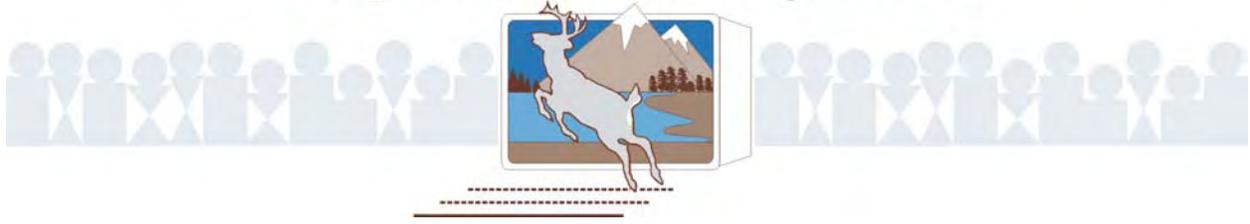


# Responsive Management



## WASHINGTON BOATER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**An independent assessment of Washington State boaters' needs submitted  
to the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office**

**by Responsive Management**

**2007**

# **WASHINGTON BOATER NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted for the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) to determine the needs of Washington boaters and to help determine priorities for allocating resources. The Washington State Legislature authorized the needs assessment in Substitute House Bill 1651. The study entailed focus groups of boating services providers, a telephone survey of boating services providers, a telephone survey of the general public in Washington, and a telephone survey of registered boaters in Washington.

The survey data on boaters was scientifically weighted to reflect actual proportions of boaters according to region of the state in which the boater most often boats and ownership status of the boat most often used. There are three types of ownership: owners of registered boats—which make up 44% of Washington boaters, owners of non-registered boats—14% of Washington boaters, and non-owners (those who charter, rent, or go boating on a friend’s boat)—42% of Washington boaters. The analyses included crosstabulation of the data by various respondent characteristics, including type of ownership, region in which respondent boats, and type of boats most often used. The rest of the study methodology is discussed in the full report titled, *Washington Boater Needs Assessment: Data Compendium* (500 pages).

The regions are as follows:

- Peninsula and Coast Region (Clallam, Grays Harbor, Jefferson, Kitsap, Mason, Pacific, and Wahkiakum Counties)
- Islands, Seattle/King, and West Northern Cascades Region (Island, King, San Juan, Skagit, Snohomish, and Whatcom Counties)
- East Northern Cascades and Northeast Region (Chelan, Ferry, Kittitas, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane, and Stevens Counties)
- Southwest Region (Clark, Cowlitz, Klickitat, Lewis, Pierce, Skamania, and Thurston Counties)
- South Central, Columbia Plateau, and Palouse Region (Adams, Asotin, Benton, Columbia, Douglas, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Lincoln, Walla Walla, Whitman, and Yakima Counties)

The data suggest that the following recommendations should be considered, categorized into 10 topic areas.

## 1. FUNDING

There is a clear, immediate need for additional funding for boating programs and services in Washington. In the survey of boaters, large majorities of boaters indicated needs for increased law enforcement and education, as well as for additions and improvements to boating facilities. These included access, launch ramps, parking at launch ramps, and improved docks, restrooms, fish cleaning stations, and other features currently in disrepair. Boating services providers expressed concern about a lack of resources for boater safety, access, launch ramps and facilities, law enforcement, and education.

## 2. BOATING SAFETY

Among providers, boater safety was the top rated program or service, as well as being the top area in which providers would like to direct more time and money. Boaters also expressed safety concerns, particularly some types of boaters, such as paddlers, those using sailboats, and those using hand-powered craft other than canoes and kayaks. Some of boaters' concerns about safety manifested themselves as concerns about crowding at launch sites (an issue exacerbated by unsafe boaters) and particularly concerns about uneducated boaters. Note that boating safety is high on the list of information that boaters are interested.

## 3. ACCESS

Providers and boaters alike consider access to be one of the central needs affecting recreational boating in Washington. Access was commonly mentioned by boaters as a constraint to their participation or as something that took away from their boating satisfaction, and it was the top item towards which they want more time and money directed. The most important issue related to access is the need for additional or improved boat launches: about three-quarters of boaters who indicated that access issues had taken away from their boating satisfaction cited boat launch ramps as the specific reason. Similarly, majorities of boating providers indicated that more time and money should be directed toward public access, including the development of new boat launch ramps and the management of existing boat launch ramps. Over two-thirds of providers said they would like to see more boat launch ramps in their areas in Washington.

The data suggest that boaters are generally satisfied with the *location* of existing boat launches, with three-quarters indicating being satisfied with the location of launch ramps in the counties in which they boat most often. Similarly, boater frustration with crowding on the water is not nearly as pervasive an issue as frustration with crowding at boat launch ramps: about 1 in 4 boaters consider crowding *at boat launch ramps* to be a major problem, compared with just 1 in 10 boaters who consider crowding *on the water* to be a major problem. At the same time, boaters gave relatively low mean ratings to Washington's management of existing boat launch ramps and the development of new boat launch ramps, suggesting that efforts to improve access at launches have not been wholly adequate.

Exacerbating the issue of overcrowding at launch ramps is a growing need for improvements to parking at launch ramps and access sites (essentially a second aspect of overcrowding). The survey results indicate that inadequate parking is recognized by both providers and boaters as being a major deterrent to boating in Washington: almost three-quarters of providers and about half of boaters would like to see more parking at boat launch ramps.

## 4. LAUNCHES AND FACILITIES UPKEEP

The improvement of access is by far the most pressing need for Washington boaters. Overall, boaters named access as the most important program or service that the state provides, although not necessarily new access. The data reflect that both providers and boaters feel strongly that the maintenance of *existing* access sites and launch ramps is as important a concern as the development of *new* sites and launch ramps; indeed, management of existing ramps ranked ahead of the development of new launch ramps in the importance ratings in the surveys of both providers as well as boaters.

Upkeep and maintenance extend beyond improvements to the launch ramps themselves. In the survey, many boaters indicated that restrooms at boat launch ramps and parking at launch ramps are in poor condition, while the top facilities and services cited by providers as being in poor condition in their areas were parking at launch ramps, fishing cleaning stations, restrooms at launch ramps, mooring buoys, pumpout stations, and dump stations. Among the facilities and services boaters would like to see improved in the areas in which they most often boat, launch ramps top the list, followed by restrooms at launch ramps, mooring buoys or docks, and daytime parking areas.

## 5. LAUNCHES AND FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

Whether the needs are satisfied by adding to existing access sites or developing new ones, there are numerous facilities and services that both boaters and providers would like to see more of in their respective areas. Parking at launch ramps and launch ramps themselves were the top items providers would like to see more of, followed by docks, pumpout stations, restrooms at launch ramps, courtesy tie-ups, dump stations, mooring buoys, and campsites—each item with a majority of providers saying that more are needed.

Among boaters, their top perceived needs are boat launch ramps (nearly half said this answer, by far the top need), mooring and docks, and restrooms at launch ramps. Furthermore, parking at launch ramps and launch ramps themselves are the top facilities and services boaters would like to see more of in the counties in which they most often boat; following these, boaters would like to see more courtesy tie-ups, restrooms at boat launch ramps, docks, and campsites—each item with at least half of boaters saying more are needed.

## 6. AGENCY ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATION OF BOATING IN WASHINGTON

In Washington, there are multiple entities administering various aspects of boating programs and services, and there is a *perception* of some fragmentation of services. Certainly, the study found that the coordination among the agencies involved was seen as a problem among many boating stakeholders—both agency personnel and boating service providers. The assessment results suggest that greater levels of coordination and communication are necessary among the entities providing boating services and programs in Washington—perhaps a multi-agency administrative body. For instance, there was discussion in the provider focus groups about the need to consolidate boating programs and to establish consistency in the delegation of responsibilities. It was also acknowledged that the administration of boater safety in the field (patrols, safety and PFD checks, the enforcement of laws and regulations, etc.) was frequently spread over a number of entities that are not always in adequate communication with one another.

It may be that this requires changes to the actual way that some boating services are provided, or it may be that better communication among agency personnel and better communication to providers and boaters would adequately address the problem. Nonetheless, because there was feelings among some boaters and many boating services providers that a single agency is needed, it may be that Washington's boating programs could be better served if a multi-agency coordinating body were established consisting of all agencies involved in administering and providing boating services. A coordinating body, if it helps improve the delivery of services, could become a permanent part of the structure of the administration of boating services in

Washington. If, however, coordination problems persist, the suggestion of many boating stakeholders that a “State of Washington Department of Boating” be created could be explored.

## **7. INCREASE LAW ENFORCEMENT PRESENCE AND ENSURE THAT ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS RECEIVE STANDARDIZED TRAINING**

While boater safety and law enforcement had high ratings of importance among providers (with safety being ranked consistently as the top area for importance), majorities of boating providers indicated that more time and money should be directed to boater safety and law enforcement. Further, the majority of all providers would like to see an increase in the law enforcement presence on Washington’s waters. Also, among boaters who consider boating programs and services in Washington to be ineffective, the top reason cited was insufficient law enforcement presence on the water.

Many providers expressed the need for coordinated and consistent training programs in order to maintain a knowledgeable staff equipped to respond to an array of enforcement issues. Invasive species education was cited as an example of specialized training that all enforcement personnel ought to receive, reinforcing many providers’ feelings that there should be basic and consistent standardized training for enforcement officers throughout Washington.

## **8. INFORMATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

In general, the development of boating information and education programs should be treated as an ongoing process of providing boaters beneficial information, with mandatory boater safety education serving as the beginning. More than half of providers indicated that more time and money should be spent on the provision of information and publications.

By all accounts, the State Parks and Recreation Commission effectively manages the production of informational materials related to boating. However, multiple agencies are involved in the actual dissemination of boating information. For this reason, it is recommended that boating information be made available at various points in the field, including through contact with enforcement personnel. There were two recurring suggestions in the focus groups for a more efficient delivery of boating information: a centralized website, coordinated by State Parks and/or the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, with frequent updates and the ability for agencies to add or edit information as necessary; and a greater amount of boating information and publications made available at the sites of recreation, such as at boat ramps and marinas on the water.

Safety information, in particular, should be made available in a variety of formats, including pamphlets and handouts (kiosks were cited as a potentially effective method of providing boaters with information—many providers noted that the need for information among boaters is greatest in the field, and not in a classroom). Agency-sponsored campaigns may target the most important issues in terms of boater needs; the assessment indicated that boaters are most interested in receiving information on ramps and marinas, maps and charts, general safety, boating rules and regulations, fishing, wildlife, and boating programs in Washington—each item with at least a quarter of boaters saying they are interested in such information.

## 9. RCO GRANT PROCESS

It is recommended that the RCO use the results of the full study to set priorities for the Boating Facilities Program and Boating Activities Program. The information in the full report of this study—particularly the data on improvement priorities and the preferred locations for service additions—is available to assist the RCO in its decision-making and its review of proposals.

There is a problem in that boating services providers do not always understand that the RCO is constrained by state law from using capital funds for maintenance. This results in the oversimplified belief among providers that the RCO will not fund a grant project designed to perform maintenance, upkeep, or other improvements to *existing* access sites and launch ramps, only for *new* facilities.

Additionally, many boating providers indicated being uncertain about the RCO's proposal requirements, with some remarking on the complexity of the grant application process. The larger issue may be that these perceptions represent fundamental gaps in sufficient knowledge of the RCO's grant program. To address some of these concerns, the RCO may wish to consider issuing Requests for Proposals for grant projects in order to better outline the Office's objectives and to more efficiently publicize project needs identified in this assessment.

## 10. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In general, boating providers show a greater concern for environmental issues in Washington than do the boaters themselves. This, however, should not detract from the importance of educating both enforcement personnel and boaters on environmental issues before the onset of a crisis. As previously mentioned, agency responsibilities regarding issues such as invasive species are sometimes vague, often because multiple steps are required to sufficiently address the issue: the prevention of invasive species depends on both an enforcement and an educational component. Water quality, technically listed as a responsibility of the Department of Ecology, was a major concern among all providers. In particular, providers voiced concern about the potential for boaters to be sources of pollution, such as through fuel spillage, the use of copper bottom painted boats, or by spreading contamination from pumpout and dump stations.

The data suggest that agencies directly involved in environmental education and information dissemination may wish to increase information and education efforts focusing on the environmental impacts of boating, including ways for boaters to mitigate their environmental impacts—including invasive species. Issues of particular importance may be evaluated through a communications plan that could also address methods for informing boaters on the issues. If possible, a component for enforcement personnel and marina operators could be included.