

Going “Green”: The State of Sustainability in Camps across the United States

NC STATE
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Natural Resources

GREEN CAMPS
empowering camps, inspiring campers

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Why Sustainable Camps?

- ▶ **Sustainable camps benefit the environment**
 - ▶ Reduce ecological footprint, maintain environmental quality
- ▶ **Sustainable camps benefit society**
 - ▶ Teach diverse youth (and adults) importance of sustainable living
 - ▶ Model effective sustainability practices
- ▶ **Sustainable camps benefit camps**
 - ▶ Improve efficiency of operations and reduce maintenance costs
- ▶ **To what extent are current camp operations sustainable?**
 - ▶ **What are the motivations and barriers influencing integration of sustainable practices in the camp world?**



Research Methods

- ▶ Web survey distributed in Spring 2021 to camp organizations across the United States
 - ▶ Posted on listservs, circulated via ACA and other groups
 - ▶ Requested one response per camp organization
- ▶ 181 clicked on survey link, 158 started survey
- ▶ **118 completed entire survey (75% completion rate)**
- ▶ Survey instrument focused on:
 - ▶ Camp attributes
 - ▶ Sustainable practices across 5 categories
 - ▶ What camps are currently doing
 - ▶ What camps would like to be doing
 - ▶ Motivations for engaging in sustainable practices
 - ▶ Barriers to sustainability



Sustainability
Education &
Communication



Purchasing &
Procurement



Waste
Management



Energy & Water
Consumption



Natural Resource
& Wildlife
Conservation

About the Sample

- ▶ **At least 1 response from all 50 states**
- ▶ Respondents mostly camp administrators (77.3%), also program (11.0%) and facility managers (10.3%)
- ▶ Mostly single location camps (81.1%)
- ▶ Most offer overnight option (82.4%)
- ▶ Mix of rural (67.1%) and urban camp settings (32.9%)



About the Sample

▶ Variety of camp structures:

- ▶ 35.0% independent, not-for-profit
- ▶ 39.5% affiliated, not-for-profit (e.g., YMCA, Scouts)
- ▶ 25.5% for profit

▶ Variety of camp sizes:

- ▶ 39.4% <500 annual campers
 - ▶ 20.0% 500-999 annual campers
 - ▶ 40.7% 1,000+ annual campers
- ▶ 34.8% of camps had more than 20% of campers on scholarship



Current Participation in Sustainable Practices

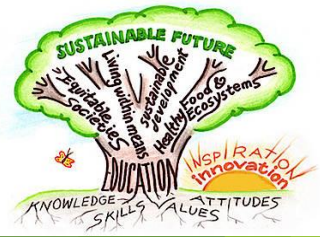
- ▶ Which types of sustainable management practices are camps currently engaging in?

Category of Sustainable Practices	# of Actions	Mean Rating (0 to 2)	Average % Engaging “all of the time”
Waste Management	5	1.23	40.4%
Sustainability Education & Communication	7	1.02	29.8%
Natural Resource & Wildlife Conservation	4	0.93	26.6%
Purchasing & Procurement	3	0.87	13.4%
Energy & Water Consumption	7	0.67	17.1%

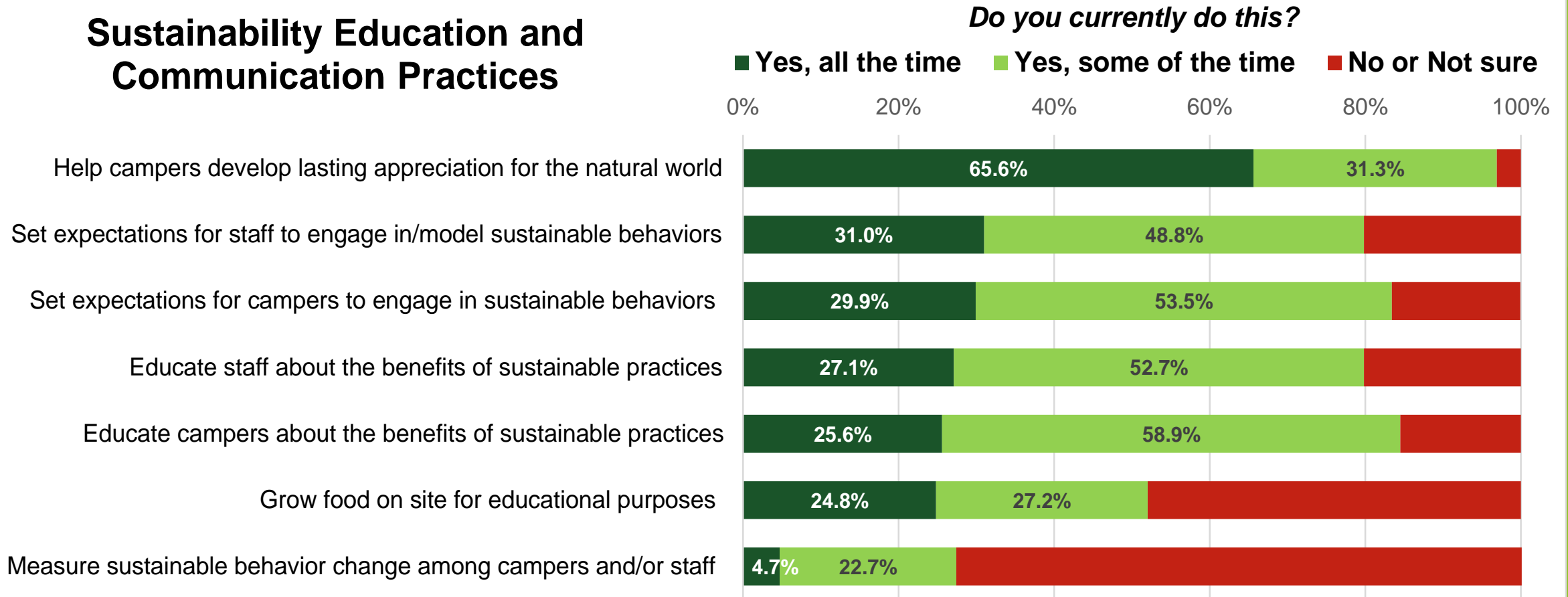
Rating scale: 0=Never do it, 1=Yes, do it some of the time, 2=Yes, do it all the time

Sustainability Education & Communication

- Sustainability education is embedded in many camps, but few camps measure these impacts



Sustainability Education and Communication Practices



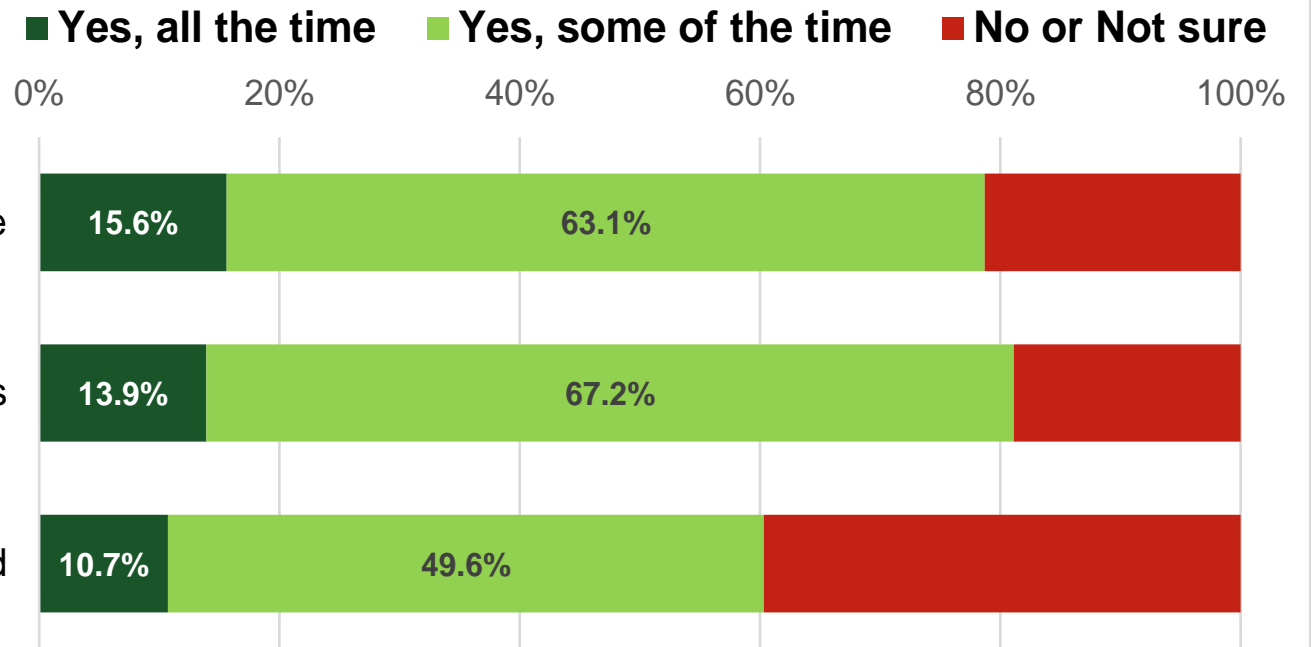
Purchasing & Procurement



► “Green” purchasing occurs, but it is not the norm

Purchasing and Procurement Practices

Do you currently do this?



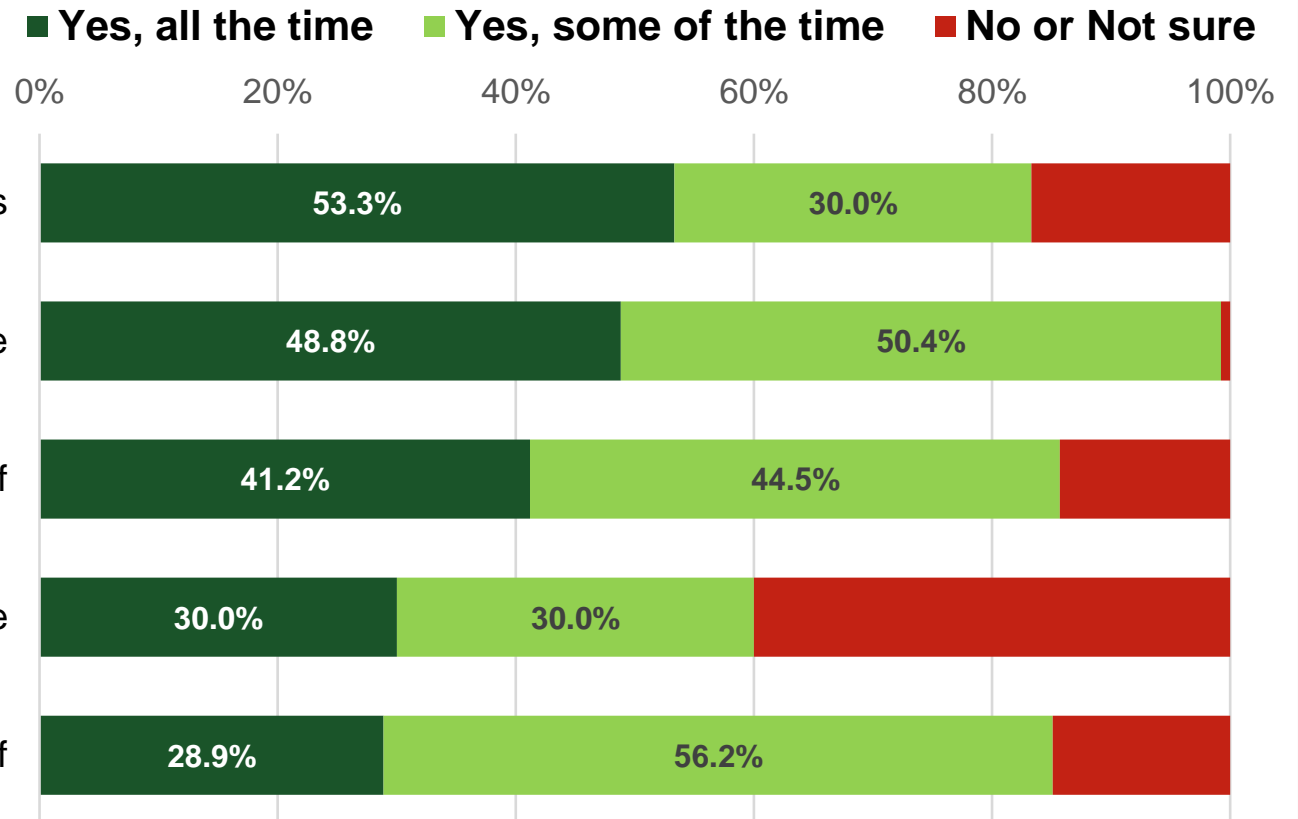
Waste Management



- ▶ Reuse and recycling are common, but food and kitchen waste present larger challenges

Waste Management Practices

Do you currently do this?



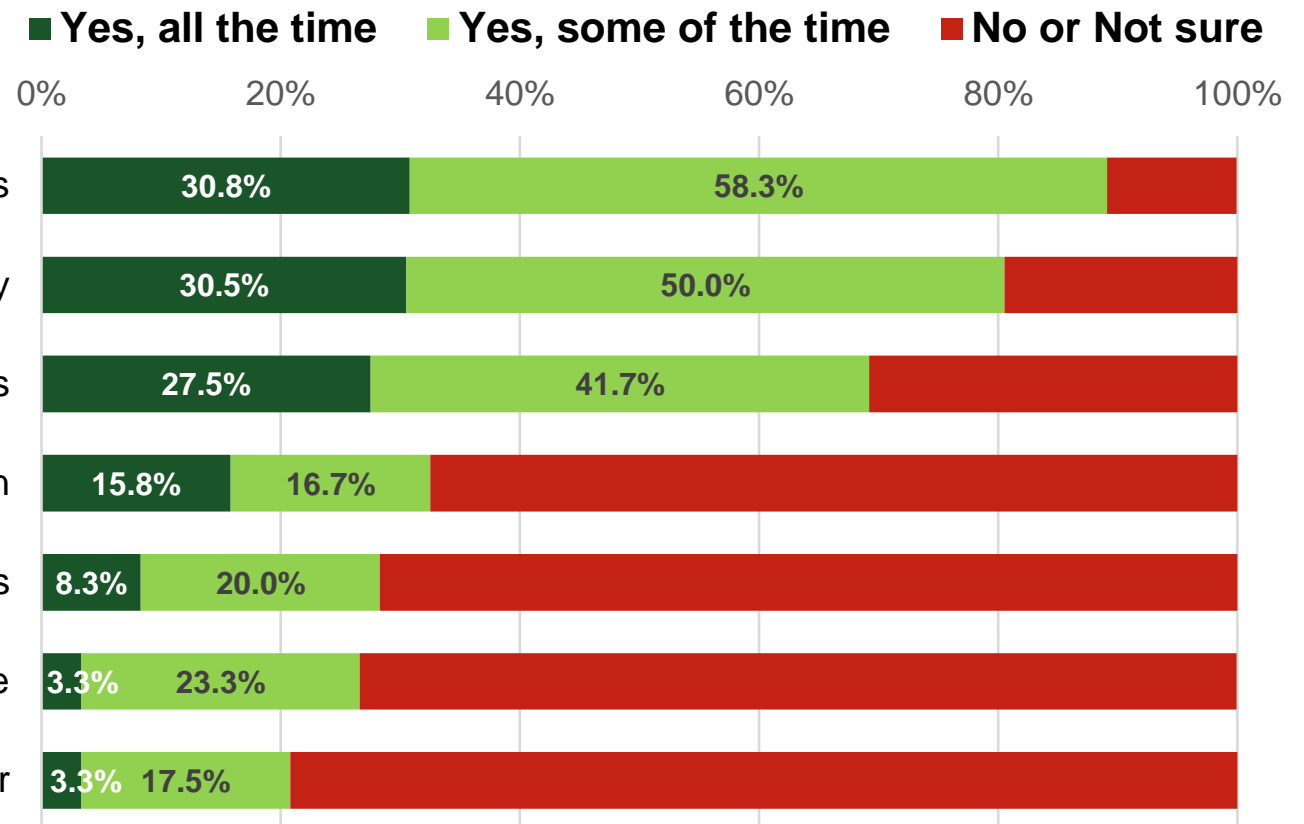
Energy & Water Consumption



- ▶ Efficiency is important, but camps tend to focus on “small-scale” solutions

Energy and Water Consumption Practices

Do you currently do this?



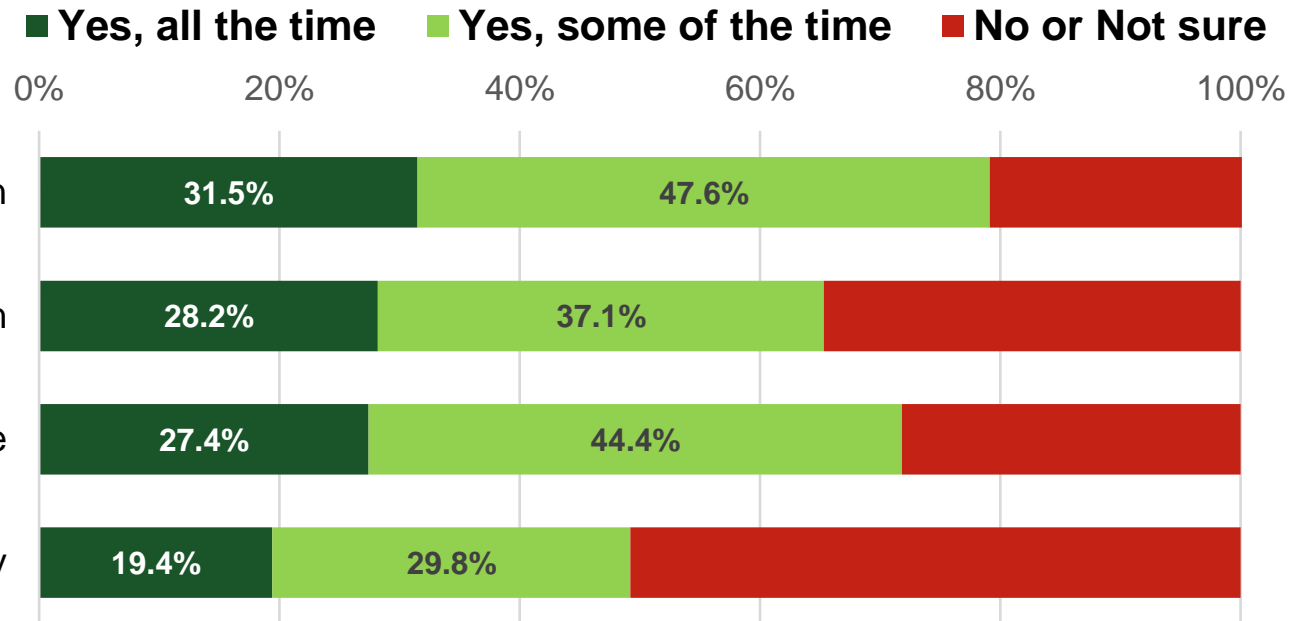
Natural Resource & Wildlife Conservation



- ▶ Natural resource conservation and pollution reduction is a highly variable priority

Natural Resource and Wildlife Conservation Practices

Do you currently do this?



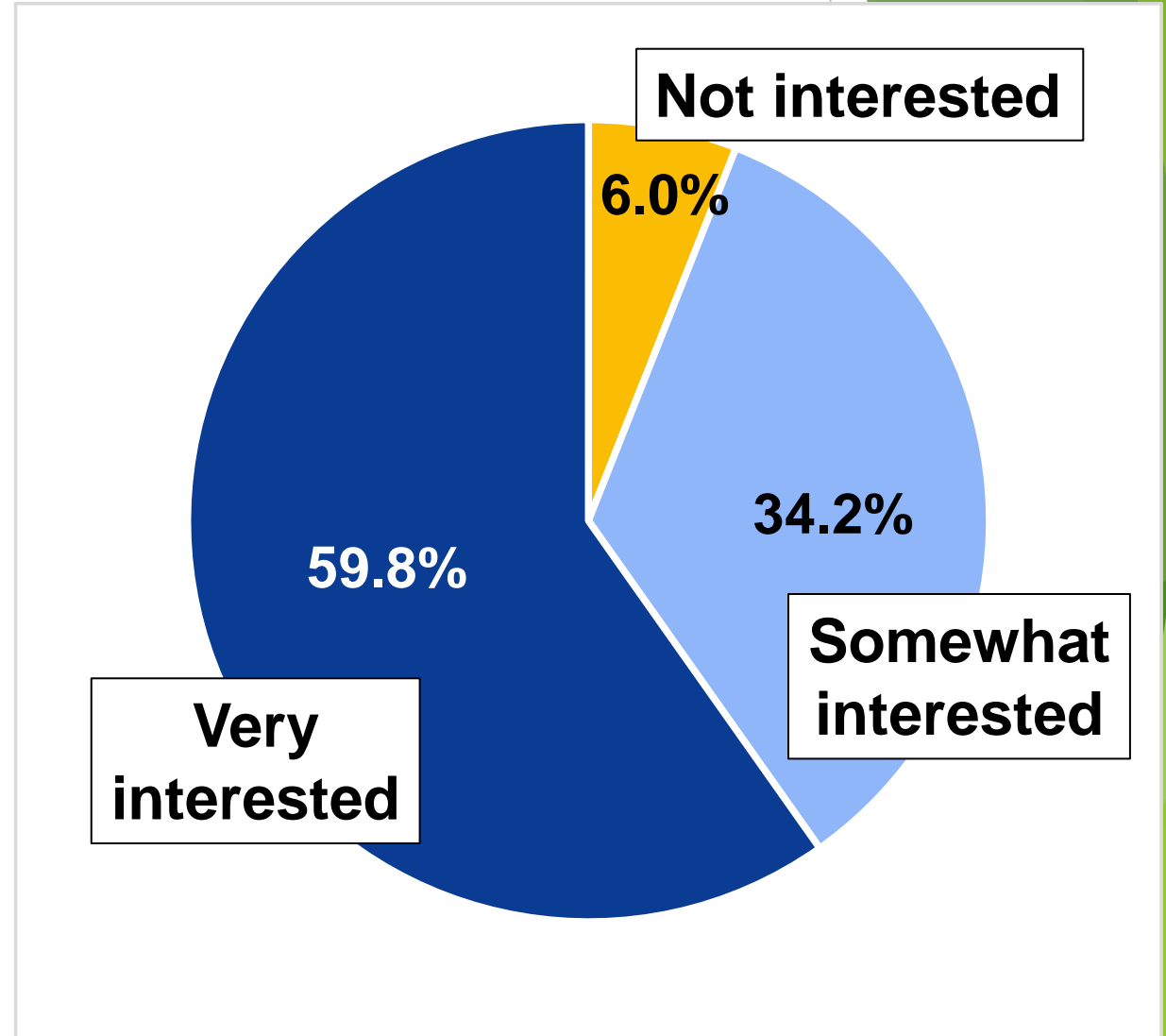
Motivations to Engage in Sustainable Practices

Category	Mean Rating (1 to 4)	% Rating “Very important”	Mean Ranking (1 to 3)	% Ranking #1 Reason
Environmental reasons (to protect natural resources and minimize environmental impacts)	3.83	86.4%	1.49	60.0%
Social reasons (to do the right thing and set a good example for campers and the community)	3.73	76.3%	2.03	24.2%
Economic reasons (to save and/or make money)	3.75	44.9%	2.47	15.8%

Motivation rating scale ranged from 1=Not all important to 4=Very important

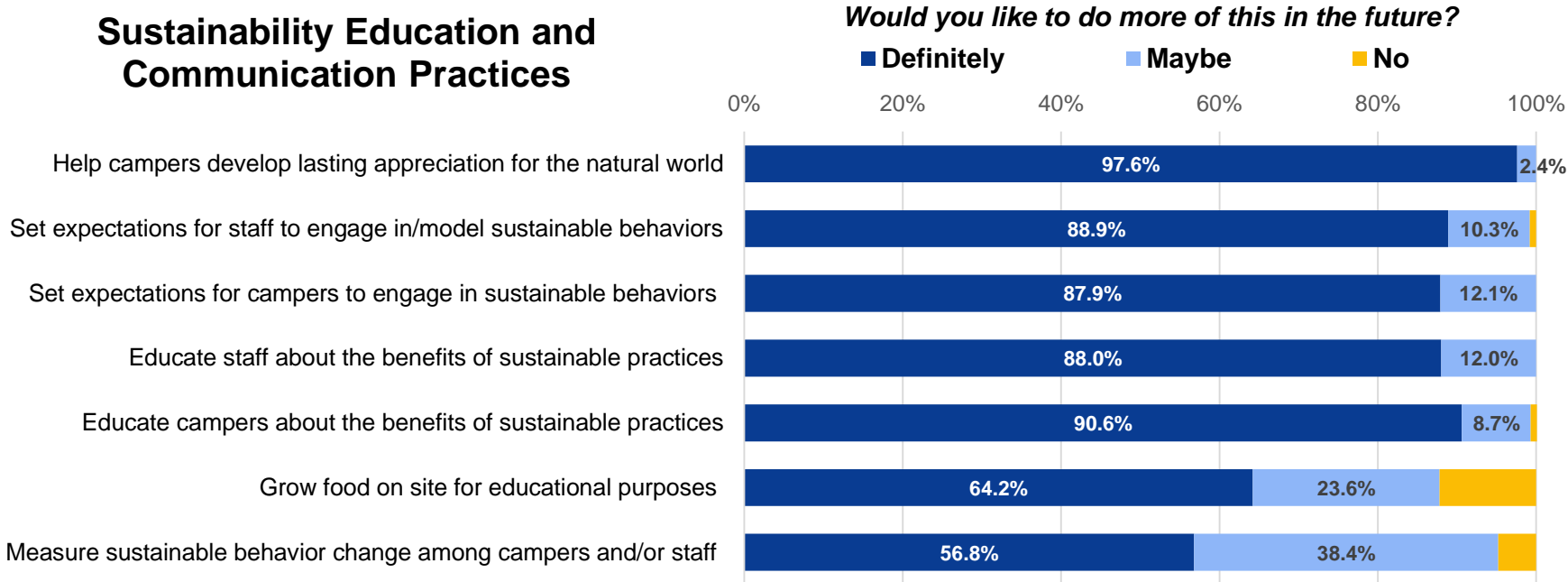
Future Sustainability Ambitions

- ▶ How interested would you be in receiving more information about how to make your camp operations more sustainable?

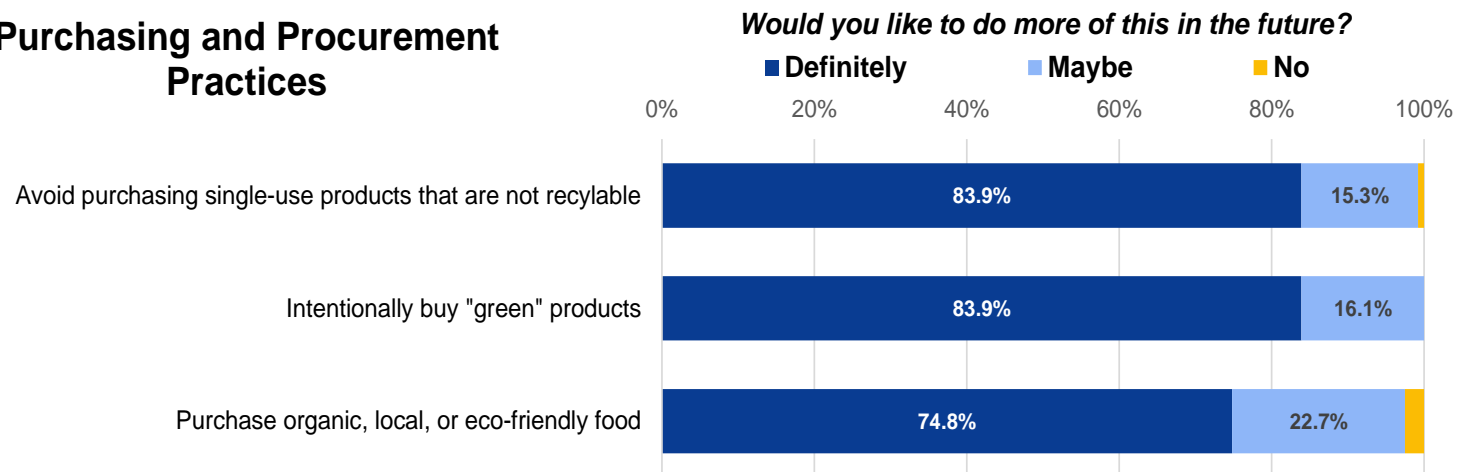


Future Sustainability Ambitions

Sustainability Education and Communication Practices



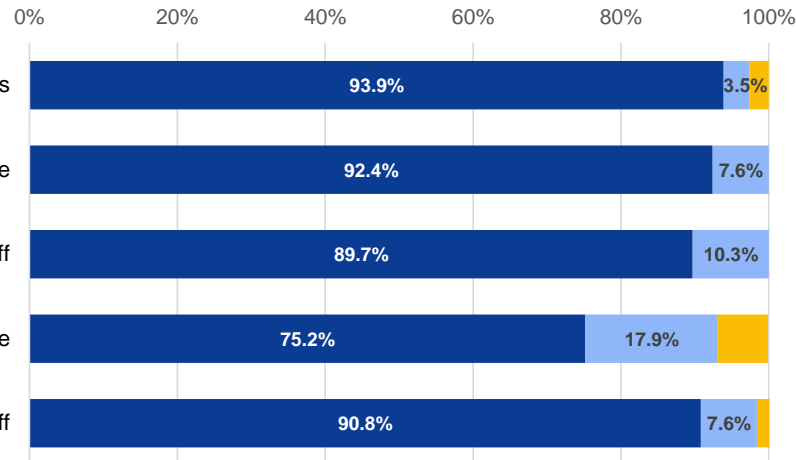
Purchasing and Procurement Practices



Waste Management Practices

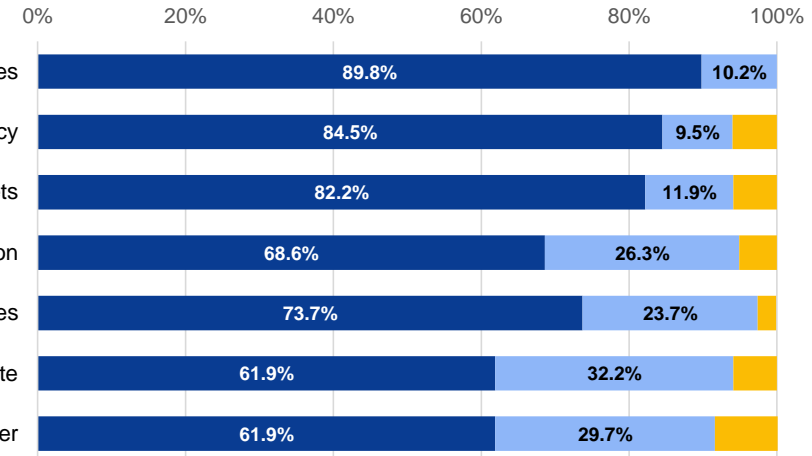
Would you like to do more of this in the future?

■ Definitely ■ Maybe ■ No



Would you like to do more of this in the future?

■ Definitely ■ Maybe ■ No

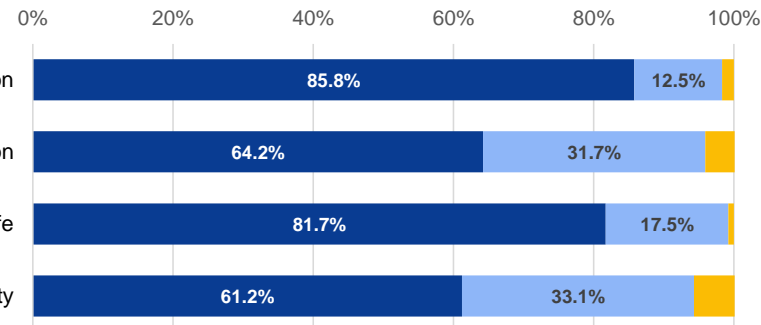


Energy and Water Consumption Practices

Natural Resource and Wildlife Conservation Practices

Would you like to do more of this in the future?

■ Definitely ■ Maybe ■ No



Future Sustainability Ambitions

- ▶ **Would you like to do more of the following sustainable management practices in the future?**

Category	Mean Rating (0 to 2)	% Rating “Definitely”	Mean Ranking (1 to 5)	% Ranking Priority #1 or #2
Waste Management	1.86	88.4%	3.30	32.8%
Sustainability Education & Communication	1.79	82.0%	1.96	72.5%
Natural Resource & Wildlife Conservation	1.70	73.2%	2.94	42.2%
Purchasing & Procurement	1.79	80.9%	3.69	16.4%
Energy & Water Consumption	1.70	74.7%	3.11	36.2%

Rating scale: 0=No, 1=Maybe, 2=Definitely

Barriers to Engaging in Sustainable Practices

Barrier	Mean Rating (1 to 4)	% Rating Mod. or Major Barrier
Lack access to financial resources needed	3.12	78.5%
Cost of implementation is too high	3.07	75.8%
Lack staff with the knowledge and skills needed to implement	2.53	53.5%
Lack access to technological resources needed	2.51	52.2%
Camp infrastructure and/or setting does not support it	2.26	38.0%
Don't know other organizations who might help us do it	2.11	31.9%
Enhancing sustainable practices is not a current priority	2.06	36.2%
Decisions about sustainability priorities made at higher levels	1.91	25.0%
Not aware of opportunities to enhance sustainability	1.86	20.7%
Other	1.62	24.4%

Barrier rating scale ranged from 1=Not a barrier to 4=Major barrier

Barriers to Engaging in Sustainable Practices

Barrier rating scale ranged from 1=Not a barrier to 4=Major barrier

Category of Barriers	# of Barriers	Mean Rating (1 to 4)	% Rating Minor Barrier or Higher
Lack of resources (financial, technological)	3	2.90	91.4%
Other barriers (awareness, authority, personnel, training)	6	2.12	57.8%

- ▶ **Impact of COVID-19 pandemic** on efforts to prioritize sustainability:
 - ▶ 65.3% reported decreased ability
 - ▶ 24.6% reported no change
 - ▶ 10.1% reported increased ability

Comparing Different Camps

- ▶ **Affiliated, not-for-profit camps less likely to engage in sustainable practices, more likely to report barriers**
- ▶ Camps with overnight facilities more likely to engage
- ▶ Camps in urban areas slightly more likely to engage
- ▶ Few differences based on camp size



Conclusions

- ▶ **Many camps already engage in sustainable practices...**
 - ▶ Most common = waste management & sustainability education
- ▶ **But almost all camps want to do MORE**
 - ▶ Few camps monitor the impacts of sustainable practices
- ▶ **Camps motivated to engage for environmental & social reasons** (economic reasons less common)
- ▶ **Perceived lack of resources biggest barrier to sustainability** (especially financial resources)
 - ▶ Other common barriers include awareness, training, etc.

Strong interest in making camp sustainability a high(er) priority!

Contact Information

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