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Brevard County Recreational Boating Characterization Study

Who's Boating in Our Waters and What Are They Doing?

In September 2007, *A Recreational Boating Characterization for Brevard County* study was completed through a collaborative partnership between the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Brevard County Department of Natural Resources, the University of Florida Brevard County Cooperative Extension Program, and the University of Florida Sea Grant College Program. The recreational boating study was recommended in order to determine and map the present marine facility and waterway usage in support of Brevard County's Comprehensive Maritime Management Master Plan goals. Boating is an important activity in Florida. According to the National Marine Manufacturers Association, in 2011, Florida ranked number one in the nation in recreational boat registrations with 889,895 boats registered. Florida is also the number one destination for marine recreation in the U.S., including boating, with over 22 million people participating in some form of marine recreation and approximately 3.3 million people participating in boating in the state (Leeworthy and Wiley 2001). Boating is also very important to Florida's economy with the marine industry representing a total economic output of over \$18.4 billion annually and employment estimated at over 220,000 jobs according to the Marine Industries Association of Florida, Inc.

A Recreational Boating Characterization for Brevard County report states:

"The goals of the study were (1) to quantify and map public access facility use through an inventory of marinas and boat ramps, and (2) to obtain information from boaters who use Brevard County access facilities and waterways regarding their preferences, activities, and water-use patterns. Specific objectives included (1) the development of spatial data sets within a geographic information system (GIS) to map boating patterns, and (2) the analysis of trip information provided by boaters to describe the preferences and behaviors of boaters who use Brevard County waterways. The study process involved (1) the development of a survey instrument and accompanying correspondence; (2) the identification of target boater groups by waterway access facility type; (3) the implementation of seasonal mail surveys of target boater groups; (4) the construction of spatial databases from returned mail surveys that identify trip departure sites, destinations, travel routes, and congested areas; and (5) the determination of seasonal boating profiles."

Summary of Statistics from Survey

Who is the average boater accessing Brevard County waters?

- The average age for boaters is 54 years of age
- The typical boater is a year-round Florida resident
- The mean vessel length is about 22 ft with open fishing vessels being the most popular type of vessel
- The typical boater has about 20 years of boating experience. Those accessing the water from docks and ramps have more experience than boaters accessing water from marina wet slips, marina dry storage, and shoreline/causeway.
- About 65% of the boaters had a boating safety or seamanship course. Those accessing from shoreline/causeway or boat ramp were least likely to have had a boating safety or seamanship course while those from marina wet slips were most likely to have had a course.
- 46.3% of ramp users live in Brevard County; 36.4% of ramp users live in surrounding counties of Orange, Seminole, Indian River, or Volusia. (53.7% not from Brevard County)
- 66.2% of marina users live in Brevard county; 25.8% of marina users live in surrounding counties of Orange, Seminole, Indian River, or Volusia. (33.8% not from Brevard County)

What is the typical boating trip?

- Most boaters accessed the water from boat ramps (52%) followed by docks (29%), marina wet slips (14%), marina dry storage (4%), and shoreline/causeway (<2%).
- Those accessing boat ramps, marina wet slips, and marina dry storage have an average drive time of 40 minutes from their home. Most boaters travel 20 minutes or less. Thirty-three percent of the boaters had drive times greater than 40 minutes.
- The average departure time in the morning was 7:51AM and in the afternoon was 2:35PM. Those accessing the water from boat ramps, launched earlier than others with an average start time in the morning of 7:21AM and later than others in the afternoon at 3:30PM.
- The average day-trip duration on the water was 5.72 hours. Those accessing the water from marina dry storage and boat ramps spent more time on the water than other groups with average times of 6.48 hours and 6.15 hours, respectively.
- Typically trips were taken during the weekend with a typical weekend day having 3.5 times more reported trips than a typical weekday.
- Boaters ranked fishing as their #1 activity out on the water followed by cruising, nature viewing, sightseeing, and socializing.
- Boaters selected their favorite departure/launch site based on the safe and secure parking at the site first. Other reasons from most important to least were adequate parking, ease of launching/retrieving boat, proximity to favorite boating spots, short wait to launch, well-marked access channels, and no parking/launch fee.
- Boaters selected their favorite travel route because it helped them avoid congested areas. Other reasons from most important to least were they enjoyed the scenic beauty, quick access to favorite boating spots, good fishing, they preferred well-marked channels, they preferred calm protected waters, and they wanted to avoid shallow water.

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- 40% of boaters said they avoided or left congested areas while boating.

What affect does season have on boating?

- Peak season (when 44% of trips occurred) was found to be during the months of May, June, and July. Off-peak season included the months November, December, January, and February when 22% of trips occurred. Shoulder season (34% of trips occurred) included the months March and April, which were considered pre-peak, and August, September, and October, which were considered post-peak .
- The mean number of trips per month during the peak season was 3.39 trips. The mean number of trips per month during the shoulder season was 2.8 trips. The mean number of trips per month during the off-peak season was 2.06 trips.
- Boat Ramp users had a greater number of trips per month during the peak and shoulder season than users from other water access groups
- Average AM departure time during peak season was 7:40AM (peak time 6-6:30am), shoulder season was 8:01AM (peak time 7-7:30am), off-peak season was 7:58AM (peak time 7-7:30am)
- Peak PM departure time between noon and 1pm
- Average trip duration was 5.72 hours; boaters departing from Marina Dry Storage stayed out on the water 30-90 minutes longer than boaters from other groups during the peak and shoulder seasons
- During peak season, ramp users had highest percentage of weekend trips at 64.8% and higher percentage of weekend trips across all seasons (62% average)

What are the perceived detractors and needs of boaters?

- The #1 detractor was lack of courtesy and/or seamanship (33.4%), followed by excessive regulation (22.3%), lack of access (14.5%), altered environment (9.6%), infrastructure shortcomings (8.6%), congestion (6.3%), lack of destinations (2.2%), no detractors (1.6%), and lack of enforcement (1.4%)
- The #1 need was more water access (26%), followed by infrastructure improvements (17.6%), less regulation (16.9%), more regulation/better enforcement (10.9%), environmental protection (8.5%), more destinations/activity provisions (8.4%), boater education (7.7%), no needs (2.6%), and less congested waterways (1.4%)

Where do boaters like to go on the water?

- Greatest density of traffic in Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) within Indian River Lagoon (IRL) from Haulover Canal to Sebastian Inlet; also great within lower part of Banana River to Port Canaveral
- Favorite destinations include Sebastian Inlet area, small spoil islands along ICW south of Melbourne Causeway, Ski Island, Bird Island and Party Island in Newfound Harbor, spoil islands north of the Brewer Memorial Parkway, some areas of Mosquito Lagoon
- These favorite destinations also have the most congestion but congestion is also found in Haulover Canal and any causeways that contain a boat ramp (Merritt Island, Pineda, Eau Gallie, Max Brewer Memorial Parkway)

Boating Characterization Study

For more detailed information from *A Recreational Boating Characterization for Brevard County* visit http://brevard.ifas.ufl.edu/marine/PDF/2007_finalreport.pdf to view the document online.

References

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