kittitas County

Ultimately, should these lands not be protected they are likely to be developed. Survey respondents were asked what they would lose if they could not access these lands. The top three most frequently listed potential losses, for both residents and non-residents, were recreational use, scenic value, and health/wellness. A commonly listed write-in option was off-road vehicles (including bikes, motorcycles, and all-terrain vehicles) so these are also summarized in the bar plot under "ORV".

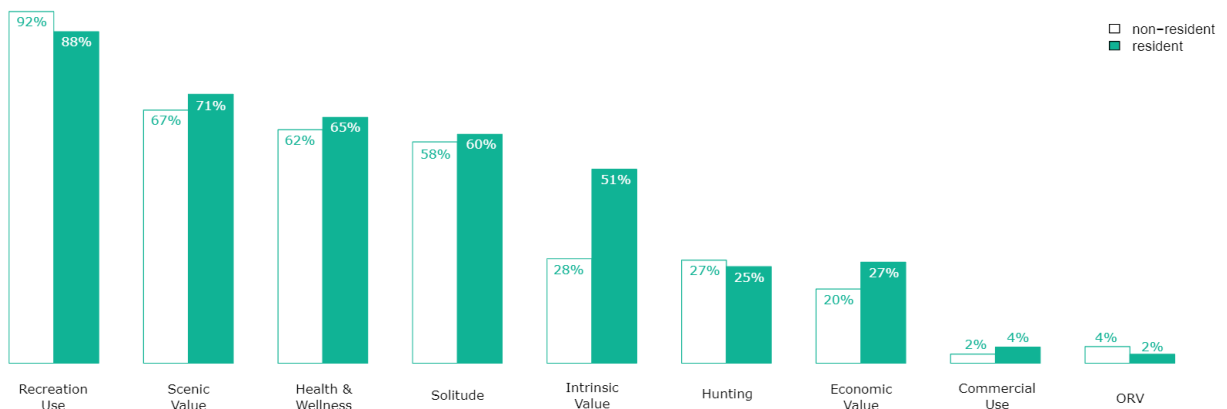


Figure 7 Bar chart showing the percentage of non-resident (white) or resident (teal) respondents listed each feature as something they would lose should they not be able to access these lands

A Note on Motorized Recreation

The survey did not explicitly ask about motorized vehicle use of the lands, but motorized vehicles were mentioned frequently in the “Other” columns of Question 3 (What draws you to these lands?) and Question 8 (What would be lost), which allowed respondents to free write. Motorized vehicle was divided into dirt bikes versus all-terrain vehicle/utility terrain vehicle/side by sides, as possible based on responses, to understand which lands are favored by these different users. Of respondents who mentioned dirt bikes specifically as a draw in Question 3, Cle Elum Ridge and Taneum were equally likely to be listed as valued or highly valued (97% of respondents). Of all other (non-dirt bike) ORV respondents, Cle Elum Ridge was most likely to be listed as valued or highly valued (95% of respondents). However, motorized use is not permitted on the Cle Elum Ridge.

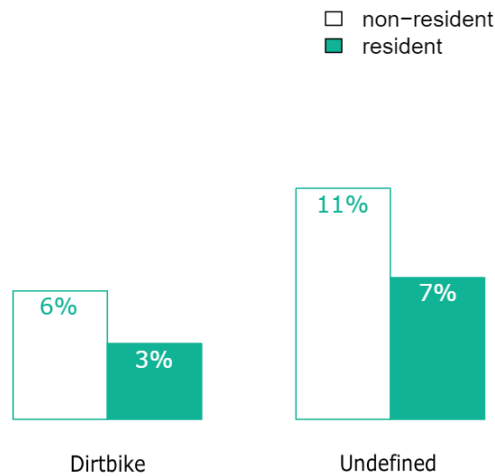


Figure 8 Bar chart showing the percentage of non-resident (white) or resident (teal) respondents that mentioned dirt biking or other forms of off-road vehicle use in their survey response

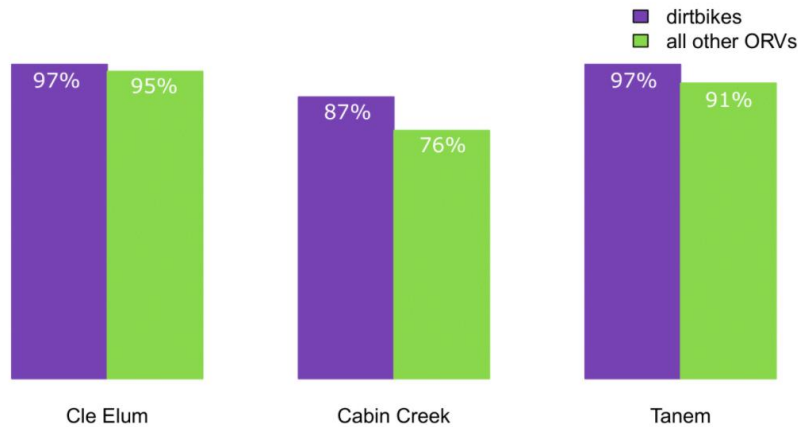


Figure 9 Bar chart illustrating what percent of respondents that mentioned motorized recreation in their survey response 'valued' or 'highly valued' each area

Conclusion

Thank you to all the survey participants, we were able to learn about the community's desires and needs for these lands. Here are some key take-aways:

- Cle Elum Ridge is the most valued place by community members and visitors
- Recreation is the largest draw overall by community members and visitors
- Future use is the highest ranked benefit by community members and visitors
 - Habitat ranked second place for residents while recreation ranked second place for non-residents
 - Visitors significantly value recreation, access, and local economies more than residents
- Fire and forest health is the highest ranked issue by community members and visitors
 - Residents ranked increased recreation pressure as second
 - Conversely, non-residents ranked access as second
 - Residents also ranked climate change higher than non-residents
- Recreation is the greatest loss listed by community members and visitors

Currently, the Checkerboard Partnership is focused on achieving permanent protection for these lands. As the lands are transferred to an ongoing conservation model, the values expressed in this survey will be incorporated into the management plan.