CSREES National Water Quality Program

Title: Using Surveys to Establish Priority Water Issues in the Pacific Northwest

Name: Robert Mahler **Email:** bmahler@uidaho.edu

Organization: University of Idaho

State: ID **Region:** Pacific Northwest **Year of Funding:**

Theme: Water Policy and Economics

Situation: Water quality has been a priority for Extension since the 1980's. The national water quality program was refocused in 2001 to emphasize regional rather than state-by-state education of our clientele. This change at the federal level required us to assess our current water quality programs in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Objectives: The objective of this project was to develop a region-wide water issues survey for our clientele to collect base line information to document public awareness, attitudes, aptitudes and current actions toward water quality and the environment. The base line data used in this survey would be used to determine priorities in the Pacific Northwest.

Methods: A 50-question survey was designed to assess public attitudes about water issues in the Pacific Northwest. Based on statistical advice, the target sample size population was set as 900 residents. Surveys were sent to residents of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington on a proportional basis. The Dillman survey methodology was used.

Partnerships: The water quality coordinators from Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington jointly developed the survey. The CES liaison and EPA Region 10 also provided important input into the survey development.

Research: The survey was designed to establish Extension priorities. However, needs expressed by the public could possibly result in the development of formal coursework through the universities. Public opinions to a large extent drive research priorities. The results could be used as leverage to get research funds for high priority issues.

Results: Key findings included: (1) a vast majority of survey respondents consider clean drinking water, clean groundwater and clean rivers very or extremely important issues in the region. (2) A large majority of residents feel that their drinking water is safe to drink. (3) Almost 4 in 10 respondents do not have enough information to determine if bacteria, nitrates, pesticides, heavy metals, industrial pollutants or minerals are a threat to their drinking water supply. (4) Most survey respondents did not consider water quantity to be a critical issue; however, people living in drier areas of the region did express concern.