

Background

Over the past decade, data is becoming increasingly available on coastal water quality. Despite this availability, it is uncertain whether or not residents are receiving accurate and up to date information about coastal water quality.

What indicates clean ocean water?

When surveyed, many respondents answered 'a lack of visible pollution (i.e. trash)' 'a lack of development' and 'clear water'. Very few identify the presence of fecal coliforms to be an important factor in coastal marine health.

How do we talk about coastal water quality?

With a focus on sources of water quality information and trust in management entities, researchers from the School of Economics attempt to gauge the most effective methods for communicating with residents about coastal water quality issues.



A volunteer collects a sample for analysis at Hull's Cove, Bar Harbor ME -photo by Margaret Snell

Methods

Sample:

Sample purchased from InfoUSA. Sample included 6,000 coastal Maine residents. The coastal zone is defined by the inland line of coastal towns on tidewaters and all islands. Media:

Residents received an initial letter of invitation containing a link and an access code. The link directed them to a Qualtrics Survey, Version: Shellfish. The survey contains approximately 55 questions.

Analysis:

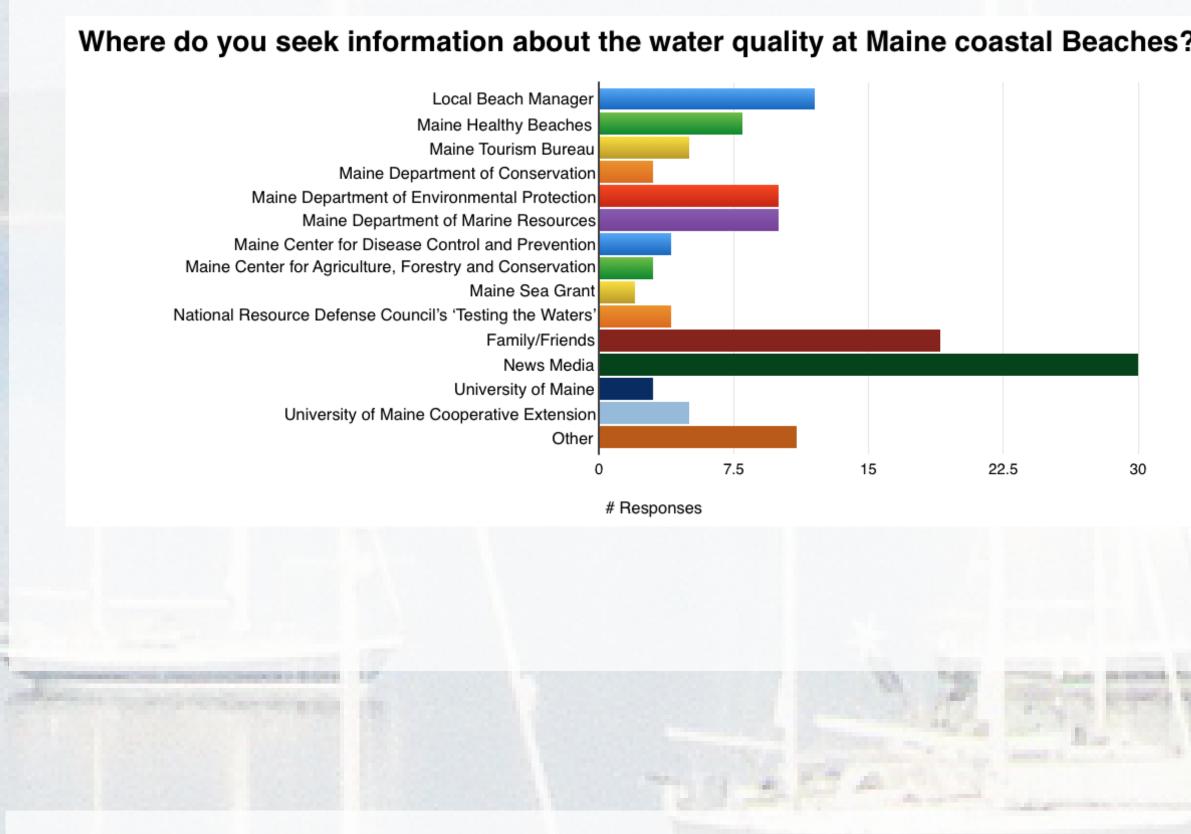
Analysis of preliminary data conducted using Statistical Analysis Software (SAS). The survey is still in the field, and analysis will continue.

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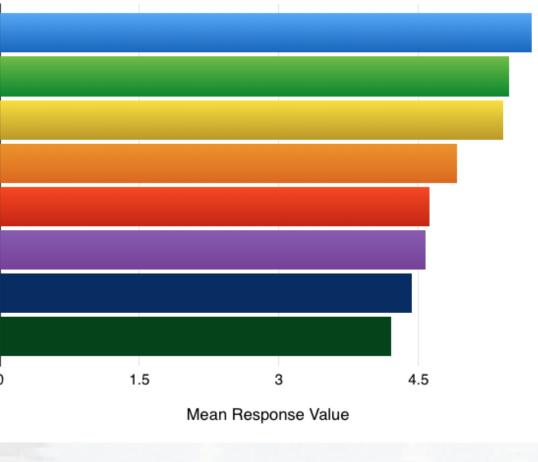
How are coastal Maine residents getting information about water quality? Identifying avenues for communication about water quality issues using surveys administered to coastal residents

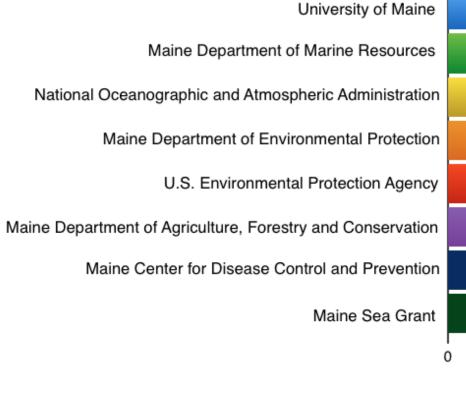
Tagwongo Obomsawin, Caroline Noblet, Kathleen Bell, Emma Fox, Abigail Kaminsky, Margaret Snell, University of Maine School of Economics

Results

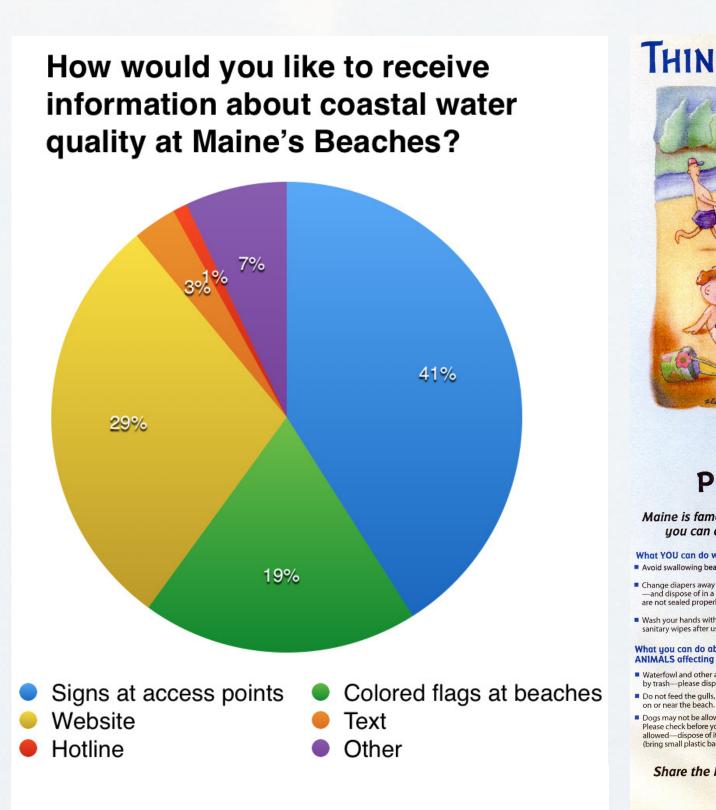


Who do you trust to run the Coastal Water Quality Improvement Program?











Practice Healthy Beach Habits!



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This question about the information-seeking habits of Maine residents attempts to identify common avenues for communication about water quality issues. The majority of respondents indicated that they preferred to get their information from News Media, followed by Family/Friends and Local Beach Managers.

These data suggest that coastal residents prefer to seek out local sources of information before turning to state or national organizations.

This question about trust followed a hypothetical coastal improvement program scenario. Respondents were asked to rate each of these sources from 1 (Least Trusted) to 7 (Most Trusted).

Residents indicated a willingness to trust most of these sources somewhat equally. Trust increases somewhat with the relevancy of the managing organization.

This question about asked how respondents would like to recieve information about water quality.

41% indicated they preferred to see signs at access points. However, 70% of residents also indicated that they had never seen a Maine Healthy Beaches sign (a common indicator of coastal water quality monitoring).

This poses the questions:

Are these signs prevalent enough at local beaches? Are these the kinds of signs residents are hoping to see? And, are these signs being properly interpreted?

Conclusion Data collected from this survey indicate that coastal Maine residents may be most receptive to water quality information from local, trusted sources. Through collaboration of research efforts, managers may be encouraged to present the most comprehensive information through local media and effective beach signage.





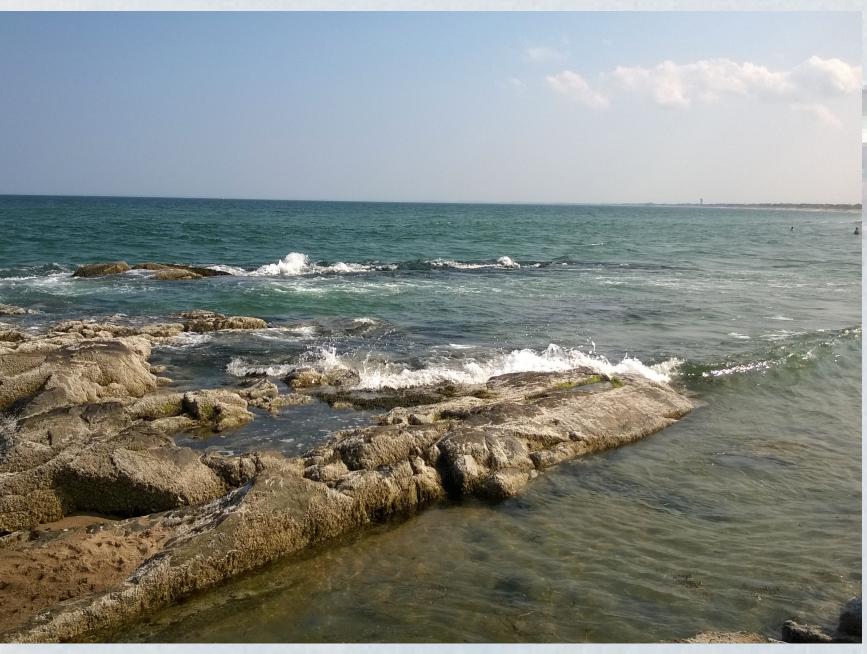


Discussion

The data collected from the survey indicated strong support for preserving the coast and providing a healthy marine environment for animals. Residents also indicated a preference for local sources of information, with a willingness to trust a variety of management entities. **Do** these data provide an opportunity for effective communication through local news media and beach managers?

While respondents indicated they would like to receive information through beach signange, many indicated never having seen a common indicator of beach water quality monitoring. This disconnect in communication is important in considering what additional steps to take in outreach efforts.

Finally, how can researchers use this knowledge of preferred methods of communication to effectively inform residents about water quality issues?



Seabrook Beach, Hampton NH- photo by Abigail Kaminsky

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