

# Public Opinion Research for Water Policy Makers

Regional Water Providers Consortium Board Meeting  
October 1, 2014

[www.dhmresearch.com](http://www.dhmresearch.com)



# About DHM

**Non-partisan, independent**

**Quantitative and qualitative work**

**35+ years**

**Public policy and community impact**

# Our Recent Work On Water

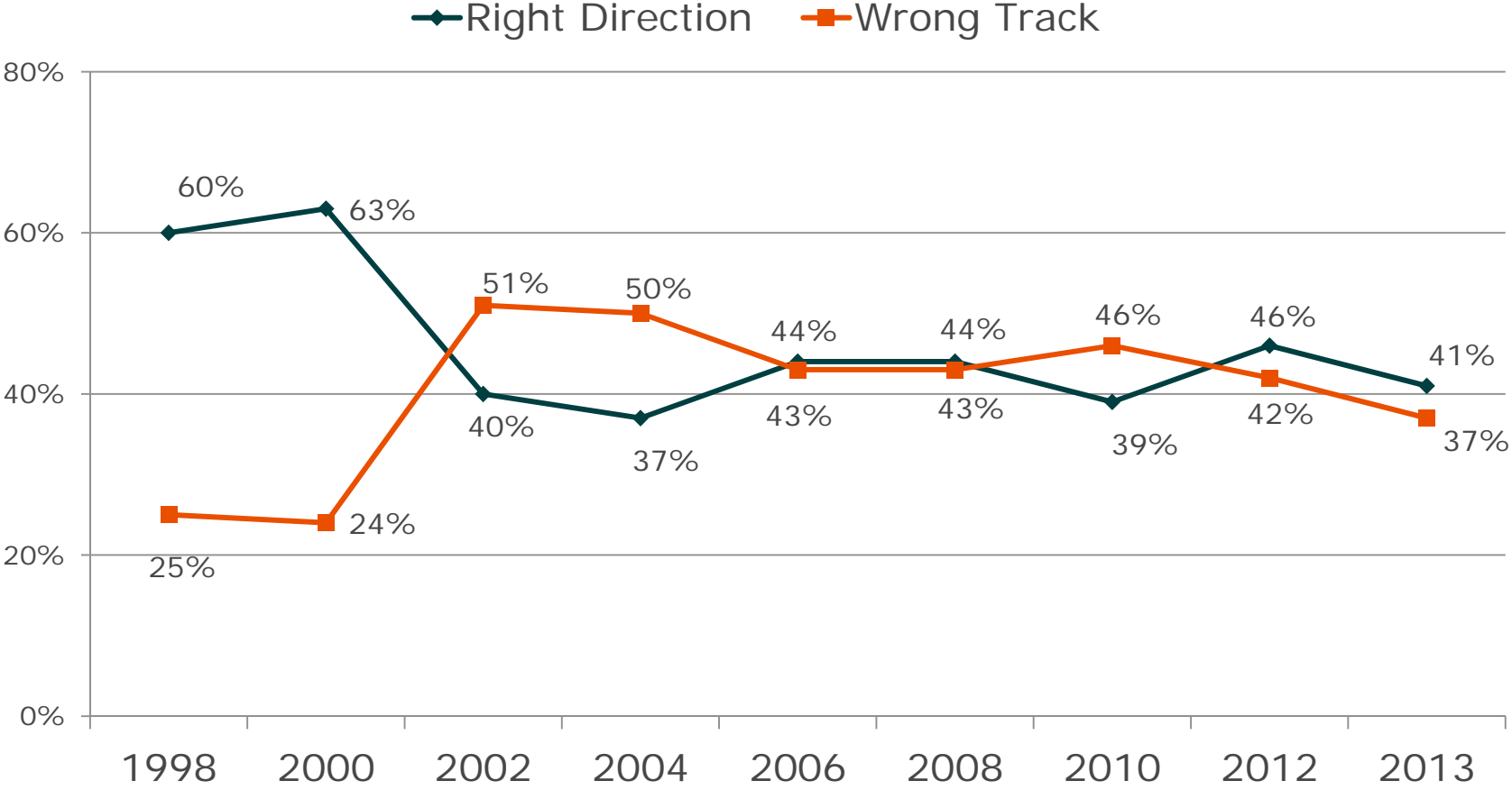
**CITY OF HILLSBORO  
TIGARD WATER DISTRICT  
LAKE OSWEGO / TIGARD WATER SUPPLY ANALYSIS  
CLEAN WATER SERVICES  
EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD (EWEB)  
SALEM PUBLIC WORKS  
COALITION FOR CLEAN RIVERS AND STREAMS  
MOORE FOUNDATION (ALASKA SALMON PROJECT)  
PORTLAND HARBOR  
WASHINGTON WATER + WORKERS  
EARTHFIX  
WILLAMETTE WATER SUPPLY PROGRAM**

## **What to expect...**

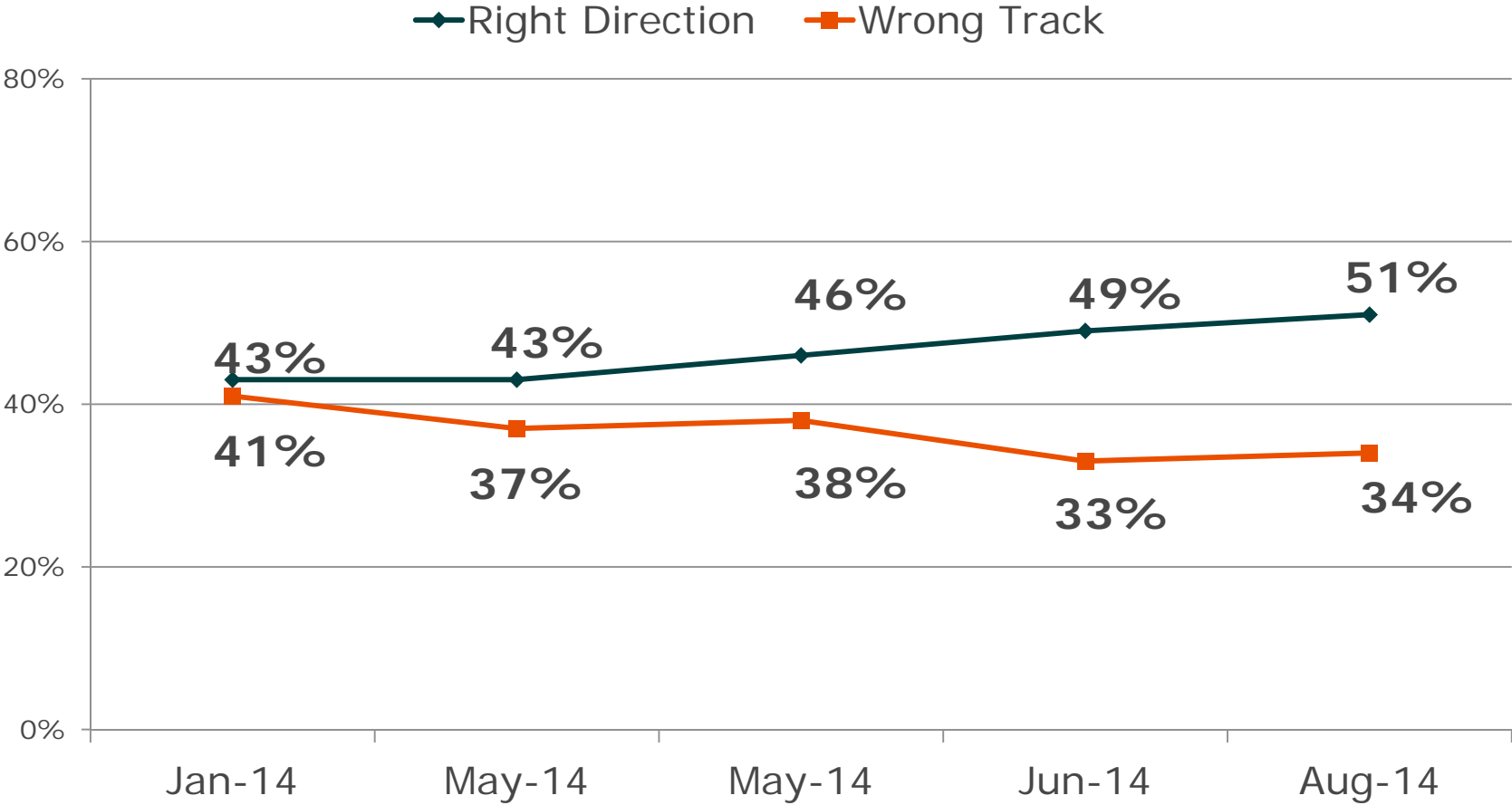
- 1. Opinion climate of the region and state**
- 2. Better understanding of public knowledge and awareness of water**
- 3. Communication recommendations**

# **OPINION CLIMATE**

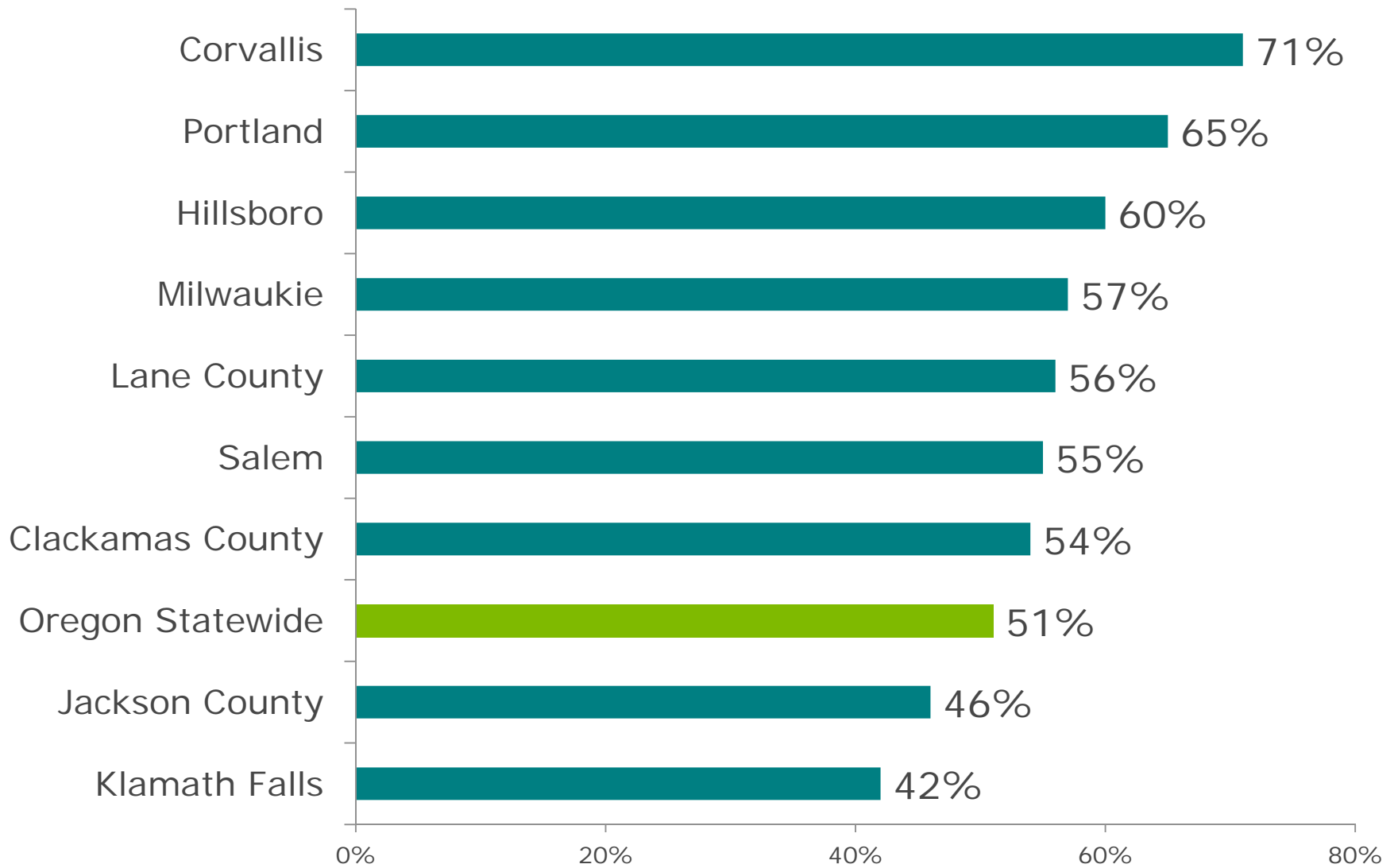
# All things considered, do you feel things in Oregon are headed in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?



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## Right Direction by Community 2013/2014





# Low Awareness Of Government

- **49%** Oregonians don't know the number of US Senators who represent the state, just one-third know their names
- **51%** Oregonians cannot name the three branches of government
- **35%** of Oregonians can identify the income tax as the primary source of revenue for state services

**What does this mean for their awareness of their local water systems?**

# Perception Of Waste

How many cents out of every dollar the state spends do you feel is **wasted**?

**\$0.44**

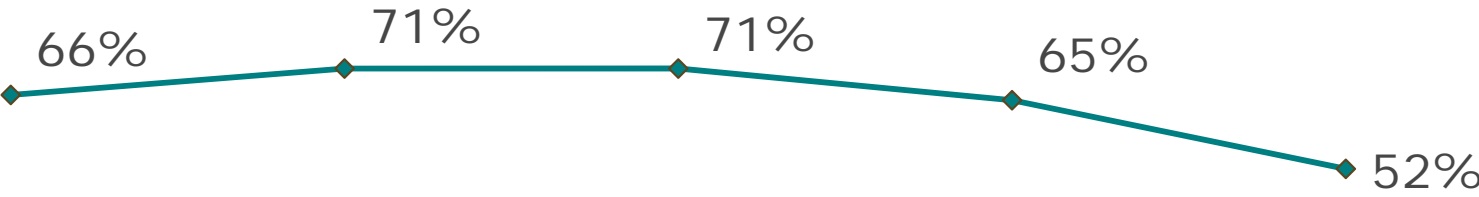
How many cents out of every dollar the state spends do you feel **benefits your daily life**?

**\$0.30**

Oregon statewide

# Anxiety About The Economy

How worried are you about your personal financial situation?



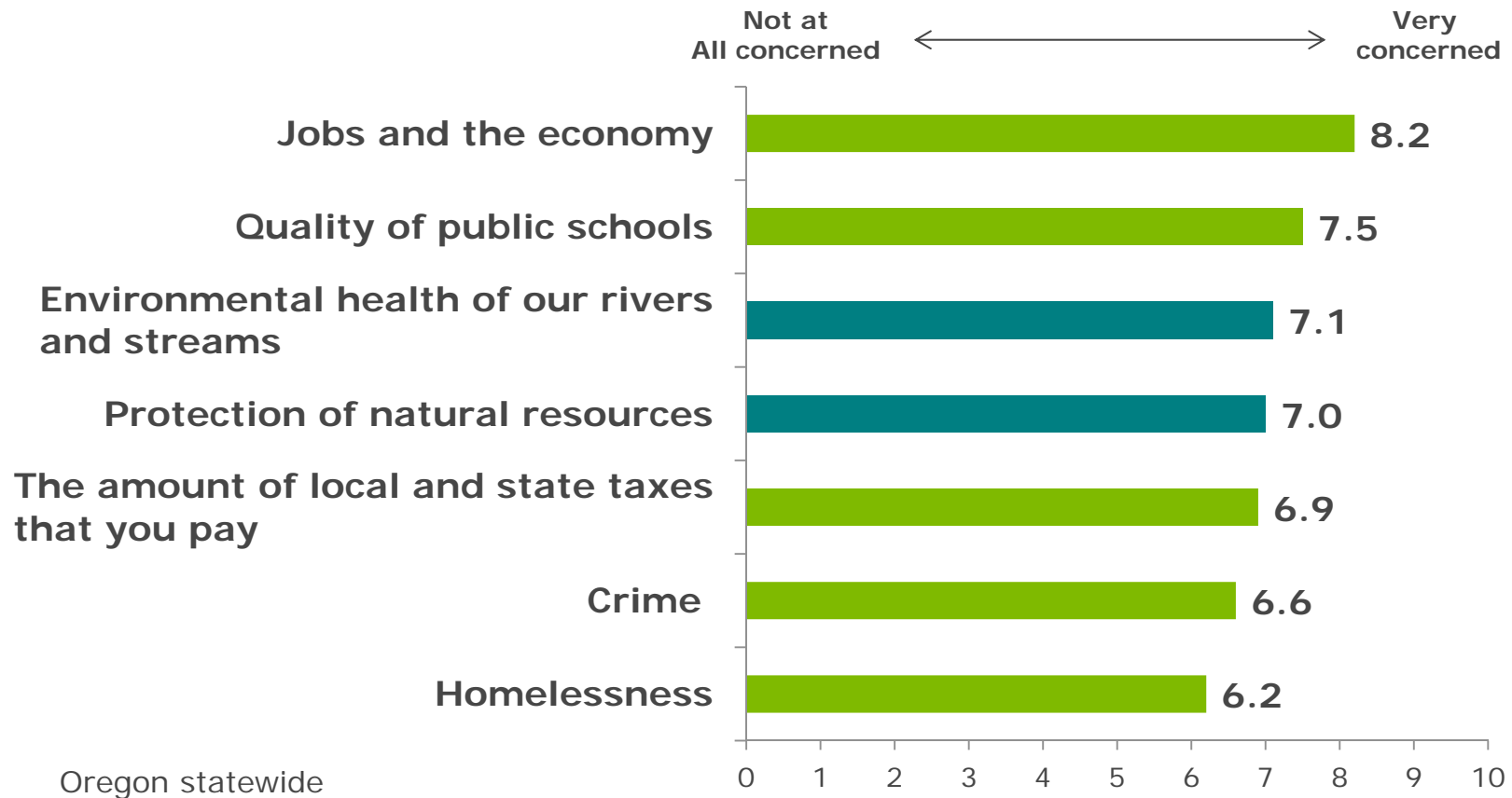
March 2011    September 2011    January 2012    April 2013    Sept 2014

Oregon statewide

◆ Somewhat/very

# Economy is top of mind concern, water quality is second tier concern

## Level Of Concern About Issues Facing Area



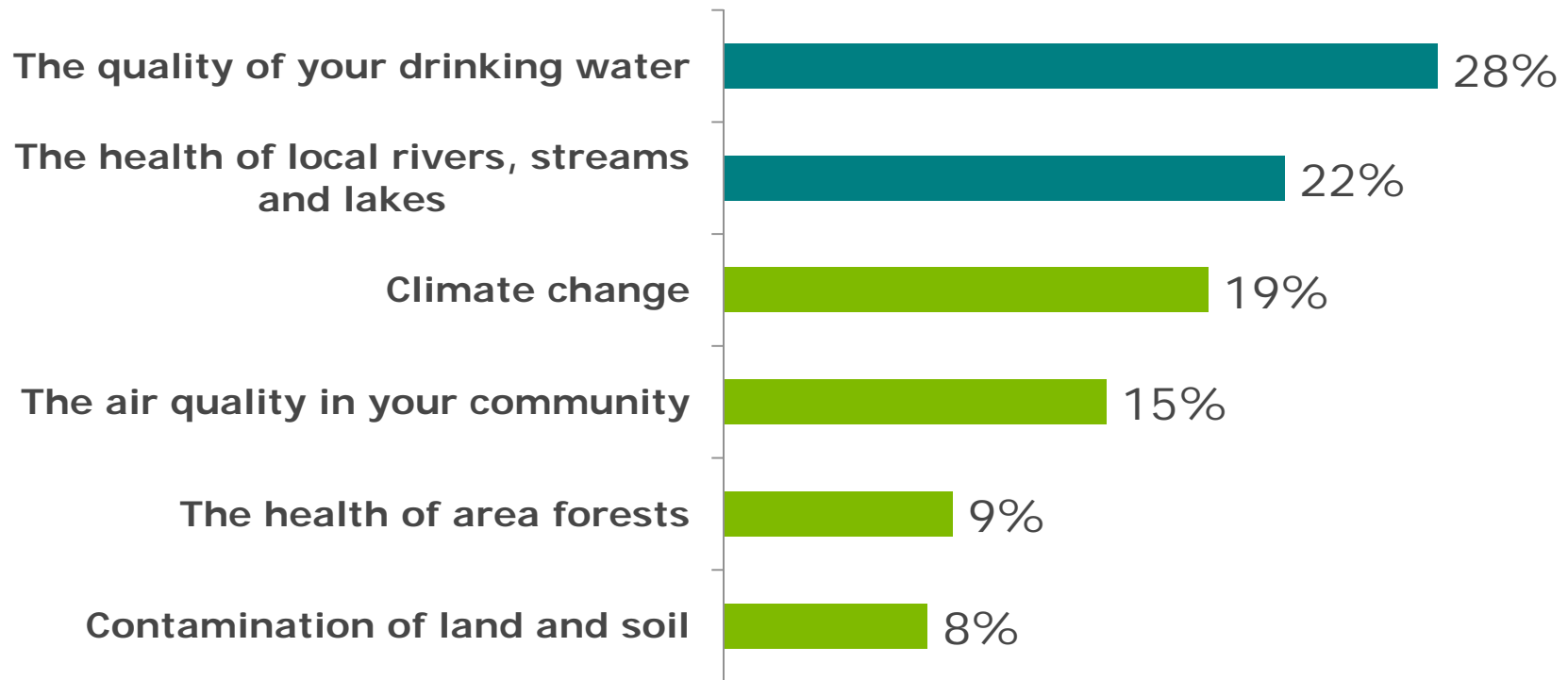
# What Oregonians value most about living in the state

- **Outdoor recreation opportunities – proximity and variety**
- **Natural beauty including open space, farmland, and forests**
- **Climate**
- **Water and air quality**
- **Sense of community/neighborliness**

# **AWARENESS & KNOWLEDGE OF WATER ISSUES**

# Oregonians are concerned about water quality

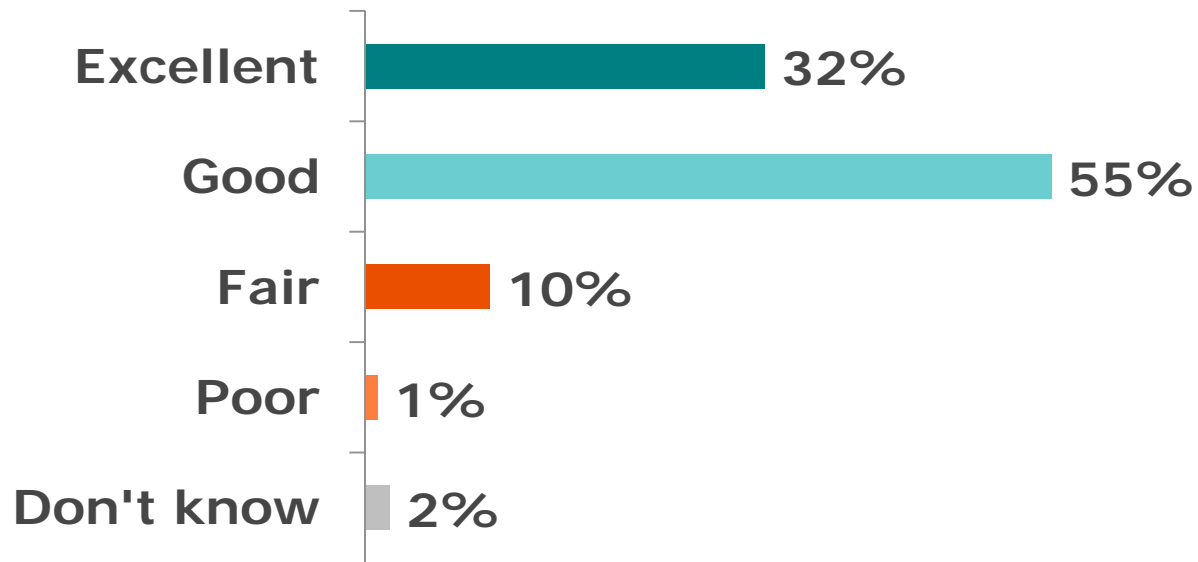
## Local environmental issue most concerned about



Oregon statewide

# Oregonians like their water...

How would you rate the water quality in Oregon?



Oregon statewide



# Water Values

## TOP TIER

**Public health and safety** – top priority

**Purity** – treat water as little as possible. Concern about long-term environmental and personal health consequences of water treatment

**Reliability** – having an adequate supply to meet the needs of today and the future

## SECOND TIER

**Wildlife habitat** – provide for fish, animals, and natural areas

**Economic growth** – clean, reliable water necessary for business. Both the supply and the waterways

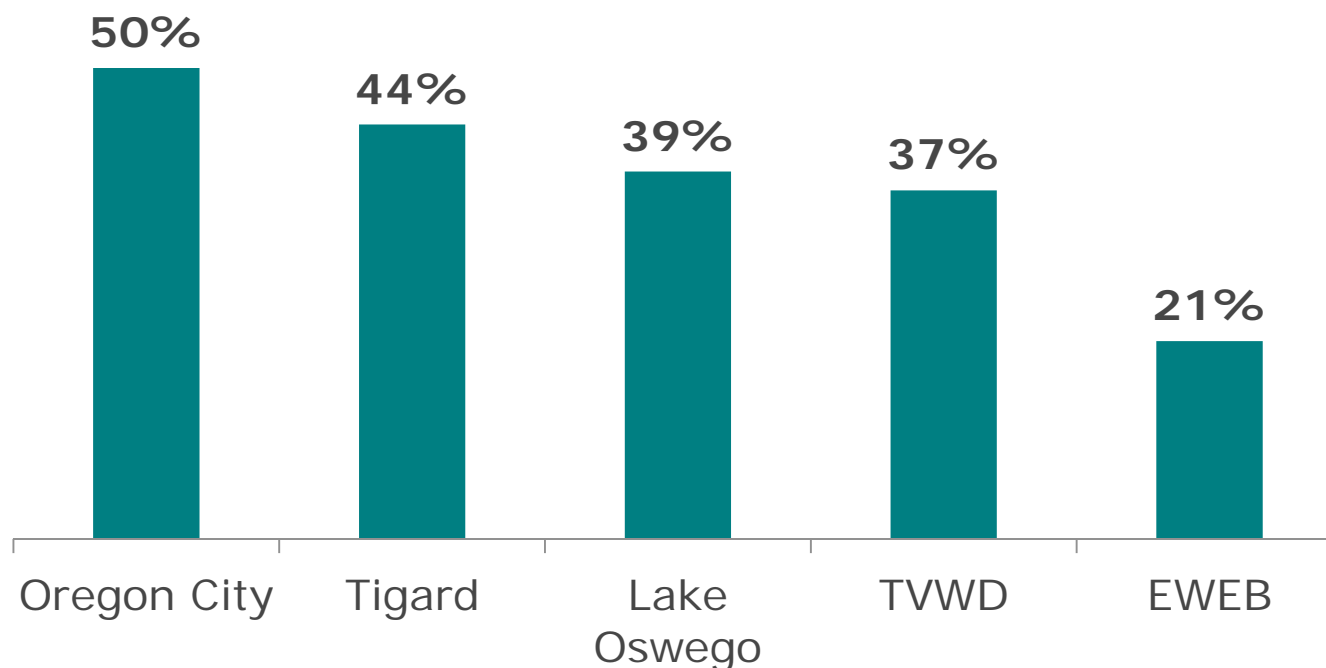
**Recreation** – waterways safe for swimming, fishing, and other recreational activities

## LOWER TIER

**Cost and value** – affordable to all

# ...Even though many don't know where it comes from

Percent who don't know the source of their community's drinking water



# Awareness Of Drinking Water Source



*"I am not aware of any information about the water source. I am a super-focused, single mother and business owner."*



*"It's one of those things that I don't think about. I mean, I go and turn the faucet on, it's there. I go to my refrigerator, get water out of it. I never really think about it. That makes me feel good."*

# Even if they don't know where their water comes from, the public generally likes their water provider

Which one utility service do you believe provides the best value for your money.

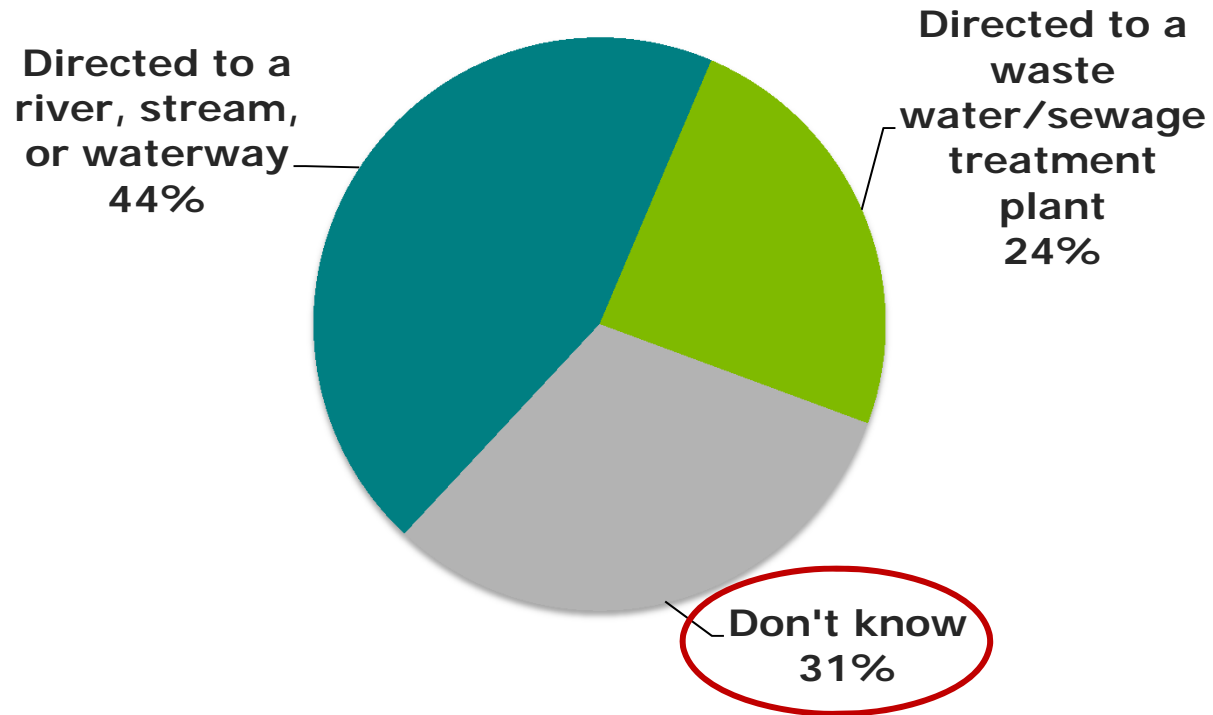
Response Category	%
<b>Water service*</b>	<b>28%</b>
Garbage service	25%
Electricity	18%
Cable	6%
Telephone	4%
Sewer service	4%
Don't know	15%

**\*Most customers do not distinguish the clean water service from storm/sewer service**

Oregon statewide

# Limited Understanding Of Stormwater

**What happens to the water that enters your neighborhood or local public storm drains or drainage ditches?**



Portland metro

# Low Awareness Of Stormwater Service

How would you rate your satisfaction with the following services?

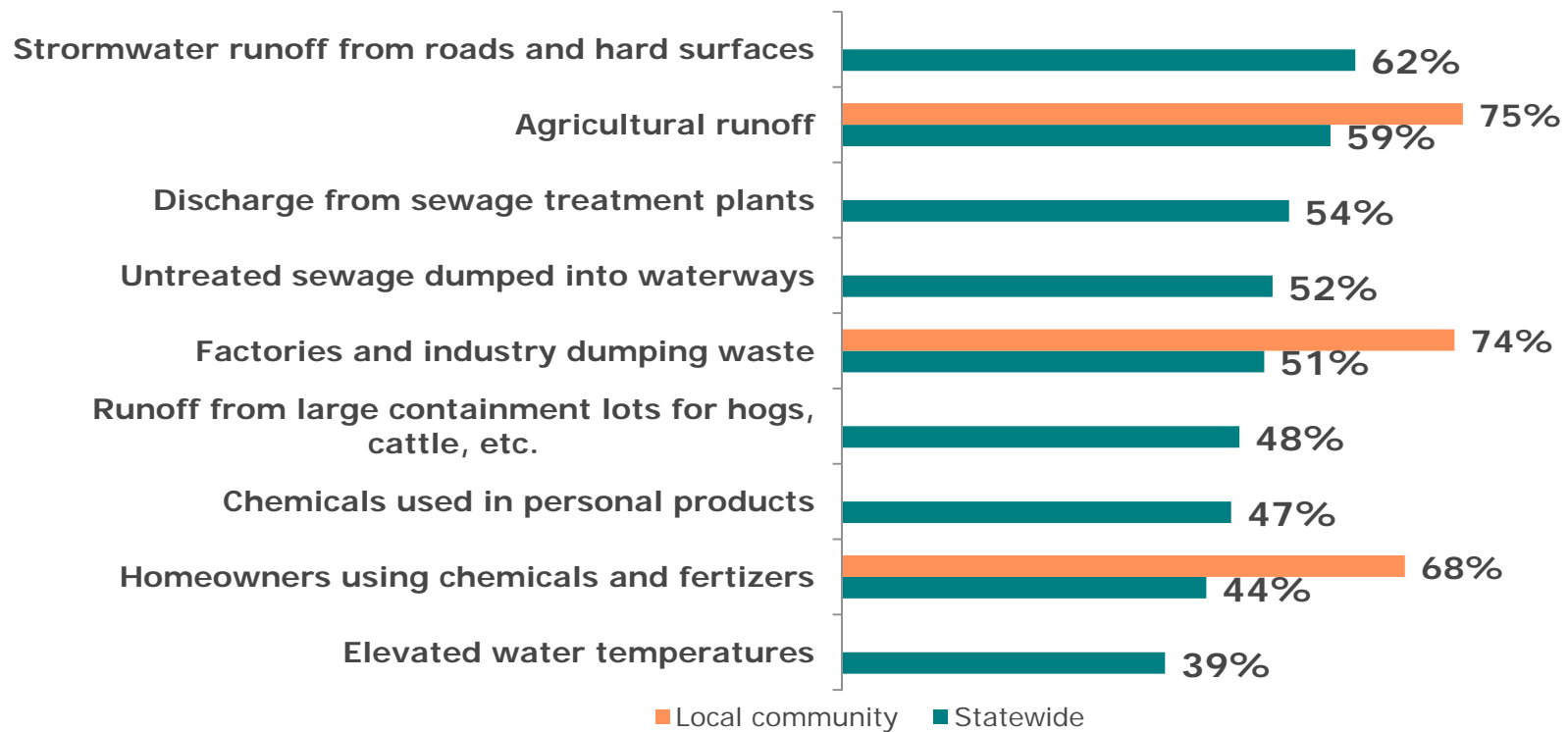
Response Category	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know/Not applicable
Your wastewater service	11	4	2	0	1
Your water service	11	3	3	0	1
Your stormwater service	3	3	2	0	10



*“How does it relate to water use? Why is that on the same bill as my water? You know, it seems like a different service even though they are both water. But I’m not using rain water.”*

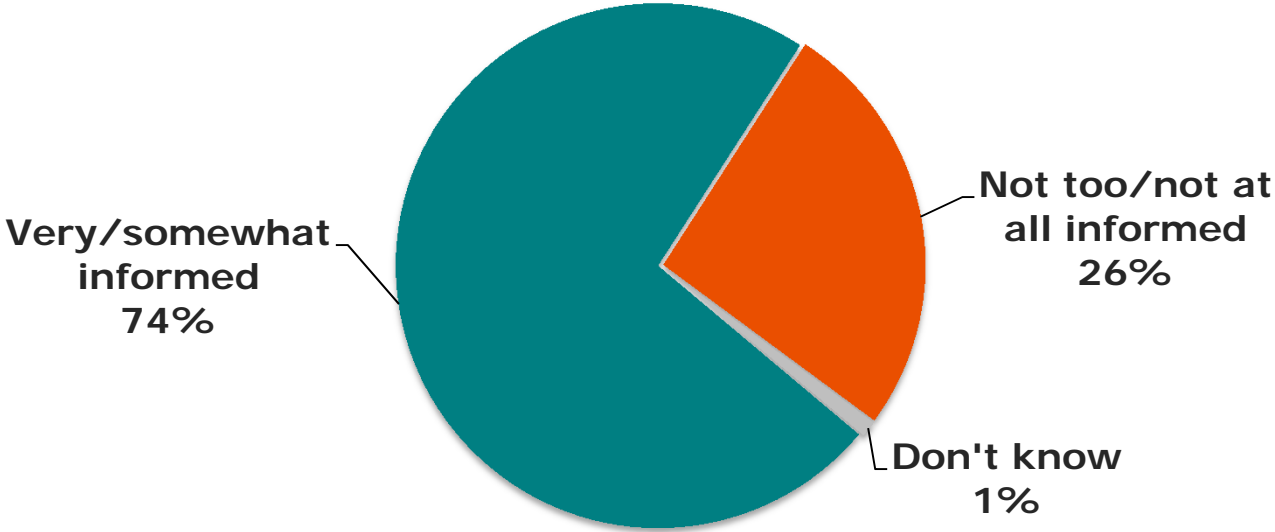
# Perceptions Of The Causes Of Water Pollution

Causes of water pollution ("a lot"/"fair amount")



# People feel informed about what they can do to maintain water quality...

In general, how informed do you feel about what you can do to maintain the health and quality of local rivers and streams?

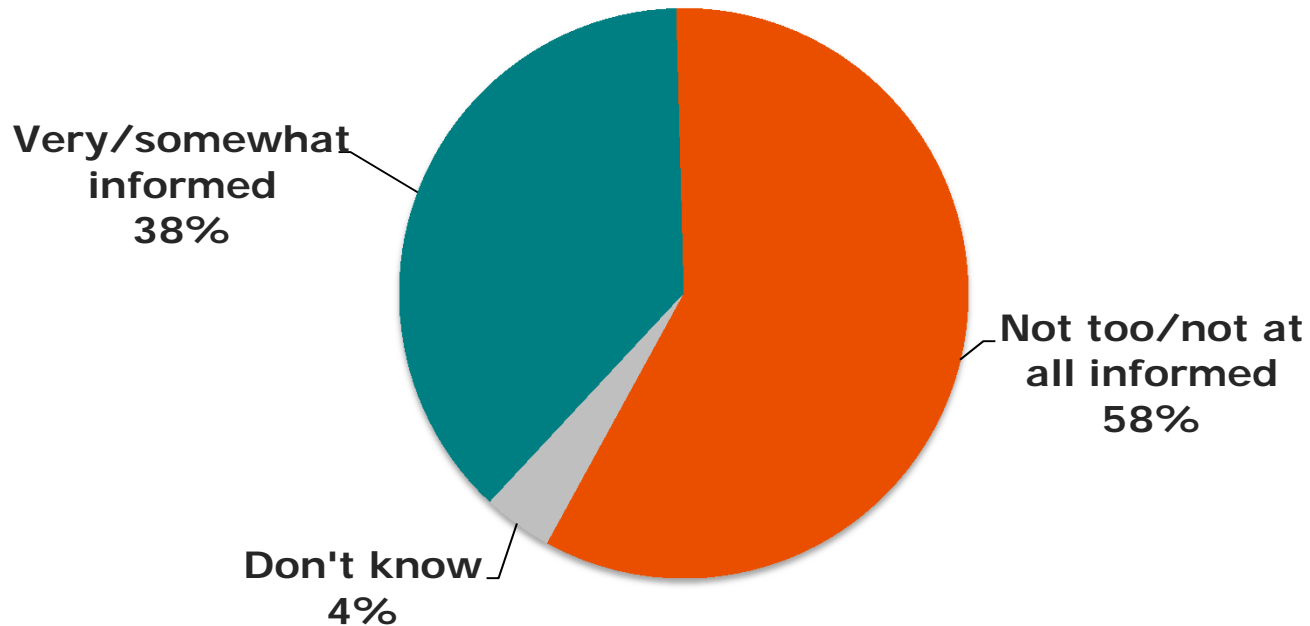


Portland metro



# ...but they are less confident about what they can do on their own property

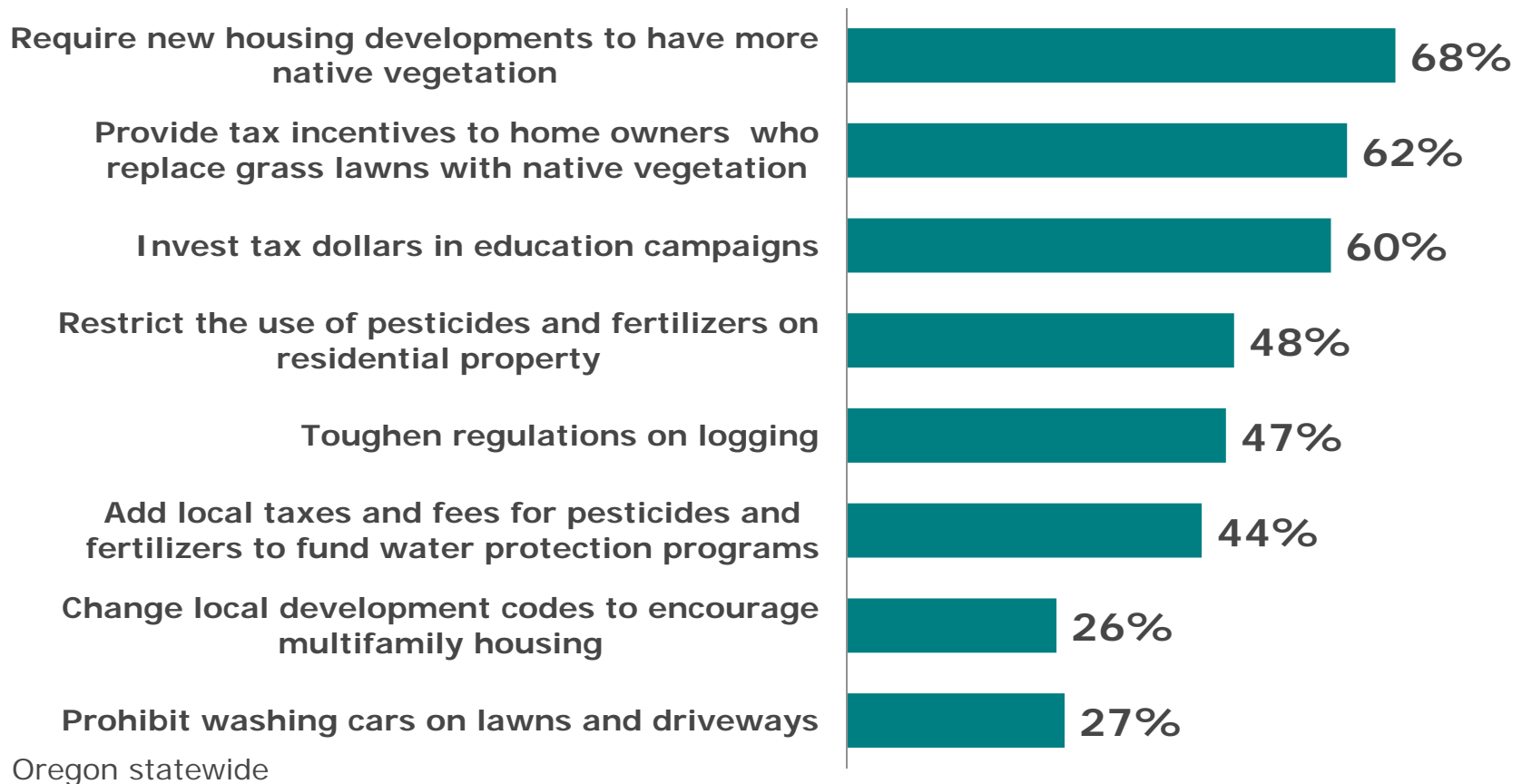
In general, how informed do you feel about what you can do on your property to help manage stormwater?



Portland metro

# However, they generally support policies to reduce pollution

## Support for policies to reduce pollution from stormwater runoff



# Stakeholder opinions: biggest challenges to water resource management

- **Managing population and industry growth and the strains they will place on water resources**
- **Sustainable and equitable funding**
- **Maintaining and replacing aging infrastructure**
- **Managing complicated federal and state regulations**
- **Balancing competing demands from residential, business and agricultural users**
- **Planning for crises, including persistent drought and earthquakes**

# **MESSAGING RECOMMENDATIONS**

# Communicating About Water

- Connect to **Oregonians' values**
  - Specifically to preserving the natural beauty of our state, the outdoors, water, trees, and nature. Water evokes strong emotions in people; this is an opportunity to engage Oregonians on something they care about.
- Use a **positive tone** and **focus on outcomes**
  - Keep a focus on maintaining our quality of life, and specifically to improve our rivers and streams for future generations.
  - Communicate that there is a plan for the future. Failed policies or consequences of bad behaviors are weak reasons for behavior change.

# Communicating About Water

- Make links to **drinking water**. Protection of drinking water is one of the best motivations for changing behaviors.
- Mention and include **specific rivers and streams** to make a stronger “local” connection to a drinking water source.
  - Relate how individuals’ behaviors impact their community to more effectively address how individuals can make a difference in their own “backyard.”

# Communicating About Water

- Protecting the **health of children and pets** is a powerful motivator.
  - Link water behaviors to the safety of children and pets. This is highly effective in both focus groups and surveys, especially among women.
- Consider **mothers as messengers** to target the strongest base of supporters – females, Democrats, and people with higher education/income.
  - Other research also shows that women are strong messengers, often the most effective messengers, around improving the health of families.

# Communicating About Water

- Suggest **simple steps** to behavior change.
  - A large number of residents are uncertain or confused about what actions they can take. They are also unsure of where to find additional resources on alternatives. Provide simple changes and link those to outcomes. Be specific.
- **Partner** with community organizations, small businesses, retailers, and university experts as spokespeople.



# Communication Don'ts

**DO NOT** lead with saving money as the key motivation for behavior change. Instead, lead with other values and include saving money as an added benefit.

**DO NOT** get bogged down in too many details and instructions. Keep it simple and easy.

**DO NOT** start with government messengers. They evoke a high sense of skepticism due to increasing distrust in government generally.

# Communication Don'ts

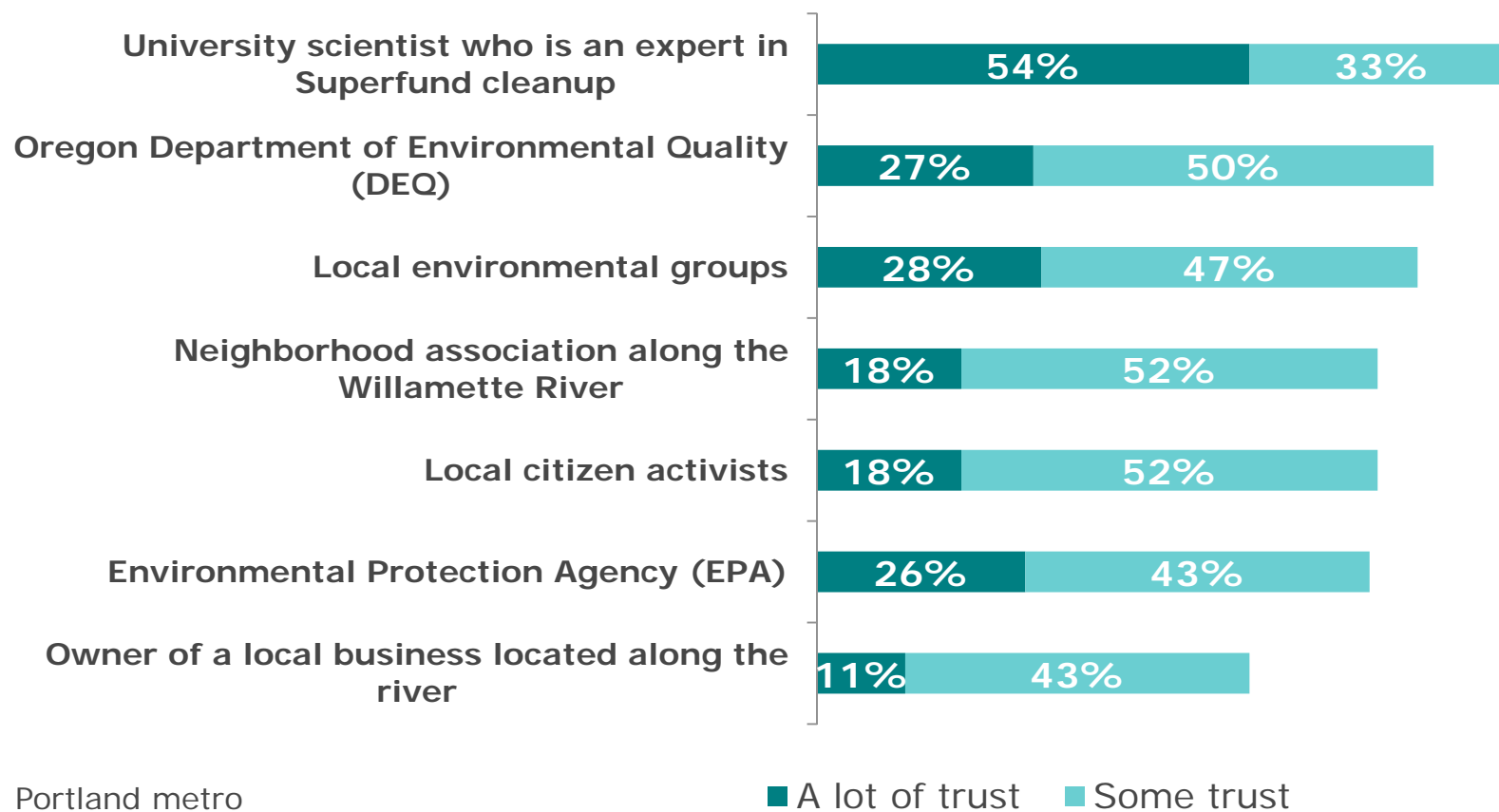
**DO NOT** talk about water in general terms. It's too broad and global, and leaves people with a sense that their behavior won't make a difference. Link to local rivers and streams. Name them.

**DO NOT** persuade residents that alternative products are just as effective as chemical ones. Let them come to that conclusion. Instead, move people with other values like the safety of children and pets.

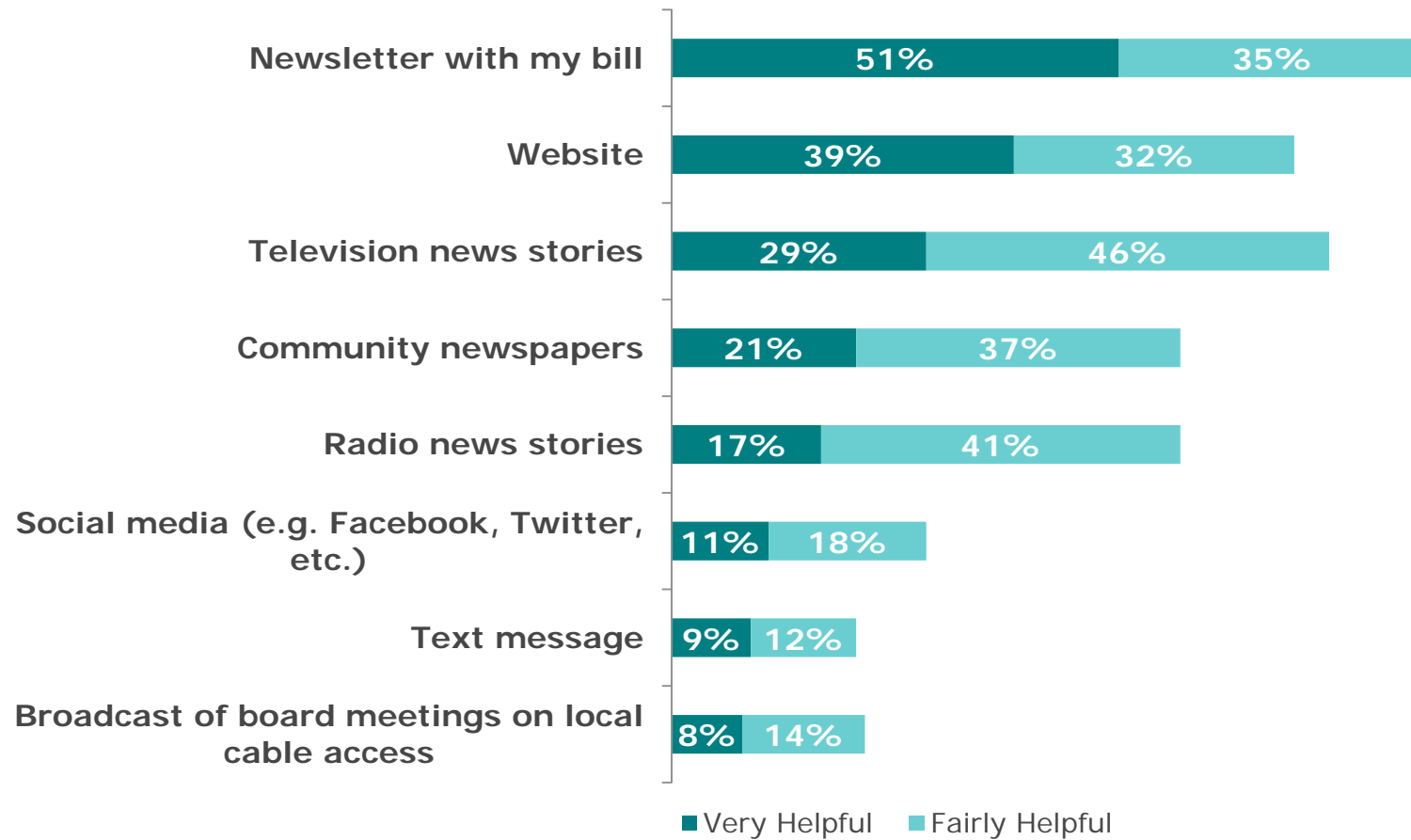
**DO NOT** use words like infrastructure, sustainable, herbicides, pesticides, etc. Use words that express benefits for the individual.

# Credible Sources

## Information sources on cleaning the Willamette River



# Helpfulness Of Communication Outlets



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