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Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
2020 Minnesota Recreational Boating Study

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Summary of Key Statistics Research Objectives*

- This research was conducted to learn the behaviors and attitudes of Minnesota recreational boaters who have licensed a motorized or non-motorized boat with the DNR. The sample of 2,893 recreational boaters has been weighted to be proportional to the profile of recreational boaters who have licensed boats. Therefore, these data can be used to understand and profile the population of those who have licensed boats.
- It is important to keep in mind that the person who licensed the boat may not be the one using the boat. The data reflect the behaviors and sentiments of the person who licensed the boat(s), not all persons who use watercraft on Minnesota lakes and rivers.

Boater Profile

- Individuals who licensed boats skew older, more educated, and more affluent (based on household income) than the population of Minnesota.
- About half (49%) of the respondents own waterfront property. Of those who own waterfront properties, about half own seasonal homes.
- Three-fourths (75%) say boating is an important part of their life. o Most (89%) of the recreational boaters say they go boating for rest and relaxation. However, about half (48%) say they go boating to catch/ harvest fish.
- Most recreational boaters (59%) have more than one watercraft. About one-third own three or more boats. o Mid-size motorized boats (seventeen to nineteen feet) (35%) and smaller motorized boats (less than seventeen feet) (34%) are more commonly owned. Larger motorized boats (twenty feet or more) (21%) are less popular.

Boating Activities

- The most common activities among boater owners are boat riding (77%), fishing (76%), and swimming off of the boat (47%).
- Just over one-quarter (28%) paddle and 32% water ski or tube. Fewer (5%) wake-surf.
- Of those who fish, about 75% fish at least some of the time they go boating.
- Half (50%) of the recreational boaters used non-motorized boats last season.

- Sixty percent (60%) of non-motorized recreational boaters use non-motorized boats entirely on lakes and 4% use them entirely on rivers. The remainder (36%) use non-motorized watercraft on a mix of lakes and rivers.

The Boating Experience

- Most recreational boaters engage in boating for rest and relaxation (89%), social times (62%), or fishing/ harvesting (48%).
- Recreational boaters are generally satisfied with the Minnesota boating system.
 - o 87% are satisfied with the overall water recreation system.
 - o 70% or more are satisfied with the enforcement of boating regulations, boating safety education, and information about boating opportunities, rules, and maps.
- High wakes (34%), boats going too fast or too close to shore (30%), jet skis (27%), and wake-surfing (24%), are the most common problems.
 - o Greater Minnesota recreational boaters, Metro area recreational boaters, and lakeshore property owners perceive problems as more serious. The Greater Minnesota area feels that 2020 Minnesota Recreational Boating Study 12 recreational boaters making high wakes (28%), going too fast (27%), jet skis (25%), and careless operation (25%) are the biggest issues. About half (43%) of the recreational boaters in the Metro area feel high wakes from other recreational boaters is the biggest problem followed by careless operation of boats (38%), boats going too fast (36%), and wake-surfing boats (33%).
 - o Lakeshore property owners feel high wakes (39%), boats going too fast (35%), careless operation (32%), wake-surfing (29%), and jet skis (29%) are the biggest problem areas.
- About 80% perceive crowding to be an issue 25% or less of the time.

Public Water Access Facilities

- About 79% of recreational boaters use public launches and about two-thirds of those users use public launches more than three times a year.
- Respondents say that docks (79%), toilets (54%), and a large parking lot (52%) are most important amenities to have at public boat launch facilities.
- Of those who have used a public boat launch, 88% are satisfied with the availability of public launches and 79% are satisfied with the quality of public launches.
 - o Recreational boaters who are willing to pay more in registration fees are most likely to support maintaining existing boating facilities rather than additions or improvements.

Boating Safety and Enforcement

- Nearly all (90%) recreational boaters have life jackets on their boats.

- A minimal difference exists between the two regions for wearing life jackets. About 60% in each region wear life jackets 25% or less of the time when boating.
- At least 42% of the respondents are willing to support restricting wake-surfing in shallow water, on small lakes, and near shore.
- Almost all respondents say some wakeboard boat restrictions are needed (about 94%). Additionally, those with waterfront homes are more likely to support wakeboard boat restrictions further away from shore.
 - o Among those who want restrictions or have an opinion about wake-surfing restrictions, about two-to-one prefer restrictions are on a lake-by-lake basis rather than on a statewide basis.
 - o Waterfront homeowners are more likely to support wake-surfing restrictions (i.e., wakesurfing near shores and wake-surfing in shallow water). However, the majority of all respondents support restricting wake-surfing near shore.
- Respondents are more likely to oppose than support expanding the time jet skis are allowed on the water.
 - o More than half (54%) of waterfront homeowners oppose expanding the hours to operate a personal watercraft. However, even 44% of those who do not own waterfront property oppose expanding the hours to operate a personal watercraft.

- **The information above is from pages 11 & 12 of the DNR's 53-page report. The link to the full report is:
<https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/boating/2020-mn-rec-boating.pdf>**