

# **The 2004 Monhegan Island Resident and Business Owner Survey**

**A presentation of the data with some analysis**



Prepared by:

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Report submitted  
April 2, 2005

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## **A presentation of the data with some analysis**

**In August, 2004, FutureMetrics, a Bethel, Maine economic consulting firm, spent a week on Monhegan Island. The 2004 visit was a follow up to a one week visit in 2003. During both visits FutureMetrics gathered about 500 surveys from island visitors. In 2004 the survey was supplemented with a special survey crafted specifically for island residents, property owners, and/or business owners. Residents are loosely defined to include households or individuals who regularly spend an extended period of time on the island or who live on the island all year.**

**91 Monhegan Island residents, property owners and/or business owners responded to the survey.**

**The report on the visitors' surveys is available online\* and it is suggested that the reader review that report. In many ways it is a companion to this report. This report is also available online\*.**

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\* Visitor Survey

<http://www.FutureMetrics.net/Monhegan/Monhegan%20Study%202005.pdf>

\* Resident/Business Owner Survey

<http://www.futuremetrics.net/Monhegan/Monhegan%20RESIDENT%20Study%202005.pdf>

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	4
Some Demographics .....	5
Business, Resident and/or Property Owner Data .....	6
Revenue Sources .....	6
Visitation Patterns .....	9
Is the Island Crowded? .....	11
Actual Crowding Perceptions .....	11
Ideal Crowding Levels .....	13
Did Crowding Affect You? .....	14
Is the Island More or Less Crowded than You Like? .....	15
A Fee! .....	16
Island Stewardship .....	17
Monhegan Associates .....	20
Conclusion .....	22
Appendix .....	23
Comments about change of plans: .....	23
General Comments .....	24

## Charts

Chart 1 - Education .....	5
Chart 2 - Income .....	5
Chart 3 - Revenue Sources .....	6
Chart 4 - Annual Spending on Repairs .....	7
Chart 5 - Percent of alcoholic beverages purchased on the island .....	8
Chart 6 - Meals eaten at restaurants .....	9
Chart 7 - How long do you stay on the island? .....	9
Chart 8 - How long on the island now and five years ago? .....	10
Chart 9 - How long have been coming to Monhegan? .....	10
Chart 10 - Crowding perception by month .....	11
Chart 11 - Perception of crowding at least and most crowded month .....	12
Chart 12 - Ideal level of crowding in August .....	13
Chart 13 - Change of plans from crowding .....	13
Chart 14 - Response to crowding .....	14
Chart 15 - Is the island more or less crowded than you would like .....	15
Chart 16 - More crowded now than you remember .....	15
Chart 17 - Fee .....	16
Chart 18 - Stewardship - Clear fallen trees .....	17
Chart 19 - Stewardship - Trail erosion control .....	17
Chart 20 - Stewardship - Poison ivy elimination .....	18
Chart 21 - Stewardship - Muskrat removal .....	18
Chart 22 - Stewardship - Japanese barberry control .....	19
Chart 23 - Stewardship - Other invasive plant control .....	19
Chart 24 - Stewardship - Herbicide use .....	20
Chart 25 - How has Monhegan Associates handled conservation .....	20
Chart 26 - How has Monhegan Associates handled land use decisions .....	21
Chart 27 - How has Monhegan Associates handled relations with non-members .....	21

## Executive Summary

The island's economy is currently healthy. But the future of that health depends upon decisions made now. Those decisions will have to mediate the inherent differences that exist seen between business and non-business owners.

Although everyone agrees that August is very crowded, it appears that Monhegan residents and business owners, in general, agree that it is a tolerable state for a few weeks. Most are able to adjust in order to tolerate that month. However, it is also clear that Monhegan is very close to the limit in this regard.

In many ways, the way the island now has not crossed onto an unsustainable path. In a general sense, the island is experiencing a golden era in terms of the balance between maintaining its heritage and its economic base. Decisions that will keep it that way, and thus retain much of what makes Monhegan what it is and retain the economic base, are important. From an ecological viewpoint, in this land, fresh water, and effluent limited microcosm, any future growth is not desirable. From a profit maximizing point of view, a loss of the island's heritage resource would be highly undesirable.

Monhegan Associates has played a key role as the island's land steward. The maintenance of the wild characteristics of most of the island and the care for the ecology has very likely been crucial for keeping the visitor experience a very positive one. Yet there is an obvious tension between members and non-members. The vision for the island community's future must acknowledge the need for a working community as well as for a pristine, isolated, and wild destination. Open and representative meetings from which the decisions represent all of the island's stakeholders must be the norm going forward.

## Some Demographics

We asked several questions regarding the income and educational backgrounds of the respondents. In general, respondents are well educated (significantly above the national average). The pre-tax income levels of island residents and business owners however do not correlate with the educational profile. Pre-tax incomes are, on average, about 20% below what the educational profile would suggest. Looking more closely at the data we see that island business owners or residents who do not own a business are willing to make a significant trade-off in their earning power (as suggested by educational attainment) in order to have a business on Monhegan. Island residents who do not have businesses on the island are closer to the expected earnings levels.

Income levels are quite different for members of Monhegan Associates versus non-members. Monhegan Associates respondents have an average income of \$98,000/year whereas non-members have an average income of \$47,000/year.

Chart 1 - Education

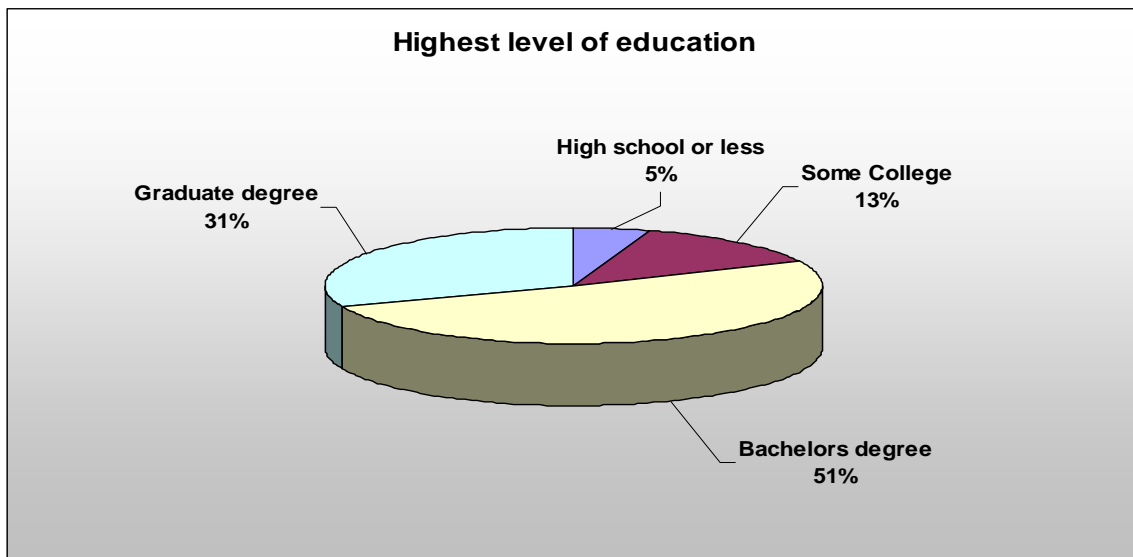
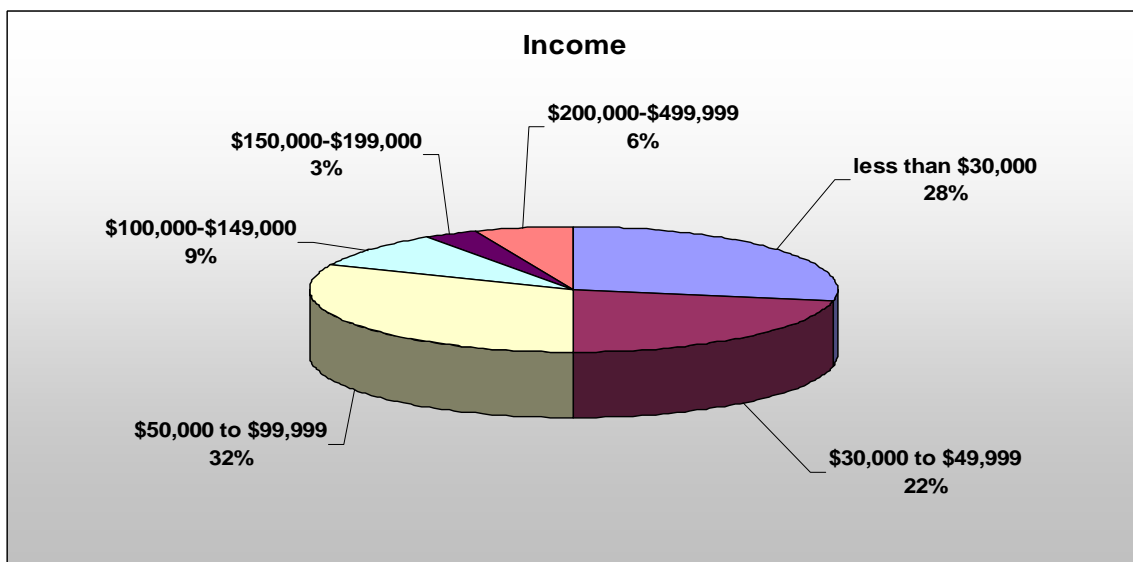


Chart 2 - Income



## Business, Resident and/or Property Owner Data

Of the respondents to the survey, 39% are business owners or local workers and 61% are residents or property owners that do not own a business or work on the island.

There is an overlap of business owners, workers, and residents. Of the respondents, 46% are property owners. 27% are both business/worker and property owners. 40% of the residents that responded are neither business nor property owners (long-term summer renters and/or seasonal workers).

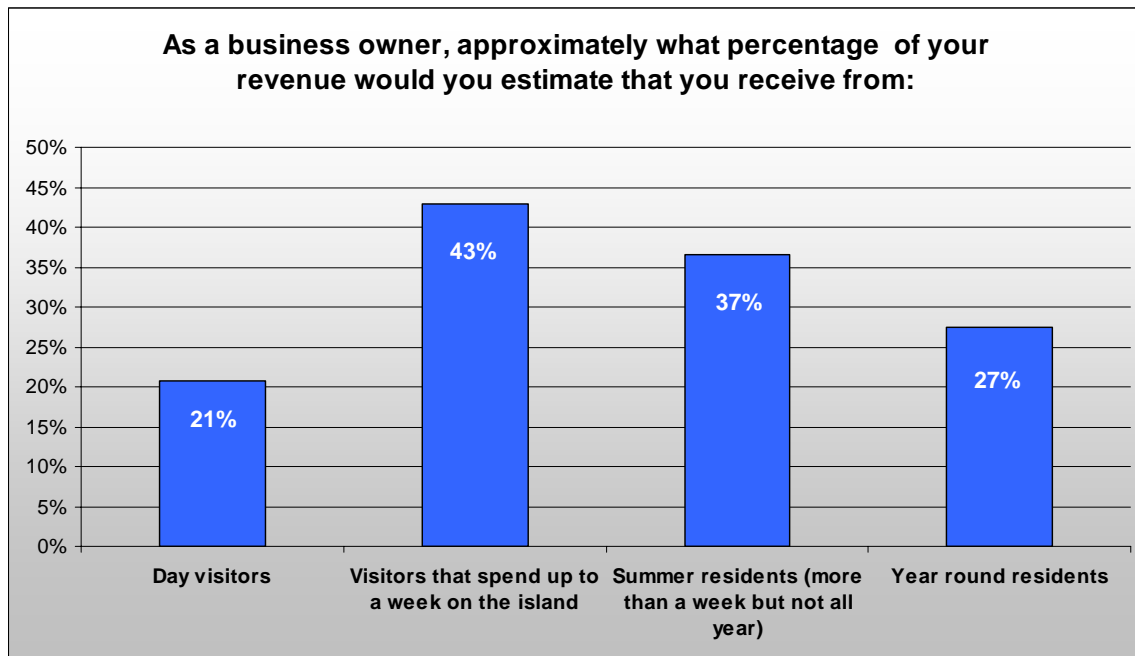
61% of the surveys were completed by members of Monhegan Associates. Of the business owners in the data, 43% are also members of Monhegan Associates.

### Revenue Sources

Business owners estimate that the majority of their revenues come from overnight and longer term visitors. Although day visitors make up about half of the visitors to the island, business owners estimate that they contribute to only 21% of their revenues.

A significant amount of the revenue received by island businesses is provided by visitors and by summer residents.

Chart 3 - Revenue Sources



The average renter has been renting their property for 10 years (the maximum is 24 and the minimum is 2). The average weekly rent charged by owners is \$1045. This is a 41% increase over 5 years ago when the average rent was \$740 per week. For 2004, the maximum weekly rent reported was \$1750 and the minimum was \$500.

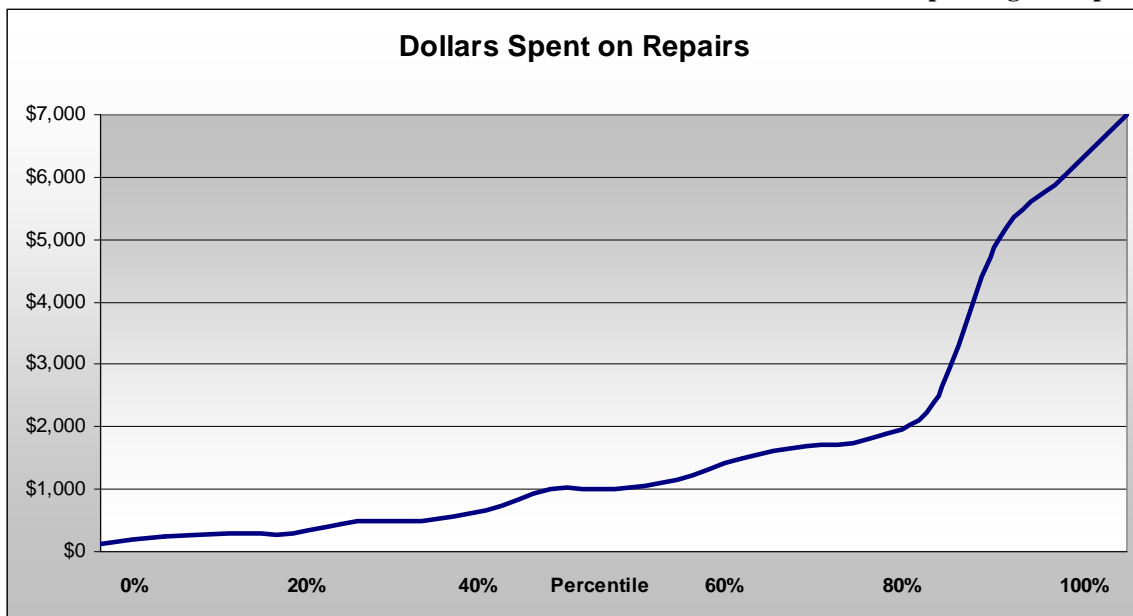
40% of the properties that are used as residences by the owners are winterized but most are not lived in over the winter.

In addition to rental and other visitor generated revenues (please see the Visitor Survey for a detail analysis of visitor spending), a number of island residents work for other island residents and property owners on landscaping and maintenance.

The average annual spending on landscaping by property owners was \$390. The maximum reported was \$1000/year and the minimum was \$100/year.

The average on repairs was \$1900. The chart below illustrates the distribution of spending on repairs. About half were under \$1000. The maximum was \$7000/year and the minimum was \$130/year.

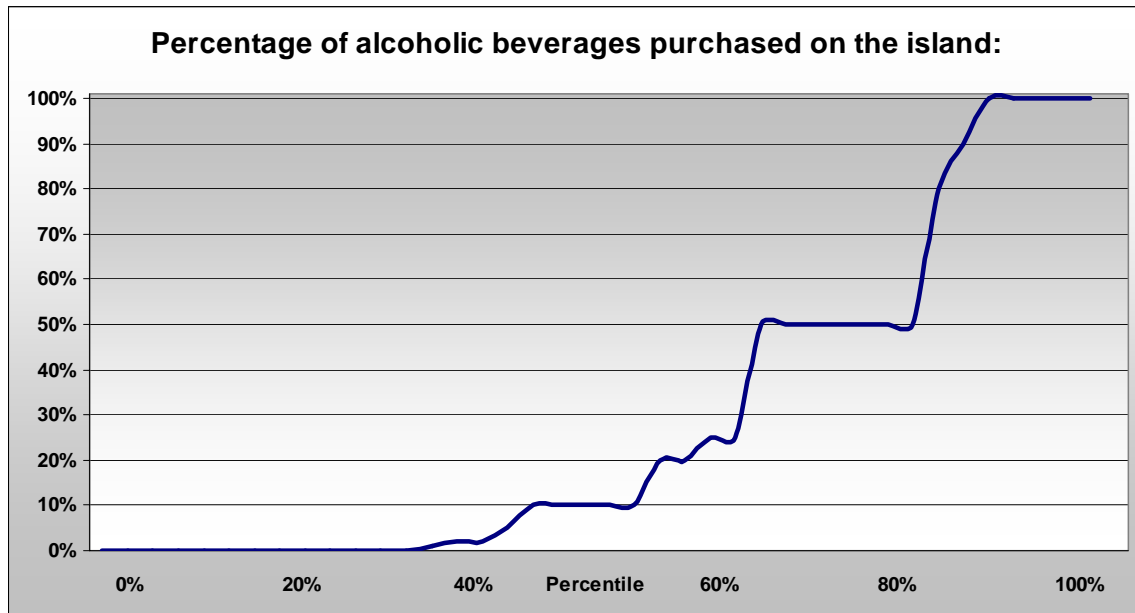
**Chart 4 - Annual Spending on Repairs**



Island residents purchase about 50% of their groceries on the island. The percentage of grocery purchases are positively correlated to income levels (the higher the income the more likely they are to buy more groceries on the island). Grocery purchases are also negatively correlated with length of stay (the longer the stay the fewer groceries they are likely to purchase on the island).

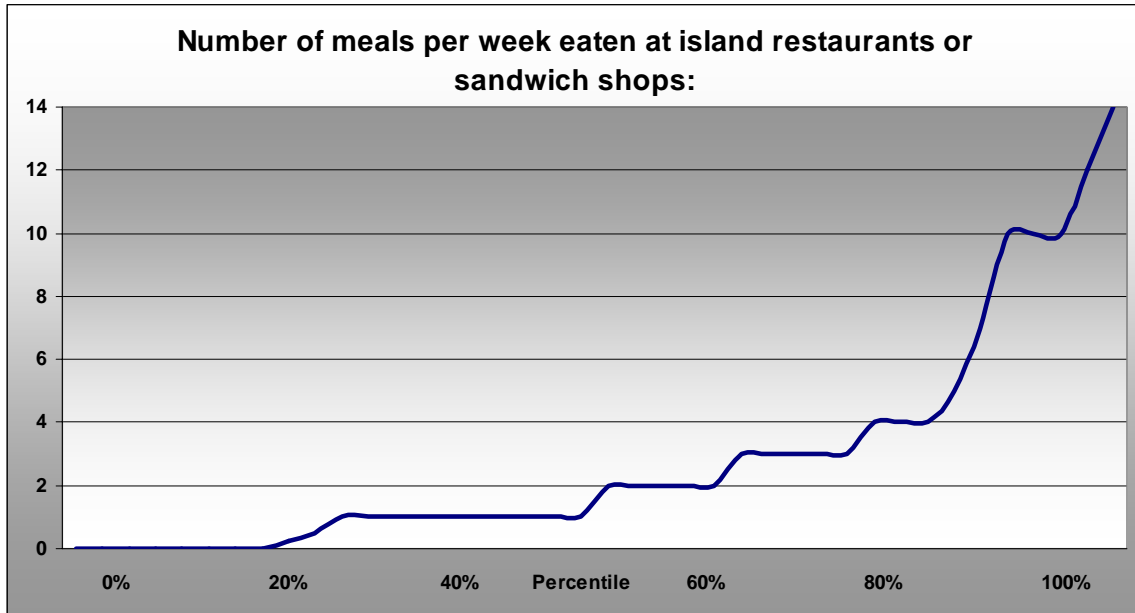
The median response regarding the purchase of alcoholic beverages on the island was 10% (see the chart below) since many residents purchase none of their alcoholic beverages on the island. However, the average was 30% because a significant number of residents purchase in excess of 50% of their alcoholic beverages on the island.

**Chart 5 - Percent of alcoholic beverages purchased on the island**



On average, residents ate about 3 meals per week at island restaurants or sandwich shops. However, as with alcoholic beverages, the average is skewed by a significant number of residents (15%) that eat at least a meal a day out. The shorter the stays the more likely people are to eat out. Visitors that stay two weeks or less eat out 2.6 times more frequently than visitors that stay for a month or more.

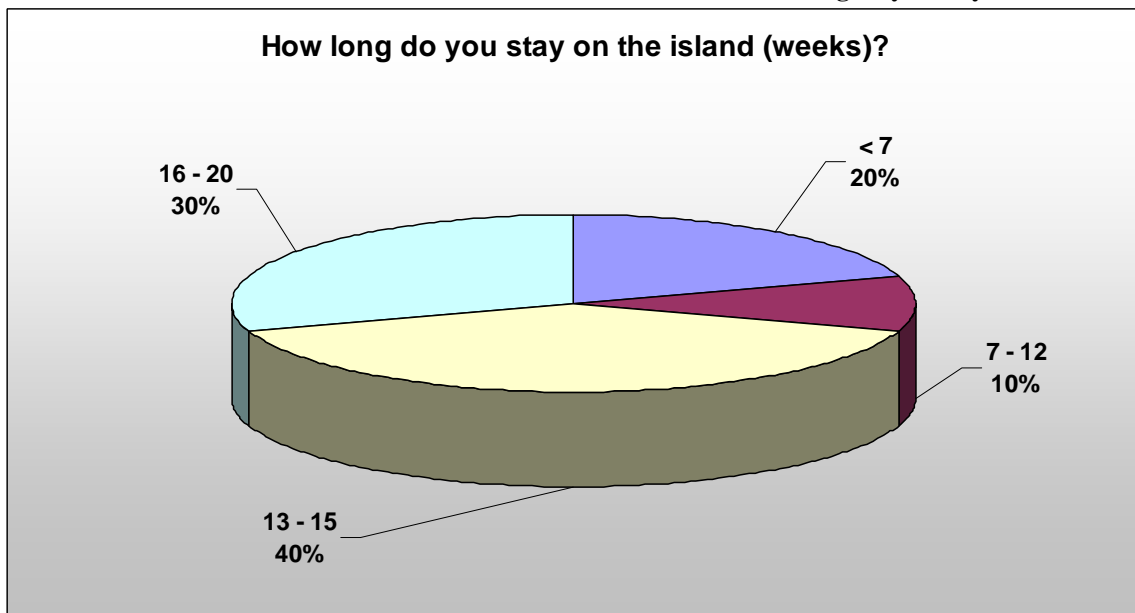
Chart 6 - Meals eaten at restaurants



### Visitation Patterns

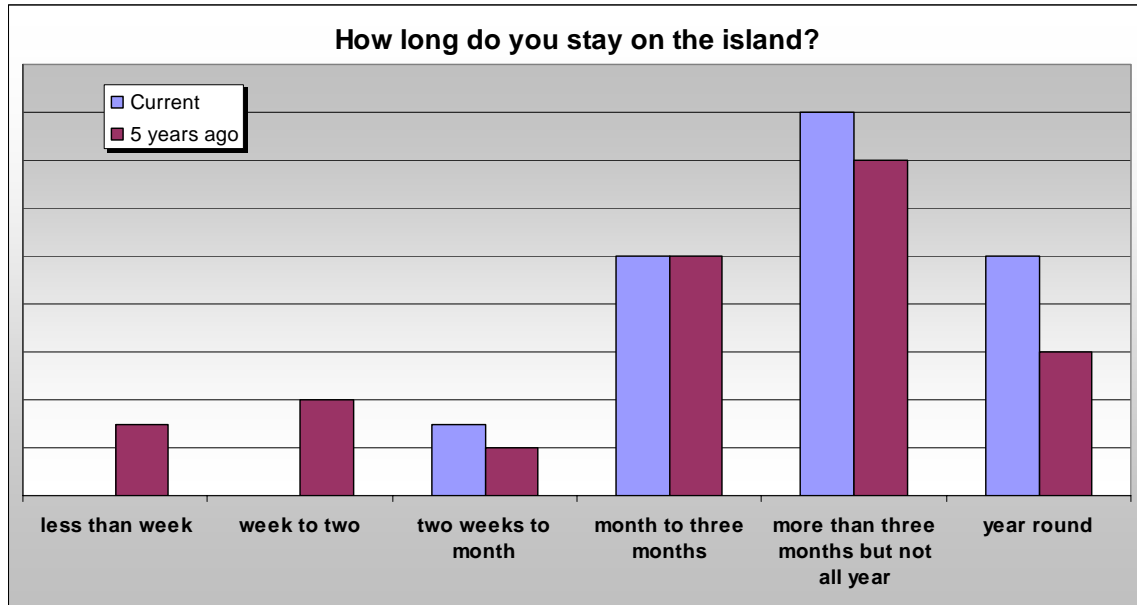
About 30% of the property owners rent their properties during the warm season. The average number of weeks rented is 6. Not including those that live on the island year round, the average property owner lives on the island for 13 weeks.

Chart 7 - How long do you stay on the island?



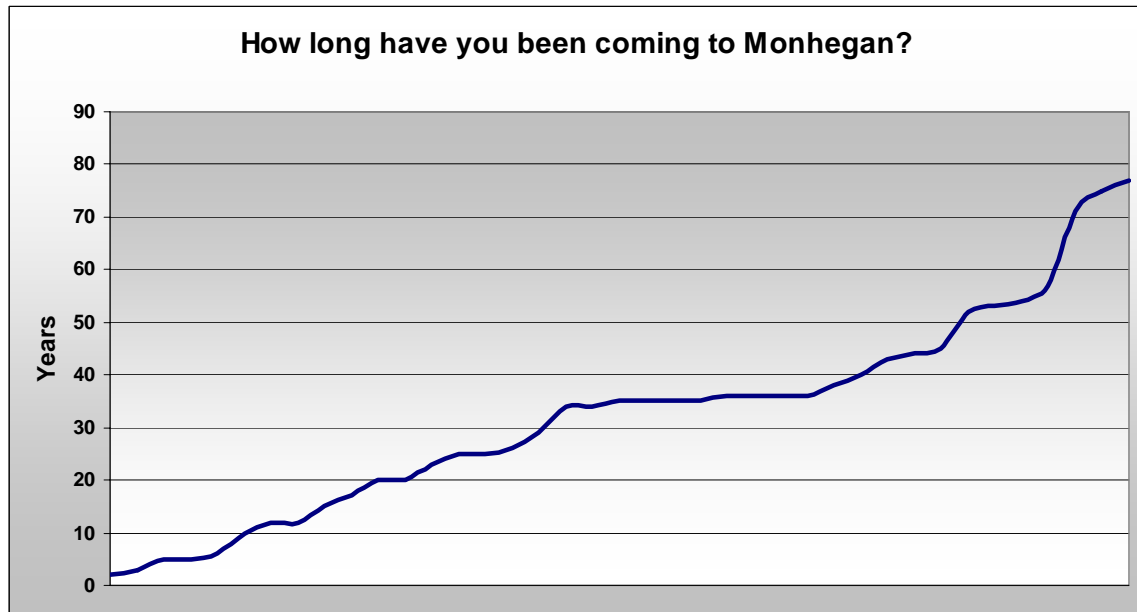
We asked residents and property owners how long they spend on the island now and five years ago. The trend is to stay longer and for there to be more year round residents (at least amongst those that responded to the survey; note that not one fisherman identified themselves in question 2 on the survey). The chart below illustrates the results.

**Chart 8 - How long on the island now and five years ago?**



The average respondent has been coming to Monhegan for 32 years (some have lived on Monhegan all their lives). The distribution of years coming to Monhegan is in the following chart.

**Chart 9 - How long have been coming to Monhegan?**



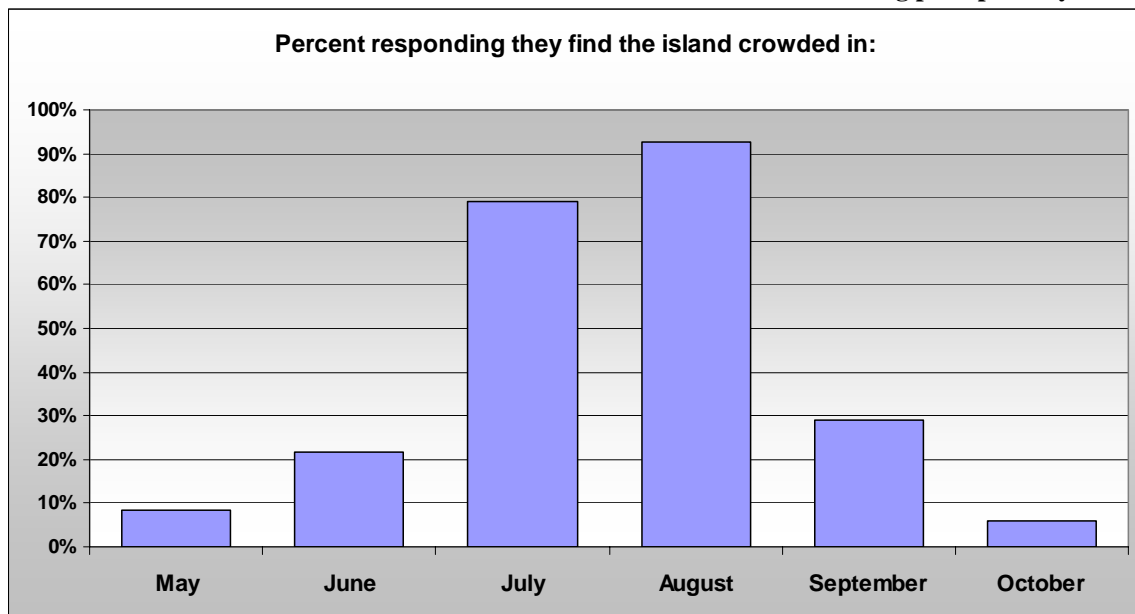
## Is the Island Crowded?

As readers of the Visitor Survey Report know, the perception of crowding by non-permanent residents has a potentially powerful effect on the future of Monhegan. Since most of the island's economy depends on visitors, both tourists and summer residents, the feelings of residents and business owners are important to understanding how policy will be formed that will determine Monhegan's future.

### ***Actual Crowding Perceptions***

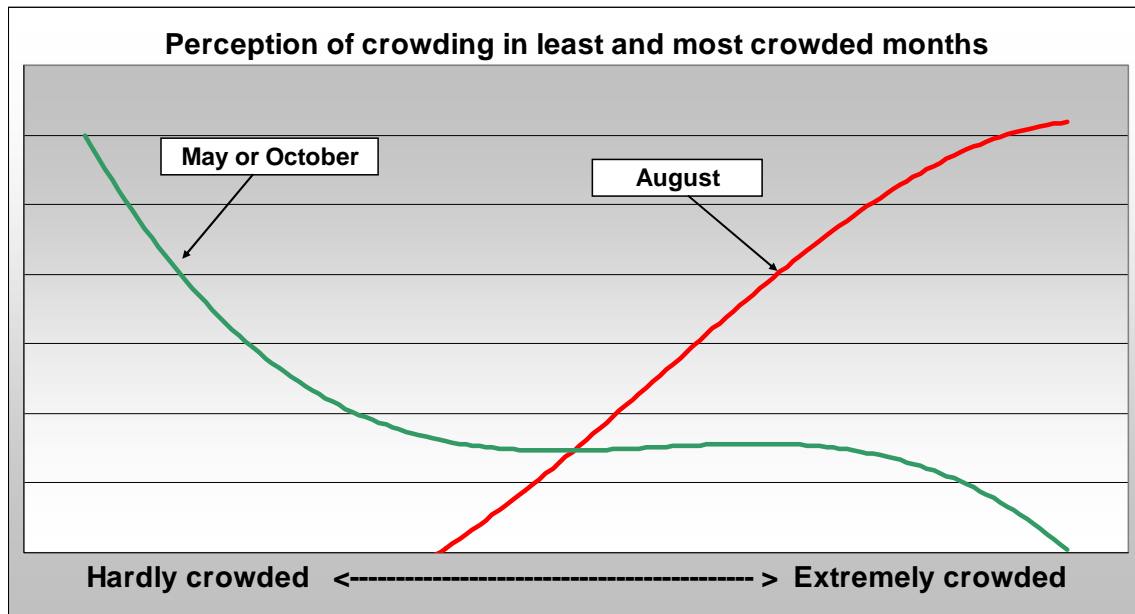
When residents and business owners were asked if they find the island crowded, the responses varied by month. The following chart shows the results.

**Chart 10 - Crowding perception by month**



Survey takers were asked to grade the level of crowding from “hardly crowded” to “extremely crowded” in those months that they found to be the least and most crowded months. The results are illustrated in the following chart. Respondents were about equally agreed that May and October are the least crowded months. August on the other hand was the unanimously picked most crowded month. It was rated on a scale of 1 to 9 (with 7, 8, and 9 in the “extremely crowded” range), and had a weighted average score of 7.75.

**Chart 11 - Perception of crowding at least and most crowded month**



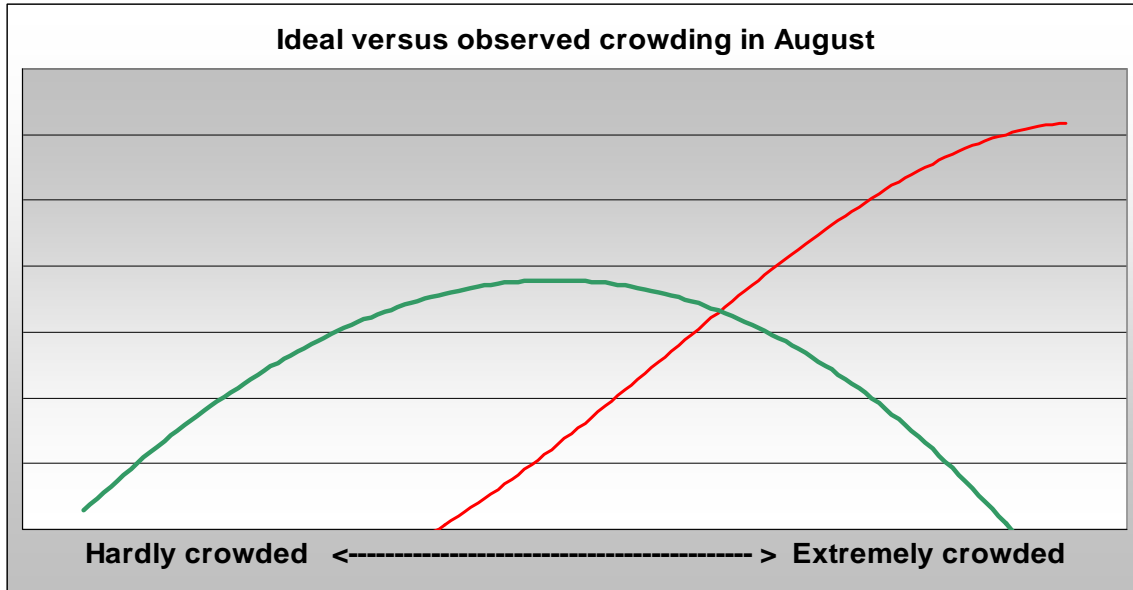
Interestingly, about 10% of the respondents thought the island was in the “extremely crowded” range in the month that they thought to be the least crowded month. Those respondents, with one exception, are year round residents.

11% of those who thought that the island was in the bottom range of crowding in May or October also thought that more tourism should be encouraged in those months. All of those respondents were business owners.

## Ideal Crowding Levels

When asked what their ideal level of crowding for August would be versus their actual perceived level, we got the following outcome (red is observed and green is ideal).

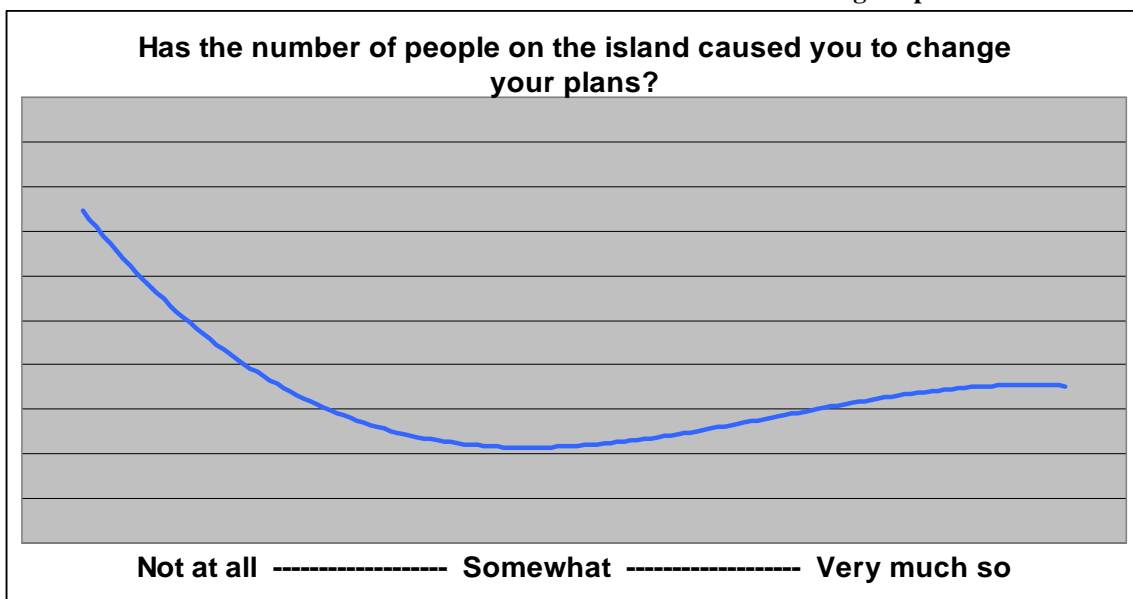
Chart 12 - Ideal level of crowding in August



Business owners, on average for August, suggested an ideal level of crowding that was about 17% higher than non-business owners.

When asked if the number of people on the island had caused residents and/or property owners to change their plans or activities, most were unaffected or somewhat affected. The follow chart shows the response distribution.

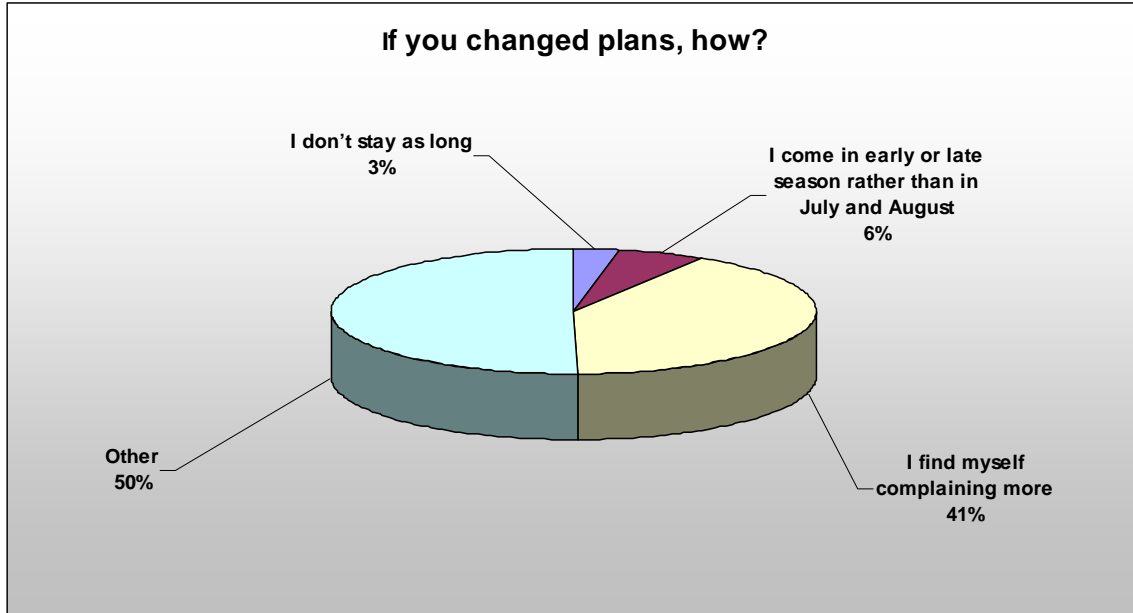
Chart 13 - Change of plans from crowding



## **Did Crowding Affect You?**

We asked those that did change plans to tell us what they do in response to their perception of overcrowding. The results are summarized in the chart below. Those that answered “other” were asked for comments. The comment of those that wrote them are in the appendix.

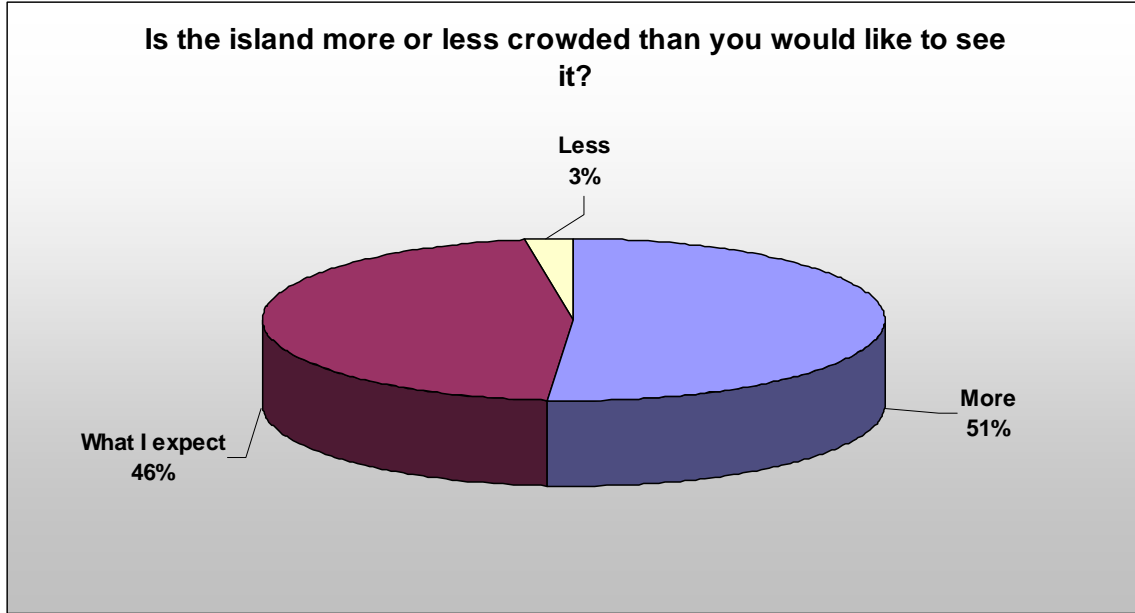
**Chart 14 - Response to crowding**



### ***Is the Island More or Less Crowded than You Like?***

When asked if the island is now more or less crowded than they would like to see it, about half said it was more crowded than preferred. The following chart illustrates that result.

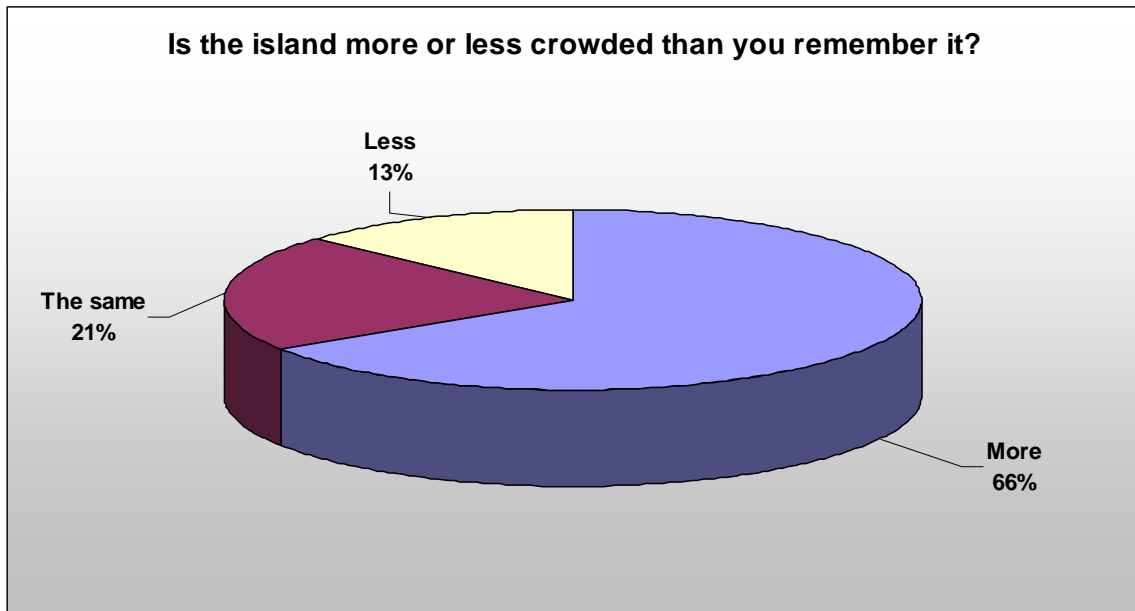
**Chart 15 - Is the island more or less crowded than you would like**



Non-business owners were slightly in the majority in terms of thinking the island was more crowded than they would like to see it (11% more likely).

When asked if the island is now more or less crowded than they remember it, more said it was. Interestingly, 13% of those surveyed found the island less crowded than they remember it.

**Chart 16 - More crowded now than you remember**



## A Fee!

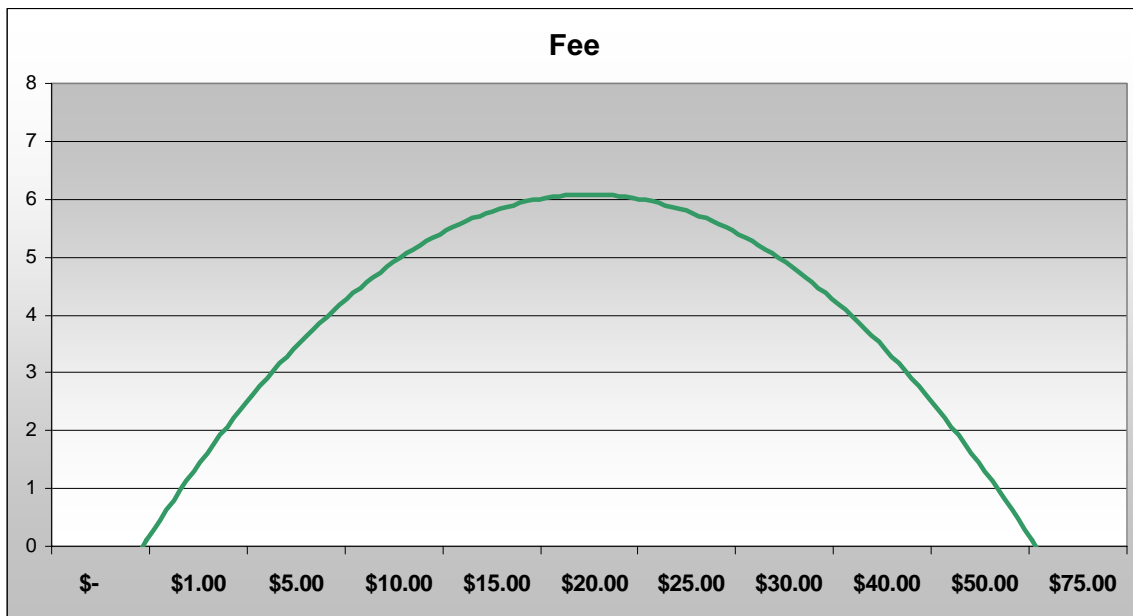
Readers of the Visitor Survey Report will recall that an analysis based on a simulation concluded that some form of a tariff or embargo that limited the number of day visitors was forecast as a way to preserve the island's heritage and economic vitality. In that report, a fee of about \$20 per person would achieve that outcome. We also asked residents, property owners, and business owners a similar question.

We posed the following:

“Imagine that each adult visitor (non-resident) has to pay a fee to step onto Monhegan. (NOTE: This fee might be used to help maintain the island's trails, historic landmarks, and infrastructure.) How high do you think the fee would have to be in order that a significant number of short-term visitors would decide NOT to come to Monhegan?”

The weighted average response was \$19.90. This does not include several extreme responses suggesting fees of \$100 to \$1000. Not one response suggested a zero dollar fee. The chart below shows the smoothed response to the question.

Chart 17 - Fee



# Island Stewardship

A series of questions regarding island stewardship were asked. The responses are summarized in the charts below.

Chart 18 - Stewardship - Clear fallen trees

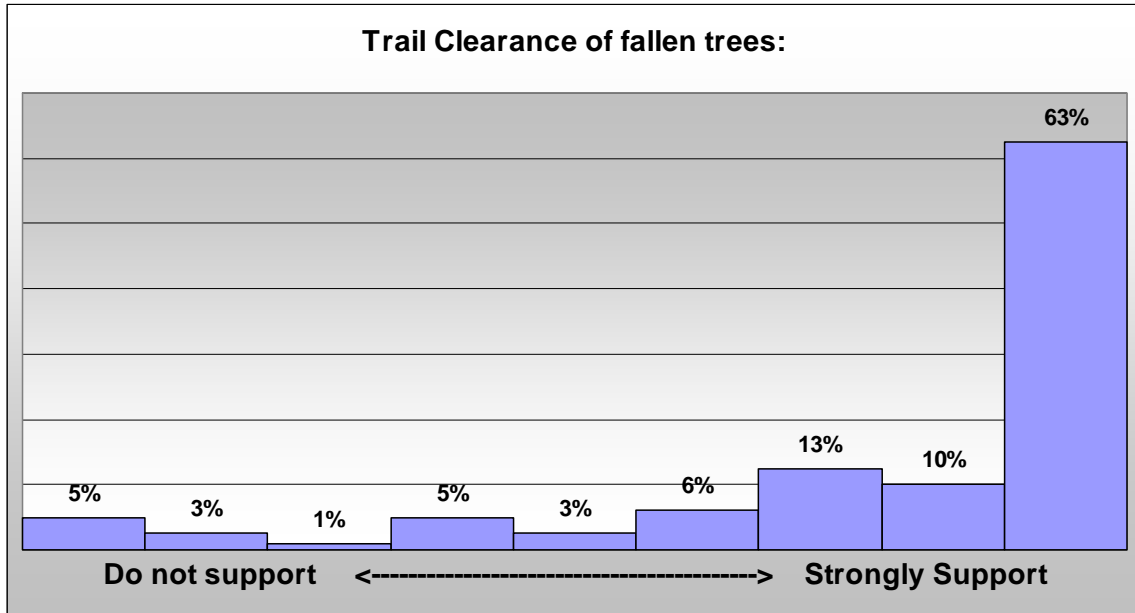


Chart 19 - Stewardship - Trail erosion control

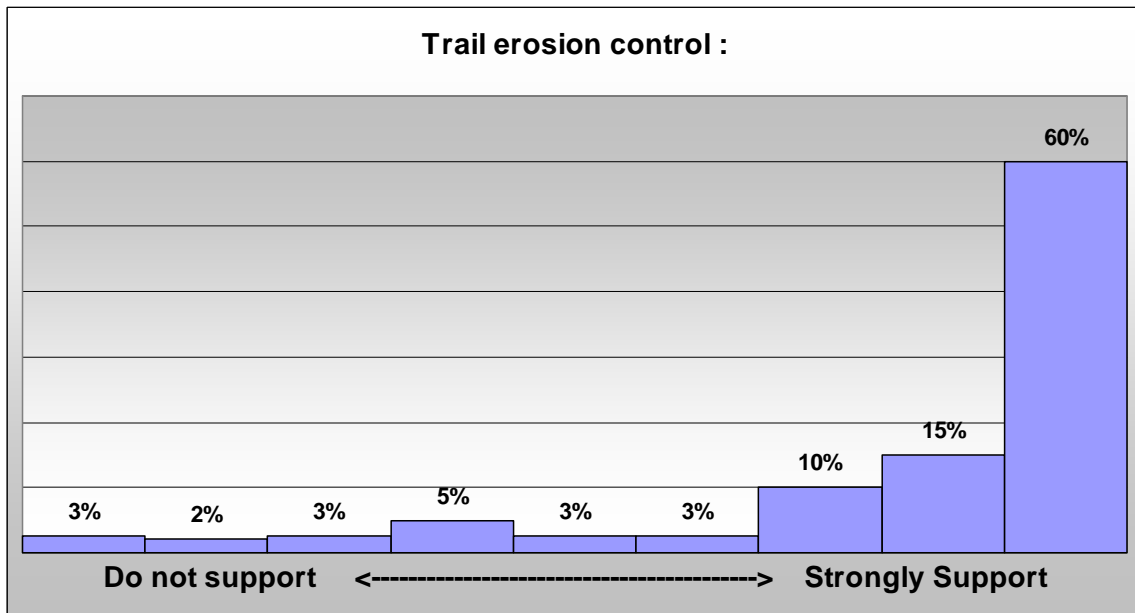


Chart 20 - Stewardship - Poison ivy elimination

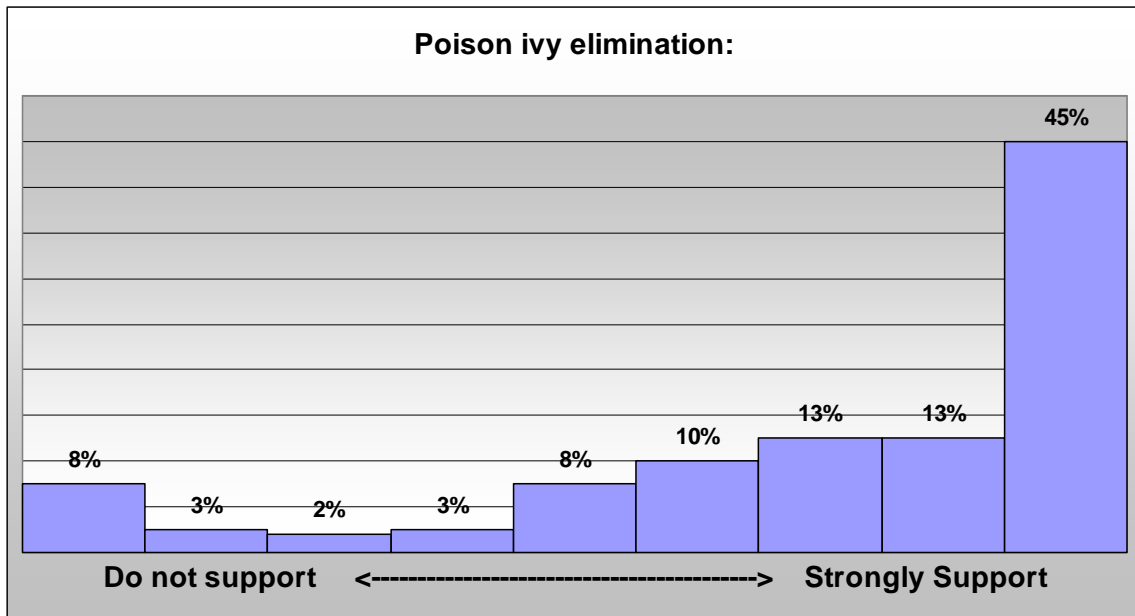


Chart 21 - Stewardship - Muskrat removal

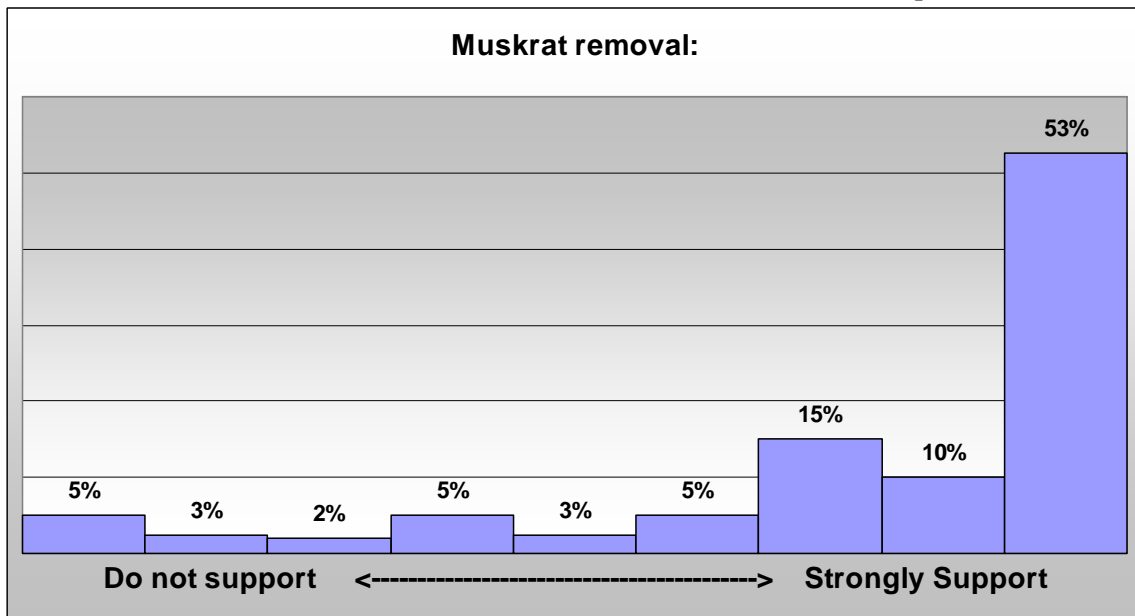


Chart 22 - Stewardship - Japanese barberry control

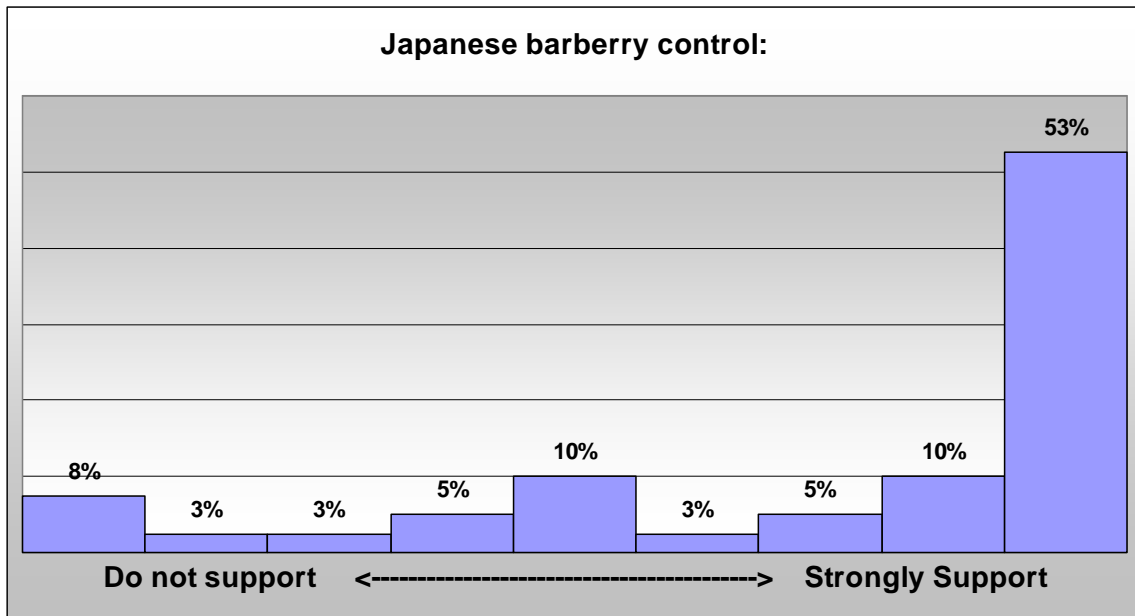


Chart 23 - Stewardship - Other invasive plant control

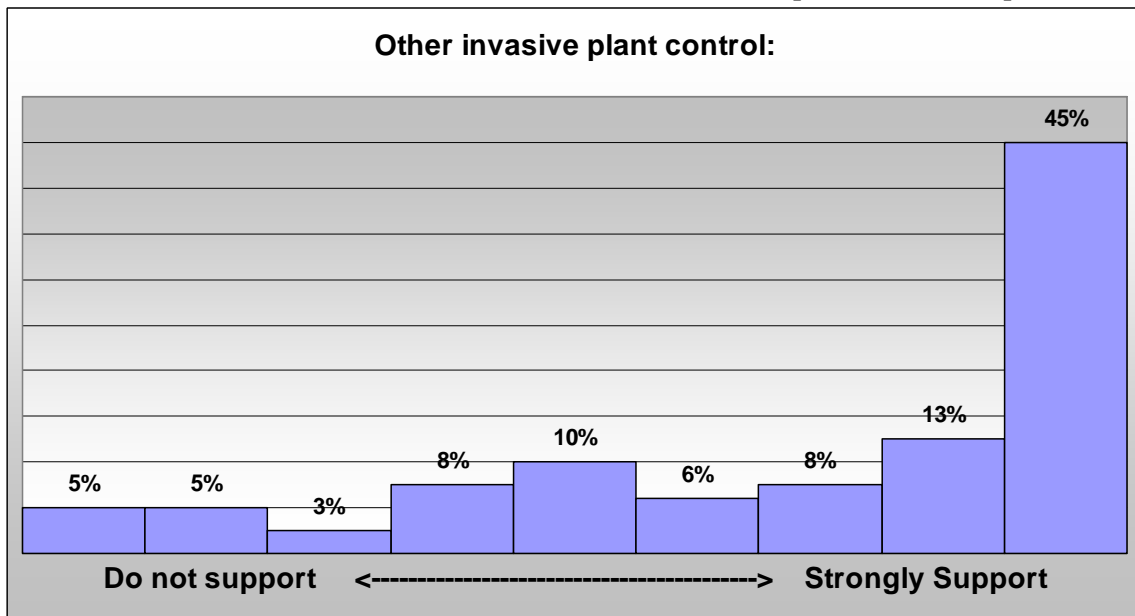
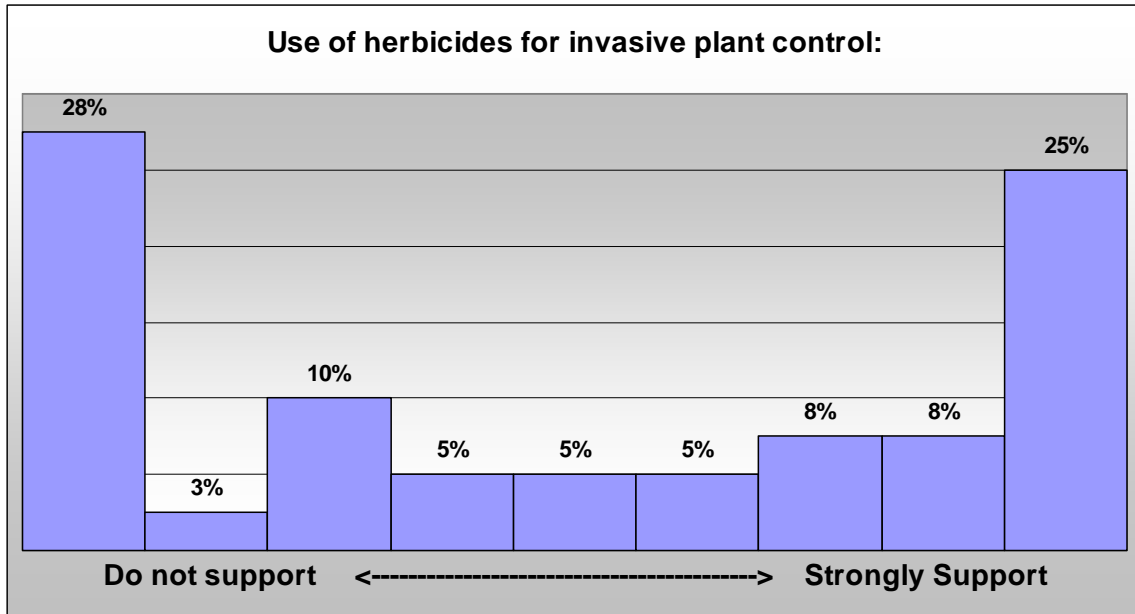


Chart 24 - Stewardship - Herbicide use



## Monhegan Associates

We also asked some questions about Monhegan Associates in general. The responses are below:

Chart 25 - How has Monhegan Associates handled conservation

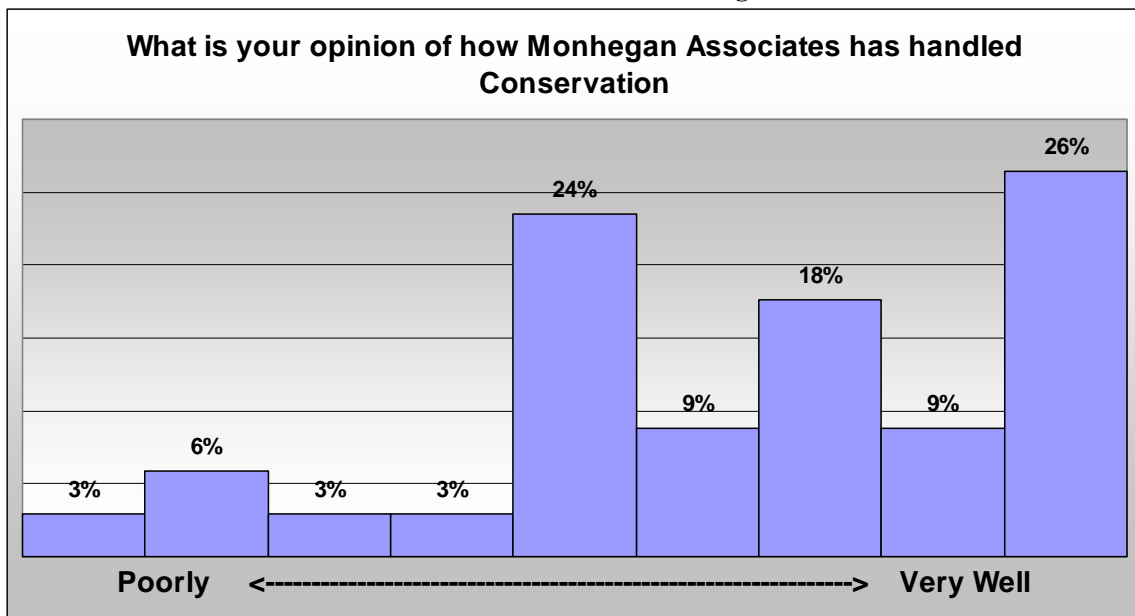


Chart 26 - How has Monhegan Associates handled land use decisions

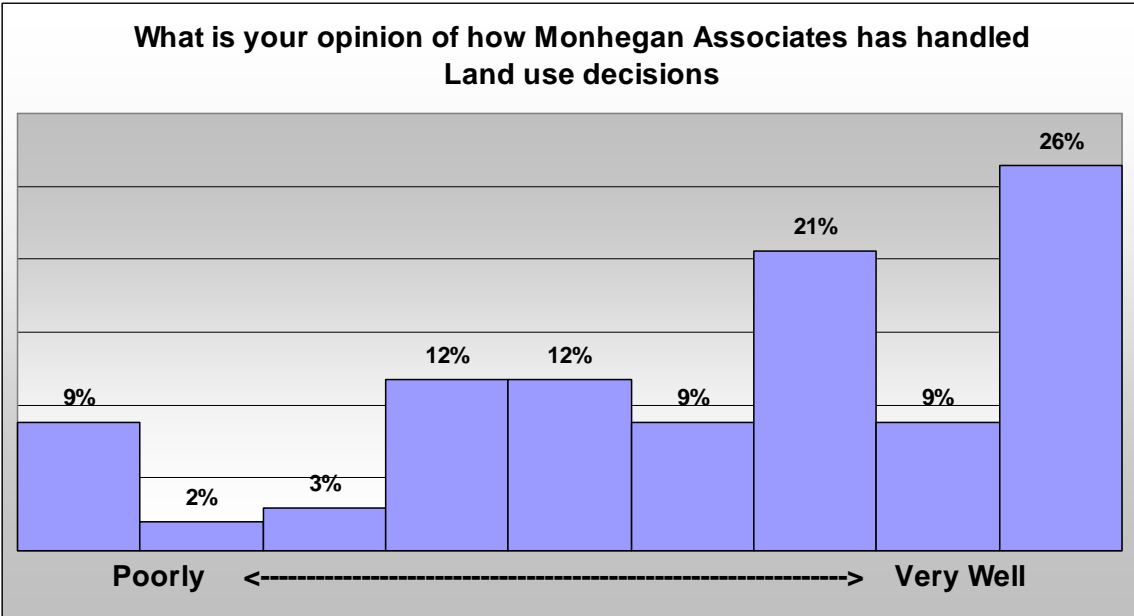
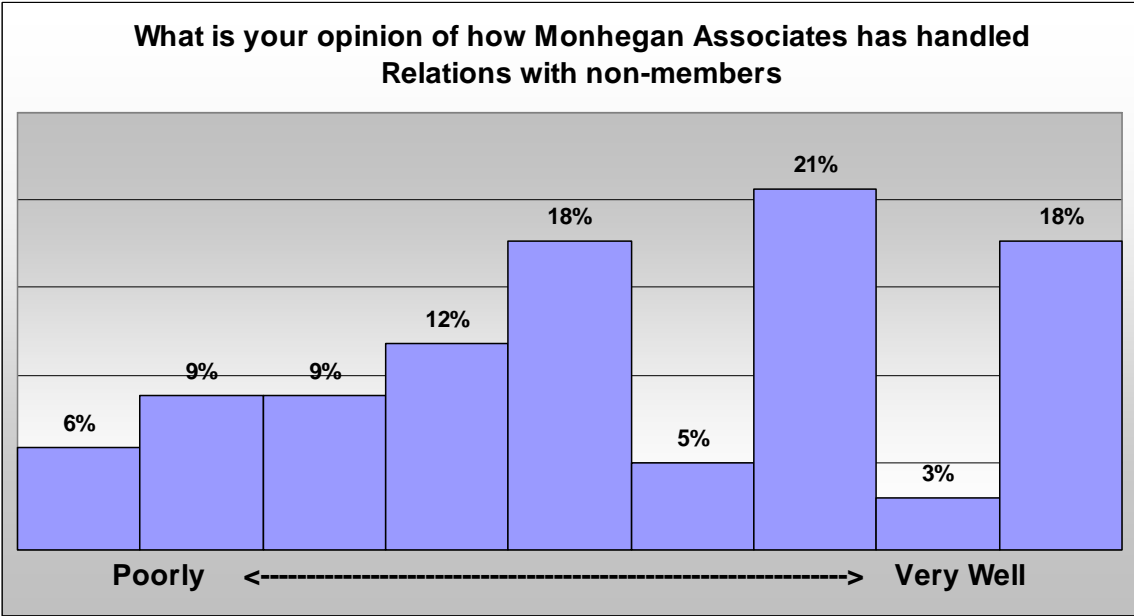


Chart 27 - How has Monhegan Associates handled relations with non-members



## Conclusion

Monhegan Island is in many ways a unique community. The island's heritage, culture, and its isolation make it a desirable destination for those seeking escape. Many of the "locals" have chosen to live on Monhegan and forgo the real potential of much higher earnings in "mainland" jobs.

Although everyone agrees that August is very crowded, it appears that Monhegan residents and business owners, in general, agree that it is a tolerable state for a few weeks. Most are able to adjust in order to tolerate that month. However, it is also clear that Monhegan is very close to the limit in this regard.

In many ways, the way the island now has not crossed onto an unsustainable path. In a general sense, the island is experiencing a golden era in terms of the balance between maintaining its heritage and its economic base. Decisions that will keep it that way, and thus retain much of what makes Monhegan what it is and retain the economic base, are important. From an ecological viewpoint, in this land, fresh water, and effluent limited microcosm, any future growth is not desirable. From a profit maximizing point of view, a loss of the island's heritage resource would be highly undesirable.

Like many so-called "eco-destinations," a growing popularity and a changing visitor demographic are forces of change that many find incompatible with the past. Past and future will always be different. Yet for Monhegan's economy, a loss of the past may be disastrous. As we noted in the Visitor Survey Report, the island's economy depends on the core of long term summer residents and tourists that wish to spend a week or so on the island.

The island's economy is currently healthy. But the future of that health depends upon decisions made now. Those decisions will have to mediate the inherent differences that we have seen between business and non-business owners. In many ways, the way it is now is good. Decisions that will keep it that way, and thus retain much of what makes Monhegan what it is and retain the economic base, are important. Growth in this microcosm is not desirable.

Monhegan Associates has played a key role as the island's land steward. The maintenance of the wild characteristics of most of the island and the care for the ecology has very likely been crucial for keeping the visitor experience a very positive one. Yet there is an obvious tension between members and non-members. The vision for the island community's future must acknowledge the need for a working community as well as for a pristine, isolated, and wild destination. Open and representative meetings from which the decisions made represent all of the island's stakeholders must be the norm going forward.

Finally, this survey and both the 2004 reports raise several questions.

- Monhegan is a retreat for the wealthy, a home to a working community, and a place for visitors from a broad set of backgrounds. Yet Monhegan, as it is currently regulated, has no way to grow in a sustainable fashion. What is the plan that the community has for balancing these needs within these constraints?
- Monhegan's visitors' primary motive for coming to the island is threatened by the growing popularity of the destination. What will Monhegan's community determine the path to the future should be?

# Appendix

## ***Comments about change of plans:***

I just come anyway and stay.

I avoid certain boat rides.

I don't hike until after 4pm.and never go topless anymore.

Sometimes I lock my front door in august.

Cannot engage in some hobbies.

I go to town late and avoid cliffs and nearby traveled trails until 4:30pm.

I stay at home on the island, avoid town.

Spending time outdoors early & late in the day to avoid tourists. For example I hardly ever use the trails in the summer.

I don't invite houseguests during August; I avoid restaurants, and I come to town less frequently. I avoid some locations and activities.

I walk the less crowed trails or "non-boat" times...also closed "non-touristy" destinations.

I have to come in mid-season-late June, July, August, early/mid Sept and stay off trails when "trippers" are there.

I hike before 11:00am boat so that I encounter few if no one on the trails. I have plenty to keep me occupied until 4pm when the people activity becomes quieter.

Since I work out in public, I try to do jobs close to the road in the early am/ then move to more private jobs/gardens.

Forced off island and stay home.

I limit my hikes due to the crowds

I avoid going into the village as much as I can.

I prefer to do errands before or after ferry times.

I tend to feel crowed/claustrophobic on the roads in July/August, and find hiking, shopping, eating out & riding the ferry to be less enjoyable because of the numbers(and level of nervousness, neediness, and conciseness) of summer visitors

## **General Comments**

I disapprove of "gated communities", and in effect this would keep out those who aren't wealthy.

I lack information to give intelligent answer, but I approve goals and admire those who maintain the natural beauty of the environment.

I don't think day trippers should be allowed to bring dogs to the island. Could the Plantation taxpayers vote on this issue. The number of visitors is limited to those arriving by sea. Therefore these issues should be negotiated between the several interests concerned with respect shown to the admirable original goals of the Monhegan Associates.

In August I swear that people seem more rude-in my fair. August is the month when people seem to see Monhegan more as a historical re-creation than an active community-a community of people that actually appreciate personal space and boundaries.

Would have to see there are only so many hotels, rentals so don't see it getting a lot worse except for day trippers

According to my sources, poison ivy elimination requires use of herbicides while non-native organisms does not.

Any fee-ought- in large part- be used to support MISCA's efforts to buy homes and sell them at affordable prices to year round residents. The cost of buying homes-as opposed to the cost of trail maintenance is huge!

Cost of restaurant meals is exorbitant, causing residents to avoid them and tourists to feel they've been taken advantage of.

Attitudes of some business owners and employees are downright curmudgeonly, considering they are earning their livelihoods from the customers they disdain.

Lack of services such as garbage collection for taxpayers who are not year round residents.

The prevailing attitude that anyone "rich" enough to rent here or summer here should be prepared to toss money around without expecting value.

Quality of water and distribution problems/equipment old. Some year round residents concerned about issues and others don't care-but that's the way it is everywhere. It would be great to have a fee-for infrastructure and environment issues but this is a public place-cannot do it I think.

While I personally prefer less crowded times I am for whatever helps people live here year round, but does not change the essential nature of the island.

Monhegan Associates needs to be receptive in a timely basis when community needs are involved. Construction must be top deductible and support water improvement and needs of winter people (eg. repairs to decks, help toward college education, etc. lobster war, etc. survival of winter community is paramount.

Ask which businesses or services would be patronized if available- e.g., beauty/barber shop, manicurist.

Trail erosion is an increasing problem as is litter on the trails.

Fecal pollution of the swim beach and harbor is a potential threat to habitation on this island.

Sewerage (human) may very soon befoul the entire island. One epidemic of hepatitis or bacterial enteritis could take Monhegan off the tourist destination charts.

I love this island. Our children grew up on Monhegan in the summers. We, my husband and I, have rented for many years and are now interested in purchasing a house. The cost of housing here has doubled in four years. A current property has quadrupled. If the owners get what they are asking, we will never be able to afford a house.

My husband has his heart set on buying in on the house we rent. I just don't know if this is possible because the owners have grown children who want to now come to Monhegan.

My concern over a fee would be that families in moderate income bracket would be discouraged making a high fee=a community of wealthy visitors.

Dogs/limits (visitors); a: control; b: poop; c: place to put dog poop.

Garbage: Who should be responsible for garbage generated by individual visitors that put their coffee cups + soda bottles in every nook, cranny, thrown in bushes, etc?

How to control the numbers of "tour boats" that discharge passengers.

I have noticed a change in focus of visitors'. They used to bring lunch + head straight out to walk in wildlands; now-they seem, in great numbers - to be looking for lunch, bathroom, shops and diversions in town - which makes it seem more crowded because they fill up the road.

Camping, smoking in the wildlands, dog control, use of golf carts, misuse of garbage system are all issues for which we have rules-but no real consequences for not following them.

Also-an issue: the winter population is small. The long-stay summer population is diminished and often elderly. General community traditions are hard to keep up because of lack of a body of volunteers. The summer residents (all summer) is almost a thing of the past. SAD.

Associates is controlled by same people every year. They do not have a clue about the natives interests, living conditions, etc.

Only year round residents should hold office in the associates.

Dogs should not be allowed to be brought by day trippers.

Outsiders have no regard for privacy of islanders. They go anywhere on private property they want. More private property signs need to be displayed for those arrogant outsiders.

We have been renting a home on this island for several years - its our big vacation of the year with our 4 children (ages17-15-12-7). We didn't go to Disney World or spend money on other vacations - we save all year for Monhegan. Lately, house rental prices have caused us to reconsider what we will do. We need a sizable place with 4 children and we love and deeply care for Monhegan but 2500.00 /week-well we're not rich + 4 children are expensive. We are contemplating limiting out time to 1 week in June instead of the 2 we presently spent + eliminating our week in Sept. + other short trips over. If you add a fee in there to come onto the

island and multiply it by 6 it might cause us even more financial hardship we can't afford. The loss of Monhegan in our lives would be devastating but we must be realistic as well. Seems Monhegan is becoming an island for rich tourists, not average folks, even when we avoid the expensive eat out meals and try to bring enough groceries so we can still buy some to support locals without going broke ourselves.

Monhegan, unfortunately, is caught in the tourist catch 22. while residents are dependent on the tourist income in the summer months, it's easy to come to hate the boat loads of daytrippers - having lived & survived on the tourist \$ for many years in Key West, I can easily relate- After 12 years for me, it was time to go.

I personally come to Monhegan for its isolation and to recoup, paint, read, re-focus. I would not have a problem paying a "fee" to get on the island, however, considering I spend approximately a minimum of \$1500.00 on the island, for lodging, food, donations to the library, MERS, the museum, etc., I really feel that this fee would better be applied to daytrippers, who might just buy a meal or some trinkets. If it was kept to \$10, noting it was used for perseveration, I don't think it would deter many people.

The Monhegan associates might do best by remembering their original goals and intents. When they opened membership to anybody simply able to say "Monhegan" they diluted the quality of the organization.

Trespass is rampant on the island and I have far too many personal experiences with it to begin to list here. I am much in favor of maintaining the fishing community rather than encouraging any of the "anything for a buck" mentality currently now in vogue. I realize that modern greed makes that unlikely, but you asked.

Re: limiting visitors: would like fewer daytrippers- if the visitors were required to pay (not sure about that idea) I'd charge more for daytrippers than those who spend at least 2 nights.

Too many people in peak months the water gets shut off due to over use & waste by tourists the power gets shut off more often due to over use & waste by tourists.

Too many people on the trails-too much trash dropped all over island. People in the roads not getting out of the way of trucks. Too many tourist dogs and owners who won't pick up after them.

In addition to experiencing an increase in visitors to the island, I believe we have seen a change in what at least some visitors seek here. As the Inn is updated and more shops have opened- along I'm sure with the mainland and boat charges - we seem to have more people coming to experience the village and shopping and eating - rather than just the natural beauty and native, non-tourist, i.e. fishing community.

I believe I have also experienced a socialization of the human community- in the form of more organized institutional activities - an expectation that all participate. I have always loved here in part for its fostering of "just being" that is harder to do. One is viewed as a deficient member of the community for not baking, making, etc. for every, fund raisers etc.

The simple way of life Monhegan associates & others treasured is not so simple, it seems anymore. People want the specialness of here and everything else they have anywhere else. It used to be one traded one for the other.

I like being for something rather than against something. (I've observed that being for something is often more effective-and may have better karma!) So I would say I am for preserving Monhegan's 'wild-lands' through purchase by Monhegan Associates and I am for preserving

Monhegan year-round community through providing affordable housing. I think Monhegan Associates' success in obtaining land has been because it is 'for preservation'- not 'against building' (although an obvious consequence of preserving the wild-lands has been to limit building.) It is too soon to say whether the Monhegan Island Sustainable Community Association (MISCA) will be a success, but I believe its acceptance so far has been because it is 'For preserving community' rather than 'taking back our island from the summer people' (although a consequence of its success would be increasing the number of year-round homes and decreasing the number of summer houses).

I am for a fee (or tax) on boat passengers that would largely benefit MISCA's effort to buy houses (because I see that as the most urgent need-and the one that requires the greatest amount of money). I would also be for a real estate transfer tax on Monhegan dedicated to buying affordable housing.