

SURVEY REPORT FOR THE BLCA BOARD

NOVEMBER, 2012

I propose to prepare two main reports for the 2012 survey. The primary one will be an analysis of the findings for inclusion in the Summer Newsletter. A draft will be available in a few weeks, which I will submit to all Board members and ask for comments and suggestions. The revised version will be sent to Peter for any final input and changes.

The second one, given here, is for Board members and focuses on the survey's results which could help us to finalize next year's events, among other topics.

First, though, I provide a summary of the study's design with a few recommendations for improvement in any subsequent waves.

We collected cottagers' opinions in two ways: on-line and by regular mail.

On-Line

Peter supplied a members' list, with 196 email addresses, and a non-members' list, with 92 email addresses. Of these 288 initial possible contacts, Peter subsequently indicated that 279 were valid. From them, we obtained 145 on-line completions, for a response rate of 52%.

Regular Mail

Thirty-eight postal addresses were provided by Peter (i.e. for BLCA members without an email address).

A paper questionnaire and a postage-paid return envelope, addressed to me, were sent to each of these addresses. One was returned as "Return to Sender". From the remaining 37, 16 completions were obtained, for a response rate of 43%. To date, two further completed questionnaires have been returned to me, about one week after the survey was closed and after the results were tabulated, i.e. too late for inclusion in the study.

In total, therefore, there were $279 + 37 = 316$ potential respondents and, from them, $145 + 16 = 161$ completed interviews for tabulation, for an overall response rate of 51%.

The on-line invitation was sent on October 2 and an on-line reminder given on October 14. The number of on-line completions was about 112 on the day the reminder was sent and,

by then, we were receiving only one or two completions every couple of days. After the reminder was sent, we had a further 28 or so completions within two days and few more subsequently.

The paper questionnaires were mailed on October 4 and many of the returns were received within two weeks.

Conclusions

The response-rate is excellent and, I believe, is higher than that received in similar studies by other lake associations. (The exact method of calculation may differ slightly from survey to survey but ours would be essentially the same as others.)

The on-line reminder contributed substantially to the completion-rate. In professional studies, we often sent more than one reminder and a second one might well have enhanced our response-rate too. We did not send a second one so that we would not be perceived as “hounding” our cottagers.

As noted, the overall response-rate is excellent, and the on-line figure was better than I expected. A minor disappointment is that the paper rate was not higher than the on-line’s. I thought that the more personal contact of regular mail would result in a much more positive level of returns than would be obtained for the on-line questionnaire.

I did not add an end date in the introductory letter for the paper questionnaires but simply said that we would like the completed questionnaires returned to me “as soon as possible”. The reason for the omission is that I did not want to appear to be pressuring the cottagers but, in hindsight, believe it might have been better to have added a date for final returns.

The envelopes sent to the cottagers had a heading of “Belmont Lake Cottagers’ Association” in the hope that they would not be discarded unopened as junk mail. I would appreciate any input on why we had a slightly lower response-rate for the regular mail returns and whether there is value in obtaining them, given the relatively large amount of labour (perhaps 15 hours) and expense (higher than \$50) to achieve only sixteen completed interviews for tabulation.

The Questionnaire

The selection of questions for any further studies should take into account the current questions and the responses to them. There are two main themes:

A) Repeating Questions to Measure Changes in Attitudes

In this category, I would include the Value for Money question, and either the ranking or rating of the importance of BLCA events and services, but possibly not both. Demographics should be repeated.

B) Topics Which Are Unlikely to Change Substantially and Should Not Be Repeated Each Time

In this group, I would include the perceived likelihood of using local products and services. It could be included every second or third wave, as needed.

A major topic, though, which should be addressed before any more surveys are conducted, is the classification and tabulation of members and non-members.

Peter supplied lists to Diane and me, split by members and non-members. The definition, I believe (Peter, please confirm), is derived from those who had, and had not, paid their 2012 dues by the date of list assimilation, probably mid-September (?). Subsequently, one non-paying cottager claimed that he was still a current member (based on paying the 2011 fee), as he was going to pay his fee before the end of 2012. This raises the issue of when membership does expire.

This leads to consideration of our question: "Are you (your cottage) a member of BLCA?", included at the end of our questionnaire.

On reflection, in light of my earlier comments, I think it should be changed next time to: "Have you/your cottage) paid the \$30 BLCA membership fee for 2013?"

YES

NO

DON'T KNOW

If 'NO', Will you/your cottage pay the \$30 BLCA membership fee before the end of 2013?

YES

NO

DON'T KNOW

An optional question, if 'NO' to the second question: "Why will you/your cottage not pay the 2013 \$30 BLCA membership fee?"

In addition, the current process did not allow us to separate in the results those whom Peter classified as members and non-members. I would have liked to have done so, to be able to compare the reality of joining/not joining (based on Peter's lists) and the perception of doing so, or not, based on the responses in the interviews.

If we had found that many non-members believed that they are, in fact, members, it would suggest that non-payers are targeted by the BLCA in, say, September each year and reminded of their non-paying status. The Board should look for a volunteer for this task, if this were the finding in the next survey.

We probably need two completely separate surveys with the same questionnaire, to ensure that we can analyse the two groups independently but I look to Diane for her views.

The Survey Results

As noted earlier, there will be a second analysis, focussing just on the study's results. The basic data among total respondents is available at Fluid Surveys for anybody to peruse. An email has already been sent with access instructions.

In addition to looking at the data among total respondents, Diane split the results for me by a number of filters:

Region: North and South, defined by me, based on fire-road

People Typically Spending Time at the Cottage: Adults 18-34 years; Adults 35-54 years; Adults 55 years and older; Teens 13-17; Children 6-12; Children 5 years or younger.

Value for Money of the \$30 BLCA Fee: Excellent/Very Good; Good/Fair/Poor

Regatta in 2012: Participated; Did Not Participate

Membership: Members; Non-Members, based on responses in the questionnaire

If you are interested in seeing results for any of these specific groups and cannot find them on Fluid Surveys, please contact me.

The survey results strongly indicate that members place the greatest importance on our lobbying efforts, rather than our social and other events. This conclusion is evident on several topics and among all sub-groups of members but can be summarized by looking at the percentages of total members rating each item as “very important” and the “most important:

	% of Total Members	
	<u>Very Important</u>	<u>Most Important</u>
Lobbying the Crowe Valley on issues of importance to Belmont Lake, i.e. water levels, maintenance & repair of dams	98	44
Lobbying the Township on issues of importance to Belmont Lake, i.e. taxes & by-laws	96	14
Rock-marking	92	26
Testing Water Quality	90	6
Newsletter	85	5
Regatta	36	3
Fireworks	26	1
Calendar	19	0
Pike Tournament	17	0
Black-out Night	11	0
Lake Party	10	0
Golf Tournament	5	0

This does have some ramifications for the Board. We clearly need to place greater emphasis on our lobbying success when soliciting for the annual membership fee and in Newsletter articles. We should similarly emphasize rock-marking and the testing of water quality. The suggested importance of lobbying the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority is presumably enhanced this year by the decline in the lake-levels over the summer. Still, it is likely to be viewed as important for the next few years, at least.

In a sense, these matters are largely “unseen” and the BLCA’s presence is far more evident during each year in the issues regarding as being of lesser importance. Since we need to be seen as well as heard, a strong case could be made for continuing with at least some, if not all, of these other events (social and similar), despite their poorer perceived importance.

The Golf Tournament clearly performs badly on these topics but was in a relatively weak position because it is the only one which was not held in 2012 or, really, to any extent in earlier years. In fact, golfing proves to be a fairly popular pastime among members, with 28% suggesting that they are “very likely” to participate in this sport in the Belmont Lake area in 2013, and a further 14% indicating that they are “fairly likely”.

While I realize that others have already discounted the idea of a golf tournament in 2013, a case can be made for it but it seems to require substantial promotion. That conclusion can also be reached, though, for all of the social and related events.

Indeed, we can look at this matter in a slightly different way by assessing the incidence of participation in BLCA events in 2012, and the reasons for not doing so.

The following table summarizes the data among members in total and shows that, for several events, the percentages of non-awareness are reasonably similar to the percentages participating. These include Buying a Calendar, the Pike Tournament, and the Lake Party. In other words, a lack of knowledge of these events is roughly the same as the number participating.

Moreover, suggested apathy for a few activities underscores the need not just to increase awareness but also to provide reasons for attending them. This conclusion is derived from the percentages indicating that they and their cottage members were “not interested” in participating in 2012.

A promotion of this sort might not be particularly fruitful for the Pike Tournament (64% are not interested) and the Parade of Lights (31%) but could be beneficial for the Lake Party (42%) and the Regatta (36%):

	<u>Participated</u>	<u>Did Not Participate Because:</u>		
	Yes	Not Aware	Not Interested	Other Plans/ Inconvenient Timing/Location
Black-out Night (%)	36	12	24	28
Bought a Calendar (%)	39	29	25	7
Watched BLCA Fireworks (%)	42	16	15	27
BLCA Pike Tournament (%)	3	8	64	26
Lake Party at Meyers' Cottage (%)	12	11	42	36
Parade of Lights (%)	19	9	31	40
Regatta (%)	29	1	36	33
Read the Newsletter (%)	97	3	0	1

We might well decide that rather low participation in each activity is still acceptable if different groups take part in each of them, resulting in reasonably large numbers participating in at least one of the BLCA activities during the year. Unfortunately, I do not have nets on this basis. The closest I can come is to assess the participation levels in the various events among members who were at the 2012 Regatta, and those who were not.

	<u>% Regatta Participants</u>	<u>% Non-Participants</u>
Black-out Night	42	34
Bought a Calendar	51	33
Watches BLCA Fireworks	58	35
BLCA Pike Tournament	9	1
Lake Party	16	9
Parade of Lights	32	12
Regatta	100	0
Read the Newsletter	100	95

Regatta non-participants tended to participate less in the other specific events in 2012 than did Regatta participants, apart from reading the Newsletter, where readership was almost universal.

This supports what we probably all suspect: certain cottagers and their families are more likely to be active participants in BLCA events than others. Being of a more social bent might well explain this trend. However, this lower participation among non-participants may be partly due to restricted access to a suitable boat. For example, we have close to three times the participation in the Parade of Lights among Regatta participants (32% versus 12% among Regatta non-participants). A question or two on boat ownership could be included in a subsequent survey to address this matter.

The Newsletter, Calendar, Fireworks and Black-out Night still resonate among Regatta non-participants, suggesting that they help to increase interest in the BLCA and, therefore, deserve to be included in the 2013 schedule.

Of course, appropriate boat ownership, or otherwise, might not be a factor at all. To examine this a bit further, let us look at Regatta participation in 2012 among age groups typically spending time at the cottage.

<u>Typically Spend Time at the Cottage</u>	<u>% Participating in the 2012 Regatta</u>
Adults 18 – 34	25
Adults 35 – 54	30
Adults 55+	29
Teens 13 – 17	31
Children 6 – 12	37
Children 5 years and younger	17

So, for example, 25% of households with adults 18 to 34 years typically spending time at the cottage participated in the 2012 Regatta.

It seems that the age of the children plays a role. This ties in with observation at the event itself, where 6 to 12 years olds are evident in relatively large numbers and children 5 years and under are seen less frequently.

An age-pattern is also apparent in other activities too, with, for example, the greatest percentage of spectators at the Fireworks being among households with teenagers 13 to 17 years (51%, compared to roughly 40% among the other age-ranges).

We should give thought to determining activities which would appeal to different age-ranges and plan dates, locations, etc. accordingly.

The question of whether to have a fireworks display in 2013 deserves further consideration. Unlike many of the other events, it means considerable expense and, like other activities, significant time on the part of some Board members and others. I think there is merit, however, in including it in 2013. Claimed participation, as seen earlier, is at least as high as for buying a Calendar, and greater than for the Regatta (42%, 39% and 29% respectively).

The issue could be explored further in the next survey by asking, for example, whether BLCA members are aware of the Havelock and Cordova Mines displays held at about the same time, whether they have attended them and whether they are likely to do so, if the BLCA one were cancelled. We could also ask whether our members would rather have the BLCA fireworks display or a reduction of, say, seven dollars in the annual membership fee.

Obviously, the promotion for the Regatta should focus on the events and competitions being held there. We invited members to indicate which of a series of current and potential events at the Regatta would be of interest "to you and your family". The percentages of total members suggesting that "we would like this" are shown below.

	<u>% of Total Members Indicating "We would like this"</u>
Canoe/Kayak Races	57
BBQ Sales/Soft Drink Sales	57
Children's Races	56
Paddle Boat Races	47
Sail Boat Races	44
Tug of War	40
Nail Hammering	40
"Fire Bucket" Brigade	39
Adult Races	36
Log Sawing	36
Dunk Tank	30
Cotton Candy Sales	26
Soccer "Beat the Goalie"	27
Limbo Contest	22

Races in different forms are popular, as is the BBQ/Soft Drink Sales. The races should continue in 2013 and could be expanded.

Of the potential, new events, Tug-of-war could be a success. Without elaboration, it scores as well as many existing activities. I see it taking the form of four-person teams, including at least two females, with possibly a “best-of-three” format. We would need soft ground, maybe a lawn supplied by an obliging nearby cottager, or on the beach or edge of the lake. Prizes could take the form of coconuts (!).

We asked cottagers to identify any other activities that they would like to be part of the Regatta. Spontaneous comments include having music, information on protecting the environment and exhibiting arts and crafts. All have merit, in my opinion. Others mentioned having an Egg Toss, which was omitted in 2012, if memory serves me.

Overall, the results should be viewed in the context that there is general satisfaction with the value for money of the BLCA fee: some three-quarters of members report it as either “excellent” or “very good”, with almost one-half in the former category. Clearly, though, a significant minority is less satisfied.

<u>Total Members</u>	<u>Value for Money</u> <u>%</u>
Excellent	47
Very Good	<u>26</u> 73
Good	16
Fair	<u>8</u> 24
Poor	0
Don't Know	3

I plan to compare the attitudes on all of the survey topics of those who are more positive about the BLCA on this basis (i.e. “excellent” or “very good” value) and those who are less so. If there is anything of note, I will include it in the report for the Newsletter.

I could continue but will come to a stop. As noted, there will be a general description of the findings for inclusion in the Newsletter. However, if any Board member wants me to address a particular issue, please contact me. We need to reach a conclusion on our final 2013 calendar of events soon, for inclusion in the Newsletter, as well as the preparation of the fire road signs showing the dates of events, etc.

One final point: throughout the analysis, it is apparent that we need more help; perhaps we should find a “volunteer” to look for volunteers (?). A further benefit is that we would broaden involvement in our Association.

Brian Deas