

## Management Problems in River Recreation: What River Floaters are Telling us

Knopf, R. C. (1982). Management problems in river recreation: what river floaters are telling us. *Naturalist*, 12-15.

River(s): 38 rivers  
Research Topic(s): Crowding, Perception of river flow, User experience, Level of environmental impact, Frameworks for managing recreation  
Type of Publication: Journal

### 1. Study Purpose

Determine the types of problems river floaters most commonly experience in an effort to assist river managers with improving the recreation experience of users.

### 2. Findings

- Response rate: 73% (average across rivers).
- Top 15 problems in order of highest to lowest:
  - litter, too few toilet facilities, too few drinking water sources, motorized watercraft, insect bites, insufficient information, obstructions, lower water levels, poor quality campsites, campsites poorly identified, seeing too many people, unskilled people, water pollution, occupied campsites, streambank erosion

#### 2.1. Social Problems

- Litter is the biggest problem
- Lack of skill by other boaters was a concern noted
- Motorized boating was considered a problem by over 1/3 of non-motorized floaters on the 12 rivers that allowed both uses.

#### 2.2. Support Facilities

- About one half of all floaters surveyed felt there were not enough toilets or drinking water sources.
- Campsites were hard to find, poor quality, and frequently occupied

#### 2.3. Natural Nuisances

- Biting insects were ranked 5<sup>th</sup>
- Also in the top 15 include obstructions (logs, limbs) and low water levels

## **2.4. Information Services**

- This category ranked 6<sup>th</sup> and is a combination of three related categories: things to do in the area, brochures of the area showing map, etc., and signs/info services at put-in points. The results were the same across the board.

## **2.5. Environmental Quality**

- Floaters appear to be aware of environmental degradation. One-fourth were concerned about water pollution and streambank erosion.

## **3. Key Discussion Points**

- The problems identified in this study are widespread across all 38 rivers.
- These problems are the most persistent as viewed by floaters.
- Common social problems were not high on the list as a nationwide problem: rowdyism, vandalism, excessive alcohol consumption, inconsiderateness, loud music, intragroup tensions, and shouting or yelling.
- All three campsite problem indicators were included in the top 15 problems. This may be indicative that campsite management is a larger issue that needs to be addressed.

## **4. Management Recommendations**

- Lack of toilet and water sources were identified as a problem, however the authors suggest better pre-trip planning may eliminate this problem in many areas. Floaters may not be aware of the location of these facilities and they are typically poorly marked from the river.
- Information sources, no matter what the source is, appears to be lacking across the board.
- Only two of the top 15 issues are generally beyond managerial control: biting insects and low water levels, however these problems can be revealed to users through information sources for pre-trip planning.
- The remaining items can all be addressed by managers.

## **5. Research Design**

Survey research.

### **5.1. Study Area**

38 rivers within the United States representing a wide range of river recreation opportunities.

### **5.2. Data Collection Instruments**

Mail questionnaire.

### **5.3. Study Population**

Floaters on 38 rivers in the United States during a three year period (1978-1980).

### **5.4. Sample Size**

350 floaters from each river were surveyed.

### **5.5. List of Variables and Operational Definitions**

#### **5.5.1. Problems on rivers**

- 52 problems (e.g., litter, bad weather, crowding, water pollution, etc.) that a floater could experience on a river trip were included in the mail questionnaire.
- Users were asked to rate the degree to which these problems were occurred using the following scale: not a problem – a slight problem – a moderate problem – a serious problem – a very serious problem.

### **6. Theories Used in Study**

N/A

### **7. Concerns or Limitations**

The measure used in this study is an average across all 38 rivers, which “does not capture the true diversity of different river environments” (p. 13).