

# **Land Use Issues and Concerns In Lake County, Ohio: Survey Results**

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## **Part 1. Introduction and Survey Procedure**

To better understand public attitudes toward farmland preservation, greenspace conservation and land use issues in Lake County, the Lake County Farmland Conservation Taskforce (LCFCT) asked that the Ohio State University (OSU) Sea Grant College Program and OSU Extension assist the LCFCT in the design, implementation and analysis of a survey of Lake County residents attitudes, opinions and beliefs on land use issues. The purpose of the study is to aid the LCFCT in its mission to preserve farmland in Lake County.

On January 28, 2002 the LCFCT and the OSU Extension office mailed surveys to 1,000 randomly selected registered voters with a cover letter explaining the survey's purpose. A fact sheet on Lake County farmland was included in the initial mailing. A follow up reminder letter with a brochure on the LCFCT was sent to non-respondents on February 5, 2002. On February 19, 2002 a third letter and a second copy of the survey was sent to non-respondents and a follow up post card was sent on February 28, 2002. Several small incentives were offered for citizens returning their completed surveys who wished to be in a randomly selected drawing.

The one thousand surveys mailed to randomly-selected registered voters represented the general voting population in Lake County. A total of 24 surveys were returned as undeliverable (moved no forwarding address, forwarding expired, deceased, etc.). A total of 976 surveys were ultimately delivered. This constituted our sample population.

The four mailings produced a total of 431 completed usable surveys for a general response rate of over 44%. We received 250 responses from the first survey and first letter reminder mailing (early returns). Replies following the third mailing, which included a copy of the survey, and the final fourth mailing that consisted of a postcard reminder (late returns), totaled 181 responses.

Average scores of early and late respondents were compared using a statistical procedure called a T-test. Out of fifty possible response items 11 were found to be significantly different at the .05 level. Research suggests that late returns are more similar to non-respondents than early returns. Later in this paper we discuss the methods we used to determine whether these results indicate a problem of "non-response bias" which could potentially prevent us from generalizing to the group sampled, and to the population of the county.

## **Part 2. Clean Ohio Fund and Lake County Land Use Issues**

In the past decade, farmland preservation has become an important issue in the state of Ohio. The LCFCT is working to provide interested landowners with tools and options to preserve farmland and open space. In Lake County most farmland is used for very high value horticultural crops such as ornamental shrubs, trees, vineyards and perennial ornamental plants. Preservation of Lake County farmland benefits communities in a number of ways: 1) as greenspace buffers, 2) as habitat for wildlife, 3) as a way to encourage water infiltration thus helping to reduce flooding, 4) as a method to help maintain water quality, and 5) as scenic views. Preserving farmland and greenspace particularly as riparian buffers will ultimately contribute to improving Lake Erie water quality as excess nutrients, silt, and contaminants are kept from entering the lake.

A key objective of this study was to find out the extent to which residents of the county would be willing to pay for the purchase of conservation easements to protect farmland and greenspace from development. A conservation or agricultural easement is a deed restriction on a parcel of land, which forbids most types of development from taking place on the land for a specified period of time or in perpetuity. When a landowner sells or donates a conservation easement on his or her property, the owner still maintains ownership of the land, with all other rights of ownership intact. These rights include the right to lease, use, occupy or to sell the land. The landowner also retains all of the responsibility of ownership including the maintenance of the land as well as legal liabilities associated with ownership.

In 1998, the Ohio State Legislature passed into law the legal recognition of the purchase and sale of conservation easements. In November of 2000, Ohio voters approved a constitutional amendment called the Clean Ohio Fund (Issue #1) authorizing the sale of \$400 million in bonds to fund land use programs. A total of \$200 million has been earmarked for brownfield rehabilitation (clean-up of old industrial sites), while the other \$200 million is to be allocated for green field and farmland preservation, including the purchase of conservation and agricultural easements. The greenspace component includes a total of \$25 million for farmland preservation. As a requirement of the program the state will fund 75% of the cost to purchase agricultural easements with a required local match of 25%. It is in this atmosphere that studies on public opinion on willingness to pay for farmland and greenspace preservation are now being conducted.

To introduce the topic of greenspace and farmland preservation, survey participants were first asked to respond to a series of items soliciting their views on land use in Lake County. Residents were asked to indicate their opinion on the amount of land being used for various land uses. In general, most respondents thought that the amount of Lake County land in residential and industrial uses was about right, the amount of land used for commercial uses was too much and the amount used for natural areas and agriculture was not enough. The results are tabulated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Percentage of Respondents Indicating their Views on the Current Amount of Land Devoted to Various Land Uses in Lake County.\*

<b>Types of Land Use</b>	<b>Not Enough</b>	<b>About Right</b>	<b>Too Much</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Residential	3%	54%	39%	4%	412
Commercial	4%	35%	57%	4%	409
Agricultural	58%	33%	1%	8%	410
Industrial	6%	52%	34%	8%	411
Natural Areas	71%	25%	1%	3%	414

\*Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

When asked about their opinions on future land use in Lake County respondents answered as follows: 1) over 24% wanted land use to stay about the same as now; 2) not quite 5% would like to see more commercial and/or residential development; 3) 64% would like to see less commercial and/or residential development; and 4) 7% were not sure what direction the county should go.

When asked about their familiarity with the Clean Ohio Fund (Issue #1) 62% indicated they were not at all familiar with the issue; 29% were slightly familiar and 9% were generally familiar with Issue #1. Only slightly more than 1% said that they were very familiar with the Clean Ohio Fund.

### **Part 3. Willingness to Pay (WTP) for Greenspace Preservation**

After a short paragraph explaining the natural areas conservation easement program allowed by the Clean Ohio Fund, respondents were asked whether they favored Lake County's participation in such a program. Almost 88% favored or strongly favored Lake County's participation in a natural areas conservation easement program. The results appear in Table 2 below.

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**Table 2.** Overall, to What Extent do you Favor or Oppose Lake County's Participation in a Natural Areas Conservation Easement Program?

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Strongly Favor	61%
Somewhat Favor	27%
Neither Favor nor Oppose	8%
Somewhat Oppose	3%
Strongly Oppose	1%
Number of respondents	417

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In order to measure the response of residents to a proposal concerning payment of a purchase of natural areas conservation easement program we used a variation of the Contingent Valuation Method (CVM) called the payment card method. In this method various levels of payment were proposed ranging from \$0 to \$56 in irregular whole dollar increments. Respondents were asked to circle the amount they would be willing to pay annually for the next 10 years to generate local funds needed for Lake County to participate in a natural areas conservation easement program. The results are found in the Table 3 below.

increased property tax with 21%.

#### **Part 4. Willingness to Pay (WTP) for Farmland Preservatio**

After a short paragraph explaining the agricultural conservation easement program allowed by the Clean Ohio Fund, respondents were asked whether they favored Lake County's participation in such a program. Seventy-two percent favor or strongly favor Lake County's participation in an Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The results appear in Table 4 below.

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**Table 4.** Overall, to what extent do you favor or oppose Lake County’s participation in an agricultural conservation easement program?

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Strongly Favor	40%
Somewhat Favor	32%
Neither Favor nor Oppose	19%
Somewhat Oppose	5%
Strongly Oppose	4%

Number of respondents	413
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We used the payment card method to measure the WTP for an agricultural conservation easement program. We used the same levels of payment as before. Respondents were asked to circle the amount they would be willing to pay annually for the next 10 years to generate local funds needed for Lake County to participate in an agricultural conservation easement program. The results are found in the Table 5 below.

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**Table 5.** Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – WTP Payment Card Method  
(Number of Respondents=402)

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<b>Annual Amount</b>	<b>Frequency of Response</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent of Those Responding <i>Yes</i> Total Group</b>
\$56	6%	6%
\$51	2%	8%
\$47	0%	8%
\$44	1%	9%
\$37	2%	11%
\$34	4%	14%
\$29	5%	20%
\$24	15%	35%
\$19	8%	43%
\$11	16%	59%
\$ 8	11%	70%
\$ 3	8%	77%
\$ 0	22%	---
Total 100%		

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The lower bound mean (LBM) for an agricultural conservation easement program designed to provide matching funds for the Clean Ohio Fund for all respondents is \$16.25. The lower bound mean is a conservative lower average WTP because the formula used to calculate a LBM does

not attempt to capture the interpolations of WTP that lie between the amounts offered in the survey. For example, we do not try to estimate the percentage of people who would pay more than \$3 but less than \$8 and use it in our LBM calculations. If we were to multiply the individual voter WTP by the number of households in Lake County (89,700) we get an aggregate WTP of \$1.46 million per year for agricultural conservation easement efforts. Note that a majority (59%) of respondents would support an agricultural conservation easement program at the \$11 per year level. This is about half of the level of financial support for a natural areas conservation easement program.

The preferred method of funding this program by the respondents to this item was an increase in the sales tax with 45% in favor of this method, followed by “some other method” at 35% and an increased property tax with 20% in favor. This is very similar to the preferred method of funding a natural areas conservation easement program.

## Part 5. Regression Analysis: A Profile of Willingness to Pay

In order to understand the characteristics of those respondents who were more (or less) willing to pay for the preservation of natural areas and agricultural lands, we used a statistical procedure called regression analysis. This procedure generates an equation that expresses willingness to pay (WTP) as a function of a set of socio-economic and attitudinal variables.

### Natural Areas Preservation

In the first analysis we specified WTP to preserve natural areas as a function of perceived importance of preserving these areas, gender, age, income, area of residence (rural versus urban), and whether the respondent replied early or late to the survey. The results appear in Table 6 below.

**Table 6.** Statistical Results of Regression on Willingness to Pay to Preserve Natural Areas

Dependent Variable (WTP for Natural Areas)

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>Parameter Estimate</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Importance of preservation	-12.22	.00**
Residence (Urban/rural)	6.94	.00**
Age	4.68E-03	.93
Gender	1.34	.44
Income	3.40	.00**
Early/Late	-0.68	.70

R<sup>2</sup> = .27      F = 20.09\*\*

\*\* indicates statistically significant at the 99% level of confidence

These results show that age, gender and time of response (early/late) played no role in determining individual WTP. Next we deleted those irrelevant variables and re-ran the regression and the results appear in Table 7 below.

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**Table 7.** Statistical Results of Regression on Willingness to Pay to Preserve Natural Areas

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Dependent Variable (WTP for Natural Areas)

<u>Independent Variable</u>	<u>Parameter Estimate</u>	<u>Significance</u>
Importance of Preservation	-12.14	.00**
Income	3.47	.00**
Residence (Urban/rural)	6.81	.01*

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$R^2 = .27$        $F = 40.70^{**}$

\* denotes statistically significant at 95% level of confidence

\*\* denotes statistically significant at 99% level of confidence

The results of this regression may be interpreted in a straightforward manner. For every one unit higher on the one to five scale respondents ranked the importance of preserving natural areas, they were willing to pay \$12.14 more per year. For each income category increase, respondents would pay \$3.47 more, and urban residents average a willingness to pay \$6.81 more than rural citizens. All of these results are highly statistically significant, as was the equation as a whole as measured by the F statistic. The R Square value indicates that the three factors identified here explain 27% of the variation in respondents' WTP. This is a relatively high amount for this kind of analysis, but it indicates that there is still a great deal we do not know about why people support or oppose specific environmental initiatives.

In any case, the analysis reveals that the profile of someone most willing to support the program is a high income urban resident who strongly agrees that preservation of natural areas in Lake County is important. The profile of someone least willing to support the program is a low-income rural resident who strongly disagrees that preservation of natural areas in Lake County is important.

## **Agricultural Land Preservation**

In the next segment, we regressed WTP for agricultural land preservation as a function of the same set of variables, this time replacing perceived importance of natural area preservation with importance of preserving farmland (also registered on a 1-5 scale). The results appear in Table 8 below.



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**Table 8.** Statistical Results of Regression on Willingness to Pay to Preserve Agricultural Land

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Dependent Variable (WTP for Agricultural Land Preservation)

Independent Variable	Parameter Estimate	Significance
Importance of Ag Land Pres	-7.81	.00**
Residence (Urban/rural)	3.23	.17
Age	-4.84E-02	.36
Gender	1.55	.34
Income	1.86	.00**
Early/Late	-1.90	.25

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$R^2 = .18$        $F = 11.95^{**}$

\*\* denotes statistically significant at 99% level of confidence

Again, we removed the variables on age, gender, and time of response and re-ran the regression. The results of that equation are shown in Table 9 below.

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**Table 9.** Statistical Results of Regression on Willingness to Pay to Preserve Agricultural Land

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Dependent Variable (WTP for Ag Land Preservation)

Independent Variable	Parameter Estimate	Significance
Importance of Ag Land Pres	-7.71	.00**
Income	2.13	.00**
Residence (Urban/rural)	3.16	.18

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$R^2 = .18$        $F = 23.14^{**}$

\*\* denotes statistically significant at 99% level of confidence

These results may again be interpreted in a straightforward manner. For every one unit increase in perceived importance of preserving agricultural lands, residents are willing to pay \$7.71 more to protect farmland. For every one unit, \$20,000, (see Appendix B) increase in income, they are willing to pay \$2.13 more. Unlike the case for preservation of natural areas, WTP to protect agricultural land is not related to area of residence.

The analysis reveals that the profile of someone most willing to support the farmland preservation program is a high-income voter who strongly agrees that preservation of agriculture in Lake County is important. The profile of someone least willing to support the program is a low-income voter who strongly disagrees that preservation of agriculture in Lake County is important.

## **Summary on WTP for Programs**

These results show that for the residents of Lake County, WTP for easements to protect natural areas is significantly higher than WTP for easements designed to preserve agricultural lands. The most common response (Table 3) on the payment card for natural area WTP was \$24, while the most common response (Table 5) on agricultural land WTP was zero.

Moreover, average WTP for natural areas was \$23.05 per resident per year, while it was \$16.25 per resident per year for agricultural lands. A total of 52% of respondents would pay at least \$24 for the natural areas program, while only 35% would pay that much for the agricultural program. See Tables 3 and 5.

The lack of statistical significance of early versus late response in both of the regression equations in which it was included is a strong indication that non-response bias is not a problem in this study. As a result, we believe that the results presented throughout the paper can in fact be generalized to the voting population of Lake County with a margin of error of +/- five percent.

These results are a reflection of current Lake County land use – an urban western end, a rapidly urbanizing central sector and a still rural eastern end. In the face of growing development, Lake County still has significant natural areas and a significant highly specialized form of agriculture. If a conservation easement program is established, qualifying parcels may be deemed worthy of preservation on the basis of the natural qualities they possess, in addition to being part of an agricultural industry. The survey indicates that the public in Lake County would be more likely to support an open (green) space easement over an agricultural (farmland) easement program.

There would likely be more support for preservation for agricultural parcels that are adjacent to existing natural areas such as public parks. The creation of large contiguous blocks of undeveloped land provides more habitat as well as aesthetic scenery, qualities which may be at the root of resident support for the conservation easement programs described in this survey.

## Appendix A: Land Use Issues and Policy Items

In this section of the survey, respondents were presented with a series of land use issues and policy statements and asked to give their level of agreement on each item using a fully anchored five point scale. The scale was as follows: one equaled strongly agree, two equaled somewhat agree, three equaled neither agree nor disagree, four equaled somewhat disagree, and five equaled strongly disagree. The frequency of citizen responses to the items are presented below:

### Land Use Issue and Policy Statement

**Agriculture** Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

1. Agricultural production (nurseries, vineyards, food crops) in Lake County is an important industry.

Strongly Agree	69%
Somewhat Agree	22%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6%
Somewhat Disagree	2%
Strongly Disagree	1%

2. It is important to protect the agricultural industry in Lake County.

Strongly Agree	67%
Somewhat Agree	24%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5%
Somewhat Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	1%

3. It is important to preserve agricultural land in Lake County.

Strongly Agree	67%
Somewhat Agree	22%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8%
Somewhat Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	1%

4. The presence of farmland in Lake County offers benefits beyond the economic impact of commercial agriculture.

Strongly Agree	60%
Somewhat Agree	25%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	12%
Somewhat Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	1%

5. Agriculture in Lake County helps maintain a robust diverse local economy.

Strongly Agree	56%
Somewhat Agree	30%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	10%
Somewhat Disagree	3%
Strongly Disagree	1%

**Natural Areas (Greenspace)** Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

1. Elected officials should understand the significance of greenspace preservation issues.

Strongly Agree	79%
Somewhat Agree	15%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5%
Somewhat Disagree	<1%
Strongly Disagree	<1%

2. It is important to preserve natural areas (greenspace) in Lake County.

Strongly Agree	77%
Somewhat Agree	18%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4%
Somewhat Disagree	2%
Strongly Disagree	<1%

3. We must increase monitoring and enforcement of existing laws to prevent damage to our natural resources.

Strongly Agree	71%
Somewhat Agree	21%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6%
Somewhat Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	1%

4. Local citizens need to understand the significance of greenspace preservation issues.

Strongly Agree	69%
Somewhat Agree	20%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9%
Somewhat Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	1%

5. It is important to reduce the impact of residential development on local water quality.

Strongly Agree	71%
Somewhat Agree	17%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	9%
Somewhat Disagree	2%
Strongly Disagree	<1%

6. The water quality in our local rivers and streams should be improved.

Strongly Agree	65%
Somewhat Agree	21%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13%
Somewhat Disagree	<1%
Strongly Disagree	<1%

7. The water quality of Lake Erie should be improved.

Strongly Agree	58%
Somewhat Agree	26%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14%
Somewhat Disagree	1%
Strongly Disagree	1%

8. Citizens in Lake County are well informed to make prudent land use decisions.

Strongly Agree	7%
Somewhat Agree	17%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	29%
Somewhat Disagree	32%
Strongly Disagree	15%

**Commercial and Residential Development** Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

1. Lake County has a problem with traffic congestion.

Strongly Agree	51%
Somewhat Agree	35%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8%
Somewhat Disagree	4%
Strongly Disagree	2%

2. It is important to reduce urban sprawl in Lake County.

Strongly Agree	53%
Somewhat Agree	26%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	14%
Somewhat Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	1%

3. There should be increased wetland protection in Lake County.

Strongly Agree	47%
Somewhat Agree	28%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	18%
Somewhat Disagree	6%
Strongly Disagree	2%

4. Future industrial, commercial and residential areas should be restricted to existing areas that are already served by a central sanitary sewer.

Strongly Agree	35%
Somewhat Agree	31%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	23%
Somewhat Disagree	8%
Strongly Disagree	3%

5. The cost of community services (fire, police, schools, etc.) for commercial and industrial land is generally less than the taxes paid by commercial and industrial land property.

Strongly Agree	6%
Somewhat Agree	15%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	60%
Somewhat Disagree	13%
Strongly Disagree	6%

6. The cost of community services (fire, police, schools, etc.) for farm and forestland is generally less than the taxes paid by farm and forestland property owners.

Strongly Agree	8%
Somewhat Agree	15%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	67%
Somewhat Disagree	7%
Strongly Disagree	4%

7. The cost of community services (fire, police, schools, etc.) for new residential development is generally less than the taxes paid by the homeowners.

Strongly Agree	6%
Somewhat Agree	13%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	58%
Somewhat Disagree	15%
Strongly Disagree	8%

8. Government officials in Lake County are well informed to make prudent land use decisions.

Strongly Agree	4%
Somewhat Agree	26%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	35%
Somewhat Disagree	24%
Strongly Disagree	12%

9. Lake County is developing in a well-planned manner which will maximize community services (police, fire, roads, schools) and minimize costs to citizens.

Strongly Agree	5%
Somewhat Agree	24%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	31%
Somewhat Disagree	27%
Strongly Disagree	13%

10. The character of Lake County should be changed to an even more urbanized developed county.

Strongly Agree	6%
Somewhat Agree	10%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	19%
Somewhat Disagree	25%
Strongly Disagree	40%

## Appendix B: Respondent Demographics

Age	54 Years +/- 18 years		
Gender	Female 55% Male 45%		
Live within 1/2 mile of Agricultural Land	YES 36%	NO 64%	
Live within 1/2 mile of Natural Area	YES 71%	NO 29%	
Live in...	Rural Area 13%	Urban Area 87%	

Percent of respondents in the various income categories

Income Range	Percent of total respondents
<\$20,000	15%
\$20K to \$39K	21%
\$40K to \$59K	22%
\$60K to \$79K	20%
\$80K to \$99K	10%
> \$100,000	13%

## Appendix C: Land Use Issues and Policy Statements grouped into factors

We conducted a statistical procedure called factor analysis to determine whether sets of topics listed in this section fell into groups, or “factors” in the responses we received. The results revealed that six separate factors emerged. Respondents tended to answer items within the factors in the same manner. We labeled the factors: 1) Protect Agriculture; 2) Reduce Impacts of Development; 3) Improve Water Quality; 4) Information/ Education; 5) Knowledge of Cost of Community Services; and, 6) Traffic Congestion.

### Protect Agriculture Factors

- It is important to protect the agricultural industry in Lake County
- Agricultural production (nurseries, vineyards, food crops) in Lake County is an important industry
- It is important to preserve agricultural land in Lake County
- Agriculture in Lake County helps maintain a robust diverse local economy
- The presence of farmland in Lake County offers benefits beyond the economic impact of commercial agriculture
- Local citizens need to understand the significance of greenspace preservation issues



**Reduce Impacts of Development Factors**

- It is important to reduce urban sprawl in Lake County
- There should be increased wetland protection in Lake County
- Future industrial, commercial and residential areas should be restricted to existing areas that are already served by a central sanitary sewer
- Government officials in Lake County are well informed to make prudent land use decisions
- It is important to preserve natural areas (greenspace) in Lake County
- It is important to reduce the impact of residential development on local water quality

**Improve Water Quality Factors**

- The water quality of Lake Erie should be improved
- The water quality in our local rivers and streams should be improved
- We must increase monitoring and enforcement of existing laws to prevent damage to our natural resources

**Information / Education Factors**

- Government officials in Lake County are well informed to make prudent land use decisions
- Lake County is developing in a well-planned manner which will maximize community services (police, fire, roads, schools) and minimize costs to citizens
- Citizens in Lake County are well informed to make prudent land use decisions
- The character of Lake County should be changed to an even more urbanized developed county

**Cost of Community Services Knowledge Factors**

- The cost of community services (fire, police, schools, etc.) for commercial and industrial land is generally less than the taxes paid by commercial and industrial land property
- The cost of community services (fire, police, schools, etc.) for new residential development is generally less than the taxes paid by the homeowners
- The cost of community services (fire, police, schools, etc.) for farm and forestland is generally less than the taxes paid by farm and forestland property owners

**Traffic Congestion Factor**

- Lake County has a problem with traffic congestion