

UTAH RECREATION & TOURISM MATTERS



Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

December 2009

No. IORT/020

Utah Boat Ownership and Boat Owner Management Preferences: Twelve Years of Data William Spain, Douglas Reiter, and Steven W. Burr

Introduction

In 2006, researchers at Utah State University's Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism (IORT) conducted a telephone survey of a random sample of 397 registered boat owners in the state of Utah. This survey replicated questions from a 1999 survey conducted by IORT and a 1994 study by researchers at the University of Utah. In addition, very limited amounts of data were taken from a corresponding 1989 survey conducted by Business Strategies, Inc. because of concerns about sampling methods and the representativeness of data; only data unaffected by these issues was incorporated into the study at hand. The three later studies (1994, 1999, and 2006) were directed at a random sample of registered Utah boat owners, and thus, we now have data from a 12 year time period with which to examine changes in perceptions, opin-

ions, and various other characteristics of Utah boat ownership and boating recreation.

Boat Ownership and Recreational Use in Utah

An interesting trend evident in statewide registration data is the change in the number of registered boats and boat owners in Utah. Between 1989 and 1994, the number of registered boats increased by 19.9%, while this increased by 10.0% between 1994 and 1999, and decreased by 2.0% between 1999 and 2006 (Table 1).

In comparing these registration trends with Utah population data for the same time period, a stable growth rate is apparent, ranging between 1.1% and 1.7% for any five year period going back to 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). In other words, there was a larger increase in registered boaters than can be accounted for by the statewide population increase. Even though the number of registered boats in Utah decreased by 2.0% between 1999 and 2006, the number of boat owners increased by 8.0%. This indicates that the average number of boats per owner has decreased, which is



Boaters on Utah Lake

Table 1: Utah Boating Characteristics 1989-2006

Characteristic	1989	1994	1999	2006
Number of registered boats	58,464	70,154	77,171	75,635
Registered motorboats ¹	56,842	68,753	75,961	74,424
Registered sailboats	1,622	1,401	1,210	1,211
Number of boat owners	39,335	NA	58,289	62,938

¹ The term motorboat includes PWCs (personal watercraft) and traditional motorboats.



Water skiing on Lake Powell

confirmed in Table 1. The number of boat operators per household has stayed relatively constant since the 1994 survey.

The number of boat outings per year has decreased substantially since 1999. The percentage of respondents who stated they either did not go boating last year or went five or fewer times increased from 34% in 1999 to 48% in 2006 (in 1994 41% of respondents had been boating five or fewer times in the last year).

Utah boaters seem to have a great deal of experience operating a boat. The average number of years of boating experience has stayed rather consistent, ranging from 17.5 years in 1994 to 18.4 years in both 1999 and 2006. The average number of boat outings per year, however, declined substantially from 11 in 1994 to nine in 2006, while the average number days per typical outing increased from three to five days over this same period (Table 2).

In all three studies, participants were asked which boating area was their favorite. Lake Powell was the

most frequently mentioned water body in each survey, but the percentage decreased from 33% in 1994 and 40.9% in 1999 to 28.2% in 2006. Strawberry Reservoir continues to have a great deal of popularity, going from third most popular in 1994 (mentioned by 13% of respondents) to second most popular in 1999 (14.3%) and 2006 (11.8%). Bear Lake was tied with Strawberry Reservoir as the second most popular boating area in 2006, with 11.8% citing it as their favorite, compared to 5.1% in 1999. Flaming Gorge has remained in the top four most popular areas in all three studies (14% named it their favorite in 1994, 9.0% in 1999, and 8.6% in 2006). Jordanelle has increased in popularity. It was ranked as the ninth most popular water body in 1999, with only 2.1% of respondents citing it as their favorite (the newly-created reservoir was not presented in the 1994 survey results) but it had become the fifth most popular in the state, with 5.5% of respondents mentioning it in 2006.

In 1999 and 2006, respondents were asked about the specific recreational activities in which they partici-

Table 3: Activity Participation 1999 and 2006

Activity	Often or Always Participate	
	1999	2006
Water ski, tube, or knee board	50.0%	49.7%
Swim from a boat	39.3%	47.8%
Sail	3.0%	2.3%
Go sightseeing on a water body	44.4%	44.8%
Canoe or kayak	1.8%	4.5%
Fish from a boat	58.1%	56.9%
Just drive the boat around for fun	49.2%	46.8%

Table 2: Frequency of Boating Recreation

Boat outings in the last 12 months	1994	1999	2006
0 to 5	41%	33.9%	48.0%
6 to 10	23%	27.5%	24.0%
11 to 20	25%	25.0%	20.0%
> 20	11%	13.6%	8.1%
Mean number of outings	11	12.3	8.8
Median number of outings	NA	8.0	6.0

pate while boating (Table 3). Increases were observed in the number of respondents stating they “swim from the boat” (from 39.3% in 1999 to 47.8% in 2006) and “canoe or kayak” (from under 2% to nearly 5%). Otherwise, the proportions participating in these activities remained about the same.

Opinions about Utah Boating Management

Respondents were asked about their opinions regarding several specific uses of their boat registration fees: launch facilities/ramps, restrooms, parking, law enforcement, boating education programs, picnic areas and campsites, safety patrols, pump-out facilities, non-motorized boating facilities, and printed guides. Respondents were generally quite supportive of most of these items, with the exceptions of pump-out facilities (45.3% supported), non-motorized boating facilities (45.8% supported), and printed guides (37.6% supported). Support for all other items ranged from 81.1% (safety patrols) to 90.4% (launch facilities). Levels of support appeared to be relatively consistent over the three surveys with the exceptions of safety patrols (decreased from 90% to 81.1% support since 1994), pump-out facilities (decreased from 54% to 45.3% support since 1994), and printed guides (decreased from 48% to 37.6% support since 1994). This was the first survey in which respondents were asked about their support for using registration fees for non-motorized boating facilities.

More than 90% of respondents to all three surveys believed boater education courses were important. The percentage of respondents who had completed a boater education course increased from 17.0% in 1994, to 19.9% in 1999, to 21.2% in 2006. Support for mandatory boater education, however, is not strong and appears to have decreased over the years; 50.0% of respondents agreed in 1994, 44.5% agreed in 1999, and only 32.0% agreed in 2006. When compared to support for mandatory boater education, a slightly larger percentage of respondents (45.9%) supported requiring licenses for boat operators in 2006. This percentage is comparable to the 46.0% who supported this in 1994, though support dipped to 38.1% in 1999.

Respondents to all three surveys were also asked about their sources of boating safety information (Table 4). Some changes over the years are evident, such as a decreased reliance on personal experience/common sense. Boater education courses or classes also appear



Sailing on the Great Salt Lake

Table 4: Sources of Boating Safety Information 1994-2006

Sources of boating safety knowledge	1994	1999	2006
Personal experience/common sense	33%	45.8%	23.9%
Pamphlet	19%	15.2%	18.4%
Course/class	8%	8.3%	14.9%
Parents/family	6%	4.8%	14.6%
Book	7%	4.3%	8.8%
Friends	4%	6.3%	8.6%
Internet	NA	NA	3.0%

to play a larger role according to 2006 results, as do both family and friends.

Support for personal watercraft (PWC) use of Utah lakes and reservoirs has been somewhat erratic, though clear majorities consistently support PWC use. In 1994, 78% of respondents were supportive. This fell to 67.3% in 1999 and then rose to 71.5% in 2006. While support for PWC use is widespread, a majority of respondents feel that PWCs should be regulated differently than other watercraft (53% in 1994, 61.8% in 1999, and 60.2% in 2006).

Respondents to the 1999 and 2006 surveys were queried about the prevalence of boating conflicts. While

the percentage of respondents who reported the actions of others had detracted from their enjoyment has decreased (from 78.0% to 66.0%). However, the number who said others' actions had "possibly" detracted from their experience increased substantially from 5.4% to 20.4%. The number of respondents who reported no detracting behavior decreased slightly from 16.6% to 13.6%.

Respondents to the 1999 and 2006 surveys were also asked about whether there was a need to limit the number of boats on lakes and reservoirs at one time. A stable majority of respondents to both surveys supported use limits (64.5% in 1999 and 65.0% in 2006). When this subgroup of respondents was asked which water bodies needed use limits, the same five reservoirs were mentioned most frequently in both surveys: Pineview, Jordanelle, Deer Creek, Willard Bay, and East Canyon (ranked from most frequently mentioned to least; rankings were the same for both surveys).

References

U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.). Quick Facts: U.S. Census Bureau Homepage [online]. Available at <http://www.quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>

For the complete IORT professional report see: Spain, W., Reiter, D., Blahna, D., & Burr, S. (2007). *A summary report: 2006 Utah State Park boating survey: Comparison with previous studies* (professional



A recreationist rides a PWC

report IORT-PR-2007-3a). Logan, UT: Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

See also:

Spain, W., Reiter, D., Blahna, D., & Burr, S. (2007). *Recreational water use issues and regional planning on Utah's lakes and reservoirs* (professional report IORT-PR-2007-3b). Logan, UT: Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

Reiter, D.K., Blahna, D.J., & Smith, J.J. (2001). *A summary report: 1999 Utah State Park boater telephone survey* (professional report IORT-PR-2001-1). Logan, UT: Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism.

These reports are available from IORT online at http://extension.usu.edu/iort/hm/professional_subject/boating

For More Information:

Copies of this and other publications are available through Utah State University's Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, or visit our website at <http://extension.usu.edu/iort/>

Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism
Utah State University
5220 Old Main Hill
Logan, Utah 84322-5220



A lone fishing boat on Bear Lake