



# 2019 MERRIMACK RIVER STUDY: ROWING COMMUNITY



*Healthy Merrimack River Initiative*

October 2019

## **Purpose of Study**

The Merrimack River has always been a place that enabled commerce, travel and recreation for the people and communities lucky enough to access it. But that access has come at a price as population density continues to rise, and industries, shopping malls and office space continue to expand. The result is that the Merrimack again appears threatened by pollution.

This survey is a grass-roots effort to get beyond speculation and appearances, and start measuring, tracking and quantifying the real effects of all this change on the Merrimack. To do this, we're collecting feedback directly from some of the most vested members of the community -- rowers.

## **Survey – Rowers**

Stakeholder Community – Adult (Masters) Rowers from Newburyport, MA to Manchester, NH.

(Hundreds of Middle and High School rowers were not contacted)

## **Survey - Builders**

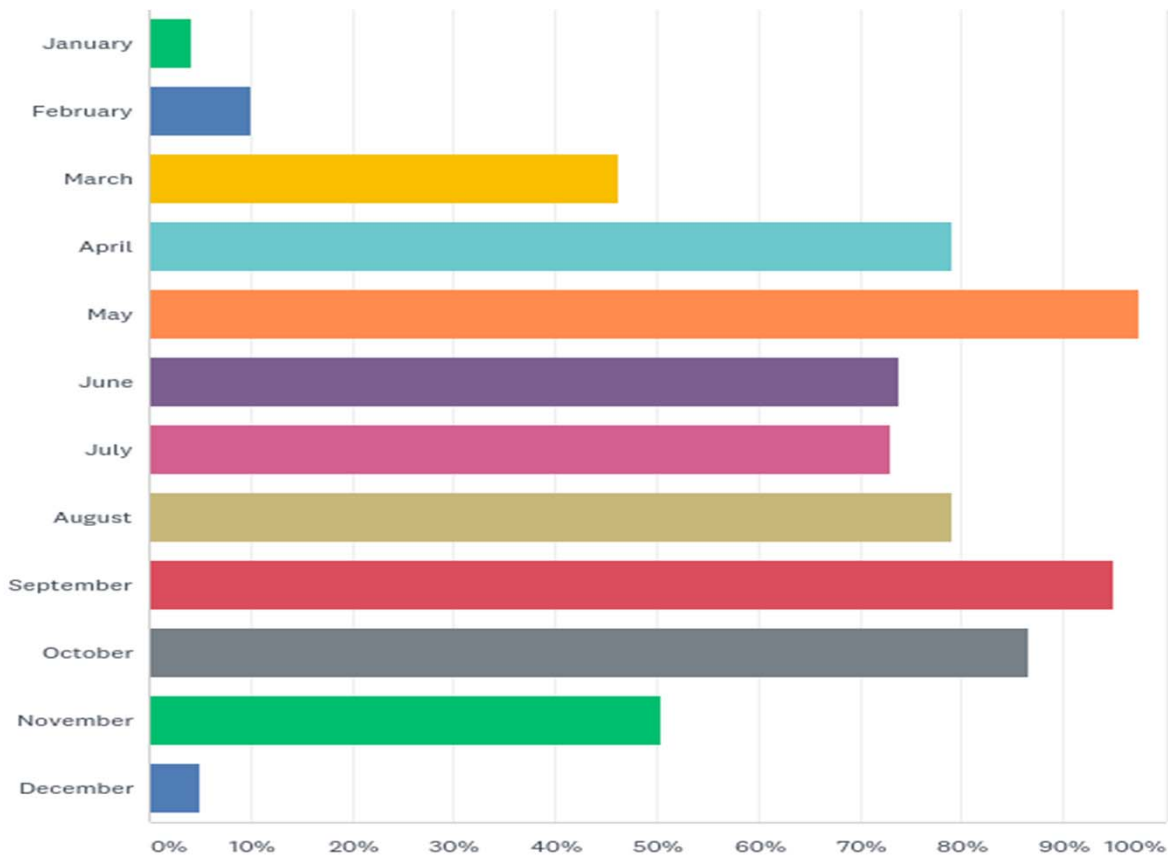
Rick Jacques, a project partner, is a Healthy Merrimack River Initiative (HMRI), and EbbTide Rowing on the Merrimack River member. He is a long-time resident of Newburyport, and an avid recreational rower on the Merrimack and surrounding communities. In support of the ACES research project on the experiences of recreational users of the Merrimack River, the survey was constructed by Olivia Duffin, a marketing student at Suffolk University, and intern the Alliance of Climate and Environmental Stewards, ACES (<https://www.aces-alliance.org/initiatives/healthy-rivers>) in support of the research project on the experiences of recreational users of the Merrimack River.



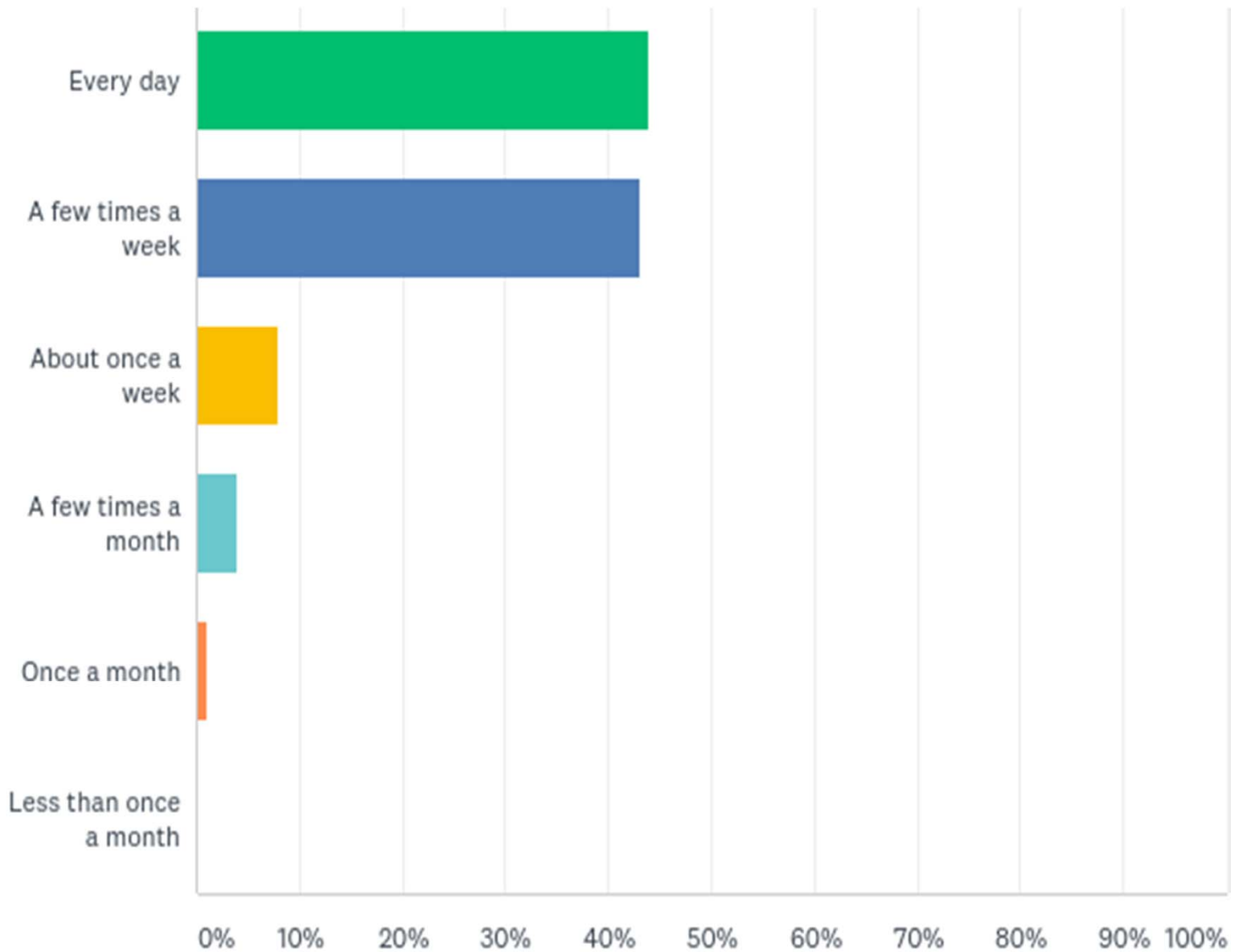
# Do you live in a community which borders the Merrimack River?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	79.37%	100
No	20.63%	26
TOTAL		126

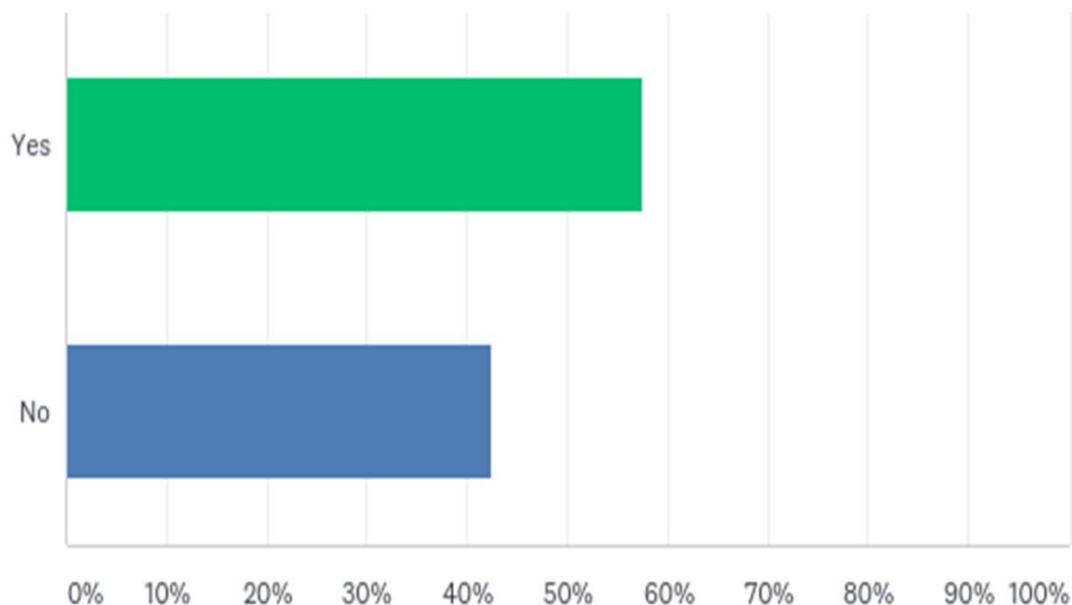
# What months of the year do you enjoy the benefit of being on or in the Merrimack River?



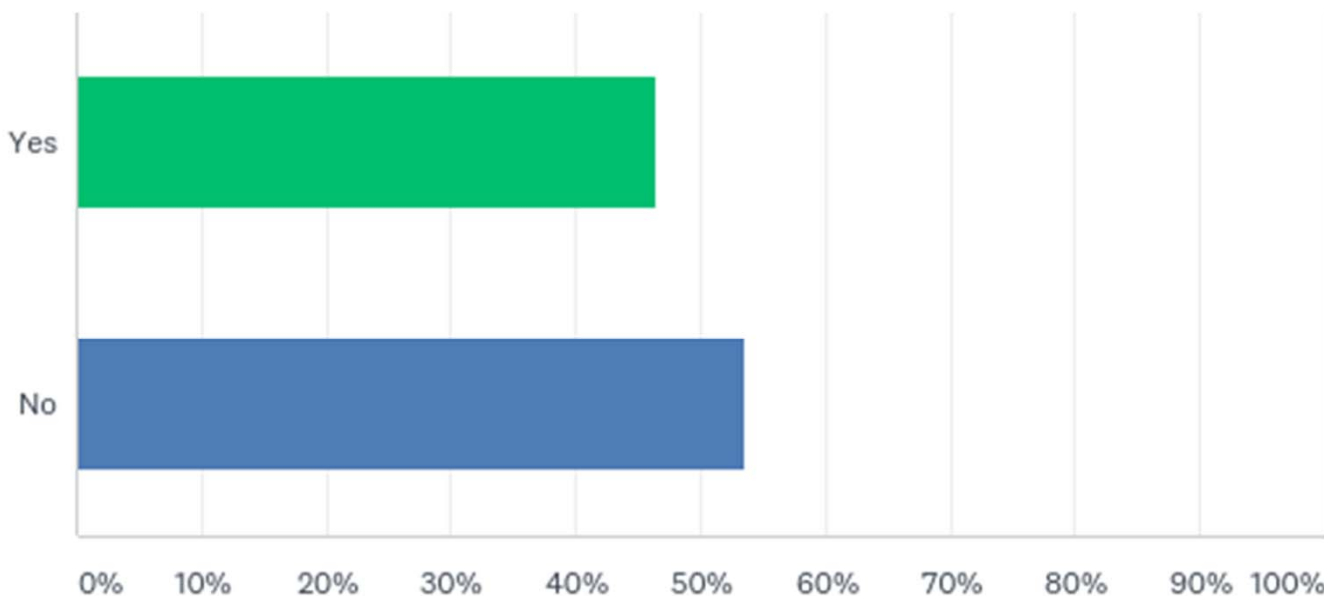
# How many days per month do you pursue your rowing activities on the Merrimack River?



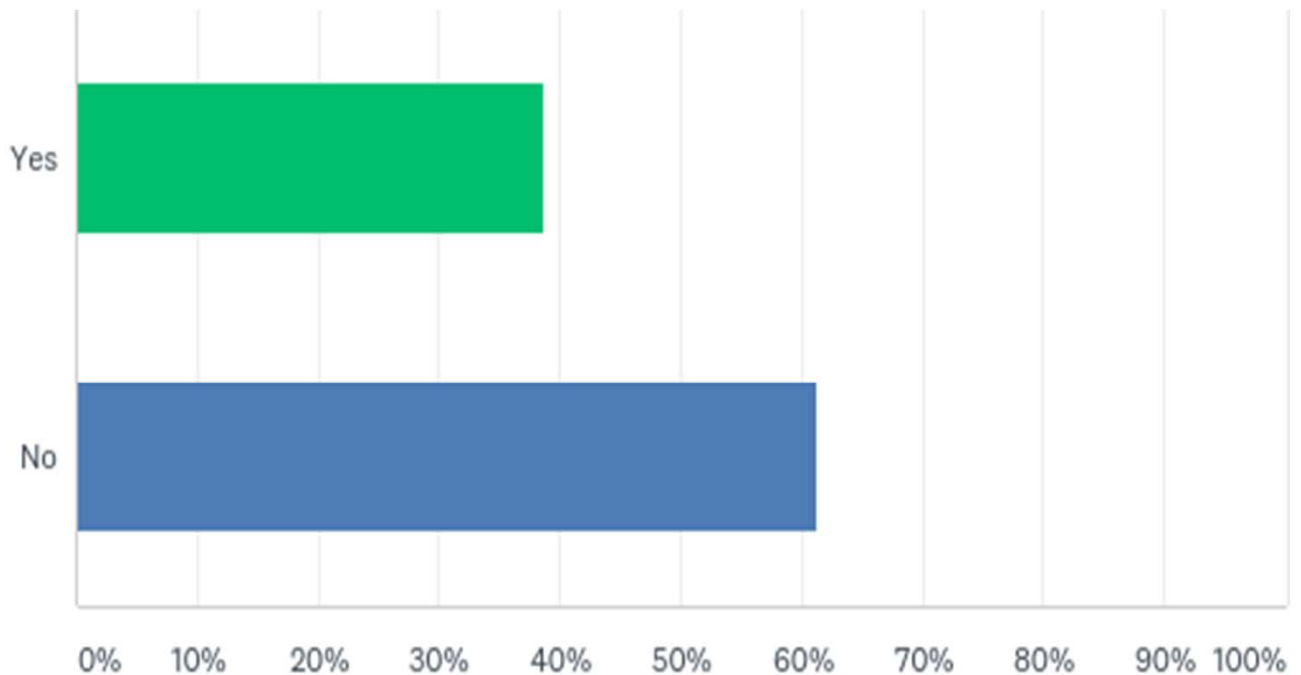
# Are you aware that many communities in the area get all or some of their drinking water from the Merrimack River?



# Does your rowing organization also have a high school program?



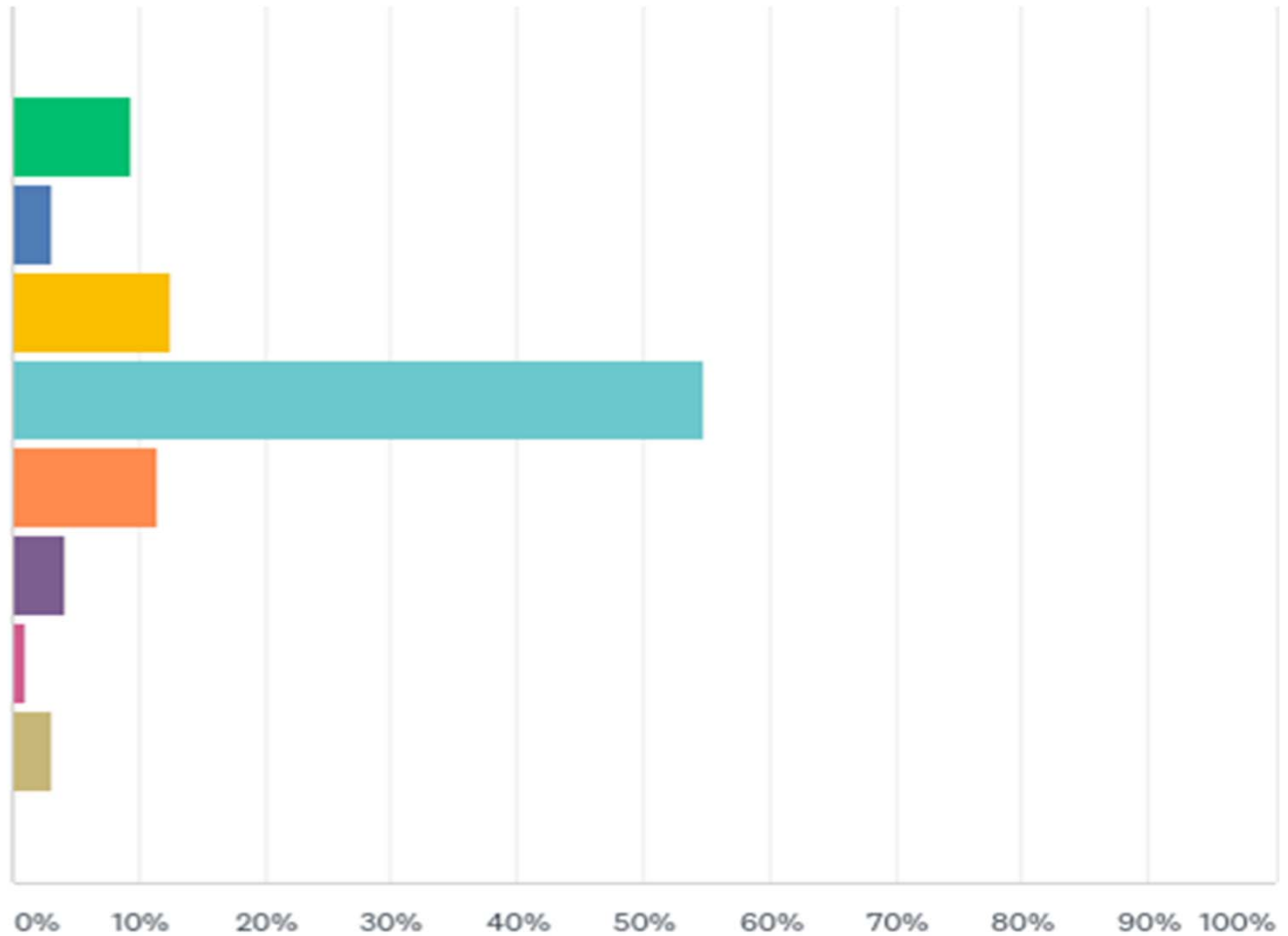
# Does your rowing activity launch from the water instead of a dock, or did you have an incident where you had to swim or recover from the water?



*Comment: 39% of the rowers walk into the Merrimack River to row frequently or every day!*

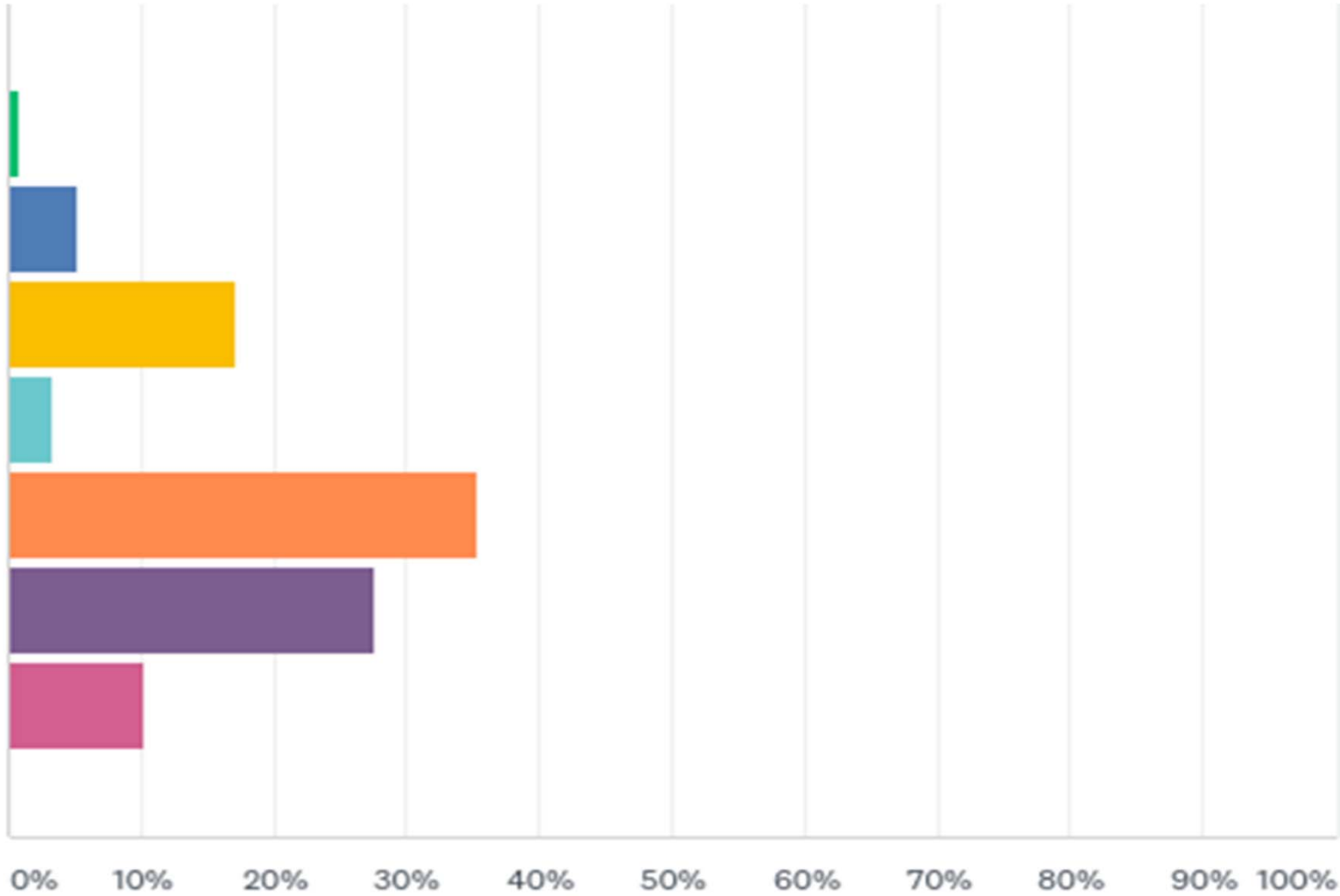
*This survey does not measure the numbers of middle and high school rowers that are affected. Their coaches trust municipalities and state government to give them the right advice after a CSO event, with meaningful notification.*

# How would you rate the water quality of the Merrimack River?



- Should not step in it
- No fishing
- No swimming
- OK for boating
- OK for swimming
- OK for fishing
- OK for shell-fishing
- Suitable for drinking water supply

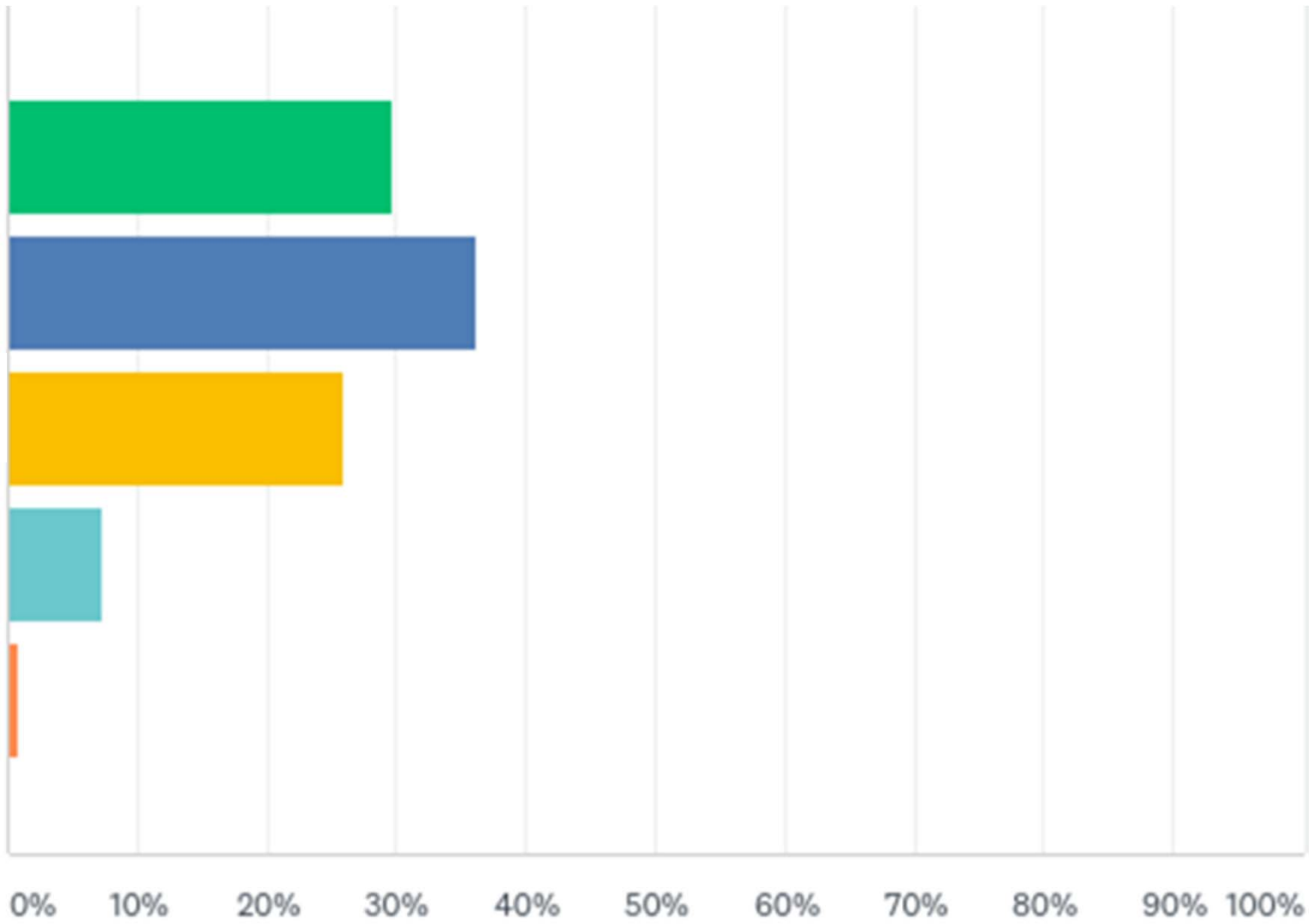
# Please indicate the degree of concern that you have about the overall condition of the river.



- Not concerned
- A little concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Neutral
- Concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned

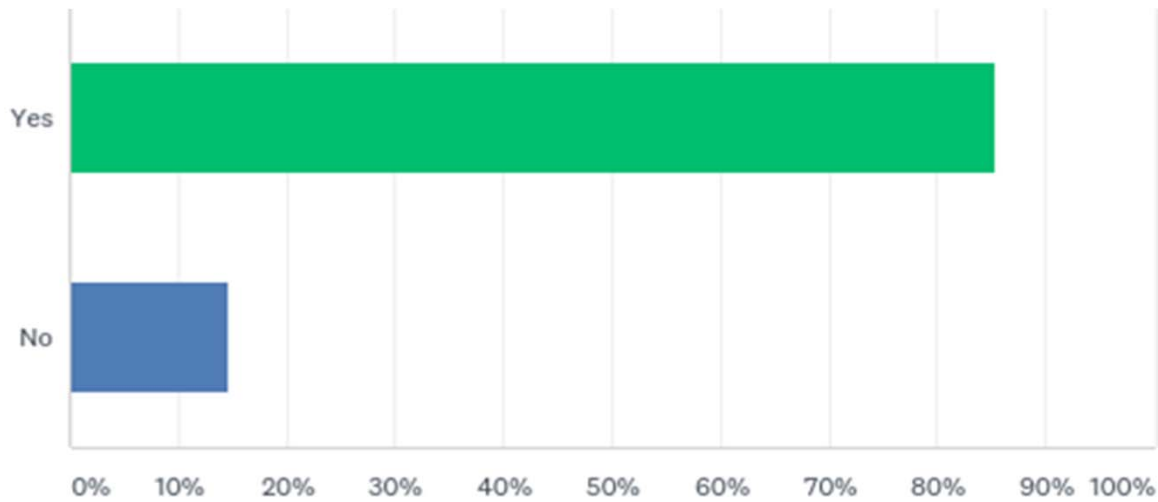


# Have you experienced a decline in the condition of the Merrimack over the past three rowing seasons?

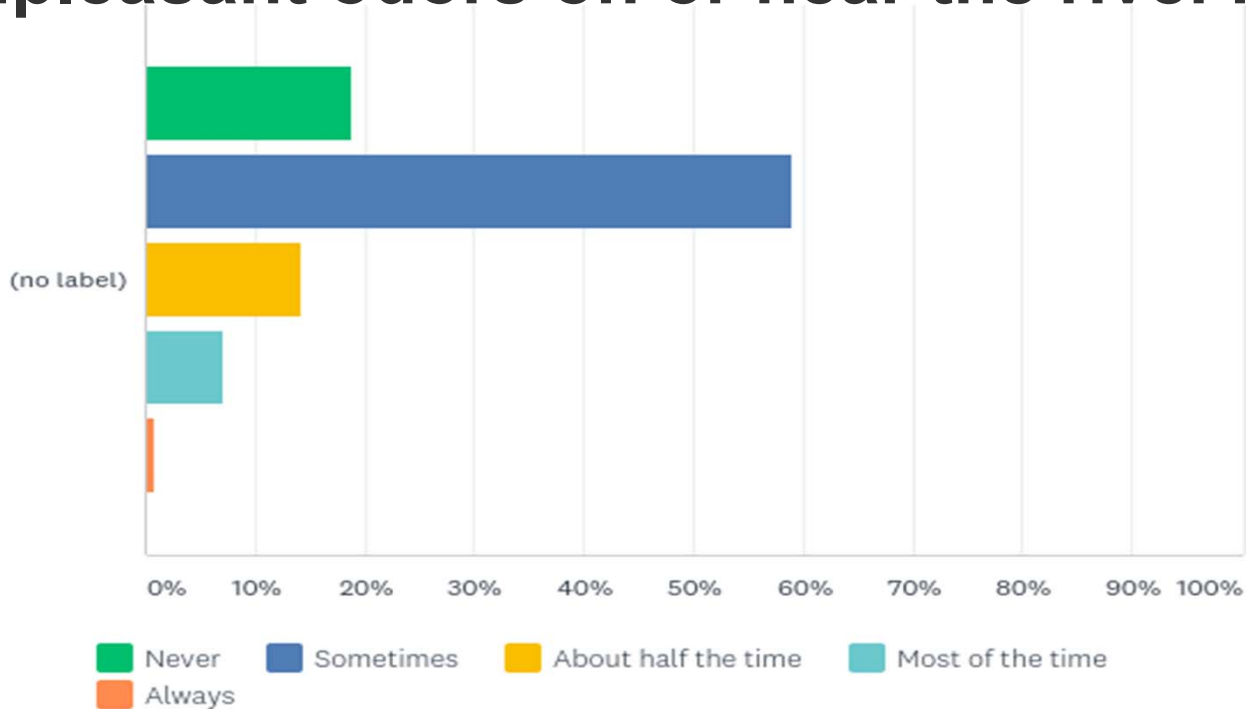


■ Not at all   ■ A little   ■ A moderate amount   ■ A lot  
■ A significant amount

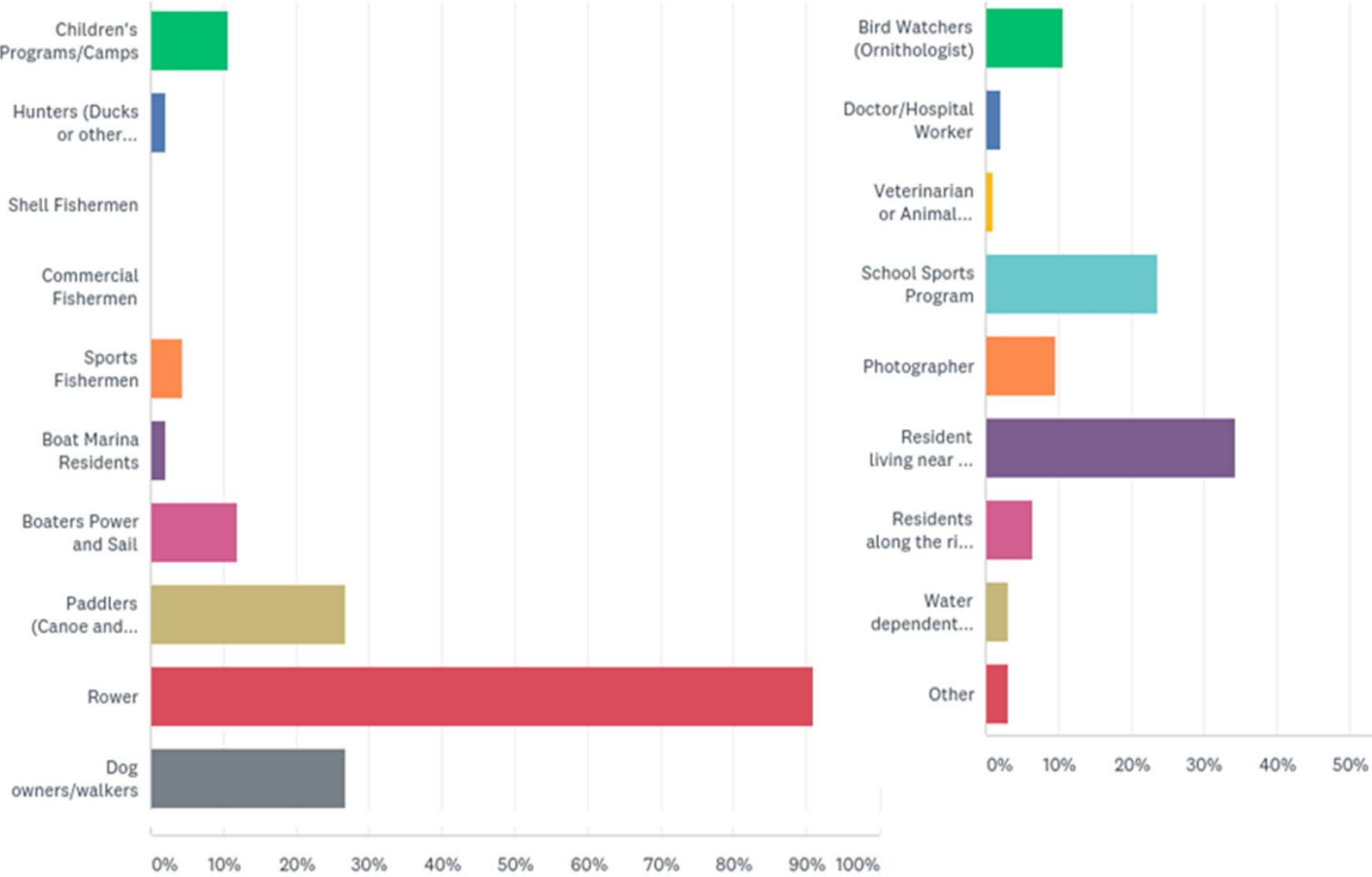
**During the 2018 rowing season, when you removed your boat from the river following each workout or race, did you notice any films, grime or coatings on the hull as you washed it?**



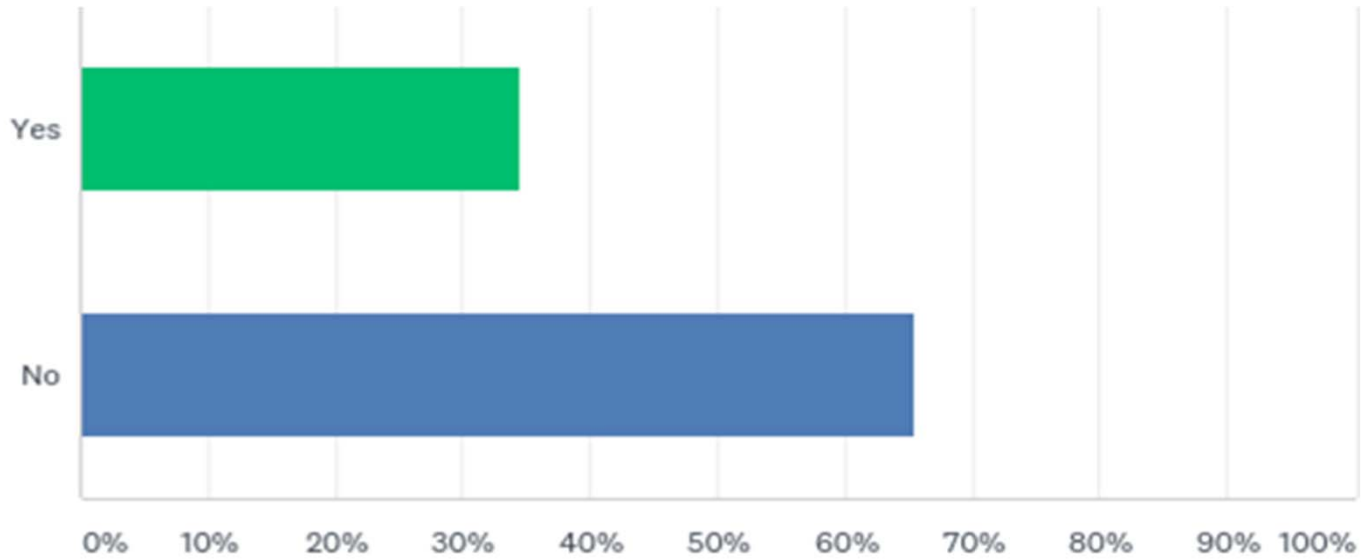
**Have you ever experienced a change in unpleasant odors on or near the river?**



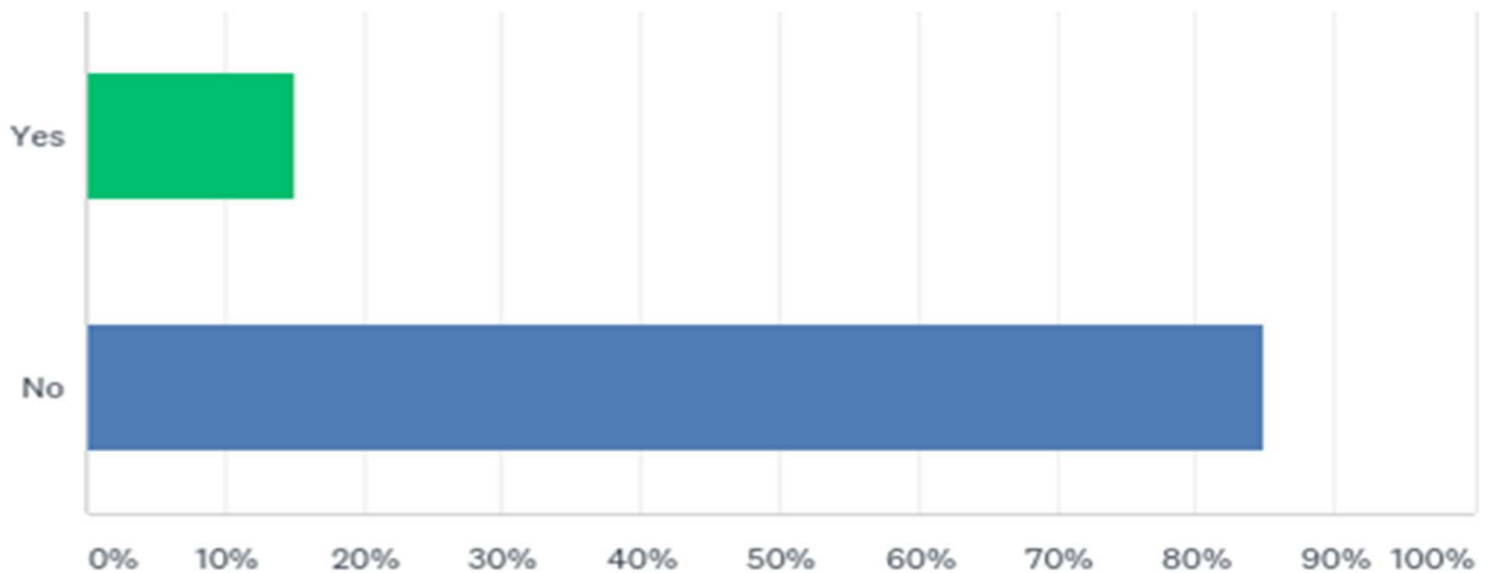
**If you enjoy the benefit of being on or in the Merrimack River or have professional or frequent experience with the Merrimack River, please select the other activities in which you participate in.**



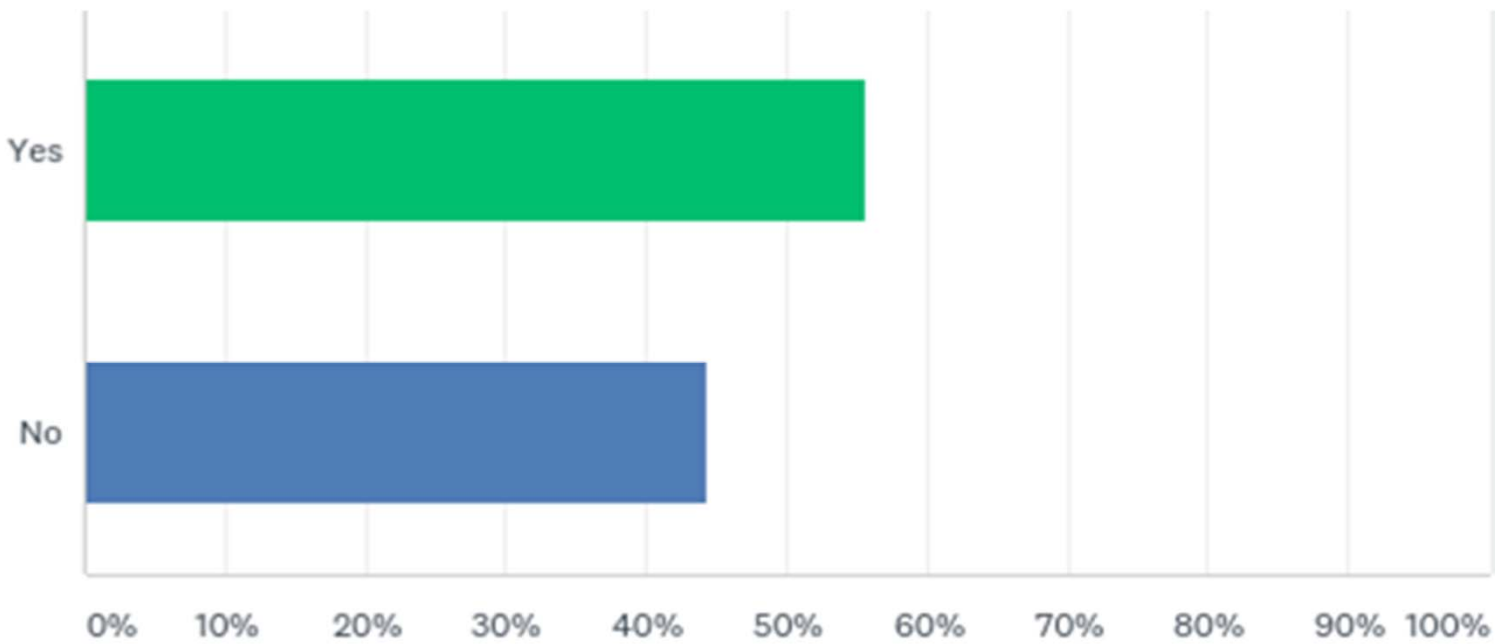
# Do you know what causes CSOs or Combined Sewage Outflows?



# Are you a member or following any environmental organizations in the Merrimack River Watershed?



# Would you like to learn more about improving the Merrimack River for rowing, swimming, boating, fishing, and other recreational uses? Or newsletter on river condition, legislation, enhancements to recreational value/quality of the Merrimack River, and events?



*NOTE: 56% of those surveyed want MORE information regarding the health and vitality of the Merrimack, and what our legislators are doing to improve it.*

## Conclusion

As this is only the first survey conducted, this data will form the basis for possible future surveys of users benefiting from the Merrimack River and the watershed.

Although it's not possible to draw valid statistical inferences from one survey, these initial results do point to a growing problem with pollution along the Merrimack. It also highlights the very real threat and concerns for Combined Sewage Overflows (CSO) along the Merrimack.

With the expansion of the survey to reach a large number of recreational users of the river, we plan to have more statistically-significant results which we will share with organizations and governmental agencies that are concerned with the health of the river.



## What to Do?

If you are concerned about the health of the 117 mile Merrimack River and Watershed, contact your municipal leadership, state and federal representatives and say so. Request that they support development of a systemic reporting of CSO outflows within a few hours of the event. Hopefully, with a joint and collaborative effort by both states, our U.S. Congress representatives will be provided with the scientific facts and feasible solutions needed to obtain federal support needed to resolve the CSO issue.

Visit our website for more information at Alliance of Climate and Environmental Stewards, ACES (<https://www.aces-alliance.org/initiatives/healthy-rivers>)

If you are a member of a community or athletic organization, start a discussion to approach others and form an coalition. Numbers, voices and organized efforts make a difference.

Observe where you work, and recognize excessive runoff from roofs, parking lot and other hard surfaces that may overwhelm the storm drains, and the combined sewer systems. Ask about the possibility of collection systems and runoff management. Recognize manufacturing pollutants that may be captured in heavy rain runoffs.

At home, don't throw unused medications or metals (mercury) into the sink or toilet to prevent them from getting into the food chain and back to our table at home.

