

# **Enhancing Fishing Access Through a National Assessment of Recreational Boating Access**

## **Focus Group Report**



**Produced by the States Organization for Boating Access, the  
Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, the National Marine  
Manufacturers Association, BoatU.S., the Association of Marina  
Industries, and Responsive Management**

**Conducted Under a Grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
and Administered by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies**

**Multistate Conservation Grant F13AP00236  
2013**



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**2013**

**States Organization for Boating Access**

[www.sobaus.org](http://www.sobaus.org)

**Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation**

[www.takemefishing.org/corporate](http://www.takemefishing.org/corporate)

**National Marine Manufacturers Association**

[www.nmma.org](http://www.nmma.org)

**BoatU.S.**

[www.boatus.com](http://www.boatus.com)

**Association of Marine Industries**

[www.marinaassociation.org](http://www.marinaassociation.org)

**Responsive Management**

[www.responsivemanagement.com](http://www.responsivemanagement.com)

## **Acknowledgments**

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The views contained in this report do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Although numerous people assisted with this project, any errors, omissions, or typographical mistakes in the report are the sole responsibility of Responsive Management.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Multistate Conservation Grant to determine the extent to which the quality of boating access throughout the United States has affected recreational fishing participation. The research proceeds from the understanding that participation in boating and fishing are intertwined, with obstacles or barriers to one activity strongly influencing participation in the other. To address hunting, fishing, and boating recruitment and retention as part of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Outdoor Heritage National Conservation Need, this project will result in an assessment tool, implementable at the national, state, and regional levels, for measuring boating access throughout the United States and determining how it relates to overall fishing access, satisfaction, and participation.

Overall, the study includes a review of previously implemented boating access evaluation tools, a series of focus groups with boaters and boating professionals, and a nationwide survey of boaters, anglers, boating industry professionals, and private business owners. This report discusses the results of the first major phase of data collection, the focus groups with recreational boaters and professionals from the boating industry.

Four focus groups were conducted in April 2013 with recreational boaters in Richmond, Virginia; Kenosha, Wisconsin; Houston, Texas; and Portland, Oregon. A fifth group was held with professionals from the boating industry in Washington, D.C. at the 2013 American Boating Congress; participants included representatives from boat and engine manufacturers, boat dealers, marina operators, industry service providers, and marine trade association groups. Additionally, to initiate the study, a "kickoff" focus group was held with the agency and organizational research partners; the purpose of this meeting was to assess project goals and expectations, although the administrative and planning outcomes of the group are not discussed as part of the results in this report.

Each group consisted of 10-12 people and lasted between 1½ and 2 hours. The focus group recruiting criteria for the recreational boater groups called for individuals active in both boating and fishing. Each group was conducted using a discussion guide that allowed for consistency in the data collection, and was recorded for later analysis and transcription. The groups were led by one of Responsive Management's trained moderators. To recruit for the boater groups, Responsive Management contacted individuals listed in boating registration records and placed advertisements in local papers in the cities of interest. To encourage participation, Responsive Management provided a monetary incentive to attendees of the recreational boater groups.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

#### **Overall Implication of Boating Access**

Comments from both the recreational boaters and boating industry professionals suggest that "boating access" is an expansive concept referring to the all-encompassing set of barriers and challenges affecting overall boating and fishing participation: boating access includes the number and quality of physical launches and ramps at access points; the availability of

information on how to find and use such access points; awareness of how to store one's boat, particularly in residential neighborhoods or urban environments; environmental issues specific to certain areas, which may influence a boater's decision to frequent the area in the first place; concerns regarding the costs of boating participation, which contribute to the perception that boating is an activity exclusively for the wealthy; experiences with congestion on the water or conflicts with other boaters or recreationists, which may influence overall interest and participation; knowledge of and comfort with various procedures associated with boating, such as trailering, launching, and recovering; and access to both public and private opportunities for reaching the water. The upcoming survey of boaters should attempt to explore all possible facets of the broad issue of boating access, as the relative importance or unimportance of each of these issues will likely vary considerably by type of boater and region of the country.

### **Boater Satisfaction With Physical Access**

In general, a majority of boaters in the focus groups appeared relatively satisfied with the physical aspects of access (i.e., the availability of reliable, conveniently located launches and ramps), but many were concerned about related issues, such as the quality of access areas, security at access locations, and the availability of various features and amenities at access areas. These issues contributed to moderate but not extreme concern among most boaters in the focus group, and therefore do not amount to overwhelming, ongoing barriers to participation. Rather, these issues represent challenges for a group of recreationists that is, on the whole, resourceful and adaptable in determining the sites that combine quality with convenience. As many boaters and industry professionals from the groups indicated, access to reach the water is a means to an end for boaters who have already made substantial financial and time commitments to the sport—in other words, most boaters will, to a certain extent, take whatever steps are necessary in order to locate and take advantage of suitable access points. At the same time, however, the focus groups provided numerous examples of access areas and sites in disrepair or that need certain improvements—the prevalence of such areas may decrease participation and enjoyment from boaters who are limited to only adequate or even unsatisfactory areas. The survey of boaters should seek to measure both overall satisfaction with access on a location-specific basis as well as satisfaction with various individual features, amenities, and access-related resources.

### **Maintenance of Existing Access Versus Creation of New Access**

Members of both the recreational boater and industry professional groups were consistent in their preference for maintenance of and improvements to existing access sites, rather than substantial resources and funding being devoted to the creation of new sites. Most boaters seemed to grasp the challenges associated with agencies and other organizations identifying suitable areas for brand new launch sites, and this concept was echoed in the industry group. For one thing, many boaters pointed out that there is simply a finite amount of sufficient waterfront land on which an access area can be developed; another aspect concerned the financial dimension, as most people agreed that it is less expensive to improve on an existing area than it is to create an entirely new one. The survey should continue to explore with boaters this preference for the maintenance of existing areas over the creation of new ones, but should also measure related opinions among industry professionals and agency providers of access sites, as there may be some notable differences among the groups.

## **Travel Distance to Access Areas**

A few boaters across the focus groups suggested that they must travel a fairly considerable distance to the nearest access point to launch a boat. Common reasons for having to travel a notable distance to an access area included closures of more conveniently located access points or simply a preference for the quality and services offered by a more remote access point. While the focus groups suggest that most boaters are aware of access sites located within a reasonable distance of their home or the location of their boat, the survey should nonetheless attempt to explore the average distances traveled by various types of boaters in reaching an access point, as there are likely important differences to discern in terms of the availability of public or private access, or access catering to a specific type of boater. It is also important to note that long travel distances tend to be compounded by concerns related to travel costs (gas, lodging, etc.) as well as time constraints, thereby decreasing avidity among some boaters.

## **Launching and Recovering Experiences**

A substantial number of boaters across the focus groups indicated frustration with experiences at particularly crowded boat ramps—while this issue varies considerably based on boater experience, location, time of day/year, and other factors, the concept of congestion and waiting times at launch ramps appears to be one of the biggest issues affecting participation and satisfaction. Many sites may have only a limited number of ramps and launch points, or are extremely popular or well-known areas, but these issues are compounded by the presence of newer and less experienced boaters attempting to launch and recover as others are forced to wait in line or maneuver around them. This issue was discussed at length in both the recreational and industry groups, and suggestions included signage at access areas displaying key information for preparing and launching a boat in a timely manner, as well as volunteers or paid employees located onsite to assist with traffic flow. Fortunately, many boaters throughout the groups said they generally felt an obligation to help less experienced boaters with procedures, although at least a few people in each group expressed a sense of frustration over people taking too long at ramps. It would appear that this issue can be alleviated in part through an overall site design accommodating to a larger number of boaters, or simply a greater awareness among boating communities of the best ways to prepare a boat in advance of use of a ramp or arrival at an access point. The survey should attempt to explore overall experiences related to congestion, crowding, and interaction with lesser experienced boaters at access areas.

## **Boat Storage Issues**

A small but notable number of boaters throughout the groups mentioned problems associated with boat storage: the most common issues concern keeping a boat in a residential neighborhood (the ability of which can be impacted by homeowner association agreements or municipal ordinances), finding or affording dry stack storage convenient to the boater's home and/or preferred boating area, and simply having to travel a problematic distance to reach a stored boat, trailer it, and reach a desired water body. Several professionals in the industry group echoed the concern regarding residential boat storage constraints, and it is possible that boaters in many areas across the country are facing similar issues. Especially problematic is the scenario of a boater who invests in the purchase of a boat under the assumption that he or she will be able to

maintain the boat at a private residence, only to later discover that the area forbids such storage or has introduced new policies limiting such storage. The survey should explore the extent to which boating participation is affected by storage and associated travel issues, particularly as such constraints are specific to boat type, residence type, or storage preference.

### **Site Improvements and Amenities**

Boater preferences for various improvements, additions, features, and amenities to sites will vary by location and type of boating, but the focus group results suggest that several key features are widely desired. These include the availability of parking at or near launch areas, the availability of sanitary restrooms, convenient access to trash receptacles (which are regularly emptied), and the general guarantee of site security (e.g., lighting at remote areas and an assurance that cars will not be burglarized). Many of these features were discussed in the context of overall site design, with a few boaters wondering how certain sites could provide highly effective ramps or ample parking but lack something as obvious as trashcans or restrooms. Another fairly commonly heard frustration related to site design were examples of areas that devoted considerable space to little-used features like picnic areas at the expense of more important things such as additional room for parking. On the topic of site security, a commonly heard idea from various focus group participants concerned the introduction of an affordable user fee at access sites to fund a security guard or site attendant position. Additionally, the group results suggest that boaters in some locations have learned to avoid certain access areas due to security concerns—this is especially worrisome in terms of general access availability, suggesting certain sites plagued by security concerns that otherwise represent suitable locations are underused or not used at all. Finally, while the aforementioned features were simply among the most commonly named amenities by group participants, the survey should explore preferences for the full list of amenities and concepts, including mooring fields, boarding floats, transient slips or tie-ups, courtesy piers, and other items.

### **Availability of Access-Related Information**

One key aspect of boating access concerns the availability of information on launch ramp, marina, or park locations, boating procedures, storage concepts, and other topics; such pieces of information are especially critical to new boaters or those considering an entry into boating. While most boaters across the groups appeared fairly aware of their state fish and wildlife or boating agency website and a general familiarity with the types of content included on such sites, there were a number of suggestions for new or updated information delivery methods, including interactive maps, smartphone apps, and webcams at launch site to gauge parking availability or the general state of the site (note that the most common type of information desired concerns the locations of access areas and an updated summary of their current state/condition). Once again, the upcoming survey of boaters will be invaluable in determining the specific types of information most desired by boaters, but it will also serve as an opportunity to measure the types of information currently being offered by agencies and boating organizations—a comparison of these results may identify areas for which more information is needed or areas in which information is already sufficiently available.

## **Location-Specific Environmental Concerns**

As one might expect, environmental concerns tended to vary considerably by group, although the issue of ethanol-based fuel was mentioned briefly across the groups and appears to be an issue of importance to boaters nationwide. In the Richmond group, environmental concerns included observations of oil residue in some water bodies and the presence of dead fish, although a few participants indicated that state waters are generally cleaner now compared to five or ten years ago. In the Kenosha group, comments addressed reluctance to swim in Lake Michigan, the presence of zebra mussels (a major invasive species), and smaller lakes affected by weeding issues. In the Houston group, there was mention of the need for increased dredging as well as the deterioration of areas bays. In the Portland group, there was ample discussion on sea lions, as well as some mention of wood debris in area waters. Additionally, certain state-specific fishing regulations appear to influence boating and fishing participation. The contrasting focus of these comments illustrates the fact that environmental concerns affecting boating participation will vary by state and region of the country—the survey should attempt to determine the most important environmental or ecological issues as they influence boaters in various locations.

## **User Conflicts, Etiquette, and Related Educational Opportunities**

Conflicts between various boating groups appears fairly common throughout the United States, with group participants mentioning conflicts between human-powered watercraft (kayaks, paddleboards, etc.) and larger motorized boats, as well as between jet skiers and other recreationists. More generally, there were several reports of conflicts between anglers and motor-powered boats, with a general theme being the tension between those who wish to engage in less involved or less active water-based recreation (fishing from a stationary position or boating in human-powered watercraft) and those who use motorized watercraft or who engage in highly active, potentially disruptive activities (e.g., jet skiers or other boaters creating wakes in the water). A consistent recommendation across the groups concerned the need for more boaters and water recreationists to complete comprehensive educational courses, particularly offerings that specifically address on-the-water etiquette. There is particular support for such courses to be completed in a hands-on, on-the-water environment, as opposed to an online version. Finally, a concept discussed in a few of the focus group discussions, but most prominently in the industry professional group, concerned the recommendation for human-powered and personal watercraft such as kayaks and canoes to be registered as a way of increasing funding for boating management. (Note that many states do not currently require such watercraft to be registered.)



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Methodology .....	1
Focus Group Overview.....	1
Participants and Locations.....	1
Recruiting .....	2
Discussion Guide and Analysis .....	2
Recreational Boater Focus Group Results .....	3
General Boating Preferences and Opinions on Issues Affecting Boating .....	3
Preferred Boating Activities.....	3
Satisfaction With Boating and General Issues Affecting Participation .....	7
Satisfaction With Boating Access .....	19
Opinions on Specific Access-Related Issues and Resources .....	26
Needed Improvements and Additions to Access Areas .....	26
Maintenance of Existing Access Versus Creation of New Access .....	35
Opinions on User Conflicts.....	36
Potential Policies and Programs to Improve Boating Access .....	39
Issues Affecting Fishing Participation Specifically .....	43
Boating Industry Focus Group Results .....	45
Opinions on Issues Affecting Boating.....	45
Maintenance of Existing Access Versus Creation of New Access .....	48
Boater Behavior Launching and Recovering at Access Areas .....	50
Opinions on User Conflicts .....	52
Potential Policies and Programs to Improve Boating Access and Participation .....	54
Major Findings.....	56
Overall Implication of Boating Access .....	56
Boater Satisfaction With Physical Access.....	56
Maintenance of Existing Access Versus Creation of New Access .....	56
Travel Distance to Access Areas.....	57
Launching and Recovering Experiences .....	57
Boat Storage Issues.....	58
Site Improvements and Amenities.....	58
Availability of Access-Related Information.....	58
Location-Specific Environmental Concerns.....	59
User Conflicts, Etiquette, and Related Educational Opportunities .....	59
Appendix: Focus Group Discussion Guides .....	60
About Responsive Management .....	67

## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted under a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Multistate Conservation Grant to determine the extent to which the quality of boating access throughout the United States has affected recreational fishing participation. The research proceeds from the understanding that participation in boating and fishing are intertwined, with obstacles or barriers to one activity strongly influencing participation in the other. To address hunting, fishing, and boating recruitment and retention as part of the Fish and Wildlife Service's Outdoor Heritage National Conservation Need, this project will result in an assessment tool, implementable at the national, state, and regional levels, for measuring boating access throughout the United States and determining how it relates to overall fishing access, satisfaction, and participation.

Overall, the study includes a review of previously implemented boating access evaluation tools, a series of focus groups with boaters and boating professionals, and a nationwide survey of boaters, anglers, boating industry professionals, and private business owners. This report discusses the results of the first major phase of data collection, the focus groups with recreational boaters and boating industry professionals. Specific aspects of the focus group methodology are discussed below.

### **Focus Group Overview**

Four focus groups were conducted with recreational boaters in separate locations throughout the United States, with another group conducted entirely with professionals from the boating industry; the latter group was held at the 2013 American Boating Congress in Washington, D.C., a major boating industry political and legislative event. The industry focus group was held with representatives from boat and engine manufacturers, boat dealers, marina operators, industry service providers, and marine trade association groups. To initiate the study, a "kickoff" focus group was held with the agency and organizational research partners; the purpose of this meeting was to assess project goals and expectations, although the administrative and planning outcomes of the group are not discussed as part of the results in this report.

The focus groups entailed in-depth, structured discussions with small groups of recreational boaters and boating industry professionals (generally between 10-12 individuals) about their attitudes toward the state of recreational boating in general, including obstacles, access-related challenges, and crossover issues concerning recreational fishing participation. The use of focus groups is an accepted research technique for qualitative exploration of attitudes, opinions, perceptions, motivations, constraints, participation, and behaviors. Focus groups provide researchers with insights, new hypotheses, and understanding through the process of interaction.

Focus groups allow for extensive open-ended responses to questions; probing; follow-up questions; group discussions; and observation of emotional responses to topics—aspects that cannot be measured in a quantitative survey. Qualitative research sacrifices reliability for increased validity. This means that, although focus group findings cannot be replicated statistically as can a survey (high reliability), they provide researchers with a more valid understanding of the topics or issues of concern in the study (high validity).

The focus groups were conducted using a discussion guide designed to encourage participants to discuss their attitudes toward boating access and fishing participation. Each focus group was moderated by one of Responsive Management's trained moderators. The moderators, through the use of the discussion guide, kept the discussions within design parameters without exerting a strong influence on the discussion content. In this sense, the focus groups were non-directive group discussions that exposed the spontaneous attitudes, insights, and perceptions of boaters and boating professionals regarding their experiences with, impressions of, and attitudes toward access-related issues. All focus group discussions were recorded for further analysis. At the end of the focus groups, any questions that participants had regarding the study were answered.

### **Participants and Locations**

The recreational boater focus groups were held throughout April 2013 in Richmond, Virginia; Kenosha, Wisconsin; Houston, Texas; and Portland, Oregon. As mentioned, the industry group was held in Washington, D.C. at the May 2013 American Boating Congress. Host facilities and reservations were coordinated by Responsive Management; locations included professional focus group facilities for the boater groups and a meeting room at the hotel conference center for the industry group. Responsive Management ensured that each focus group room was set up appropriately, including seating, recording equipment, and food arrangements. Refreshments were provided to focus group participants, and each group lasted approximately two hours.

### **Recruiting**

Responsive Management recruited participants for the focus groups using boater registration records as well as advertisements in local papers in the cities of interest. Potential participants were contacted by telephone and email. Those interested in participating were given a brief summary of the focus group topic, screened using a screener questionnaire, and, if qualified, confirmed for attendance. The screener ensured that the focus group participants met the recruitment criteria of active boating and fishing participation, as well as a minimum age requirement. Confirmed participants were e-mailed or mailed the date, time, and location of the focus group and a map and directions to the focus group facility. Each participant received a reminder call the day before the group and received a telephone number for directions or last minute questions. To encourage participation, a monetary incentive was given to participants. During the recruiting process, the recruiting manager maintained participant names, contact information, and essential participant characteristics. The target size for each focus group was approximately 10-12 people. The recruiting manager ensured that all confirmation e-mails or letters were sent promptly to participants and that reminder telephone calls were made the day before each group. Reminder calls and interaction with potential participants prior to the groups helped ensure sufficient attendance and quality participation.

### **Discussion Guides and Analysis**

Each focus group was conducted using a discussion guide that allowed for consistency in the data collection. Responsive Management conducted qualitative analyses of the focus groups through direct observation of the discussions by the moderators as well as through later observation and analysis of the recordings by other researchers. The development of findings entailed a third review of the focus groups as part of the qualitative analyses. Throughout the report, direct quotations from participants are shown in relevant sections.

## RECREATIONAL BOATER FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

### GENERAL BOATING PREFERENCES AND OPINIONS ON ISSUES AFFECTING BOATING

#### Preferred Boating Activities

- An initial discussion in each of the focus groups assessed the recreational activities in which boaters most enjoyed participating (note that all focus group attendees were active anglers, as fishing and boating participation were the central recruitment criteria for the study). Apart from fishing, many participants named other water- and boat-based activities in which they regularly participated, the most prominent of which included wildlife viewing, swimming, wakeboarding, water skiing, tubing, and pleasure cruising. Additionally, a number of boaters said they fished for several different types of species, although fishing avidity generally ranged from highly active to more casual participation levels.

#### Please tell me about the kinds of activities you enjoy doing while boating.

"I've had a boat since I was 14; today's my 50th birthday. I fish quite a bit, both the bay and some near-shore in the ocean, I do some light tackle stuff. And I have three boats...so I'm on the water quite a bit." —Richmond boater

"I've only had a boat about 2 years. I do all my fishing here in the James River. I was out there yesterday. I do a lot of catfishing out there." —Richmond boater

"I have a 20-foot center console, and I fish in the bay, and the rivers and creeks down there. Striper, flounder, all of it. All salt water." —Richmond boater

"I'm from Mechanicsville. I've had a boat since about '78. I do 100% bass fishing. I won't fish for anything else but bass, in tournaments and things. I got a 20-foot bass boat now. I fished a tournament Saturday. It's just a fun fish, all strictly fresh water bass. [The tournament was on] the James." —Richmond boater

"I'm from Chesterfield, originally I'm from Petersburg, Virginia. I've got a 17-foot Carolina skiff. I got a place in the Outer Banks. I kept it down there for a number of years and it just sat there. Brought it up here about 4 years ago. I fish in the James River and the Appomattox River. I take it out on the bay when it's a calm day. Basically I'm a fly fisherman. I do a lot of fly fishing out of it. I do a lot of fly fishing out west, and Alaska...I use the Carolina skiff to fish for trout, striper, bass." —Richmond boater

"Do a lot of wildlife observing. I have a little trolling motor, a 16-foot canoe, which is basically a square-back duck boat. We just put that on, take a ride around the lake. Maybe troll it once, about 2 miles an hour. Just enjoy it." —Richmond boater

"At the James River, we put in a lot down there at Osborne Boat Landing. There's a lot of eagle nesting sites along the James River. A lot of wildlife." —Richmond boater

"It's always good to see the ospreys, the herons." —Richmond boater

**Please tell me about the kinds of activities you enjoy doing while boating.**

“I don’t go out to look at the wildlife, it’s just great that you can see it when you’re out...Last year I was fishing and on the bank was a gang of turkeys, and two of the males were fighting.” —Richmond boater

“I’ve gotten my wife more into boating...We’ll go to dinner more by boat than by car. She just really likes to get out on the water late in the evening, watch the sun do down.” —Richmond boater

“We tube behind the boat a lot.” —Richmond boater

“[I started boating in] 2010...I love rafting and canoeing, so I’ve spent all my life doing that. But as far as accessibility and owning a motor boat, that’s since 2010 and it’s been an experience. I basically worked with other people in my age bracket and...everyone pitched in about a grand, so it’s [a community boat]...I think it’s a growing trend, where people pitch in and kind of co-share it. I guess I have a millennial aspect to it.” —Kenosha boater

“I’ve been boating since about 1980. I got into it more or less because I was in a high stress job. I needed something to do, especially on the weekend. So I got into fishing, I got into boating, I just got away for the whole weekend from the rat race. I came back to work on that Monday, I was mentally ready to go back to work. I go to California every year to fish with my buddy out there at Clear Lake, California. He’s got a nice 22-foot train with 250 horses on it. We have a ball. Don’t catch too many fish, but we have a ball.” —Kenosha boater

“I had a little 12-foot boat for years, with a little 12-horse engine on it. It wasn’t until ’07 when I got a pontoon boat. I do a little fishing on it, and tubing and stuff. Got it really for the family. My kids and my grandkids, they love it.” —Kenosha boater

“I was boating for 39 years. In the last year and a half it’s been difficult, to say the least. Took the dogs out 3 weeks ago, ice fishing, and darn near lost a dog in the ice. Fell in. Sent my son swimming, ‘go get the dog’....Where the ice was, was good, but she went out a tad too far. [Can’t remember] what lake we were on. Somewhere north of here, I’m from Racine. I think somewhere in the Long Lake area.” —Kenosha boater

“Been boating approximately 35 years. Started out very young. Had everything from pleasure boats to row boats, speed boats to cabin cruisers. You name it, I’ve had them through the course of the years. Started out water-skiing and little-fishing. As I got older I can’t take it any more, so it’s more pleasure boating on Lake Michigan, a lot of that.” —Kenosha boater

“Not everyone has licenses and we don’t want to risk the whole legal aspect. It’s more...tubing, wake boarding, knee boarding. More water sports. I have [fished], but it’s mostly off the dock. It just doesn’t happen off the boat.” —Kenosha boater

“For my partner, fishing is definitely his primary reason for getting out with me. For me, it’s secondary. [The primary is] canoeing, getting out, the quiet and nature.” —Kenosha boater

“For me, fishing’s the main thing. 100%.” —Kenosha boater

“Just getting away. There’s times I’ll throw a line out in the morning, tie the string around my tool,

**Please tell me about the kinds of activities you enjoy doing while boating.**

and hope the fish don't bite." —Kenosha boater

"I have a 14-foot aluminum boat that I made, I guess, the fanciest 14-foot aluminum boat. Wiring and carpet floors, all that kind of stuff. I fish at Lake Conroe, a lot, during the summer especially."  
—Houston boater

"I've been boating probably since I was 16. I have a 19-foot fishing/ski combo. I pretty much hit the water wherever I can access it." —Houston boater

"I've been boating about 60 years. I have a 16-foot john boat." —Houston boater

"I have a 21-foot deck boat, and we use it for some fishing and a lot of tubing up at the lake. I have a john boat, and I have 9 kayaks. So we get out on those quite a bit with the kids." —Houston boater

"I have a 19-foot reefer, use it mainly up at Lake Conroe also. Occasionally take it out other places. And we have two kayaks we use for shallow water fishing." —Houston boater

"I have a 21-foot Parker and a 16-foot custom flats I get in real shallow water. I like to cod fish."  
—Houston boater

"We'll actually do the water skiing, the tubes, cruising around." —Houston boater

"For me, that was the whole purpose of getting the type of boat that I have. Where you can pull a tube and skis, because we have two little ones...multi-purpose." —Houston boater

"Same, except I've got two sons in college who are very outdoorsy. A lot of times we'll just get in the boat and take off somewhere and go to some remote island or just some beach and get out and explore, and spend a few hours doing that. Most of our fishing trips wind up at Papano's anyway." —Houston boater

"I've done that travel thing a couple of times too, on the Trinity River. Stop at a few places that I knew were old town sites and get out and metal-detect...especially in the winter time." —Houston boater

"I duck hunt. I use the boat to, in certain areas." —Houston boater

"I got three boats. A 14-foot Starcraft, it's strictly a small-time fishing boat; poor man's fishing boat. I also have a 12-foot aluminum that accepts a 6-horse kicker motor. I also have a 10-foot-6 car-topper that I take up to Mount Hood and I row on non-motorized lakes. And I've been an outfitter, non-professional, an outfitter on Mount Hood." —Portland boater

"I got a 23-foot Stingray. I live on the water, we have our own dock. I'm an ex-tugboat captain on San Francisco Bay." —Portland boater

"I have a 21-foot sea scroll. I've been boating all my life. My first crossing of the Columbia Bar was at age 3. So a lot of experience on a lot of waterways of Oregon." —Portland boater

"We have a 16-foot Emmet Pressliner, 1971. My parents bought it and now it's mine. Learned how

**Please tell me about the kinds of activities you enjoy doing while boating.**

to fix a boat...we do a lot of crabbing. Been boating my whole life.” —Portland boater

“I got two teenagers and I do a lot of wakeboarding in my boat. Probably more hours wake boarding than there are fishing...I did a lot of fishing as a kid, but now that I have teenagers, not a lot of interest. It comes and goes. When they were little kids we did a lot of fishing.” —Portland boater

“Try surfing. I love surfing, off the back of the boat. It doesn’t matter if the water’s rough or anything, you can surf.” —Portland boater

“Swimming. My kids aren’t really too much into fishing...which is completely foreign to me. My wife is one of those who feels the fish...it’s kind of mean...Her grandfather did it professionally, her dad [fished].” —Portland boater

“We got what’s called an overnigher. There’s beds and a little toilet. When we’re out fishing we like to just take off for the weekend and go find an atoll or someplace, throw the anchor out.” —Portland boater

“...We have osprey and coyotes howling, total saturation...I’m a part-time fly fisher. I enjoy the wildlife and the scenery. You can see Mount Jefferson...It’s a total sensory, almost church. That’s how important it is.” —Portland boater

“We do a lot of skiing in Biscuit and Newport.” —Portland boater

## Satisfaction With Boating and General Issues Affecting Participation

Participants were encouraged to discuss things that affected their boating satisfaction, with the discussions not being limited strictly to access-related concepts and issues. These broad discussions on boating satisfaction helped to place access-related issues into the context of major factors influencing overall satisfaction and participation, and while access emerged as an important issue, several other factors were also commonly mentioned.

- In the **Richmond** group, common “external” factors such as available free time, weather, and the price of fuel were mentioned by several group members. However, various access-related concepts also began to emerge as discussion points: one person discussed restrictive neighborhood regulations concerning boat storage, necessitating an inconvenient trip to another residence for retrieving the stored boat, while a few other people discussed the lack of navigational signage and buoy markers near a landing at a popular water body. Similarly, signage designating shallow waters was mentioned as a needed improvement to a few access areas. Also discussed at length was the issue of crowding at popular boat launches and access sites, which was said to be highly discouraging during peak boating months. Connected to the issue of crowding was the concept of poor or reckless behavior from other boaters or recreationists on waterways, particularly from jet skiers and other personal watercraft users (a few people connected this issue to the need for more comprehensive boater education courses, while others suggested mandatory licensing for personal watercraft users). The prevalence of alcohol use on the water was also named as a concern by some boaters in the group, leading a few people to comment about the need for a greater enforcement presence. Environmental and pollution-related concerns were addressed briefly by a few people, with some people mentioning dead fish spotted on the James River as well as oil residue and sewage seen elsewhere. Finally, a few people indicated frustration with fishing regulations limiting catch to a small number of fish, although others in the group pointed out that such regulations had helped the populations of certain species to rebound.
- In the **Kenosha** group, several of the same external factors were named by participants, with weather and the price of fuel being the most common of them. A few participants discussed the issue of having to drive a problematic distance to reach a boat stored somewhere other than at the participant’s own residence, and the issue of reckless and rude behavior from jet skiers was again discussed to a considerable extent. A few people talked about the specific fees charged at various launch sites, with one person complaining that such costs varied too much. Crowding and behavior from fellow boaters at launch sites, particularly during launching and recovering procedures, were discussed at length—a few people in the Kenosha group suggested that rude behavior among boaters and anglers (particularly when people are waiting to use a launch ramp) was not uncommon. Another issue concerned behavior on waterways, with jet skiers again being commonly mentioned as a source of frustration—a few people indicated that inconsiderate behavior from fellow recreationists and boaters has worsened in recent years. Regarding environmental issues of concern, a few Kenosha boaters mentioned zebra mussels (a major freshwater invasive species), while one person said that he avoided consuming fish from smaller lakes that were “weeded over.” Another person mentioned mercury counts at Lake Michigan as a reason for not eating fish caught in the lake.



- In the **Houston** group, crowding was mentioned early in the discussion as a prominent issue of frustration, especially on weekends at popular boating destinations. Jet skiers again factored heavily into the discussion on problematic behavior from other recreationists; another dimension concerned inexperienced boaters attempting to prepare and launch their boats, which was said to be often problematic insofar as lengthening wait times and adding to congestion. On this point, a few boaters in the group said that they made a point of trying to help uncertain or novice boaters launch when they were able to. Travel distance to preferred launch areas and access sites appeared to be an issue of moderate concern, with a few boaters indicating being forced to drive fairly far distances in order to go boating. Fuel costs were discussed as part of the conversation on travel distances. One person said that launch sites that had been open when he was younger were now closed, which led to a brief discussion on the need for agencies to maintain access sites, especially when droughts have added to damage at certain boat ramps. Pollution and related environmental concerns were briefly discussed, with a few participants mentioning dredging problems in shallow areas where sand and vegetation have deteriorated.
- In the **Portland** group, an initial topic of discussion concerned pressure from private homeowner groups to create no-wake zones in waters surrounded by private land, thereby restricting use from boaters. Following this topic, there was substantial discussion on the issue of sea lions as a major environmental concern affecting boating, fishing, and other forms of recreation—nearly all group members affirmed the presence of sea lions, most commonly in the Willamette River, with several group participants expressing profound frustration over federal regulations prohibiting the killing of sea lions. Several group participants described damage to docks and piers caused by sea lions, while others mentioned threats to salmon fisheries from sea lions. One participant expressed frustration over catch limit regulations affecting kokanee salmon; another person mentioned that cold water towers implemented at Lake Billy Chinook by the Oregon state government had negatively affected the ecosystem of the lake. The conversation returned to the issue of sea lions, with many in the group speaking to the need for more effective management of the species; one participant stated that her children were afraid to get in the water because of sea lions. Regarding access-related issues, a few people mentioned the limited availability of parking at launch ramps and other access areas as a deterrent to participation, while others echoed comments from the earlier groups concerning novice or inexperienced boaters affecting wait times or congestion at access areas (similarly, a few people talked about parking spots designed for a truck and a trailer being occupied by only a single car or truck). This was commonly referred to as “boating etiquette,” with a few people repeating the suggestion for better education on proper launching and recovery procedures.

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

“Gas money...\$3.50, \$3.75 a gallon.” —Richmond boater

“My job.” —Richmond boater

“Three children, and time.” —Richmond boater

“We just bought a house...in a neighborhood where it’s kind of restricted, storing the boat there. So now I have to store it at my parent’s house, and any time I want to use it I have to go there to get where we’re going...Having it at a marina would be nice, but then you’re kind of limiting yourself to where the marina is.” —Richmond boater

“Sometimes the weather around the bay. We only have a 19-footer.” —Richmond boater

“[Regarding fuel costs], the size of your boat has got a lot to do with that too.” —Richmond boater

“[There are] two boat landings that I use when I fish in front of the Surry Power Plant...the public landing on the Surry side [has] no indication where the channel is, to get out of there. Unless you fish there on a regular basis...it’s very difficult. It took me 25 minutes to find my way out of there. No signage [or buoy markers].” —Richmond boater

“Like Winter Harbor...a lot of the charts were made in 1972...there’s some problems with navigation. Also in Matthews I noticed the ramps have no lights, so if you’re out at night, God bless you.” —Richmond boater

“I don’t go out on weekends, after May. Because the pleasure boat people come out; it would just beat me to death trying to fish...the ramps are packed...Sunday afternoon in June, or summertime in Osborne, about 2:00 you won’t find a parking spot. Just a whole lot of boat traffic.” —Richmond boater

“I’ve been canoeing streams probably ever since the mid-60’s. It used to be, going up the Rappahannock, put in 3 or 4 days and not see another soul...You get anywhere out there now, you’re going to see 20, 25 [boats]. Any given day.” —Richmond boater

“Weekends are crazy. I prefer not to go on weekends. I actually like to get there as early as possible before everybody else, and then leave after everybody else.” —Richmond boater

“An access problem we have, living in Winter Harbor, is the dredging. We have to have them dredge it. Several times I write Congress and things like that, because honestly if that becomes land locked there’s no point in me being down there. We can’t get access to the bay and basically my land is worth absolutely nothing at that point. That’s been a big fear of mine since it’s now my property....” —Richmond boater

“There ought to be some kind of indication [for shallow depths].” —Richmond boater

“You’re supposed to stay up with the charts, but they’re not always the best. If [submerged pilings] are 6 inches under, you’re as good as gone.” —Richmond boater

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

“It’s not such a problem where I am. The channel is plenty deep...it’s marked pretty well, but it zigs and zags...You got to stay in the channel or you’ll run aground.” —Richmond boater

“You’ve definitely got to know your waterways, wherever you are.” —Richmond boater

“I don’t go out on the holidays. It’s crazy.” —Richmond boater

“...The Great Wicomico where I am...people are just going buoy to buoy, and not giving the other boaters any leeway....” —Richmond boater

“Here in Virginia, everybody has to take the boater education. Especially with the jet skis, I’ve seen those folks do a much better job than they used to...[But] I pulled a guy off last year. Brand new boat, he’d had it two weeks. Didn’t know what the marker meant. Ran her aground.” —Richmond boater

“It’s easy to do along the edge of the bay anyway. It looks like there’s a lot of water there, but you’ve got to pay attention to the buoys. It could be miles wide, but the channel is 25 feet wide.”  
—Richmond boater

“Just dodging other people. Especially on crowded weekends, that can take the fun out of it. Because you know what to do, but you don’t know what the other guy is going to do.” —Richmond boater

“Especially if they have a lot of rental boats in the area. Those guys have no idea.” —Richmond boater

“I’ll put my boat out [on the Great Wicomico]. A lot of times the boats will go by so fast, it’s a heavy wake and my boat isn’t very big.” —Richmond boater

“The problem I have [with kayakers] is they’ll sit right in the middle... You kind of have to hit it to get out, so you’re not dragging. Don’t sit right in the middle, because we can’t get our boat out. There’s plenty of room....” —Richmond boater

“You should be mandated to have a boating license if they’re renting you a jet ski. Because this guy, he was running into boats....” —Richmond boater

“I think the boater safety thing, that’s definitely brought some awareness. There’s been a couple of significant boating accidents in Virginia over the last couple of years, with some bad fatalities unfortunately. I think that’s brought an awareness to people with alcohol on boats.” —Richmond boater

“I think two of the major ones were alcohol-related.” —Richmond boater

“I think they changed the DUI requirements to mimic, on the waterway, just as they do in a car.”  
—Richmond boater

“It’s gotten better...there’s more of a police presence.” —Richmond boater

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

“I see the police boats tearing up and down the river all the time but I never see them stop anybody.”  
—Richmond boater

“They always check when you have fish, they’ll grill you tight.” —Richmond boater

“It’s probably fewer people on the water than there was maybe 5, 6 years ago...maybe not in some of the congested areas, like on the James, but when you cross the bay...there used to be hundreds of boats, and maybe 50 on a big weekend now...Some of it’s the economy and some of the species of fish are harder to find.” —Richmond boater

“I seem to have more trouble with people at the ramp than I do in the water...I’ve seen them take up to 15 minutes to put a 20-foot boat on the trailer.” —Richmond boater

“They block the boat ramp. That’s just a courtesy thing.” —Richmond boater

“They back down, then they start unloading...You [should] line it up, you launch it, then you pull out.” —Richmond boater

“There’s a lot you can do pre-[boating]...before you get down there.” —Richmond boater

“I was fishing not long ago, I think it was King William off the pier, and I was watching a boat come in. You’re fishing off the pier for shad and you just see this oil residue or whatever coming in behind him.” —Richmond boater

“When I was out yesterday [on the James River] we saw 3 or 4 dead fish floating by, catfish...I don’t have to eat it, I just catch them and throw them back, so I don’t mind at all.” —Richmond boater

“Personally I think it’s a whole lot cleaner now than it was back in the 50’s and 60’s when I was growing up. But I wouldn’t eat anything that came out of the James or Appomattox River.”  
—Richmond boater

“When I was a kid in the 70’s, the trash and the sewage stuff, the things I saw floating down [the James], you don’t see much of that any more. I still see some of it coming out of Richmond...The James is dirty. It’s never clean...If you ask anybody, they wouldn’t eat anything out of the James.”  
—Richmond boater

“The limits that they’ve been putting on have not made it worth my time to go out there, drag the boat down, pay for the fuel, the ice, the bait, the shrimp, for everything else. For what, two fish?”  
—Richmond boater

“The striped fish that we fish for, they change the regulations on them quite often...you really have to understand what you’re fishing for when you get ready to go fishing....” —Richmond boater

“You got to give it to them, those stripers and things like that were damn near extinct. They’ve made a great, huge comeback and I’m happy with it. I can’t keep up with the slot differences though.”  
—Richmond boater

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

“I did a lot of fishing in Jersey too. And striped bass up there, were 33 and above we could keep one...You guys down here were keeping 18-inch fish and going for it. So we felt very much we were feeding you our fish.” —Richmond boater

“I think everyone would want [to boat] more, but a lot of it is weather-permitting.” —Kenosha boater

“Weather.” —Kenosha boater

“Can’t drive any more [for the past] year and a half.” —Kenosha boater

“A majority would be weather, because it’s Lake Michigan.” —Kenosha boater

“Just getting up there, because my boat is up north, I have to keep it up there. I can’t drive any more neither, so I can’t tow it back and forth, so it stays there.” —Kenosha boater

“My place is up north too, 4-1/2 hours. I will go as often as I can get away from work, long weekends....” —Kenosha boater

“I would just say that one of the things I can see an improvement in, is accessibility to topographical maps for the rivers for canoeists or kayakers or boaters. Those aren’t always as readily accessible.” —Kenosha boater

“I have a thing with...at 10:00 in the morning, when the jet skiers and everybody can come out, some of these guys are pretty rude. Most fishermen, if they come by you they’ll slow down. But some of these guys in these jet skis just barrel right by you; they don’t care. And that kind of ticks me off.” —Kenosha boater

“They’re probably one of the people that never went to a safety course.” —Kenosha boater

“There’s too much of that. The chain I’m on, the police patrol, they have a jet ski and they have a boat. I’m not sure what the number is, but I bet 90% of the people they stop are on jet skis. It’s like – sit on it, hit the throttle, and go. I don’t think they understand the rules, that’s very true.” —Kenosha boater

“The price of fuel, definitely.” —Kenosha boater

“The differences in launch fees throughout the state is ridiculous. You go to [indistinct launch area name], it’s like \$10.50 to launch, and they’ve only got 4 launches. Then go up to [area name] where it’s \$3, they got about 8 launches up there and they’re better launches. The township sets the price on their laws, not DNR. So they’re just cleaning up.” —Kenosha boater

“If you want to put a canoe next to some of the big boats, I still have to pay pretty much the same.” —Kenosha boater

“Besides the accessibility for me, it’s horrible. People don’t give me the time, for me to unload, to get the boat. It doesn’t go in 5 minutes. Then you have to pay the fee. People are, they just get irritated,

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

they start to yell ‘can’t you hurry up?’ Well obviously no I can’t...They don’t give discounts for the handicapped.” —Kenosha boater

“It cost \$2500 to put the boat in for a season at port. Up until a few years ago they had no floating docks in a lot of places that I would like to go and can’t, because...the lake is too low...Fuel is always a problem...It’s a big expense...I don’t have a problem with jet skis. I do have a problem with sail boaters...when you got lines out. I have yellowbirds, and you can have yellowbirds out 300, 400 feet from the boat.” —Kenosha boater

“I don’t go out enough to know the type costs. If I go a couple of times a year with [my son] I’ve done pretty good.” —Kenosha boater

“On Lake Michigan you find a lot of people with big boats that shouldn’t have the boat. Probably the last 8, 9, 10 years...They can’t dock, don’t know turning, don’t know the rules of the road. So from my point of view, you just look out for them.” —Kenosha boater

“I think it’s looking at the philosophical aspect of why you’re out there. If you’re truly out there to fish or enjoy the solitude, you want calm, quiet water...When you mix those two [calm and active sports]...there are different purposes for the usage of the water.” —Kenosha boater

“It’s just not hard to respect what other people are doing...it probably upsets me more that people ignore that. I can’t say that it happens to me a lot...I actually saw somebody on a jet ski tip over a couple of kayakers. He thought it was funny. It is a respect thing, and some people don’t have that no matter what they do.” —Kenosha boater

“...I haven’t seen that being too prevalent...Does it happen on every lake?...” —Kenosha boater

“Five years ago it seemed it was better. Or maybe now I notice it more. Or people have gotten ruder.” —Kenosha boater

“I would agree. Within the last five years there have been a lot of changes. Kind of a deterrent, but I don’t let it get to me.” —Kenosha boater

“Now that I’m retired I’ll go out in the middle of the week...The water’s calm and I have a good time. As opposed to going out on the weekend, when everybody and his uncle is out there then.” —Kenosha boater

“Typically like holidays, 4th of July – I usually don’t even go up to my place on 4th of July, because there are so many people. Other than that...” —Kenosha boater

“Lake Michigan. It’s a very common...everyone says ‘if you’re going to go out there don’t swim’...it’s a huge environmental concern. I’m from Milwaukee, so maybe it’s just the area around there, but that’s what I keep hearing.” —Kenosha boater

“A lot of zebra mussels in some of these lakes. You have to be real careful when you come out of that lake. You have to make sure everything’s off your boat. Underneath your carriage...they’re all over the place, and you really have to wash that stuff off.” —Kenosha boater

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

“It’s an invasive species. It’s been a problem for years. They just can’t do anything about it.”  
—Kenosha boater

“A lot of the small lakes are weeded over.” —Kenosha boater

“Yeah...I don’t care to eat the fish that I catch any more.” —Kenosha boater

“The chain that I’m on, they’re very actively involved...The weekends, they’re actually there. They look at your boat before you put it in. They look at your trailer. Because they got a problem with milfoil up there. So they’re very active in looking at what you’re going to put in the water....”  
—Kenosha boater

“I am [concerned] to a certain extent. I got a couple of lakes that I fish, one of them you can’t even see from the highway...it’s a 5 mile an hour wake...it’s a nice lake. Now Lake Michigan, I’ll go there and fish for perch, but I won’t eat any of the perch. Just from the mercury count there.” —Kenosha boater

“I would say learning service routes, how to get there. Marking it on GPS.” —Houston boater

“I grew up fishing but I quit it because it got so crowded out there...On weekends you can walk across the boats. Some pretty rude people out there also. No etiquette.” —Houston boater

“Makes you want to carry a gun everywhere you go.” —Houston boater

“I’d probably be out more if I didn’t have to trailer my boat...If I could push a button and be on the water, I’d be out a lot more often.” —Houston boater

“When you got a smaller boat, especially on the weekends, like at Lake Conroe there’s a thousand jet skiers everywhere. It’s hard to get away from them to find a place to fish.” —Houston boater

“I find that courtesy at the boat launches, that’s the thing. That’s the worst thing. People are in a hurry. You got beginners...I think if you take time to help a person, you could get them in and get them out.” —Houston boater

“If you go by yourself, you got to tie your boat up and go park, run back.” —Houston boater

“That’s the most stressful part of the whole trip.” —Houston boater

“I try to help people who are out there by themselves. It speeds things up.” —Houston boater

“All over the state the ramps are terrible for the most part.” —Houston boater

“I’d probably go more [if an access point were closer]. Conroe’s the closest, I’m probably 45 minutes out.” —Houston boater

“[Traveling far] can get expensive.” —Houston boater

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

"I keep my boat up in Lake Conroe... I keep it in storage in the marina, we'll launch it in there. One of the reasons I didn't go much last year, it was dry. The ramp didn't go in the water." —Houston boater

"Definitely [fuel cost has worsened]. Take in consideration when you're pulling your boat, your gas mileage just goes down. So with that cost in mind, having it where it's an easy, accessible location [like] boat storage is almost justifiable. You're offsetting your gas cost." —Houston boater

"I thought about it...I had an FJ and was pulling it, and was getting like 7 miles a gallon." —Houston boater

"Places that were open when I was a kid aren't there any more. I don't know where really to go to launch down in Galveston." —Houston boater

"I am [knowledgeable where to launch] with the motorboat. With the kayaks, I just go out to any beach where we can carry them to the water and go." —Houston boater

"When boating...I don't like to go to places I'm not familiar with." —Houston boater

"They make some pretty detailed maps now...and they'll show you on the maps where all the launches are. It's a private [organization]." —Houston boater

"That's exactly the struggle with the state parks and the public sites. The launches are an afterthought...If they maintain them, great, but it's not something they put any kind of focus on. I guess they're all about picnic areas and primitive spaces. It's like the boating is an annoyance or something. They just don't keep them up like they should. They might have been nice but they're just not very well maintained. Places like Livingston, and Lake Conroe, and in Lake Travis that have gone down a dozen feet, and stayed down. Which means bulkheads fall down, things deteriorate, holes form. The system is designed to have water pushing up against it. And we've had these long droughts. Things fall apart, and then they're not dealt with when the water comes back." —Houston boater

"Sometimes they're real utilitarian, just saying you got to tie up your boat in a place where it's in the way of everybody and then go park and then run back. Some of them are like that, I hate going to those but sometime you have to." —Houston boater

"It really does sort of take the joy out of the day. You got guys mad at you for taking up too much time." —Houston boater

"It becomes a stress factor. Both coming and going." —Houston boater

"I think having a lift [would help]. Because they're helping you, they put you in the water, they move it and you drive away, you get out of people's way. And I don't mind paying a fee for that...It's kind of an old time thing, you just don't see it as much." —Houston boater

"Where I'm at, you have a storage barn, like 10 feet wide, and they have two tractors. They back up,



**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

they have hydraulics on the back, pick up your tow, take it down to the water. You park inside...they'll back you into the water...it's pretty neat. They can go through a number of boats fairly quickly." —Houston boater

"There's some really high end places, there's one in Clear Lake where it's 6 or 7 stories tall. You can call ahead on your way down. They'll grab it and put your boat in the water and have it ready to go." —Houston boater

"I think it has [changed]. You got a lot of people getting boats now. They don't have that experience...." —Houston boater

"You want to have some fun, go on YouTube and look up 'boat ramp fail.'" —Houston boater

"I think the biggest problem is, they float their trailer too deep...." —Houston boater

"I would prefer to drive out of the way or spend that extra time getting to a nicer ramp than using a public access ramp." —Houston boater

"You'll see floating cans. Somebody's going to do something." —Houston boater

"The sand washes there into the inter-coastal canal and they can't come back and re-dredge it...They're thinking about closing it up." —Houston boater

"It's going to happen. They're worried about storm surge. It will allow the water to pass too quickly and back." —Houston boater

"The shallow bays have deteriorated over the years since I grew up down there. It used to be flats that ran along the shoreline towards Dollar Point...it used to be hard sand with grass on it, now it's muck...you'd sink almost to your knees in it. There's no vegetation there any more." —Houston boater

"We changed our practices. We used to spend a lot of time on the channel, down here off of Ross Island. We used to do wake boarding out of there, and now we no longer have a wake in there because they're now closed off to any speed. You can only go at an idle through there now. So our access in the Portland area, we just choose not to go there any more." —Portland boater

"I think a lot of that was from [the homeowners]. They didn't like the wake, said it was destroying their docks and destroying the shore." —Portland boater

"And there's a lot of kayaks. Kayaks are really taking off." —Portland boater

"My son counted 100 sea lions on the Willamette River today. A hundred. They're destroying docks. The federal government has got to decide what they ought to do with these sea lions. Or let the Indians shoot them because they can do it. We can't. We don't know if the sea lions are protected or endangered. 25 years ago they were endangered, now they're protected. They're destroying the fisheries in Oregon and Washington. Washington now has them in the major lakes, the freshwater lakes, which is the drinking water for Seattle. ...The federal government is not subsidizing the state to

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

produce more kokanee, and the state now is diminishing our fishing rights. Until 2 years ago you could catch 25 kokanee a day. It's down to 5 now, it's not worth my time to go over there. Because we would harvest literally 200 kokanee in 5 days, with 3 fisherman, and eat them all winter...they're better eating to me than salmon. Oregon has diminished that, because they're not subsidized by the federal government. Tree huggers are screwing us bad, because they think 25 fish per person is exactly bad...It cost me 2 gallons of gas to run up to where I can harvest the kokanee, Langley. Physical access on these lakes is wonderful...but they're controlled by being subsidized from the federal government on their finances. The State of Washington is doing better because they're producing kokanee or landlocked salmon...We're not doing that. The State of Oregon is stupid, they're broke." —Portland boater

"[At Lake Billy Chinook] they put in cold water towers to change river temperatures down river...They changed the habitat of the lake dramatically. [Algae blooms] are even worse...Water conditions are now deplorable. I don't even really like to go there just to recreate...We're going to have algae; salmon can barely get through now [and kokanee] are not going to survive." —Portland boater

"The government [probably] spent two or three hundred million dollars putting in these low level outlets so that, quote, the salmon may come up the river even though they haven't done that in 100 years...It's all these bureaucrats that are screwing everything up for all of us." —Portland boater

"We have three small children. They don't want to get into the water because they're afraid of the sea lions." —Portland boater

"I'm a little bit of a tree hugger. So when they're talking about what to do, I'm trying to think of what to do besides kill them. That's what I think they have to focus on." —Portland boater

"They have to be managed. They're just like deer, they're just like elk, wolves. You have to manage them, and management means eradication at a certain amount. They're called sea lions, they're not river lions." —Portland boater

"A hundred years ago, sea lions did not enter the Columbia River nor did they go in to Seattle waterways. There's no salmon, empirically speaking to 100 years ago...Our government decides to assign 12 federal agents to kill one sea lion. That cost you and I \$400,000 a year to kill a sea lion. They could put a net on a dock, let the sea lions get in it, net it out, [release them in California]. There's all kinds of ways to do this. Indians are allowed to kill a sea lion. They would harvest the sea lion, and eat it and smoke it." —Portland boater

"They do come into boats when you net your fish sometimes...Somebody's going to die. If somebody dies then maybe they'll wake up." —Portland boater

"I think parking [affects boating satisfaction]. We go to the beach and the roads covered in potholes, so the boat's bouncing down the road. I'm afraid it's going to jump off the trailer. By the time we get down to the boat ramp, there's nowhere to park. Boat ramps are so small at the coast..." —Portland boater

"If you disconnect your trailer, they can steal it, or steal the hitch out of the truck." —Portland boater

**Are you generally satisfied with your boating experiences these days? What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction?**

“It’s not necessarily that there’s not enough parking, it’s that you get a single car parking in the slits where you’re supposed to have a truck and a trailer. They’re always full of just one car...It’s posted, it’s just people don’t care. And they’re lazy. My biggest frustration with boating in general is people who don’t know what they’re doing...They try to learn to launch it [in the heart of summer]...My other big pet peeve is when, there’s staging areas where you’re supposed to take your gear out of your boat...I see time and time again people back into the water...They should have done it up top.”  
—Portland boater

“Before each season, [we] take the boat out to make sure everything is working on it, before we take it out and inconvenience everyone around us...My wife and I, we can drop and be out of the way in less than a minute. Same with pulling out.” —Portland boater

“Take last week – a huge staging area, we’re ready to go. Two grandkids, three adults, we put our boat in in a minute. But we waited 45 minutes for idiots.” —Portland boater

“One thing the marine board could do better is have a section [on the test] on boating etiquette.”  
—Portland boater

“With our boater cards, we did ours online...People, I didn’t agree with what they did, but they had one person who knew all the stuff, so they took the test for all their friends.” —Portland boater

“When I’ve been at the rivers, not in a boat, what I’ve noticed is debris...[not trash, but] wood coming down the river.” —Portland boater

## SATISFACTION WITH BOATING ACCESS

Following the discussions on general issues and concerns affecting boating participation and overall satisfaction, the discussion turned to satisfaction with boating access specifically.

- In the **Richmond** group, overall satisfaction with local boating access was generally fairly strong, with a few people mentioning the perception of additional access sites being developed within the past decade or so. Many participants suggested that they used both public and private access sites, depending on the water body and general preference. A public ramp on the James River, the Osborne Boat Landing, was singled out for praise, although this location represents something of a unique situation in that it was constructed for a Bass Masters fishing tournament in 1988. Despite that most people in the group appeared relatively satisfied with and accustomed to their preferred access sites, several comments suggested that at least some public access areas have not been adequately maintained, such as the landing at Winter Harbor in Mathews County. A few people in the group said they paid for private access at marinas, while others said they had developed relationships with private landowners in areas where public access was scarce. Some in the group suggested that public access is rather inconsistently distributed throughout certain areas; it was mentioned that some boaters are limited either to public access points (which may be in less than optimal condition or are simply inconveniently located) or permission to use private access granted through landowners. A few people discussed security concerns at heavily trafficked access points, while others mentioned that certain popular areas were monitored by a paid attendant or employee directing traffic and assisting with launch procedures—this was generally described as highly beneficial and well worth the cost of the user fee. (A few people discussed a situation in which users of a free ramp created a co-op to hire a guard.)
- In the **Kenosha** group, there were more pronounced concerns over the condition of certain access areas, although a number of these concerns were specific to periods in which water levels were low and the areas immediately off ramps were quite shallow, such as at the Racine harbor. Parking was also said to be a concern across certain access sites; on this point, one person remarked that while the number of boating access areas is adequate, the condition and upkeep of such sites could be improved. The general impression from the group conversation was that Kenosha boaters had developed preferences for certain access areas through personal experiences, learning to use certain areas and avoid others based on parking, security concerns, water levels, crowding, and a site design convenient to their needs.
- In the **Houston** group, much of the initial conversation dealt with a perceived decrease in available access via private lands—a few participants remarked that numerous private access points formerly open to the public had been closed or fenced off due to irresponsible behavior from users (e.g., littering from recreationists). Despite this, a few people shared examples of public access areas being adequately patrolled by enforcement authorities and an associated positive change in security and/or the aesthetic qualities of the site. A conversation regarding security at access points in general found that some focus group participants preferred to pay fees to use private sites almost solely out of the guarantee of safety/security. A public access point at Lake Houston was used as an example of a quality area regularly patrolled by sheriff's deputies. At the opposite end of the spectrum, one person mentioned more problematic areas in which ramps lack established parking lots; in

such places, boaters are forced to park “in the weeds,” adding to security concerns. Many in the Houston group agreed that enforcement authorities are responsible for sizable patrol areas and may not have the opportunity to ensure safety and proper behavior at water bodies and throughout boat launch areas.

- In the **Portland** group, there were numerous comments addressing certain access areas with particularly notable shortcomings, although, similar to previous groups, many boaters suggested that they had simply adapted to learn about which sites to use and which to avoid. Some of the observations regarding site shortcomings included mentions of a ramp with challenging concrete partitions as well as a particularly deep drop-off (this was said to be particularly problematic for newer, inexperienced boaters); a site with too many unused parking spaces reserved for disabled individuals; areas with prohibitively steep boat ramps; areas insufficiently paved with concrete, where trailers must navigate through mud or other off-road environments; and security/safety concerns at more remote sites (one person remarked that while an enforcement presence is almost always apparent on the water, security is comparatively lacking at access sites themselves). A recurring comment, similar to statements made in the other groups, was that private access sites which charge usage fees generally offer better recreational experiences than do free, public access sites. Finally, one person remarked that the Oregon State Marine Board holds meetings open to the public in which boaters can make known their preferences in terms of sites that need improvements or upkeep—this person noted that while it was not guaranteed that the Marine Board would make an access site a priority based on boater demand, the Board was nonetheless an “approachable” entity that tries to reasonably accommodate boater suggestions.

#### Are you generally satisfied with the boating access in your area?

“I am. State did a real good job in this area...A whole lot better than it was 20 years ago. More ramps.” —Richmond boater

“In the past couple of weeks they put a new ramp down in Charles City, on the lower James...There’s only parking for maybe 10 trucks. It’s going to be a busy ramp, I don’t know how it’s going to work.” —Richmond boater

“Where we are, we have a marina that we have to pay for each year. And then there’s a public spot, literally around the corner, but it’s so shallow, unless you’re launching a jet ski or a small john boat, there’s no way you can get a boat of any size. Publicly I’m not happy with our access. We have to pay for the private of course, where we are. [Public access is] not very well maintained. [It’s the access area near] Mathews, Winter Harbor, a public boat landing. We went to James, my husband and I’ve been up there a couple of times, and they’ve been fine.” —Richmond boater

“When you’re talking private, up on Lake Anna, [there’s a] private boat launch place that you pay to launch. But then on the James River you’ve got Osborne Boat Landing that’s public, and that’s free. Much nicer facility, I don’t know who funded it, whether Henrico County did or the state did. They’ve done a good job, the way they’ve dredge it out. When you put your boat in you’re not going with the flow of the river. They’ve kind of dredged out with a bunch of launch sites.” —Richmond boater

**Are you generally satisfied with the boating access in your area?**

“They built that ramp for the Bass Masters to come here. Back in ’88...So we thank them because they had a big part of it. They paid the city so much...I guess Henrico County owns that ramp.”  
—Richmond boater

“In some places across the state they’ve got excellent boat ramps. In other places they’re terrible, but they’ve been there 40 years, 50 years. It’s what they could get at the time...[Older ones] need more parking, or the ramp itself will drop right off....” —Richmond boater

“The one I’m talking about [Mathews] we don’t even have concrete, it’s moisture. It’s like maybe enough for 3 trucks but not 4 with a trailer.” —Richmond boater

“At some places you just go miles and miles and miles with no access. Then you’re dependent upon what I consider to be subpar [locations].” —Richmond boater

“If you look at the big picture, they’re waters of the U.S., but I think it’s a private entity that maintains the facility or it’s a state agency or maybe even a local agency. I’m not aware of how that funding gets trickled down to the facility.” —Richmond boater

“I love boating on the Monkey, because it’s really a wild, scenic river. But you got to go way down to get on it, and then go up. There’s nothing, no private landowners that will let you...Over the years I’ve built up some friendships with people who will let me go on their farms to launch a boat, they have some private ramps.” —Richmond boater

“In Bug’s Island...the Army Corps of Engineers, the way they launch there, you go to Bluestone Landing and put money in the slot and just park your vehicle. That seemed to work pretty nice, the way they did that.” —Richmond boater

“Anything above the fall lines, if you’re in a canoe or kayak or small john boat to fish for small mouth, you are dependent on the public landings unless you know somebody who will allow access. And they get bombarded by people that they know, and they’re not going to allow someone that they don’t know go on there.” —Richmond boater

“I’m satisfied.” —Richmond boater

“I’ve got 6 ramps within a half hour. Some of them are private.” —Richmond boater

“When you talk about a canoe or kayak, in a lot of places if you’re looking for a 6-hour float, you’re restricted from this stretch to this stretch...because a lot of times the ramps are maybe 8- to 10-hour floats’ distance. So you’ll have to spend the night out or [paddle] until sundown to get to it. There’s not a variety that you can look for to take 4 or 6 hours.” —Richmond boater

“There’s no way we can put our big boat into the [public ramp] that’s within sight of our house. If we didn’t have that private access [it would be a problem].” —Richmond boater

“During the week you can hit it, but on the weekend it’s a different world.” —Richmond boater

“The public ramp there was having problems with break-ins. Then they had to pay a fee so you could

### Are you generally satisfied with the boating access in your area?

hire a guard...It was a free ramp but the users themselves created a co-op.” —Richmond boater

“There’s a ramp on the Chickahominy, I wouldn’t go there for years because people would come back and your tailgate would be off your truck. They would steal whatever because it was down on a remote dirt road.” —Richmond boater

“If you launched out at Lindhaven, I think they do a good job of monitoring that. I think that’s state. As far as monitoring the park and directing boat traffic in and out of the ramps...They’ve got a couple of guys in a little shack, and a nice little facility, bath house. You do pay to launch, but you’ve got somebody directing boats, trailers in. Moving it along because you’ve got so much boat traffic there.” —Richmond boater

“With all the money that DNR takes in, it seems like they could do a lot better job with these ramps and some of this other stuff, getting your boat into the water. Some ramps, you almost break your axle on your trailer dropping it off, it’s so bad. The concrete’s all screwed up...I don’t know what [DNR] is doing with [all the money], but I don’t think they’re putting it all back into these lakes.” —Kenosha boater

“Parking. My trailer is 32 feet long and my truck is another 18 feet. I’ve eliminated [a lot of lakes] because there’s no parking.” —Kenosha boater

“You’re dealing with so many different entities...it depends on what towns and cities want to spend....” —Kenosha boater

“They don’t have enough handicapped parking on these ramps.” —Kenosha boater

“There’s none anywhere.” —Kenosha boater

“Access on rivers...if you want to do a segment on a river, sometimes where you have to park is not real kosher. Then there’s also vandalism issues out where you do park. The parking is huge, and even access on rivers is huge....” —Kenosha boater

“The Racine harbor...the ramps, the water level is so shallow it’s hard to get a big boat in there.” —Kenosha boater

“I don’t really feel knowledgeable about access; they [his children] would have to tell me where they [access areas] are, because they know more about it than I do.” —Kenosha boater

“[My knowledge] is low because our boat is docked on a lake. We generally don’t take it anywhere else. But I have put other boats on the water...it was not the most pleasant experience...a lack of understanding...the nice thing is that the boating community is so friendly. Usually there are people there that know what they’re doing. If you’re there and you don’t, they can help you out. But there aren’t any public resources.” —Kenosha boater

“My boat stays in all summer, much like his. I do launch a jet ski but that’s pretty simple. There’s a landing very close to me, it’s actually open to the public but it’s privately owned...I don’t move around to different lakes as far as having to get my boat in the water.” —Kenosha boater

**Are you generally satisfied with the boating access in your area?**

“[The number of access areas is] adequate if they were maintained proper.” —Kenosha boater

“Yeah, I believe so. Normally I go to places where you have to pay to launch. Then I found out about [places with] free launches. That are excellent, that I’d never knew about...About half a mile away is a public launch. No fee.” —Kenosha boater

“If there’s two places to launch and someone’s there, you have to wait...it’s not worth the aggravation.” —Kenosha boater

“When the water’s up [the quality of most access areas] is ok, but it seems like every year they got to extend the piers out so you can get your boat in there because the water’s so low.” —Kenosha boater

“Depends on where you go...The ones that rely on tourism...you’ll find pretty good docks. The ones on smaller lakes, they don’t. —Kenosha boater

“With the kayaks, going out to the big areas [is easy] but trying to go in some of the [smaller lakes] and stuff like that, I found it difficult to find a good access point.” —Houston boater

“A lot of people trash up a place...the owner locks it down...” —Houston boater

“It was more accessible 20 years ago. I remember there used to be an H, L, and P plant where people would go and do a lot of crabbing because the water temperature was just right. And now you can’t even get close to it. They’ve fenced it out into the water.” —Houston boater

“The law doesn’t allow them [private landowners] to close off the water, [but] you can’t step on their beach.” —Houston boater

“I grew up in a rural area. It seemed like when I was a lot younger, people didn’t really care if it was private property. It seems like a lot of places now, people are more uptight about it.” —Houston boater

“Where I went the other day, I’m impressed with how they cleaned it up...With the police being visible all the time, it’s not trashy no more. You can really enjoy going out there now.” —Houston boater

“[The Clear Lake county park has a] big parking lot. You don’t have no problem parking on that one.” —Houston boater

“You mentioned something about the cops having more presence. There’s a couple of places on the Trinity...it was not uncommon to see some guy’s truck with an empty trailer in the back and a window busted out. So that’s not fun, when you got to be worried about that the whole time. There’s no law, maybe a game warden every once in a while.” —Houston boater

“There’s a direct relationship between the police being close by and visible. Lake Houston has this great ramp and a great park...A lot of people drown up in the San Jacinto River, right at 59, which is sort of the north end of the lake. And they have a big station, with the sheriff’s department there, [with] boats and rescue equipment. And they’re there all the time. You’ll see one of them parked out



### Are you generally satisfied with the boating access in your area?

near the ramp, just observing...They're really behaved in Lake Houston. The place is clean and people behave and nobody's fussing at the ramp. It makes a difference." —Houston boater

"I worry a little bit when there's no real place to park and everybody has to just pull off into the weeds. That's a little sketchy sometimes." —Houston boater

"Well you don't think about it because you're not being carjacked or nothing...If it happens to you, then you starting thinking this will need to be addressed." —Houston boater

"Generally where I'm going in the motorboat, I'm usually in places that there's a lot more people around. When we go with the kayaks, a lot of times we're the only ones out there. [We are] a little worried or concerned about putting in. It's just what you have to do." —Houston boater

"It's very rare that I actually see [a game warden]. I guess they've got pretty big patrol areas." —Houston boater

"I don't think it's the game warden's job to police a water body." —Houston boater

"I use private launches about 90% of the time. I pay...they usually got a store right there, people right there. So I'm paying [for security], I'm just not paying for it to a state." —Houston boater

"The Milwaukee boat ramp, it's a joke. It's dangerous. You can back your boat up, and if you're a knucklehead and you didn't take your back straps off, and your boat floats up, you can back right off into 120 feet of water. It's too short; they've got concrete partitions in half of it. If you don't know what the heck you're doing you can run right into that...It's such a high use area, there's just no excuse to have it this dangerous...I don't go there any more just for that reason." —Portland boater

"It's a poor place for them to have a ramp...there's a big bend...a lot of current that goes through there, a deep drop-off. So they're already screwed because it's in a bad position." —Portland boater

"No matter where I go, there is a police presence on the water, [but] not a presence in the launch area." —Portland boater

"When I park in front of WalMart and I got to walk 200 yards because there's 82 parking spaces for paraplegic people, I'm a little upset because there's nobody in those spaces. It's the same thing true at the lakes. They have 10 or 12 assigned spots and nobody's in them." —Portland boater

"Access for a boat ramp up in Timothy Lake, this [is a pay site], but for \$5 a day...it's nice." —Portland boater

"If you're paying something...you're usually going to deal with less garbage than the ones that are free and they don't give a crap." —Portland boater

"There's a ramp on the Columbia [that is] really steep. My stepdad was pulling a boat out and he blew out the transmission on the truck." —Portland boater

"In eastern Oregon all the lakes practically, in August, your trailer's off the concrete. So you better have a 4-wheel drive to get it out." —Portland boater

**Are you generally satisfied with the boating access in your area?**

“There’s more than enough [access] areas for me.” —Portland boater

“There’s such a wide spectrum. You’ve got a Cadillac versus a Yugo within a 10-minute drive, and every other option in between, in terms of what that quality of an experience is going to be based on the different places that you go. There does appear to be no sensibility in how they’re spending the money. They’re choosing one place to build it up really nice and letting the other one go to crap...They do a beautiful job when they choose to do it.” —Portland boater

“I try to go to the places I’m familiar with and happy with, and haven’t had my car broken into...That seems to be the running thing in my head: Is anybody going to take anything?” —Portland boater

“I agree. That’s a lot of my motivation.” —Portland boater

“There’s about 20 camp grounds in Oregon that the State of Oregon pays a management fee, that’s out to bid for a different agency to [maintain]. Overall they’re doing very well. But to me, the amount of money they’re paying these people, I would like to see the money stay in the state. I would like to see the state do that...It’s a for-profit operation....” —Portland boater

“The Marine Board, I’ve dealt with them a couple of times. They have their agendas, and they’re set up at the beginning of the year, which has got to do with what they’re going to concentrate on. But you’ve got to approach those guys, they all have open meetings, and say ‘We’d like you to consider working on this ramp, and this,’ and maybe get them to prioritize on the places that we’re not happy with. They have their bureaucracy. The worst thing they do is they talk to their attorney. But they’re approachable.” —Portland boater

## OPINIONS ON SPECIFIC ACCESS-RELATED ISSUES AND RESOURCES

### Needed Improvements and Additions to Access Areas

Using a list of major boating access site amenities and features, the moderators asked boaters in each of the four groups about the major features or improvements needed most at the sites they regularly used. The summary below reflects the amenities and features that received the most discussion time in the four boater groups:

#### ➤ **Parking:**

- In the **Richmond** group, it was generally agreed that parking is worst on weekends during peak boating months; despite this limitation, however, many people in the group suggested that the overall availability of parking at access points does not represent an overly burdensome obstacle.
- In the **Kenosha** group, a few people commented that parking lots at some access points tend to be located fairly far from the boat launches, ramps, and other facilities, necessitating a certain distance boaters must walk; others mentioned cracks and other damage to concrete pavements.
- In the **Houston** group, the conversation returned to overall differences between public and private access locations: parking was said to be an issue at some public access areas, particularly areas in which picnic areas or green space occupied prime areas in which parking could otherwise be expanded.
- Parking-related concerns were most pronounced in the **Portland** group, where several boaters said that lots at public access points tended to fill up rather quickly, particularly on weekends.

#### ➤ **Restrooms:**

- In the **Richmond** group, restrooms were viewed as a feature of moderate concern, with a few people comparing their experiences at access sites in Virginia to areas in the western part of the United States, which were said to offer a greater number of restroom facilities.
- Participants in the **Kenosha** group generally had minimal concerns about restroom facilities.
- In the **Houston** group, two participants mentioned that the relative lack of proper restroom facilities at commonly used launch sites sometimes prevented female family members from joining them on boating excursions.
- In the **Portland** group, a few people voiced preferences for wider availability of restrooms at access areas but recommended securing such facilities in the interests of preventing loitering or crime.

#### ➤ **Trash receptacles:**

- In the **Richmond** group, one of the central observations regarding trash receptacles was the need for regular emptying of such receptacles (it was noted that adding a trashcan does little good if the receptacle is regularly overflowing with trash).

- Participants in the **Kenosha** group voiced a clear need for more trash receptacles at launch areas, with several participants suggesting that trashcans that had once been located at popular access points had been removed in recent years.
- In the **Houston** group, some boaters were ambivalent about the need for more trash receptacles: a few people mentioned the possibility for trash overflow (i.e., when receptacles are not regularly emptied) as well as the possibility for trash to attract wildlife. One participant said that trashcans at certain beaches are simply not used often enough.
- In the **Portland** group, one participant observed that many access areas use the same number of trashcans throughout the year, despite that certain months see much higher boater traffic (and need more trashcans as a result).

➤ **Fueling areas:**

- Throughout the four groups, it was generally agreed that privately run marinas and marine fueling stations on the water offer fuel at a higher price on average; most boaters said they took care of fueling before reaching an access area or getting on the water. Note, also, that several participants in the Portland group discussed the need for non-ethanol boat fuel.

➤ **Launch ramps and launch lanes:**

- In the **Kenosha** group, one person indicated that the number and quality of ramps and lanes would vary by location, while another person said that there was a considerable need for improved ramps at river access points; another participant echoed this concern and noted that some ramps are quite old and unsteady, while others are so steep that backing a vehicle down them can be dangerous.
- In the **Houston** group, a participant echoed concerns heard in Kenosha regarding the quality of public ramps, while another person in the group cautioned against building too *many* ramps.

➤ **Access for disabled individuals:**

- The **Kenosha** group was the only one to discuss this, with a few boaters indicating a need for expanded accessibility catering to disabled individuals. Conversely, a boater in the **Portland** group stated that there is an excess of handicapped spaces that are never used.

➤ **Safety/security, such as in remote access areas:**

- In the **Richmond** group, several boaters said that they only used public access areas during daylight hours due to the lack of lights in most areas. One person suggested that inexpensive solar-powered lights could be installed in certain areas, while others again discussed security/safety concerns, particularly in certain areas after dark. Comments were fairly similar in the **Kenosha** and **Houston** groups.
- Safety and security concerns were most prominent in the **Portland** group, where a few boaters mentioned crime-related concerns or personal examples of theft, particularly taking place in eastern and central Oregon. Enforcement presence in various areas was

discussed at length, and several participants said they were willing to pay a fee to use a site patrolled by a security guard or other law enforcement representative.

**I'd like to ask you about some specific features of boating access facilities and areas and get a sense of how important each item is to your boating experiences.**

*(Moderator asks about parking)*

"If you boat on the weekends it's an issue. If you boat on a week day it's not too much of an issue. Unfortunately, most of the people who have boats, that's when they go boating." —Richmond boater

"[They] don't put too much into it because 5 out of 7 days it's not an issue." —Richmond boater

"[Expanding is] just encouraging more people to use the ramp." —Richmond boater

"There's a lot of places I don't think they could expand. They're as developed as they could be." —Richmond boater

"Osborne is about as nice a ramp as there is around here. It's in Henrico County and it's free and the facilities, they've got a nice bathhouse. It's got a lot of parking but it is full on a Sunday afternoon in the summer. But it's not usually full any other time." —Richmond boater

"This state has great facilities compared to New Jersey. You go there, the cement's broken...you may or may not make it on low tide...." —Richmond boater

"I [read that] in the western part of the state...licensing was down from \$100,000 to \$70,000 over the last couple of years...that affects where we can get ramps for public use." —Richmond boater

"I don't think access is ever a problem. I fish everywhere, every river and lake, and they all have at least one good place that you can go. I'm lucky to have a lot around Richmond. I don't know of a bad ramp, really, in this area." —Richmond boater

"Back Bay could use another ramp." —Richmond boater

"The only thing I would probably like to see, is because I'm using an electric troll motor, is just some types of signs out there. You can see the current, but you really don't know at certain sections, 'is this going to be really hard?'...Sometimes you're just looking for a ramp that you can go down that's not going to be heavily populated...[the current might] be too hard for your electric motor...." —Richmond boater

"Some of the lots are so far away from the launch, that's what pisses me off...you got to walk so far to get back to your boat. It seems like they would have better access so you don't have to walk so far. Especially older people like me, I got a bad hip and everything. A couple of lakes I know I'm walking over a block...." —Kenosha boater

"Each place is different. Some have parking right by the docks, some you have to walk." —Kenosha boater

**I'd like to ask you about some specific features of boating access facilities and areas and get a sense of how important each item is to your boating experiences.**

"From what I heard, parking seems to be the biggest problem for everyone. But what I've seen, the condition of this concrete...is all cracked." —Kenosha boater

"That's back to the public/private thing. Private places are going to have adequate parking. Public aren't. There's just nothing the government's going to do better than private businesses down there." —Houston boater

"You're probably going to have less rowdy, drunk people at a private place too." —Houston boater

"[Public places] will have tons of picnic areas laying around, that are just going to waste. People aren't using them...I know they want green space, it's a park, but there's really not enough parking." —Houston boater

"I would use [a public ramp] if it was well-maintained, had everything we were talking about — parking, security, that kind of thing. The worst thing you want to do is tear up your boat or tear up your trailer when you're trying to use one of these public launches." —Houston boater

"Usually at a private place, you would pay a couple of dollars. There's a store there, would sell ice, beer, Cokes, water, everything. If you forget something, you'd go right in and get it. Where most of the public places, there's not anything like that, that I know of." —Houston boater

"I would have to say yes [parking is a problem]. If you're not there at 4 in the morning, and get a good parking spot and get your spot in the river, it fills up fast. You get people overflowing..." —Portland boater

"I drive right by a boat ramp on my way to work every morning, and at 5 in the morning, this time of year, it's full." —Portland boater

"We've had times where we go to Chinook Landing and it's full. You can't even get in to check the parking spaces. So we would go up to the next one, which is Rooster Rock, and that one's full, and so we just go home." —Portland boater

"I can usually find somewhere to put in and park. Where my house is I've got 3 or 4 places, all about equal distance from me. Just Oregon in general has so many places you can go and be in the water, that's one of the great things about it." —Portland boater

"If you make that decision at noon that you're going to go out on the boat on a 100-degree day, you've already missed out...You have to manage the crowd...Once you get on the water [there is] an awful lot of freedom [that] you can't get on the freeway, you can't get on the city streets...but it's not completely free because you still have to manage the crowd." —Portland boater

***(Moderator asks about restrooms)***

"I don't think it's an issue with the guys, it's more an issue with the ladies...Sometimes it's been an issue with me too. You go on a lot of public ramps that are remote, no port-a-johns or anything around there. And there should be. They need to put a permanent facility in there. Out west you go

**I'd like to ask you about some specific features of boating access facilities and areas and get a sense of how important each item is to your boating experiences.**

there and they got these restrooms, they're not fancy but they're concrete, do what you got to do in a tank. Then they come every 6 or 7 months and pump it out of there." —Richmond boater

"If you ever went out west, in Colorado, Alaska...even the most remote areas, they got restroom facilities. Concrete structures. They might bring them in there on a truck, dig a hole, and dump them in there. It's all stainless steel, the commodes, the urinals...." —Richmond boater

"That would be nice...You have to leave to go find somewhere...." —Richmond boater

"Have they thought of lime for their port-a-potties? They need to use it more." —Kenosha boater

"[Public places] have outhouses, you know how that is." —Houston boater

"I have two girls. I'm not going to go put them in a port-a-can." —Houston boater

"Lack of facilities keeps my girls from wanting to go out as much as they'd like to. My wife and daughters say 'It's too uncomfortable, it's too much work.'" —Houston boater

"Vaults [for restrooms] are great, but when you build a vault there's issues in that vault. You have dope heads in there shooting up. I won't go there alone." —Portland boater

"It could use security. I think restrooms, have security, and then lock them up at night." —Portland boater

***(Moderator asks about trash receptacles)***

"That's another thing they really should have. A place to put your fishing line, recycle." —Richmond boater

"Having it is one thing, and then having it maintained, the trash pickup. You put a 55-gallon drum there, but if it's mounded up and stuff's piling up beside it...." —Richmond boater

"I guess that's why the state or the localities don't put receptacles there, because they think 'They'll either carry it with them or put it on the ground and we'll just come around and pick it up,' because if you put something out they'll use it." —Richmond boater

"Terrible. For some reason the state and some of these parks have taken away their trash receptacles. Up at [indistinct park name] they used to have a big dumpster there – [now,] nothing. They don't have them anymore...you have to carry your trash out of the park." —Kenosha boater

"Yeah, I'm thinking about the sites that are up where I'm at. There isn't anything. I don't think any of them have any." —Kenosha boater

"I think in a lot of cases, it's because the people that use them leave a mess. So rather than deal with the mess, they just pull the trash cans out. I don't know what you do about that." —Kenosha boater

"It's more than a mess because it draws in, if you're up north, it draws in the bears and the raccoons,

**I'd like to ask you about some specific features of boating access facilities and areas and get a sense of how important each item is to your boating experiences.**

and all those kinds of critters that get in and get going with all that. It then brings in a whole set of other problems too. I understand it, but it's also very irritating and very frustrating." —Kenosha boater

"With the trash cans, there's a plus and a minus to it..." —Houston boater

"If there's a fish cleaning facility around, there's going to be stinking." —Houston boater

"That turns into rats and snakes." —Houston boater

"If that can fills up, god help you. It's going to be a 10-foot pile of trash." —Houston boater

"People [are] not using them. A lot of the beaches...got garbage cans all lined up for people to use. Yet every year [they pick up] 500 tons of trash that people never threw in the trash cans." —Houston boater

"The State of Oregon hasn't recognized the crowds from June to September, and they have the same trash bin 12 months a year." —Portland boater

***(Moderator asks about fueling areas)***

"We're probably all used to just making sure you fill up where you are." —Richmond boater

"You don't want to stop at a marina and buy gas." —Richmond boater

"\$4.99 a couple of weeks ago. I ran out of gas, I had to buy it." —Richmond boater

"You don't have gas, you got to go to the gas station." —Kenosha boater

"Up at Oshkosh there's a couple of marinas where you can gas up. Small lakes, no, you got to go to their gas station." —Kenosha boater

"It ends up being more expensive when you fuel up at a marina. It's why I just bring my own gas." —Kenosha boater

"Not at the public...get it on your own." —Houston boater

"A lot of the [private] marinas will have fuel. But on the water gas is a lot more expensive than buying it at your local place. You avoid it if you can." —Houston boater

"Everything on the water will cost more." —Houston boater

"We need non-ethanol fuel, boat fuel. I just paid \$200 to have my carburetor rebuilt. We need gas that doesn't have ethanol...The water [sucks] into the fuel system. The fuel is crap anyway. It has a lot of particulates and stuff in it...You have to buy a stabilizer." —Portland boater

"That's a federal problem." —Portland boater



**I'd like to ask you about some specific features of boating access facilities and areas and get a sense of how important each item is to your boating experiences.**

"I'll only buy fuel on the water...That's the only place where they're allowed to sell non-ethanol fuel, is on the water in Oregon." —Portland boater

"[Fuel information] is just word of mouth." —Portland boater

***(Moderator asks about launch ramps and launch lanes)***

"If you're talking about rivers, those are a great need. Even the ramps to the rivers are a great need. [A ramp to the Wisconsin River] is basically a joke. It's just so steep that it's not even safe to back your vehicle down...and just the walk down areas to rivers can be extremely dangerous from just a physical standpoint...I think there's a lot more issues with boat ramps and lanes going on to rivers than what I'm hearing them talk about to lakes." —Kenosha boater

"There's some that I fished that are so old, when you walk out on them they're just shaking. They're that bad. And these are public launches, that's what really gets me...I fell in the water once, the pier was so bad." —Kenosha boater

"Every lake is going to vary on that." —Kenosha boater

"The state-maintained ones are not maintained." —Houston boater

"You wouldn't want to have too many. That would cause a lot of problems. Some engineer could probably come up with something that would allow more spaces to tie off, or something." —Houston boater

***(Moderator asks about access for disabled individuals)***

"Doesn't exist." —Kenosha boater

"Poor." —Kenosha boater

"My first priority would be the handicapped accessibility." —Kenosha boater

***(Moderator asks about safety, such as in remote access areas)***

"There's no lights at our public access area." —Richmond boater

"I'm off the water at dark." —Richmond boater

"It wouldn't be a bad idea, now that you have solar lighting so accessible and cheap, to have the ramp marked so you could find it after you've been out, if you don't get back before the sun, or if you fish at night." —Richmond boater

"At Osborne...at dusk, I've had two boating issues. [Henrico County marine patrol] helped me out. That's a nice service that they offer." —Richmond boater

**I'd like to ask you about some specific features of boating access facilities and areas and get a sense of how important each item is to your boating experiences.**

"Again, west of the fall line in the floating streams...it's not the safest place, just the people around there had too much to drink. You worry about them driving home and getting into fights...it's scary."  
—Richmond boater

"It depends again where you're at, but yes, it is a big issue." —Kenosha boater

"A lot of the public parks – state parks, county parks – have hours. You can't even get in too early or stay too late. They shut the gates on you. So they don't have lights." —Houston boater

"I go strictly sunrise to sunset." —Houston boater

"Talk to the marine patrol. They got their little boathouse up on the Clackamas. They're scared to death to leave their cars there. They get broken into once a month. And that's the sheriff."  
—Portland boater

"At Depoe Bay where we have our boat docked, the Coast Guard is right there. So they keep it pretty [safe]. They have cameras everywhere." —Portland boater

"When you talk about security, you might as well leave all the windows down in your car and let them steal whatever they want, and have the radio, and that's kind of the way it gets in eastern Oregon, central Oregon. Might as well leave the windows down, pull the hitch out of your stinger...If you don't take [the pin] out they will steal it from you and you can't pull your boat home...." —Portland boater

"The security may not be good enough at all of our boat launch areas, especially during the day...."  
—Portland boater

"If you pay a place, money should be going toward...some kind of security...You should have some kind of reassurance...." —Portland boater

"It's free to launch [at North Fork]...There's a cop every time we go there. Spread it out. Send those guys to other places...I don't see them anywhere else. If I know they're going to be there, the thieves know they're going to be there. So mix up your rotation a little." —Portland boater

"We've got to be responsible for our own security." —Portland boater

"We want homegrown security, not Homeland Security." —Portland boater

"I vote with my pocketbook. If I think it's a nice place to go, a safe place to go...At a nice place like Chinook I don't mind at all paying a fee for use...It's the highest priced place in Portland and it's the first one that fills up." —Portland boater

"I think the State of Oregon, the only thing they manage their budget to do well, is sports and recreation...On the internet you can read where all the money goes in to that department and comes out. The rest of the state's totally absurd." —Portland boater

**I'd like to ask you about some specific features of boating access facilities and areas and get a sense of how important each item is to your boating experiences.**

*(Moderator asks about overall site design issues)*

"[Matthews public access] is just an old spot that's been neglected. Because it is in a small area. It sounds like Richmond [has] gotten a lot of attention, where we are is not as populated...This is great for kayaks or jet skis...there's no way you can get a big boat out...it's that gross, black sinking mud. Just not very safe." —Richmond boater

"There's one on the Rappahannock that they've closed down...they closed the state ramp because it's just silted in." —Richmond boater

"I think some of these people that design the sites ought to have to try to put their vehicles and their boats in them." —Kenosha boater

"Conroe got a lot of businesses and restaurants around there. They spent a lot of money building piers, where you can come and tie up. I don't see that at the [public] launch sites; they're not doing that. So the industries have figured out that if you build these, many people will come to their business." —Houston boater

"You can park and have lunch, go to the bathroom, rest a while, and go back out." —Houston boater

"For a public ramp, [Seven Coves is] not too bad. I've never had to wait too much, and the ramp itself...doesn't have potholes under the water and cracks like that...There's no lights at night, so you better just know where it is when it gets dark." —Houston boater

"Why can't they fix the piers? [private example] I fished a lot there when I was a kid. And then the piers washed away, and then you got to get a boat. Now there's more boat traffic." —Houston boater

*(Moderator asks about distribution of access areas for both larger motorized boats and smaller, non-motorized boats)*

"I think the state caters to motorboats rather than canoes, kayaks." —Richmond boater

"It's still kind of a pay as you go thing. Canoes and kayaks, they aren't registered. You don't pay anything for that, so what access we have is appreciated, because it doesn't cost us anything. You don't have to register the trailer, you don't have to register the boat as long as you don't have a motor on it. So what we got out there is very beneficial to us, and the paddlers, we're not paying for it. So if more of the money goes to motor boaters that's fine, and I'm a motor boater. If I'm paying all these fees, I think it's as important that that be used to maintain them, to keep them up." —Richmond boater

"There's been a boom on kayakers and canoeists in the past 8 years or so too." —Richmond boater

## Maintenance of Existing Access Versus Creation of New Access

- In each focus group, the moderator asked participants whether it was more important to build new access areas or maintain existing ones, such as through repairs and improvements. Interestingly, the overwhelming response across all four groups was to improve existing sites, rather than construct new ones. The most common reasons included the cost-effective nature of adding improvements and maintaining upkeep, compared to erecting brand new sites; the relative scarcity in most areas of suitable, affordable waterfront property on which to build new access areas; and examples of underused, poorly planned new access areas.

### What do you think should be a higher priority: building new access facilities and areas or maintaining existing ones, such as through repairs and improvements?

“Maintain existing ones.” [group consensus] —Richmond boater

“Maintaining.” [group consensus] —Kenosha boater

“I don’t think there’s a shortage of access, I think it’s the quality of it. There are lots of abandoned old places where nothing but a john boat or a kayak is going to get at it. Then nobody bothers and then they get worse.” —Houston boater

“If they took the existing places and added parking and maybe a couple of more launches there, instead of just like two, they’d be a lot more convenient to use.” —Houston boater

“When you get a lot of people launching, sometimes it’s hard to find a tie-up area [so] you can run and get your car and trailer. So that’s kind of important if you have a large launch area, just have enough spots to tie up at.” —Houston boater

“The boating industry itself has grown up so much, along with the Houston area in the last 10 years, I imagine boat traffic probably has almost doubled, in the number of boats. But the number of launches is probably still the same but they’re in worse conditions.” —Houston boater

“If I had to choose, it would be the second one [to maintain existing access areas].” —Portland boater

“At Oswego they put in a monster dock for 70-foot cruising boats...What a waste. Nobody ever parks there.” —Portland boater

“It’s not used. I just discovered that. It’s public. It’s beautiful, it’s not used.” —Portland boater

“I vote for maintenance.” —Portland boater

“It would be a lot more expensive, I think, to build a new one than take that money and spread it among five of them and make them a lot nicer.” —Portland boater

“From an environmental standpoint, you’re not ruining an area [with a new facility]. I think it’s unrealistic to think we’re going to get another [facility] in Portland” —Portland boater

## Opinions on User Conflicts

User conflicts on waterways, such as conflicts between larger boats and jet skiers or operators of human-powered personal watercraft, were discussed at length throughout each of the four focus groups. Such concerns were often mentioned early on during the discussions of factors affecting boating satisfaction, but the moderators also returned to the topic at later points in the discussions to give participants an opportunity to continue discussing these concerns.

- In the **Richmond** group, a few people commented that many boaters (including personal watercraft operators) simply have not been properly trained and educated as to the “rules of the road,” particularly in terms of right-of-ways on the water. Another major aspect of the discussion concerned obligations of common courtesy, cooperation, and mutual respect among recreationists sharing the same area or water body.
- Comments followed a similar pattern in the **Kenosha** group, with some participants mentioning the tendency for jet skiers to operate their watercraft at high speeds, particularly around paddlers and kayakers. It was also mentioned that motorboats are a frequent source of frustration to anglers. A few participants again brought up the concept of educational programs to address the obligation for boaters and recreationists to share waterways and cooperate with one another. A later portion of the discussion focused on conflicts with private landowners of waterfront properties, and a few people mentioned property owners who closed the areas near their land to parking due to poorly behaved canoeists and kayakers.
- In the **Houston** group, one person said that he had observed fishing guides rush with their customers into fishing spots in which other anglers appear to be catching fish, often leading to crowding issues.
- Interestingly, the **Portland** group saw differing opinions as to whether conflicts between boaters had worsened or improved in recent years: a few people said that jet skiers continued to be an annoyance to other boaters and anglers, while others said that wake-boarders and similar groups had learned to stay clear of larger boats.

<p><b>Have you observed any conflicts between competing boater groups (e.g., motorized versus non-motorized boaters), between boaters and anglers, or between boaters and private landowners?</b></p>
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<p>“[It’s just about] rules of the road. A lot of people don’t understand, whoever has the least amount of power has the right-of-way.” —Richmond boater</p>
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<p>“It’s still a matter of courtesy. Everybody that’s in a powerboat ought to sit in a kayak one time... You have to throttle back. If you see a canoe or kayak, you’re in a no-wake zone.” —Richmond boater</p>
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<p>“You can equate that to driving a tractor-trailer or towing a camper or boat...[Other drivers] don’t understand that your visibility and your stopping distance is not [good].” —Richmond boater</p>
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<p>“It all goes back to education.” —Richmond boater</p>
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**Have you observed any conflicts between competing boater groups (e.g., motorized versus non-motorized boaters), between boaters and anglers, or between boaters and private landowners?**

“And respect. We have a jet ski. Some people have not ridden a jet ski respectfully around kayakers.”  
—Richmond boater

“It can be [a problem]. Again, it’s when respect matters. There’s going to be a lot of boats out there, just slow down and get on your way. Probably the biggest issue I would say is boater safety. I think anyone out there should have a class. Learn the rules of respect. Certain lakes, you go counter-clockwise...you go the other way, you’re pulled over, you get a fine. That’s the way it should be...A lot of people go out there, don’t know the rules. That’s when stuff happens.” —Kenosha boater

“Some of these guys in motorized boats, they see people in their canoes, and they still go zipping by...some of these people don’t care. All they want to do is gun it...” —Kenosha boater

“It can be pretty scary out there. Especially if there’s already waves on the lake, and you add in a boat that’s going too fast. I know how to turn the boat into the wave so it doesn’t affect me. But if you don’t have time to do that, or if the waves are counter-acting waves that are already on the lake...I would love to have every boater sitting in the canoe about that time, then they would have greater respect for what they were doing. Especially when you’re about ready to go over.” —Kenosha boater

“I think it’s the boaters that don’t respect the fishermen. You can very easily see when somebody’s fishing from a long way away. I don’t think it works the opposite way, as far as I don’t think the fisherman bothers the boaters. It’s pretty much a one-way street.” —Kenosha boater

“Fishermen have respect toward each other, whereas the common boater, the speed boater doesn’t. I try to get out there at maybe 4:00 in the morning just as the sun’s coming up, and hope I’m off the lake by 9:30, 10:00 before all the speedboats get out there. —Kenosha boater

“But I would just like to add that there’s been a lot of fishermen that just about pushed me over too. So yes, there’s levels of degrees of respect...but it’s also not understanding. I don’t know that all people that drive motorboats completely understand what it’s like to be in a canoe or a kayak, and to know what it’s like to have those waves come at you....So I think it’s, again, that education piece. Maybe that should be included in boater safety...” —Kenosha boater

“I’ve noticed [issues] between guides and civilians, them being just bold and relentless about it. Just pushing you, getting their paying customers. —Houston boater

“If you’re out there fishing, they see you catch one they’ll come right up on you.” —Houston boater

“It hadn’t happened too many times, but every once in a while you’re trying to fish in some area and they’ll [jet skiers] decide to come over there and do donuts.” —Houston boater

“That’s a lot bigger issue on fresh water.” —Houston boater

“That’s where the confusion comes in at the boat launch. A lot of boaters are trying to get to that spot. The guide, he’s trying to get that too because he’s got paying customers. You know that spot just as well...They’re rushing to get in the water.” —Houston boater

**Have you observed any conflicts between competing boater groups (e.g., motorized versus non-motorized boaters), between boaters and anglers, or between boaters and private landowners?**

“Yes. Jet skis, getting strafed by jet skis. A 12-foot aluminum boat on the Columbia, at Oregon City this happened. If you’re the little guy, little guy loses.” —Portland boater

“About the month of June, in the Portland area...there’s that one month where you still got the last few shad fishermen [when it is also] about the beginning of the time for the summer water sports users. And so there [is] conflict in there, usually kind of in the middle of the day....” —Portland boater

“I don’t think it’s really widespread.” —Portland boater

“Like the wake board groups. They were really obnoxious about 10 years ago. They’d come flying through. But over the years...they stand over 150 feet off my dock all the time now. I never get dive-bombed. They have evolved to where, I think they’re great now.” —Portland boater

“[My boat] is designed to throw a wake...I try to be courteous. Typically [anglers] are going to be places I don’t want to be anyway. [But] people just don’t care. They don’t care what’s going on around them....” —Portland boater

“...A couple of years ago a jet ski ran into a boat. I think it killed someone.” —Portland boater

“It’s gotten to the point where everybody’s getting along, everybody’s being considerate. I mean there are a few exceptions here and there, when they’re like 18 years old.” —Portland boater

*(Moderator asks specifically about conflicts with private landowners)*

“Usually they keep a public landing adjacent to it. It’ll be no parking...which is fine, it’s their prerogative.” —Kenosha boater

“The only issue [as a waterfront land owner], the permanent docks we have are in an area where you go under a state highway right adjacent to it. So it’s a narrow area. There’s ‘No Wake’ signs out, and people just don’t seem, sometimes, to follow the ‘no wake’. It’s dangerous. If you’re on a fixed dock and you’re going to step on your boat and the thing is bouncing up in the air, you have to keep your eyes open as far as what other people are doing.” —Kenosha boater

“I think this is an issue for rivers. This is what I was hoping to get into. Because it really depends on if the landowner owns the land underneath the river or if they don’t. Some landowners think they own the land under the river but they really don’t. The waters are public. Just as you have people who speed in motorboats, you’ve got canoe people who don’t do well by the property owners when they’re canoeing rivers, so they don’t necessarily treat the property owners well. I get both sides of that. I see that as more of an issue on rivers, as far as the landowners not liking it... If you could guarantee that all canoeists and kayakers are going to treat the land respectfully, they should be allowed to go...the water is public water. But not everybody is respectful. They’ll leave their bags of trash and think the farmers won’t care.” —Kenosha boater

## POTENTIAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE BOATING ACCESS

Participants were asked if they had any ideas for policies or programs that could help to improve boating access.

- In the **Richmond** group, most of the conversation concerned the need for a greater enforcement presence on the water (the Henrico marine patrol was mentioned as a good example, but it was noted that resources for enforcement are generally lacking throughout the state). A participant indicated that authorities on the water focused on enforcing fish catch limits rather than policing unruly behavior. One person reiterated the need for jet skiers and operators of personal watercraft to complete a boater safety course.
- In the **Kenosha** group, a few participants discussed dredging needed at access sites to maintain the quality of the shallow areas near ramps, but noted that it seemed difficult for the Department of Natural Resources to receive authorization for such measures. Another person commented about the need for regular, consistent inspections of boating access areas to determine needed repairs, maintenance, or additional features. Enforcement was also mentioned, specifically the need to police boaters who consume alcohol while operating watercraft. One person recommended a website providing updates for boaters looking for information on boating access throughout the state. There was also some discussion about standardizing the fees charged to launch on various lakes throughout Wisconsin, with a few people indicating frustration over the apparent inconsistency in such user fees. One participant recommended that the state decide on a standard set of rates, although another countered that a small pond could become as expensive as a major lake.
- In the **Houston** group, a few participants reacted positively to the idea of a website or smartphone app providing updates and general information on boating access, particularly if such a service allowed users to search by various preferred features. A couple of participants mentioned a webcam and an app that are already available. One person emphasized that such services would have to come from the private industry, as the State of Texas simply had no room in its budget to accomplish much in terms of boating access improvements. A few Houston group participants also commented about the difficulties of storing a boat in a residential neighborhood in some areas, with some people being faced with the option of paying high prices for dry boat storage.
- In the **Portland** group, suggestions included signs posted at boat ramps and access sites displaying key information on boat launching and recovering procedures (this was suggested as a potential way to limit congestion at ramps as well as address a general lack of familiarity with the proper procedures among newer boaters); pertinent boating safety and procedural information included on the backs of tickets; integrated websites displaying updated, real-time parking availability information for busier launch areas; and generally increased enforcement presence on water bodies. It was also suggested that boating safety courses include a section on on-the-water etiquette, but one participant cautioned against online versions of such courses by sharing an anecdote about a person who completed the test for friends.



**What kinds of policies or programs could be put in place to improve boating access? Do you have any ideas or suggestions for programs that might help alleviate access issues?**

“We have game wardens here. I hardly ever see them on the water. Some marine patrol people, but...they’re only worried about striper or something. Henrico has a marine patrol but that’s unusual, most places don’t. Who’s going to enforce the issues? The state doesn’t have the resources.”  
—Richmond boater

“I took the boater’s education for the jet skiers [would be helpful]...I sat in a class that was taught by the Coast Guard...My mom did it online. I know a whole lot more, even though she’s been on the water longer than I have.” —Richmond boater

“Dredging. For a lot of the rivers, dredging has been an issue. They keep telling me it’s been an issue with the DNR. DNR won’t let them dredge until they know what they’re going to do, they know what they’re taking out of there.” —Kenosha boater

“The first thing I would do, I would go and survey all of the sites. I would make a list of what each one needed. And if there’s not handicapped accessibility, or it needs maintenance, or it needs dredging, that would be the first thing I would do...have a criteria list of what is best practice, and what is best for the environment, and everybody, and make sure each of those spots had that. Whether it’s excellent lighting, or handicapped accessibility, or handicapped parking, excellent parking, walk down ramps...make sure the grades of the ramps are the right angle. I would be inspecting everything first.” —Kenosha boater

“The condition of the docks.” —Kenosha boater

“Water quality. Condition of the lake. Take some fish samples.” —Kenosha boater

“Educate the people on how to behave.” —Kenosha boater

“One thing we didn’t talk about is monitoring. There’s a lot of people drink too much when they’re out on the water. When you look at most boating accidents it’s usually from somebody who’s had too much alcohol...More patrols or checks or whatever, just for that type of thing...it’s the overindulgence that causes the issue....” —Kenosha boater

“There’s a website [Lake-Link] that tells you where they’re catching fish. If they could come up with a website that tells you about boating accessibility...” —Kenosha boater

“I would like more information on where access is. If it was on a website, something I could go browse. Right now we’ve pretty much limited [boating] to Conroe, so I haven’t had to go look. I’ve got an 18-year-old son that does like to try different things, so that’d be nice to be able to do.”  
—Houston boater

“I’ve used Google Earth to look at ramps before I’ve headed out. It could be a year or two years old but it could still give you a sense of how well done was it. Is the concrete new-looking in the picture?” —Houston boater

“There’s a couple of websites. There’s one on Conroe where they’ve got a webcam, and you can

**What kinds of policies or programs could be put in place to improve boating access? Do you have any ideas or suggestions for programs that might help alleviate access issues?**

actually look at it real-time, what the water looks like.” —Houston boater

There’s a lot of smartphone apps too; Navionics. That’s a good one.” —Houston boater

“The theme here is – whether it’s Valero with gas on the water, or Conroe has a Subway sandwich on the water, or an app on your phone to find it, or Google Earth, or a magazine that shows you where it is – it’s all private sources that are getting us what we need. It’s not the State of Texas. That’s why these questions are fascinating, because you’ve got the State of Texas that’s shutting down a third of its state parks. They’re shut down, they’re mothballed because they can’t afford them. We’re paying ridiculous fees for our fishing licenses. We’re paying boat registration fees, and registration fees on our cars to get them down there. And it’s getting worse, not better. You never see a game warden...So we’re forced to go to private sources and private marinas.” —Houston boater

“I would like to see the federal money go directly to the state. The federal government doesn’t need to be involved as much...especially in fisheries and wildlife organizations in Oregon, I think they’re doing a great job. They just could utilize more money.” —Portland boater

“More procedures [posted] for loading and unloading...Keep the things flowing.” —Portland boater

“How about on the parking spaces; couldn’t there be a [website to] find out, ‘this one’s full right now, this one has three left’?” —Portland boater

“Maybe they’d just add it to TripCheck...where you can look at the freeway accidents and see how the freeway is moving. Maybe just add a link to the boating ramps.” —Portland boater

“If I could go on the web and see the ramp, see what’s going on....” —Portland boater

“I hate to say it...I think the only way it’s going to get better is through increased [police] presence.” —Portland boater

“Police presence and signage that informs people. The little sign at Hagg Lake is 2-foot by 2-foot, and you never see it. It tells you exactly what to do.” —Portland boater

“Maybe even put it on the back of a ticket.” —Portland boater

*(Moderator asks specifically about boat storage issues)*

“I sold my place at Lake Livingston and needed to get the boat closer to home. It is a real struggle in Houston finding affordable dry boat storage anywhere close. Mine is up almost near Intercontinental Airport for \$100 a month. It doesn’t even have a concrete floor.” —Houston boater

“Keeping it at home is not an option for a lot of people because your neighborhood doesn’t allow it.” —Houston boater

**What kinds of policies or programs could be put in place to improve boating access? Do you have any ideas or suggestions for programs that might help alleviate access issues?**

*(Moderator asks about programs through government agencies and/or local or statewide organizations)*

“States should...or you get people doing different things all over the place.” —Kenosha boater

“The fees [on a local level] vary so much...The state needs to get a set rate on some of these launches....” —Kenosha boater

“Watch what you say though, they could raise all the rates...if you go to a little pond you don’t want to pay what they do [at a major lake].” —Kenosha boater

“It’s the town and the city that [sets rates]. DNR doesn’t have anything to do with it.” —Kenosha boater

“There’s no reason that state can’t set the standard.” —Kenosha boater

*(Moderator asks about programs through volunteer groups and nonprofits)*

“[As volunteers] we tried to clean that out [polluted stream] but it was like an act of God to work with the DNR to remove a tree or do anything with it...so it just wasn’t worth the headaches.” —Kenosha boater

“They’re really funny about a tree that’s fallen on the water. It’s almost like you have to leave it there.” —Kenosha boater

“The DNR will go out and purchase property. I think this is one thing they do. A lot of lakes don’t have any access at all. You’ve got to buy some private property and you’ve got to build an access point.” —Kenosha boater

“A lot of homeowner associations will fight it.” —Kenosha boater

## ISSUES AFFECTING FISHING PARTICIPATION SPECIFICALLY

Participants were also asked specifically about issues that affected their fishing participation, including access-related issues as well as more general concerns. Many of the comments echoed remarks from the earlier discussion concerning factors affecting boating participation (e.g., available free time, weather, costs of fuel and other supplies). A few people in the Richmond group spoke positively about a public fishing pier established in the area of an old bridge, thereby providing an appealing fishing spot for those unable to fish from a boat. In the Kenosha group, several participants suggested that while improvements could be made in the overall quality of boating access throughout the state, they still went fishing about as often as they preferred; on the other hand, a few other group members said that improvements to boating access would likely encourage them to fish more. In the Houston group, participants emphasized the importance of experienced anglers and boaters inviting others, particularly young people, to go fishing as often as possible. In general, boating access-related concerns appeared to be of moderate importance to overall fishing participation to most people in the Houston group. Additionally, earlier conversations in the Portland group on fishing issues addressed frustrations with sea lions as well as kokanee catch limits (see comments on pages 16-17).

### Do you fish as much as you would like to? What keeps you from fishing more?

“It’s gas for me.” —Richmond boater

“For me it’s time.” —Richmond boater

“It is an expensive hobby to have a boat. There’s a lot of people that could, maybe if there was better access for them, that would go trout fishing off of piers....” —Richmond boater

“We had an incident down on the northern neck years ago [where they turned an old bridge into a public fishing pier]. Everyone wrote in to editors, ‘there’s going to be crime, there’s going to be problems’...Been there 10 years now and nobody’s had any problems with it that I know of....They just took the old road bed and made a little parking area...and built a pier at the end where the old bridge went out. It’s great, people who can’t afford a boat have a place right there to fish...It’s a great use of VDOT property.” —Richmond boater

“Striped bass all up and down is a coastal species, so Marine Fisheries does regulate it and tell states [the requirements]. In Virginia, it’s the [only fish] that VMRC does not regulate.” —Richmond boater

“In 2016 we all have to take a boater education course. Is there a requirement for a refresher after 8 to 10 years?” —Richmond boater

“One time is all I know of.” —Richmond boater

*(Moderator asks whether access issues have hindered fishing)*

“[I hunt and fish] whatever the season is. Fishing has cut down because of the access problems. The parking, people, concrete, ramps.” —Kenosha boater

**Do you fish as much as you would like to? What keeps you from fishing more?**

“I find the access through the lakes is pretty decent. I might fish 5 or 6 lakes the whole year, it’s easy access in, easy access out.” —Kenosha boater

*(Moderator asks whether better access would encourage participants to fish more often)*

“I wouldn’t fish more. I fish about as much as I want to.” —Kenosha boater

“I’d probably try to fish more.” —Kenosha boater

“Yes, I would fish more.” —Kenosha boater

“I want to get out there more.” —Kenosha boater

“If you want to do it you’re going to pay for it, whatever it is.” —Houston boater

“I think a lot of people took up fishing. Families are doing it a lot more. The wives are picking it up, learning how to cast...” —Houston boater

“Even with a small boat, just every little thing is pricey. If you’re going to do it, you’re going to go all in.” —Houston boater

“Lures have tripled in just the last few years.” —Houston boater

“I do [fish as much as I would like to].” —Houston boater

“When you want to fish it doesn’t mean anybody else wants to fish, so you have to go by yourself.” —Houston boater

“Most of the guys I fish with, I grew up around. But they’re an hour and a half away...It’s hard to find somebody that is interested in going.” —Houston boater

“I got 12-year-old twins. I take them maybe a third of the time. They got so much school stuff.” —Houston boater

“Maintain the public programs. Get rid of those underwater potholes. Restrooms, maybe. Take more kids fishing.” —Houston boater

“In Harris County they bring in fish and stock various ponds...trying to get the kids out and the adults out.” —Houston boater

“There are probably a couple million kids in Houston that have never been near salt water, 45 minutes away. They never smelled it or seen it, or baited a hook. And it’s a shame.” —Houston boater

“Everybody at this table spent a lot of money with Academy, and a company like Academy coming out and supporting that kind of thing, sponsoring it—it’s in their interest to do that.” —Houston boater

## BOATING INDUSTRY FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

The focus group of professionals from the boating industry was held in Washington, D.C. at the 2013 American Boating Congress; participants included representatives from boat and engine manufacturers, boat dealers, marina operators, industry service providers, and marine trade association groups.

### OPINIONS ON ISSUES AFFECTING BOATING

- Boating industry professionals discussed several key issues affecting boating participation. Urban boating access for boaters residing in cities was an early topic in the discussion, with one participant noting the potential difficulties in trying to find a place to keep a boat in an urban environment, not to mention locating sufficient launch areas. It was also mentioned that access in more rural areas can also be challenging if boaters are unfamiliar with the locations of specific access points. More general issues included the availability of free time among busy families faced with a number of other options for recreational activities, some of which are less costly and time-consuming than boating. A few participants discussed the problematic perception of boating as an activity reserved for the wealthy, while others pointed out the importance of education and service made available to boaters from within the industry to ensure that those new to the activity are given proper assistance in helping them to learn. Differences in federal, state, and local environmental regulations and ordinances were discussed as a possible obstacle to the development of new boating access (e.g., conflicting steps for mitigating seagrass), and challenges in urban and suburban boat storage were again mentioned as a potential barrier to new boat owners or those interested in purchasing a boat. Finally, the group touched on the concept of competing user groups and associated conflicts, particularly between motorized boaters and human-powered personal watercraft—it was mentioned that the industry has an obligation to help strengthen communication and mutual understanding between such competing groups in order to consolidate the boating constituency and ensure a better experience for all participants.

#### What do you see as the most important issues affecting recreational boating these days?

“Personally, one of the most difficult things from a boating perspective is urban access issues. I’m either down at my boat every day to make sure the thing doesn’t sink or I’m trying to find a place to keep a trailerable boat. It’s very daunting in an urban environment, particularly for the middle-class portion of the boating community.” —Boating industry professional

“Even from a non-urban, remote area, it [access] is an issue. Public access to water is very restricted in some places; there’s no place to launch a dinghy. It may be private marinas or yacht clubs, [in which case], getting out to a mooring can be very difficult.” —Boating industry professional

“I think the perception that boating is a rich man’s sport is a problem. I know in the state of Connecticut, 86% of registered boats are less than 26 feet long—the average boater is not a fat cat, it’s the guy working a second shift. With so many environmental laws, with access—it comes down to who they [government] think boaters are, and it’s not who they really are.” —Boating industry

### What do you see as the most important issues affecting recreational boating these days?

professional

“Chicago has one of the largest public access venues to get to the water, but you don’t have a sufficient number of boat launches to address the trailerable boats. I think in the city proper there are maybe two or three boat launches, so it’s a low number. There’s an awareness and communication issue: there are a lot of resources but unless you’re inside the boating community, you may not know about them. How does an outsider get into this sport?” —Boating industry professional

“I think time and the aging demographic of the core boater today is an issue. People don’t have time and it’s a sport that’s perceived as expensive. You have a population whose core group is aging. The challenges are cyclical in terms of the recession but more structural long-term. The economy will recover but 10,000 Baby Boomers turning 65 each day—that is not going to recover.” —Boating industry professional

“It’s the combination of things: people are deciding how they spend their time. It’s easier to watch your kid go play some soccer than dealing with a boat, which is more difficult. It’s about how you spend your time. It’s just a lot easier to go to the soccer field. The state of Florida is very different than the state of Illinois. We’ve got a lot of great boat ramps in Florida but people aren’t going to them because it’s harder to do.” —Boating industry professional

“As marinas put dry stacking in, all that concierge service stuff in—even if the cost is a little bit higher, cost doesn’t need to be the focus as much. Sometimes it’s about the value.” —Boating industry professional

“Time isn’t such a big factor as the range of interests today [among different family members]. There are more competing activities today pulling the family in different directions. The family has to be committed to do the boat thing together.” —Boating industry professional

“Time is a huge problem but it’s also really hard to be successful at boating. There are a lot of ways you can have a bad time boating. I think it comes back to education and service. Boaters have a culture of trial and error, and no one wants to get a coach for boating or do training or whatever. Service is a big thing too: you can spend so much time and money taking care of your boat and I think our industry does a bad job helping boaters take care of their boats.” —Boating industry professional

“I think the environmental issues are confusing to boaters. ‘What biodegradable soap can I use?’ You have issues around copper bottom paint, Porta-Potties, all that.” —Boating industry professional

“We did a lot of studies on stormwater and runoff and all that; the cows and the fertilizer had far more damaging runoff than the boaters, but the boats are an easy target. I think if they’re putting the rules into effect for us, they need to put them into effect for the farmers as well. I don’t want to be in a boat with a bunch of dirty water either.” —Boating industry professional

“There are really hot areas for environmental issues, like Seattle, and some of these issues might be a deterrent there. Boaters might say, ‘To heck with it.’” —Boating industry professional

“There is a perennial issue that hunters have: there tends to be a natural cleavage between gun hunters and bow hunters. It’s been recently that everyone has said, ‘Look, we’re all in this together; if you think your bowhunting is sacrosanct from getting whacked by PETA, you’re crazy.’ The education to

**What do you see as the most important issues affecting recreational boating these days?**

the kayaker that the 37-foot boat on the water is really their friend and brother, not their enemy, is something that I don't even think this industry has started to address." —Boating industry professional

"Dredging and seagrass are issues in Florida; they become a real challenge even for municipalities in Florida. There are a lot of rules associated with what you have to do to mitigate seagrass. If you're going to put a marina in, can you put in additional slips or floating docks? That becomes a problem, even with the City of Fort Lauderdale versus the County of Broward versus the State of Florida versus the United States; they all have different views about what to do about the seagrass. It becomes a real challenge. A big overlying factor is consumer confidence: people not knowing whether to spend money on a toy or discretionary item when they don't have a level of confidence in the economy going forward." —Boating industry professional

"We have people in Northern Virginia who aren't allowed to keep a boat in their neighborhood—doesn't matter if it's in their driveway or yard, they're not allowed to. Just like you're not allowed to change your oil in your driveway. So they've been faced with a homeowner covenant that means they get to pay for storage somewhere else. We have people in Florida facing county blue tarp bans, meaning they can't store their boat. So I think there are an increasing number of county and local restrictions affecting boaters. It doesn't seem to have a lot of common sense." —Boating industry professional



## MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING ACCESS VERSUS CREATION OF NEW ACCESS

- Adding some notable commentary to the consensus in the recreational boater groups that maintenance of existing access areas is more important than the building of new access locations, most industry professionals agreed that it is generally much easier for states and municipalities to budget the creation of a new ramp or access area than to allot funds for continuous maintenance and upkeep of such areas. In discussing this point, several people in the group recommended that the budgets for boating access areas apportion funds specifically for future maintenance. A few people emphasized that such scenarios tend to vary by state, with some areas having ample access points but lacking important amenities and features, such as parking; other areas, meanwhile, may have underdeveloped access sites (such as unpaved roads) or an adequate number of sites but insufficient outreach and information as to where such sites are located and how they may be reached.

### **What do you think should be a higher priority: building new access facilities and areas or maintaining existing ones, such as through repairs and improvements?**

“Launch ramps have not been a priority in anybody’s budget. So most ramps are tar, they’re blacktop. You get a few potholes after a bad winter or storm. But there’s no gradual—it’s a drop-off. The ramps tend to be budgeted items that are cut.” —Boating industry professional

“There’s money out there to build boat ramps but no money to maintain them. Easy to go out and build it, you can get all the support you need; and then it becomes someone else’s problem to maintain it. There’s no money in the budget.” —Boating industry professional

“I just went to a new boat ramp in Charleston, South Carolina: gorgeous, beautiful pavement, double parking spots, used by both commercial and local fishermen. Nice, clean, sturdy piling. No garbage cans; no recycling; no water; no Porta-Potty. So we had to go behind trees. So it was an interesting contrast between nice facilities and [a lack of certain amenities].” —Boating industry professional

“Who designed that? An engineer who was really focused on getting the slope and texture right and it never occurred to him [to add restrooms].” —Boating industry professional

“Some of the places where we go in Pennsylvania are nothing more than a dirt ramp down into the water. So if you hit a drought period, you can’t even get your boat anywhere near there before your car would sink into the mud. So there is a distinction between boaters in inland lakes versus boaters on the coast.” —Boating industry professional

“In Massachusetts, you get in and get on the list to build a new ramp, but then you go to the end of the list for maintenance. If you have a problem, you might be 20 years away from a solution.” —Boating industry professional

“I think when the grant money arrives to build it, there needs to be a budget offset for some annual maintenance. Maintenance doesn’t mean ‘replacement,’ it means maintenance.” —Boating industry professional

“It’s all about getting the funding to build a project; very few people think a few steps down the line in

**What do you think should be a higher priority: building new access facilities and areas or maintaining existing ones, such as through repairs and improvements?**

terms of maintenance.” —Boating industry professional

“We’re kind of talking about ramps here but access has a bigger scope. ‘Access’ isn’t just a boat ramp, it’s where do I keep a boat, how do I dry stack, what do I do with it? ‘Access’ seems to be bigger and more encompassing. Maybe ‘access’ is a boat rental program or a timeshare. How do we get people hooked on the drug [of boating]?” —Boating industry professional

“The reason access became such a big issue—besides the elephant in the room of the real estate bubble—was the fact that people realized they’d increased boat sales by 10% but then said, ‘Shit—where are we going to put them all?’ You know? We’ve got them through the bubble and crash and now everyone’s focusing on the physical aspects of where is the boat going to be. Now it’s, ‘How do we get someone into boating’ and ‘How do we accommodate them once they’re in?’ You can identify real sales opportunities, but where the hell are you going to put them?” —Boating industry professional

“In 1989 I worked with SOBA on putting together a national database of boating access—you couldn’t find anything; it was way before Internet and many other things. Access at that point meant physically reaching the water, whereas now it’s a little broader—the affordability, the time factor, all that.” —Boating industry professional

“We’re thinking about access differently. Now we need to sell more boats, but once upon a time we needed to build more space. But at some point the economy will recover and we’ll be back to a physical access problem.” —Boating industry professional

“[Getting back to the number of ramps], I live in Annapolis, the sailboat capital of the world. There’s [a small number] of public boat ramps but a lot of private ramps—you choose to live in a community with a private ramp if you want access to the water. But there are remarkably few public ramps, and then there’s the question of where do you park. You can’t park within a mile of some of these ramps that are just dirt ramps down to the water.” —Boating industry professional

“And we have that in Connecticut—plenty of ramps down to the water but in neighborhoods where there’s zero parking.” —Boating industry professional

“I think historically we’ve probably put more energy into building those access sites than telling people where they are. I think most of the access sites have been developed by municipalities and states—I’m talking boat ramps predominantly—and those folks aren’t usually great marketers in terms of telling people where they are.” —Boating industry professional

“I think it varies by state. I know that in Connecticut, if they built a new access site, it would get a lot of press because there aren’t that many of them there. It would get a lot of press from the groups that were going to use it.” —Boating industry professional

“I think if a boater can’t find a ramp, that’s their fault. But if it’s knowing how to back a boat down, or being afraid of doing so, or knowing how to bring a boat into a slip in a bad wind or big current, I can understand that.” —Boating industry professional

## BOATER BEHAVIOR LAUNCHING AND RECOVERING AT ACCESS AREAS

- In discussing one of the recurring discussion points from the boater focus groups, many boating industry professionals agreed that boat launch areas and ramps can become congested with people waiting to launch or recover—such scenarios are exacerbated by the presence of newer or inexperienced boaters and/or during peak boating times or seasons. Several industry professionals noted that site design has a great deal of influence on the ability for a launch area to efficiently move boaters in and out of the site, or for the site to become easily congested. A few people in the group supported the idea of signs or prominent displays of key information for efficiently launching or recovering a boat, while others emphasized the importance of experienced individuals taking the time to assist or provide guidance to those struggling or taking an inordinate amount of time to execute launch procedures (this echoed comments made by numerous boater focus group participants as well). There was also discussion on the potential for volunteers or paid employees to act as marshals or attendants assisting with traffic and flow at access sites. However, one person noted that boaters are likely to encounter the biggest challenges while *on* the water, and not waiting to get on the water.

**We have heard a lot in the recreational boater focus groups about behavior at launch ramps and varying levels of experience and familiarity with procedures among boaters, some of whom may be new boaters. What is your sense of this issue?**

“You show up at a ramp at noontime on a Saturday, you’re going to be waiting. But you get there early, you play it smart.” —Boating industry professional

“I think it’s not the launching so much as the recovering: I did it before on a lake with a big long group of people waiting to get in and out—that can be daunting for a new boater. It’s like waiting in line at a grocery store with \$150 worth of groceries and your card doesn’t read. It’s a real heart-palpitation situation.” —Boating industry professional

“Part of that is how new the ramp is and what it’s designed for. Certain ramps are designed for multiple vehicles; these parking spaces are not car spaces, they’re car-and-trailer spaces. They’re designed specifically for their use. But a lot of these ramps are not. You have guys jockeying for room, angling for space. It’s about design for use, and the new facilities are far more efficient.” —Boating industry professional

“[In terms of a sign you could put up at an access area], if you have someone who’s launched a boat before but maybe not a public launch, if you say to the person, ‘Have your lines ready, have your fenders out, have your plug in, commission your boat before you get down there,’ I think that could speed things up a bit. Is the person going to read the sign? Probably not. But it might be good to at least have it there.” —Boating industry professional

“The total number of people who are trailering for their first time has to be minute, compared to the people who are doing it for the hundredth time. Most people have been out with a friend, been out with some family—the first time [launching at a ramp] sucks, yes, but I have to believe they’d know what they’re doing by the time they buy their own boat.” —Boating industry professional

**We have heard a lot in the recreational boater focus groups about behavior at launch ramps and varying levels of experience and familiarity with procedures among boaters, some of whom may be new boaters. What is your sense of this issue?**

“I think maintenance of the ramp is another question: you never quite know what’s under the water at a ramp. Is it going to eat your trailer, drag your car down, whatever—I think some way of providing maintenance information at websites would be good.” —Boating industry professional

“Some of the busier ramps in our area will have a lifeguard-type person there saying, ‘You’re next, okay, you’re ready...’ and that really helps with the drama at those things.” —Boating industry professional

“The boaters themselves have a bit of a responsibility to help out new boaters.” —Boating industry professional

“I know at the Baldwin Bridge ramp in Connecticut, there’s a state DEP guy there, but it’s very rare.” —Boating industry professional

“If you have to wait for hours with three screaming kids in the back—I mean, if you’re not there at 6:00 a.m.... why would you even boat?” —Boating industry professional

“I don’t know how we afford the person [stationed at access areas to help coordinate launching].” —Boating industry professional

“We talked about a youth initiative, like having kids earning merit badges or something like that—some of these youths will know a lot about directing traffic. There are different ways to skin the cat but relying on someone to be there on the weekends is probably not going to happen. If you look at some of these marinas in Michigan that get a tremendous amount of traffic, you could imagine ways to have someone there so that things get done more efficiently.” —Boating industry professional

“I think you can address a lot of this with design: a lot of the newer ramps are better designed, the flow is more obvious, the way that one uses it is more obvious. A lot of the sites that are out there weren’t designed that way. It does take a fair amount of land to lay out a site correctly though.” —Boating industry professional

“The big complaints we hear about amenities are parking, design, and restrooms.” —Boating industry professional

“Also, not enough dock space, like when you’re launching eight boats and there’s only space for three.” —Boating industry professional

“I still think there are more challenges on the water than trying to get on the water [such as at the ramp].” —Boating industry professional

## OPINIONS ON USER CONFLICTS

- As in the recreational boater focus groups, there was ample discussion in the industry group on issues connected to user conflicts and congestion on waterways—somewhat in contrast with the boater groups, in which participants discussed problems with jet skiers at length, the focus of the industry group discussion concerned friction between motorized boaters and human-powered watercraft such as kayakers and paddle boarders. One of the main topics in this conversation was the potential to encourage a registration requirement among personal watercraft operators (currently, many states do not require such operators to register their watercraft). One major motivation for this suggestion was to encourage operators of smaller watercraft to contribute to the funding used to maintain and conserve the resources used by all boater groups (water bodies, access areas, rescue services, etc.); a second major point was to engender among smaller personal watercraft operators a feeling of solidarity and identification with the boating community as a whole, leading to a stronger overall constituency. One person drew a comparison between competing hunter groups (specifically, firearms hunters versus bow hunters) and mentioned the importance of factions within the overall boating community putting aside their respective differences to the benefit of all parties. A few people in the group also pointed out that kayakers and other human-powered watercraft operators seem to be increasing in number. (In the recreational boater focus groups, participants who said they owned and used both motorized boats and human-powered watercraft tended to possess a better understanding of right-of-way scenarios and other rules of etiquette.)

### **Have you observed any conflicts between competing boater groups (e.g., motorized versus non-motorized boaters), between boaters and anglers, or between boaters and private landowners?**

“We’ve certainly seen that the kayakers and human-powered craft and smaller guys feel that they are much better than the rest of us, far more legit, more green, and don’t even want to affiliate with other boaters. The problem is that we’re all using the same access sites and they [the kayakers] are not paying for them. I definitely see a growing problem there, as the kayakers are increasing in number.”  
—Boating industry professional

“Again, the issue between the gun hunter and bow hunter is a template for this: ‘We’re obviously better than you because we’re not shooting a bullet.’” —Boating industry professional

“I think at a high level, nationally and in some states, everyone is recognizing that access is important to both groups. It seems like it’s a newer conversation that’s happening right now: we’re all in this together.” —Boating industry professional

“I think RBFF has done a good job getting people to register their boats, because you need that funding. Same thing with fishing licenses: the more we can sell, the more money that’s available for conservation to waterways, etc. The government isn’t doing anything to sell those, they’re just the storefront for selling them. We need people to buy more licenses, but only one in five anglers had a fishing license in the past five years, which is crazy. You should buy a license to be legal while you’re fishing, to support conservation of the fisheries and waterways, and to be a part of a club or group or

**Have you observed any conflicts between competing boater groups (e.g., motorized versus non-motorized boaters), between boaters and anglers, or between boaters and private landowners?**

something bigger.” —Boating industry professional

“Well, why don’t we require human-powered vessels to register? Like kayaks—they’re using the same resources [as bigger boats that are required to be registered].” —Boating industry professional

“I don’t think human-powered craft are declining at all. If you think about access, those guys [kayakers and other personal watercraft users] need the areas from the land to the water as well. They need a place to park the car, use the restroom, dump the trash.” —Boating industry professional

“In terms of access and paying for access, we need to start paying attention to what the evolutionary process is going to look like [in terms of fewer motorized boats and more personal watercraft and human-powered boats].” —Boating industry professional

“The non-motorized group is also consuming services on the water, such as rescue services and things like that. They’re using the resources.” —Boating industry professional

“I think it falls on our shoulders as a community to educate the human-powered boaters to say, ‘Look, you don’t need a \$55 registration and you don’t need to put numbers on your boat, but you do need a \$5 sticker, which will help keep some track for the state officials of the human-powered boats, it can help put some money into the coffers, and it makes the human-powered boater feel like they’re part of a larger community.’” —Boating industry professional

“Back in the 1980’s, boaters didn’t like the ‘Hell’s Angels of the water’ and tried to exclude [personal watercraft and human-powered boaters] from their lakes. And that affected boating access in general: ‘If you’re going to exclude these guys, then you have to exclude these guys, and then these guys.’ Well, water skiers don’t like wake-boarders; the skiers are the purists. But they restricted themselves off the lake too—you can’t exclude just one segment of boaters.” —Boating industry professional

## POTENTIAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO IMPROVE BOATING ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

- In a short discussion concerning programmatic and industry-wide approaches to overall improvements to boating access and boating participation as a whole, several industry professionals reemphasized the importance of the industry making it as easy and accessible for new boaters to become involved with the activity—a repeated suggestion was to minimize barriers whenever possible, such as how to afford a boat, how and where to get the boat into the water, and options for boat storage. In discussing potential barriers to boating, one person mentioned invasive species checks at boat launches, which could potentially be viewed as intimidating or overreaching to boaters unfamiliar with such procedures. Later comments in the discussion addressed the potential for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Boating Infrastructure Grant Program to be used for boat ramp and launch maintenance funding, and the potential for fishing regulations to act as a deterrent to boating participation (red snapper regulations in Florida were mentioned as a primary example).

**What kinds of policies or programs could be put in place to improve boating access? Do you have any ideas or suggestions for programs that might help alleviate access issues?**

“I think from an industry perspective looking to increase market share, what we want to do is be sympathetic to the 40-year-old who’s never done [boating] before. For the majority of people willing to get into boating and willing to put in some work [in terms of learning the basics], we want them to have an enjoyable experience.” —Boating industry professional

“It’s not just an education on how to get the boat into the water but how to afford the boat, where do they go, is it a dry stack—it’s almost a focus on that stereotypical individual [the 40-year-old new boater] and how to overcome the barriers for them.” —Boating industry professional

“Different question on access: has anyone run into invasive species checks at launch ramps? What’s the norm out there? That’s got to be another barrier to getting in the water. ‘What do you mean you’re going to inspect my boat?’” —Boating industry professional

“If they found something [an invasive species] in your state, they’re going to do the inspections.” —Boating industry professional

“That could be a disincentive [to boating participation in general].” —Boating industry professional

*(Moderator asks about potential for the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program to improve access)*

“I think B.I.G. [Boating Infrastructure Grant Program] is designed mainly for transient docks as opposed to ramps. However, it is part of the Sport Fish Restoration Fund, so there may be some slightly flexible dollars.” —Boating industry professional

“Some of that money has been left on the table, so we’re going to consider that.” —Boating industry professional

**What kinds of policies or programs could be put in place to improve boating access? Do you have any ideas or suggestions for programs that might help alleviate access issues?**

*(Moderator asks about other issues affecting fishing participation overall)*

“I suspect that there are recreational fishermen out there who might give up boating because of the restricted access to fishing—that’s the bigger issue.” —Boating industry professional

“[Regulations pertaining to] red snapper fishing in Florida—that hurts us more than just about anything else.” —Boating industry professional



## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

### **OVERALL IMPLICATION OF BOATING ACCESS**

Comments from both the recreational boaters and boating industry professionals suggest that “boating access” is an expansive concept referring to the all-encompassing set of barriers and challenges affecting overall boating and fishing participation: boating access includes the number and quality of physical launches and ramps at access points; the availability of information on how to find and use such access points; awareness of how to store one’s boat, particularly in residential neighborhoods or urban environments; environmental issues specific to certain areas, which may influence a boater’s decision to frequent the area in the first place; concerns regarding the costs of boating participation, which contribute to the perception that boating is an activity exclusively for the wealthy; experiences with congestion on the water or conflicts with other boaters or recreationists, which may influence overall interest and participation; knowledge of and comfort with various procedures associated with boating, such as trailering, launching, and recovering; and access to both public and private opportunities for reaching the water. The upcoming survey of boaters should attempt to explore all possible facets of the broad issue of boating access, as the relative importance or unimportance of each of these issues will likely vary considerably by type of boater and region of the country.

### **BOATER SATISFACTION WITH PHYSICAL ACCESS**

In general, a majority of boaters in the focus groups appeared relatively satisfied with the physical aspects of access (i.e., the availability of reliable, conveniently located launches and ramps), but many were concerned about related issues, such as the quality of access areas, security at access locations, and the availability of various features and amenities at access areas. These issues contributed to moderate but not extreme concern among most boaters in the focus group, and therefore do not amount to overwhelming, ongoing barriers to participation. Rather, these issues represent challenges for a group of recreationists that is, on the whole, resourceful and adaptable in determining the sites that combine quality with convenience. As many boaters and industry professionals from the groups indicated, access to reach the water is a means to an end for boaters who have already made substantial financial and time commitments to the sport—in other words, most boaters will, to a certain extent, take whatever steps are necessary in order to locate and take advantage of suitable access points. At the same time, however, the focus groups provided numerous examples of access areas and sites in disrepair or that need certain improvements—the prevalence of such areas may decrease participation and enjoyment from boaters who are limited to only adequate or even unsatisfactory areas. The survey of boaters should seek to measure both overall satisfaction with access on a location-specific basis as well as satisfaction with various individual features, amenities, and access-related resources.

### **MAINTENANCE OF EXISTING ACCESS VERSUS CREATION OF NEW ACCESS**

Members of both the recreational boater and industry professional groups were consistent in their preference for maintenance of and improvements to existing access sites, rather than substantial resources and funding being devoted to the creation of new sites. Most boaters seemed to grasp the challenges associated with agencies and other organizations identifying suitable areas for

brand new launch sites, and this concept was echoed in the industry group. For one thing, many boaters pointed out that there is simply a finite amount of sufficient waterfront land on which an access area can be developed; another aspect concerned the financial dimension, as most people agreed that it is less expensive to improve on an existing area than it is to create an entirely new one. The survey should continue to explore with boaters this preference for the maintenance of existing areas over the creation of new ones, but should also measure related opinions among industry professionals and agency providers of access sites, as there may be some notable differences among the groups.

## **TRAVEL DISTANCE TO ACCESS AREAS**

A few boaters across the focus groups suggested that they must travel a fairly considerable distance to the nearest access point to launch a boat. Common reasons for having to travel a notable distance to an access area included closures of more conveniently located access points or simply a preference for the quality and services offered by a more remote access point. While the focus groups suggest that most boaters are aware of access sites located within a reasonable distance of their home or the location of their boat, the survey should nonetheless attempt to explore the average distances traveled by various types of boaters in reaching an access point, as there are likely important differences to discern in terms of the availability of public or private access, or access catering to a specific type of boater. It is also important to note that long travel distances tend to be compounded by concerns related to travel costs (gas, lodging, etc.) as well as time constraints, thereby decreasing avidity among some boaters.

## **LAUNCHING AND RECOVERING EXPERIENCES**

A substantial number of boaters across the focus groups indicated frustration with experiences at particularly crowded boat ramps—while this issue varies considerably based on boater experience, location, time of day/year, and other factors, the concept of congestion and waiting times at launch ramps appears to be one of the biggest issues affecting participation and satisfaction. Many sites may have only a limited number of ramps and launch points, or are extremely popular or well-known areas, but these issues are compounded by the presence of newer and less experienced boaters attempting to launch and recover as others are forced to wait in line or maneuver around them. This issue was discussed at length in both the recreational and industry groups, and suggestions included signage at access areas displaying key information for preparing and launching a boat in a timely manner, as well as volunteers or paid employees located onsite to assist with traffic flow. Fortunately, many boaters throughout the groups said they generally felt an obligation to help less experienced boaters with procedures, although at least a few people in each group expressed a sense of frustration over people taking too long at ramps. It would appear that this issue can be alleviated in part through an overall site design accommodating to a larger number of boaters, or simply a greater awareness among boating communities of the best ways to prepare a boat in advance of use of a ramp or arrival at an access point. The survey should attempt to explore overall experiences related to congestion, crowding, and interaction with lesser experienced boaters at access areas.

## **BOAT STORAGE ISSUES**

A small but notable number of boaters throughout the groups mentioned problems associated with boat storage: the most common issues concern keeping a boat in a residential neighborhood (the ability of which can be impacted by homeowner association agreements or municipal ordinances), finding or affording dry stack storage convenient to the boater's home and/or preferred boating area, and simply having to travel a problematic distance to reach a stored boat, trailer it, and reach a desired water body. Several professionals in the industry group echoed the concern regarding residential boat storage constraints, and it is possible that boaters in many areas across the country are facing similar issues. Especially problematic is the scenario of a boater who invests in the purchase of a boat under the assumption that he or she will be able to maintain the boat at a private residence, only to later discover that the area forbids such storage or has introduced new policies limiting such storage. The survey should explore the extent to which boating participation is affected by storage and associated travel issues, particularly as such constraints are specific to boat type, residence type, or storage preference.

## **SITE IMPROVEMENTS AND AMENITIES**

Boater preferences for various improvements, additions, features, and amenities to sites will vary by location and type of boating, but the focus group results suggest that several key features are widely desired. These include the availability of parking at or near launch areas, the availability of sanitary restrooms, convenient access to trash receptacles (which are regularly emptied), and the general guarantee of site security (e.g., lighting at remote areas and an assurance that cars will not be burglarized). Many of these features were discussed in the context of overall site design, with a few boaters wondering how certain sites could provide highly effective ramps or ample parking but lack something as obvious as trashcans or restrooms. Another fairly commonly heard frustration related to site design were examples of areas that devoted considerable space to little-used features like picnic areas at the expense of more important things such as additional room for parking. On the topic of site security, a commonly heard idea from various focus group participants concerned the introduction of an affordable user fee at access sites to fund a security guard or site attendant position. Additionally, the group results suggest that boaters in some locations have learned to avoid certain access areas due to security concerns—this is especially worrisome in terms of general access availability, suggesting certain sites plagued by security concerns that otherwise represent suitable locations are underused or not used at all. Finally, while the aforementioned features were simply among the most commonly named amenities by group participants, the survey should explore preferences for the full list of amenities and concepts, including mooring fields, boarding floats, transient slips or tie-ups, courtesy piers, and other items.

## **AVAILABILITY OF ACCESS-RELATED INFORMATION**

One key aspect of boating access concerns the availability of information on launch ramp, marina, or park locations, boating procedures, storage concepts, and other topics; such pieces of information are especially critical to new boaters or those considering an entry into boating. While most boaters across the groups appeared fairly aware of their state fish and wildlife or boating agency website and a general familiarity with the types of content included on such sites,

there were a number of suggestions for new or updated information delivery methods, including interactive maps, smartphone apps, and webcams at launch site to gauge parking availability or the general state of the site (note that the most common type of information desired concerns the locations of access areas and an updated summary of their current state/condition). Once again, the upcoming survey of boaters will be invaluable in determining the specific types of information most desired by boaters, but it will also serve as an opportunity to measure the types of information currently being offered by agencies and boating organizations—a comparison of these results may identify areas for which more information is needed or areas in which information is already sufficiently available.

## **LOCATION-SPECIFIC ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS**

As one might expect, environmental concerns tended to vary considerably by group, although the issue of ethanol-based fuel was mentioned briefly across the groups and appears to be an issue of importance to boaters nationwide. In the Richmond group, environmental concerns included observations of oil residue in some water bodies and the presence of dead fish, although a few participants indicated that state waters are generally cleaner now compared to five or ten years ago. In the Kenosha group, comments addressed reluctance to swim in Lake Michigan, the presence of zebra mussels (a major invasive species), and smaller lakes affected by weeding issues. In the Houston group, there was mention of the need for increased dredging as well as the deterioration of areas bays. In the Portland group, there was ample discussion on sea lions, as well as some mention of wood debris in area waters. Additionally, certain state-specific fishing regulations appear to influence boating and fishing participation. The contrasting focus of these comments illustrates the fact that environmental concerns affecting boating participation will vary by state and region of the country—the survey should attempt to determine the most important environmental or ecological issues as they influence boaters in various locations.

## **USER CONFLICTS, ETIQUETTE, AND RELATED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Conflicts between various boating groups appears fairly common throughout the United States, with group participants mentioning conflicts between human-powered watercraft (kayaks, paddleboards, etc.) and larger motorized boats, as well as between jet skiers and other recreationists. More generally, there were several reports of conflicts between anglers and motor-powered boats, with a general theme being the tension between those who wish to engage in less involved or less active water-based recreation (fishing from a stationary position or boating in human-powered watercraft) and those who use motorized watercraft or who engage in highly active, potentially disruptive activities (e.g., jet skiers or other boaters creating wakes in the water). A consistent recommendation across the groups concerned the need for more boaters and water recreationists to complete comprehensive educational courses, particularly offerings that specifically address on-the-water etiquette. There is particular support for such courses to be completed in a hands-on, on-the-water environment, as opposed to an online version. Finally, a concept discussed in a few of the focus group discussions, but most prominently in the industry professional group, concerned the recommendation for human-powered and personal watercraft such as kayaks and canoes to be registered as a way of increasing funding for boating management. (Note that many states do not currently require such watercraft to be registered.)

## APPENDIX: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES

### RECREATIONAL BOATER FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION OUTLINE

**Study Background and Goals:** This study is being funded through a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to examine boating access throughout the United States as it relates to recreational fishing participation. We're conducting the research to understand the kinds of access-related obstacles boaters face, how they influence boating and fishing participation, and how such obstacles can be minimized through new improvements and programs.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Welcome
- B. Rules:
  - 1. Please speak one at a time and do not interrupt others; everyone will have a chance to speak.
  - 2. Please be respectful of others' opinions, even if you disagree.
  - 3. Discussion is being recorded; recordings reviewed later and comments extracted are never associated directly with your name.
- C. Please introduce yourself to the group, tell us:
  - 1. Your name
  - 2. What kind of boat(s) you have
  - 3. How many years you've been boating

#### II. GENERAL EXPERIENCES AND CURRENT SATISFACTION WITH BOATING

- A. Tell me about the kinds of activities you enjoy doing while boating. For example, do you like to fish, sightsee, go swimming, watch wildlife, scuba dive, waterski, just cruise around?
- B. How many days per year do you typically go boating?
- C. Are you boating as much as you would like to these days?
  - 1. If not, why not?
  - 2. What prevents you from boating more often?
- D. Are you generally satisfied with your overall boating experiences these days?
  - 1. If not, why not?
  - 2. What kinds of things affect your boating satisfaction? (e.g., boat registration fees, travel distance to launch sites or marinas, access issues, price of fuel, the economy/general costs associated with boating?)
  - 3. Have these things always been an issue or have they gotten worse in recent years? How has the situation changed in recent years?
- E. How about the state of the waters in which you boat? Do you have any environmental concerns affecting your boating participation?
  - 1. Pollution?
  - 2. Algae blooms?
  - 3. Invasive species?
  - 4. Anything else related to the health and quality of the waters in which you boat?

### III. OPINIONS ON BOATING ACCESS, INCLUDING SPECIFIC ASPECTS AND FEATURES

- A. Moving away from your overall boating experiences and thinking specifically about access-related issues, are you generally satisfied with the boating access in your area?
  - 1. What types of things could be done to improve boating access in your area?
- B. What are the most important issues or concerns related to boating access that you have right now?
- C. Are you aware of boating access facilities and areas that are convenient to you?
- D. Have you ever had any difficulty finding boating access facilities and areas?
  - 1. Please describe the difficulties you've experienced.
  - 2. How have you dealt with these difficulties?
- E. How satisfied are you with the **number** of access areas near your home? Do you have to travel long distances in order to reach an access point?
- F. How satisfied are you with the **state** of the access areas that you typically use?
  - 1. Are they in good shape or do they need repairs or improvements?
  - 2. What repairs or improvements would you like to see?
- G. Let's move into some specific features of boating access facilities and areas. For each of these items, I'd like to get a sense of how important the feature is in terms of your own boating experiences and whether you think the access areas that you typically use are in need of improvements to these features. What about...
  - 1. Parking?
  - 2. Transient slips or tie-up facilities?
  - 3. Transient moorings?
  - 4. Mooring fields?
  - 5. Boarding floats?
  - 6. Restrooms?
  - 7. Trash receptacles?
  - 8. Fueling areas (both gasoline and diesel)?
  - 9. Sewage pump-out / portable dump stations?
  - 10. Carry-down walkways to the water?
  - 11. Launch ramps?
  - 12. Launch lanes?
  - 13. Courtesy piers next to ramps?
  - 14. Dry stack storage?
  - 15. Fish cleaning stations?
  - 16. Drinking water availability?
  - 17. Access for disabled individuals?
  - 18. Safety, such as in especially remote access areas (lighting at night)?
  - 19. Overall site design issues?
  - 20. Any other features not currently offered that ought to be offered?
- H. Which do you think should be a higher priority: building new access facilities and areas or maintaining existing ones, such as through repairs and improvements?
- I. Have you ever experienced any difficulties related to the time you spend trying to get in and out of the water at the access areas you typically use?
- J. Have you ever experienced any difficulties related to congestion on waterways at or near the access areas you typically use?

- K.** Have you ever experienced any difficulties related to the distribution of motorized versus non-motorized access at the access areas you typically use? Is there an imbalance at all between the two, with one being more readily available?
- L.** Have you observed any conflicts between competing boater groups (i.e., non-motorized v. motorized) or between boaters and anglers?
- M.** Have you ever experienced any difficulties from surrounding waterfront properties or private landowners near the access areas you typically use?

#### **IV. BOAT STORAGE**

- A.** Where do you typically keep your boat during the boating season?
  - 1.** If you don't keep your boat at your home, do you use a marina, waterfront property, a dry stack or other storage facility?
  - 2.** Are there any issues, concerns, or challenges related to the area where you keep your boat?
- B.** How many miles do you typically have to travel from the area where you keep your boat to an access point or facility?
  - 1.** Do you consider this distance to be challenging or problematic at all?

#### **V. POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES TO ALLEVIATE ACCESS ISSUES**

- A.** What kinds of policies or programs could be put in place to improve boating access?
  - 1.** Do you see more potential in programs offered through government agencies, private organizations, nonprofits, local clubs, or some combination of these? Why?
- B.** Are you familiar with any boating access programs?
  - 1.** Specifically, what programs have you heard about?
  - 2.** Do they operate using public land, private land, or a combination of the two?
  - 3.** Do you participate in any such programs? If so, do they seem to be working?
- C.** Do you have any other ideas or suggestions for programs that might help alleviate access issues? Please describe them.

#### **VI. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BOATING ACCESS AND FISHING PARTICIPATION**

- A.** Would you say that any of the issues we've discussed so far, particularly any access issues, have impacted your fishing participation in any way? If so, how?
- B.** If you do fish, do you generally prefer to fish from a boat on the water or from the shore or another area on land? Why do you prefer one over the other?
  - 1.** In general, do you think improvements to boating access would encourage you to fish more often from your boat?
- C.** Do you see your fishing participation changing for any reason over the next few years? How so?
- D.** How many days per year do you typically go fishing from a boat?
- E.** Do you fish as much as you would like to? What keeps you from fishing more often?

**VII. CLOSING:** Thank you. Does anyone have any additional comments or questions regarding anything we've discussed this evening?

## BOATING INDUSTRY PROFESSIONAL FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION OUTLINE

**Study Background and Goals:** This study is being funded through a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to examine boating access throughout the United States as it relates to recreational fishing participation. We're conducting the research to understand the kinds of access-related obstacles boaters face, how they influence boating and fishing participation, and how such obstacles can be minimized through new improvements and programs.

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Welcome
- B. Rules:
  - 1. Please speak one at a time and do not interrupt others; everyone will have a chance to speak.
  - 2. Please be respectful of others' opinions, even if you disagree.
  - 3. Discussion is being recorded; recordings reviewed later and comments extracted are never associated directly with your name.
- C. Please introduce yourself to the group, tell us:
  - 1. Your name
  - 2. Where you work
  - 3. How your job relates to boating access

### II. GENERAL OPINIONS ON BOATING ISSUES

- A. What do you see as some of the most important issues related to recreational boating these days? Please mention anything you consider to be an issue, and not just concepts related to access.
- B. Do you have any concerns related to environmental issues affecting boating participation?
  - 1. Pollution?
  - 2. Algae blooms?
  - 3. Invasive species?
  - 4. **Note: E10 ethanol-blended fuels came up in every recreational boater focus group as an important concern.**
- C. Have these things always been an issue or have they gotten worse in recent years? How has the situation changed in recent years?

### III. OPINIONS ON BOATING ACCESS, INCLUDING SPECIFIC ASPECTS AND FEATURES

- A. What are the most important access-related issues in the areas you're involved with or manage?
  - 1. How about distinctions between physical aspects of access (availability of docks, marinas, launch sites) and informational or psychological aspects (knowledge of where to go to find access sites, knowledge of how to properly use access sites)?



2. What are the main improvements or changes to boating access needed in the areas you're involved with or manage?
  3. **Note: in the focus groups with recreational boaters, some commonly named issues connected to access were travel distance to launch sites and associated fuel costs, long wait times at launch ramps and lanes (particularly because of boaters inexperienced with launch procedures), the need for more parking at public sites, and safety/security concerns with leaving vehicles at public access sites.**
- B. We've asked boaters throughout the focus groups how satisfied they are with both the **number** of access areas near them as well as the **state or quality** of the access areas that they typically use. In general, there seems to be greater satisfaction with the number of sites than with the quality of existing sites (too few launch ramps, inadequate parking, overflowing trash cans, etc.).
1. Have you observed or heard much about boaters being unable to find boating access facilities and areas convenient to them? (i.e., a quantity issue)
  2. Have you observed or heard much from boaters about repairs or improvements needed for the boating access facilities and areas you're involved with or manage? (i.e., a quality issue)
  3. Which do you think should be a higher priority: building new access facilities and areas or maintaining existing ones, such as through repairs and improvements?  
**Note: in general, the focus groups with recreational boaters showed a preference for improvements to existing facilities/areas, rather than the creation of new facilities/areas.**
  4. What types of repairs or improvements are most needed?
- C. Let's move into some specific features of boating access facilities and areas. How important are each of the following items or concepts in terms of a currently needed improvement or something to plan for in new access sites? What about...
1. Parking? – **in general, one of the most common and important needs to come out of the recreational boater focus groups**
  2. Transient slips or tie-up facilities?
  3. Transient moorings?
  4. Mooring fields?
  5. Boarding floats?
  6. Restrooms? – **important need from recreational boater groups**
  7. Trash receptacles?
  8. Fueling areas (both gasoline and diesel)?
  9. Sewage pump-out / portable dump stations?
  10. Carry-down walkways to the water?
  11. Launch ramps? – **important need from recreational boater groups**
  12. Launch lanes? – **important need from recreational boater groups**
  13. Courtesy piers next to ramps?
  14. Dry stack storage?
  15. Fish cleaning stations?
  16. Drinking water availability?
  17. Access for disabled individuals?
  18. Safety, such as in especially remote access areas (lighting at night)?

- 19. Enforcement presence, such as from game wardens or fish and wildlife officers – **important need from recreational boater groups**
- 20. Overall site design issues?
- 21. Any other features not currently offered that ought to be offered?
- D. Is there an adequate distribution of access areas for both larger motorized boats and smaller, non-motorized boats in the areas you're involved with or manage? Is one type of access more readily available than the other type?
- E. Have you observed or heard much about boaters experiencing difficulties related to time spent trying to get in and out of the water at access areas? **Note: the focus groups with recreational boaters generally suggested that this is a fairly common access-related obstacle, owing largely to inexperienced users taking too much time to launch. A few people suggested the placement of large signs with basic rules and guidelines for using launch ramps.**
- F. Have you observed or heard much about difficulties related to congestion on waterways in the areas you're involved with or manage? **Note: the focus groups with recreational boaters generally suggested that this is fairly common, particularly with jet skiers.**
- G. Similar to the previous question: Have you observed or heard much about conflicts between competing boater groups, such as between PWC users and larger boats, or between boaters and anglers?
  - 1. What types of things could be done to alleviate this?
- H. In planning for boating access, there is a need to balance the rights of surrounding waterfront property owners and private landowners with boaters and other recreationists. Have you observed or heard much in terms of conflicts between private landowners and boaters?
  - 1. What types of things could be done to alleviate this?
- I. What major obstacles exist for states seeking to identify and acquire/lease land for suitable sites for access along water bodies? **Note: several boaters throughout the groups seemed to understand how difficult it is to acquire the proper land size to accommodate boating access needs (parking, launch lanes).**

#### IV. BOAT STORAGE

- A. Are you aware of much pressure at the boat storage facilities or areas you're involved with or manage in terms of a need for more space or room for boats?
  - 1. Are there any issues related to the development of additional storage facilities? Any obstacles, challenges, changes, issues to plan for?
- B. Is there any data available regarding the average distance boaters travel to use the boat storage facilities or areas you're familiar with? (In other words, do people have to travel a long way to access a boat storage facility?)
- C. Is there any data available regarding the average dollar amount in fees or dues paid by boaters who use the boat storage facilities or areas you're familiar with? (Are boaters satisfied? Have these fees increased in recent years? Are you aware of boaters who have been forced to use private facilities because of inadequate public facilities?)

**V. POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC CHANGES TO ALLEVIATE ACCESS ISSUES**

- A. Do you have any ideas for new or improved policies or programs that could be put in place to improve boating access?
- B. Do you think the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Boating Infrastructure Grant program is an adequate funding source / opportunity for alleviating access-related issues and improving access across the country?
  - 1. What other opportunities exist?
  - 2. Do you participate in any such programs? If so, do they seem to be working?

**VI. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BOATING ACCESS AND FISHING PARTICIPATION**

- A. To what extent do you think boating access issues throughout the country are influencing recreational fishing participation?
  - 1. For instance, do you think people are likely to fish from the shore or another area on land if they continually run into access issues affecting their boating?
  - 2. In general, are you confident that improvements to boating access will encourage anglers to fish more often from their boats?

**VII. CLOSING**

- a. Thank you. Does anyone have any additional comments or questions regarding anything we've discussed this evening?

## **ABOUT RESPONSIVE MANAGEMENT**

Responsive Management is an internationally recognized public opinion and attitude survey research firm specializing in natural resource and outdoor recreation issues. Our mission is to help natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies and organizations better understand and work with their constituents, customers, and the public. Utilizing our in-house, full-service telephone, mail, and web-based survey center with 50 professional interviewers, we have conducted more than 1,000 telephone surveys, mail surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups, as well as numerous marketing and communication plans, needs assessments, and program evaluations.

Clients include the federal natural resource and land management agencies, most state fish and wildlife agencies, state departments of natural resources, environmental protection agencies, state park agencies, tourism boards, most of the major conservation and sportsmen's organizations, and numerous private businesses. Responsive Management also collects attitude and opinion data for many of the nation's top universities. Specializing in research on public attitudes toward natural resource and outdoor recreation issues, Responsive Management has completed a wide range of projects during the past 22 years, including dozens of studies of hunters, anglers, wildlife viewers, boaters, park visitors, historic site visitors, hikers, birdwatchers, campers, and rock climbers. Responsive Management has conducted studies on endangered species; waterfowl and wetlands; and the reintroduction of large predators such as wolves, grizzly bears, and the Florida panther.

Responsive Management has assisted with research on numerous natural resource ballot initiatives and referenda and has helped agencies and organizations find alternative funding and increase their membership and donations. Additionally, Responsive Management has conducted major organizational and programmatic needs assessments to assist natural resource agencies and organizations in developing more effective programs based on a solid foundation of fact.

Responsive Management has conducted research on public attitudes toward natural resources and outdoor recreation in almost every state in the United States, as well as in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan. Responsive Management has also conducted focus groups and personal interviews with residents of the African countries of Algeria, Cameroon, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Responsive Management routinely conducts surveys in Spanish and has conducted surveys in Chinese, Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese and has completed numerous studies with specific target audiences, including Hispanics, African-Americans, Asians, women, children, senior citizens, urban, suburban and rural residents, large landowners, and farmers.

Responsive Management's research has been upheld in U.S. District Courts; used in peer-reviewed journals; and presented at major natural resource, fish and wildlife, and outdoor recreation conferences across the world. Company research has been featured in most of the nation's major media, including CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and on the front pages of *USA Today* and *The Washington Post*. Responsive Management's research has also been highlighted in *Newsweek* magazine.

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