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# Tennessee River Basin Network Meeting

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**August 13-14, 2018**

**Knoxville Convention Center, Knoxville, TN**

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## *Post-Meeting Summary*

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The Tennessee River Basin Network (TRBN) convened its 4<sup>th</sup> annual meeting on August 13-14, 2018. Held for the first time at the Knoxville Convention Center, a total of 86 participants attended, representing 50 organizations—an increase of 10 more participants and 4 more organizations than in 2017.

The overall meeting goals were similar to 2017:

- Facilitate collaborative exchange and partnership results across the TRBN
- Sustain momentum of past years
- Celebrate Network achievements

As a result, the TRBN agreed on action steps to further implement TRBN's priorities:

- Continued evolution of a transparent governance structure and **development of a shared mission and vision**
- **Leverage of the Hidden Rivers film and development of targeted local messaging** including
  - Formation of a social media base (start of organizational hashtags)
  - Use of tools and messaging approaches to customize outreach to the needs/interests of diverse constituencies
- **Initial ideas for a communications team and an outreach plan**
- **Development of a strategic plan that defines selection of projects and issues to put into action** i.e., education or outreach tools

More details on the program and results are below.

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## Outcomes

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The 2018 TRBN meeting was a departure from prior gatherings in that the action planning combined participants into mixed constituencies rather than holding breakouts specifically for the Science and Management Community of Practice (CoP) and the Communications and Outreach CoP. The combination of the groups working together resulted in a unified approach and agreement on the future of TRBN. Most significant was that TRBN meeting participants agreed on the following:

### Vision and Mission Statement

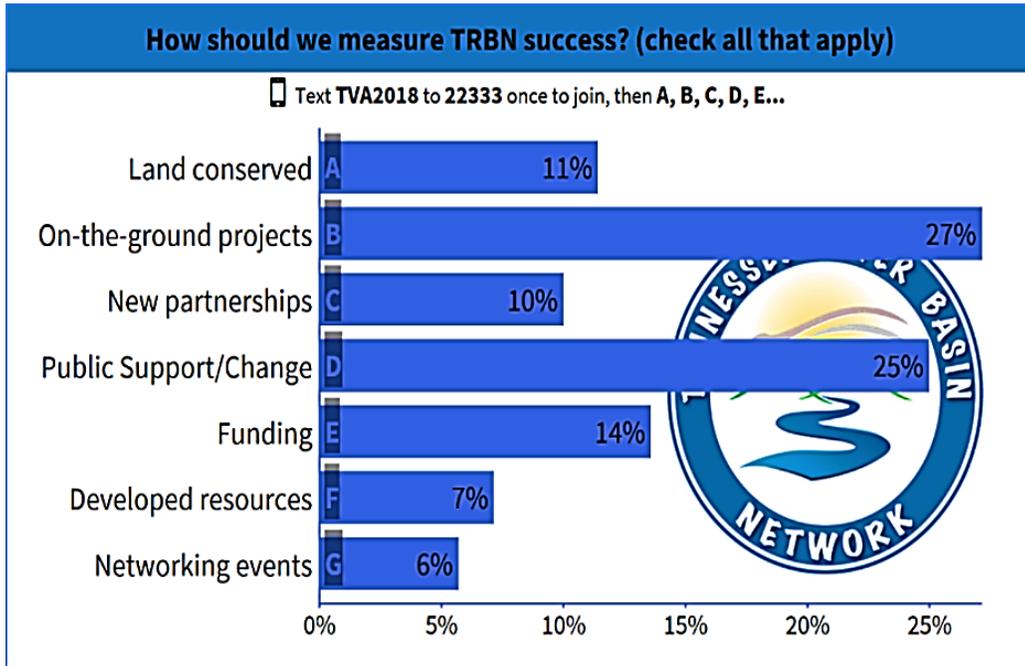
Foremost on the list of meeting outcomes was the creation of agreed-upon vision and mission statements. In the pre-meeting, Gillian Bee, Clemson Conservation Fellow, engaged the steering committee to draft the vision and mission statements that were then used in the plenary session to survey participants using text-to-vote software. The result was broad agreement for the vision and mission statements:

The future of the TRBN was further defined by this survey of participants and the feedback demonstrated in the data results below.

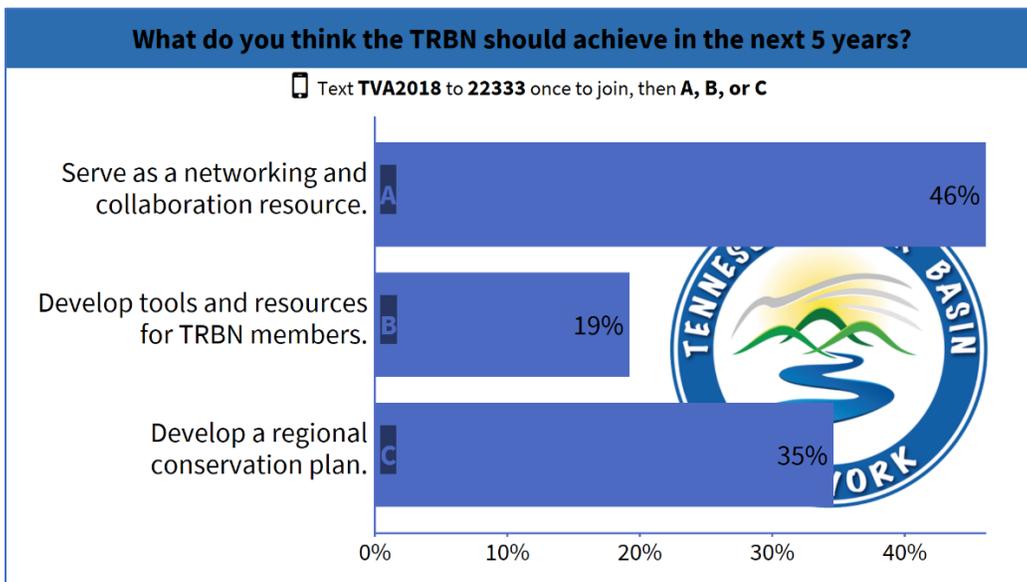
**Vision Statement:**  
*A Tennessee River Basin where aquatic biodiversity and humans thrive.*

**Mission Statement:**  
*To inspire and empower the people of the TRB to effectively steward the region's aquatic biodiversity.*

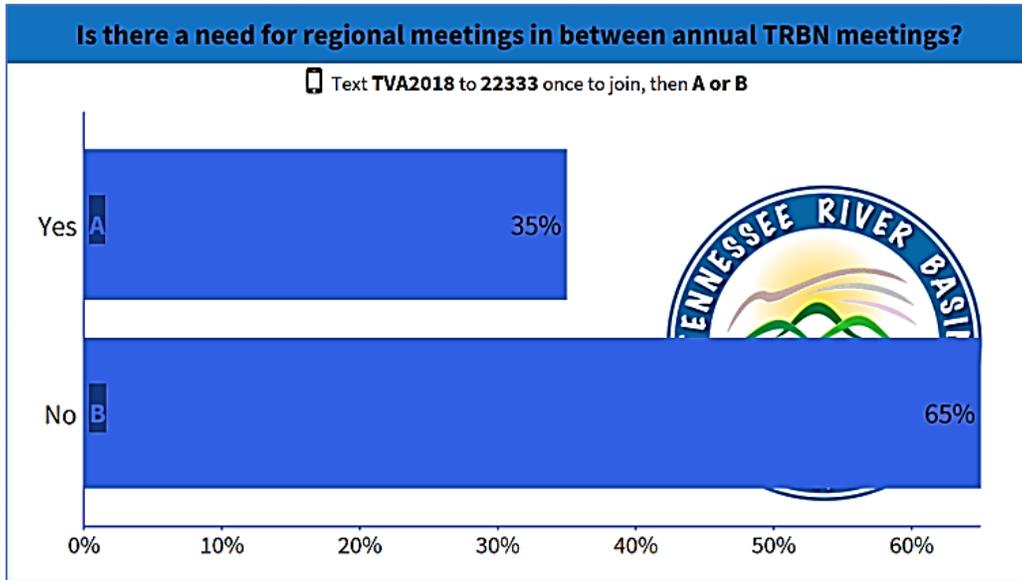
- Fifty percent of the attendees indicated TRBN success by either on-the-ground projects or public support for change.



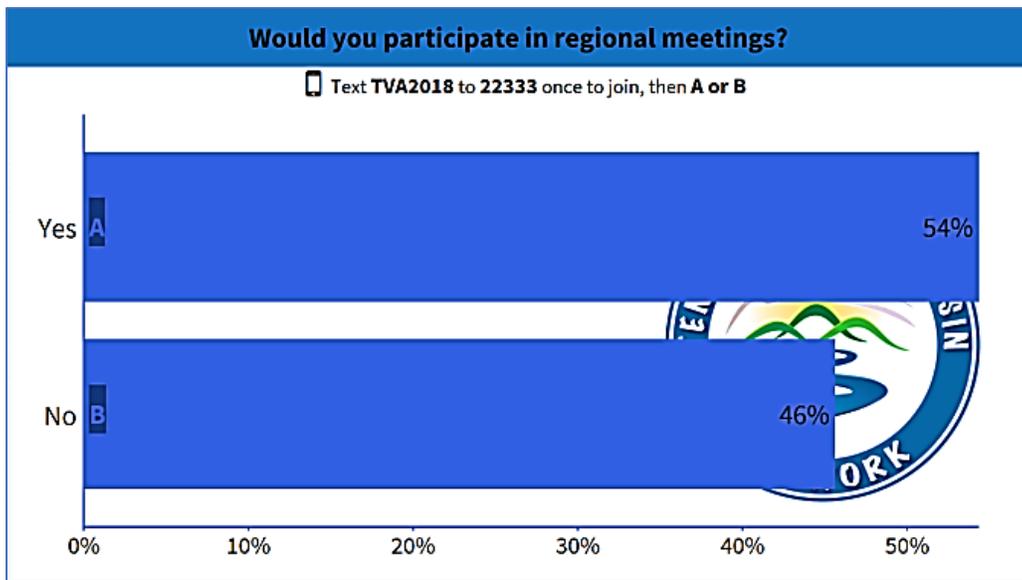
- Almost half of respondents (46%) support TRBN’s role as a resource for networking and collaboration. A third (35%) support the creation of a regional conservation plan.



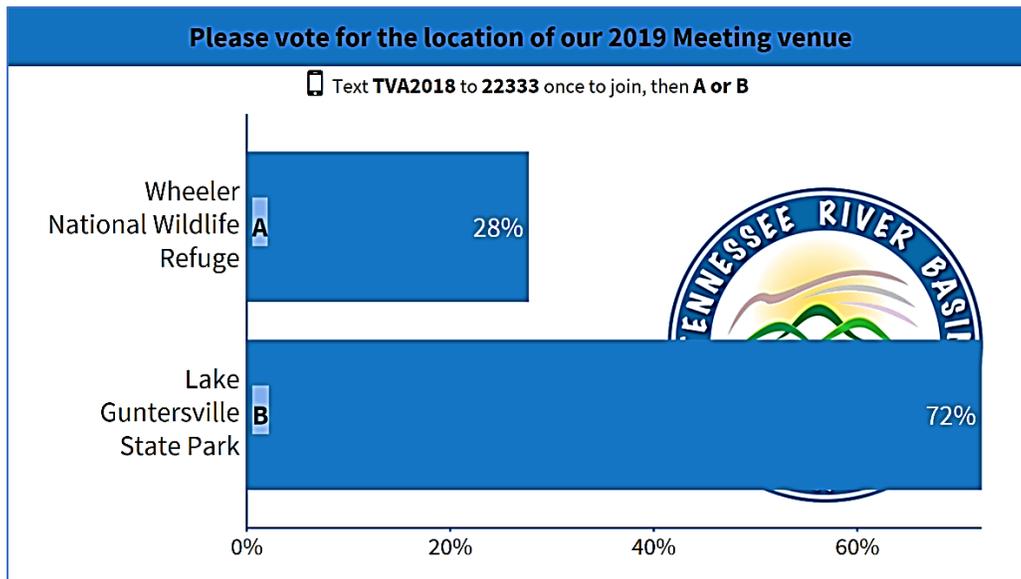
- Polling regarding regional meetings drew mixed results: A 65% majority felt there wasn't a need for regional meetings while 35% favored holding them.



- Oddly, in a follow-up question, 54% said they would participate in regional meetings. These questions might be worth further examination to determine the kinds of programs of interest and the extent of shared or wider-ranging interests or training needs that could lead to desired outcomes.



- Finally, participants voted for the location of the 2019 meeting venue, selecting Lake Guntersville State Park over Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge in a vote of 72% to 28%.



The second outcome was a strong commitment and proposed actions to leverage the impact of the Hidden Rivers film and development of targeted local messaging. Participants expressed strong support for using the film as both a vehicle to engage a broad range of constituencies in understanding the global significance of the Tennessee River Basin and its biodiversity and thus the importance of its ongoing health for humans and other species. The special preview film screened by Jeremy Monroe also primed the discussion and ideas for developing additional localized films across the Basin and the next-day discussion on the potential for engaging local constituencies through messaging and ideas for outreach to broaden the seats at the table and ultimate support for maintaining and enhancing the integrity of the Basin.

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## *Summary of Meeting Sessions and Awards*

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**Day 1** kicked-off with a welcome from Shannon O'Quinn of the Tennessee Valley Authority, followed by Kendra Briechele of The Conservation Fund providing the meeting goals and laying the groundwork for the agenda.

### **Session 1:**

#### **Organizing the Future of the TRBN**

##### ***Gillian Bee, Clemson University, Landscape Conservation Fellow***

**Gillian Bee** launched the core program with Organizing the Future of the TRBN--guiding the development of the needed infrastructure for the network. In addition to developing the vision and mission statement as highlighted above, Gillian mapped out the approach for creating transparent governance, introducing the 14 TRBN Steering Committee members, who represent non-profit, federal, state, and academic organizations, and will be further helping to define the TRBN values, vision, mission, strategic objectives, and actions.

### **Session 2:**

#### **A Fish Story... or one about a Mussel, or...**

##### ***Luke Etchison, North Carolina Wildlife Commission***

##### ***Ronald Lambert, Nature Conservancy***

##### ***Dr. Mounir Minkara, Director of the Chattanooga Water Quality Program***

This panel session provided three on-the-ground success stories with examples of TRBN implementation and stewardship.

**Luke Etchison** shared the work of multiple agencies and partners to save the sicklefin redhorse, distributed only in the Little Tennessee and Hiwassee River basins. The NC Wildlife Commission, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, and five other partners signed on to a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) in December 2015, with additional organizations engaged in the propagation and other management activities to sustain the fish's health.

**Ronald Lambert** provided an engaging session on the Clinch-Powell Clean Rivers Initiative. The team secured \$3.4 million in NRCS EQIP funds to support a BMP

Implementation Priority Ranking System using GIS Based Modeling across five counties in southwest Virginia and northeast Tennessee. This enabled them to identify Priority Aquatic Habitat Zones and Priority Agricultural Restoration Areas in the Upper Clinch-Powell Project Area to protect freshwater mussels. The identified zones strategically direct EQIP project funding to those lands with greatest restoration needs and/or greatest potential ecological benefits.

**Dr. Mounir Minkara** shared urban examples of protecting, restoring, and enhancing the TRBN. Programs ranged from stormwater education and enhancement programs for single-family homes to green grants to restore and enhance neighborhoods and the broader environment, and to stream restoration using an array of green infrastructure techniques.

### **Session 3:**

#### **Keynote: A Vision for the Future of TRBN**

##### ***Sandra Meola, Director of the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed***

**Sandra Meola** delivered the keynote address on the Coalition's approach to watershed partnerships and management. She spoke on the range of partners, the mission statement, activities, and history, driving toward the broader governance of the coalition organization. She also highlighted the challenges of a four-state partnership seeking to work together—while facing issues of trust, transparency, open communications, and shared vision. Ultimately, they found strength in joint priority-setting, creating a “big tent” to work together on projects that they could never accomplish on their own. Ultimately, they brought four governors together to discuss Delaware River issues. The result was unprecedented funding support and agreement for broader shared goals.

#### **Evening Program: Awards and the Hidden Rivers Film Preview.**

**David Bowling**, Vice President of TVA, and **Shannon O’Quinn** recognized the achievements of the Science and Management CoP and the Communication and Outreach CoP. The Little River Chapter of Trout Unlimited was acknowledged as the 2018 Science & Management Winner for their efforts to protect and improve cold water fisheries, and the Powell River Blueway Trail was honored as the 2018 Education & Outreach Winner for its dedicated focus on education, river access, and economic development for the Powell River watershed in Tennessee.

The Hidden Rivers film preview generated additional interest and excitement as a powerful tool to engage a wide range of constituents. Jeremy Monroe provided ideas and discussed how the 2019 film release can increase awareness as well as provide ways to strengthen outreach across the TRBN. Vehicles for outreach could include additional projects, needs, and opportunities ranging from geographically specific films, policy campaigns, movie nights, engagement with schools as well as government decisionmakers, and coupling the film with other tools such as the TRBN Report Card.

**Day 2** of the meeting focused on the potential for targeted outreach and messaging.

#### **Session 4:**

##### **Update on 2017 Meeting Research Topics—TRBN Report Card**

*Heath Kelsey, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science*

**Heath Kelsey** returned to the TRBN meeting with an update on the 2017 TRBN Report Card that set up discussions on how to improve the “C” grade. He noted the threats to the Basin, region-specific health, and the means to better manage the Basin. The report card and the methods report are both available on-line at <http://ian.umces.edu/press/publications/575,576>. Heath also shared two guides that provide diverse perspectives for understanding the importance of protecting and managing the Basin: 1) *A Scientist’s Guide to Influencing Decision-making* and 2) *A Decision-Maker’s Guide to Using Science*. This set up the day’s focus on how to reach and break down barriers from different constituencies.

#### **Session 5:**

##### **Raising Awareness within the TRBN**

*Jeremy Monroe, Freshwaters Illustrated*

*Moshay Simpson, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement*

*Thom Benson, Director of External Affairs, TN Aquarium*

*Gillian Bee, Clemson University, Landscape Conservation Fellow*

The next session provided a panel of speakers, starting with a few comments by **Jeremy Monroe** on the use of the Hidden Rivers film, followed by **Moshay Simpson** offering up the means to share the TRBN vision, mission, and values with other groups by

- 1) developing the message and using it consistently across the network for internal and external communications;
- 2) identifying who the range of stakeholders are, their motivations, how they receive information, and how you communicate on what you want them to know or do;
- 3) creating time to engage stakeholders ranging from face-to-face connections, phone calls, site visits, events, tours, digital media, email, etc. and controlling the narrative using coaching, clarifying, correcting, collaborating, and compelling; and
- 4) evaluating results over time by gauging the effectiveness of the engagement and how motivations, stakeholders, and organizations have changed. He closed by noting, “You’re never done messaging.”

**Thom Benson** indicated the need to be good storytellers, to share stories using social networks including Facebook, twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and others tailored to the target audience. He shared the value of celebrity endorsements, such as the media attention from Fabian Cousteau’s recent visit to the Tennessee Aquarium. Finally, he stressed the need to budget for social media and have a vision for where the “story” is going.

**Gillian Bee** provided some final remarks, focused on the need to go beyond email communication platforms using tools such as google sheets, google suites, and basecamp.

## **Session 6: Exercise & Discussion on Messaging to Different Constituents**

### ***Kendra Briechele, The Conservation Fund***

The final session sought to “stitch the quilt together” through a small-group messaging exercise followed by a plenary discussion on priorities led by meeting facilitator, Kendra Briechele. The table group participants dug into the exercise, playing the role of six different stakeholder groups—representing businesses, public land managers, scientists and conservation organizations, communications and educators, landowners including timber and farm interests and elected officials/decisionmakers. Each table discussed the constituents’ concerns; the message points that would address the concerns, answer questions or spark interest; and the communication style for engaging the constituents.

## Next Steps

Kendra then turned to the final discussion to ask what's next? The result was a list of priorities for 2018-2019 focused on three buckets:

- 1) Planning
  - Create a strategic plan with goals and objectives
  - Develop a communications and outreach plan
  - Leverage the Hidden Rivers plan
- 2) Outreach and Communications
  - Form a social media base, beginning with a list of organization hashtags
  - Craft local targeted messaging (i.e. residents, government officials, etc.) and use range of tools to reach local constituents
- 3) Project Implementation
  - Choose a couple of projects/issues and put into action (ideas included areas with broad impacts for education or outreach tools)

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## *Evaluation Feedback and Participation Profile*

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Review of the Evaluation gleans interesting results. The numbers showed that 16 people completed the evaluation out of 86 total participants--a 19% return. Of those who filled out the evaluation, the composition of evaluations did not align with the broader meeting registration (non-profits accounted for 40% of the participants but only 4 of the 16 evaluations). Nevertheless, in 2018 one more person completed the evaluation.

### **Evaluation Feedback**

Participants made several suggestions of support for how to improve the meeting. Details are provided in the attached database but here is an overview of several thought-provoking comments. Of note, participants expressed IDEAS, TRENDS and SUGGESTED ACTIONS.

#### **IDEAS:**

- Interest in an orientation or introduction to TRBN and resources as well as how to engage the TRBN community
- The value of the professionalism of presentations
- Support for more interactive "games" to promote discussion and fun throughout the meeting.
- Interest in providing more examples of on-the-ground work

#### **TRENDS:**

- The value of networking opportunities that the TRBN meeting provides
- Broad-ranging kudos for the sessions: Participants expressed support for the range of sessions, take-aways, and even speakers, meaning that while Hidden Rivers film received the best overall session response, other sessions pulled in close behind in an overall narrow margin. Participants commented on the value of every session from governance structure to session development, from on-the-ground success stories to messaging outreach, and from the keynote to the Report Card, resulting in a fairly even appreciation of the range of sessions.

**SUGGESTED ACTIONS** to improve TRBN’s future outcomes:

- Continue outreach, information, and updates throughout the year
- Feature more on-the-ground restoration presentations
- Translate large-scale goals to local-scale implementation
- Determine ways to facilitate funding partnerships or provide time to figure this out and engage other partners
- Have a product that results from the meeting (Note: Arguably, the steering committee development of the mission and vision statements provided such a product this year.)
- Increase diversity in a wide range of ways, including engaging people of color, federal agencies, state (TDEC) and local agencies, state legislators supportive of environment record, universities, businesses, and US ACE. A 2018 participant even recommended a future participant or speaker, suggesting inviting Jane Polansky, TN DEC Blueways Establishment [jane.polansky@tn.gov](mailto:jane.polansky@tn.gov) next year)
- In the future, TRBN might consider sending out post-meeting online evaluations to see if that results in a higher rate of return.

A last comment from the evaluations came from a participant who expressed gratitude for making this meeting affordable.

**PARTICIPATION PROFILE:**

Shifting to the summary of overall registration and attendance, at the baseline level, the 2018 meeting saw an overall increase in participants and organizations as well as a higher percentage of attendees. This may be due to the shift from Chattanooga to Knoxville and inclusion of people attending regionally.

<b><u>2017</u></b>	<b><u>2018</u></b>	<b><u>Difference</u></b>
76 Attendees	86 Attendees	+ 10 Attendees
46 Organizations	50 Organizations	+ 4 New Organizations
~ 40% New attendees	~ 50% New attendees	~ 10% New Attendees

Additional data can be drawn from the registration, highlighted here in text and graphs:

- **Past Participation:** overall annual participation trends
- **Organization Type:** participant composition (with 40% of participants representing non-profits, 30% federal, and 17% state government, 11% other, and 2% business);
- **Geographic Focus:** stepping down from Upper Tennessee River Basin to the Middle, and Lower Basin, and including people from other geographies
- **Taxa or Group(s):** percent of people working on aquatic and terrestrial taxa

