

**Summary of Survey and Personal Interview Results on Lawn Fertilizer Use  
Midshore Riverkeeper Conservancy  
November, 2014**

Of the 300 respondents who took MRC's lawn fertilizer use survey, a vast majority were homeowners who did not live on the water. The size of lawns was equally represented. Just under half of the respondents fertilize their lawn or use a lawn care service that fertilizes their lawn. Spring was by far the most popular season to fertilize, with 86% fertilizing, followed by Fall with 65%, Summer 29%, and lastly 6% of those who fertilize do so in the Winter. More than half of those who fertilize indicated they only fertilized once or twice a year, but about 40% fertilize their lawns more than three times a year.

When asked how one decides how much fertilizer to use, the most common answer was to follow the instructions on the bag. Only 11% of respondents tested their soil to determine how much fertilizer to apply. Over 70% of respondents decide when to use fertilizer based on what season it is and 50% agree that more fertilizer means a greener lawn. Finally, when asked why do you fertilize, 42% fertilize to have a green lawn, 37% fertilize to reduce weeds, 13% enjoy the ritual of fertilizing, and 7% fertilize to be a good neighbor. Other responses included fertilizing to keep the lawn healthy, because lawn care companies suggested it, and because they want the grass to grow.

MRC conducted 20 personal interviews on fertilizer use and motivation. The majority of interviewees fertilized 3-4 times a year based on suggestions from lawn care companies and fertilizer companies such as *Scotts*. When asked how they decide how much to apply, those who do not use a lawn care company answered that they read the instructions on the bag, which is consistent with our online survey results. Weed control in general was a major motivator for using fertilizer. Other responses include appearance and "to keep the wife happy."

When asked why they think others do not use fertilizer, the vast majority replied that those who do not fertilize are uneducated. Most responded aggressively to this question with answers such as "They're morons who don't care about having a nice lawn," "People who don't fertilize are just lazy," "It has nothing to do with the environment, they just don't care about their lawn." Only 3 of the 20 participants said environmental issues could be a reason people do not use lawn fertilizer. Most noted that there was a relationship between lawn fertilizer and unhealthy rivers, but claimed that their fertilizer use was not contributing enough to matter. Answers include: "I think if I don't over fertilize, then it's fine", "It's like spitting into the ocean, it doesn't really matter," "Everything in moderation." Three of the 20 interviewees thought there was no relationship between lawn fertilizer and the health of rivers.

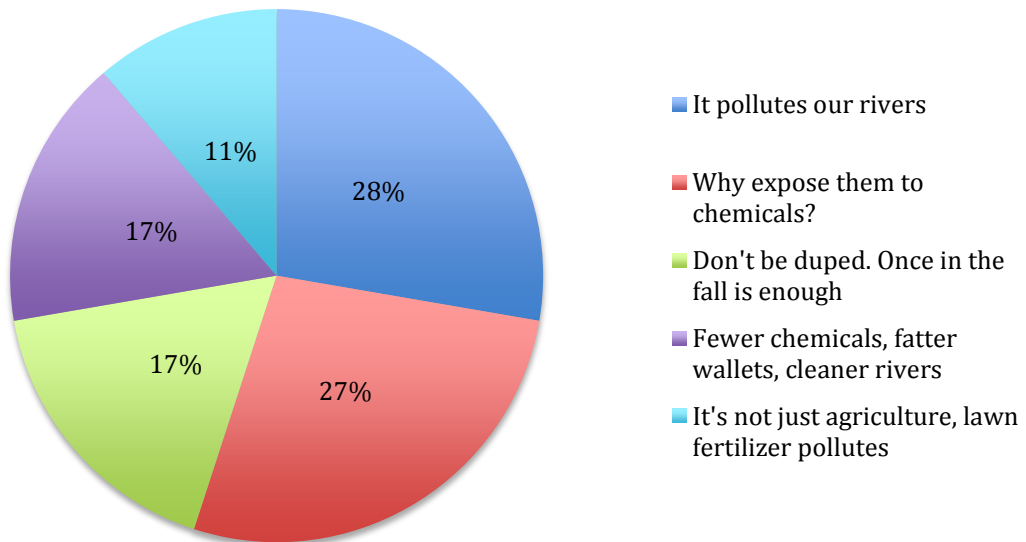
When asked how one could prevent lawn fertilizer from getting into our rivers and streams, most replied: "don't use lawn fertilizer." Other suggestions were to not apply before a rainstorm or near a body of water (even though respondents who made those suggestions were often near a body of water and still used lawn fertilizer). Finally, when asked how they could be motivated to change behavior and through what mediums, the most common

answer was “education on proper fertilizer techniques.” Multiple respondents suggested using scientific data, giving ample information, and being consistent with campaign messaging. Newspaper articles and reliable news broadcasts were the most popular mediums to get the message out, which is consistent with our post advertisement surveys.

MRC created multiple ads after initial research and surveying. These ads were then tested using additional surveys and interviews. About 90 people responded to the survey. *Why expose them to chemicals?* and *It pollutes our rivers* were by far the most popular with over 70% of the votes. Overall, the “chemicals” and “pollution” ads were ranked in the top three choices most often, with both receiving 69 votes. *Don’t be duped. Once in the fall is enough* was the third most popular with 43 votes. MRC also conducted personal interviews using the created messages. Most were consistent with each other, noting that each message has a strong individual theme. However, most interviewees noted they wanted more information.

MRC also used surveys to research the best distribution channels to access our target audience. Respondents ranked each source of media based on how influential that outlet is to them. Newspaper articles, social media, and billboards were the most popular responses. Additionally, MRC surveyed what incentive gift would be most popular to give out in reward for making a pledge to reduce lawn fertilizer use. Receiving a small native plant was the most popular choice.

## Ad Themes: Total Votes Received



## Media: Total Votes Received

