



- **Species at Risk Public Opinion Survey for Greater Vancouver and Fraser Valley Regional Districts – March 2007**



***Commissioned by the South Coast Conservation Program  
Conducted by Synovate Research***

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# RESEARCH BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

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- The South Coast Conservation Program (SCCP), commissioned Synovate to conduct a survey with GVRD and Fraser Valley residents to gauge public awareness of species at risk and the level of support for possible provincial initiatives or legislation aimed at this issue.
- The specific objectives of the study included:
  - Understanding the concerns and values held by residents with regard to species at risk in the region;
  - Determining the residents priorities with respect to, economics, land development, and environmental and species conservation
  - Understanding the level of personal commitment residents are willing to make regarding protecting species at risk and their habitat, when it comes to:
    - Making monetary contributions
    - Protecting species at risk and their habitats occurring on residents' private lands
- This report contains the detailed findings from the survey, including the methodology followed, highlights and implications.

## METHODOLOGY

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- For this study a total of 1,394 surveys were completed with members of Synovate's online panel. To be eligible for the survey, panel members had to be residents of the GVRD or Fraser Valley regions.
- Surveying was conducted online from March 19th to March 27th, 2007.
- To ensure the final sample was representative of the total GVRD and Fraser Valley populations, at the data processing stage, the sample was weighted to match the actual population distribution of the regions, based on community/municipality, age and gender variables.
- the total sample of 1,394 is accurate to within +/-2.6%, nineteen times out of twenty. On the GVRD sample of 966, the results are accurate to within +/-3.2% and on the Fraser Valley sample of 428, the results are accurate to within +/-4.7%, both at nineteen times out of twenty. When comparing GVRD and Fraser Valley results, a difference of +/-5.7 percentage points may be required for significance.

# HIGHLIGHTS

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## Concerns & Values

- The majority of GVRD and Fraser Valley residents (67%) believe that in the past few years, the natural environment in the region has deteriorated, rather than improved (5%) or even stayed the same (21%).
- Concern over environmental issues and ecosystems is highly correlated with age, that is, the level of concern about these issues rises as age increases. The greatest differentiation is among the 18 to 34 versus the 35 and older age groups.

## Beliefs/Values/Trade Offs

- When it comes to prioritizing the conservation and protection of wildlife species and their habitats over economic development (like housing and commercial development), residents support the former by a 70:4 ratio. This leaves 25% of residents that are undecided and unable to choose one position over the other. Further, when presented with a list of statements about conservation and development trade offs, the majority of residents tend to agree with those points of view that place wildlife/ecosystem protection and conservation ahead of land development.



# HIGHLIGHTS

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## Legislation and regulation

- Just over 50% support legislation that would protect species at risk and their habitats on privately owned lands (again they do not distinguish between the species and their habitats) while the majority of the remainder are unsure, rather than opposed to this type of legislation.
- When residents are specifically asked about restricting development of valley bottoms when the land is privately owned, support also comes in just over 50% (56%), with opposition again being low at 9% and indecision (i.e. a rating of three out of 5) sitting at 23%.
- When it comes to their own property, almost all GVRD and Fraser Valley residents say they would allow a small at risk animal to live on their land undisturbed if it inhabited a small amount of land they did not use anyway. If the animal was only a bit of a nuisance, nine in ten residents claim they would leave it undisturbed and if it inhabited a part of their yard they would otherwise use, 75% claim they would still leave it alone. However, if it became bothersome, only 45% would leave the animal undisturbed. Definite intentions to leave such an animal undisturbed generally fall as the “bothersome/ inconvenience level” increases.
- Comparatively, residents are less accommodating when it comes to leaving at risk plants species undisturbed on their property. Broadly six in ten say they would leave such a plant if it was in a section of their yard they were not using and it was not spreading or if it was in a small part of their yard they were not using. However, only 32% say they would fully accommodate and protect the plant under all circumstances.

## Personal Commitment

- The average GVRD resident would be personally willing to contribute \$64 per year to improve conservation efforts, while the average Fraser Valley resident would contribute close to \$52 per year. In both regions, just over 30% say they are not be willing to contribute any amount to improve conservation efforts.
- Six in ten GVRD and Fraser Valley residents feel it is the responsibility of every homeowner to conserve the habitat of the wildlife that lives on their property and also feel, however, that homeowners should be eligible to receive compensation for accommodating and conserving such habitats. Among the remaining residents, about one in ten disagree with this point of view and 20% to 24% are undecided.

# IMPLICATIONS

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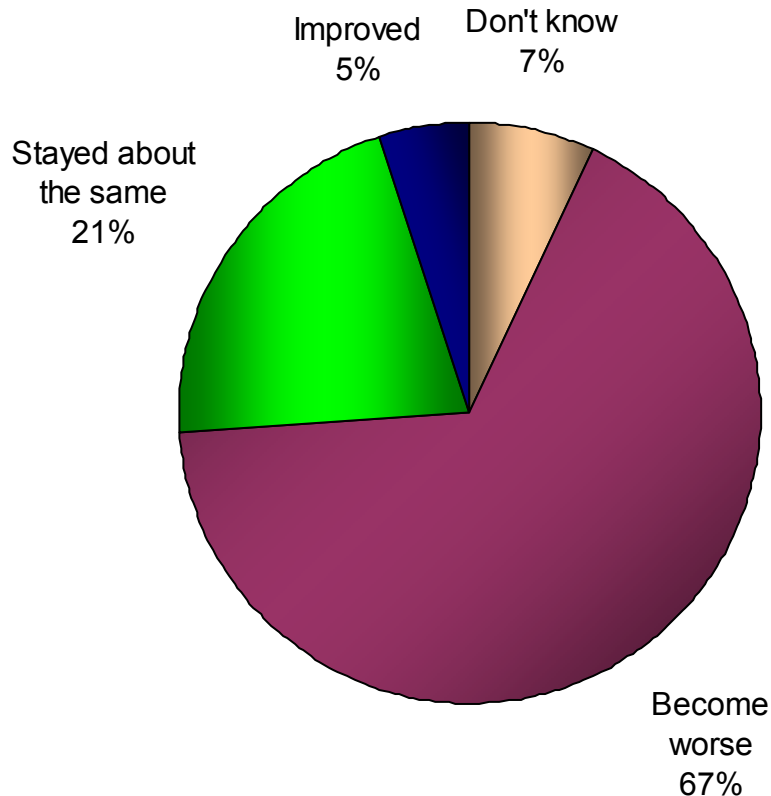
- ***One link that is already clearly established in the minds of GVRD and Fraser Valley residents is the need to protect species at risk as well as their habitats. Support for protecting species at risk and then extending that support to their habitats is almost identical, indicating that residents understand that to protect the former you also need to protect the latter. Hence, any communication aimed at residents does not have to (strongly) differentiate between the two as the assumption can be made that residents understand that the two go “hand in hand”.***
- ***Lastly, it appears that animal species at risk are a more compelling topic for residents than plant species at risk. Not only are the former more top-of-mind, but residents claim to be more apt to protect an animal species at risk on their own property than they are a plant species at risk. Therefore, any communication aimed at residents will likely be more effective if it focuses on both animal and plant species at risk or just animal species at risk.***

# Concerns & Values

## Status Of Natural Environment

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*Over the past few years, do you think the natural environment in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley has...*



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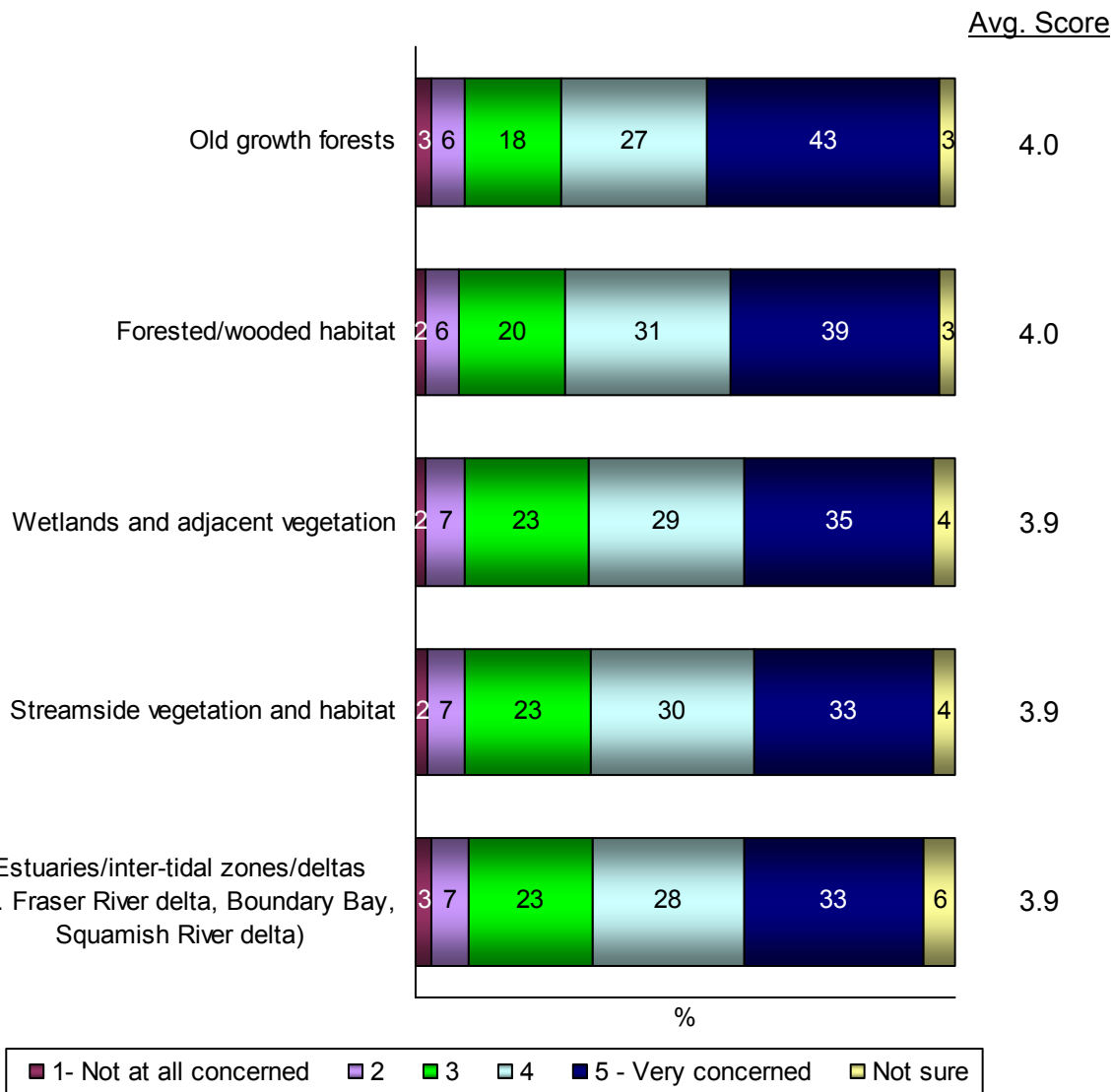
- Two-thirds of GVRD and Fraser Valley residents feel that over the past few years, the natural environment in the region has deteriorated, rather than improved (5%) or stayed the same (21%). The remaining 7% say they have no idea.
- The point of view that things are getting worse is similarly high among GVRD and Fraser Valley residents and across all demographic groups. However, among those living in the Surrey/North Delta/White Rock/Langley areas, the perception that the natural environment has deteriorated over the past few years is held by a high 76% of residents.



# Concerns & Values

## Concern For Loss/Deterioration Of BC Ecosystems

**How concerned are you about loss and deterioration of the following ecosystems in BC?**

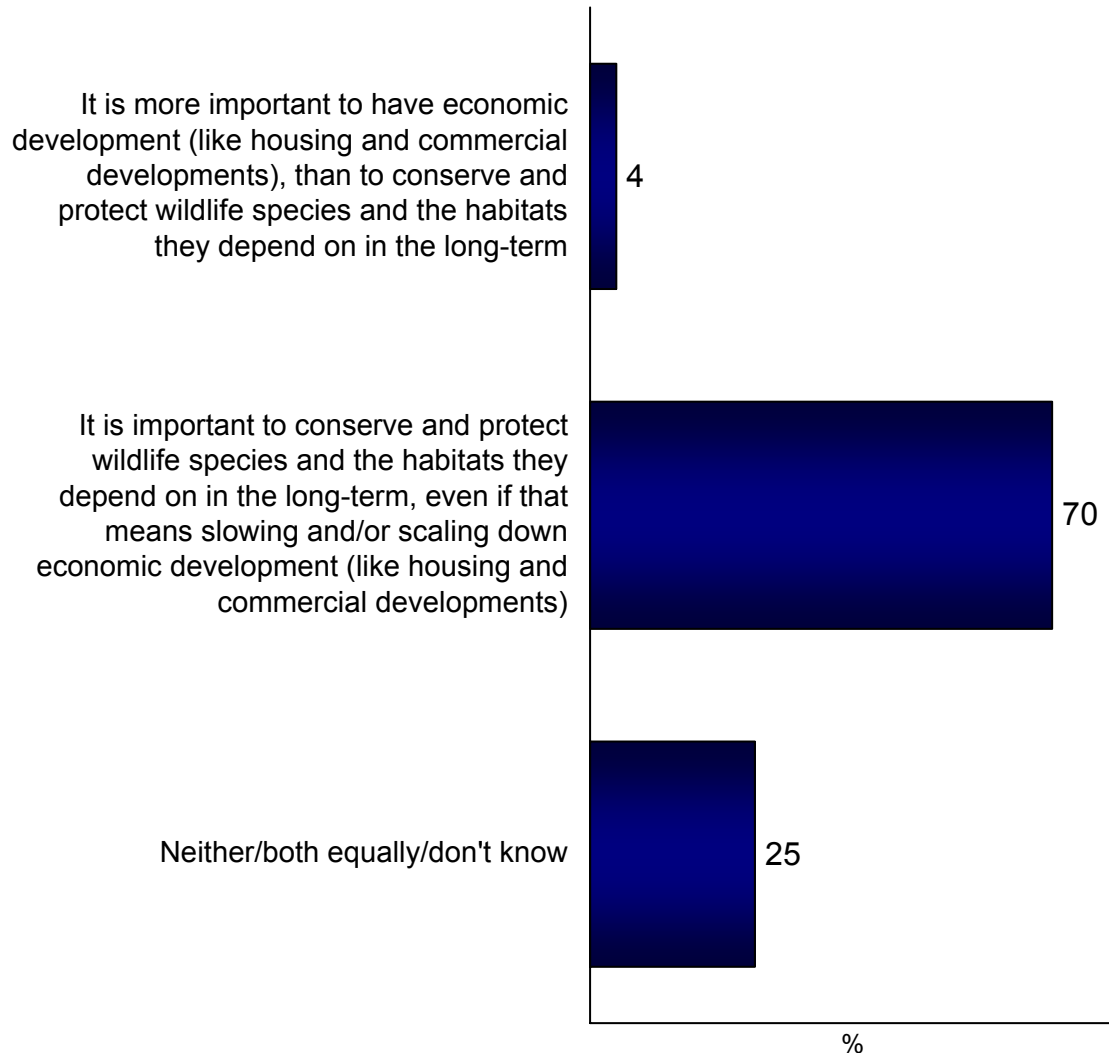


- From a list of five ecosystems, residents express the greatest concern about old growth forests and forested/wooded habitats (70% are concerned, giving ratings of four or five out of five, where five means very concerned). GVRD residents tend to express slightly more concern about old growth forests than those in the Fraser Valley (71% versus 64%), with those in the TriCities/East to Maple Ridge and Surrey/North Delta/White Rock/Langley areas voicing the greatest concern. Residents in the latter area also have above average concern about the loss and deterioration of forested and wooded habitats.
- For each of the remaining three ecosystems, just over 60% express concern about their loss and deterioration. GVRD residents express a stronger level of concern than Fraser Valley residents (i.e. give a rating of five) when it comes to wetlands and adjacent vegetation and estuaries/inter-tidal zones.
- Again, we find that residents over 34 years of age, especially those over 54, are more concerned about all these ecosystems than their younger counterparts.

# Beliefs/Values/Trade Offs

## Development Vs. Conservation

*Which of these statements best represents your views:*



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- When presented with two points of view, one prioritizing economic development and one prioritizing conserving and protecting wildlife and habitats, the majority of GVRD/Fraser Valley residents support the latter.
- Specifically, 70% side with the point of view that it is important to conserve and protect wildlife and habitats even if it means slowing down or scaling down economic developments. Only 4% feel it is more important to have economic development than to conserve and protect species and habitats.
- This leaves 25% who do not have a solid opinion either way.
- Opinions on this issue are uniform across the regions.

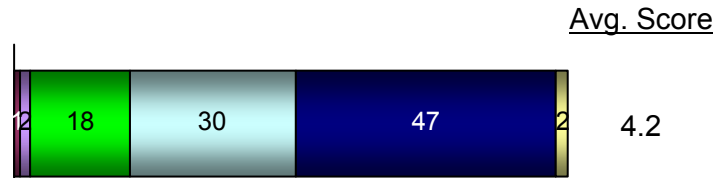
# Beliefs/Values/Trade Offs

## Opinion On Conservation & Development

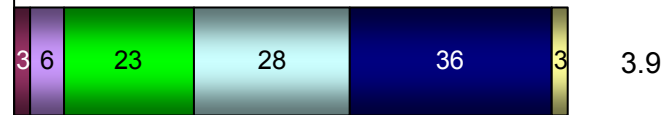
**Please indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with each of the following statements:**

### Pro-Conservation Statements

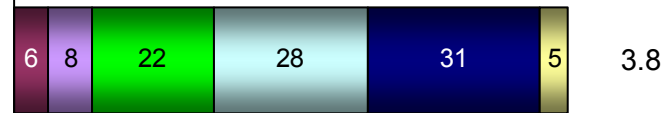
It is important to protect the natural ecosystems, plant and wildlife species in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley in order to maintain our quality of life



Governments should do more to conserve wildlife and their habitats on private lands

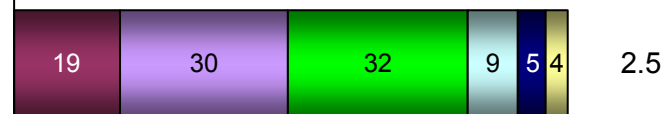


Privately owned land that is the home of at risk species should have restrictions on their land use or development



### Pro-Development Statements

Land and development is the critical engine of economic growth in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley and should be encouraged not limited



We have protected too much land for wildlife in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley already



%



- Over three-quarters of GVRD and Fraser Valley residents agree that it is important to protect the natural ecosystems, plant and wildlife species in the region in order to maintain our quality of life. GVRD residents, women, those 55 and older and rural residents feel slightly more strongly about this than their counterparts.
- Two-thirds of residents feel that governments should do more to conserve wildlife and habitats on private lands and 59% believe privately owned land that is the home of at risk species should have restrictions on its use or development. Again, women and those 55 and older express marginally stronger opinions about both these points of view than their counterparts.
- Two “pro-development” points of view draw only a minority of support from GVRD and Fraser Valley residents. 70% of residents do not agree that we have already protected too much land in the region and 49% disagree that land development is the critical engine of economic growth and should not be limited.

# Beliefs/Values/Trade Offs

## Opinion On Conservation & Development

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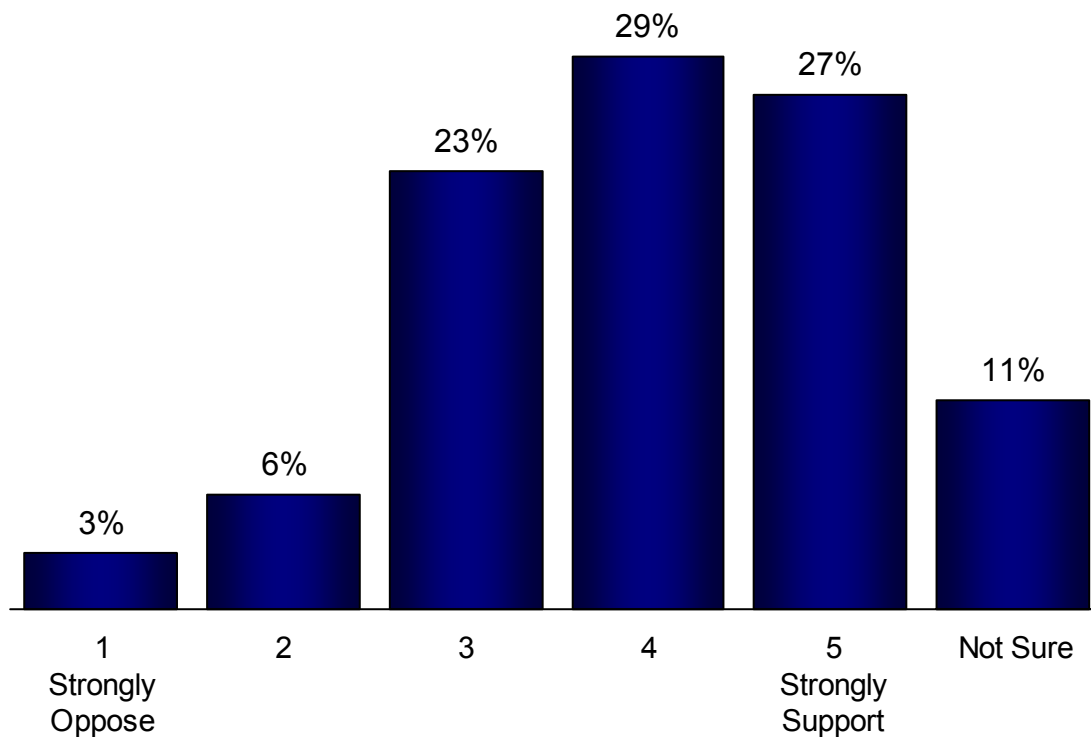
- For the latter point of view, among the remaining one-half of residents, 32% are “sitting on the fence”, giving a rating of three out of 5, meaning they do not strongly agree or disagree with the statement.
- For both pro-development points of view, women (again) voice a stronger anti-development view than men. Further, North Shore residents are the most apt to be “on the fence” on the pro-development statements, tending to give them a three out of five rating.

# Legislation & Initiatives

## Opinion On Valley Bottom Development

***Privately owned lands only make up a small portion of the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley but these lands are often in valleys which are important habitats to many species of fish and other wildlife. In general, do you support or oppose measures to restrict development of valley bottoms when the land is privately owned?***

**Average Score = 3.8**



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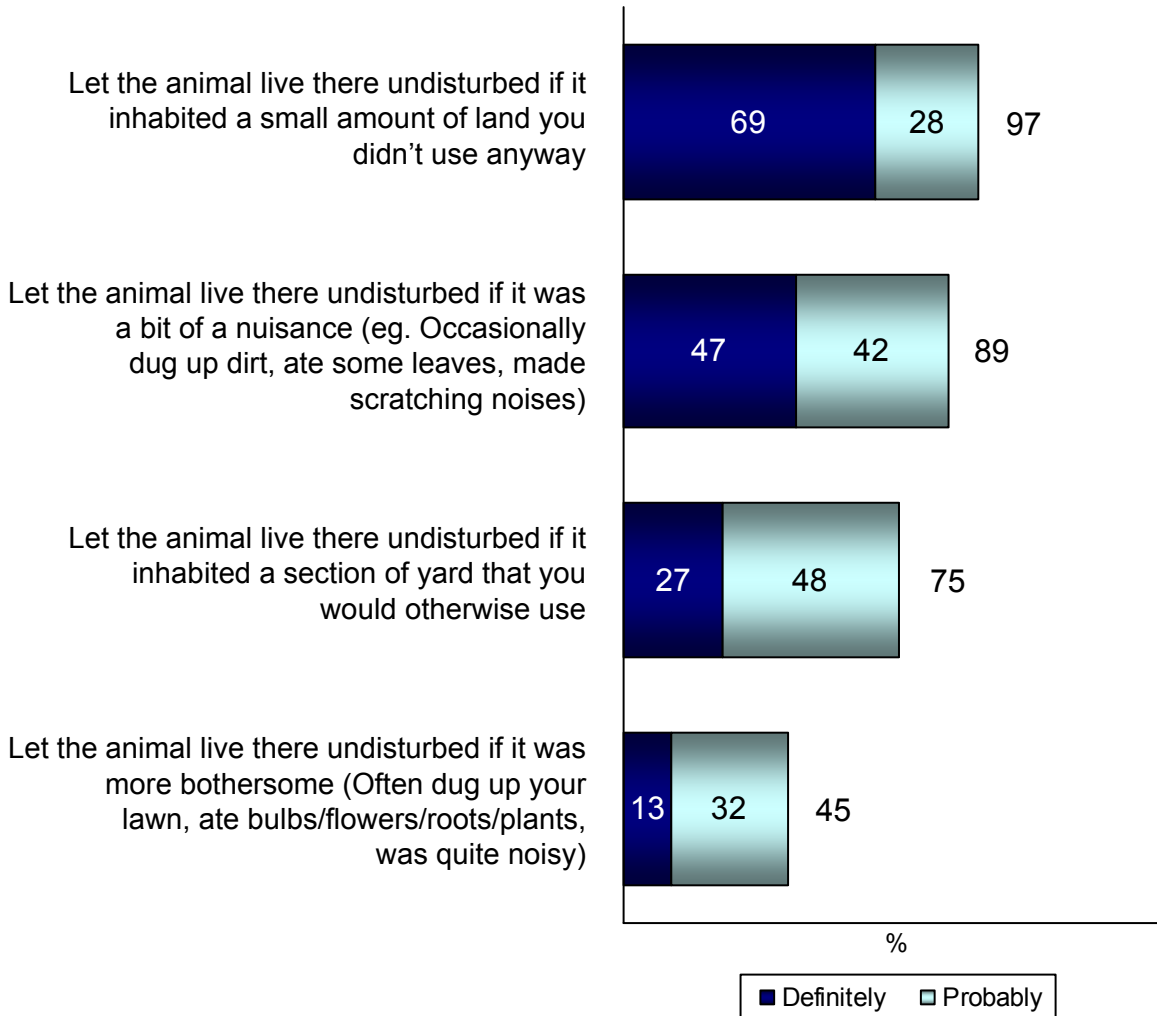
- Support for measures to restrict development of valley bottoms when the land is privately owned stands at 56%. The majority of the remainder tend to be undecided (giving a rating of three out of five) rather than being opposed (9%).
- Support tends to be slightly higher in the GVRD (57%) than in the Fraser Valley (51%), with Surrey/North Delta/White Rock/Langley residents (65%) expressing the highest levels of support.

# Personal Commitment

## Conditions For Allowing At Risk Animals To Live On Property

***Please imagine that you own and live in a house in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley which is now residential but still contains animals and plants that are indigenous to the area (ie. It's their natural habitat). If a small animal was living in your backyard and you found out it was a species at risk, would you...***

- With the exception of an animal being bothersome to the point that it dug up plants and was quite noisy, the majority of GVRD and Fraser Valley residents say they would allow a small at risk animal to live in their backyard.
- If the animal was particularly bothersome, only 45% say they would allow it to stay.
- Definite intentions to allow such an animal to live in their backyard decreases as the animal's "nuisance-level" and/or the current utility of the yard area increases.

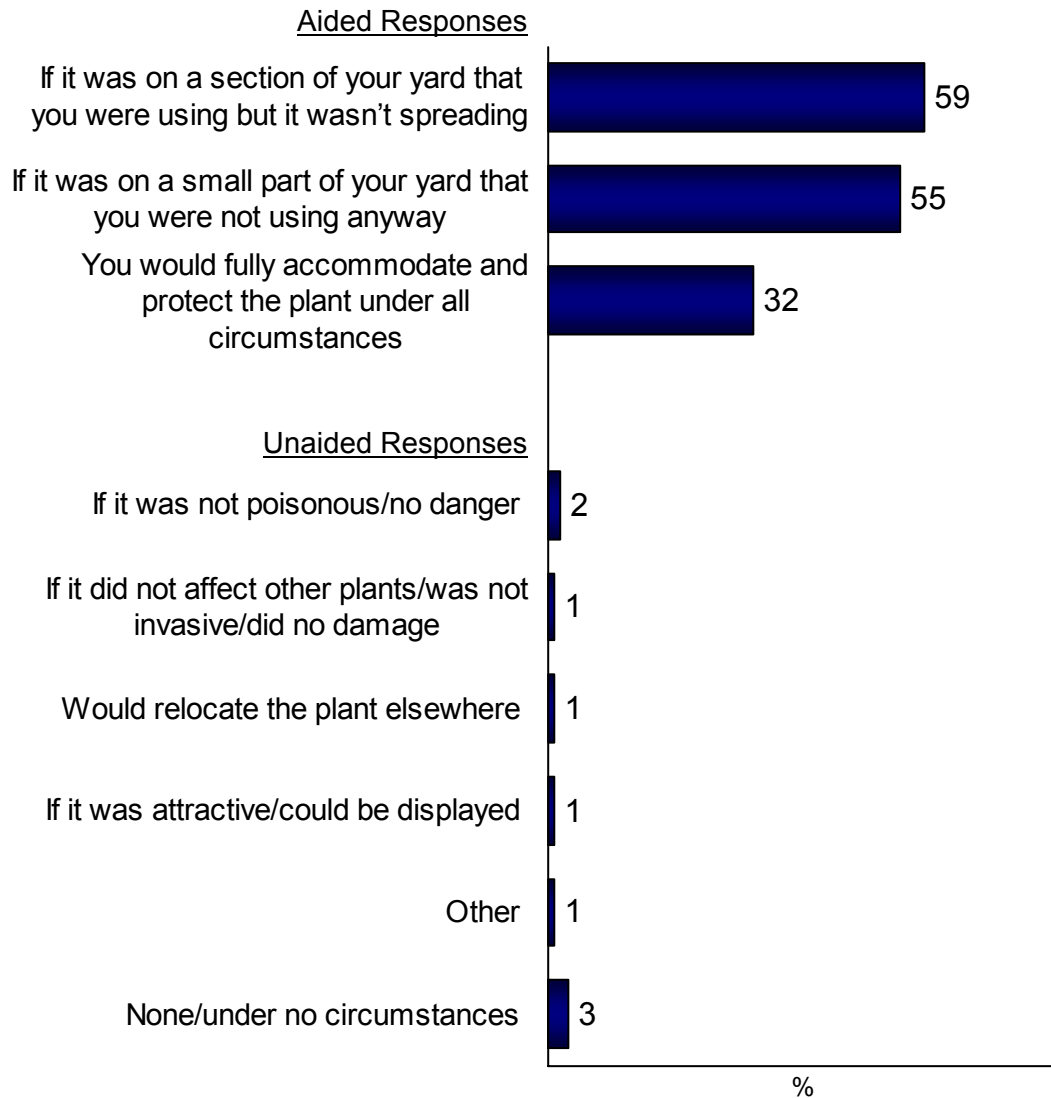




# Personal Commitment

## Conditions For Allowing At Risk Plant Species To Live On Property

***Under what situations would you let a plant species that was at risk live on your property undisturbed?***



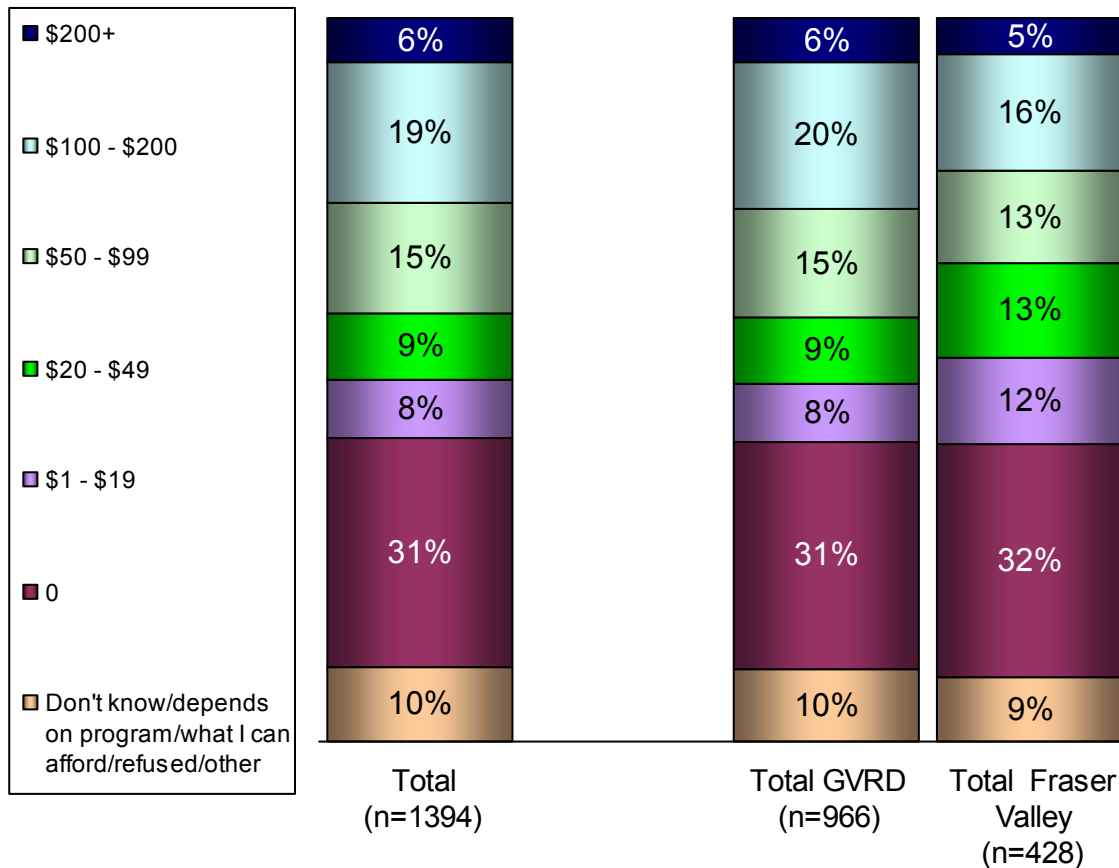
- At best, six in ten residents would allow an at risk plant species to live on their property undisturbed as long it was in a section of the yard they were not using and it was not spreading or if it was on a small part of their yard they were not using anyway.
- Only 32% say they would fully accommodate and protect such a plant under all circumstances.

# Personal Commitment

## Willingness To Contribute To Conservation

**Conserving species at risk and their habitats in the Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley will require more money than is currently available. What amount, if any, would your household be willing to contribute per year to improve conservation efforts?**

Average Amount	\$63.10	\$64.30	\$52.60
Median Amount	\$20	\$25	\$20

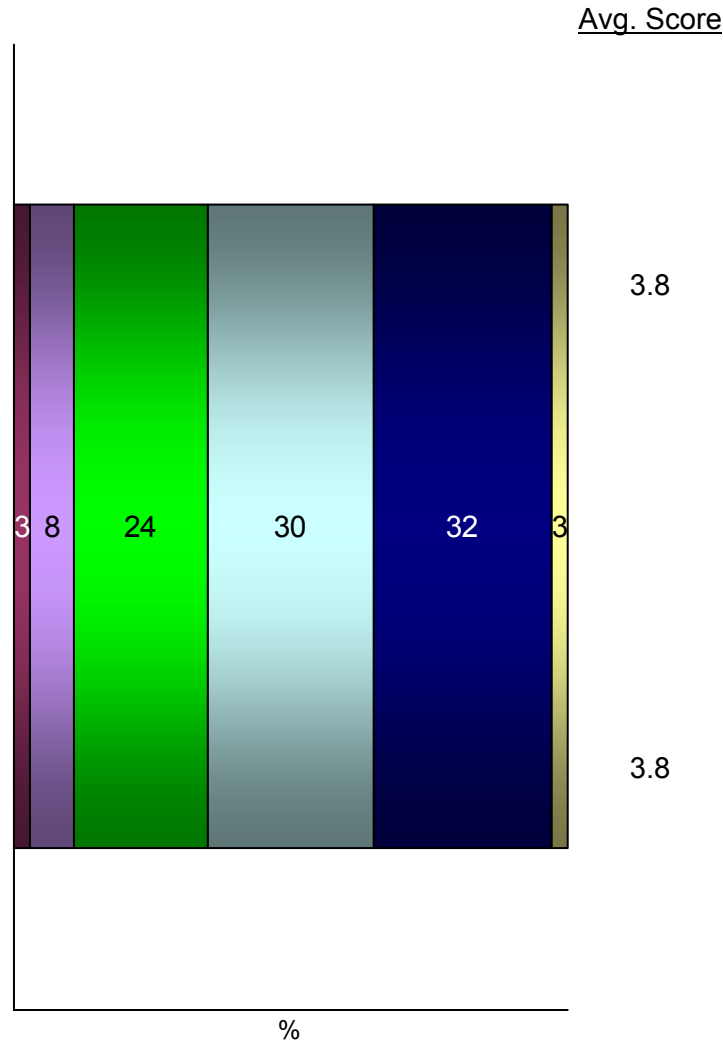


- The average GVRD resident reports that they would be willing to contribute just over \$64 per year to improve conservation efforts, while the average Fraser Valley resident reports they would be willing to contribute just over \$52.
- In both regions, just over 30% say they would not be willing to contribute any amount.
- By community, North Shore residents are the most forthcoming with conservation contributions, saying they would be willing to give over \$100 per year, on average.

# Personal Commitment Opinion On Responsibility And Compensation

**Please indicate your level of agreement / disagreement with the following statements:**

It is the responsibility of every homeowners to conserve the habitat of the wildlife that lives on their property. Humans must respect and accommodate the natural wildlife that is native to the area, especially when that species is at risk.



1- Strongly disagree 2 3 4 5 - Strongly agree Not sure

- Just over six in ten GVRD and Fraser Valley residents agree that it is the responsibility of homeowners to conserve the habitat of wildlife that lives on their property and agree that homeowners should be eligible to receive compensation for accommodating and conserving such habitats on their property.
- Among the remaining 40%, most tend to be sitting on the fence (i.e. give a rating of three out of five or say they do not know).