

Having “the Talk”: How to Communicate with Utahns about Water

APA UT Spring Conference
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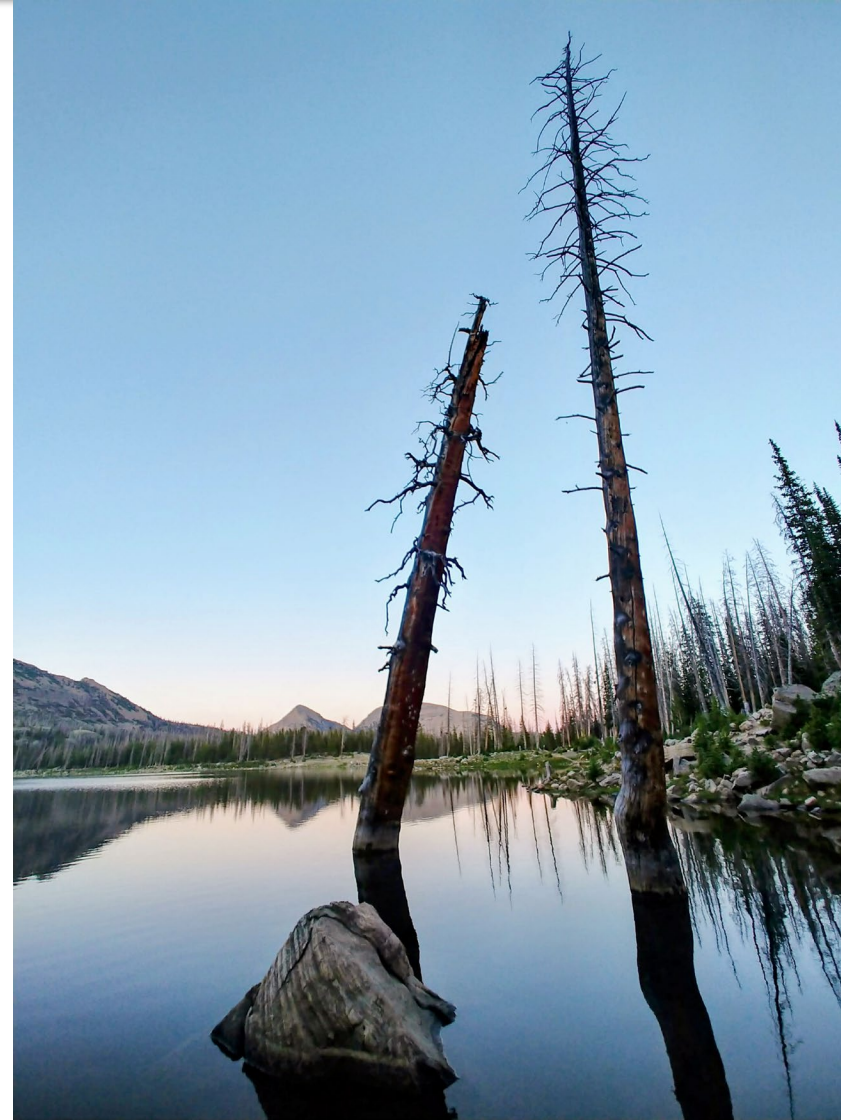


**Envision
Utah**

How we grow matters.

What region do you live/work in?

1. Bear River (BRAG)
2. Wasatch Front (WFRC)
3. Mountainland (MAG)
4. Uintah Basin
5. Six County
6. Five County
7. Southeast Utah



Throughout most of 2024, Envision Utah conducted this research with partners including Utah Water Ways, Utah Division of Water Resources, and the office of The Great Salt Lake Commissioner. This included a multi-day focus group followed by this survey at the end of the summer.



MODE	Online survey
LENGTH	20 minutes
DATES	August 22 – September 8, 2024
GEOGRAPHY	Utah

AUDIENCE and SAMPLE	General public living in Utah, 18+ (n=800) <ul style="list-style-type: none">Weighted to reflect Utah population based on CountyFor comparison, margin of error for a true probability sample of this size would be +/- 3.47
DEMOS	To ensure a representative sample, quotas were imposed on key demographics such as gender, age and ethnicity



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WATER VALUES MESSAGING GUIDE

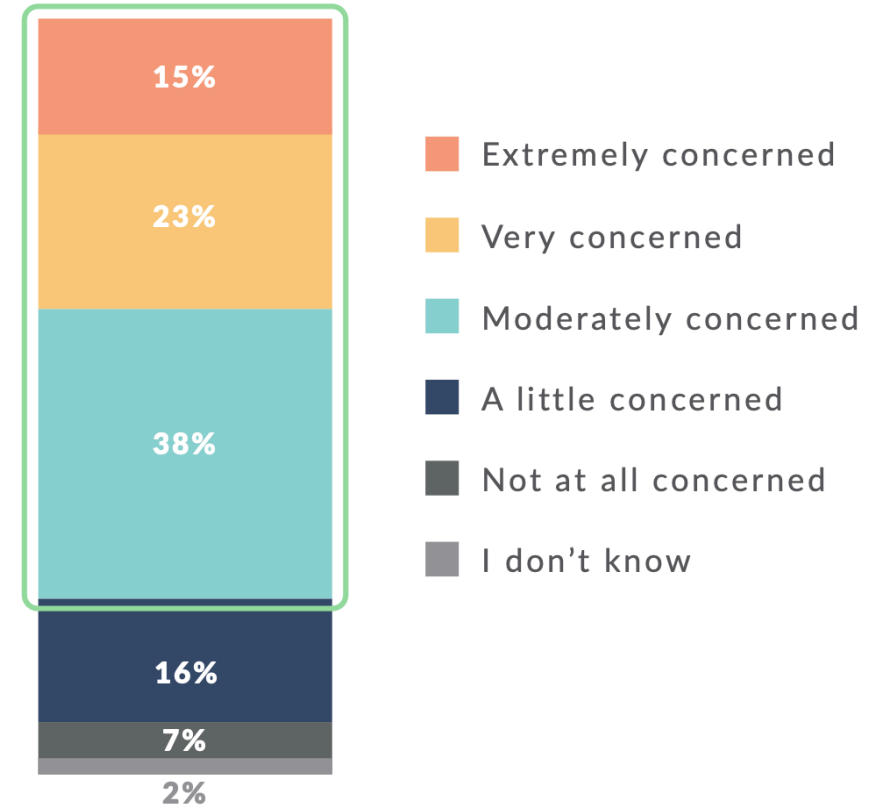
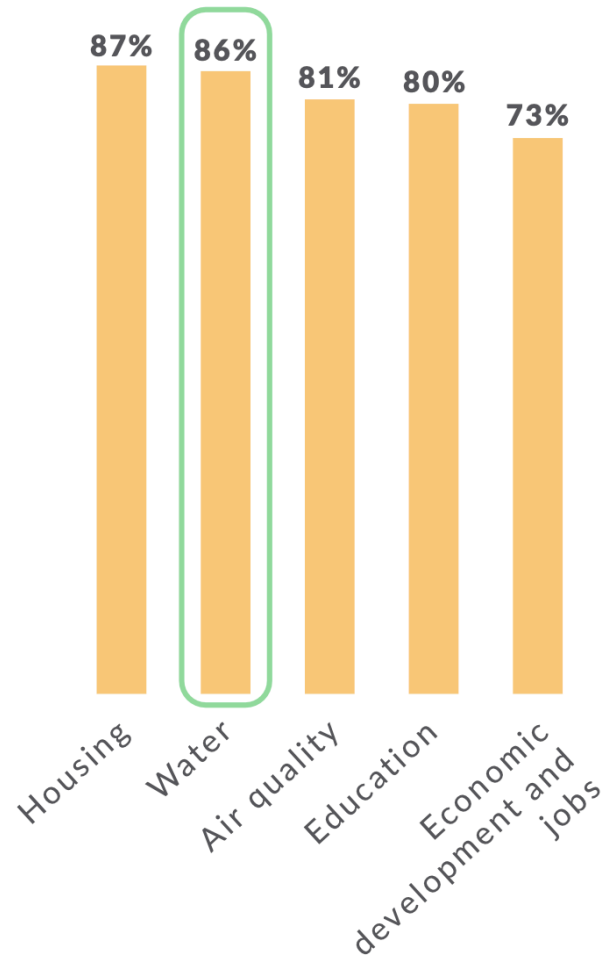
TALKING TO UTAHNS ABOUT WATER

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW No. 1

**Utahns understand water's significance to
quality of life in Utah.**

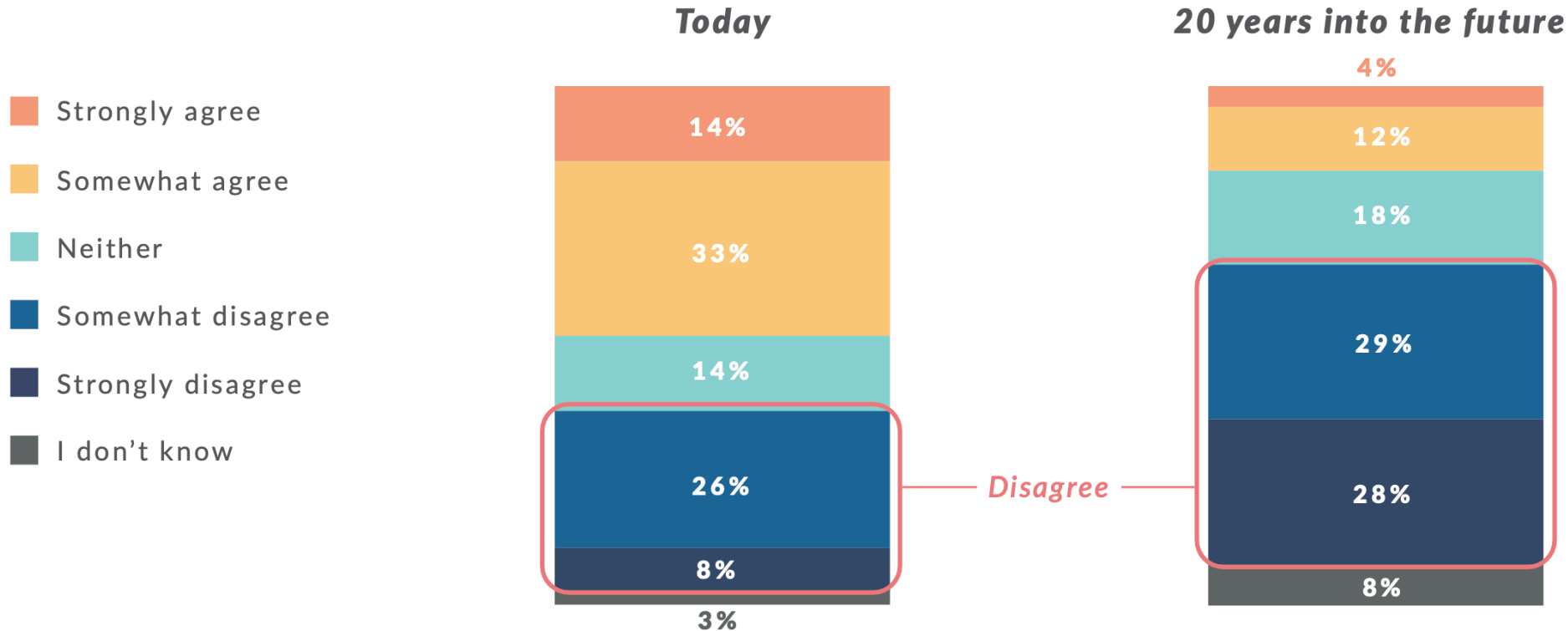
Utahns believe that water matters. When asked to think about the future, they **consistently rank water as one of the top issues in Utah today**. Three out of four Utahns express some level of concern about water.

Percentage of respondents who rated these issues a 6 or 7 on the scale of importance, 7 being "extremely important."



Only about half of Utahns think we have sufficient water to meet demand today, and a **majority don't think we have sufficient water supply for the future.**

Utah has sufficient water supply to meet demand...

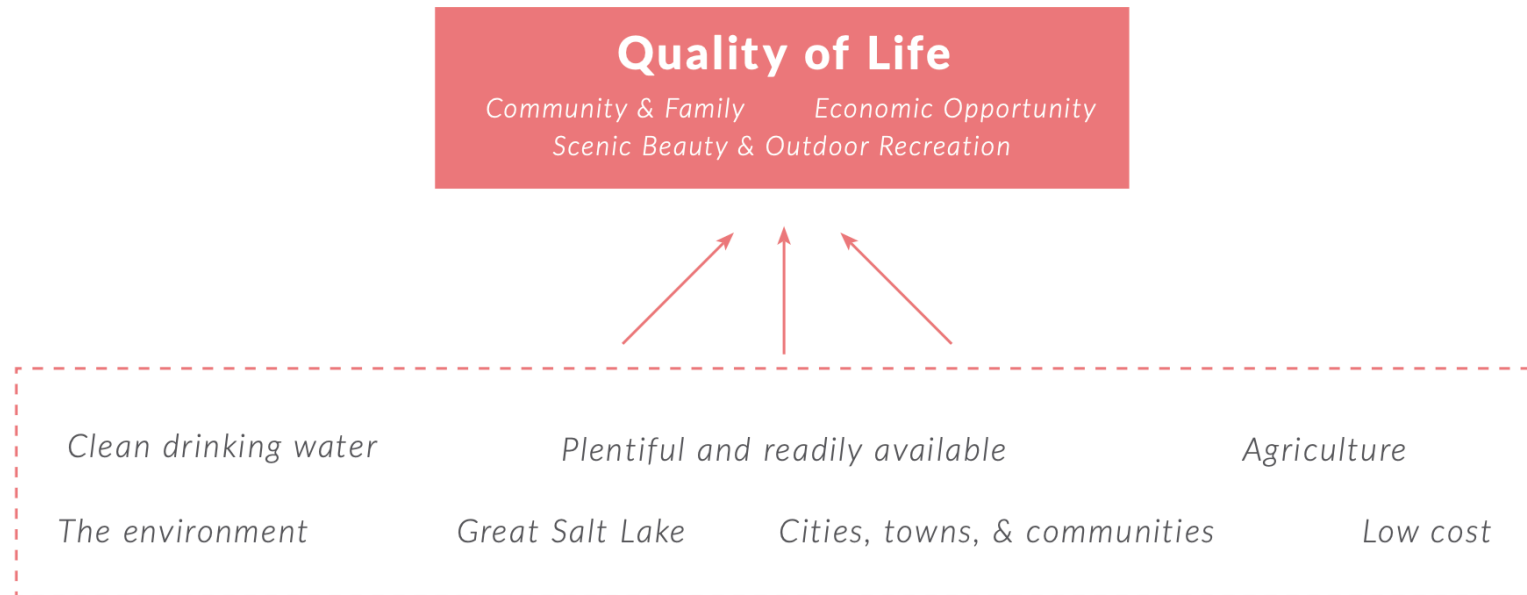


Utahns care about water for a variety of reasons including its essential function in daily living, the importance of water for food production, supporting communities, preserving the Great Salt Lake, and more. Having enough water for living, protecting nature, and having food security ultimately contribute to a sense of well-being, security, and hope for the future.

Well-being/balance/wholeness

Hope for the future

Personal safety and security



In other words, Utahns understand the importance of water. They get that it is essential to everything that makes a great quality of life in Utah.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW No. 2

There are still a lot of things Utahns don't know about water.

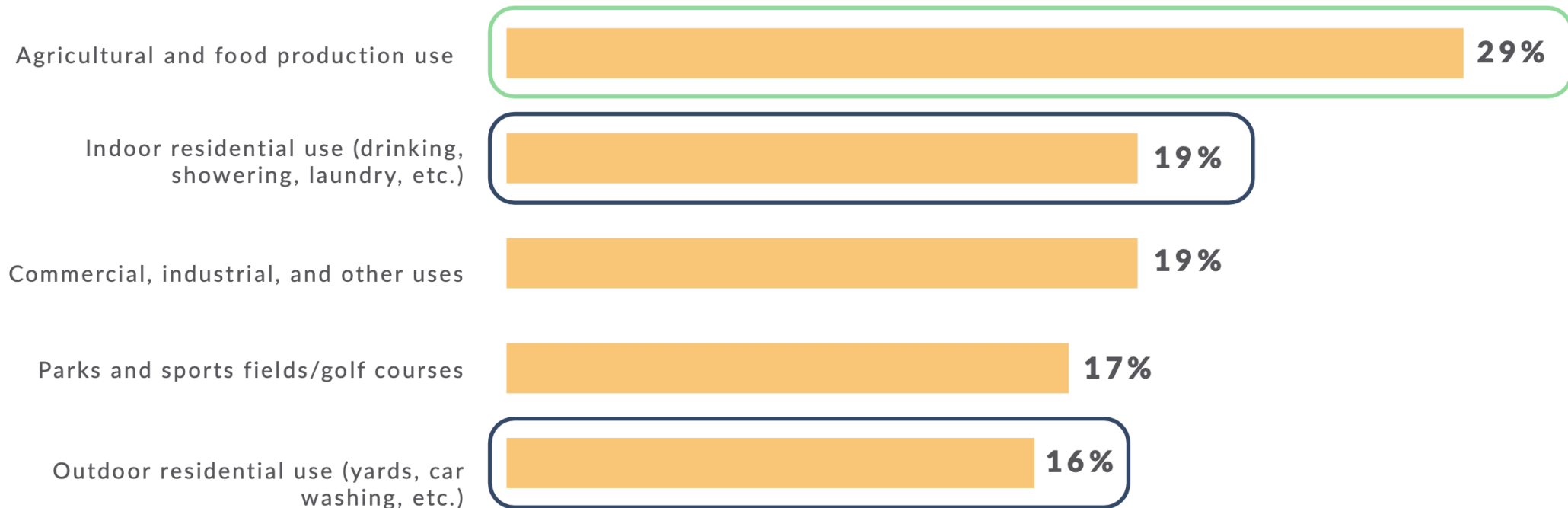
Nearly all Utahns believe they are **at or below average in terms of their water use**. While this could be mathematically possible, it is most likely not accurate that 9 out of 10 Utahns are at or below average water use.



Utahns recognize that **agriculture and food production** take the most water in Utah, but they underestimate the share of water that goes towards agriculture and food production.

Utahns also incorrectly assume that **more water is used indoors than outdoors in residential areas.**

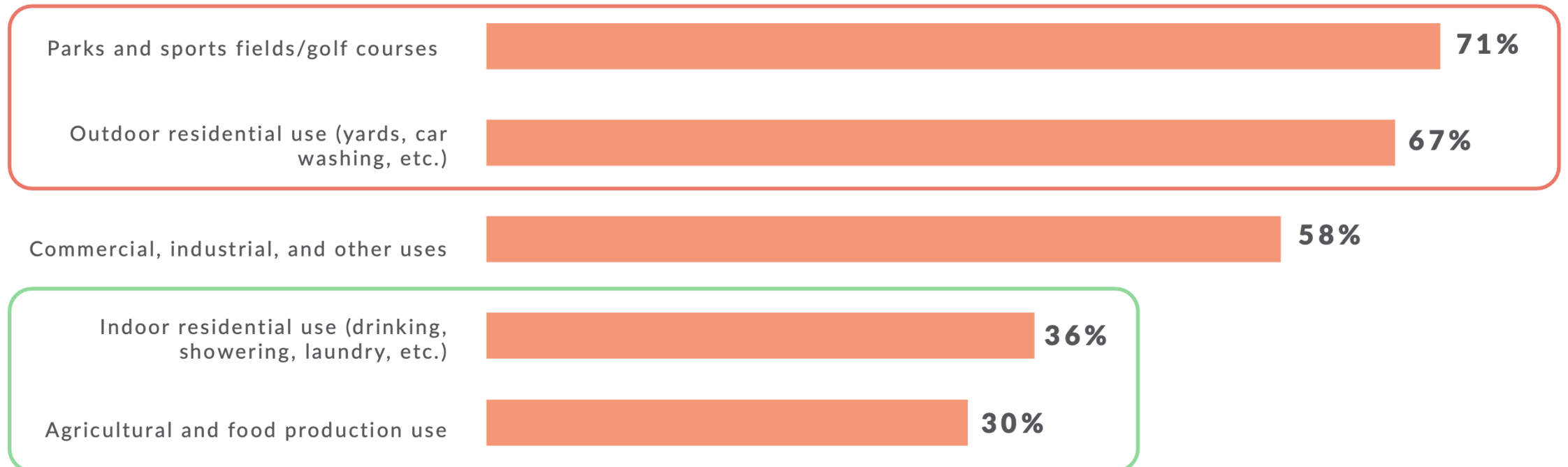
Based on what you know or think, how much water is consumed in each of the different ways below?



But, even though Utahns see **outdoor recreational** and **outdoor residential** use as the two lowest consumers of water, Utahns say **these two areas use too much water**.

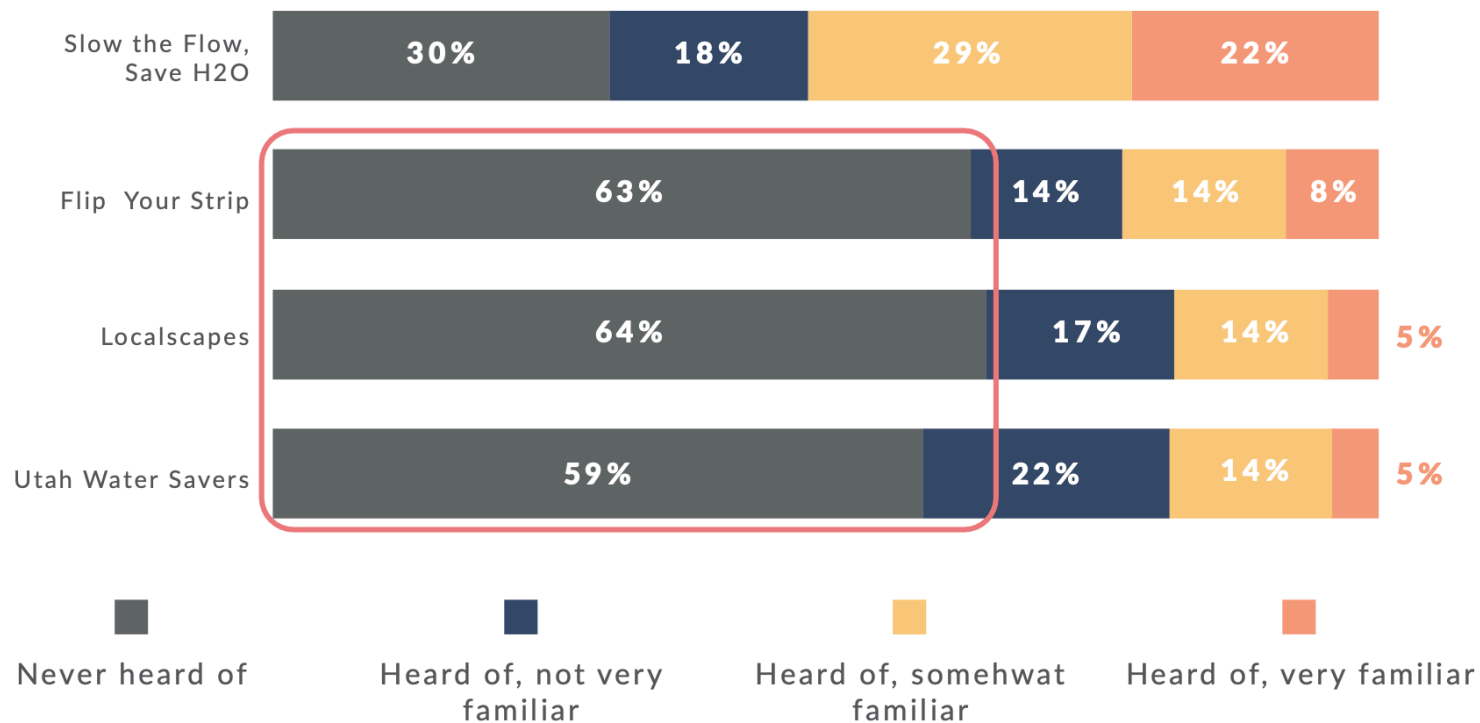
Agriculture and **indoor residential** water use is seen as **more reasonable or valuable**.

For each of the following uses, please indicate whether you agree or disagree that too much water is being used (percentage of respondents who “agree”).

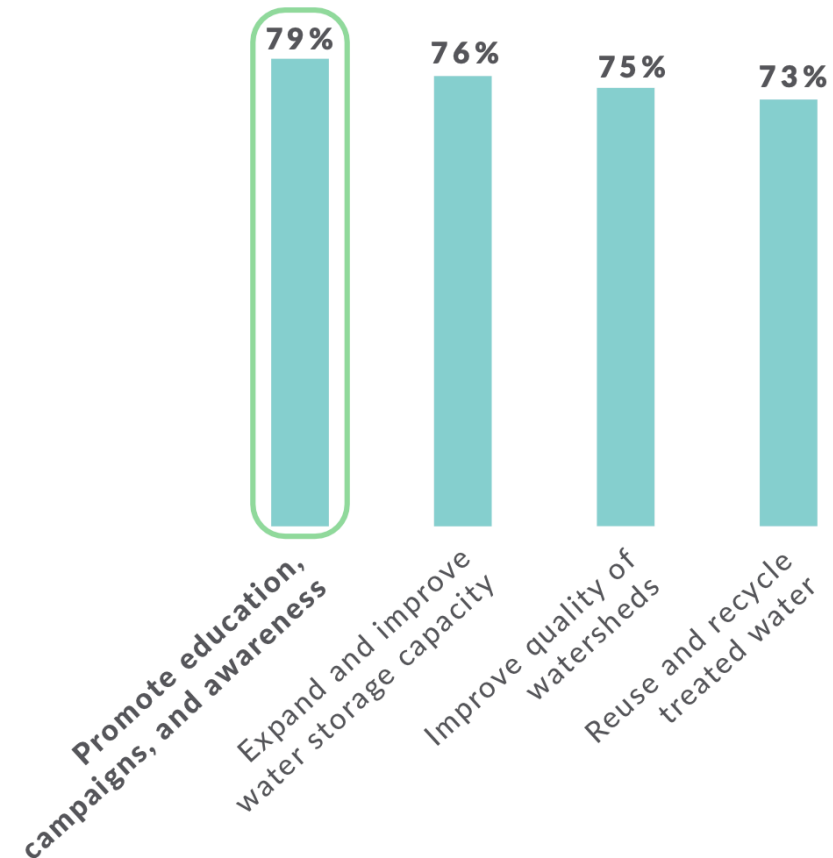


Most Utahns haven't heard about other water conservation campaigns outside of "Slow the Flow." But Utahns say **they would support other campaigns and more information** about water conservation initiatives.

Please indicate your level of familiarity with the following water conservation efforts.



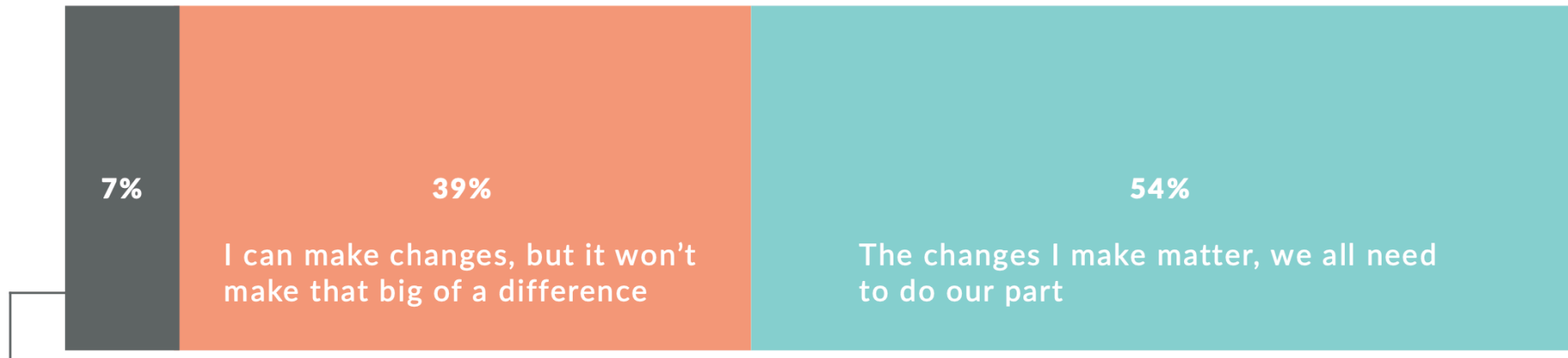
Percentage of respondents who rated the following solutions a 4 or 5 on a 1 to 5 scale, 5 being "fully support."



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW No. 3

Most Utahns feel they can make a difference and see a role for themselves, but that's not the case for everyone. And there are still some barriers.

A slight majority of Utahns believe they can make a difference in the water situation, **but nearly half don't believe their efforts will make a big difference or a difference at all.**

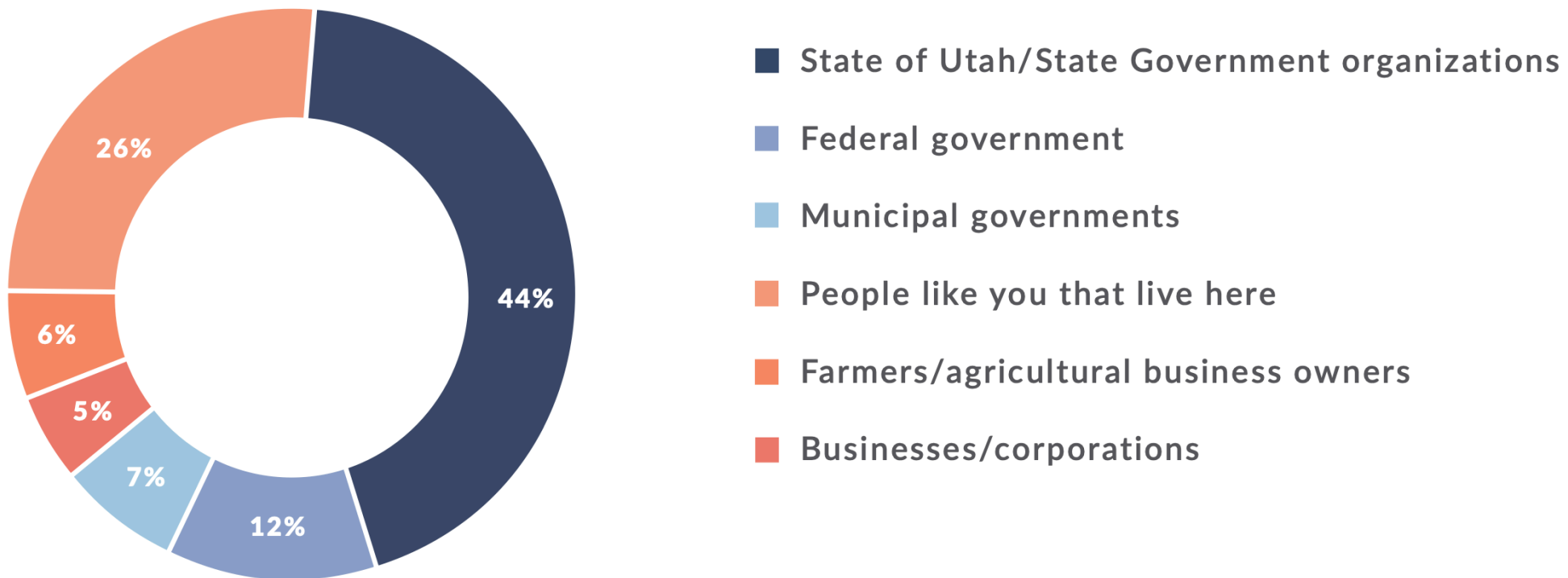


Nothing I do makes a difference, there are much bigger consumers that need to make a change

Our research also shows that peoples' motivation to make changes can be affected by simply having conversations about water.

Most Utahns believe that **the government** should take the lead on local water conservation. They also see **a large role for themselves** in conservation efforts.

When it comes to water conservation, who do you believe has the most responsibility to help solve water shortage issues that Utah may face?



When it comes to messaging, here are our recommended strategies:

1. **Connect** messages to Utahns' existing values.
2. **Educate** people about the specifics.
3. Use **wording and phrases** that resonate most with Utahns.
4. Use **illustrations or images** to help convey landscaping alternatives

Utahns understand the **connection between water and quality of life**. Framing issues in terms of quality of life activates those connections. Not only are those connections more motivating, but they also cast a wider net.

Well-being/balance/wholeness

Hope for the future

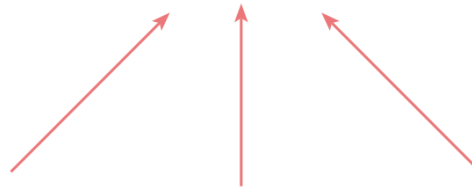
Personal safety and security

Quality of Life

Community & Family

Economic Opportunity

Scenic Beauty & Outdoor Recreation



Clean drinking water

Plentiful and readily available

Agriculture

The environment

Great Salt Lake

Cities, towns, & communities

Low cost



Top perceived drawbacks of water-smart landscaping:



Not as good for recreational uses

Could make yard hotter



Not as good for dogs



Utahns would be more likely to change their landscaping if:

It was affordable



They could get up-front incentive money

They knew it would be attractive and provide for the recreation and lifestyle needs of their family



They knew it would require less maintenance



■ WORDING RECOMMENDATIONS: WATER

POSITIVE RESPONSE

Affordable water
Recycle/reuse water
Water for future generations
Water sustainability
Water supply

NEGATIVE RESPONSE

Water waste
Water shortage

POLARIZING RESPONSE

Water restrictions
Water mandates

■ WORDING RECOMMENDATIONS: GRASS

POSITIVE RESPONSE

Recreational grass

NEGATIVE RESPONSE

Non-functional grass
Useless grass

POLARIZING RESPONSE

Decorative grass
Ornamental grass
Non-essential grass

Both **positive** and **negative** response words can be used in messaging depending on the desired reaction. Response sentiment simply informs us how each wording will be received, not what should or should not be used. **Polarizing** here means the response to these wordings is more unpredictable.

■ WORDING RECOMMENDATIONS: LANDSCAPING

STRONG POSITIVE RESPONSE

Water-smart

Water-efficient

Waterwise

Native

MODERATE POSITIVE RESPONSE

Localscaping

Desert landscaping

Xeriscaping

■ WORDING RECOMMENDATIONS: UTAH WATER CAMPAIGNS

STRONG POSITIVE RESPONSE

Slow the Flow, Save H2O

Rebates

Utah Water Savers

MODERATE POSITIVE RESPONSE

Flip your Strip

Exercise:

At your table, develop a message to encourage residential water conservation in your community.

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The following messages illustrate how to use the values framework effectively.

“Smart water use is essential to everything that makes Utah a great place to live. Our communities, our economy, and the beautiful outdoors all rely on us being good stewards of our water.”

WHY THIS MESSAGE WORKS

- Connects smart water use to more important and universal priorities related to quality of life in Utah.
- Appeals to a sense of stewardship.
- Plays on the term “water-smart,” which tested well.

“When you save water, you save money. But more importantly, you help make sure that Utah remains a great place to live for future generations.”

WHY THIS MESSAGE WORKS

- Ties pragmatic concerns (cost savings) to higher-level values like taking care of future generations.
- Evokes a sense of hope for the future.
- Appeals to cost savings, which tests well among Utahns.

“Conserving water helps us take care of the Great Salt Lake [Colorado River / Lake Powell]. When we take care of the natural world, our communities and our economy also thrive, and we’re able to continue to do the things we love.”

WHY THIS MESSAGE WORKS

- Connects specific environmental concerns to everyday priorities like the economy and communities.
- Offers a sense of hope for the future.

“When individual households manage water wisely — especially outdoor water — it supports the local agriculture and food production that help communities and the economy thrive.”

WHY THIS MESSAGE WORKS

- Connects individual water use to greater priorities like agriculture/food production. Then connects those to even greater quality of life priorities.
- Suggests a sense of personal responsibility.

The following messages illustrate how to use Utahns' questions and concerns to create effective messages.

“Water-smart landscaping helps all of us. Cash rebates and other tools are available so you can make waterwise changes for your homes and your state.”

WHY THIS MESSAGE WORKS

- Addresses affordability concerns. Gives the power back to Utahns in their own home.

“Changing to your yard to water-smart landscaping can reduce water use by two-thirds.”

WHY THIS MESSAGE WORKS

- Shows Utahns the direct impact making some of these changes will have for themselves and the environment.

“Having a waterwise yard still allows you to do all of the things you love with your family, while preserving water for generations to come.”

WHY THIS MESSAGE WORKS

- Tells Utahns a waterwise yard won't sacrifice the things they love and value about their current yards, and supports generational growth.

View the messaging guide and more at envisionutah.org/tools