Love Our Waterways
2026 Litter Survey

CHOOSE YOUR LEGACY

LoveOurWaterways.Org

MICHIGAN WATERWAYS STEWARDS

Creating A Community Culture of Care

Since our start in November 2022, Michigan Waterways Stewards has rapidly emerged as a leading, award-winning, grassroots conservation organization focused on protecting, caring for, and improving Michigan's treasured and vulnerable waterways.

Through our community-wide, year-round, collaborative approach to waterways stewardship, we have completed 320 projects across 20 communities, mobilized over 4,000 volunteers, and removed an estimated 222,000 pounds of litter and trash while clearing 154 river-wide obstructions. The estimated value of our volunteers' time alone is greater than $534,000.

To help you understand how much 220,000 pounds is, it is the equivalent of:

- 1,100 average-sized top-freezer refrigerators (200 lbs. avg.)
- 55.5 average-sized cars (4,000 lbs. avg.)
- 22.2 adult elephants (10,000 lbs. avg.)

BY THE NUMBERS	
Stewardship Events	320
Volunteer Engagement	4,098
Volunteer Hours Logged	15,368
Volunteer Value	$534,635
Lbs. of Materials Retrieved	222,325
Lbs per Volunteer	54.3
Communities Impacted	20
Park Beautifications	17

Our greatest focus and success have been in Michigan's Capital City. Here we have transformed what was once described as a garbage dump into what is now considered Michigan's most scenic, varied, and enjoyable urban waterways destination. This year, the Grand and Red Cedar Rivers, along with Sycamore Creek, will be declared clean and clear for the first time. Beautification efforts for our riverside parks will continue, including the eradication of invasive trees and bushes and the planting of native trees to restore the area's natural beauty and biodiversity.

Significant efforts have also been directed toward the Kalamazoo River, from Albion to Lake Michigan, with our greatest emphasis in the Greater Kalamazoo Area. In 2026, we celebrate our third year of ongoing stewardship along this vital waterway, where volunteers have helped remove thousands of pounds of litter and trash, and several hundred cubic yards of invasive trees and bushes at Kalamazoo's Mayors' Riverfront and Verburg Parks, and adjacent to Red Arrow Golf Course.

MICHIGAN WATERWAYS STEWARDS

Creating A Comprehensive Approach

Our programming continues to evolve. There are now four pillars to our work (SEAL): Stewardship, Education, Advocacy, and Legislation. At the heart of our educational initiatives is our mascot, "Hannah the Heron," who inspires a commitment to environmental stewardship. Through her powerful message, “Love Our Waterways. It’s A Shared Responsibility,” she aims to cultivate a collective sense of purpose. Our Public Service Announcements tackle essential from the front door to the river floor stewardship themes, including keeping our garbage bins closed, clearing storm drains, and reducing littering.

Advocacy plays a pivotal role in our mission. We actively collaborate with cities and townships, universities, businesses, and industries to enhance their stewardship practices. Currently, we are working on legislation designed to strengthen protections for our waterways, with the aspiration of achieving statewide adoption and, ultimately, national acceptance.

Our mission transcends merely cleaning waterways; it’s about fostering community spirit and civic pride. The transformative efforts of our volunteers illustrate the incredible achievements we can accomplish together.

As we continue our efforts to advance our geographic and program expansion, to create an even greater impact, it is essential that we remain familiar with outdoor and volunteering trends, the wants and needs of the greater community, and the attitudes and beliefs which shape human behavior. Regarding the latter, we have conducted two primary research studies to improve our understanding of two critical matters.

Michigan Waterways 2023 Environmental Study - Electric Scooters

Our September 2023 12-point research sought to understand Michigan Capital City Region residents thoughts and opinions about the matter of hundreds of electric scooters and bicycles being tossed and abandoned in our local rivers.

Love Our Waterways 2026 Litter Survey

Our March 2026 25-point research study explores Michigan residents’ thoughts and opinions regarding litter, trash, and other signs of urban living on the appearance, health, and recreational use of our waterways. The learnings from our research will guide us in our work as we aim to:

1. Sustain and build upon the herculean efforts and remarkable achievements of our thousands of volunteers here in Michigan.
2. Put in place greater protective and preventive measures to steward our treasured and vulnerable waterways.
3. Take our programming nationwide by 2030.

MICHIGAN WATERWAYS STEWARDS

Seeking An Improved Understanding As Those Potential Barriers To Success

Michigan residents were invited to participate in a 25-point online, plus a five-point special feature section, to explore several critical topics of interest, including:

- The potential harm that litter and trash can cause to fish, wildlife, the environment, and human health.
- How litter and trash may affect your choices regarding recreation, shopping, dining, and vacationing.
- Who is thought to responsible for waterways stewardship.
- The effectiveness of public service announcements, signage, and law enforcement in deterring littering.

This survey was voluntary; no financial incentive was given. Participants were asked to share their thoughts and opinions and to provide us with additional insights into the matters they deemed important. A total of 160 individuals participated in the survey. Their responses were consistent and tended to be slightly higher in ranking than those reported by Keep America Beautiful's national 2021 litter survey.

Keep America Beautiful reports large majorities of U.S. residents (75 to 97 percent) recognize that litter negatively affects:

- The environment
- Our waterways
- Home values
- Tourism and businesses
- Quality of life
- Health and safety in their communities

Our Love Our Waterways
2026 Litter Survey
Reports Much The Same,
But At Slightly Greater Rates.

Love Our Waterways
2026 Litter Survey

MICHIGAN RESIDENTS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE HEALTH OF THEIR WATERWAYS

Love Our Waterways. It's A Shard Responsibility.

Love Our Waterways 2026 Litter Survey

Michigan residents believe that litter and trash is harmful to fish and wildlife, the environment, and that it poses a risk to human health.

ON AVERAGE, 96.2% ARE CONCERNED

about the health of Michigan's waterways
consider litter and trash unsightly and harmful
to the environment, fish and wildlife, and humans.

Q5. How concerned are you about the health of Michigan's waterways?			
Very Concerned	99	61.9%	92.5%
Somewhat Concerned	49	30.6%	

Q6. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes to be unsightly?			
Strongly Agree	139	86.9%	96.3%
Agree	15	9.4%	

Q7. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes are harmful to the environment?			
Strongly Agree	144	90.0%	98.8%
Agree	14	8.8%	

Q8. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes are harmful to fish and wildlife?			
Strongly Agree	142	88.8%	98.8%
Agree	16	10.0%	

Q9. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes pose a risk to humans?			
Strongly Agree	98	61.3%	94.4%
Agree	53	33.1%	

Love Our Waterways 2026 Litter Survey

Michigan residents believe that littered and polluted waters reflects poorly on a community and would travel elsewhere for recreation, shopping, dining, or for vacation.

On Average 95.2% AGREE

litter and polluted rivers reflect poorly on a community
and would travel to an area for recreation, to shop, dine, or vacation
if it were free of litter and trash.

Q12. Do you agree with the statement, “Littered and polluted rivers, creeks, and inland lakes reflect poorly on a community?"			
Strongly Agree	45	28.1%	95.6%
Agree	108	67.5%	

Q13. Would you be more likely to travel to visit an area for recreational activities if its river, creek, or inland lake is free of litter, trash, and other signs of urban living?			
Definitely More Likely	128	80.0%	95.6%
Somewhat More Likely	25	15.6%	

Q14. Would you be more likely to visit an area for shopping, dining, or vacationing if its river, creek, or inland lake is free of litter and other signs of urban living?			
Definitely More Likely	119	74.4%	94.4%
Somewhat More Likely	32	20.0%	

95.2%
On Average.

Q17. Who do you think 'is most' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other signs of urban living once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways?		
City/Township	70	43.8%
State (Either DNR or EGLE)	36	22.5%

Q18. Who do you think 'is least' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other signs of urban living once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways?		
Volunteers	98	61.3%

Love Our Waterways 2026 Litter Survey

Michigan residents believe that PSA and enforcement of laws prohibiting littering and illegal dumping would be effective to protect the health of our waterways.

Q19. Do you believe that well-crafted public service announcements will be helpful in raising awareness about our shared responsibility to protect and care for our waterways?			
Strongly Agree	70	43.8%	84.4%
Agree	65	40.6%	

Q20. Do you believe that well-designed and appropriately placed signage will be helpful in raising awareness about our shared responsibility to protect and care for our waterways?			
Strongly Agree	55	34.4%	84.4%
Agree	80	50.0%	

Q23. Do you believe that public service announcements, appropriate placement of well-designed signage, and the enforcement of a municipality's laws prohibiting littering and illegal dumping would collectively help protect the appearance and health of our waterways.			
Strongly Agree	71	44.4%	87.5%
Agree	69	43.1%	

87.5% BELIEVE

that public service announcements, well designed and well placed signage, and enforcement of litter laws would improve the appearance and help protect the health of our waterways.

Love Our Waterways 2026 Litter Survey

Michigan residents believe that fines for littering on or near our waterways should be greater to reflect the greater effort, costs, risks of personal injury involved in retrieval, and environmental harm.

Q24. Should the penalties or fines for littering on or near our waterways be greater to reflect the increased effort, cost, risk of personal injury, and environmental harm?		
Greater	127	79.4%
The Same	33	20.6%
	160	100.0%

Q25. In the event that a person is unable to pay a fine, would you find it acceptable for them to volunteer their time to conduct community service in lieu of payment?		
Yes	155	96.9%
No	5	3.1%
	160	100.0%

79.4% BELIEVE
that the penalty for littering
near our waterways should be greater.

96.9% BELIEVE
that if someone is unable
to pay their fine,
volunteering their time
to conduct community service,
is an unacceptable alternative.

Love Our Waterways 2026 Litter Survey

Michigan residents are sensitive about the matter of homelessness,
but believe they too should be held accountable for littering our waterways.

Q1. Should homeless individuals be held accountable for littering, polluting, and discarding items in our waterways?			
Yes	105	65.6%	86.1%
No	17	10.6%	
Would Rather Not Answer	32	20.0%	
Non Response	6	3.8%	
	160	100.0%	

Q2. Should homeless individuals be subject to fines or penalties for littering, polluting, and discarding items in our waterways?			
Yes	76	47.5%	61.3%
No	48	30.0%	
Would Rather Not Answer	29	18.1%	
Non Response	7	4.4%	
	160	100.0%	

Q3. If a homeless individual is unable to pay a fine, would you find it acceptable for them to volunteer their time to conduct community service in lieu of payment?			
Yes	127	79.4%	92.7%
No	10	6.3%	
Would Rather Not Answer	15	9.4%	
Non Response	8	5.0%	
	160	100.0%	

86.1% BELIEVE
that the homeless
should be held accountable
for littering and polluting.

92.7% BELIEVE
It would be acceptable for the homeless
To conduct community service
in lieu of payment of fine.

Love Our Waterways 2026 Litter Survey

WHILE MICHIGAN'S DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES AND ENERGY (EGLE) SELF-REPORTS TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE HEALTH OF OUR WATERWAYS...

Michigan residents believe that the respective city or township is most responsible for the retrieval of litter and trash attributed to the homeless.

Q4. Who do you think is 'most' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other pollutants attributed to homelessness once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways.			
City/Township	54	33.8%	**35.8%**
The State	23	14.4%	28.5%
Homeless Individuals	25	15.6%	10.3%

Q5. Who do you think is 'least'' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other pollutants attributed to homelessness once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways.			
The State	22	13.8%	15.0%
Homeless Individuals	24	15.0%	16.3%
Volunteers	70	43.8%	**47.6%**

Q16. Are you familiar with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)?		
Yes	108	67.5%
No	52	32.5%
	160	100.0%

35.8% BELIEVE
that the respective city or township "is most" responsible for waterways stewardship.

47.6% BELIEVE
that volunteers "are least" responsible for waterways stewardship.

32.5% ARE UNAWARE OF EGLE.

LITTERING AND ILLEGAL DUMPING ON OR NEAR OUR WATERWAYS REMAINS A CHALLENGE

WE WISH TO DO MORE THAN:

1. MICHIGAN WATERWAYS STEWARDSHIP
2. RIVERSIDE PARKS AND RIVER TRAIL BEAUTIFICATION
3. INSPIRE CURRENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

WE AIM TO:

1. SUSTAIN AND BUILD UPON THE HERCULEAN EFFORTS AND REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OUR THOUSANDS OF VOLUNTEERS.

2. PUT IN PLACE GREATER PROTECTIVE AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO STEWARD OUR WATERWAYS FOR THE BENEFIT OF GENERATIONS TO COME.

3. TAKE OUR LEARNINGS NATIONWIDE.

INTRODUCING

Love Our Waterways EcoZone

This is the single most important action to adopt to ensure waterway stewardship excellence and sustainable success.

Creating a Love Our Waterways EcoZone around a city or township's rivers, creeks, streams, and lakes is essential for protecting aquatic ecosystems.

These designated areas:

- Demonstrate an unwavering commitment to waterways stewardship excellence.
- Significantly reduces pollution and runoff.
- Helps maintain water quality, support wildlife habitats, and promote healthy ecosystems.
- Encourages greater recreational usage and ensures a more pleasant user and guest experience.

Love Our Waterways EcoZone

Creating a year-round, community-wide commitment.

Implementing EcoZones fosters community awareness and a shared responsibility, encouraging residents to adopt sustainable practices that benefit the environment and public health.

We define an EcoZone as:

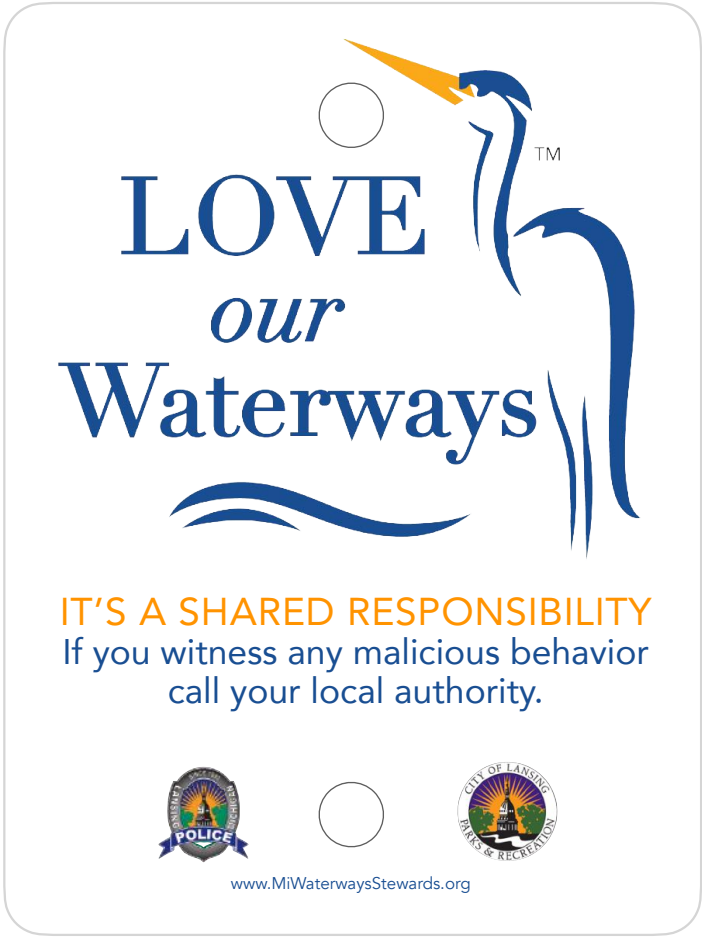
- The area within 50 feet of the high-water mark of a waterway.
- Within 20 feet from the outer edge of an adjacent stretch of their River Trail.
- Or whichever is greater.

Love Our Waterways EcoZone

Is an easy-to-implement multidisciplinary approach to waterway stewardship.

THREE EASY STEPS TO IMPLEMENTATION

1. **Ensure littering laws to include:**
   - Verbiage that includes rivers, steams and lakes.
   - Impose stricter penalties for littering offenses that occur on or near these vital natural resources.
2. **Educate residents and visitors about:**
   - The importance and our shared responsibility of keeping our waterways clean and healthy.
   - The many benefits of having cleaner, healthier, and more enjoyable waterways.
3. **Place appropriately sized signage:**
   - In high pedestrian traffic areas to raise awareness.



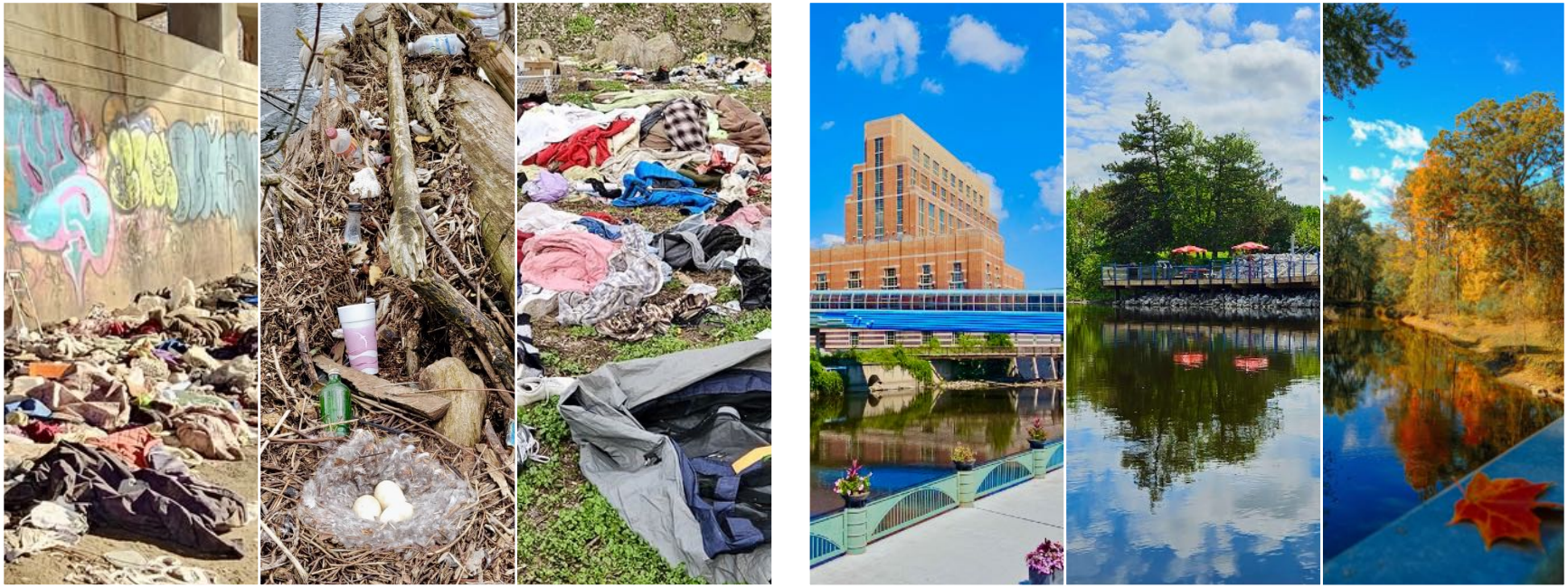
CONCEPT ONLY

TEN EASY STEPS TO BEAUTIFYING OUR STATE'S WATERWAYS

1. Conduct an Assessment of Your City or Township's Waterway Stewardship Condition and Needs.
2. Declare Your Commitment, Your Determination, to Becoming A State Leader In Waterways Stewardship Excellence.
3. Engage the Greater Community In Waterways Stewardship to Make Work Easier, Fun, and Ensure Greater Compliance.
4. Adopt the Proposed Love Our Waterways EcoZone:
    - Amend Current Littering Ordinance
    - Educate Residents and Visitors of Its Benefits
    - Place Appropriately Designed and Sized Signage to Heighten Awareness
5. Complete Cleaning and Clearing of Your City or Township's Waterways.
6. Complete An All Riverside Parks Beautification Campaign.
7. Complete Grooming of All Adjacent Stretches of Your River Trail.
8. Designate Protected Wildlife Areas.
9. Conduct A Municipal-wide, "From Your Front Door to River Floor," Waterways Stewards Education Campaign.
10. Recognize and Reward All Stakeholders.

WE CAN DO ANY PART, OR THE ENTIRETY, FOR YOU.

WE ARE AT A CROSSROAD



WHICH PATH DO YOU CHOOSE?

Love Our Waterways
2026 Litter Survey

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LITTER SURVEY PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

SEX			
Male	56	35.0%	
Female	104	65.0%	
	160	100.0%	
AGE			
Less than 13	0	0.0%	
13-18	9	5.6%	
19-25	54	33.8%	68.8%
26-35	13	8.1%	
36-50	26	16.3%	
Over 50	56	35.0%	
Prfer not to say	2	1.3%	
	160	100.0%	
EDUCATION			
Less than high school	1	0.6%	
High School	33	20.6%	
College two-years	38	23.8%	
College four-years	47	29.4%	
College greater than four years	41	25.6%	

LITTER SURVEY PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

Kalamazoo	32	20.0%	23.8%
Lansing	22	13.8%	70.0%
East Lansing	10	6.3%	
Delta Township	7	4.4%	
Meridian Township	5	3.1%	
Portage	5	3.1%	
Albion	4	2.5%	
Dewitt	4	2.5%	
Okemos	4	2.5%	
Grand Rapids	3	1.9%	
Holt	3	1.9%	
Coopersville	2	1.3%	
Grand Ledge	2	1.3%	
Haslett	2	1.3%	
Alaiedon Twp	1	0.6%	
Alma	1	0.6%	
Almena	1	0.6%	
Bath	1	0.6%	
Battle Creek	1	0.6%	
Benton Harbor	1	0.6%	
Channahon	1	0.6%	
City of Holland	1	0.6%	
Clawson	1	0.6%	
Clinton County, Rural	1	0.6%	
Coleman	1	0.6%	
Cottrellville	1	0.6%	
Dansville	1	0.6%	
Dearborn	1	0.6%	
Detroit	1	0.6%	
Dimondale	1	0.6%	
Eagle	1	0.6%	
Eaton Rapids	1	0.6%	
Ferndale	1	0.6%	
Flint	1	0.6%	
Fruitport Village and Twp.	1	0.6%	
Grand Rapids Township	1	0.6%	
Hastings	1	0.6%	
Holland	1	0.6%	
Jackson	1	0.6%	
Kalamazoo Township	1	0.6%	
Laingsburg	1	0.6%	
Livonia	1	0.6%	
Marshall	1	0.6%	
Mason	1	0.6%	
Middlebury	1	0.6%	
Muskegon	1	0.6%	
N/A	1	0.6%	
Niles	1	0.6%	
Novi	1	0.6%	
Oakland	1	0.6%	
Oshtemo	1	0.6%	
Oshtemo Township	1	0.6%	
Plymouth	1	0.6%	
Port Huron	1	0.6%	
Prairieville Twp	1	0.6%	
Putnam	1	0.6%	
Quincy	1	0.6%	
Richland	1	0.6%	
Riley township	1	0.6%	
Royal Oak	1	0.6%	
Schoolcraft	1	0.6%	
Texas Township	1	0.6%	
Union Twp, Grand Traverse County	1	0.6%	
Vevay Township	1	0.6%	
Waterford	1	0.6%	
Watervliet	1	0.6%	
Williamston, Locke Twp	1	0.6%	
Williamstown	1	0.6%	
Wolverine Lake Vlg	1	0.6%	
	160	100.0%	

QUESTIONS 1-5

Q1. Do you live by a waterway?			
Yes	107	66.9%	
No	53	33.1%	
	160	100.0%	
Q2. Do you have a secondary residency by waterway?			
Yes	12	7.5%	
No	148	92.5%	
	160	100.0%	
Q3. Do you regularly recreation on water?			
Yes	101	63.1%	
No	59	36.9%	
	160	100.0%	
Q4. Do you regularly recreation along the water?			
Yes	130	81.3%	
No	30	18.8%	
	160	100.0%	
Q5. How concerned are you about the health of Michigan?			
Very Concerned	99	61.9%	92.5%
Somewhat Concerned	49	30.6%	
Neutral	12	7.5%	
Somewhat Unconcerned	0	0.0%	
Very Unconcerned	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 1-5

It is our responsibility to be concerned
The level of nondiposable trash I see near water ways is concerning to me. Mostly plastic water bottles, wrappers, and tin cans.
Everyone lives in a watershed, so the first question is confusing question. Also likert scales are subject to distortion.
Concerns regarding microplastics (from residential and commercial discharge), boating oils and gasoline (from not properly maintained motors), general trash from multitude of sources, commerical and residental 'chemical' leaching. Concerns on how all previous stated concerns affect fish and wildlife that call rivers,creeks, and inland lakes home.
Waste water and factory runoff is a major concern. The pollutants in our water, algal blooms, and invasive species are all cause for concern for the environment, wildlife, and for us humans.
Although I don't spend much time enjoying inland lakes, rivers or creeks, I do enjoy time on/in Lake Michigan. I realize the importance of keeping these smaller waterways clean as they feed into the Great Lakes. I also understand how important their cleanliness is for our watersheds, farmers, etc.
Im currently working in one of my professor lab so our investigation and research have been about the removal of phosphate and treatment of the rivers and waters in Michigan.
I believe the stability of the ecosystems is a serious potential threat that should be considered.
I have a county drainage ditch that runs along 2 of my rural property boundary lines. The middle of my property (field) is a wetland area where the water from surrounding farm fields drains into it. I have a vernal pool area that the US Fish and Wildlife re-graded for me. I used to clean litter out of the Lansing Rain Gardens and am upset with the amount of trash in urban areas. Also, upset by excess nitrates going into waterways from agriculture.
My main concern right now is that they are using fresh water for AI and it is using up so much of our fresh water. With Michigan having the big lakes and many other lakes, I'm worried about how it will affect Michigan in the future.
We are avid kayakers and consider ourselves to be stewards of the Battle Creek River (Emmett St. to the Kzoo confluence). We've developed a GIS map using "what3words" app showing where tires, barrels, campsites, hazards, etc. are along this stretch (and some others) so we can return with volunteer groups to clean.
We do alot of kayaking and many rivers are streams are impossible to navigate due to trees in them.
Over the past few years the waterways have become more polluted.
My city has a local man-made beach along the St. Clair River. Every year, there is growing concern about contaminants in the water from the power plants that are all along the northern parts of the river. There are also frequent beach shutdowns on Lake Huron for the same reasons of unsafe contaminants in the water. Also, the water is so dirty in the smaller rivers that branch off from the St. Clair River that the city advises for people to stay out of the smaller streams and rivers pretty much all the time.

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 1-5 continued

Can't eat the fish, litter and large debris make many waters dangerous to fish or swim, at times kayak or canoe.
I'm concerned about the contamination I can see, as well as the contamination I can't see, like E.coli.
I am very concerned for Michigan's waterways, the Lansing area is constantly littered with trash from homeless people and others who just don't care. When I go into the outdoors I like to see the natural beauty and it gets tainted with the litter and random objects in the waterways. The data centers as well concern me!
I grew up with the Grand River running through our backyard. Spent countless hours with my brothers, sisters and friends, canoeing, fishing & swimming along the grand in the summer, playing hockey on it in the winter. Also spent considerable time on Burt Lake with my grandparents. Take regular fishing trips along the Au Sable for steelhead and salmon on the lower Au Sable below Foote Dam and native trout and walleye on the upper river. I am always concerned for the health of these rivers from trash to sewage bypass overflows and the extensive PFA pollution in the lower AuSable and Clark's Marsh from the old Wurtsmith AFB that the federal govt refuses to address, even more so presently.
I am the East Lansing Rotary Club President and have participated in three different River clean ups of the Red Cedar River. I would like the East Lansing Rotary Club to continue to support you in all future endeavors 😍
Currently, biggest concern is companies moving in to build data centers. Michigan and the Great Lakes need to be protected.
Michigan's natural water resources are the state's most valuable resource. We should go above and beyond to protect them.
clean water and wetland protection acts worked. concerned that officials in michigan talk in generalities yet policies and legislation don't address.
I live next to Plaster Creek in Grand Rapids and have learned a lot through Plaster Creek Stewards about the high pollution levels. I am a lover of wildlife, which began in childhood when I got to know the wildlife in my backyard. I wish we could all live near clean, healthy waterways.
Our waterways need protection from pollution and irresponsible land use decisions. I have spent my second career doing this work.
I am worried with talk of data centers and drawbacks on federal environmental regulations.
As somebody who enjoys hiking, outdoor recreation, and a clean environment, the quality of our waterways affects us all. The quality of our drinking water, recreational areas, and local wildlife all depend on clean water.
The lake I've always lived on and grew up on often times isn't taken care of. Over the years its health has been declining and it makes me nervous I one day won't be able to have my kids see the beautiful lake I have spent my life on.
Concern is about forever chemicals, herbiside/pesticide run off, sediment, litter, intentional dumping.
My partner is a geologist who does a lot of work with soil/water testing and environmental cleanup sites, so added knowledge on how badly some areas have been exposed to poor conditions and contaminants.

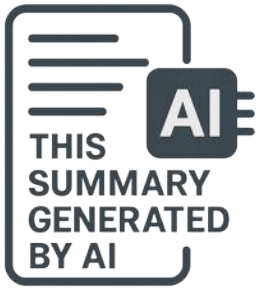
‘COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 1-5 continued

I'm a climate activist and care deeply about Michigan water resources, from the smallest creek to Lake Superior! I've always felt deeply connected to water in SW MI, and I commonly organize or attend community river cleanups.
It still amazes me that Michigan in my opinion doesn’t lead all states or the world in water filtration and developing the highest standard of keeping the waterways clean.
Our water is the most precious resource we have!! We (policymakers/society) don't see the severity of our water issue.
I'm old so I recognize that both the rivers and lakes are healthier than they were years ago (especially urban rivers). But there's still a long way to go to get them cleaner and keep them that way.
Would like to see MI Waterways work more with the Mid-Michigan Environmental Action Council
The rivers seem generally clear of litter recently, however I have concerned about the data centers and the pollutants that are not visable. Being surrounded by cars and urban runoff must have an effect on the water quality and with the several data center coming to Lansing, I'm worried about the ecosystems that rely on these waterways.
I'm more concerned now because I really had know idea people were really throwing mechanic devices in the water, as well as bikes and scooters.
I think about the vibrant wetlands that used to fill the entire Lansing area, and then look at the sad, lifeless and eroded shores of the Grand River as it flows through downtown, and it makes me want to cry
I am concerned about the level of pollution in Michigan lakes and rivers due to the chemical PFAS. I thoroughly enjoy fishing and this particular chemical gets into the fish's systems and makes them harmful for human consumption.
Industrial agricultural and sediment runoff are concerns.
All the lakes and rivers I have been on have been pretty clean, so I was not concerned about this being an issue.
I think it is terrible how so many of Michigan's rivers and creeks are covered with litter and trash. I find it difficult to understand, not alone accept, that this is such a prevalent problem in Michigan.

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 1-5 continued.-1

I have only lived here for a year but I'm kind of amazed at how tolerant this community seems to be of some of the most destructive members of the community. I walk the trail every day a few times a day from the foot of the trail on Grand River Ave near the Olympic Broil to the Brenke Fish Ladder and often beyond. There is a homeless couple named Chucky and Sarah that move their tents around from spot to spot and bounce from shelter to shelter. Occassionally Chucky gets locked up by the police for a few days but then he's back on the trail harassing people and producing an insane trail of garbage and random items and often hypodermic needles and pieces. I pick up after him daily. I have tried to help them but they are abusive and lie and steal and make it impossible. I'm just kind of shocked that nobody seems to notice they are responsible for a large portion of the chaos and garbage along the trail and that with all the different programs no one can intervene beyond giving them more crap to spread along the river on their daily quest to steal and salvage metal and score meth and dope and beer and do it all over again every day. Just wondering if anybody else notices or has any ideas how to help them so that kids can enjoy nature without being exposed to used hypodermics, human feces, and abject squalor. If I can be of any assistance beyond the little bit of picking up I do on my own, please let me know.
As a serious triathlete who loves to train running, cycling, and especially swimming outdoors, the safety, cleanliness, and overall health of the environment is of most importance to me. It makes me upset when I see pollution, especially in the water.
There are too many pollutants that regularly make their way to the water, including: Runoff from herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers used on lawns Same plus manure used in agriculture Excessive road and sidewalk salt Sewage when drain systems are not separate for rain and sewage Residuals from car/truck/suv tires Microplastics Air pollution / acid rain Among others
I pick up a lot of trash.
Between PFAS, Line 5 or the threat of killing off entire species the health of our environment is only behind the loss of our democracy these days. The loss of our democracy will cement the death of our environment, as well as humans across the globe. Without ridding our government of climate deniers and liars (puppets of an authoritarian) neither our environment or democracy have a prayer.
I don't know much about Michigan's rivers, creeks and inland lakes.

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Litter Survey Comments to Questions 1-5:



1. **Pollution Concerns**: There is a strong emphasis on various forms of pollution affecting Michigan's waterways, including plastic waste, agricultural runoff (herbicides, pesticides), industrial discharges (e.g., PFAS), and sewage overflow issues. Respondents are particularly worried about the impact these pollutants have on wildlife and human health.
2. **Littering and Debris**: Many comments express frustration over the visible litter in parks and waterways, particularly in urban areas. This pollution not only detracts from the natural beauty of these spaces but also poses safety risks for recreational users.
3. **Impact of Development**: Concerns have been raised regarding the construction of data centers and other developments that may threaten water resources and ecosystems. Respondents worry about how this will affect the long-term sustainability of Michigan's waterways.
4. **Community Involvement**: Many individuals are actively engaged in cleanup efforts and community stewardship. There is a call for more organized efforts and collaboration among local groups to address littering and pollution effectively.
5. **Ecosystem Health**: The stability of local ecosystems is a recurring theme, with many expressing a desire to see improved policies and actions to protect these vital resources. Comments reflect a sense of urgency regarding the need for better environmental regulations and community awareness.

Recommended Next Steps:

1. **Organize Community Cleanups**: Plan more frequent community cleanup events in urban and rural areas, particularly near waterways, to engage local residents and foster stewardship.
2. **Educational Campaigns**: Launch educational initiatives to raise awareness about the sources and impacts of pollution, especially focusing on microplastics, agricultural runoff, and the importance of maintaining clean waterways.
3. **Advocate for Policy Changes**: Collaborate with environmental organizations to advocate for stricter regulations on pollutants, particularly concerning industrial discharges and land-use practices impacting watersheds.
4. **Enhance Monitoring and Reporting**: Implement a system for ongoing monitoring of water quality and litter levels in major waterways, ensuring transparency and accountability in addressing pollution issues.
5. **Collaborate with Local Governments**: Work with local governments and community organizations to address homelessness and littering issues, finding sustainable solutions that promote both environmental health and community support.

QUESTIONS 6-9

Q6. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes to be unsightly?

Strongly Agree	139	86.9%	96.3%
Agree	15	9.4%	
Neutral	4	2.5%	
Disagree	1	0.6%	
Strongly Disagree	1	0.6%	
	160	100.0%	

Q7. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes are harmful to the environment?

Strongly Agree	144	90.0%	98.8%
Agree	14	8.8%	
Neutral	1	0.6%	
Disagree	0	0.0%	
Strongly Disagree	1	0.6%	
	160	100.0%	

Q8. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes are harmful to fish and wildlife?

Strongly Agree	142	88.8%	98.8%
Agree	16	10.0%	
Neutral	1	0.6%	
Disagree	0	0.0%	
Strongly Disagree	1	0.6%	
	160	100.0%	

Q9. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes pose a risk to humans?I

Strongly Agree	98	61.3%	94.4%
Agree	53	33.1%	
Neutral	7	4.4%	
Disagree	1	0.6%	
Strongly Disagree	1	0.6%	
	160	100.0%	

QUESTIONS 10-12

Q10. Do you agree that litter, trash, and other signs of urban living found in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes are more harmful than that found on land?

Strongly Agree	59	36.9%	76.3%
Agree	63	39.4%	
Neutral	35	21.9%	
Disagree	3	1.9%	
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

Q11. What level of litter, trash, and other signs of urban living in or near our rivers, creeks, and inland lakes do you consider acceptable?

Completely Unacceptable	101	63.1%	96.9%
Unacceptable	54	33.8%	
Moderable	5	3.1%	
Mostly Acceptable	0	0.0%	
Complete Unacceptable	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

Q12. Do you agree with the statement, “Littered and polluted rivers, creeks, and inland lakes reflect poorly on a community?"

Strongly Agree	45	28.1%	95.6%
Agree	108	67.5%	
Neutral	4	2.5%	
Disagree	3	1.9%	
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 6-12.

Signs of urban living varies, especially in harm to wildlife. For example, liquid pollutants are more harmful than a candy wrapper. Priorities may be difficult but necessary
It is an eye sore to see trash in nature as well as a health risk to both the enviorment and human health.
I can't say that litter in water is worse than litter on land because the litter on land always finds its way into the waterways, so they are the same
All pollution flows to the waterway, so inland trash is just as important. I am disappointed with how Q10 was written. Also Q11 is confusing. Also to blame pollution on the community instead of businesses or corporations and government policy is wild - community members have to deal with the effects of pollution, but it is often out of an individual person's control.
I believe that while human detritus is a problem, there are much more important issues requiring attention to protect, conserve and restore the water resources.
The community on a larger scale (i.e. state of Michigan or watersheds). What someone puts in the river here can cause all the cities, townships, etc along the river to be impacted.
Often the pollution is moved into an area, it may not enter the waterway where it is seen.
Unhoused people deserve a place to live. If we place more garbage cans and maintain them properly, do more river clean ups, it will certainly help. These questions make it seem like you guys are anti unhoused. What if you do outreach events at community kitchens, offer ways for the unhoused to contribute to clesn up so they can understand a different side of this. If they have a clean area to live. Then we can have a clean area to walk. But if we are going to huff and puff about the problem but not work to educate and share knowledge, we are unable to empathize with each other. These events should not be led in judgment. Unhoused people have more to worry about than throwing trash in places where there are no trash receptacles. Unhoused people live with the clothes and items thst they can personally carry. They have to constantly move and stay out of civilian site. Imagine how tiring that is. Of course litter and debris is a problem for wildlife, but we need to ensure that the unhoused community is shown respect and understanding of their circumstances.
Q10, Interesting question, I haven't read about which is worse but would like to learn more. I will have to educate myself.
urban living is a pretty nonspecific term. do you mean trash from cities or homeless encampments?
I understand about the concerned this topic have arise in the community but most the people will prefer to ignore this issue
How you treat the environment reflects the values that you learn from home or the community.
It is a representation of how much locals love their own area I believe.
Why isn't the city of Lansing prioritizing the aesthetics of the rain gardens. Why don't they use more native plants and less mulch. Why don't they create something more useful like the "Montgomery Drain Project"? Why do farmers get away with polluting our land? Their lobby is too big! Corn uses so much water. Why are homeowners on lakes and streams allowed to have extensive turf lawns that they fertilize?

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 6-12 continued.

I just don't understand how people litter and pollute. There are trash cans all over all you have to do is put your trash in it.
We have found that most litter is from people that purchase products that are not even good for us. They are typically fast food, convenience store wrappers, related to alcohol, tobacco, soda, cigarettes, and gambling. At the risk of sounding puritanical, clean living = less trash. The other huge issue we see is that garbage trucks spread trash throughout neighborhoods because residential trash is not deposited completely into the trucks (i.e. it is windy, items are not bagged, trucks drive with the compartment open and trash flying out.)
Any litter is totally unacceptable
Sometimes trash and litter can float through the air before landing in water and by waterways.
It really is a shame to see litter all along the banks of the small rivers I live around. I've seen boaters just throw out whatever garbage they have on their boats, and it is sad to see how little they care about doing so. It is also disappointing that the city does little to none to do cleanups of litter that is all around the rivers, ditches, and roads that are near the main river.
I understand that community resources are also tied to litter and the lack of ability to clean up. Also that a lot of litter comes from those not living in that community or can accidently be released through common litter collection like garbage trucks.
Our family has always cleaned up our own mess plus any other litter found on beaches, pathways and in parks. It's everyone's responsibility.
I believe that trash found on land is just as harmful to waterbodies locally since all hydrology is connected through wetlands and groundwater, especially in the state of Michigan. I would also add that cleanliness of wetlands is just as important as all the waterbodies listed due to their ability to host species of most concern in our state, as well as clean and mitigate flood and storm water during rain events.
I'm trying to be realistic with my expectations. I think litter is dangerous anywhere (including in landfills) so that's why I'm neutral on that question. And for 11 & 12, I just feel like this is slipping into judgement and shaming zone so, while I don't want to accept liter and I don't think reflects well, I don't have such strong judgmental emotions that other people might have.
Review survey Q11 - the anchors don't match the question
I pick up trash that I see when fishing and hiking along the Au Sable some unfortunately left by fellow anglers and hikers. It feels overwhelming in some of the more urban areas. I work at MSU and the amount of plastic water bottles and bags can be substantial. I have participated in Red Cedar spring clean-ups and it is astonishing the amount of trash that is pulled from and along the river through campus.
I believe there is a responsibility for more trash receptacles with a regular maintenance plan to help part of this problem
We should all do our part to make sure our trash goes where it should and that our communities have infrastructure to better manage waste.

'COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 6-12 continued

The homeless problem is a blight on our community. They must be kept off of our public lands.
Not all letter and pollution in a river come from the community in which is it found. It could be from upriver. However, it is the community's responsibility to help steward and clean up the waterways within their jurisdiction so as not to continue the cycle and pollute the waters downstream.
I agree that polluted waterways reflect on a community, but especially so on the people doing the littering. While it's a city's responsibility to maintain clean waterways, it's also the responsibility of individuals.
Water pollution is more harmful than land pollution because of our drinking water. It's much easier to avoid a contaminated area on land, but water flows to everyone. I dont understand why anyone would want to harm the place where they live or work -- those people reflect poorly on the community and then make the entire place look bad.
While I do see pristine natural environments to be a sign of a community that cares, often signs of litter and human living surrounding creeks or natural areas is a reflection of a community's socioeconomic status and the level of investment that community receives. Currently, lower income communities are provided on average less aesthetic, conservation, and infrastructure care and investment, so litter in these communities is often a reflection of a governing bodies care for that community. While there is some level of individual responsibility that comes in to play in littered communities, my personal reflections and mal-sentiments are usually aimed towards systems when I see litter and not individuals living in that community.
Many times a community such as ours based around n paper didn't fully grasp the negative impact it would have on citizens. Out of sight out of mind for many of us
Above
It reflects the failure of the community in being stewards of the environment and there is a relationship between the health and financial wellbeing of communities and polluntion.
I mean it could've been a simple mistake that someone forgot to pick up after themselves, but for the most part it does reflect poorly in a community if they're known for those things mentioned above.
Litter demonstrates a lack of respect for the environment and the beauty of nature. Its presence distracts from the scenery and is harmful to the creatures and plants that live there.
When there is lots of trash around it makes the whole community look worse both aesthetically and as a group of people.
No community should allow their waterways be affected by litter and trash. I understand this is a difficult issue as a lot of the litter and trash found begins at a point well up stream.

‘COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 6-12 continued.

No additional commentary.
Michigan, at the state level, needs to allow other levels of government ban single use plastic, styrofoam, etc Even better they should be banned state wide Litter needs to be stopped at the source as much as possible - long before it becomes trash Michigan should not be accepting trash in its landfills from other states Bottle returns should extend to all Single use items should be banned as much as possible to decrease waste and litter
Some signs of "urban living" can be good, right? Such as park or riverfront development that protects the riverbank and provides safe access for residents and visitors.
It make the people in the community look like they don't care about their environment at all. It's disgusting.

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Litter Survey Comments to Questions 6-12:

1. **Perception of Pollution**: Many respondents express that litter, whether on land or in water, reflects poorly on the community and poses health risks. The presence of litter can deter individuals from enjoying outdoor spaces, shopping, and recreational activities.
2. **Responsibility and Community Impact**: Comments indicate a shared belief that both individuals and systems contribute to littering issues. Many feel that community members should take responsibility, while also recognizing the role of businesses and government policies in maintaining clean environments.
3. **Socioeconomic Factors**: There is a notable connection made between litter prevalence and socioeconomic status. Lower-income communities often receive less investment in aesthetics and waste management, leading to higher visibility of litter.
4. **Call for Systemic Change**: Respondents advocate for more robust waste management infrastructure, including additional trash receptacles and maintenance, as well as broader policies to reduce single-use plastics and other waste sources.
5. **Community Engagement**: There is a desire for outreach and education efforts that involve the unhoused population in cleanup initiatives, emphasizing empathy and understanding of their situations. Participants believe that fostering a sense of community can lead to better stewardship of local environments.

Recommended Next Steps:

1. **Enhance Waste Management**: Increase the number of trash receptacles in public areas and ensure regular maintenance to reduce litter accumulation.
2. **Community Education Programs**: Develop educational campaigns that focus on the impact of litter on community health and wildlife, alongside initiatives to engage residents in cleanup efforts.
3. **Advocate for Policy Changes**: Work with local and state governments to promote policies that limit single-use plastics and improve wastewater management, addressing the sources of pollution.
4. **Foster Community Involvement**: Organize community events that invite diverse groups, including the unhoused, to participate in cleanup efforts, creating a sense of ownership and responsibility for local environments.
5. **Monitor and Assess**: Implement a system to regularly monitor litter levels and community attitudes towards pollution, using this data to

Q13. Would you be more likely to travel to visit an area for recreational activities if its river, creek, or inland lake is free of litter, trash, and other signs of urban living?			
Definitely More Likely	128	80.0%	95.6%
Somewhat More Likely	25	15.6%	
Neutral	5	3.1%	
Somewhat Unlikely	2	1.3%	
Definitely unlikely	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	
Q14. Would you be more likely to visit an area for shopping, dining, or vacationing if its river, creek, or inland lake is free of litter and other signs of urban living?			
Definitely More Likely	119	74.4%	94.4%
Somewhat More Likely	32	20.0%	
Neutral	7	4.4%	
Somewhat Unlikely	2	1.3%	
Definitely unlikely	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

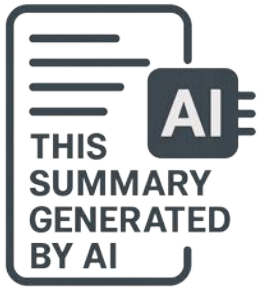
COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 13, 14

Hard to see some pollutants but if they are absent than plants & wildlife can be evidence of lack there of
I love nature, and it feels less authentic when I can see human trash in nature.
Pollution doesn't deter me - it spurs me to action to pull out a trash bag and clean up (take with me) what I can. I have vacationed in places like Chattanooga that employ people specifically to street sweep at night to clear the streets, and guess what? There is still trash to take care of every single day. It doesn't affect my ability to choose places to recreate or vacation with.
I would like to visit the area to make up my mind why is important to preserve the nature recourses our planet have to offer
I don't think lots of motor boats on a waterway or shopping/restaurant areas will reduce trash.
We call an eddy full of trash a "Seven-Eleven" because most of what is swirling around is what people purchase at those types of convenience stores. When we kayak, we almost always go with our trash-collecting gear and have sort of made a sport of it. In urban areas where we have found needles and broken alcohol bottles, I am especially unnerved to be out of the boat.
Reason why we avoid some outdoor dining areas of restaurants around the state
Although I agree I would visit these places more, mostly it is that I would be more stress free visiting an area without trash. I enjoy recreating in areas where trash can be an issue, but, I also understand it is a privilege to recreate in clean areas. I am also part of the solution and can bring a bag and garbage picker to those places I enjoy recreating at.
I hope a stronger answer will encourage decision makers to make better choices if you are presenting this data.
If there is a lot of trash somewhere I travel the chances of me going back are a lot slimmer.
My family and I vacation every year in Frankfort, MI, an Up-North beach town. The Betsie River and the surrounding Lake Michigan shoreline are well-maintained and clean, and so we've been visiting every year since.
I assume that a place I am traveling to will be clean and have safe water to swim and drink. If I knew ahead of time that it wasnt so, then I wouldnt choose to go there.
I live in the city of Kalamazoo, but drive to Portage trails to walk my dog regularly because Portage has clean trails, maintained trash cans throughout their trail systems, and year round public bathroom. Across the street from one of the trail heads that I visit frequently is Kalamazoo's Milham Park. It is littered with trash, trash cans only maintained during warm months, and public bathrooms only open during the summer.
In my opinion it is very likely if "word on the street" don't go there it's really polluted you should go to place x where at least it's clean.

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 13, 14 continued.

I went to Jackson, excited to see the headwaters of the Grand River, and when I saw the concrete ditch that encases the river in the downtown area, I thought it was the ugliest urban river I've ever seen. I would much prefer to see a wetland area--even one that smells like mud or decomposition--and it would draw me back to businesses in the area
I do not enjoy seeing the results of people's carelessness.
To understand the importance of having waterways of cleared of litter and trash, just look at every lakeside community where much of their commerce is made from seasonal water related activities.
I have the utmost respect for communities that keep clean waterways that are mostly free of pollutants and are safe for swimming. I think that communities that allow for people to pollute their wetland environments reflects poorly on the community itself.
Whether urban or rural there should not be trash near waterways We do not need all of the single use and packaging that exists If people spend time near waterways, or anywhere they should pack out / take with them all waste

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Litter Survey Comments to Questions 13&14:



1. **Impact on Recreational Choices**: Many respondents indicated that litter significantly influences their decisions about where to travel, shop, and recreate. Clean environments are seen as essential for enjoyable outdoor experiences, while areas with visible trash deter visitors.
2. **Community Responsibility**: There is a strong sentiment that both individuals and communities share responsibility for maintaining clean waterways. Comments highlight the importance of collective action, such as community cleanups, to address litter issues.
3. **Perception of Urban vs. Natural Areas**: Participants expressed a preference for natural settings over urban areas that are overwhelmed by pollution. Some even mentioned that they'd rather experience a natural wetland than a polluted urban river, reflecting a desire for authenticity in nature.
4. **Health and Safety Concerns**: Concerns about health and safety are prevalent, particularly in areas where pollution is visible, such as broken glass and needles. The presence of trash not only detracts from aesthetic enjoyment but also raises safety concerns for families and outdoor enthusiasts.
5. **Environmental Stewardship**: Respondents showed a willingness to take action by cleaning up litter themselves. However, they emphasized the need for better infrastructure (e.g., trash cans, maintenance) and policies (e.g., reducing single-use plastics) to support a cleaner environment.

Recommended Next Steps:

1. **Enhance Waste Management Infrastructure**: Increase the number of trash receptacles and ensure regular maintenance in public areas to minimize litter accumulation.
2. **Organize Community Cleanups**: Foster community engagement through organized cleanup events that encourage residents to take an active role in maintaining their local environments.
3. **Promote Environmental Education**: Develop programs that educate the public about the importance of clean waterways, including the impact of litter on wildlife and community health.
4. **Advocate for Policy Changes**: Collaborate with local governments to implement policies that limit single-use plastics and promote sustainable practices to reduce waste at the source.
5. **Create a Reporting System**: Establish a platform for community members to report littered areas, enabling local authorities to respond promptly and effectively.

Q15. Are you familiar with Michigan's Department of Natural Resources (DNR)?		
Yes	137	85.6%
No	23	14.4%
	160	100.0%
Q16. Are you familiar with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE)?		
Yes	108	67.5%
No	52	32.5%
	160	100.0%
Q17. Who do you think 'is most' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other signs of urban living once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways?		
City/Township	70	43.8%
County	18	11.3%
State (Either DNR or EGLE)	36	22.5%
Local Watershed	12	7.5%
Volunteers	24	15.0%
	160	100.0%
Q18. Who do you think 'is least' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other signs of urban living once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways?		
City/Township	10	6.3%
County	14	8.8%
State (Either DNR or EGLE)	30	18.8%
Local Watershed	8	5.0%
Volunteers	98	61.3%
	160	100.0%

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 15-18.

I feel that the responsibility is everyones, but ultimately we need to be realisitc and task this to the individual communities. If trash is in your own community then you (the person living in the actaul environment) are the most likely to care about the problem. So townships and cities should take the initiative in keeping their enviorment clean.
While I think it usually ends up falling to NGOs and volunteers to retrieve litter, trash, etc., these folks are least likely to have contributed to the problem. The litterers themselves are most responsible and the businesses that make and sell single use plastics also bear some responsibility. I know that DNR and EGLE do not have the budget and personnel to tackle a defuse problem like litter cleanup, but I checked the State box for responsibility because I think we need State legislation to limit single use plastics, educate and fine litterers, and fund cleanup efforts.
I would have chosen an all of the above option for question 17 if it was an option
I selected volunteers for Q17 and Q18 because community involvement/buy-in is very important. However, it's a shared responsibility. Local watershed organizations don't really exist in mid-Michigan like they do in metro Detroit. There are several that are really good - like the Clinton River Watershed Council - that work in tandem with volunteers and local/county/state government. The watershed ecologists and education/stewardship team with that organization are amazing communicators that are able to work across all of the lines of shared governance to make things like removal (of not just pollution, but also things like log jam removal) happen.
I think that there should be more than one answer for who is most retrieving litter from waterways. Volunteers are the largest percent of trash retrievers but they don’t do this without organizing agency’s-NGOs. Watershed Councils and City governments have been rhe most effective parties at organizing volunteers in our area and often work together.
It's everyones duty or non-duty. It's a personal choice.
The issue of responsibility is an interesting way to phase your question. I think everyone, state, county and local all 'should' have responsibility to keep water clean. Similarly volunteer groups 'should' keep water clean as well. Some of these are legal responsibilities, others are moral responsibilities.
Overall, I feel like the State (EGLE) should be responsibly budgeting ample funds for an office like DNR or Watershed Organizations to carry out the task of educating and organizing local clean up events with cities and townships. My thought being that the more people are engaged with their local events the deeper the impact the event will have on them. Creating more opportunities and hopefully interest in learning how litter and pollution effect them personally on a local level. The effects litter and pollution have on their waterways and ultimately their drinking water, which, in turn provides an opportunity and motivation for learning how to change their behaviors and how they model behaviors for others. If all of this is done on a state or even county level I think people feel too far removed from the situation and then take on the mentality that someone else will take care of it. Locally, it seems, the more concern is raised and the more neighbors start to discuss issues, the better the chance for local engagement, additional volunteers, and hopefully cleaner waterways going forward.
I think everyone is responsible for there trash and one have to do there part to help a little.

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 15-18 continued.

River clean-up should be treated like residential garbage clean-up. Some of this work is too risky for volunteers. My Rotary club often does this work, but we've cut back after there was a lighting storm; we were finding needles; water was very deep when we were wading; there were snags requiring us to use chainsaws (omg so dangerous) and there are always the regular risks of drowning on the river. I stopped asking them after realizing that we were setting ourselves up for disaster if we were doing more than light trash pick-up. I think there needs to be a specialized City team that does this work after storms (clear debris, clean up after storm sewers wash trash into creeks). We also need to pay a person in each area to keep drains clear in each neighborhood (or at least have a very well coordinated effort of volunteers). This is all too much and too important to leave up to the Rotarians, Kiwanians, and Elks every once in a while.
If there were a budget, I think stewardship for young people would be a great idea. Volunteer adults overseeing a paid group of youth who could see the impact of cleanups.
Volunteers do it in their own time because they care, where people in the city get paid to take care of the environment in their area.
I think everyone is responsible for cleaning up litter and trash. Volunteers do it for free and out of the goodness of their hearts, while others get paid while doing it.
I think everyone is responsible for picking up their trash. I understand trash is sometimes blown out of a car or inadvertently dropped, but individuals need to be responsible for their own actions and not always depend on the government to make rules or fines to make people responsible. With that said, people are not always taught the consequences of litter and trash on the environment so they need to be educated and fined.
I think it is best if they all work together. Picking most and least responsible doesn't accomplish anything
Just to clarify, I am reading the question as who is 'currently the most responsible' and vice versa, which is what my answer is based off. I did not answer who I think should be most responsible, but rather who the responsibility falls on the most.
We ALL have a responsibility to clean up what we can, but shifting the burden of labor, proper disposal etc to the citizens instead of DNR or EGLE is not right.
I think this is a trick question. Nobody should be responsible and we are all responsible. It should be built into the funding structure for communities to pay for it at all levels and for everyone to participate. Unfortunately, there is not enough funding so local organizations and volunteers have the most power and flexibility to get this done at this point.
Waterways are a shared asset, which require distributed responsibility with defined ownership. Responsibility should sit at the level closest to the impact (city/township), but be reinforced by higher-level policy and incentive alignment (DNR, EGLE).
I am not 100% sure who should be responsible for it but it definitely is not the ones who take the time out of their day to do so because no one else will, however they still do because they know it’s right!
I’m sure that State, county and city agencies can be open and supportive of clean-up efforts, but I am unsure of the level of priority they place on it

'COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 15-18 continued.

It's locally easier to police areas.
I believe each person is responsible. In other countries people take pride in their towns and waterways. Here, too many people just litter and either don't care or think someone else will pick it up. Unhoused people should be given the tools to clean up after themselves. (brooms, bags, gloves, etc.)
I do feel that this is a good way for people to work off time they need to serve for some sort of community service. I also think that people like me have 8 hours of community service that I don't typically use. I know somebody from EGLE puts something out once a year. Would be nice to have several such events.
I think the city should be more responsible for ensuring clear waterways with the guidance, help and funding from Michigan organizations like the DNR and EGLE.
The city has a public services department, and the state has agencies that are responsible for public lands and pollution, but the county has no such agency or department. County conservation districts are not staffed or funded to be able to handle this burden.
This was hard to answer.
We are all responsible for keep trash and pollution out of our waterways.
The public should be handling their own trash removal anytime they are out enjoying nature, parks or waterways.
The most responsible party is every living individual in that community. The second is the watershed group if there is one and if not, the city/township/village.
If no one person owns our waterways, then I think it's everybody's responsibility to take care of our waterways, not just one individual group. However, I think local communities should take more responsibility for clean-up, as oftentimes waterways run through local communities (like how the Grand River runs through Lansing; Lansing should take responsibility for the sections of the River within their boundaries). Where community boundaries end, the respective county (or the state of Michigan) could take over.
Inland lakes are bordered by multiple cities, so the responsibility there has to be shared, or from the state or county. To be honest I'm not sure what a Watershed organization does other than recruit volunteers to help with clean-up events like we are discussing. I also think the responsible group depends on the source of the pollution. If it's a mildly littered area like from trash blowing out of bins or random packaging left behind, then volunteers would be well suited to help clean up. But if it's a large clean-up in a known problem area, then a municipality or the state needs to step in.
Although I ranked volunteers at least responsible for cleaning up trash, it is often volunteers who do the majority of the trash picking.
The last two questions are tricky to answer because I think the state should set the environmental standards, however it is more logical for the individual cities/townships to be responsible for keeping their side of the road clean so to speak.
I personally think that while it should be the responsibility of a city/township to provide labor to remove litter from waterways, state agencies like the DNR and EGLE are responsible for monitoring waterways and are partially responsible for finding and alerting local agenices to the state of their waterways and which locations may need further stewardship.

'COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 15-18 continued.

While it is amazing to have volunteers to pick up liter. They should not be held fully accountable for doing volunteer work. They already doing amazing by just being there to volunteer. The city should be held accountable.
This was a very broad question, the state should be responsible for allowing/not protecting the people. When constant “accidents” happen by big businesses to retain jobs or money. The state has the most overall power for the big picture. The counties would be responsible for mid level pollution and address or confirm in agreement with the state as to hot areas. Cities would be responsible to the county and as each city would be able to use the creative thinkers, architects and engineers to solve their area unique issues. My hope is the water shed org would facilitate volunteers with knowledge and items to help clean water areas. Each person is ultimately responsible for their conduct. But alas we all want this issue to be somebodies else’s problem and all complain about the lack of funding.
Honestly, I don't know who should be responsible - but I doubt my little township has the resources. Ultimately it should be EVERYONE'S responsibility to keep our waterways clean - but I suppose that isn't realistic...
It should be REGULATED. SHARPLY. Made a priority in our state, county, town, etc. Should have jobs for regulating it.
I'm not sure I understand Q17 & Q18. For Q17 organizations and volunteers are the ones doing it but I think the city/ township should be. For Q18 the city/township aren't doing enough.
I may be way off base, but I would think the state entities are responsible for policy, rules and regulation and maybe some grants or funding for cleanup. I may be totally wrong though.
Volunteers do bulk of work though
This is tough! I don't think you can make volunteers, of which I am one, responsible for the clean-up. Although we do that regularly, it can be hazardous and dangerous. I believe we need entities with expertise to do the job properly. Some primary resposiblity has to rest with individuals to cease leaving their signs of living in and along waterways. That needs to be backed up with laws and codes when violated.
I have always viewed pollution as more greatly effected by big companies. The community members can influence state organizations and pollical figures but ultimately, it is the responsibility of the state to reduce these pollutants. Allowing these big companies to continue polluting our riverways and welcoming data centers who will do much worse in the near future is a huge statement for where our government's priority lies. Although volunteers and local organization often are tasked with clean up, it should be put to the state who allows these issues in the first place.
Personally, I feel that all the above should come together since each of them have a common goal, keeping the environment clean.
The City/Township also has a responsibility. Local trash pick-up creates a lot of litter: every week after trash day there is lots of loose trash flying around because some of it slips between cans and the truck. There must be ways to reduce this effect. The city also could have programs to encourage waste reduction (like expanding municipal composting, giving rewards for smaller city trash bins, etc)

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 15-18 continued..

Volunteers are the most responsible because they are the ones doing most/all of the work. Governments at all levels lack resources to do trash clean up.
I feel people who throw trash in the river should be responsible for cleaning it up, but nearly impossible to enforce. Volunteers and Watershed Organization shouldn't be responsible for clean up, but they do 99% of clean up. I am thankful for volunteers and Mi Waterways stewards. They have done remarkable work cleaning up the Red Cedar. State, county, township are most likely unaware of trash in river.
These last 2 questions are difficult to answer. I believe no one should have to pick up litter if we don't have litter in the first place. We need to work towards more sustainable products that are not made from plastics. I believe the responsible party should be the corporation/company that develops products/packaging, etc should be the responsible party to reducing our litter issues.
Volunteers are people trying their best to clean up the place so they are least at fault. They are actively taking time out of their day to do free manual labor. The city should have funding set aside to pay workers to keep the areas clean. If the city doesn't have funding then the state should step in.
Regardless of who is responsible, there is a great problem and high failure rate. I think each city should be responsible for the stewards of their waterways. If the source is upstream, its incumbent upon the municipality o reach out to their counterpart upstream to help create a solve.
While I know that volunteers are the most likely group to actually clean up the litter, I feel that they are also the least responsible. The responsibility for maintaining our waterways should fall upon state and local government employees, and be funded by taxpayer dollars. The responsibility should not be shouldered primarily by private citizens through volunteer based clean up days.
Everyone is responsible for making sure they do not litter. The governing officials of an area should be responsible for implementing programs to clean up the trash.
State organizations like DNR and EGLE should allocate time and resources to cleaning up litter. What they don't clean up effectively or quickly, I think should be handled by the city/township in cooperation with local watershed organizations. Volunteers can and should help, but they should not be held solely responsible for cleaning up what they did not create.
People should pick up after themselves number 1 and take regular measures to make sure their garbage stays contained. After litter has entered the waterway, it should be removed by the county or some local organization. While I love volunteers who clean up the waterways, I don't think that volunteering alone is sufficient based on the sheer amount of pollution I see out there.
Volunteers will usually bebthe people cleaning up after the slobs but that doesn't mean they should be the only ones doing it. Whoever owns the land along the waterway should probably take the lead on clean ups. EGLE ought to be more involved too. They are quick to issue fines but their effort at monitoring & maintaining waterways is poor.
Q17 - the companies that produce the items that create the waste; better policies to ensure less waste is produced - lower levels of government should be allowed to set their standards higher

'COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 15-18 continued..

I often think that the word "disposable" should be struck from being on labels or products. Ultimately, the people who are active on or around rivers, lakes, and streams should be responsible for picking up their trash. But a certain amount of trash is almost inevitable. Maybe paying prison/jail inmates is a good way to do some of this. It would be strictly voluntary, but anyone who does trash pickup should be paid.
The state agencies should provide oversight to ensure that waterways are not filled with trash, but depending on resources they may need help coordinating volunteers and local government participation.
Given we can only choose one of the above I'm trying to be realistic. The state is highly unlikely to take on the responsibility, and I truly believe that it's on all of us to keep our waterways clean. I try to do my part whether it's hiking or kayaking, but I'm highly sensitive to our environment and get highly annoyed at any type of litter.

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Litter Survey Comments to Questions 15-18:

1. **Shared Responsibility**: Many respondents believe that the responsibility for maintaining clean waterways is collective and should be shared among individuals, local communities, state agencies (like DNR and EGLE), and businesses. However, there is a recognition that local communities are often most impacted and thus should take a proactive role.
2. **Role of Volunteers**: Volunteers are frequently cited as the primary group engaged in cleanup efforts, yet many feel they should not bear the burden of responsibility for litter that they did not create. There is a sentiment that while volunteers are crucial, organized entities should lead the stewardship efforts.
3. **Need for State Support**: There is a consensus that state agencies like DNR and EGLE should allocate more resources and funding to support local cleanup initiatives and environmental education. Respondents advocate for legislation to address pollution sources, such as single-use plastics, and to provide better infrastructure for waste management.
4. **Community Engagement**: Effective cleanup efforts often rely on community engagement and education. Respondents emphasized the importance of raising awareness about the impact of litter and pollution on local ecosystems and drinking water, which can motivate individual responsibility and community involvement.
5. **Concerns About Safety**: Some comments highlight the risks associated with cleanup efforts, indicating that specialized teams may be necessary to handle hazardous materials and ensure volunteer safety. There are calls for local governments to take a more active role in managing cleanup operations, particularly following storms or significant litter events.

Recommended Next Steps:

1. **Enhance Local Cleanup Initiatives**: Organize and promote community cleanup events that engage residents, while ensuring safety measures are in place for volunteers.
2. **Advocate for Increased State Funding**: Work with advocacy groups to push for increased funding and resources from DNR and EGLE to address litter and pollution effectively.
3. **Develop Educational Programs**: Create educational campaigns focused on the importance of clean waterways and the role of individuals and communities in maintaining them, potentially partnering with local schools and organizations.
4. **Implement Legislative Changes**: Collaborate with local lawmakers to support legislation aimed at reducing single-use plastics and improving waste management practices.
5. **Establish a Coordinated Cleanup Strategy**: Develop a coordinated strategy involving local governments, watershed organizations, and volunteers to address litter comprehensively, ensuring that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities.

QUESTIONS 19-21

Q19. Do you believe that well-crafted public service announcements will be helpful in raising awareness about our shared responsibility to protect and care for our waterways?			
Strongly Agree	70	43.8%	84.4%
Agree	65	40.6%	
Neutral	21	13.1%	
Disagree	4	2.5%	
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

Q20. Do you believe that well-designed and appropriately placed signage will be helpful in raising awareness about our shared responsibility to protect and care for our waterways?			
Strongly Agree	55	34.4%	84.4%
Agree	80	50.0%	
Neutral	19	11.9%	
Disagree	6	3.8%	
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

Q21. Do you believe that the combined use of well-crafted public service announcements 'and' well-placed signage would demonstrate a community's commitment to protecting and caring for its waterways?			
Extremely effective	39	24.4%	
Very effective	64	40.0%	
Modernly effective	47	29.4%	
A little effective	10	6.3%	
Not at all effective	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

QUESTIONS 22, 23

Q22. Do you believe that the enforcement of a municipality's laws prohibiting littering and illegal dumping would prove to be an effective deterrent against such acts?			
Extremely effective	53	33.1%	
Very effective	42	26.3%	
Modernly effective	49	30.6%	
A little effective	11	6.9%	
Not at all effective	5	3.1%	
	160	100.0%	

Q23. Do you believe that public service announcements, appropriate placement of well-designed signage, and the enforcement of a municipality's laws prohibiting littering and illegal dumping would collectively help protect the appearance and health of our waterways.			
Strongly Agree	71	44.4%	87.5%
Agree	69	43.1%	
Neutral	17	10.6%	
Disagree	3	1.9%	
Strongly Disagree	0	0.0%	
	160	100.0%	

‘COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 19-23.

Enforcement is key word May public service announcements include interactive programs to schools & communities encouraging positive change of culture & valuing our nature
Ultimately people will do what they want unless their is sever risk of punishment, which is not nessisarily a proportional option to litering. Having access to trash disposal options in nature is a good way to deal with the issue becasue most people don't want to harm the enviorment if there is an easy alternative, such as a nearby trash can. Remindinders that you should not liter are beneficial, but pratical and easy ways to dipose of one's trash is likely the best method to lessen the level of litering.
I think that there is a significant percentage of folks that are unreachable, but I do think that we can raise new generations with a smaller percentage of such people. I grew up with the ads featuring a Native American man with a tear rolling down his face as litter is tossed out.
Any type of placemaking efforts should be effective at changing perceptions/behavior, including events and activities that encourage positive interactions with the river/body of water
It's not really about the signage - people that are going to commit littering or dumping aren't going to stop because they see a sign.
People who trash our waterways are unlikely to respond to public messages or be deterred by prohibition.
This issue is often a non-point source issue. Trash in the waterways is not directly dumped into the water, it may get washed off of streets, into storm drains and into the water. Addressing trash at all levels will help the water.
Enforcing strict laws to prohibit litter is putting the unhoused at more of a disadvantage and sending a message thst they are criminal. Chances are they might not be aware of the issues they are causing, and may be focused more on living/surviving each day. Outreach and gentle education and encouraging involvement with incentives would be such a great idea. Get the homeless/unhoused involved. Offer fun activities, meals, beneficial resources.
I think these tactics are only effective on those who are actively reading or actively listening, which, seems to be only a portion of our society. The portion that is tied into gaming, YouTube, and social media platforms are being missed. How can the local importance be brought to their attention? That is the challenge.
enforcement and deterence is key
More strick law would help and at the same time, the benefit that comes when we do our part.
Would like to see people held responsible for littering, dumping, and contributing to putting nitrogen, etc. into our waterways. I'd like it if the state/county/city gave grants to homeowners and farmers to reduce lawn and crop areas and planted more native plants.

''COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 19-23 continued.

I feel like cities need to also provide un-housed people with excellent alternatives to living along the creeks. This is one of the largest issues we have along the Battle Creek River, especially when flooding occurs and camps are washed out. Besides, un-housed people NEED HOUSING. Pushing our most vulnerable people into the most vulnerable environments is just disastrous for everyone and the river.
I feel the most impact by seeing the work done by volunteer groups. Shows what can be accomplished when people work together. Will be checking into joining a volunteer group this summer. We love our waterways.
I think we need a cultural shift because nothing is more effective than peer pressure.
Education and awareness are starting points, but they won't be enough to address the root issue you've defined, "no one owns our shared rivers, streams, and inland lakes, making it unclear who is accountable for their stewardship". Creating ownership requires visible public support that recognizes individual impact while drawing attention to missed accountability by county stewards.
In Ireland they have a clean city contest. Somehow it seems to work. Some kind of positive reinforcement or contest may help. Education from birth on taking care of the environment is really what is needed.
I'm not sure that signage is going to deter somebody from littering. People who do that just don't care. The only way I see them changing is to be fined. I'm all for that! The public service might be helpful for young people before they become littering adults.
Please enforce the laws and hold litterers accountable!
We need more trash and recycle bins around waterways.
Actual enforcement of litter laws would be most effective. If there is an actual punishment, there will be a reduction in litter. Ideally, a punishment including, but not limited to, cleaning up the area in question.
I agree that laws prohibiting littering and dumping would help reduce those actions, but only with proper enforcement. How to actually enforce those laws, though, could be quite a challenge (since anybody can essentially litter anywhere at any time).
Enforcement of dumping laws only work if people get caught. Signs and announcements will not work for people who want to dump trash -they know it's wrong and will do it anyway and will continue to do it unless they are caught. Signs and announcements will only be effective for the people who already care about the planet, and maybe will reach a few people who learn something new.
We have done many of these things over the years and currently and they have largely proved ineffective.

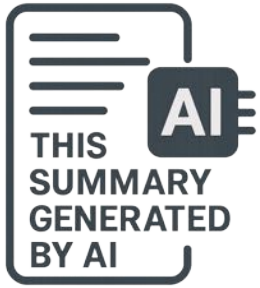
‘COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 19-23 continued

PSAs and signage educating communities about the importance, role, function, and value of pristine waterways is extremely important in reducing litter and increasing care for the environment, however enforcement of laws on the individual level may actually be a deterrent to pro-environmental behavior. Individuals on average already tend to have a distrust of public service officers, so law enforcement on the individual level may actually promote more littering as 'revenge.' However, law enforcement at the corporate level I think would be extremely effective, as most extremely dangerous pollution comes from runoff.
Signs don’t stop people! Accountability, as well as alternative options would help the most. As a community if it is frowned upon by most, more people will less likely do it.
I think you'll need a combination of things (public announcements, signage and enforcement). Just one or the other probably won't cut it.
We need to go deeper-- climate/environmental education must be instilled in us as young persons so we respect mother nature as a society and these problems don't happen.
There will always be people that just don't care so I don't think the problem will ever be 100% eliminated.
Would like to see MI Waterways work more with the Mid-Michigan Environmental Action Council
All the above are good, but I've seen the signs for no pet waste along the Grand River, as well as around our neighborhood near the river, with the little plastic poop bags thrown at the base of the signs! Also, saw individual dog walkers toss the poop bags into city curb drains with a sign just a few feet away.
While public service announcements would help, it should also be explained on how and way if protects everyone from environmental harm.
Enforcement of illegal dumping laws against companies could be very effective. In terms of individuals/households--it would be more effective in my opinion to give people more options for how to dispose of large items for free or cheap (like free curbside large item pickup days), and do a better job of advertising the options that do exist. "Enforcement" against individuals is just going to force them to find other, more hidden places to dump
I don't think it is ever enough to simply prohibit littering and illegal dumping - why it does help, I think ways of encouraging responsible disposal, beautification of areas, business led incentives/initiatives, etc. are more effective and better for communities over all.
I definitely think all of those things would help, but it also comes back to the community members and whether or not they take this seriously.
PSAs are unlikely to reach the target audience that is polluting, especially in the era of fragmented media.
Signs and public notices are moderately effective, but the asshats doing the littering are those who just do not care at all. You will reach a few, but not many. You cannot shame these folks—clean and beautiful environments do not matter to them.
I believe communities need to develop messaging about the importance of water resources and that there is an expectation for those that visit these communities will not litter. We need to create sustainable tourism that offer street recycling and composting. And local businesses should also be using sustainable business practices that project our waters. There is work being done on sustainable tourism with these principles and others that will set a standard for visitors and the community alike.

‘COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 19-23 continued.

More needs to be done to hold those responsible for creating the litter responsible. Fines and enhanced enforcement would help deter apathetic offenders.
I think that trash and recycling bins, and perhaps bags for collecting, placed at commonly visited areas like boat launches and parks would be helpful. "Well placed signage" would be more effectively if used in combination with trash bins. In my experience, when I pick up trash that is not my own, I usually have to transport it home to dispose of it.
I would need to do research on what types of policies and strategies are most effective at promoting change to know exactly what to support.
It would be great to prosecute illegal dumping - littering too - but especially dumping. Hard to implement tho.
We need system changes. Please read the book “Dark PR” by Grant Ennis. While the steps you propose, as you say, are generally excepted approaches they are a bandaid not a cure. We absolutely need better laws to allow for environmentally friendly practices to be the norm. In terms of litter, this needs to start at the source - production, over packaging, single use items. We have to make it a priority to change practices hurting the water - not just litter but chemicals that lead to algae blooms, fish die offs, invasive species (both plants and animals)
I long for PSA's that raise these types of issues; that benefit the citizens of America rather than the ones the current regime uses to dehumanize immigrants. Ones that actually help make America a better place to live - not ones that back authoritarian regimes. God save our environment and our democracy. (Never thought I'd be writing that, and very afraid about what's happening in America today.)

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Litter Survey Comments to Questions 19-23:



1. **Need for Enforcement**: Many respondents emphasized that effective enforcement of littering and illegal dumping laws is crucial for deterring these behaviors. Without the threat of punishment, individuals may feel less compelled to change their actions.
2. **Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and Education**: There is a recognition that while PSAs and educational initiatives can raise awareness, they may not reach those who are most likely to litter. Engaging younger generations and integrating environmental education into school curriculums are seen as essential for fostering long-term change.
3. **Accessibility of Disposal Options**: Providing convenient and accessible trash disposal options in natural areas is viewed as a practical solution to reduce littering. Many believe that if people have easy access to trash cans, they are less likely to litter.
4. **Cultural Shift and Community Engagement**: A cultural shift towards valuing clean environments is necessary. Respondents suggested that positive community engagement, such as events and contests, can encourage responsible behavior and foster a sense of ownership over local waterways.
5. **Focus on Corporate Responsibility**: Some comments highlighted the need for accountability at the corporate level, particularly for businesses that produce single-use plastics and contribute to pollution. Encouraging sustainable practices among local businesses is seen as a way to address the root causes of littering.

Recommended Next Steps:

1. **Strengthen Law Enforcement**: Advocate for increased funding and resources for local authorities to enforce littering and illegal dumping laws more effectively, including setting up systems for tracking and punishing offenders.
2. **Enhance Educational Initiatives**: Develop and implement educational programs targeting schools and communities that focus on environmental stewardship and the importance of keeping waterways clean.
3. **Improve Access to Disposal Options**: Increase the number of trash and recycling bins in public areas, especially near waterways, and ensure they are regularly maintained.
4. **Foster Community Involvement**: Organize community events, contests, and outreach programs aimed at promoting a culture of cleanliness and environmental responsibility, encouraging residents to engage in local cleanup efforts.
5. **Promote Corporate Accountability**: Work with local businesses to implement sustainable practices and reduce the use of single-use plastics, while also supporting policies that hold companies accountable for their environmental impact.

QUESTIONS 24, 25

Q24. Should the penalties or fines for littering be greater to reflect the increased effort, cost, risk of personal injury, and environmental harm?		
Greater	127	79.4%
The Same	33	20.6%
	160	100.0%

Q25. In the event that a person is unable to pay a fine, would you find it acceptable for them to volunteer their time to conduct community service in lieu of payment?		
Yes	155	96.9%
No	5	3.1%
	160	100.0%

COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 24, 25

Again actual enforcement is key; it's tricky
Not everyone is in the same economic position to pay a fine, so mandatory public services seems like a fair and acceptable alternative.
I think that the person should be offered that option as a first choice, regardless of ability to pay.
Community service + education about the value/benefits of a clean and healthy river
What even is this question?
I make a distinction between the potential effectiveness of laws and fines for littering vs for dumping. Littering is unlikely to actually be observed let alone enforced and litterers are unlikely to be deterred by the minor fines. Dumping of large amounts of waste or trash on the other hand is more likely to be traced and prosecuted and can entail larger penalties which can be effective deterrence.
I am one who wholeheartedly believes in the impacts humans have on our environment. I believe in education around the issues, cause and effects, impacts, hazards, etc. In most circumstances I can not walk past litter, unless it is something too large for me to carry or is unidentifiable. I will pickup up trash and recyclables if I am able and will remove them from garbage cans if it's an amount I can manage. If I am in a situation where I can't take care of the litter, I struggle internally with leaving it. My wish is that everyone be conscientious about their behaviors and realize how their behaviors impact our environment and society, personally on a local level. Realizing that reliance on said resources is for all not just one.
I feel that community service should be the penalty, not a fee.
The first incidence, yes. After that, if they haven't learned, then no leniency.
I have mixed feelings about all of this. Again, I think we need a cultural shift and increased engagement. Charging a fine to a homeless person because their belongings are abandoned next to the river is not going to fix any problems. I am All for enforcement against companies. For people, I think we need a different approach.
Of course they would have to be supervised to make sure they actually do the work.
Clean up should always be part of the sentencing on addition to the fine.
Violators should have to clean up the waterway!
They should do both. Cleaning up would be more effective for reducing future littering than a fine.
Volunteering could be a great way to raise awareness about the issue and reduce the chance of repeat incidents.

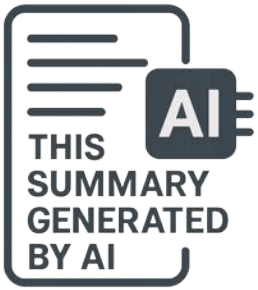
COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 24, 25 continued.

It is more challenging to retrieve trash from the water vs. land. Especially if the water is deep and the trash is not retrievable. People are probably dumping trash because they cant afford or dont want to pay for their own trash disposal? So hitting them with a fee is maybe not the best option? Community service seems like the better option- why not use those people as volunteers to clean up other areas? How do we make trash disposal more affordable for people? How do we make it easier to dispose of bulk items and hazardous waste? What is the root cause for why people are littering? Is it because it's easier and cheaper than the alternative?
I fully respect and have dedicated time to helping this org clean up the Kalamazoo area. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the ties you have with Kalamazoo Growlers. They take dirty money funding from Graphic Packaging, Kalamazoo area's biggest polluter who releases toxic gas into our air and regularly pollutes the Kalamazoo river with waste water spills. I would hope that a group who's mission is to protect our waterways would vet their partners better and choose organizations that align with their mission.
Th first question in this section is also tricky because it's difficult to truly measure the amount of damage that litter can cause, but I think it would be fair to fine them or mandate that they volunteer x amount of hours towards cleaning up litter.
Community service inline with the offense, for example dumping they should be out cleaning illegal dumps sites not some other community service
I would like to see that even if you can afford the fine, that mandatory clean up of not only what they've done but also community service for other trash clean ups would be required. Having money should not let you off the hook.
Again, I think of the violators as being more big companies rather than individuals.
I don't think increased enforcement of littering laws will help, and I don't think we should be forcing poor people to pay fines or their labor when caught littering. We need more trash cans in public places.
I think volunteering should be considered first over paying a fine - wealthy individuals wouldn't be necessarily effected as it could be just an insignificant expense rather than "punishment". Plus, with volunteering, we would sooner see community improvement and may even teach the person to value the community more.
Service over fines can be an effective tool.
A very good way to promote a clean environment is to tell the public about the real cost, in tax dollars, to do cleanups. Cost to public health too.
No one should be held responsible for their littering and polluting our waterways. We held business and industry accountable to steward our air decades ago. It's time we now steward our waterways.
There’s got to be a humane way to intervene in the lives of homeless addicts whose lifestyles and conditions have such a negative impact on the overall health of the community. I see all this work and investment going on to make it nice and it’s just a handful of frequent flyers that menace the trail. If I can identify this as an individual who isn’t even from here, surely there are people and organizations in this community with the resources and wherewithal to address the problem. That is my honest opinion. I can’t believe it’s tolerated to the extent it is and for the length of time I’ve observed it.

‘COMMENTS TO QUESTIONS 24, 25 continued.

In extreme cases, jail time
If they made a mess, it's their job to clean it up by either paying someone for it (paying the fine) or getting off their ass to clean it up themselves (community service in lieu of payment). That is a great policy idea.
Volunteers will have to be supervised with repercussions for failing to show up or do their assignment. Maybe that's a role for EGLE.
What are the fines? They are not likely steep enough. To change behaviors we have to look at the underlying values held in society. In cultures where nature - water, air trees, etc. are considered sacred, there is better treatment. (Japan, indigenous cultures in the U.S.) We need much better protection for the natural environment, including water
The community service should be clean-up of roadsides and waterways.
This seems like the best way to handle it; given the ridiculous affordability crisis.

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Litter Survey Comments to Questions 24 & 25:



1. **Preference for Community Service Over Fines**: Many respondents believe that community service should be the primary consequence for littering and illegal dumping, especially for individuals who may not have the financial means to pay fines. This approach allows offenders to contribute positively to their communities while also addressing the litter problem.
2. **Concerns About Economic Disparities**: There is a strong sentiment that not everyone can afford to pay fines, and imposing financial penalties may disproportionately affect lower-income individuals. Community service is viewed as a more equitable alternative that can also promote a sense of responsibility.
3. **Need for Enforcement and Education**: While some respondents support increasing fines as a deterrent, they also emphasize the importance of effective enforcement. Additionally, education about environmental stewardship and the impacts of littering is seen as crucial for long-term behavior change.
4. **Varied Perspectives on Littering vs. Dumping**: Participants differentiate between littering and illegal dumping, suggesting that while littering may require different enforcement strategies, dumping should incur stricter penalties due to its larger environmental impact.
5. **Community Engagement and Cultural Shift**: Several comments highlight the need for a cultural shift towards valuing clean environments. Encouraging community involvement through volunteer opportunities and public engagement initiatives can foster a deeper sense of ownership and responsibility for local waterways.

Recommended Next Steps:

1. **Implement Community Service Programs**: Develop structured community service options for littering and dumping offenders that focus on cleanup efforts in affected areas, ensuring participants are supervised and supported.
2. **Enhance Educational Campaigns**: Create educational initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the environmental impact of littering and the importance of individual responsibility, targeting both schools and community groups.
3. **Review and Adjust Fine Structures**: Assess the current fines for littering and illegal dumping to determine if they are sufficient to deter such behaviors, considering a sliding scale based on income for individuals who may struggle to pay.
4. **Increase Enforcement Efforts**: Advocate for improved enforcement of existing littering and dumping laws, ensuring that local authorities are equipped with the resources needed to effectively monitor and penalize offenders.
5. **Promote Community Engagement Events**: Organize community cleanup events and contests to encourage participation and foster a culture of environmental stewardship, emphasizing the collective responsibility for maintaining clean waterways.

SPECIAL FEATURE SECTION. QUESTIONS 1-3

Q1. Should homeless individuals be held accountable for littering, polluting, and discarding items in our waterways?

Yes	105	65.6%	86.1%
No	17	10.6%	
Would Rather Not Answer	32	20.0%	
Non Response	6	3.8%	
	160	100.0%	

Q2. Should homeless individuals be subject to fines or penalties for littering, polluting, and discarding items in our waterways?

Yes	76	47.5%	61.3%
No	48	30.0%	
Would Rather Not Answer	29	18.1%	
Non Response	7	4.4%	
	160	100.0%	

Q3. If a homeless individual is unable to pay a fine, would you find it acceptable for them to volunteer their time to conduct community service in lieu of payment?

Yes	127	79.4%	92.7%
No	10	6.3%	
Would Rather Not Answer	15	9.4%	
Non Response	8	5.0%	
	160	100.0%	

SPECIAL FEATURE SECTION. QUESTIONS 4. 5

Q4. Who do you think is 'most' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other pollutants attributed to homelessness once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways.

City/Township	54	33.8%
The County	18	11.3%
The State	23	14.4%
The Local Watershed	8	5.0%
Homeless Individuals	25	15.6%
Advocacy Groups	7	4.4%
Volunteers	16	10.0%
No Response	9	5.6%
	160	100.0%

Q5. Who do you think is ‘least'' responsible for retrieving litter, trash, and other pollutants attributed to homelessness once they have made their way into our rivers, creeks, or inland waterways.

City/Township	5	3.1%
The County	5	3.1%
The State	22	13.8%
The Local Watershed	7	4.4%
Homeless Individuals	24	15.0%
Advocacy Groups	14	8.8%
Volunteers	70	43.8%
No Response	13	8.1%
	160	100.0%

SPECIAL DISCUSSION - THE HOMELESS FACTOR

Again, tasking clean enviorment tasks are most effective with the people that actiually live in that environment. Homeless people usually have very little to lose in their position of life, so something like a clean enviorment is less of a priority for them since they are struggleing for their next meal or are dealing with a menatl ilness or something else that limits their participation in social beneficial practices. Ultimately the responsobility to keep the eviorment clean should be predominately the responsobiltiy of the individuals living in that enviorment.
Whew, this is complicated. I have volunteered with Kalamazoo River Cleanups in my kayak, including a stretch along and downstream of a homeless encampment. It was awful, and it was worrisome from a public and personal health risk perspective. I checked the State as most responsible because I think that there were fewer and smaller encampments years ago before Governor Engler and several legislatures gutted residential mental health care services in Michigan. The primary question is how to reduce the number of unhoused and the second question is how to provide those remaining with trash collection.
Homelessness is a systemic issue and needs to be addressed systemically. Singling out and punishing individuals who are already vulnerable for outcomes that are largely outside of their control is wrong.
I can't even respond to this properly because asking these questions after asking for our names and emails is wild! Again with Q4 and Q5, it needs to be across all of the groups - it can't be a sustained effort from one section, or an individual person. Those that are unhoused should be subject to the same laws as those who are housed, but there also needs to be recognition that there aren't ways to properly dispose of trash while living in an encampment. The people who are living there are not our enemy, and these questions are very offensive.
This is a complicated issue- the solution of preventing homelessness seems the most humane and effective. Our state, county, and city need to be investing in low barrier housing solutions and programs to prevent homelessness.
The county seems too far removed from the situation to hold them accountable for taking care of the litter and pollution left by the unhoused. I am sympathetic to the situation of being unhoused however, if they consider a particular spot to be their home it seems they'd want to keep it clean. It may be harder than I realize but bringing a bag of overnight toilet paper up from the encampment to throw away in a trash can doesn't seem too difficult.
Why not have the State put homeless individuals to work cleaning up our waterways and other areas?
If a city doesn't provide homes, it cannot penalize those who are unhoused.
They just do it for the love of our waterways. Definitely not because it is their responsibility.
Even though homeless individuals create a lot of litter in natural areas, the city/township can create waste receptacles that are accessible and available for those in these areas. These individuals are just trying to survive, they are much less concerned about the environment in this state and the city should be able to help them out or at the very least, not further criminalize and make it harder for these folks.

SPECIAL DISCUSSION - THE HOMELESS FACTOR continued

I think this is a difficult section to answer questions to, since the topic has a lot of gray area. I do think it would be difficult to enforce penalties and volunteering on the unhoused population due to their situation. I do not think they should be charged, but I am not sure I think they should be mandated to pick up the litter either. Maybe this is something that could be a collaboration between the city, homeless advocacy groups and local watershed organizations, so that it may be handled with care.
I agree 100% about the impacts of homelessness on the environment, I believe the state and city should be doing more to address the issue of homelessness and provide better options and resources for the unhoused.
I appreciate what you are trying to do here but I don't think punishment works on this issue, and especially not with homeless people who have nothing and are already likely to be suffering from mental illness, abuse, addiction, etc. I think that you make a good point that solving the homeless problem will contribute to cleaning up our waterways and should be factored into the benefits of those decisions. I've seen other municipalities have success paying their homeless community to clean up and they had great results. I think that's a MUCH better alternative than trying to punish or fine people who are already in the worst possible situation.
I am sympathetic to the plight of being homeless and it is unfair of me to judge what led to their situation without knowing their experiences or personal situations. I have always wondered why county and state agencies allow homeless camps along waterways. I understand the attraction of these areas. I know they have to be somewhere, and that's another social debate about resources, opinions and location. With the amount of trash and waste that is generated at every camp I've seen, waterways and flood zones are not the place for these camps
i work with RSVP as a volunteer on the river trail. Volunteers help collect garbage, but can't be the only source. Education and incentives are needed.
I think that increasing the financial burden for unhoused folks who litter into our waterways is not realistic (if they don't have money for housing and food they surely will not have funding to pay a fine) but I do think they should be responsible for the effects of their actions on a shared resource and mandatory community service as a form of restitution would be appropriate.
Homelessness is a systemic failure and requires much more thoughtful and strategic shifts than proposals targeting individuals. This makes it difficult to choose a yes or no answer to the above questions.

This is a hard one, and I commend your org for asking these questions. I've personally helped clean after encampments in multiple situations and it is very real issue. From what I've seen, this stems from more than lack of trash service or safe disposal sites as well. It's a massive community health and safety issue and the conversations around the problem tend to become very volatile and polarized very quickly. I have trouble with the most/least responsible question for both this and general trash issues—I think responsibility needs to be shared at all levels. The reality, in my opinion, is that individual volunteers ARE shouldering more than their share of the burden right now, but it's important that we remain willing to step up and act for our own communities and not just kick responsibility entirely over to any government org, either.
The homeless and their advocacy groups are both responsible for the consequences of their littering. The advocacy groups are better prepared to be responsible for the cleanup since the homeless themselves are often incapable of being held to account for their own actions. Therefore the responsibility should be on the people who enable them.
Homeless individuals are already facing challenges associated with their situation of being homeless. I do not think adding burdens to them will help minimize their contributions to litter and pollution in local waterways. These individuals could be provided with education and other resources to help minimize their contributions to waterways pollution.
Fining homeless individuals seems unreasonable; after all, how would they pay the fine for littering? However, I do think if local communities could establish homeless encampments away from public waterways to avoid their pollution, that would be a great step towards cleaner waterways, and help better care for the homeless individuals.
I participated in a number of cleanups of abandoned homeless camps in kalamazoo last year. I'd like those individuals to be held accountable but not in a financial way because obviously that doesnt make sense. I'm not sure of the right solution here. Municipalities need to do better to get these people off the streets and off properties where they are camping. It does surprise me how careless the homeless can be while living outside - they have completely lost regard for their community and the environment, they do not even attempt to leave their trash in one place in their camp - it is literally scattered everywhere and in massive amounts. Placing trash bins or handing out trash bags to these sites would be a slap in the face, they have other needs that are much greater. Trash cans would likely be set on fire.
Having "free" trash sites/cans/dumsters for the unhoused in homeless encampments or throughout the city may help curb littering issues.
This section was nearly impossible for me to answer. Homelessness is a travesty - and shouldn't exist in one of the richest countries in the world. That said, I have seen the volume of trash and waste left behind at one of those encampments - and I do not know what the solution is.
Oh this is such a difficult situation that I have no answer or really an educated opinion on. Unhoused people face such discrimination and targeting but I also recognize that there is such a feeling of hopelessness, mental illness, addiction, etc that impact their lives. I don't know what the answer is.
Would like to see MI Waterways work more with the Mid-Michigan Environmental Action Council

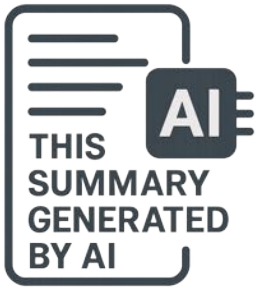
SPECIAL DISCUSSION - THE HOMELESS FACTOR continued.

Nothing wrong with homeless people helping to clean the environment, and at the same time. Have to be careful because sometimes a person can put on false persona to gain trust, and try to help for all the wrong reasons.
If we are serious about littering, we should be advocating for more affordable housing options, more accessible shelters, and providing services (including trash services!) to sanctioned encampments where we can better manage (currently unavoidable) impacts of people being houseless, and make sure people are as safe as possible while maintaining autonomy and dignity.
Criminalizing homelessness is never the right answer. It is not an effective long-term deterrent. It is important to address the core issue first - lack of shelter/housing.
Homelessness is a sad, unfortunate problem. I don't know the best solution. Homeless individuals are trying to survive, and don't have the means to clean up after themselves. If they could be housed, fed, rehabilitated, counseled, and provided with means to get back on their feet, it would be great if they could volunteer time to clean up . I have no idea how to achieve that. Years ago I tried to clean up some abandoned encampment sights. Needles, human waste, and other trash made it unsafe for me to be in the area.
I have been a part of urban cleanups along the Red Cedar for two years. HUGE MSU cause of trash in and along the river. We pulled hundreds of pounds of trash and garbage from homeless camps. I am sad from the fact that there are so many homeless people—most are mentally ill. We've got to do better.
The homelessness in this country is not a litter issue. I understand that homeless communities create litter... if they were not homeless there would not be an issue.
Homelessness is a terrible plight. But, we can't have this centuries-long problem be an excuse for us to not steward our waterways. We need to make sure that we do all that we can to steward our waterways. The Clean Water Act was enacted in 1972, more than 50 years ago. It's difficult to understand, not alone accept, that this remains a problem today.
Homeless individuals are individuals and should not be judged as a group necessarily. I observed the process of removing the encampment here at Dietrich. There were individuals in that group that were sick and elderly and experiencing various mental and emotional problems. The city bent over backwards to try and accommodate every one's needs and nothing was good enough. The individuals I'm referring to were part of that group. They were put up in a hotel and could not abide by the rules. They go to the shelters but can't get along and abide by the rules. They are both addicted to multiple substances and suffering from multiple longstanding mental and emotional problems but at this point, the community is just enabling them to destroy themselves, each other, and the beauty of the Riverwalk by tolerating behavior that would not be acceptable anywhere in the world at any point in human history. It is not compassionate or kind or politically correct. It is ignorant and irresponsible to not hold them accountable for stealing, littering, and traumatizing an entire community just because nobody wants to raise their voice or look mean addressing it. I'm from Baltimore, MD and I've spent a lot of time in Washington DC. All over the country, when people like this get dug in and the authorities can't deal with it, they get one way tickets to another city. I can put them on a bus to Detroit if you don't think you can do anything about it. They won't change. They'll just get worse when the weather warms. This is just my opinion informed by my limited experience.

‘SPECIAL DISCUSSION - THE HOMELESS FACTOR continued .

Homeless or not, people should be more responsible for their actions no matter what. I do however feel that more secure trash cans should be placed in areas with high rates of homelessness.
People who are unhoused face many challenges, and while I don't think that penalizing them legally or with fines would be helpful, all people must be held responsible for their actions. I think asking them to volunteer to clean up areas where they stay is very appropriate. I think it's ultimately the state, and then the city's responsibility to address the pollution that homeless encampments create as well as enforce littering laws. Providing trash services for unhoused people along with education on the detriments of pollution could be helpful.
I think that everyone needs to be held accountable. Although, I do not believe that homeless people should be required to pay fines. I think that allowing them to do community service (cleaning up a mess they made) is a fair penalty.
Some counties have ordinances that make them attractive to homeless people. If the county invites the homeless then the county should be responsible for their little and the cost to the taxpayers should be broadcast the week before we vote.
Homeless encampments are gross and hazardous. I don't want to pick up human poop and all the other nastiness that goes along with encampments. Landowners need to be responsible for kicking the campers off. Cities have at least some services available and clearly more are needed. But it's infuriating to see what happens to an area after a couple of months of homeless people camping there.
This is classic blaming the victim. The most vulnerable and marginalized in a system (socio economic, political, governance) are the least able to deal with the extraordinarily difficult position they are in. This is a systemic, structural, fixable problem. Same goes for universal healthcare, and to address it there has to be a value placed on people’s wellbeing.
I think homeless folks should be treated pretty much as anyone else. However, municipalities move in and clear people out and then trash their belongings. It's easy to blame poor and homeless folks for being blights and being responsible for blights on our environment. There is not enough being done to get homeless folks into housing. I would support paying ANYONE an hourly, or a day, or a poundage/piece wage to help clean up public spaces, be they waterways or others.
I wish this issues was easy to deal with, but it's not. We are all responsible for those without the means to care for themselves. Seems to me the best way to handle cleaning up our waterways and land, would be to get the local government, businesses and non-profits to provide the volunteers necessary to keep our areas clean. (A local Indivisible group in Milford organizes a clean-up every spring.)

Key Takeaways from the 2026 Litter Survey Comments:



1. **Complexity of Homelessness and Litter**: Many respondents recognize that homelessness is a systemic issue that contributes to littering and pollution in waterways. They emphasize the need for compassionate approaches rather than punitive measures, especially considering the challenges faced by unhoused individuals.
2. **Preference for Community Service**: There is strong support for the idea that community service should be a preferred alternative to fines for littering, particularly for those without financial means. Many believe that requiring individuals to participate in cleanup efforts can foster a sense of responsibility and community engagement.
3. **Shared Responsibility**: The comments reflect a belief that responsibility for litter cleanup should not rest solely on the unhoused population but should involve local governments, advocacy groups, and the community at large. This includes providing adequate resources and support for trash disposal and cleanup efforts.
4. **Need for Systemic Solutions**: Respondents stress the importance of addressing the root causes of homelessness, such as lack of affordable housing and mental health services. They argue that improving these systemic issues will also contribute to cleaner environments.
5. **Implementation of Supportive Measures**: There is a call for local governments to create more accessible waste disposal options, such as secure trash cans in areas frequented by homeless individuals, as well as educational initiatives to promote environmental stewardship among all community members.

Recommended Next Steps:

1. **Develop Community Service Programs**: Create structured community service opportunities for litter violations, especially for those who cannot pay fines. This could include supervised cleanup efforts in affected areas.
2. **Enhance Support Services for the Homeless**: Advocate for increased funding and resources directed towards affordable housing, mental health support, and social services to address the underlying issues of homelessness.
3. **Increase Accessibility of Waste Disposal**: Work with local governments to install more trash receptacles and provide safe disposal options in areas where homeless individuals congregate, ensuring they have the means to properly dispose of waste.
4. **Foster Collaborative Initiatives**: Encourage partnerships between local governments, nonprofits, and community organizations to create comprehensive cleanup and support programs that involve the unhoused population in a respectful and constructive manner.
5. **Implement Educational Campaigns**: Launch initiatives to raise awareness about the environmental impacts of littering and the importance of shared responsibility, targeting both housed and unhoused community members.

KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL

Keep America Beautiful (KAB)is a national nonprofit organization founded in 1953 created to address growing litter issues and promote environmental cleanliness, later launching the iconic "Crying Indian" campaign in 1971.

In 2021, KAB conducted the largest study on litter in America, revealing key insights into its quantity, composition, and sources nationwide. The findings indicate that it is generally accepted that litter negatively impacts humans and our natural environment daily, and poses a threat to our way of life and a sustainable future. Litter affects environmental, community, and individual health, as well as quality of life, economic development, the safety of our water, environmental justice, and our climate.

Key findings from their research includes:

- **90% of people surveyed believe litter is a problem in their state**
- There is an estimate 49.6 billion pieces of litter along U.S. roadways and waterways
- This is equivalent to 152 items for each U.S. resident
- There is slightly more litter along waterways (25.9B) than roadways (23.7B)
- **Large perennial waterways had the most pieces of litter per mile with a reported (3,654 litter items per mile on average)**

Keep America Beautiful study reports how problematic litter is. Below is the percentage of U.S. residents who agree or strongly agree with litter statements:

- Litter poses a health and safety risk to people and animals 96% (Love Our Waterways fish and wildlife 98.8% and humans 94.4%)
- Litter is an environmental problem 92%. (Love Our Waterways 98.8%)
- Litter reduces property values 92% (Love Our Waterways - Reflects Poorly On A Community: 95.65)
- Litter negatively impacts tourism and businesses 89% (Love Our Waterways - Would Travel Elsewhere: 95%)
- Litter impacts my quality of life 78%

Keep America Beautiful research indicates litter costs the U.S. over $11.5billion annually in cleanup, suggesting that funds spent on cleanup could be redirected to improving community infrastructure, public services, and environmental revitalization.

To learn more about KAB and to review their research studies and findings, visit: https://kab.org/

OCEAN BLUE PROJECT

Ocean Blue Project is an Oregon-based nonprofit organization founded in 2012 in Oregon, focused on cleaning up beaches, rivers, and oceans to protect marine ecosystems.

Ocean Blue Project reports that the lack of consistent, large-scale cleaning for waterway shores is a significant environmental challenge, often leaving areas, particularly hard-to-reach ones, to accumulate litter. Unlike street sweeping, which is a routine municipal service, shoreline cleanup typically relies on volunteer-driven efforts rather than scheduled, systemic maintenance.

They list several challenges in consistent shoreline cleaning.

- Access and Logistics: Remote or hard-to-reach locations make regular, manual cleaning difficult and expensive.
- Volunteer Dependence: While effective, volunteer cleanup programs are not as frequent or consistent as daily or weekly municipal services.
- Variable Topography: Shorelines are often irregular, heavily vegetated, or rocky, making mechanized cleaning methods unsuitable.

They list several approaches used to manage shorelines:

- Manual Recovery: Often the primary tool, this involves volunteers or specialized crews using rakes and bags, which is effective but slow and labor-intensive.
- Specialized Maintenance: Some private services or community groups provide regular, scheduled shoreline, beach, or rip-rap cleaning to remove trash and invasive species.
- Targeted Interception: Some organizations work to intercept debris in rivers before it reaches the shoreline, using technology to bridge the gap between waste generation and disposal.

To learn more bout Ocean Blue Project, visit: https://oceanblueproject.org/