

# UTAH RECREATION & TOURISM MATTERS

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## Bear River Oneida Narrows Recreation Use and Preference Study

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### Introduction

As part of the study necessary for consideration of Federal Energy Regulatory Commission licensing of the Twin Lakes Canal Company's proposed Bear River Narrows Dam, Utah State University researchers collected data pertaining to existing recreational use and use patterns, and potential impacts of the proposed dam on recreational use. This information was collected from 425 intercept surveys of outdoor recreation visitors to the Oneida Narrows reach of the Bear River located in Franklin County, Idaho. Surveys took place at both the existing Oneida Reservoir, about 15 miles from Franklin, Idaho, and at the area downstream from the Oneida Dam, and were conducted throughout a one-year time span in order to reflect use patterns that vary by season. The proposed project would involve construction of a new dam and reservoir downstream from the existing reservoir. Approximately 4.5 miles of the Bear River and surrounding adjacent lands would be covered by waters impounded by the proposed dam.

### Demographics

Most survey respondents were male (71%) with an average age of 42. Just under 50% of respondents resided in Idaho, over 45% were from Utah, and the remaining respondents resided in 13 other U.S. states. Clearly, the vast majority of use comes from within the region. Over one third of respondents came from within 20 miles and almost 70% came from within 40 miles. Over 90% come from within 120 miles.

### Recreationist and Trip Characteristics

Over 86% of respondents indicated that they were not first-time visitors to the Oneida Narrows area. Of these, almost 29% said they had been coming to the area for more than 20 years, with another 31.6% first visiting between six and 20 years ago. Only about 12% repeat visitors said they first visited the area one or two years before. Almost 26% of returning visitors had first come within the last five years.

Repeat visitors were also asked about the approximate number of trips per year they made to the area. The median response to this was six times per year, although about 14% of respondents indicated they visited 50 or more times per year.



*An Oneida Narrows angler hooks a trout*

Visitors who indicated they had visited before were asked how many times per year they recreated at specific areas depicted on a map. The most frequently mentioned site was the existing Oneida Reservoir with 279 (76% of repeat visitors) respondents accounting for a grand total of 3,303 visits per year. Almost the same number (265, 72%) indicated they visit within the proposed reservoir area with a mean of 17.0, and median of six visits per year accounting for a total of 4,510 visits per year. Only 53 (14%) respondents visit the area downstream from the proposed dam for a total of 866 times a year.

Repeat visitors were asked about the size of their group on a typical visit. Mean and median group sizes were found to be 6.5 and 3.5, respectively. All respondents were asked about the length of time they would be staying on the visit on which they were surveyed. Just under 51% were staying for less than one day. Day users were spending an average of four hours in the area. Of the 49% of visitors who were staying one day or longer, more than half (58%) were staying for two or three days.

Respondents' mean group size was 6.7 and their median was 4.0. About 5% of the respondents indicated their group size was 20 or more.

Respondents were asked to indicate which activities members of their group participated in or expected to participate in during their visit (Table 1). Over half of the visitors indicated that members of their group would be spending time with their family or friends (86%), bird watching/wildlife viewing (79%), picnicking (73%), swimming (61%), or camping (54%).

Respondents were also asked about their primary recreation activity during their trip to the area. The most frequently mentioned primary activity was river fishing (22%) followed by camping (15%), river floating or boating (14%), picnicking (11%), and spending time with family and friends (10%).

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were, in general with that day's trip. On a scale of one to five, with one being very dissatisfied and five being very satisfied, the mean score was 4.7 with a median of five, indicating that overall respondents were satisfied to very satisfied with their trip. Only five respondents (1%) stated they were dissatisfied or very dissatis-

**Table 1: Recreational activities respondent participated in or someone in their group participated in or are planning to participate in during their trip to the Oneida Narrows area**

Activity	Did You or Member or Your Group Participate or Plan to Participate <sup>1</sup>	
	Yes	No
Spending time with family or friends	86.1%	13.9%
Bird watching/wildlife viewing	79.1%	20.9%
Picnicking	73.4%	26.6%
Swimming	61.6%	38.4%
Camping	54.4%	45.6%
River fishing	47.3%	52.7%
Walking or hiking	43.8%	56.2%
River boating or floating	38.4%	61.6%
Reservoir fishing	35.1%	64.9%
Reservoir boating or waterskiing	30.6%	69.4%
Nature photography	36.7%	63.3%
Exercising a pet	23.8%	76.2%
Spiritual activities	16.0%	84.0%
ATV or dirt bike riding	14.8%	85.2%
Bicycling	10.4%	89.6%
Seeking fossils, rocks, or minerals	11.1%	88.9%
Running or jogging	9.2%	90.8%
Firearms Shooting	8.0%	92.0%
4-Wheel driving/jeeping	7.5%	92.5%
Herb gathering	3.1%	96.9%
Archery shooting	2.1%	97.9%
Horseback riding	1.4%	98.6%
Big game hunting	1.4%	98.6%
Upland game hunting (including turkeys)	0.7%	99.3%
Paintball Shooting	0.5%	99.5%

<sup>1</sup>n = 425

fied with their Oneida Narrows area experience.

Respondents were also asked if they camped in the area during their trip. Forty percent of respondents were camping overnight. Of these 172 campers, about 79% camped in designated campgrounds within the canyon, and approximately 8% camped at a dispersed site within the canyon. The remaining 13% stayed at various locations outside of the canyon.

Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the area where they camped. Just as with overall satisfaction, respondents were quite satisfied with their camping areas and reported a mean score of 4.7 on a five-point scale where one is very dissatisfied and five is very satisfied. The median score was five. Only one (1%) respondent reported being dissatisfied, and no respondents reported being very dissatisfied.

Respondents were asked if there were any areas in the Oneida Narrows area that were special to them, and if so to identify these areas. Of the 425 respondents, 304 (72%) said yes. These respondents gave 320 responses (some gave more than one response) with Redpoint Campground (18%) the most frequently mentioned area. This was followed by “the whole area” (14%), Bear River (13%), Maple Grove Campground (12%), Maple Grove Hot Springs (11%), the Narrows canyon area (7%), Oneida Reservoir (4%), and the Day Use area (4%).

### Potential Recreation Impacts and Displacement

Respondents were shown a map of a proposed dam and reservoir that would inundate a portion of the existing Bear River and adjacent lands (Figure 1). They were then asked what they would do if the proposed

dam was constructed and the reservoir filled, and they were unable to participate in the recreation activities in which they were participating. They were given a choice of eight responses and asked to indicate one. The largest percent (21%) said the dam construction would not change their activities. Just over twenty percent said they would do something else in Cache and Franklin Counties and another 21% said they would do something else outside of these counties. About six percent said they would go to another segment of the Bear River and about seven percent said they would not recreate because of the lack of an adequate alternative.

### Management Preferences

Respondents were asked to read ten statements regarding management policy considerations and future use of the Oneida Narrows area and asked to rate the importance of each item. Table 2 shows the results of those questions. The highest mean score was for maintaining a free-flowing stream below the existing dam (3.58), followed by preserving a free flowing river for fishing (3.49) and boating (3.45), protecting and enhancing native Bonneville cutthroat trout populations

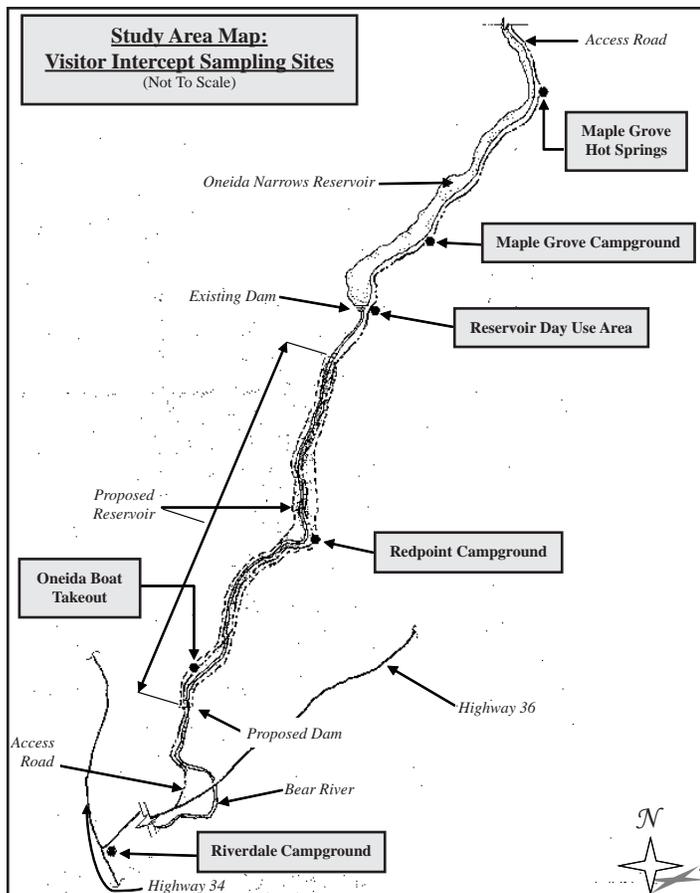


Figure 1

Table 2: Importance of future management considerations

Management Item <sup>2</sup>	Not At All Important	Somewhat Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Mean <sup>1</sup>
Preserving free-flowing river for fishing	5.9%	7.8%	17.6%	68.7%	3.49
Preserving free-flowing river for boating, floating, or kyaking	4.7%	8.9%	22.8%	63.5%	3.45
Maintaining a free-flowing river below the existing Oneida Narrows dam site	3.8%	7.1%	16.4%	72.7%	3.58
Providing increased public access to river areas in the Oneida Narrows area	14.7%	13.2%	26.2%	36.8%	2.99
Providing increased public access to reservoir recreation areas in the Oneida Narrows area	19.8%	17.2%	26.2%	36.8%	2.80
Providing Twin Lakes Canal Company irrigators with an adequate water supply during drought periods	29.3%	20.5%	26.7%	23.6%	2.45
Producing additional hydropower to help meet the electrical power demands of the region	33.0%	24.0%	22.3%	20.7%	2.31
Increasing the availability of reservoir recreation opportunities in the area	35.4%	19.8%	21.5%	23.3%	2.33
Preserving Native American historical or religious sites	7.8%	9.2%	27.7%	55.2%	3.30
Protecting and enhancing local populations of Bonneville cutthroat trout	6.6%	9.5%	24.2%	59.7%	3.37

<sup>1</sup>Mean scores were calculated on a scale where 1 = Not At All Important, 2 = Somewhat Unimportant, 3 = Somewhat Important, and 4 = Very Important.

<sup>2</sup>Valid *n*s for management items ranged from 420 to 425.

(3.37), and preserving Native American sites (3.30). The lowest mean scores were for producing additional hydroelectric power (2.31), increasing reservoir recreation opportunities (2.33), and providing irrigators with adequate water supply during drought (2.45).

## Conclusion

Outdoor recreation in the study area appears to be an important use of the resources. Interviews were conducted along the river that the proposed reservoir would inundate and at the existing Oneida Reservoir. The area appears to attract primarily local residents even though some visit from other states. More than two-thirds of respondents live within one hour's drive of the Oneida Narrows. The area offers a wide variety of recreation activities of which visitors take advantage. These include river and reservoir fishing, camping, floating the river, picnicking, enjoying and viewing natural scenery and wild animals, swimming, hiking, boating at the reservoir, or simply spending quality time with family and friends in a natural setting. Visitors seemed to be quite satisfied with their trips to the area with more than 90% saying they were satisfied or very satisfied. Respondents who said they were camping in the area also liked both the campgrounds and dispersed sites with over 90% indicating they were satisfied with those facilities.

When respondents were asked whether construction of the proposed dam and reservoir would affect their choice of recreating in the Oneida Narrows area, responses were mixed. Similar percentages of respondents (about one-fifth) indicated that it would have no effect, they would do something else in the local counties, or they would travel outside the counties to do something else. More than 10% said they would go to another river. Less than 10% each said they would recreate on the new reservoir, go to a different segment of the Bear River, or not recreate at all.

When asked about future management of the area, respondents rated the importance of maintaining the free-flowing nature of the river—for both fishing and boating—very highly. Respondents also thought it was important to protect native Bonneville cutthroat trout as well as to preserve Native American historical and

cultural sites. There was less importance attached to increasing public access to both the river areas and reservoir areas. There appear to be somewhat mixed opinions about the importance of ensuring Twin Lakes Canal Company's irrigators have adequate water supplies during times of drought, producing additional hydropower to the region, and increasing the availability of reservoir recreation opportunities in the area.

The proposed dam and reservoir would obviously disrupt outdoor recreation in the area. Almost half (47%) of the respondents said they fished the river and 38% said they floated the river during their visit to the area. Also, almost 22% indicated that river fishing—and just over 14% said river floating—was their primary activity. It is also interesting to note that the proposed reservoir would alter or inundate some of the visitors' favorite areas. When asked if there are any places that are special, nearly 18% of responses mentioned the Redpoint Campground, just under 13% mentioned the Bear River, and about 7% of responses referred specifically to the Narrows area, places that would be inundated in whole or in part.

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*The full professional report of this study is available online at:*

[http://extension.usu.edu/iort/htm/professional\\_date/october-2009](http://extension.usu.edu/iort/htm/professional_date/october-2009)

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