

Survey: water quality is 'very important'

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It's where kids play and it's what we drink.

Water is one of our most valuable resources and something we need to work to protect, said Margaret Teevens, the city's infrastructure maintenance coordinator.

Teevens said she's not the only one believes that. In a September survey of Casper residents, one of the results shows 93 percent of participants think protecting stormwater quality is either "very" or "somewhat" important.

Roughly two-thirds of those surveyed said they are willing to pay between \$1 and \$10 extra per month to "help solve drainage, flooding and surface water pollution problems."

Public services director Gary Clough said he was initially surprised by Casperites' willingness to pay extra, but on second thought, realized it fits Wyoming's nature. Outdoor activities are central to Casper and Wyoming residents' lives, which conversely makes water quality important.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency mandates every city comply with requirements in what is called the Phase II National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System.

Among the six minimum requirements are public education and outreach, illicit discharge detection and elimination, construction site run-off control and pollution prevention.

The city began education and outreach programs in 2003, and in 2005 officials began working with the Wyoming Department of Transportation, Natrona County, Casper College, Evansville and Mills. Teevens said this survey gave staff an idea of what is working as well as what can be done better.

For example, 53 percent of residents surveyed thought stormwater is treated before entering the river. Stormwater actually flows directly into rivers and streams, which means when someone dumps the material from their RV tank holding into a gutter, Teevens said that is just like pouring it directly into the river.

Most of the people surveyed are also not aware that they live in a watershed, Teevens said. Every person on the planet lives in a watershed -- an area that drains into an ocean, lake, river or stream -- and as a result, everyone's actions have an impact on the water supply.

The survey also showed that many people would support improving stormwater quality. Teevens is happy about those results but said more needs to be done -- the entire community will need to work together to impact change.

"I want to improve this stormwater quality because it affects the health of our community, and that's what makes a difference," Teevens said. "That's my bottom line. It's critical for our community."

Teevens and others will present the survey results to the city council in a work session on Monday.

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