



DENR
Listening
SESSIONS & SURVEYS

**Results of the 2011
DENR Listening Sessions and Surveys**

N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources
March 2012



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Executive Summary

In fall 2011, the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources held listening sessions across the state and launched two surveys to gather feedback from staff and customers about ways to improve services and processes. This report details the results of these listening sessions and surveys and includes recommendations based on this feedback.

Results

Of the more than 200 survey responses on each of 18 categories, DENR received an overall rating from its external customers of 3.24 on a scale of 1 to 5, with individual ratings ranging from 2.84 to 3.54. It is encouraging that a majority of those who participated in the survey have had a positive experience with DENR staff and programs.

The department collected more than 900 comments from the listening sessions and open-ended survey comments. These largely solution-based suggestions provide valuable feedback as DENR works to improve its services. The feedback included positive comments about DENR staff and services that reinforced the value of locating regional offices to serve our customers based on regional needs with staff knowledgeable of regional issues and individual customers.

The top seven categories in which we received feedback are:

1. Customer service
2. DENR internal processes
3. Outreach to DENR customers and community
4. Website and technology issues
5. Training of DENR staff
6. Permit review process
7. Legislative issues

Recommendations

The top recommendations for DENR to address the feedback gathered are to:

1. Focus on customer service and assistance
2. Review internal processes for improvement, including permit review processes
3. Increase outreach and education efforts, including regulatory updates, permit and compliance assistance and small business assistance
4. Improve technology and online resources, making online information clear and easy to find
5. Improve staff training
6. Strengthen internal communication and coordination

Future Plans

The department will use the feedback gathered through the surveys and listening sessions as the basis for developing an agenda for improvement actions, including future opportunities for customer and staff feedback. In fall 2012, DENR will release an update on the improvements that have been undertaken and completed in response to the recommendations contained in this report.

Introduction

The 2009-2013 DENR Strategic Plan includes a goal on Organizational Effectiveness Supporting DENR's Mission. This goal seeks to create "an agency where all actions, services and products are of high quality, and serve the department's mission and vision through continuous improvement, optimum efficiency, effectiveness and customer satisfaction in all operations."

Towards this end, the department created a Permit SWAT (not an acronym) Team in 2009 to look at ways to improve regulatory processes and results, and to increase customer satisfaction. The Team's recommendations, released in July 2010, focused on:

1. Technological improvements
2. Clearer policies and procedures
3. Training for staff and permit applicants
4. Staff management
5. Improved communication and customer service

In May 2011, the department announced the creation of the Environmental Assistance Center (EAC), housed in the Division of Environmental Assistance and Outreach (DEAO), to address the fifth recommendation.

One of the EAC's first tasks was to involve customers and department staff in a number of regional listening sessions to further define what types of assistance were needed. EAC staff held 17 listening sessions across the state for both internal staff and external customers. One internal and one external listening session were held in each regional office area across the state, including Asheville, Fayetteville, Mooresville, Raleigh, Washington, Wilmington and Winston-Salem. Additionally, a listening session was held for central office staff in Raleigh. An additional listening session was held in December for agricultural sector customers, and feedback was also gathered from managers at the department's annual leadership forum.

Additionally, the EAC launched two surveys, one on the intranet for DENR staff and one on the department's public website, to gain feedback from a wider audience to evaluate the department's customer service efforts and assistance and gather ideas for improvement.

While several of the DENR natural attractions already have surveys, feedback forms or other means to gather feedback on their services, the department's regulatory agencies have no coordinated survey or feedback effort. Therefore, the surveys were written primarily to gather feedback on regulatory issues and the listening sessions also focused on regulated customers and regulatory staff.

This report includes the results of these listening sessions and surveys and recommendations based on this feedback.

Listening Sessions

Seventeen listening session events were held across the state in 2011. All sessions were coordinated and hosted by non-regulatory division staff.

Eight of these sessions were conducted for internal DENR staff in September and October, held in each regional office and in the central office. Internal feedback was also collected at a ninth event, the annual leadership forum for DENR managers in December. All DENR staff were invited to participate in a listening session, and 244 staff members participated.

Seven listening sessions were held for external customers in September and October 2011, one in each regional office area: Asheville, Fayetteville, Mooresville, Raleigh, Washington, Wilmington, and Winston-Salem. Participation was by invitation-only to keep the group size small enough for all to participate; however, a press release discussing the surveys and listening sessions prompted additional customers to ask to attend, and the department welcomed all who were interested. Regional and central office staff identified customers to participate, inviting 35-50 to each event. Customers were chosen to represent the types of customers typical to each regional office, including regulated industry, local governments, environmental groups, homebuilders and others. An effort was made to invite customers who had made a complaint to that office to gather a variety of viewpoints. An eighth external session was held for agricultural customers in December. One hundred fifty-eight customers participated in the external listening sessions.

The listening sessions were non-structured events hosted by DEAO. The division director or the EAC manager welcomed attendees, explained the purpose of the listening sessions, and opened the floor for feedback. Other staff attended as note takers, to capture the comments as they were made. During the department's leadership forum, small groups were asked to generate feedback, which was submitted as written comments.

All notes were separated into individual comments and entered into a spreadsheet. Each comment was coded for location of session where the comment was made and whether the commenter was a DENR employee (internal) or customer (external). Names were not attached to comments in an effort to ensure an equal consideration of all and to remove any potential fear of retribution. All comments were then categorized by topic. Comments could be categorized in one or more topic areas, as appropriate.

A total of 917 comments were captured from all events. Eight hundred fourteen comments were captured in the regional and central office sessions, including 437 from the internal sessions and 377 from the external sessions. Additionally, 34 external comments were captured from the Agricultural listening session and 69 internal comments were captured from the DENR Managers' Leadership Forum.

Topics:

- Budget/Supplies
- Communication
- Consistency
- Customer Service
- The Economy
- Positive Feedback
- Internal process
- Legislative

- Complaints
- Other
- Outreach
- Permit review
- Training
- Website/IT

Definition of Topic Areas

Customer Service – Comments related to general customer service issues, including contacting DENR and receiving assistance from DENR.

Internal process – Comments about how DENR accomplishes its work, and suggestions for how changing our methods could improve the processes. Comments about permit review processes were included in the category, Permit Review.

Outreach – Comments that deal with communication or education from DENR to outside parties.

Website and Technology – Comments about DENR’s website or other online resources, or about needed online resources that do not currently exist.

Training – Comments about training, primarily internal training for DENR staff.

Legislative – Comments related to state or federal laws or regulations or about how the environment is regulated or how regulation is funded.

Permit Review – Comments related to the permit application and review process and compliance issues.

Other – Any comments that do not fit in another topic area.

Complaints – Negative comments about DENR.

Positive Feedback – Praise for DENR.

Communication – Comments that deal with communication issues within DENR.

Budget & Supplies – Comments about DENR’s budget or resources.

Consistency – Comments about consistency within DENR.

Economy – Comments about the current economic climate as it relates to environmental regulations or budgets.

Results

Due to the method of data collection and the fact that each response could be coded for more than one topic area, these results are not quantifiable but can be used to determine the topics that were raised or commented on most frequently in the listening sessions and open-ended survey questions.

When all responses from all sessions and surveys are combined, the five most frequent responses are related to DENR customer service, internal DENR processes, outreach by DENR to our customers and community, training for DENR staff and website and technology issues.

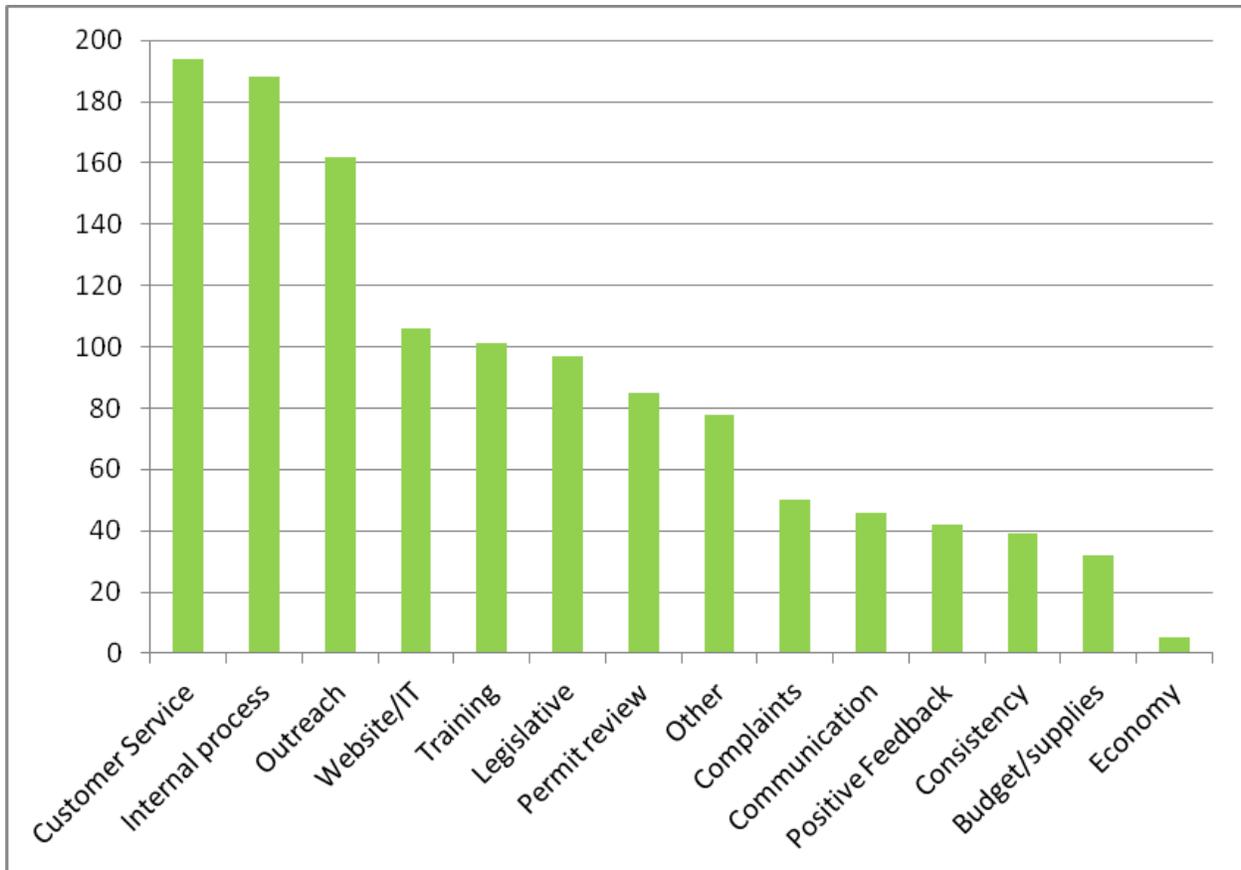


Figure 1. Results of the Listening Session and Survey Responses by Topic

Results by participant

The topic areas are shown in order below by participant type, external (customer) or internal (staff).

Combined:	External:	Internal:
1. DENR customer service	1. DENR internal processes	1. DENR customer service
2. DENR internal processes	2. DENR customer service	2. Outreach to DENR customers and community
3. Outreach to DENR customers and community	3. Permit review process	3. DENR internal processes
4. Website and technology issues	4. Outreach to DENR customers and community	4. Website and technology issues
5. Training of DENR staff	5. Legislative issues	5. Training of DENR staff
6. Legislative	6. Positive feedback	6. Other
7. Permit review process	7. Other	7. Legislative
8. Other	8. Training	8. Complaints
9. Complaints	9. Consistency	9. Communication
10. Communication	10. Website/IT	10. Budget/supplies
11. Positive feedback	11. Communication	11. Consistency
12. Consistency	12. Complaints	12. Permit review process
13. Budget/supplies	13. Budget/supplies	13. Positive feedback
14. Economy	14. Economy	14. Economy

Results by Topic

To better describe each topic area, the seven most frequently cited topic areas were broken down into subtopics, shown in the following pages. Sample responses are included for each of the most frequent subtopics to help illustrate the type of comments found in each.

Customer Service

The largest category of responses was customer service, with 194 responses. The largest subcategory was positive feedback about DENR, and 80 percent of these comments came from external customers. The next largest subcategories were phone issues, communication and website/IT. Examples of these subcategories are below.

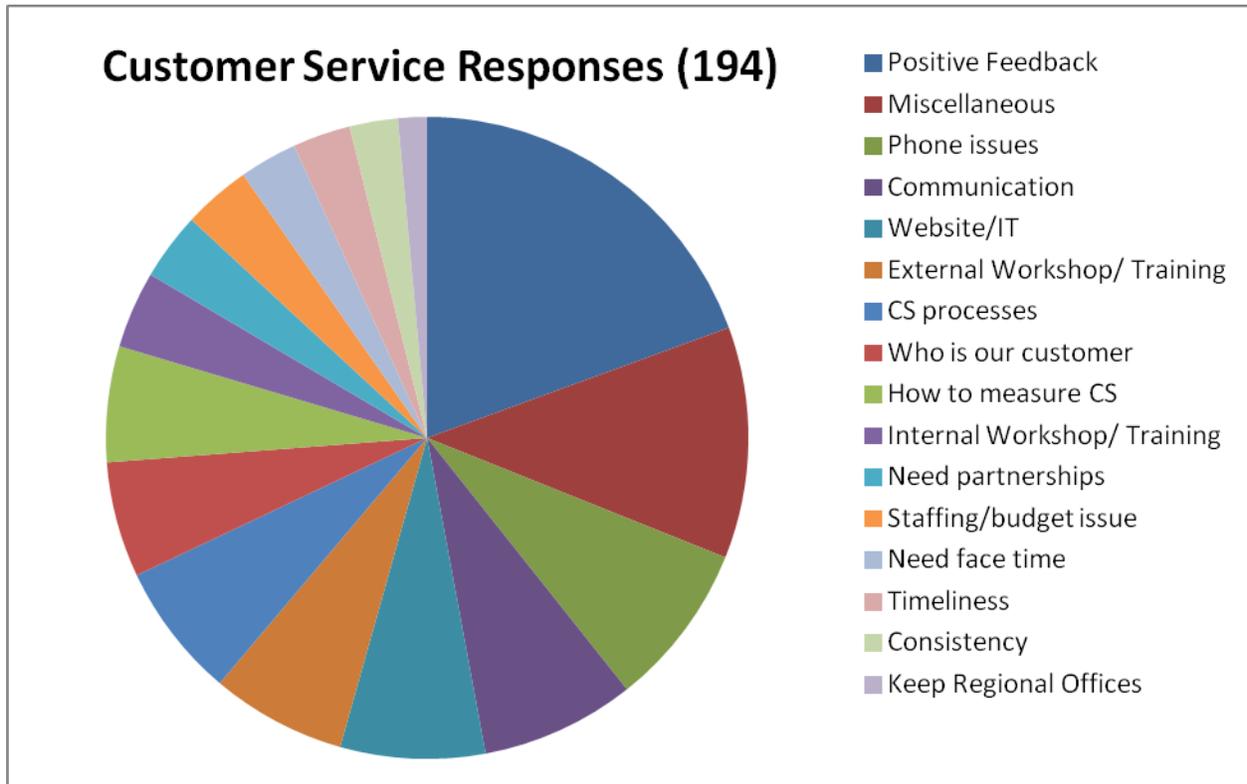


Figure 2: Customer Service Responses by Subtopic

Positive Feedback - *Express reviews are a good thing. Customers are willing to pay more for quicker turnarounds.*

Scoping meeting with the regulatory agencies to determine the necessary permits is very helpful.

Phone Issues - *Need one place to call to get the information you need.*

DENR staff members need to answer and return calls promptly.

Communication - *The free-flowing dialog that we had during the listening session is due in part to the absence of DENR regulators. I suggest that you have a few more stakeholder meetings in this same way.*

Customers need to know: What are the expectations for customer service? How many days for a permit? When will a call be returned?

Website/IT - Water Supply has an online status system. Other DENR agencies would get a lot less calls if they posted real status updates.

Paper reporting is still too prevalent. Electronic reporting strongly desired.

Remember that not all the people we serve have access to the internet. Not all assistance can be electronic.

External Workshop/Training – Place greater priority on assuring the public that DENR is safeguarding their interest via the permitting and regulatory process.

One thing which is very helpful is to get our [wastewater] certification through large sessions, for example training sessions in the regional offices. The relationships with the regional office are very valuable to our local communities.

Customer Service Processes – Include customer service training in new employee orientation.

Establish best practices for customer service and communicate to staff.

Internal Process

The second largest category, with 188 responses, was internal processes. Top subcategories were internal communication, permit coordination, stakeholder outreach, need for innovation, innovation restriction and enforcement consistency.

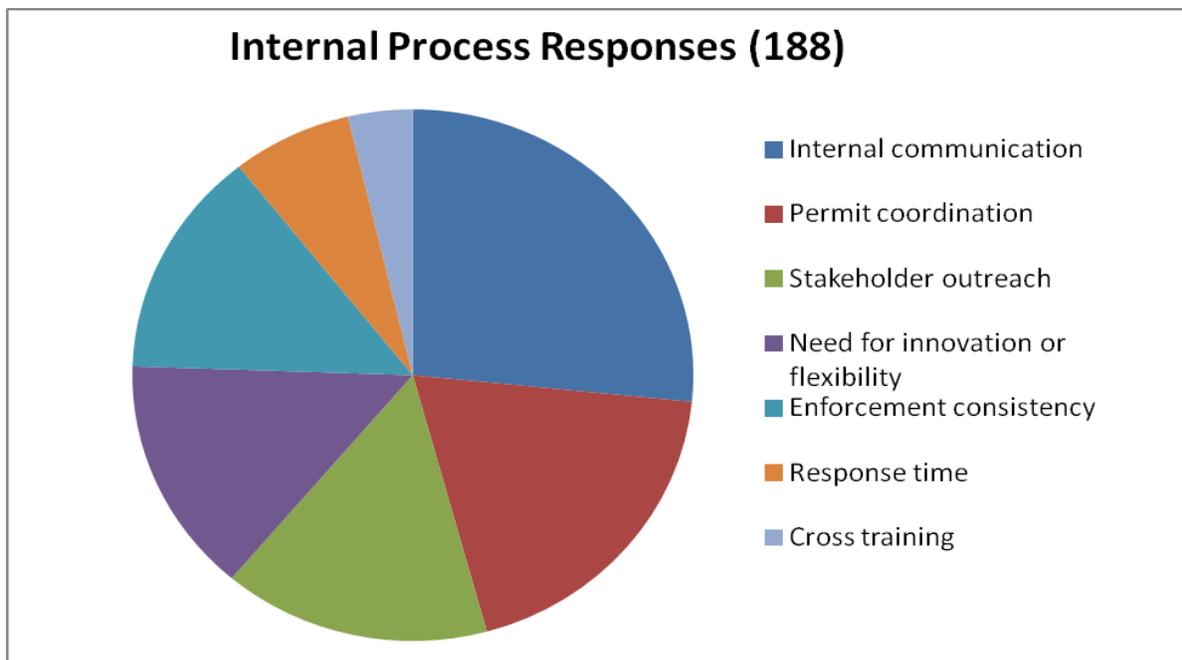


Figure 3: Internal Process Responses by Subtopic

Internal Communication - There is great need for better communications between the DENR agencies.

Permit coordination – *Permitting between more than one division needs better coordination.*

DENR needs a formal process for moving public records requests and Phase I environmental assessment requests through the system [particularly in coordinating regional responses].

Stakeholder outreach – *DENR could do a better job letting customers know about new rule changes, permit or reporting forms in advance.*

Need for Innovation or Flexibility – *Need a better tracking system for permits and need to move to electronic submissions.*

Once regulations are made there is no wiggle room or dialogue. It would be nice to be involved in the process earlier.

Need cost evaluations of some of the requirements to allow for serving the intent of the rule but allowing for other means of meeting the rules.

Enforcement consistency – *Regional offices should be consistent with how they enforce the rules. Also, DENR should consider the actual environmental impacts when deciding where to focus their resources.*

Response time – *Need electronic payment, electronic submittal to speed up response times.*

Need a fast track permitting option in water quality.

Cross-training - *Cross-training sessions would be very helpful within regional offices and also cross-training on what headquarters folks and programs do.*

Outreach

Most of the 162 outreach responses were about the need for DENR to better advertise or explain what we do or to hold trainings and workshops to educate our customers and the public about environmental laws and how to comply with these laws. To better illustrate the responses received, responses were broken into the subcategories below.

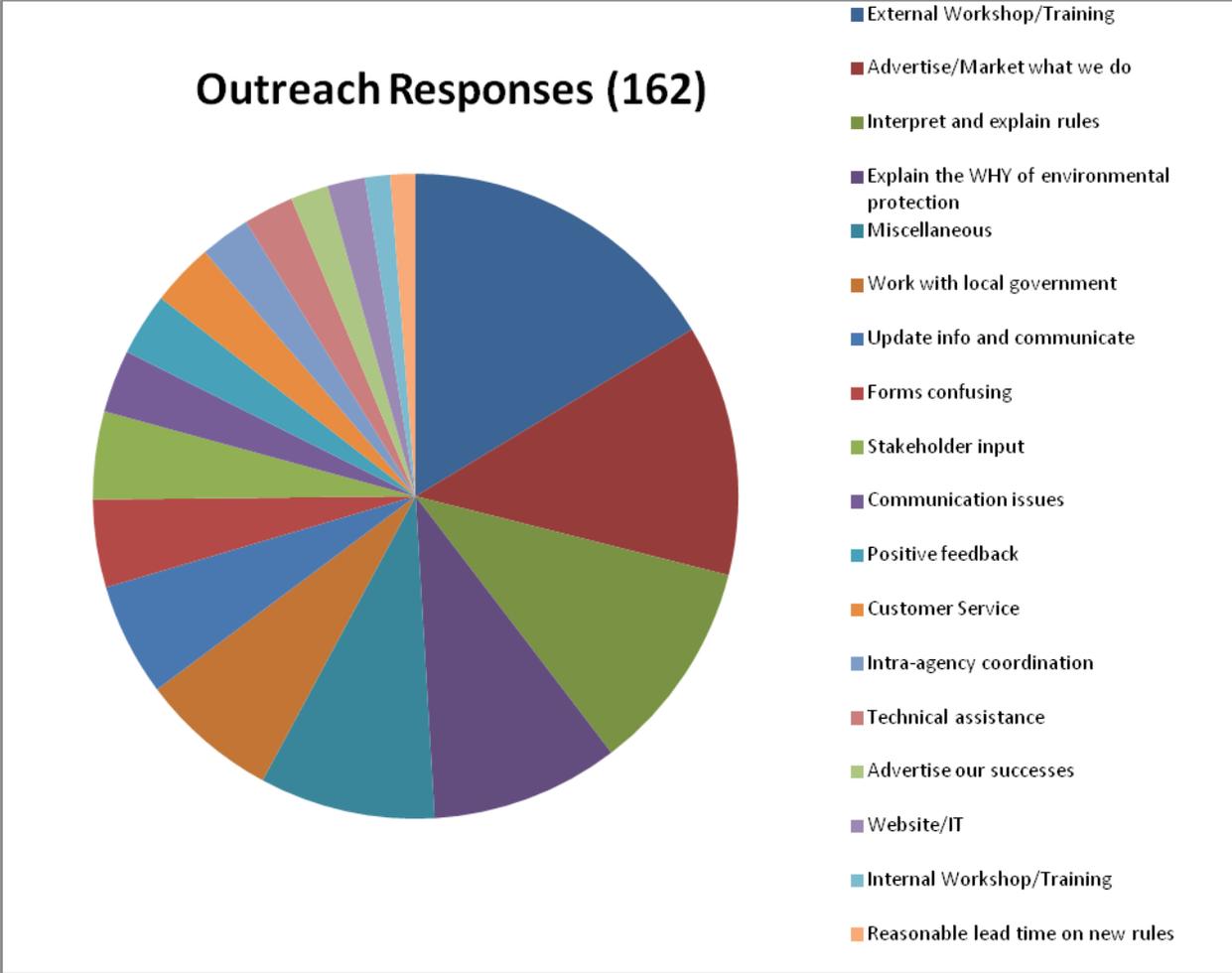


Figure 4: Outreach Responses by Subtopic

External Workshop/Training - *Have more workshops in the regions, not just in Raleigh. New Hanover County had a stormwater workshop a few years ago that was well received.*

Explain the new sedimentation forms. They are confusing.

DENR should conduct “consultant day” trainings via webinars or meetings for specific audiences to be educated on certain programs or rules. This is especially important when there is a change in regulation, to communicate when it is coming and give information on how to comply.

Advertise/Market what we do - *Need a way to showcase what we’re doing to protect the environment. Highlight how the department is keeping North Carolina beautiful, clean, natural and healthy.*

Interpret and explain rules – *Develop a process for releasing rules and regulatory changes to the stakeholder community.*

Need better information on what to report and how. Reporting requirements should be clear and easy to follow.

Explain the WHY of environmental protection - *Sediment law is clear in defining purpose. Maybe more laws and rules should more clearly state the purpose so folks can understand why this protection is in place.*

Website & Technology

Nearly one-third of the 107 responses in this category related to the need for electronic document submission and tracking, and these responses were nearly split between internal (53 percent) and external (47 percent) respondents.

Nearly half of responses were in one of three categories related to improving the structure, content, quality of materials or search feature of the website.

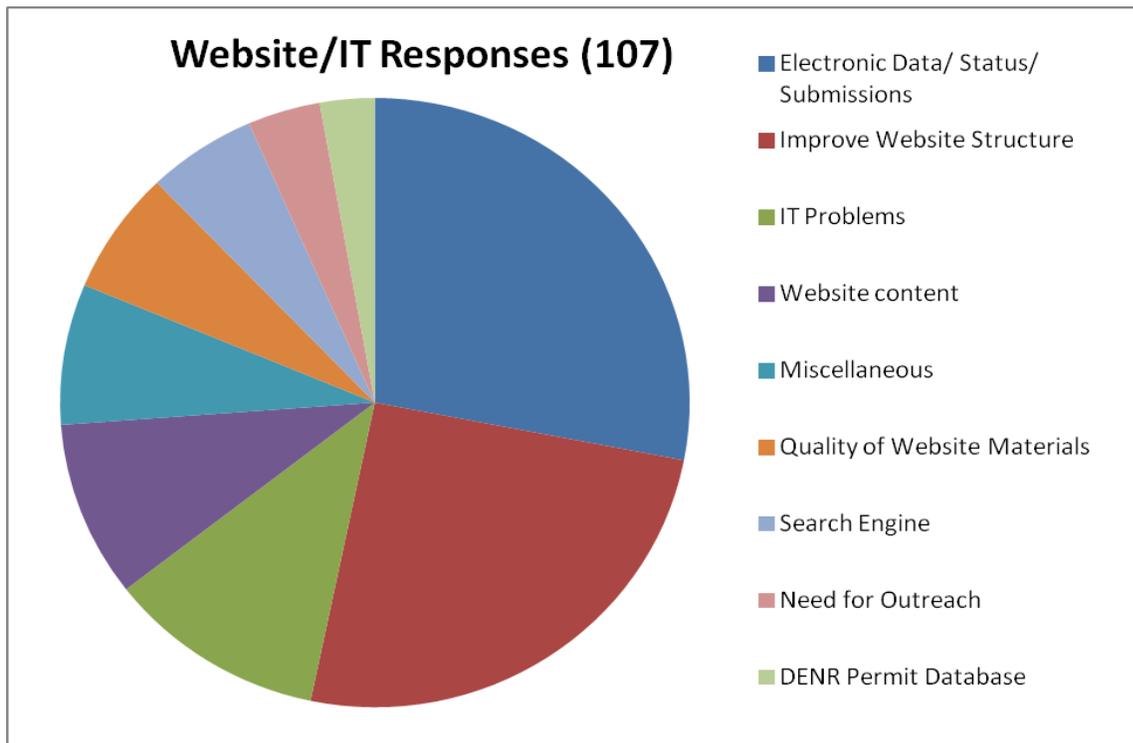


Figure 5: Website & Technology Responses by Subtopic

Electronic Data/Status/Submissions - *Payment should be electronic to expedite things more quickly.*

Move more to submission of reports in electronic format.

Have electronic tracking on the web to report current [permit] status – so don't have to call.

[Need] a DENR mandate to submit electronically. Even if only a portion of the application is submitted this way, it would help greatly. Should have that standard, but paper option also AND permit info should be posted so public and others can see what is in play.

Improve Website Structure – *Can't find the forms I need or the contact information for people to ask.*

Stick to one website design [for all divisions], it's difficult to find things. Things are constantly changing.

IT Problems – *The department is technologically behind. We need consistent technology updates funded at the department level, including internet connections [at some offices]. Also need electronic tracking of permits.*

Website Content – *Keep website information up to date. Keep staff contact information up-to-date.*

Locate all forms in one place [including permit applications and guidance documents].

Public needs some way to get the regulatory information to guide them in the right direction.

Training

The responses related to training included a variety of internal training needs, from general job and customer service training to cross-training to legal training. It also included responses about the need to offer training for our customers on how to fill out forms or be in compliance and the need to educate the public about the good work we do in DENR and why environmental regulation is necessary to protect our state's natural resources and public health.

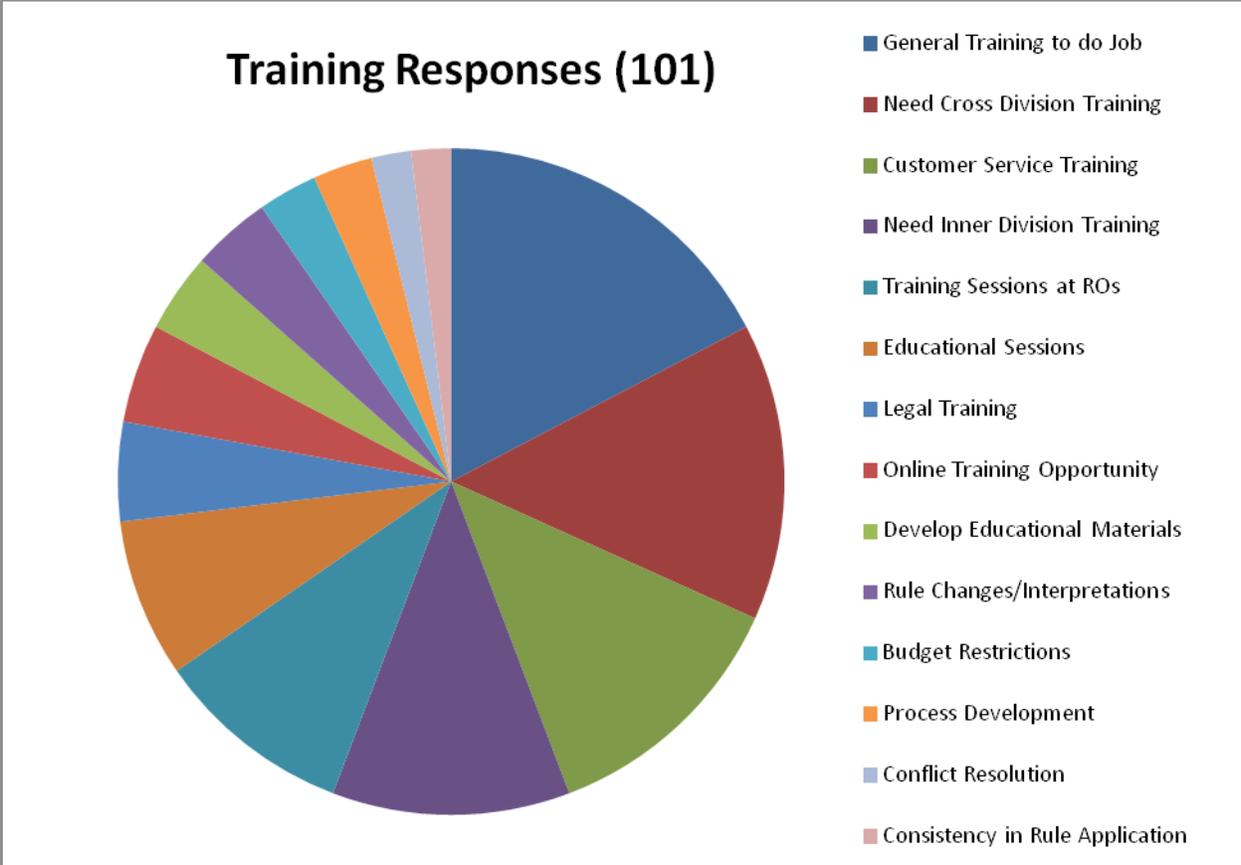


Figure 6: Training Responses by Subtopic

General Training to do Job - Professional training is important. Even what is available on the web requires registration fees. It is hard to keep up without proper training.

[DENR staff need] better training on processing travel and other approvals.

Need Cross Division Training – Have more cross-training and open discussions within the offices to resolve overlap regulations, changing regulation, and better ways to help the regulated community.

“Getting to know Wetlands” is a good example and might be emulated – but it is only offered one place and one time.

Customer Service Training – We need real, meaningful customer service training.

Customer Service is very important. We have received calls from people who have been shuffled around trying to find the right person or have gotten little info on the website. Folks taking calls do not know who to send them to or how to streamline calls. Need ways to improve websites or train people on who does what.

Need Intra Division Training - *Consistency is an issue among inspectors. Have all inspectors across the state get together in room and discuss what they are seeing and how to address issues.*

Some sections require specialists to go out with other specialists. This cross-training helps consistency and encourages camaraderie.

Regional office staff who have been around a while really are helpful and know their stuff. The younger employees who are right out of school don't necessarily know the details. It would be helpful if the newer staff worked with the older staff to learn. Facilities are willing to have regulators come in and tour sites to help them learn.

Training Sessions at Regional Offices - *Need better education on areas such as strapping [above ground fuel] tanks down to prevent future problems. Implementing an education program can prevent [future] cleanup expenses.*

Educational Trainings – *We need to continue these discussions because some of the rules are very complicated and we need to figure out the best way to explain it to the public as well as to better understand it ourselves. For example, there was confusion about the recent federal sedimentation rule.*

Public has a lack of knowledge about what DENR does. Increase understanding of DENR mandates and permits.

Public not used to DENR terminology. NOVs [notices of violations are] hard for folks to understand – too “legalese” – need to be interpreted and explained better.

Have educational workshops for stakeholder groups [and partner with them for training to address their needs].

Permit Review

The top concern areas under permit review were sedimentation and related rules (13 percent), communication (12 percent), and consistency (10 percent).

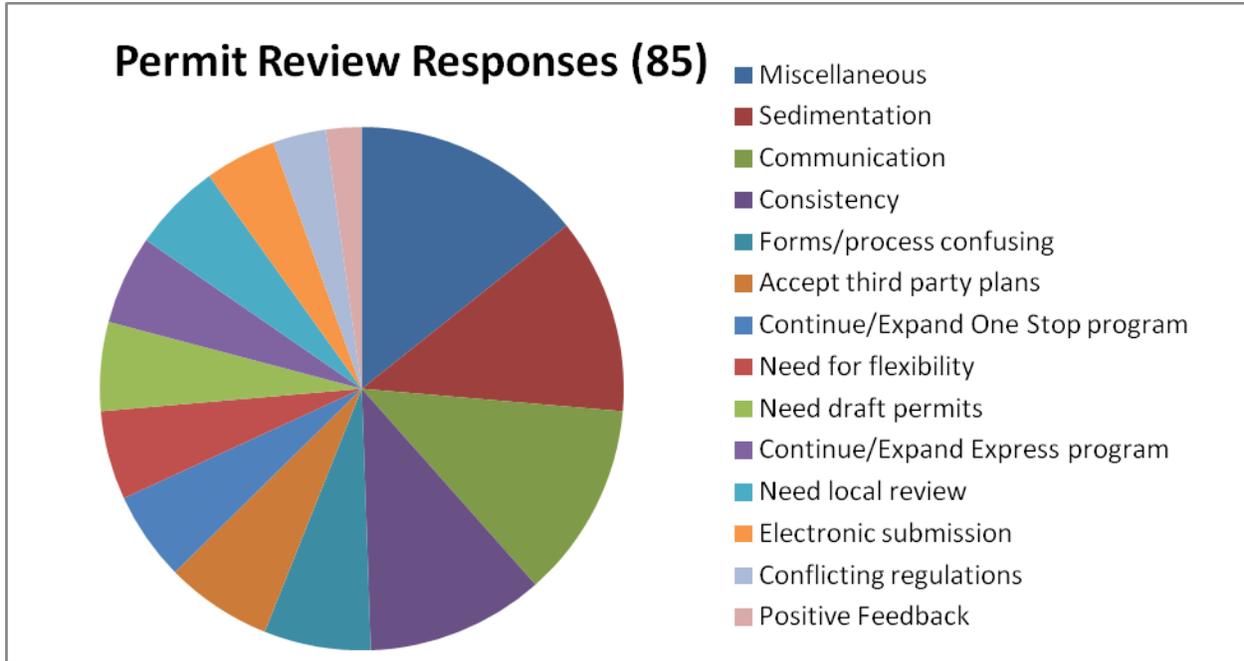


Figure 7: Permit Review Responses by Subtopic

Sedimentation – *Self-inspection forms from Land Quality are required at the erosion control box. A Water Quality form is also required with same information. The two groups should work together, combine forms and possibly combine inspections.*

Communication – *Encourage staff to make a phone call. A five minute phone call could address some of these multiple extraneous questions [about a permit application].*

Consistency – *Rule interpretations and enforcement seem to be different from one inspector to the next.*

[Need more] consistency in application of rules and policy from region to region.... Staff interpretation of rules is sometimes arbitrary.

I deal with four different regions for stormwater permitting, all [with] different reporting, verbiage there is no continuity across the state. NEED STANDARDIZATION. [Make better use of stakeholders to improve consistency].

DENR is too siloed. [Make better use of staff from other regions to improve consistency].

Legislative Issues

Of the 89 responses, 37 percent were related to changing rules or regulations, which is outside DENR's scope of work. Another 24 percent asked for continued or increased funding for DENR programs, and 12 percent suggested restructuring of DENR programs.

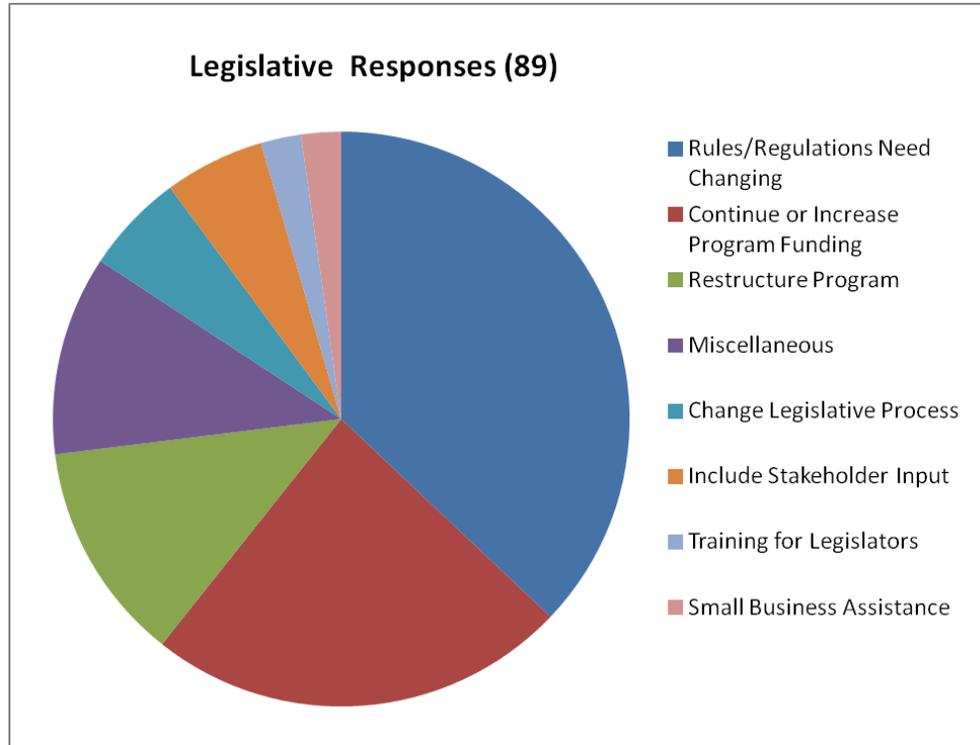


Figure 8: Legislative Responses by Subtopic

Rules/Regulations Need Changing - Base future rule-making and rule interpretation on valid science, fairness, reason and cost- effectiveness.

There are many old and outdated rules/regulations that need to be looked at but without appropriate DENR staff levels, we are not able to pursue these changes. We support [funding] appropriate levels of DENR staffing in order to pursue these changes.

There are conflicting regulations which overlap at the project level and complicate the process.

State rule requires an Authorization to Construct WWTP (Wastewater Treatment Facility) of private companies, a six month process even though it was intended for public sewage treatment systems and doesn't apply. This needs a legislative fix.

What does Senate Bill 781 [banning any new N.C. laws more stringent than federal laws] mean for our efforts to develop policies that clarify existing requirements?

Continue or Increase Program Funding - *The regional office is the key to getting one-on-one service, one-stop service and staff who know you. We have contacts that help us at the regional office in all divisions that we work with. Simple things such as a name change trigger a whole new permit. Regional office staff helped us fix this. "If I lose the regional office contacts and their service, I will tell my corporate office not to locate any other facilities in North Carolina."*

The UST non-commercial and commercial trust funds are way underfunded. The UST Trust Fund tank fees are way too low (if private insurance were used the fees would be at least triple what the state charges) and the percentage of the gas tax is way too low (for example NCDOT gets 1 penny per gallon for just NCDOT environmental issues and a comparable state to North Carolina gets four cents per gallon). Solution, give the UST Section one cent per gallon of the gas tax and increase permit fees.

Restructure Program – *The UST pre-approval process is especially cumbersome during the assessment phase [Comprehensive Site Assessment, CSA]. Multiple pre-approvals are required to define the extent of soil and groundwater contamination which slows the process down by at least 60 days. Go back to requiring pre-approval after the CSA is completed.*

Regarding reclaimed water there seems an undue regulatory burden. Extreme requirements compared with the rest of the country. Use a risk-based method to determine the rules and requirements.

Flexibility [from Miscellaneous] - *Regulation seems to be one-size fits all for the state when different areas have different issues.*

Change Legislative Process – *There is a disconnect between local assistance and legislative understanding about the helpfulness of the regional office.*

DENR Survey

DENR launched two surveys in fall 2011, one for DENR staff and one for DENR customers. The internal survey was sent out to all DENR staff and linked on the DENR intranet and received 98 responses.

The external survey was launched on Sept. 14 and sent out in a press release on Sept. 19. The survey link was on the website for 11 weeks and featured prominently on the DENR homepage for eight. It was announced at the listening sessions and sent out via email to North Carolina trade associations and environmental groups in September and October to be advertised to their members. The external survey received 203 responses.

About the external respondents

Respondents were from 56 North Carolina counties and approximately 12 were from outside the state. They represented a wide variety of customers (see Figure 9) and had worked with various divisions and programs and with all regional offices on a variety of issues, mainly permitting, regulation and compliance (see Figure 10).

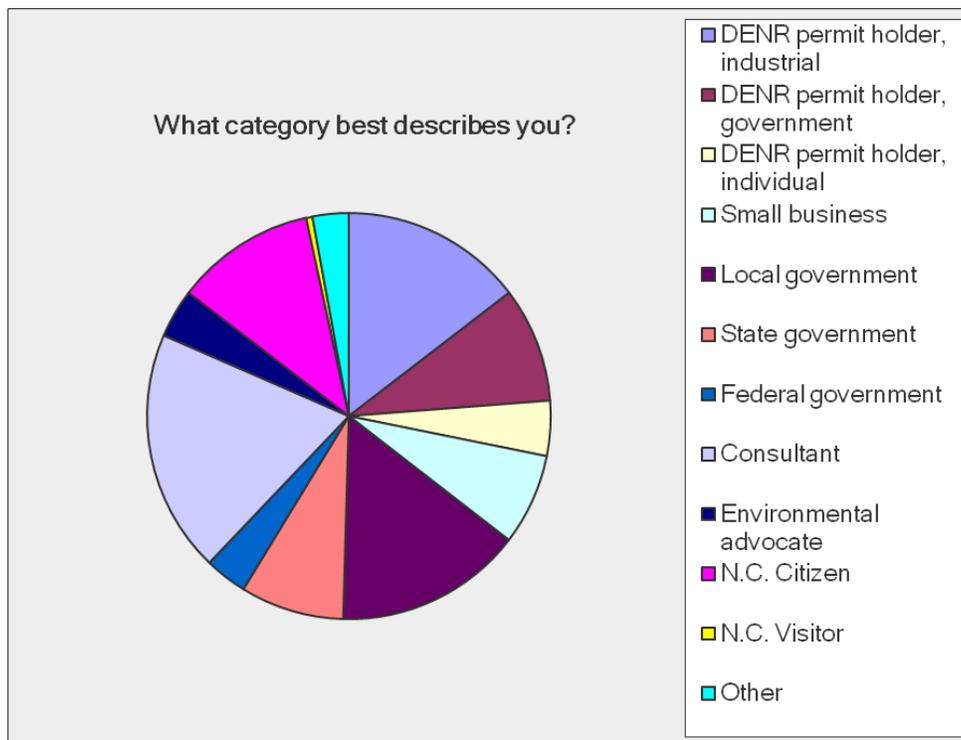


Figure 9: Survey Respondents by Category

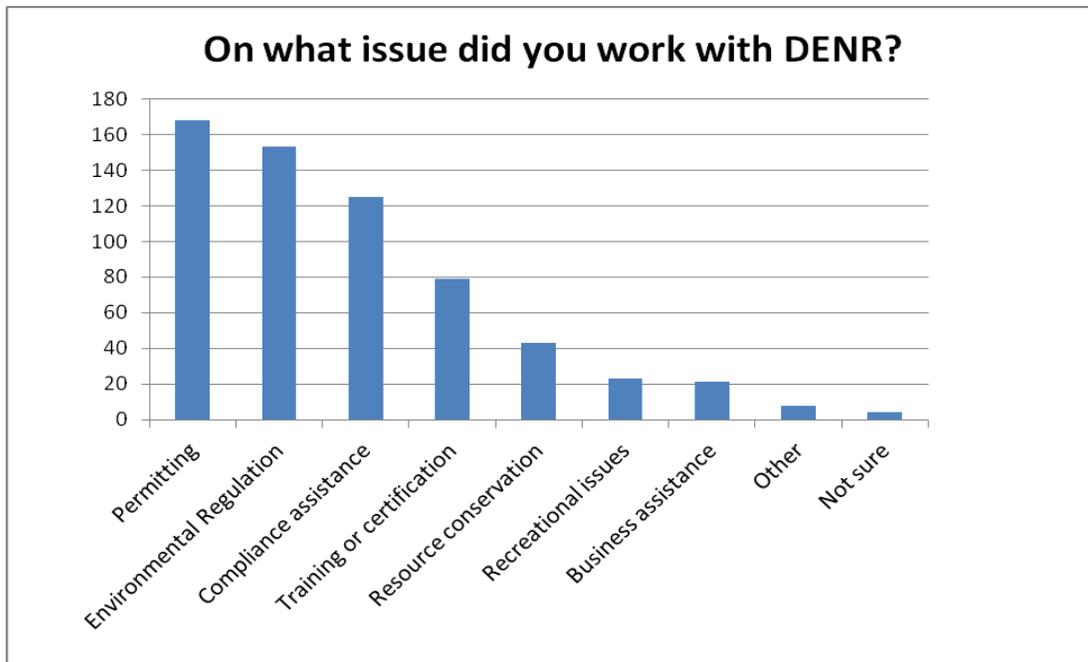


Figure 10: Survey Responses: By Issue

Survey Results

Of the more than 200 survey responses on each of 18 categories, DENR received an overall rating from its external customers of 3.24 on a scale of 1 to 5, with individual ratings from 2.84 to 3.54. It is encouraging that a majority of those who participated in the survey have had a positive experience with DENR staff and programs.

DENR Assistance

Overall, ratings for nine areas of DENR assistance were favorable, ranging from 2.78 to 3.85. When rating DENR on various types of assistance, the internal and external surveys found similar results (see Figure 11).

Externally, DENR assistance was rated average or better for all areas but one, with scores ranging from 2.93 to 3.49 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being excellent. The highest external scores were for assistance with natural resources, solid waste, water and energy; permit assistance for those needing new permits; and customer service to those who contact DENR. The lowest scores were for small business assistance, online information that is clear and easy to find, and regulatory updates.

The biggest differences between internal and external ratings were for customer service, permit assistance and compliance assistance. On all of these, DENR internal ratings were higher than customer ratings.

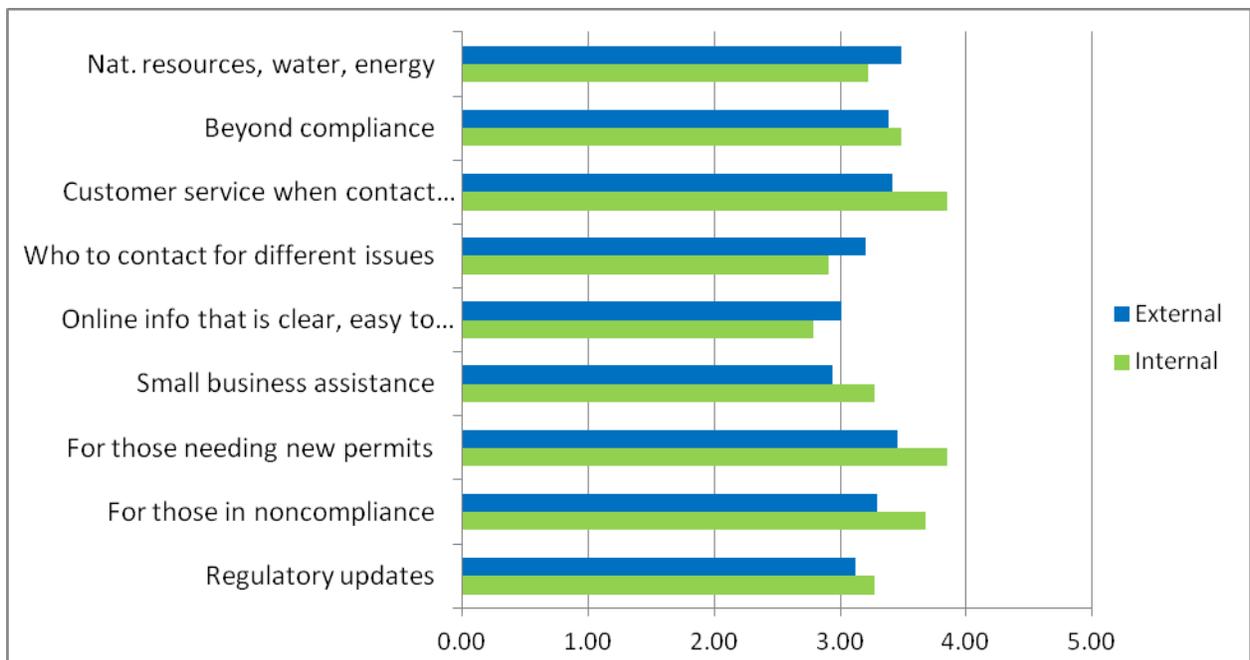


Figure 11: Survey Responses on Customer Assistance

In a separate question, respondents were asked if they were offered compliance assistance, and two-thirds said yes. Of these, more than half (52 percent) rated it either very good or excellent (4 or 5) on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being excellent. Another 25 percent rated the service they received average (3), and just 8 percent rated it poor (1).

When asked, external customers indicated that they would most prefer assistance from DENR provided through trainings or workshops, improved web-based resources, periodic newsletters or other email information sources.

DENR Culture

In general, the ratings of eight areas of DENR culture (consistency, helpfulness, etc.) were positive, ranging from 2.68 to 3.54, and results were similar between customers and staff.

The highest external scores were for DENR being approachable, helpful and factual and accurate. The lowest scores were for consistency, balance between regulatory and business needs and transparency. The biggest differences were that DENR customers find the department more transparent, approachable and fair than staff rated themselves.

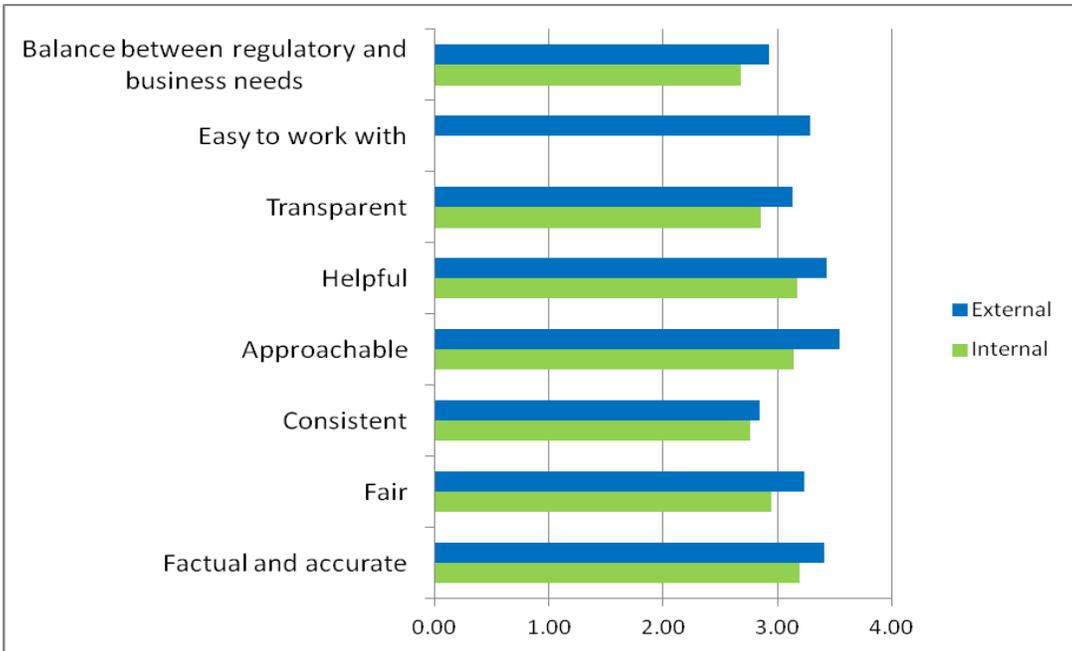


Figure 12: Survey Responses on DENR Culture

Listening Session and Survey Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the results of the listening sessions and surveys. Under each heading are recommendations for how to improve in this area.

1. Focus on customer service and assistance

Listening session feedback - both internal and external – pointed to a need to focus on customer service and assistance throughout the department. Ways this could be done include:

- Setting a departmental goal of customer service excellence, which is communicated to all employees and to customers.
- Establish departmental best practices and minimum guidelines to address expectations for DENR customer service and related issues. Recommend that DENR establish a team to address this issue.
- Set a departmental goal for customer service training for all DENR staff within a set time period, such as two years. This training could be centrally coordinated by the Environmental Assistance Center, or could be developed by each division to meet their individual needs.
- Share tools and techniques for good customer service between divisions, such as guides for how to route calls by topic and how to handle requests effectively. Recommend that DENR establish a team to facilitate this process.
- Improve and promote existing permit and compliance assistance services for customers.
- Develop and market new permit and compliance assistance services for small businesses.

2. Review internal processes for improvement, including permit review processes

A need for improving internal processes was again identified as a priority, as it was thought the Permit SWAT Team Recommendations.

- Develop clearer policies and procedures to improve consistency and predictability through intra-divisional, multi-regional teams.
- Address overlapping rules and regulations through multi-divisional teams. Begin by identifying an area of regulatory conflict, such as between sedimentation rules (Division of Land Quality) and water quality rules (Division of Water Quality). Then develop guidance for how sites can meet the requirements and reporting of all regulations by clarifying points of regulatory conflict.
- Improve communication through better collaboration and cooperation between the regulatory programs.
- Create ongoing opportunities for staff and stakeholder feedback on process improvements, such as an online feedback option or question and answer sessions between staff and customers, and address opportunities as they are identified.

3. Increase outreach and education efforts, including regulatory updates, permit and compliance assistance, and small business assistance

Recent budget and travel restrictions have curtailed DENR's previous efforts on outreach and training. The listening sessions and surveys have again highlighted our customers' need to learn about our programs and services, to learn about regulatory changes before they take effect, and

to receive ongoing compliance assistance education. In some cases, DENR has information available electronically but it does not reach the customers who need it in a timely fashion.

- Recommend designating a staff member, team or other lead for outreach and education coordination. Potential training and outreach that could be offered by DENR includes:
 - Webinars or trainings on new or upcoming regulations
 - Outreach campaign about new or upcoming regulations or programs to reach potential customers
 - Presentations on existing DENR assistance programs, which could including information from businesses who have utilized this assistance and any resulting savings
 - A listserv or other electronic communication on new or upcoming regulations
 - Customer open houses at regional offices
 - Legislative Open House
 - Link all webinars, presentations and trainings to the DENR online calendar and market each to the appropriate audience
- Set a goal for stakeholder involvement in rule and process changes. Encourage divisions to set their own methods to achieve this.

4. Improve technology and online resources, making online information clear and easy to find

In almost every category, comments were gathered about the need to improve our technology and online resources.

- Improve Departmental Technology for Increased Efficiency
 - Increase the use of electronic information and processes. Many customers asked for the following:
 - Online permit tracking
 - Electronic reporting to meet permit requirements
 - Electronic signatures and online permit applications (e-permitting)
 - Online payment options (e-payment) for fees
 - Digital documents and public access to documents
- Improve Website Structure and Navigation
 - Improve the online search feature of the portal.
 - Increase consistency of design of webpages on the portal. Consider requesting funds to hire a Webmaster to oversee consistency of design, user navigation and other department-level website concerns. This may be less important with an improved search option.
 - Have all online forms easily accessible. Create a single forms webpage so that customers can access all forms easily and in one location.
 - Improve navigation. Help customers who don't know what division or program they need to find their way. Create a navigation or information piece for those customers who don't know where to go or how to search for the information they need, such as a topic list or flow diagram. This may be less important with an improved search option.

- Create outreach campaigns around new website content to market it to the appropriate audience. For example, if a new regulation is coming out soon or a form is changing, reach out to potentially affected customers to educate them about the change and how to be in compliance.
- Improve Website Content
 - Update information on the website. All divisions should provide staff contact info (phone, email and fax), and it should be updated monthly. Ensure that customers can find the correct staff member they need to contact about an issue by including information on which staff work in which programs or topic areas. Also ensure that the contact information in the page footer is correct for the division to prevent misdirected calls. Make sure all contact information is included on webpages is linked to the main DENR staff directory, which will automatically update changes. Take down old webpages that are no longer being updated and supported.
 - Establish and promote an online feedback mechanism for gathering feedback about broken links and missing information.

5. Improve staff training

Both internal and external stakeholders identified the need to offer staff training in order to keep staff up to date on regulatory and other environmental issues.

- Identify a source or sources of departmental training coordination and funds for general and technical training needs.
- Offer customer service training for all DENR staff (see Recommendation 1).
- Re-establish the DENR New Employee Orientation Training to educate new employees on the breadth of services and regulatory programs in DENR.
- Offer short internal staff trainings on new regulations or rule changes.
- Ongoing mentoring can offer on the job training to improve employee function on the job.
- Cross-training was identified as a way to improve customer service by broadening employee knowledge and understanding of departmental functions.

6. Strengthen internal communication and coordination

The Department and divisions need to create opportunities for internal communication, such as cross-divisional meetings to address overlapping regulations or common issues, multi-division staff training events, or other opportunities for staff from different divisions and sections to work together.

- Establish cross-divisional teams to address issues of regulatory overlap and how they can best be addressed.
- Establish multi-regional, intra-divisional teams to share best practices and address issues of consistency.
- Establish cross-divisional teams to address departmental issues and share best practices of training, customer service, outreach, delegation of authority and consistency.

- Offer cross-training to existing staff for the chance to learn about other divisions and programs. If long-term cross training is not feasible, consider short-term cross-training of a few days or weeks.
- Utilize technology to include staff from all regional offices in meetings, address current issues, strengthen communication between regional offices and headquarters, and improve morale.
- Consider regular staff updates for the entire department and for each division to keep employees informed and dispel rumors. Utilize technology such as webinars or recorded videos to reach all staff with the same message.

Future Plans

DENR intends for these listening sessions and surveys to be the beginning of an ongoing process of stakeholder input and continual improvement of service delivery to our regulatory customers and the public. The results and recommendations in this report will be the basis for developing an agenda for improvement actions.

In April and May 2012, staff from the Environmental Assistance Center will travel back to all regional offices to meet with staff and update them on the results of the listening sessions, projects underway to address the issues raised, and future plans for improvement. Later this year, the EAC will work to establish ongoing opportunities for customer and internal feedback. Additionally, DENR will launch another survey in the future to gather additional customer feedback for improvement.

In fall 2012, DENR will release an update on the work that has been undertaken and completed in response to the recommendations in this report.