

# EXPLORING SENSE OF PLACE AROUND THE MINAS BASIN

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## BACKGROUND

Rising sea levels and more severe and frequent storms are increasing the risk of flooding and coastal erosion for Nova Scotia's unique coastal landscapes. This includes man-made agricultural dykelands in the Bay of Fundy, originating in the 1600s by Acadian settlers. Some of these dykelands are undergoing restoration back to salt marshes and tidal wetlands, as a climate adaptation strategy that increases coastal resilience to rising flood and erosion risk.

Adapting coastal landscapes to climate change is complex for local authorities, involving a wide range of stakeholders and management choices. This plays out alongside the many ways in which coastal landscapes are used by the public. 'Sense of place' is a concept used to describe and explore public attachment to a local environment, and is explored here in this study.



Dykeland landscape near Maitland, Hants County

## RESEARCH

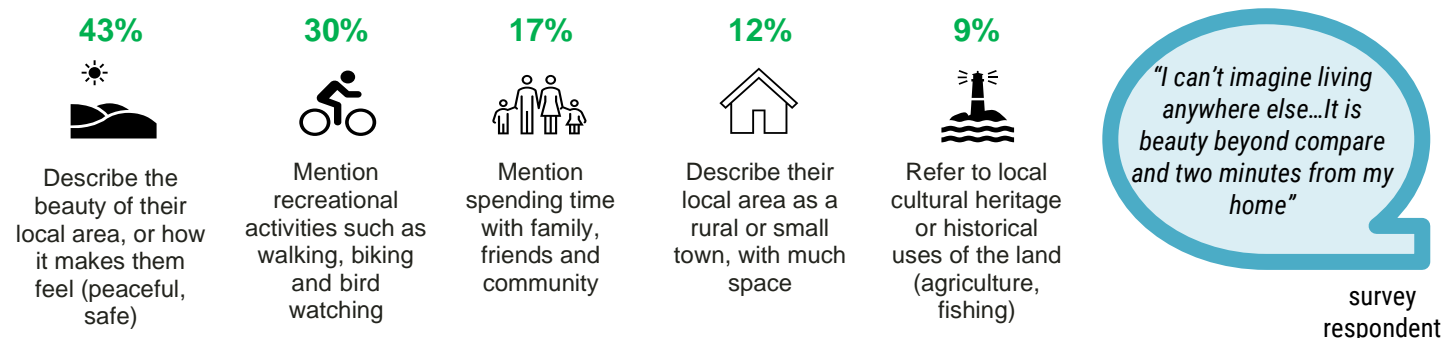
In summer 2022, ResNet landscape 1 researchers at Dalhousie University ran a postal survey in the four counties around the Minas Basin, to explore how local communities feel about, and use, the dykelands and tidal wetland landscapes in the Bay of Fundy. The survey obtained 243 responses, with a response rate of approximately 21%.

This three-month research project qualitatively and quantitatively analysed the survey data to explore sense of place around where respondents live. Research questions included;

- How do local communities feel about their local environment?
- How often are dykelands and tidal wetlands mentioned as contributing to those feelings?
- Does sense of place vary by length of residency in the region?

## RESULTS

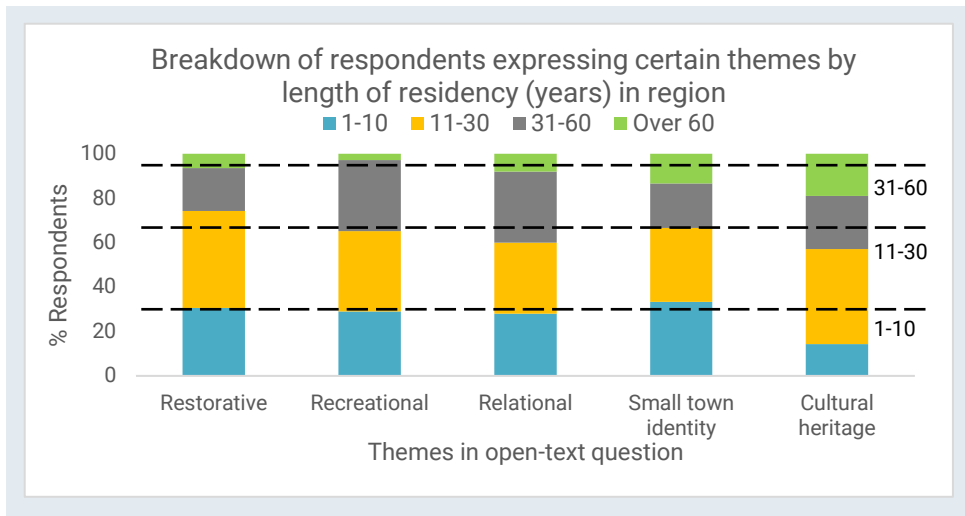
How do respondents describe and relate to their local area? This project analysed the main themes (thematic coding) from an open-text survey question, "please describe your local area, in terms of what it means to you personally and how you use it" (n=243, of which 47 were blank answers):



17 respondents (7%) explicitly mention 'dykelands' or 'dykes', and 20 respondents (8%) explicitly mention 'tidal' or 'wetland' landscapes in their answers. Responses vary by scale: while many respondents refer to their immediate property or locality, others refer to a much larger area in their answer (for example the Northumberland Shore).

Analysing survey answers by length of residency, there are some indications that sense of place is affected by time living in the region (see graph below):

- Longer-term residents (60+ years) were overrepresented in answers that mentioned themes of 'small town identity' and 'cultural heritage', and underrepresented in answers of a 'recreational' theme.
- Short-term residents (<10 years) were underrepresented in answers that mentioned aspects of 'Cultural heritage'.
- Mid-term residents, who had been living in the region for 11-30 years, were overrepresented in answers that discussed the 'restorative' value of their local environment.



*"I love my community. I love walking the dykes, and I love that the dykelands are used for farming. It provides me with peace and puts me in touch with mother nature. The land is valuable; so valuable that it is priceless. It grounds me and gives me purpose"*

survey respondent

## APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Adaptation to climate change requires understanding societal implications. The Nova Scotia Department for Agriculture is currently investing in reinforcements, restoration and/or realignments of over 25% of dykelands, as part of a \$50 million 'Working with the Tides' project which began in 2019. Meanwhile, multiple levels of government are currently undergoing feasibility studies for adaptation options in challenging sites such as the Isthmus of Chignecto. There is therefore a growing and urgent need to understand public use of such landscapes now, to inform the design and implementation of future schemes.

For local authorities, it is important to know how local communities feel about their local places when coastal management decisions are being made that impact on the public. Increased understanding of how coastal landscapes are perceived and valued is an important step in public engagement and acceptability of coastal adaptation strategies. The restorative and recreational values are particularly important in this region, both of which can be strongly related to coastal landscapes, whereas cultural heritage was less often mentioned.

This research provides a snapshot of how residents around the Minas basin describe their feelings about where they live. Findings reveal that sense of place is a multifaceted, living and changing construct. It can be described in multiple ways that is unique to an individual, but types specific to particular locations do emerge from thematic coding. For instance, the 'small town' atmosphere of the Minas Basin was mentioned by about a sixth of respondents, though it is not a commonly described sense of place elsewhere. This study indicates different 'senses' may relate to different periods of time living in the region.

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