

2007 Northwest Paddler Survey Summary



Background, Purpose, Confidence, and Acknowledgements

This survey was conducted from April 10 to June 9, 2007. It brought together several interests of Gerry Hodge, a numbers guy and data analyst who was working through the University of Washington Program Evaluation Certificate Program. Gerry chose Washington Water Trails Association (WWTa) as the non-profit organization to donate his efforts toward to complete his obligations to the Program Evaluation course. Gerry was already familiar with the WWTa, being a member for a few years, a site steward, and the WWTa representative to the Washington State Parks Boating Safety Advisory Council.

The survey was designed to serve several masters:

- A previous survey done for WWTa in 2002 by Iris Mondri-Kish needed a follow-up
- WWTa needed additional evaluation and marketing information
- Baseline opinions were needed by those representing paddlers in the political arena
- A Washington State Boaters Survey was done early in 2007 which excluded paddlers
- Legislation passed in the 06-07 session mandated a survey be done to assess boater needs and this survey could be a vehicle for increased exposure on that survey

Based upon a sample size of 534 in a population estimated at 5000, the sampling error for this survey is approximately 4.01% at a 95% confidence interval (that's good!). The population polled is not just paddlers, but involved paddlers. In addition, the respondents are self-selected and may represent a subset of involved paddlers with more informed opinions. With those limitations, you can understand the opinions expressed on this survey cannot be attributed or transferred to the casual boater who happens to use a paddle.

This document is available at

http://www.wwta.org/about_us/2007_NW_Paddler_Survey_Summary.pdf

Summary

The first section of this survey is general demographics. There are no appreciable differences between paddlers in the Northwest and the paddlers in other parts of the country. There is a stronger tendency toward a higher education level and household income level than other segments of the population. The respondents to this survey also represented a well-rounded image of the paddling community.

The second section compiled paddlers' opinions on several subjects. Respondents want more public access and more public facilities. Conflict with other recreational users and within the paddling community itself is delineated. The value of law enforcement in the eyes of paddlers is actually quite low, only 24% feel more is needed. Environmental issues all ranked high on paddler's lists of concerns. Litter and waste disposal were the most concerning, but the question didn't allow for identifying the litterbugs as paddlers or other recreational users. Permits and fees were less of a factor in deterring paddling activity than other reasons.

The knowledge level of the Leave No Trace (LNT) program was divided between WWTA members (190) and non-members (344). There was a clear difference in results reflecting the positive efforts of WWTA in promoting LNT. Amazingly, every one of the 190 WWTA respondents had some familiarity with Leave No Trace.

Of the 344 non-WWTA members, 51% said they knew very little about WWTA. The other half not only knew about WWTA, but also had a good grasp on what WWTA does.

One of the reasons for doing this survey was to compare new information to that which was gathered in a 2002 WWTA survey. The sample size for the 2002 survey was 122 and for this 2007 survey is 190 WWTA members. In general, the 2007 results showed paddling activity is less narrowly defined and spans more 'lifestyle' activity choices (Individual, Group/Club, Family). In addition, paddlers in 2007 are spending many more days on the water and are much more likely to belong to other outdoor organizations.

The reasons given for joining WWTA have also shifted. Since the Washington State Parks Cascadia Marine Trail Pass no longer exists,

there is also a drop in importance in the Cascadia Marine Trail and Access to Water Trails as a reason for joining WWTa. The 2007 reasons showing significant gains are: Advocacy, Information, and Volunteer opportunities. Surprisingly, the importance of the Cascadia Marine Trail Guidebook has dropped as a reason for joining WWTa. Word-of-mouth among the paddling community is the most mentioned way of learning about the Washington Water Trails Association.

On the subject of where members feel the WWTa budget should be spent, there are no surprises. Three new questions (advocacy, water trail maps and new sites on existing trails) were added to the survey that were not on the 2002 survey. These additions were probably the reason trail maintenance dropped in importance as members now know WWTa does much more than it used to. In addition, the website gained more favor, possibly as a result of the Internet's increased cultural importance over the last few years.

Clearly, taking the two subjects of "Why did you join?" and "Where should the money go?" members consider WWTa as having a wider influence in the paddling community.

The next section of this survey is comprised of new questions concerning WWTa. The results of these will be of interest to WWTa policy-makers, but otherwise are mostly baseline questions for future comparison.

The next section compares the results of this survey to other recently completed surveys. The 2007 survey of Washington State Registered Boaters shows that paddlers generally rate the value of law enforcement on the water about 22 percentage points lower than registered boaters. The demographics of the respondents on this survey were a very high match with the Minnesota Seakayaker survey done in 2000. Education, income and gender were almost exact matches. Paddlers have Doctorate and Masters Degrees 4 times higher than the national average and Bachelors Degrees at twice the national rate. Family incomes over \$100,000 occur at double the state and national rate of average income levels.

Wholehearted support of mandatory boater education for paddlers was less than 15%. Less experienced paddlers, those who feel more law

enforcement is needed on the water, and women are the most tolerant of this concept. Younger people, whitewater paddlers, and those who do not see the need for more law enforcement on the water are most opposed. There is probably a disconnect between paddlers and regulators as to what "education" means. Paddlers immediately think skills-based education while regulators think paper/pencil knowledge-based education on this issue.

Mandatory PFD usage was supported by 83.2% of the respondents. Canoeists were the least supportive on this issue and since their sample size in this survey was small, no real observations can be made until that sample size is increased.

Mandatory registration of paddle craft is wholeheartedly supported by only 3% of the survey respondents. Overall, 77% opposed registration. Over 90% of whitewater paddlers were opposed and even 60% of those who feel we need more law enforcement on the water oppose registration of paddle craft.

The appendix of this report contains the survey questions and results, with suggestions on how the survey might be changed for the better, if administered in the future. It also contains the names of the organizations contacted to participate in the survey

Throughout the full 77-page report are 60 evaluation charts and the individual listings of responses where "other" was a survey choice. The full report is available at http://www.wwta.org/about_us/2007_NW_Paddler_Survey.pdf