

Winter 1993

\$1.50

BOAT

Pennsylvania



The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine



Viewpoint

Pennsylvania Boaters and Surveys



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Each year the Pennsylvania State Data Center (PSDC) conducts a survey of Pennsylvania citizens. The purpose of this survey is to measure the opinions on several topics about a variety of state planning efforts. Using randomly selected phone numbers from Pennsylvania's 1,474 telephone exchanges, the PSDC conducted 868 interviews of citizens age 18 and older from November 14 through December 12, 1992.

The Commission participated in the 1992 survey to assess the public awareness and knowledge of the agency and its work. We were also interested in estimating the number of people who fished or boated during the year as well as obtaining an estimate of the total number of boats in the state.

Interestingly enough, only 68 percent of those surveyed knew that there was an agency with specific responsibility for fishing and boating. Of the 868 adults interviewed, only 3.6 percent could identify this agency as the Fish, or Fish and Boat, Commission. A few others named the Game Commission or a variant. The startling fact is that almost 80 percent of those surveyed, including those who fish and boat, could not identify the agency that provides and regulates fishing and boating.

During 1992, an estimated 2.4 million adults boated in Pennsylvania. This estimate validates a 1987 study by Chilton Research Associates that estimated that 2.47 million people boated that year. Thus, the number of people participating in boating appears to have stabilized at 25 percent of the total population. Boating continues to be one of the top recreational activities in terms of total participation in the state.

It is said that the only thing better than owning your own pickup truck is to have a good buddy who owns one. The same appears to be true with boats. Only 29 percent of respondents who boated during 1992 reported that they boated in their own boats. Sixty percent boated with a friend or relative and 17 percent rented a boat. The study estimates a total of 271,000 motorboats, which is very close to the actual 281,000 registered motorboats. Surprisingly, the number of unpowered boats is estimated at 390,000. This estimate closely approximates the earlier estimates made in the Chilton survey, but greatly exceeds previous Commission estimates. If these figures are accurate, and we are beginning to accept them, then the total number of boats in Pennsylvania exceeds 660,000.

As we might expect, most boating occurs on public lakes. Fifty-four percent of all boating activity occurs there. Another 37 percent takes place on large rivers and only nine percent is done on private lakes or small streams. Past surveys have shown that more than 30 million boater days and \$3 billion are expended each year in the pursuit of boating enjoyment by Pennsylvania citizens. Obviously, boating has a significant impact on the resource and on the economy of the state.

This survey suggests that we rethink some of our programs. We are one of the oldest state agencies, yet people still do not recognize us or our work. We have to do a better job informing the public of the role that the Fish and Boat Commission takes in the provision of fishing and boating opportunities in Pennsylvania. We must strive to provide additional opportunities for boaters and anglers. Almost 80 percent of the people who boated last year, including 300,000 people who rented boats, did so in someone else's boat. Many of these people were first-time boaters. We must direct additional educational efforts to this group of boaters, and we must learn how we can ensure that their boating experience is safe and enjoyable. Our future planning efforts must consider that many of our boaters are not part of a traditional programming effort. Finally, we must assess which demands for boating opportunities will be made and how we will satisfy these demands.

The Commission is currently developing a long-range plan for fishing and boating. The information obtained from this survey will be invaluable as Commission managers chart a course to the 21st century.

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The covers
This issue's front-cover barefoot water skier was photographed by Tom King. Learning to barefoot water ski requires building on basic water skiing skills to learn new techniques. That's the kind of information you can find in this issue—basics as well as more advanced how-to-do-it ideas. On page 26, you can forge ahead with new paddling skills built on basics. The article beginning on page 8 offers basic information on paddling, and the article on page 23 provides a brush-up on basic water skiing know-how. If you own a powerboat, don't miss the vital details on page 30. No matter which kind of boating you prefer, check out the thought-provoking article on page 14. Do you want to buy a used boat and get the most value for your investment? Better scan page 16. This spring, if you live in southwest Pennsylvania and you'd like to get away from it all just for a while after work one evening, turn to page 18. The back cover photograph was taken by Bill Burger, Dagger Canoe Company.

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