

Miistakis Institute Evaluation 2020

“...thoughtfully
progressive”



Miistakis
Institute

The Praxis Group™
Leger

January 15, 2020



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This project was funded by a grant from The Calgary Foundation



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BACKGROUND AND METHODS

Background and Method

For over 20 years the Miistakis Institute has provided scientific research in support of conservation decision making to improve environmental outcomes. Miistakis scientifically investigates environmental challenges, analyzes policy implications, develops decision support tools, and catalyzes community conservation action to realize environmental benefits and outcomes. These are all areas in which Miistakis has developed significant expertise

As Mount Royal University's only affiliated research institute, Miistakis explores opportunities to enhance MRU's environmental research capacity, and work with MRU faculty, staff and students to enhance their work.

Environmental conservation is complex. It requires engagement of a diversity of perspectives and stakeholders and a multitude of approaches to realize conservation success.

In the fall of 2019, the Miistakis Institute contracted The Praxis Group™ and Leger to undertake a program evaluation to review its performance from the perspective of key stakeholders. Specifically, the evaluation examined:

- How have relationships developed?
- What is the level of trust among stakeholders and others involved with the Miistakis Institute?
- How are the various tools and methods, both new and old, performing? What is working and not working? Are there new tools and methods that should be examined?
- What is the overall impression of the Miistakis Institute from the various stakeholder communities?
- What benefits does the Miistakis Institute bring to the stakeholder communities, sponsors and partners?

The evaluation was set up in two phases. The first phase consisted of an online survey administered to landowners, partners, government agencies, academia, students, and others who have partnered with,



“The Miistakis Institute specializes in evaluating complex environmental problems and using our equally diverse skill sets and tools to resolve them”

or relied upon Miistakis in the recent past. The second phase consisted of a series of in-depth interviews conducted online and by telephone of a selection of stakeholders.

Phase I – Online survey

An online survey was developed by The Miistakis Institute and the consulting team. Leger programmed and hosted the online survey. Unique links were provided to Miistakis and mailed to each respondent. Having Miistakis send the links ensured the survey responses (stored on Leger servers) and the contact information (retained by Miistakis) were never combined. In this way all responses remained completely anonymous. The survey questions were designed to address the research questions, and included categorical, rating, and open-ended responses. The surveys were emailed on October 29, 2019 and remained open until November 19, 2019.

Open-ended comments were theme-coded for analysis. Theme-coding allows an determination of the frequency of the comment and enables analysis of the comment themes in relation to quantitative variables in the survey. The average survey length was 15 minutes.

The survey was sent to 1029 contacts. One hundred sixty-one responded to the survey.

Phase II – In depth Interviews (IDI's)

A second data base was established with 51 key respondents. All 51 were asked to complete the same online survey as the other Miistakis contacts were invited to take. However, at the end of the online survey an additional question was asked, “would you participate in a short telephone interview?” Of the 51 respondents identified, 37 completed the online survey, and of those, 31 indicated they would be willing to take part in an in-depth telephone interview. Although 31 agreed to the in-depth interview, 25 followed through. The findings of the 25 in-depth interviews are integrated into the results sections of this report.

What made this unique was that when the respondent agreed to the survey, The Praxis Group™ was sent the notice as to the date and time of day the respondents had selected. Along with this was a copy of their online survey results so these results could be reviewed by the interviewer prior to completing the interview. This helped in having an understanding as to how the respondent had answered the online survey questions. This streamlined the in-depth interview process and allowed the discussion to focus on key qualitative questions.



INVOLVEMENT WITH MIISTAKIS INSTITUTE

The first section of the survey helps us to understand who responded to the survey, and the types of interactions they have had with the Miistakis Institute.

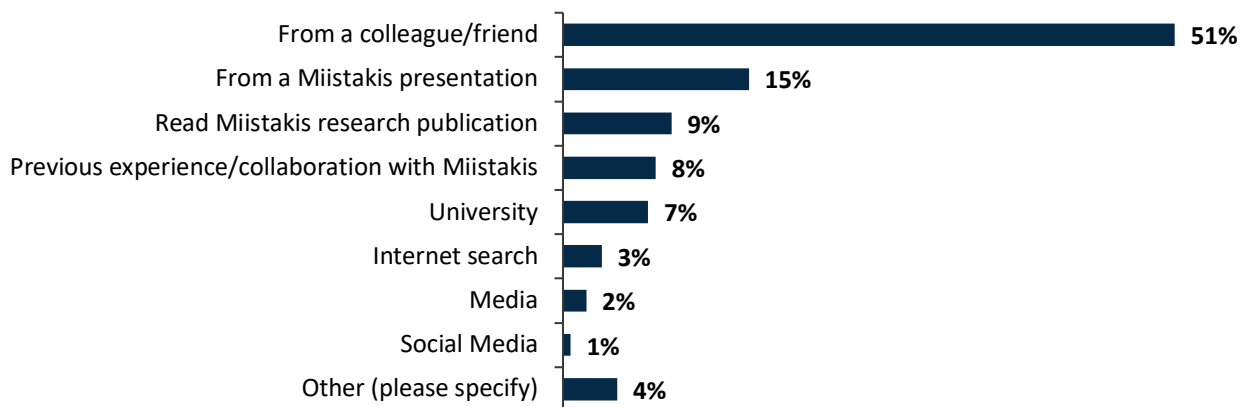
Respondents were asked for their primary role in interacting with Miistakis. Figure 1 illustrates the broad range of stakeholders who participated in the survey, with the single largest category being members of conservation or environmental organizations.

Figure 1 Primary role in interacting with Miistakis



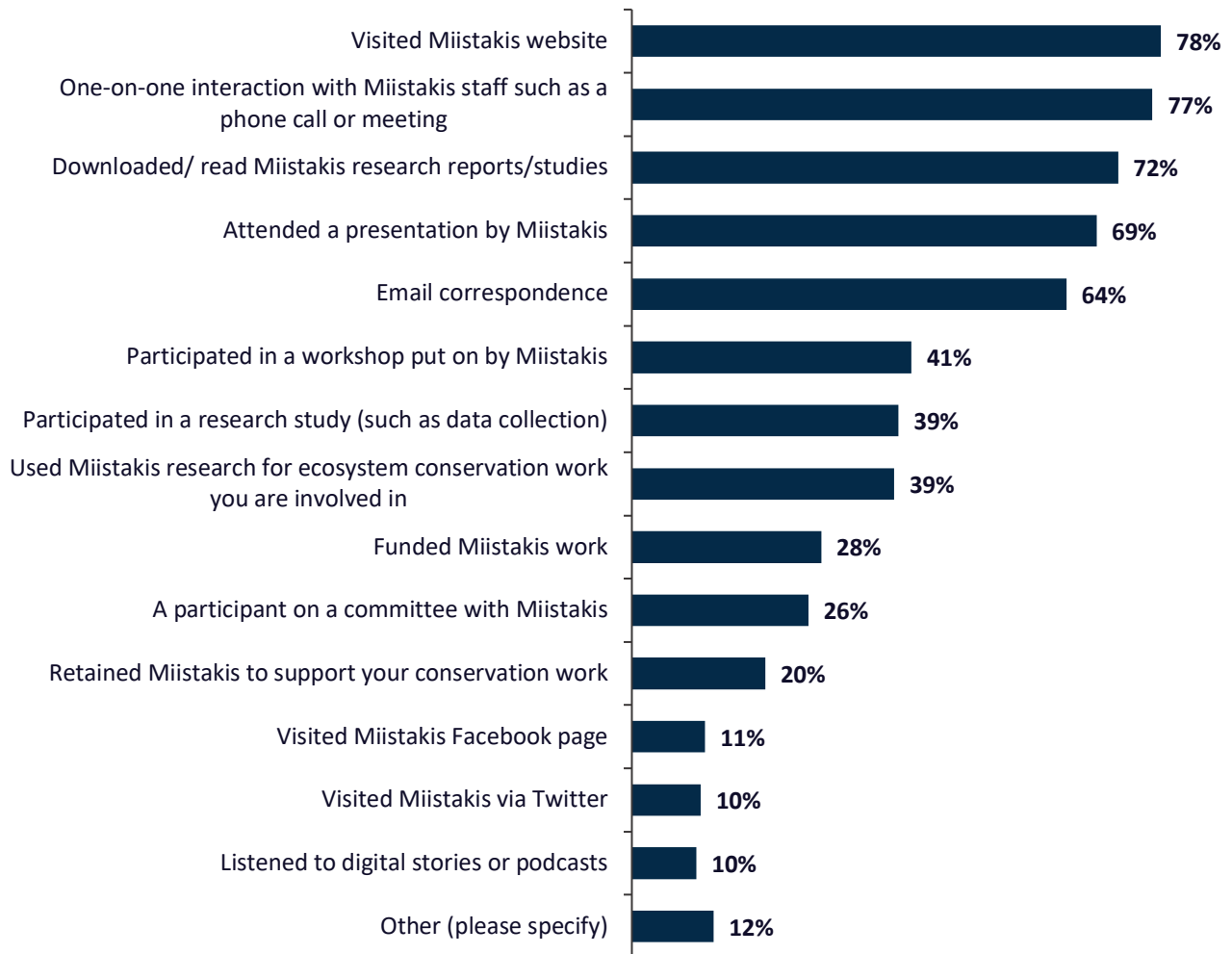
Most respondents learned of Miistakis from a colleague or a friend, followed by participating in a Miistakis presentation.

Figure 2 How respondents first learned about Miistakis



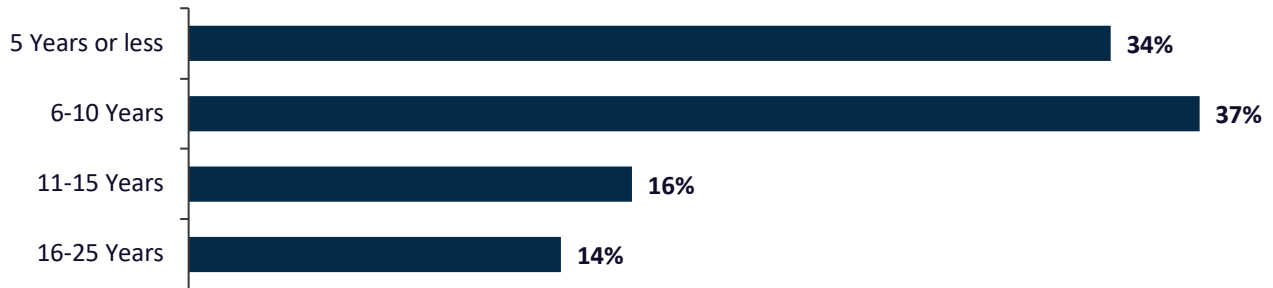
Survey participants were asked how they have interacted with Miistakis. Participants could select more than one method. The top methods of interaction included visiting the Miistakis Institute’s website, one on one conversations, read research reports, attended a presentation, and email. Due to the small sample size, and the number of different methods of interaction, there were no statistically significant differences observed by stakeholder type.

Figure 3 Interaction with Miistakis



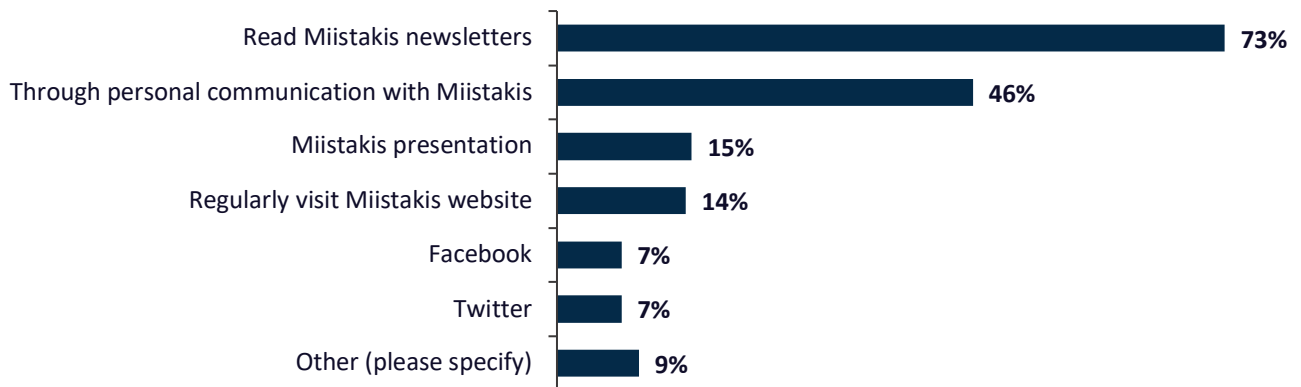
Over 70% of respondents have known of Miistakis for 10 years or less (Figure 4).

Figure 4 How long have you known of Miistakis?



Newsletters and personal communications are the primary methods of staying up to date on the Miistakis Institute’s activities.

Figure 5 How respondents keep up to date on Miistakis

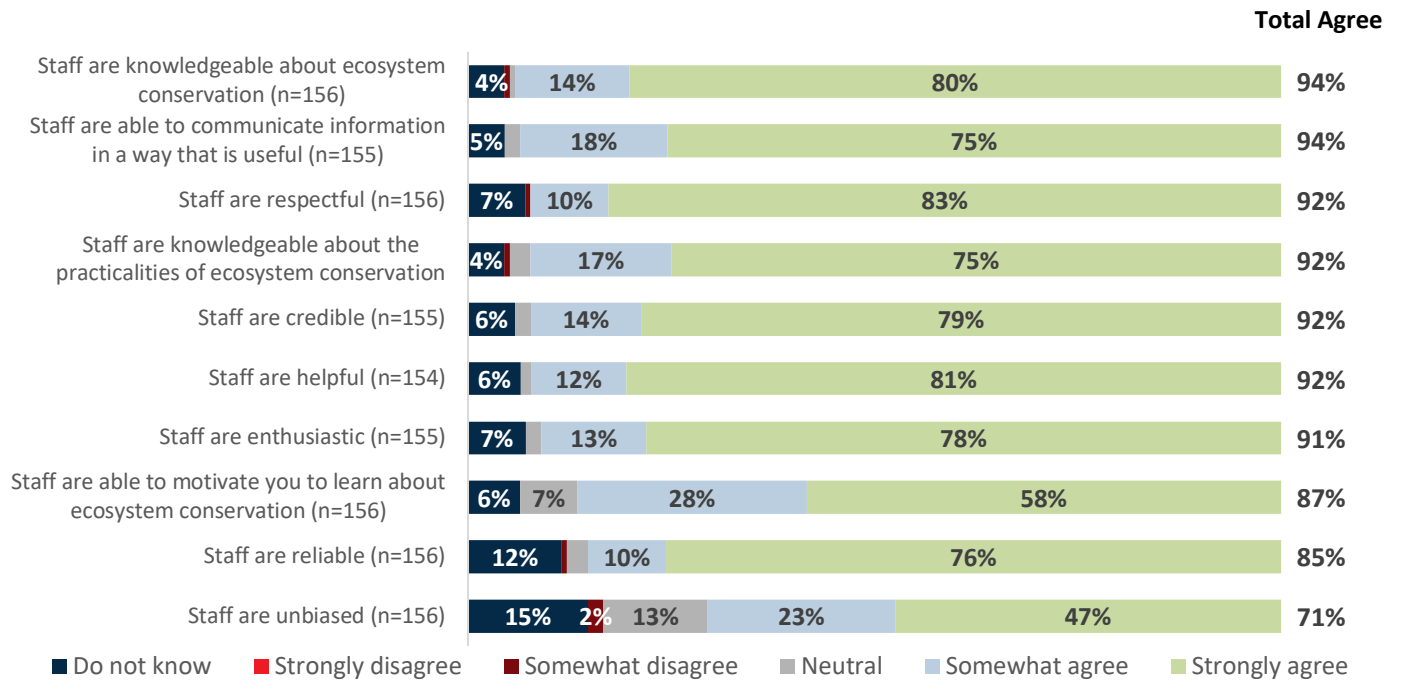




ASSESSMENT OF MIISTAKIS INSTITUTE

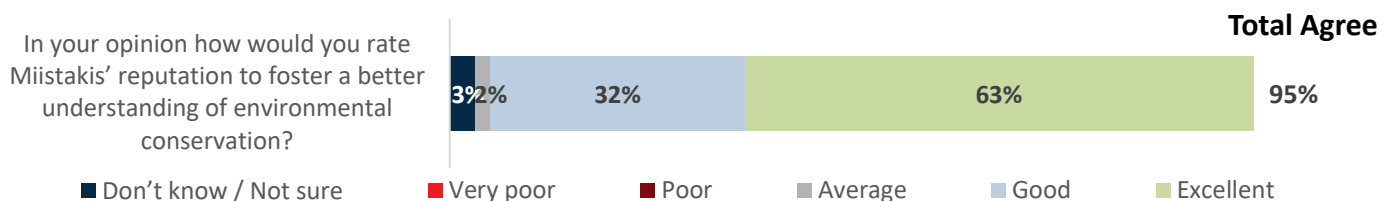
Survey participants provided a very positive assessment of Miistakis Institute staff across a range of attributes. Knowledge, communication, respect, credibility, helpfulness, enthusiasm, reliable, and motivating, are all characteristics of Miistakis staff. Being unbiased had a strong rating but was marginally lower than the other attributes.

Figure 6 Ratings of Miistakis staff Based on Respondent’s Personal Experience



Miistakis’ reputation to foster a better understanding of environmental conservation received a very high rating with 95% of respondents rating performance as good (32%) or excellent (63%). Two percent of respondents provided an average rating, and no one gave a poor or very poor rating.

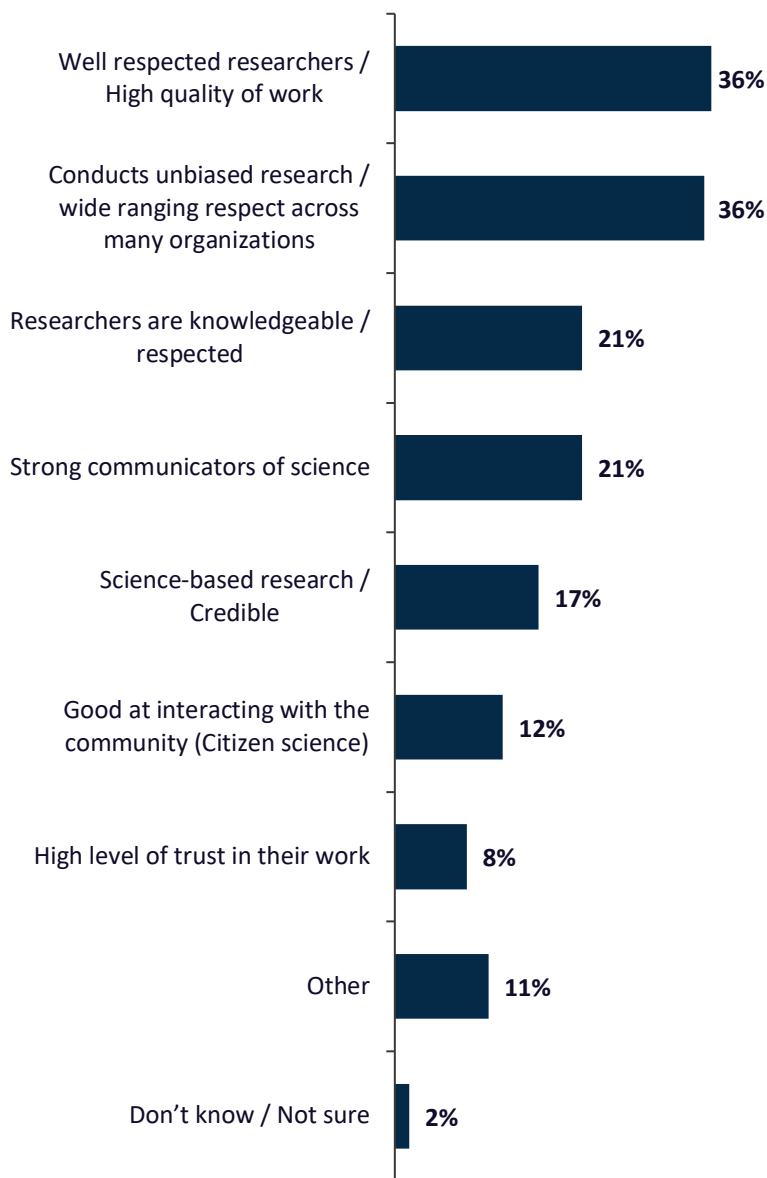
Figure 7 Miistakis’ reputation to foster a better understanding of environmental conservation



Respondents were asked to explain their rating. Over one-third (36%) identified that researchers are well respected, producing high quality work. A further 36% identified Miistakis conducts unbiased

research and has earned the respect of a wide range of organizations. Knowledge, strong communications, credibility, strong community interactions, and a high level of trust also emerged as reasons for Miistakis’ strong reputation. For the three respondents offering average ratings their reasons mainly focused on limited awareness of Miistakis, and limited scope of the research.

Figure 8 Explanations for why 95% of respondents chose a good/excellent reputation (comment themes):



Note: Figure 8 shows coded themes from the verbatim responses

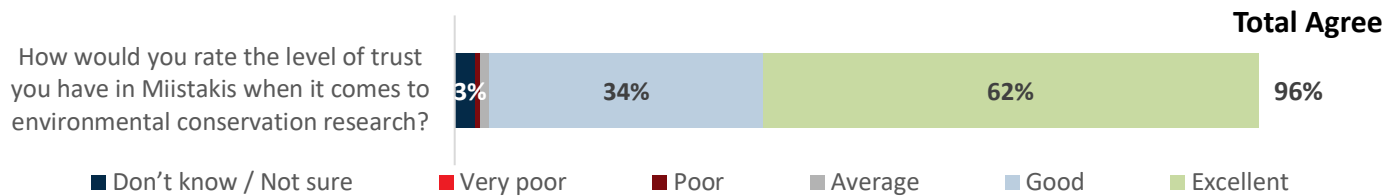
“In my experience, Miistakis is trusted across the board, which shows up in the organizations who will work with them, contract them, or otherwise affiliate themselves. Miistakis reports are considered legitimate bases for advocating for interventions because they are trusted by our supporters and those we seek to influence.”

“The Mistakes Institute works with a variety of stakeholders on many different projects and the results of the research are compiled into reports that can be understood by a wide audience. The reports are also laid out in an effective manner, allowing projects to be further investigated.”

“I see Miistakis as a leader in Alberta in road ecology and connectivity. Miistakis also has a strong reputation in workshop development and facilitation, bringing entities on opposite sides towards common ground.”

Almost all respondents rated the level of trust in the environmental research performed by Miistakis as good or excellent.

Figure 9 Level of trust respondents have in the Miistakis when it comes to environmental conservation research



The reasons for such a high level of trust are shown in Figure 10, with quality and rigor of work being the most prevalent reason.

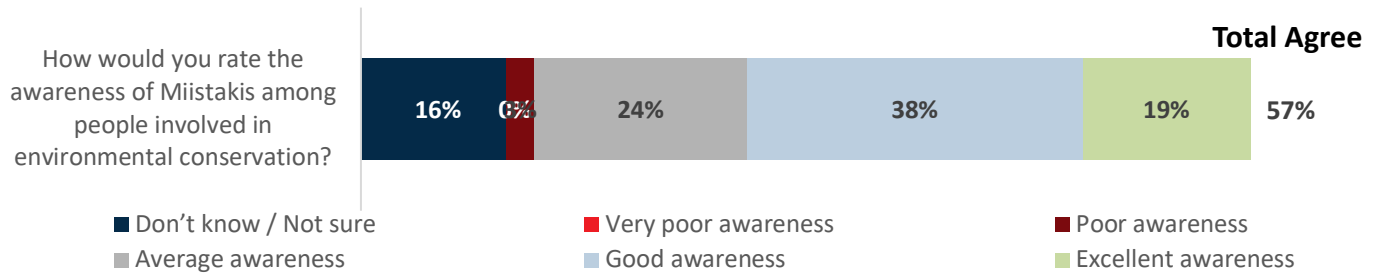
Figure 10 Explanations for why 96% of respondents chose a good/excellent level of trust (comment themes):



“Miistakis staff seem to be highly educated and experienced in this topic, and in my dealings with the institute, Miistakis applies good research methodology to their work.”

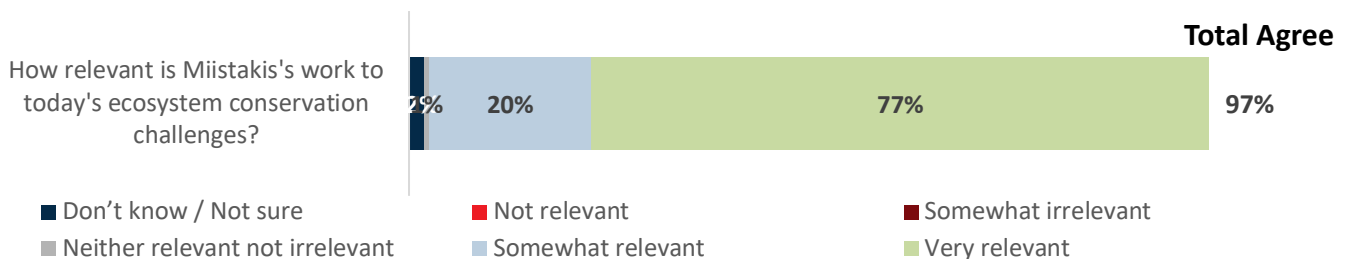
Fifty-seven percent of respondents provided a good or excellent rating in terms of Miistakis' awareness among people involved in environmental conservation.

Figure 11 Awareness of Miistakis among those involved in environmental conservation



The relevance of Miistakis' work is rated very high, with 77% of respondents providing a rating of 'very relevant'.

Figure 12 Relevance of Miistakis' work to today's ecosystem conservation challenges



“Miistakis chaired workshops that facilitated the development of our wildlife, fisheries, and land management programs and the foundation is still in place. Kept up to date on work with road crossing in Crowsnest Pass that formed the foundation and partnership for Pronghorn Xing. The discussions with Miistakis staff regarding app development have been applied internally with discussions regarding the development of other apps.”

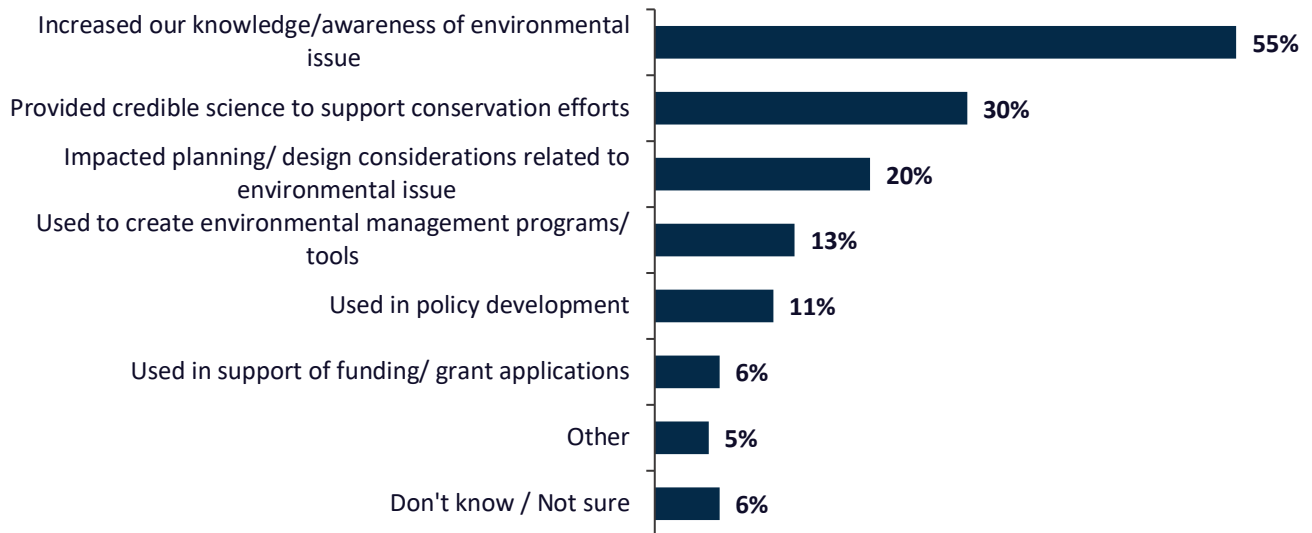
Respondents were asked in an open-ended question to identify ways in which they have used Miistakis' information. Almost 40% indicated the information is used in academic reports, publications, and theses. Creating public awareness, conservation and land use planning, informing policies, and research in support of other projects and partners were other main uses.

Figure 13 How respondents used Miistakis information (comment themes)



Eighty-nine percent of respondents who used Miistakis' information indicated they saw a positive impact on ecosystem conservation resulting from the information. Figure 14 provides the main themes related to how the information has had a positive impact on ecosystem conservation. For most, the main impact is on increasing their knowledge of an environmental issue.

Figure 14 How Miistakis' Information has had a Positive Impact on Ecosystem Conservation (comment themes)



“As Miistakis is seen as a credible source - the data or reports from Miistakis help create credibility in recommendations.”

“Although it's early in the process still and we have yet to write policy statements, the strategic direction will definitely be more conservation-oriented having relied on Miistakis material during the research process.”

“Again, there are many examples to use but, more recently, the presentation on COCS has helped create a discussion amongst landowners in the community and also through an article in the local paper. Unless people are aware of the research, they are less effective in responding to land use changes in the County.”

Examples of comments from the 11% who did not see a positive impact on ecosystem conservation from the information obtained from Miistakis are provided below. Although it is difficult to find themes from so few comments, there was repeated mention of the challenges in using environmental research to inform policy and decision-making generally, not specifically related to the quality or value of the information. There were no significant differences by the organization the respondent works with.

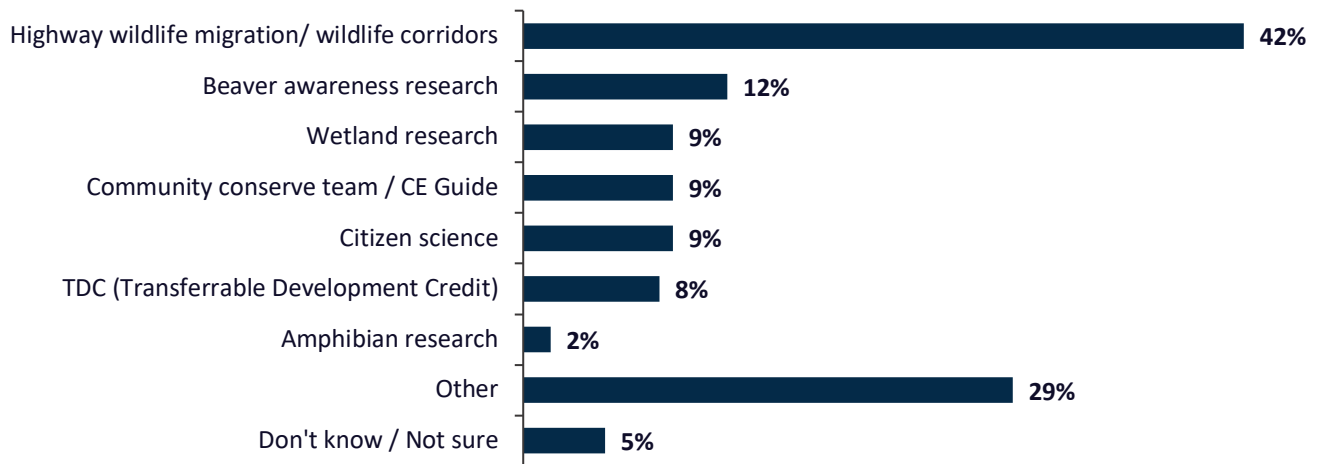
“Our council is not supportive of environmental conservation, so it is difficult to make a true impact. Information has guided our internal work, but mapping and recommendations for municipal governments are often difficult for us to act on.”

“The decision was influenced by cost and other variables including neighbouring landowners and municipalities.”

“Still waiting for Hwy 3 overpasses. It has been 20 years. Hoping someone will listen to the logic.”

When asked to name the most memorable research program or activity performed by Miistakis, highway wildlife migration/wildlife corridors stood out. However, there were many, many research activities mentioned. Beaver awareness was also among the top mentions.

Figure 15 Most memorable research, program, or activity performed by Miistakis



“It's hard to just pick one. I think the road watch program has been very effective and bridging the monitoring results with biologists and transportation agencies has been very effective...to help in wildlife corridors.”

“RoadWatch in the Pass as a grassroots engagement to heighten awareness with decision-makers and push for highway mitigation. The Collaborative work on the Southern East Slopes Conservation Strategy, that we are using now to inform work in the Livingstone-Porcupine Hills and Castle Parks, and Highways 3 and 1. Conservation work in planning and policy and Human-Wildlife Co-existence research and engagement has also been well received and utilized.”

“Putting Beavers to Work, primarily because that has been the biggest interconnection we have had with Miistakis.”

“Information on the effects of fire on watersheds and the ecosystem; research related to southern Alberta grizzly bear populations; the importance of beavers to the ecosystem.”

“The Community Conserve Team is a valuable program for municipalities.”

“We've been fortunate to be able to work with Miistakis on a number of projects and overall, we are always impressed by the innovation and enthusiasm that is shown by Miistakis staff. It's hard to pick a favourite but I'll say that my first experience in a Miistakis workshop (developing Citizen Science best practices/programs) was the most memorable in that it was well organized, had tangible deliverables produced from it, brought a wide range of stakeholders together who left inspired about introducing/improving citizen science programming into their organizational goals.”

In-Depth Interview Question - Overall, has Miistakis brought value to you and your organization?

All stakeholders (100%) who participated in the IDI's stated that Miistakis had brought value to both themselves and their organizations. There was an extensive list of projects and policy related work that were identified, including:

- Conservation agreements
- Wildlife corridors, wildlife/vehicle interactions, and wildlife habitat
- Digital mapping
- Citizen Science projects
- Stewardship reports
- Development of and assistance to Land Trusts

- Assistance to municipalities and similar organizations with their environmental stewardship discussions and projects
- Call of the Wetland
- Norquay Train Station to create a “green transportation hub”
- Leaders with digital mapping - Crown of the Continent. Excellent work.
- Prairie Conservation Forum in the 1990-2000's.
- Minimizing footprints of wind energy projects in southern Alberta.
- Southern Foothills Society-Pekisko landowners.
- Provided valuable information on the cumulative assessment process.
- Southern Eastern slopes management plan.

In conducting research programs, Miistakis has demonstrated a broad reach having worked with the private sector, different levels of government, landowners, academia and students, NGO's, ENGOs, and others.

Following are examples of quotes related to the value Miistakis has brought to various organizations:

“Miistakis has found a niche where they are very adept and opportunistic. They have a real nice way of bringing science to the table. Using the science to reach out in multi-stakeholder ways. Building collaboration between groups and stakeholders. Not many organizations have this skill set. Bringing this expertise to the table is critical. [They also flagged] when they thought we had biases.”

“Miistakis has provided solutions around complex landscape issues. They allow people to come to the table with no angst. They are able to pull together a wide variety of groups and stakeholders into forums as they are a neutral party.”

“We do quite a bit of environmental funding. We rely on our relationships to inform us what we should be funding. We can have those conversations with Miistakis as it helps us improve as well. In general, they bring value through the work they do and is beneficial to all Calgarians as part of that.”

“Thoughtful, knowledgeable, research-based, non-partisan, focused on what they do and do it well...not all things conservation/agriculture/environment. One of the best environmental organizations around and we have worked with them several times over the last decade.”

In-depth Interview Question - Is Miistakis a leader in environmental conservation research?

Eighty percent of the IDI respondents indicated Miistakis is a leader in environmental conservation research. Approximately 20% were unsure but when delving into this question further, their reasoning was that Miistakis has a particular “niche” within the broad field of environmental conservation research where they are very effective.

“They are quite “bias-balanced”. They start a project by developing a thesis and then explore it. Very capable staff. Very good at presenting information. Working on contemporary issues. Very rapid turnaround. Very capable.”

“Don't see them as a research organization. Miistakis is more about pulling together research and translating these results into “plain language” that all stakeholders can understand and apply in their own situations. They are leaders in environmental and social tool development, design and thinking. Looking at ways of doing new things with new technologies. Working on things that I haven't even thought about.”

“They are credible, university-based, and non-partisan. Miistakis has the gravitas to corral different parties working on pieces of an effort, e.g. Highway 3. Held meetings to bring species researchers, land protection groups, community leaders/decision-makers, agency leaders together to make sure all were on the same page. No other entity that I know of could get all those disparate groups in the same room, much less, talking to one-another. Very impressive entity.”

“They are a leader in implementing conservation research or filling the gap between research and application to real life situations. Communicating in a non-threatening way. They have an appropriate level of expertise on staff to interpret the cutting-edge science and delivering it in a non-inflammatory and understandable way.”

“A hard question. The area of environmental conservation research is a very busy place. They have a niche that they work at very well. They are not an advocacy group so that is really good. “

“Not sure I would call them a leader but a contributor. For example, the Road Watch program. Some elements for sure [they are a leader]. Strength of Miistakis is being able to take the science and make it work with the communities etc. Their products are very understandable to the lay public as well as the scientists.”

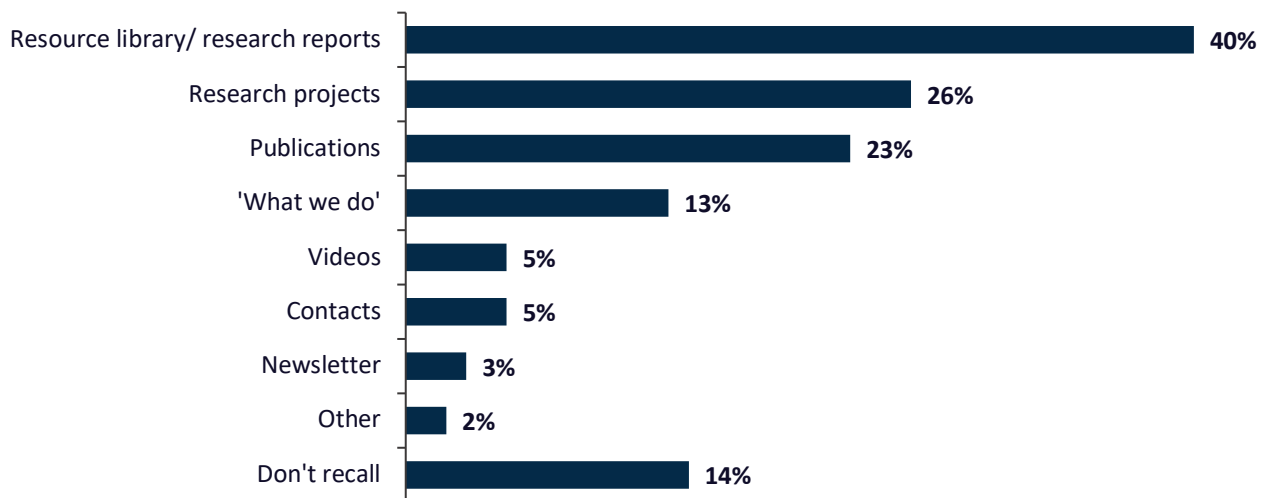
“They are. I would call them “thoughtfully progressive”. They do very good work in what I would call a “niche” area of research. The focus on citizen science is one of their real strengths and this field is only going to grow. In saying this, I guess they are not a leader overall in environmental conservation research but in their niche, no one is better.”



MIISTAKIS WEBSITE

Eighty-eight percent of respondents have visited the Miistakis website, 4% had not visited the site and 8% could not recall. The most useful aspects of the website include the resource library, research reports, and publications.

Figure 16 Most useful aspects of Website



When asked if there was anything they could not find, or could be improved upon, there were few substantive responses. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated no changes are needed. Thirteen respondents (8%) offered suggestions in terms of content and design. Content included suggestions for videos showing the impact of human presence on habitat, and, approaches to applying research in a way that can influence government policy. Design included easier navigation through the resource library by having publications sorted by category and having searchable fields for research topics. It should be noted these types of website evaluation questions are much less effective than a formal website evaluation (e.g. one where respondents are asked about the website as they navigate through it) as they are based on respondent's recall.

When asked what would motivate them to visit the website more often, 13 people responded. From the limited responses, three themes emerged; this survey acted as a motivation, having a regular email trigger directing them to the site to see recent research, and if they happened to be investigating a research topic.

Eighty-six percent of respondents could not offer suggestions on what could be improved (fine as is, not my area of expertise, not familiar enough with it, etc.). Twelve respondents offered suggestions, including more videos, higher resolution banners, more frequent stories (perhaps in a blog format), ensure links are working, identification of volunteer opportunities, maps to show where research is occurring, and better organization and searchable reports by subject.

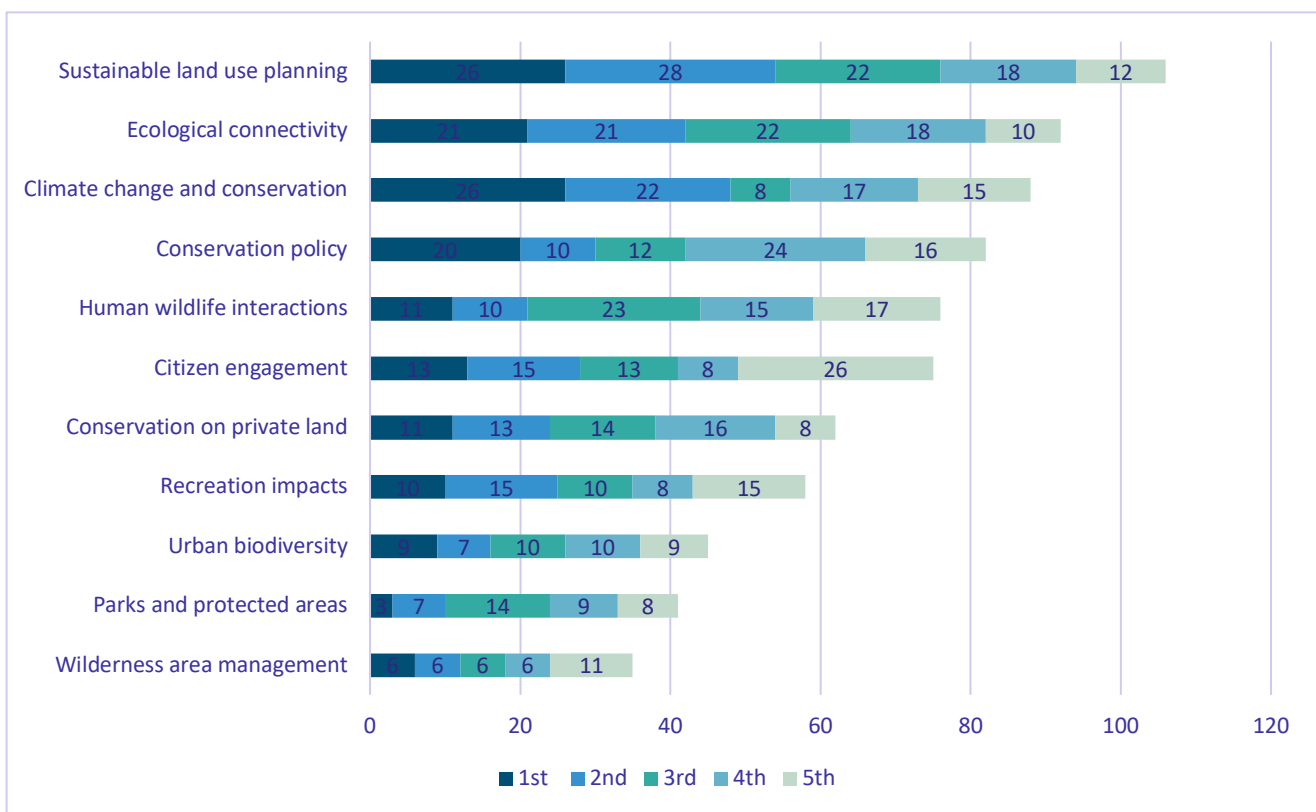


FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Respondents were given a list of ecological conservation research areas which Miistakis should be pursuing, and they were asked to select the top five and rank order them. Sustainable land use planning and climate change had the greatest number of 1st choices, followed by ecological connectivity. Sustainable land use planning also had the greatest number of total mentions in the top five.

The lowest priority areas for Miistakis were given as wilderness area management, parks and protected areas, and urban biodiversity.

Figure 17 Ecological conservation issues Miistakis should be pursuing:



Asked if there are other areas of focus, the list is wide ranging. Thirty-five respondents offered suggestions. Among those who did not offer further suggestions, many suggested the list was already comprehensive. Although most comments were unique, there were several repeat mentions of water conservation, and policy research (how to ensure conservation is applied in government decisions).

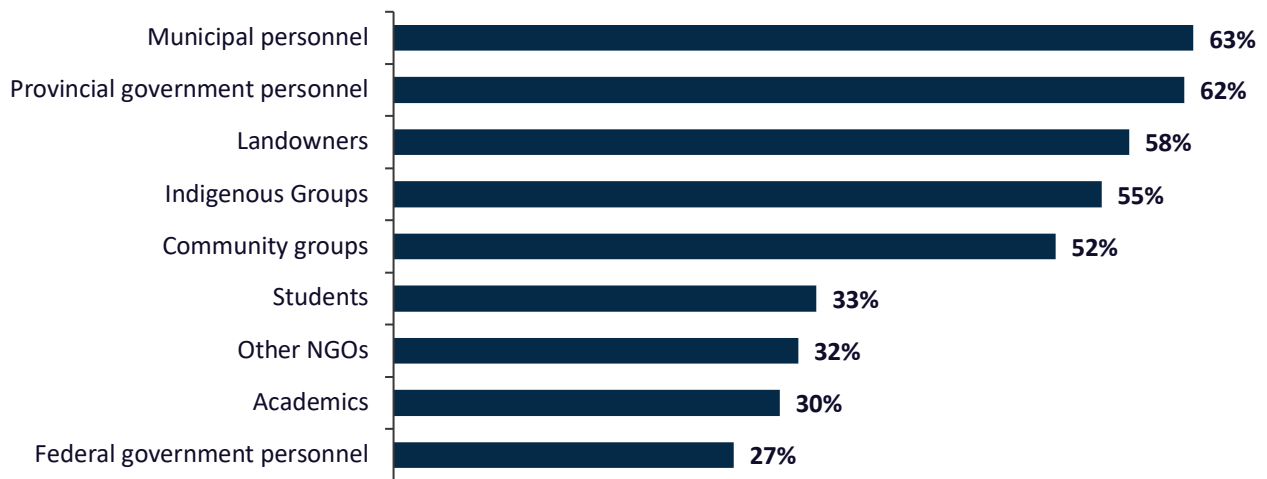
Additional subject areas could include:

- fire ecology
- political science approach to engaging decision-makers

- watershed conservation
- impacts of non-motorized recreation to environmental considerations
- media awareness
- non-market instruments like tradable development credits and conservation offsets;
- mapping wetland areas so it can be publicly available on a free platform
- general conservation outreach
- fragmentation of habitat, reclamation
- research and policy guidance specific to pollinator protection
- role of agricultural lands/working lands in ecological conservation
- species at risk
- sustainable development of hydrocarbons in the Alberta context
- wetland regulations affect private landowners in Alberta
- environmental thresholds
- tourism impacts and environmental management considerations

Respondents were asked who Miistakis should be working with more. Municipal and provincial government officials, landowners, Indigenous groups, and community groups topped the list.

Figure 18 People Miistakis should be working with more: People Miistakis should be working with more:

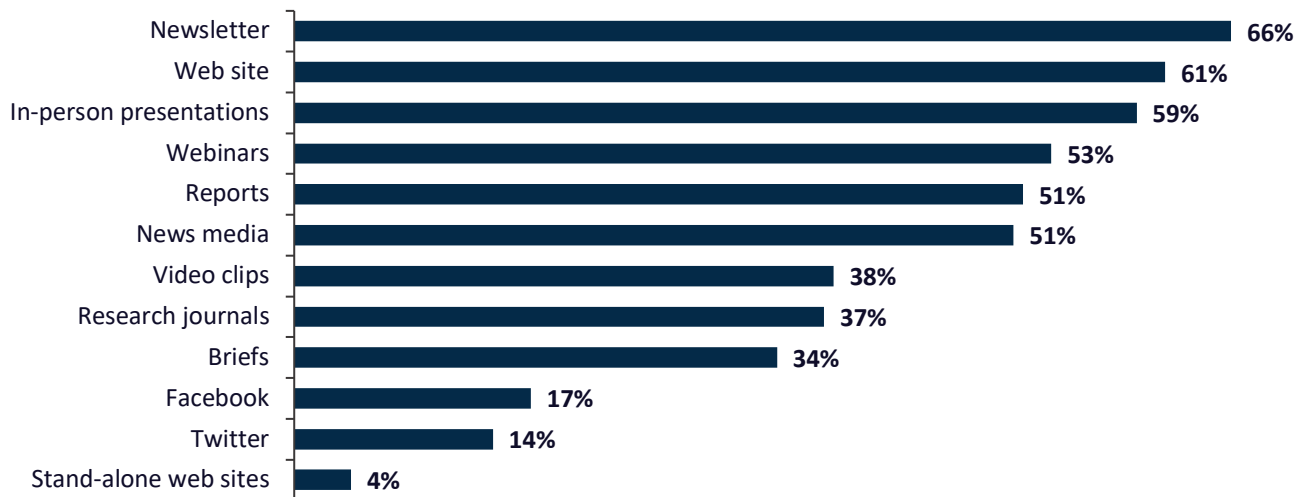


Other people/organizations Miistakis could be working with include:

- chambers of commerce; other businesses,
- citizen groups (e.g., Friends of Science, Calgary)
- environmental law groups
- environmental or conservation specialists, not in academia

- foreign investors
- global NGOs dedicated to advocacy for urban biodiversity and climate change
- the military
- hunting community, e.g., BHA
- industry -- perhaps through the Energy Futures Lab
- municipal councilors
- natural resource industries and tourism industry
- non-motorized recreation groups
- politicians - municipal, provincial and federal
- regional boards
- representatives from the land development industry
- school teachers

Figure 19 Best ways for Miistakis to disseminate research results

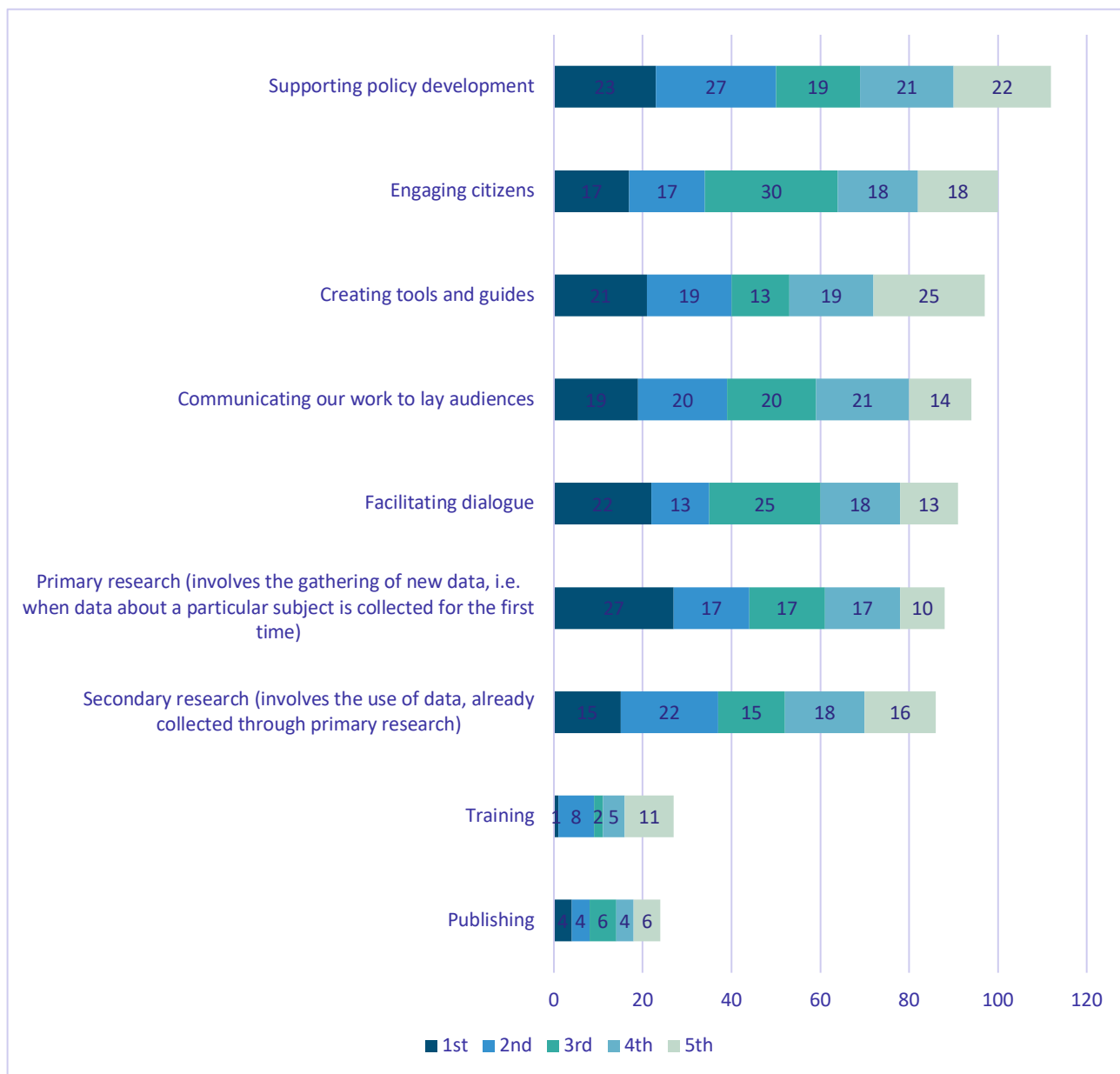


'Other' ways for Miistakis to disseminate research results:

- through other NGO's websites whenever possible
- email
- through networks that have large and/or relevant members. E.g. AEN, CEGN, WPACs, Y2Y, Nature AB, CCVO, ECVO, industry groups
- in person meetings, presentations, convenings
- conference organization; panel discussions on controversial eco-issues
- courts
- StoryMap, share slide presentations digitally
- YouTube
- AB Parks and Parks Canada to integrate research into program messages

Respondents were asked which areas Miistakis should focus on by selecting their top five choices and rank ordering them. The number of first choice items was very similar. The area with the greatest number in the top five is supporting policy development. This is consistent with comments in other questions indicating the research will be of greatest value if it can influence policy makers.

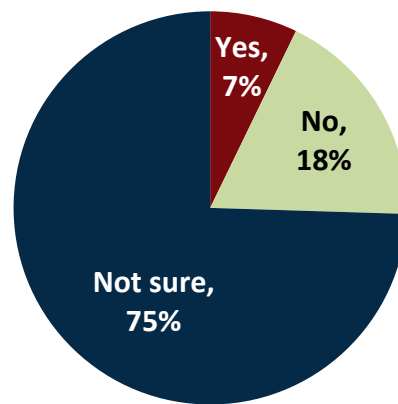
Figure 20 Miistakis should focus on...



Twelve respondents identified other possible areas of focus. These included, publishing secondary data related to conservation, public education and citizen engagement, engagement of decision-makers and policy research, thought leadership, and applied research.

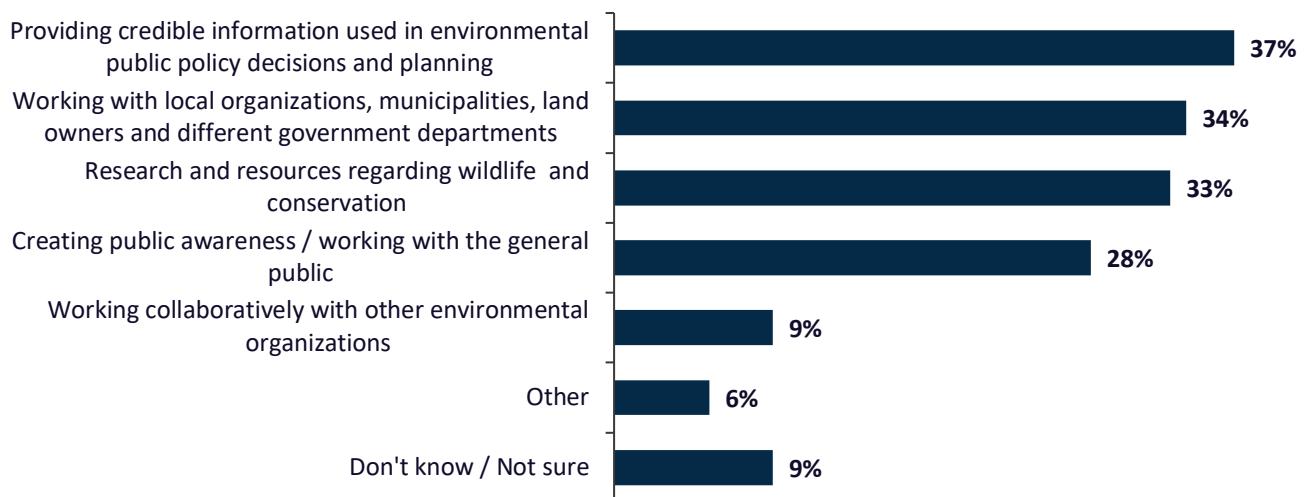
Most respondents were unable to identify any specific gaps in what Miistakis does. Those who indicated there are gaps were asked to comment on what these were. Eleven respondents identified what they perceive to be gaps in the current Miistakis programs, including, social science research, policy research in support of getting governments to respond to environmental science, and GIS. Others mentioned that Miistakis cannot do it all and should “stay in their lane” to be effective.

Figure 21 Are there gaps in what Miistakis does?



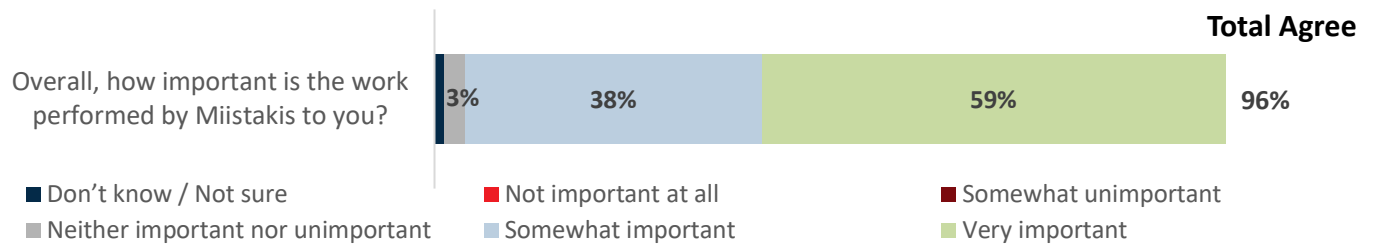
Four areas were identified where Miistakis has the biggest impact. Providing credible information used in public policy decisions and planning was most frequently mentioned, followed by working with local organizations, municipalities, landowners and government departments. Research and resources regarding wildlife conservation and creating public awareness rounded out the main areas of impact.

Figure 22 Areas Miistakis has had the biggest impact in (comment themes):



Almost all respondents indicated the work performed by Miistakis is important to them and their organization.

Figure 23 Importance of work performed by Miistakis to respondents



In-depth Interview Question - What do you think of Miistakis' overall approach to their work?

Miistakis takes a very collaborative approach to all its projects and policy work. They have a wide network including other organizations, consultants and advisors that they can draw on as needed. This really helps them build the best teams for each and every project. Many interviewed suggested that they are very good at building alliances and partnerships.

Many respondents commented on their use of citizen science as a tool that they use very frequently and effectively.

They have also become very effective in developing new computer applications for use in environmental conservation research. This was commented on consistently by respondents.

Finally, some respondents felt Miistakis was always excited about the work they undertake and that was seen very positively.

“Miistakis is very effective in translating conservation scientific information for the lay public, especially landowners, municipal governments, and other organizations. Miistakis staff are well trained and educated and many of them have excellent facilitation skills that are used effectively when they bring together a diverse (and sometimes combative) group of stakeholders. They also can teach individuals, groups and organizations how to apply and use conservation research in their own projects.”

“Demonstrated a very competent history of putting their finger on the very contemporary issues. Miistakis is a good example of an organization that doesn't take on a lot of projects, rather a few projects that they do really well.”

“It is encouraging to work with people who are excited about their work.”

“They are good at identifying who the potential stakeholders are and reaching out to them. They are good at being aware of who would benefit from information that is available and reaching out. They also know which stakeholders they should get feedback from prior to launching projects e.g. for the wildlife conflict work they brought in people to provide information and feedback before disseminating information – seeking feedback for development and refinement of their products and initiatives.”

“Miistakis is a pretty unique organization. They buck the trend of scientists. They think through how stakeholders will receive the information. A facilitative lens through which they translate to stakeholders and government. Wisdom born out of experience through collaborative multi-stakeholder processes.”

“Building alliances and partnerships. Riparian areas are so critical. On our lands we have gone from 40% to 99% in terms of species on our ranch. They have taken conservation easements to a new level in Alberta.”

“Important role. They make conservation research available to projects. They help communities and governments to understand how to apply conservation research. They are good at working with the people that make the decisions - landowners and municipalities as well as supporting land conservation (trust) organizations.”

“Aligned with what is happening and understand what society is doing. Understand the issues that are coming up and starting research on them before others are thinking about them. They have a high level of expertise within their people. They also reach out to other knowledgeable people to supplement their teams. Very thorough in finding and using the science. Very collaborative in working with diverse researchers. High level of credibility as a result.”

In-depth Interview Question - Do you have a vision of what Miistakis’ future could be or should include?

Most respondents felt Miistakis should continue to focus on what they are doing well. For these respondents, the focus should continue to be on water resources, wetlands, wildlife corridors, and continue to develop partnerships and collaborations, which is an area where they excel.

“Continue doing what they are doing. They have a niche in which they have excelled. They are very nimble and adaptable.”

Stay focused or expand on water resources, wetlands, wildlife corridors and the development of the computer tools that can support that work. They could assist municipalities and local governments in planning for expansion of human development.”

“Miistakis’ secret power is that it can work with and talk to anyone!”

“Stay true to doing what you are doing so well. Don't make change just to make change. They have the niche. Keep at it. They have a high profile with the organizations with whom they are or have worked, if not the broader publics. Be very selective if they are going to expand their marketing. If yes, then focus on similar organizations that they can work with rather than expanding too broadly. To do this they could present at selective conferences, special events, and set up workshops in selected communities especially focused on environmental easements.”

“Miistakis has got most of the trends. They have done a lot of work on the trends. Don't make change just to make change. They have the niche. Keep at it. How do they fund raise? Is it working for them?”

“They seem to be very adept at project selection. They demonstrate a very competent history of putting their finger on the very contemporary issues. They are very agile to respond to issues as they arise. Miistakis is a good example of an organization that doesn't take a lot of projects, rather a few projects that they do really well.”

“Their ability is to be very nimble and adaptable. This needs to continue. Doing environmental scans of what is coming at them. Develop and maintain linkages with the variety of conservation organizations that are out there. Need to keep at this all the time. Finding ways to develop and support tools with municipal governments is so critical.”

“I think there is a lot of work coming through land use management and planning in Alberta. Miistakis has a lot of opportunities ahead. They have the skill sets that others may be relying on in the future. Environmental conservation is a long-term process and politics is a short-term process. Miistakis is in the right place to navigate this and show what they can do.”

Some respondents also saw a role to engage industry especially in the renewable energy field. Other respondents also suggested that they should become involved with Indigenous organizations. There was a feeling expressed that this was a major area in which they could and should become involved. However, some respondents noted caution in that Miistakis should ensure that it has the skill sets needed before undertaking work with Indigenous population as this work can be very contentious and high profile.

“Most of the geographic areas that they are working in have both First Nations and Metis communities in them. They probably need to be working with these communities”

Respondents suggested Miistakis should look at research in support of building more resilient landscapes and environments given the climate change issues currently being faced.

“One newer role would be to focus on building more resilience in the landscape. How to manage using a more environmental conservation approach. Help understand the human dimensions of conservation values. Continue the great work they are doing now.”

Respondents also see a future with greater emphasis on citizen engagement and public education. In this regard, promoting environmental science and the work of Miistakis is seen as important to influencing public policy.

“Citizen science is one major avenue. Engage the community in things like carbon sequestration. Ways that are possible to do like with grasses etc. Public opinion is playing such a major role these days so they should be doing this.”

“In 1997 we looked at what we wanted to protect. Water, forestry, and land were the key to the UN. Now Miistakis is doing all of these. And then have Miistakis go out to municipalities and hold conversations with people who are interested in land conservation. There is so much interest in setting up conservation easements. Set up a series of workshops in the municipalities and the payoff will be great. Environmental education is so critical.”

“The only area that they may need to look at is that they have a high profile in some circles but a very low profile overall in the community. They may or may not want to develop their marketing to get the message of what they are doing to a broader audience. However, there are both pros and cons to doing this.”

“In the future, there will be even more complex conservation issues and Miistakis is well positioned to undertake these. They could market themselves more formally to expand. They do it informally with municipalities. There will be many conflict issues around renewable resource development. Miistakis as a neutral facilitator could go a long way.”

“Miistakis suffers from some of the things we suffer from. Too humble. Lack of profile. Need to work at this a little. They have got to get their work out to a broader audience and get them excited. Need to do more like Ducks Unlimited-Wetlands Forever. Show us the Ducks. They have a logo that is recognized across Canada. Need stronger communications to build their profile. The target is relevance. If you are not relevant you may lose out. Don't be too low key. Others are taking the stage and Miistakis may lose out as a result.”

In-depth Interview Wrap-up Question - Do you have any further suggestions or ideas you would like to add?

When the respondents were asked if there were any other suggestions that they would like Miistakis to consider, several themes emerged:

- Don't change what they are doing so well
- Communications and marketing

- Funding
- Research in provincial and national parks
- Ensure stability of staff
- Bring in more young people (they are well positioned with their location at MRU and their work with citizen science)

“On the management side, increasingly how does Miistakis win the competition for senior staff and top talent? What is Miistakis doing to get the best and brightest staff and keep them. Really have to think about this or Miistakis will lose out in the long term. Increasingly, the conservation movement is becoming “gray” (as in aging). There is a need to constantly refresh with highly motivated young people coming into any organization. New objectives mean they need to raise their profile. Must be tied to their overall strategy. Funding and high profile are very highly co-related.”

Miistakis’ profile was very high amongst those who know them but very low amongst the broader publics. There were suggestions that they needed to raise their profile but to do this with caution. This is similar to comments in the previous question related to the future of Miistakis. There were also several suggestions that were made regarding funding. Miistakis needs to make sure they have a stable and sustainable funding model in place.

“Miistakis is very, very low profile in the broader community. They need to raise this profile with the WPAC's etc. Share citizen science through offering training sessions. Present at various conferences etc.”

“One thing that is not clear to many of us who work with them is Miistakis' funding model. They need to make sure that they are well positioned. Being very aggressive in developing a sustainable funding model into the future is going to be essential.”

“Watch that your funding is consistent and in place. Research gaps around recreation management and how this interacts with the land and landowner based is going to be a major issue in Alberta and elsewhere. There is a gap in knowledge here that could benefit from their research.”

Summary of Key Insights

The overall impression of the Miistakis Institute from the various stakeholder communities is very positive. Survey participants rated staff very highly. The credibility and quality of the research are major reasons organizations rely on the Miistakis Institute. Miistakis is seen as an important facilitator and enabler of environmental science through the partnerships and collaborations they are involved in.

One of the strongest ratings in the survey is for the relevance of what Miistakis does. Although some respondents identified a few areas of emerging opportunity (e.g. resilience of landscapes to climate change, working with Indigenous Peoples), there is overwhelming support for Miistakis to stay the course in what they do. They have carved out an important niche in environmental conservation research. Research in support of sustainable land use planning was ranked first overall in terms of what respondents identified as the area of research focus.

Miistakis' reputation to foster a better understanding of environmental conservation received a very high rating from respondents. Almost everyone surveyed and interviewed indicated Miistakis' information resulted in a positive impact on ecosystem conservation. However, like many other environmental organizations, influencing policy decisions continues to be one of the main challenges. This is seen as an importance focus for Miistakis in the future. In this regard, there were suggestions that Miistakis is too humble and could benefit from promotion of its work among the general public. Miistakis is well-known in the ENGO community, but greater awareness beyond this could have an even greater influence public policy.

From the perspective of the research team undertaking this evaluation, the results of this evaluation were more positive than is typically seen in this type of evaluation. The strong endorsement for continuation of the current course of research, and the indication from participants that the work is highly valued, speaks very favourably to the future of the Miistakis Institute.

Appendix A - Survey Instrument



Miistakis Evaluation Survey

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey. The information from this survey will help the Miistakis Institute understand how we can best support the effort to maintain healthy ecosystems through the research and services we offer. The survey will only take about 10 to 15 minutes to complete, and there are no sales or promotions associated with this study.

Your involvement with Miistakis may vary from a little to a lot, and you may have interacted with them on a single occasion or multiple times over a number of years. The extent of your involvement does not matter – everyone’s opinions are important.

The information you provide will remain confidential and anonymous. An external consultant has been retained by Miistakis to manage the survey and prepare a report containing aggregate responses only. No individuals will be identified.

Thank you in advance for your time,

Danah Duke
Executive Director
Miistakis Institute
ph: 403-440-8444

Your involvement with Miistakis Institute

Q1. How would you best describe your primary role in interacting with Miistakis?

- Agricultural Producer
- Landowner
- Municipal personnel
- Provincial agency personnel
- Federal agency personnel
- Member of a conservation/environmental organization
- Student
- Funder
- Academic
- Other [Please specify] _____

Q2. How did you first learn about Miistakis?

- From a colleague
- Internet search
- Read Miistakis research publication
- From a Miistakis presentation
- Media
- Social Media
- Other (please specify)

Q3. How long have you known of Miistakis?

_____ number of years

Q4. Please indicate **HOW** you have interacted with **Miistakis**. [Choose all that apply].

- Attended a presentation by Miistakis
- One-on-one interaction with Miistakis staff such as a phone call or meeting
- Participated in a research study (such as data collection)
- A participant on a committee with Miistakis
- Funded Miistakis work
- Retained Miistakis to support your conservation work
- Participated in a workshop put on by Miistakis
- Used Miistakis research for ecosystem conservation work you are involved in
- Downloaded/ read Miistakis research reports/studies
- Listened to digital stories or podcasts
- Visited Miistakis website
- Visited Miistakis Facebook page
- Visited Miistakis via Twitter
- Email correspondence
- Other [please specify] _____

Q5. How do you keep up to date on Miistakis?

- Regularly visit Miistakis website
- Through personal communication with Miistakis
- Read Miistakis newsletters
- Miistakis presentation
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other (please specify) _____

Your Assessment of the Miistakis Institute

Q6. Based on your personal experience with Miistakis staff, please provide a rating for each of the following. If not certain, please indicate 'do not know'.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neutral	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Do not know
	1	2	3	4	5	D/K
Miistakis staff....						
are knowledgeable about ecosystem conservation	0	0	0	0	0	0
are knowledgeable about the practicalities of ecosystem conservation	0	0	0	0	0	0
are enthusiastic	0	0	0	0	0	0
are able to motivate you to learn about ecosystem conservation	0	0	0	0	0	0
are unbiased	0	0	0	0	0	0
are reliable	0	0	0	0	0	0
are respectful	0	0	0	0	0	0
are helpful	0	0	0	0	0	0
are able to communicate information in a way that is useful	0	0	0	0	0	0
are credible	0	0	0	0	0	0

Q7. In your opinion how would you rate Miistakis' reputation to foster a better understanding of environmental conservation?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very poor
- Don't know/ not sure

Please explain why you provided a rating of [from Q7]

Q8. How would you rate the level of trust you have in the Miistakis when it comes to environmental conservation research?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Very poor
- Don't know/ not sure

Please explain why you provided a rating of [from Q8]

Q9. How would you rate the awareness of Miistakis among people involved in environmental conservation?

- Excellent awareness
- Good awareness
- Average awareness
- Poor awareness
- Very poor awareness
- Don't know/ not sure

Q10. How relevant is Miistakis's work to today's ecosystem conservation challenges?

- Very relevant
- Somewhat relevant
- Neither relevant nor irrelevant
- Somewhat irrelevant
- Not relevant
- Don't know/ not sure

Q11. Please describe how you have used Miistakis information? [please be specific and provide examples if possible]

Q12. Did the Miistakis information you used, have a positive impact on ecosystem conservation?

- Yes
- No

If Yes, in what way? _____

If No, why not? _____

Q13. From your perspective, what is the most memorable research, program, or activity performed by Miistakis?

Miistakis Website

Q14. Have you visited the Miistakis website?

- Yes [Please go to Question 15a and 15b]
- No [Please go to Question 16]
- Don't recall [Please go to Question 16]

Q15a. Which parts of the website did you find most useful?

Q15b. Was there anything you were looking for that you could not find or you feel could be improved? [go to Q17]

Q16. What would motivate you to visit the Miistakis website?

Q17. What could we do to improve our website?

Future direction for Miistakis

Q18. What are the ecological conservation issues Miistakis should be pursuing? [Please drag your top five items into the box on the right, in order from highest to lowest. You can drag the items and reorder them once they are placed in the box]

- Human wildlife interactions
- Ecological connectivity
- Sustainable land use planning
- Recreation impacts
- Citizen engagement
- Conservation policy
- Conservation on private land
- Climate change and conservation
- Urban biodiversity
- Wilderness area management
- Parks and protected areas

Are there other ecological conservation issues/priorities not mentioned above which Miistakis should be pursuing?

Q19. Who are the people we should be working with more?

- Academics
- Students
- Municipal personnel
- Provincial government personnel
- Other NGOs
- Federal government personnel
- Landowners
- Community groups
- Indigenous Groups

Are there other people and organizations not mentioned above that Miistakis should be working with?

Q20. What are the best ways for Miistakis to disseminate research results? [Please drag your top five items into the box on the right, in order from highest to lowest. You can drag the items and reorder them once they are placed in the box]

- **Web site**
- **Newsletter**
- **In-person presentations**
- **Webinars**
- **News media**
- **Twitter**
- **Facebook**
- **Research journals**
- **Stand-alone web sites**
- **Video clips**
- **Reports**
- **Briefs**

Are there other ways Miistakis should disseminate research results that not mentioned above?

Q21. What should Miistakis focus on? [Please drag your top five items into the box on the right, in order from highest to lowest. You can drag the items and reorder them once they are placed in the box]

- **Primary research [involves the gathering of new data, i.e. when data about a particular subject is collected for the first time]**
- **Secondary research [involves the use of data, already collected through primary research]**
- **Publishing**
- **Supporting policy development**
- **Communicating our work to lay audiences**
- **Engaging citizens**
- **Creating tools and guides**
- **Facilitating dialogue**
- **Training**

Is there anything else not mentioned above that Miistakis should focus on?

Q22. Are there gaps in what Miistakis does?

- Yes [please specify what these are]
- No
- Not sure

Q23. Where do you think Miistakis has had the biggest impact?

Q24. Overall, how important is the work performed by Miistakis to you?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Not important at all
- Don't know/ not sure