

Rogue River User Study: Wild Rogue Planning and Policy Study

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River(s): Rogue River
Research Topic(s): Boater characteristics, Acceptable level of environmental impacts, Crowding, User group conflicts, User experience, Management standards
Type of Publication: Report

1. Study Purpose

“To assess current use patterns and user perceptions of river conditions and preferences for management” (p. 2) on the Wild section of the Rogue River.

2. Findings

Overall response rate: 87% (motorized boaters 89%, floaters (87%), anglers (81%), hikers (82%).

2.1. Use Patterns and Demographics

- Permit season primarily comprised of floaters (commercial and private) and jet boaters; fall season use is primarily private floaters and anglers
- Private users (for all user groups) tend to live closer to the river and visit more often.
- About 40% of users are first time visitors (mostly commercial floaters and jet boaters)
- All user groups participate in a variety of activities centered around the river
- River users are well educated and income levels are above the national average

2.2. Ecological Conditions

- Existing conditions are “viewed as generally acceptable by all groups” (p. 118)
- Users see campsite overuse as the biggest problem
- Private users (especially floaters and after permit season users) note more impacts than commercial users
- Compared to a survey of river users in 1977, users in 1991 do not see much change in ecological impacts (authors note this is more likely due to changes in user expectations and changes in population than on-site conditions)

2.3. Social Contacts and Conflicts

2.3.1. Perceived crowding

- Users rated crowding “substantially high” (p. 118)
- Rating differences among seasons showed 71% feeling crowded during permit season while 90% of fall season users felt crowded. Authors note this reflects the increased use levels in the fall “which can be three times greater” (p. 118).

2.3.2. Encounters

- Two-thirds of users were not bothered by other parties, while the remaining third did not like seeing other parties on the river. Crowding ratings are strongly correlated with these ratings, “suggesting there are two different types of visitors on the river – those who prefer solitude and those who are content with a higher contact social experience” (p. 119).
- Users have shifted expectations to a more crowded experience since the 1977 survey. Users tend to remain satisfied with their experience even when encounter expectations are exceeded – authors suggest product shift is occurring “to reflect a more dense and less remote setting” (p. 119).
- Hikers assessments run counter to other users. Most report fewer people than expected with 25% reporting any degree of crowding.

2.3.3. Conflicts

- A small percentage of sampled visitors reported rude behavior and conflicts. Problems noted include “poor river etiquette, noise, misuse of alcohol, campsite competition, and crowded conditions” (p. 119).
- Two user groups were most commonly noted as responsible for these behaviors: jet boaters and floaters.
- Nearly half (47%) of fall visitors reported interference in their trip from another party.

2.4. River Experiences

- Most users agreed the Rogue offers either a semi-wilderness or undeveloped recreation experience.
- “User descriptions have shifted significantly from 1977 surveys, both on the current assessment and what the river setting should be” (p. 120).
- A product shift has occurred toward a higher density experience.

2.5. Acceptability of Current Management Strategies

2.5.1. Appropriate uses of the wild section

- General agreement that floating and hiking are acceptable activities, but motorized boating is not (disagreement by motorized boaters on this point).

- Facility improvements should be limited to toilets at campsites. Other facilities viewed as unsuitable include gravel roads, tables, fire rings, and a take-out at Marial. Users were split over locator signs and the use of prescribed fire.

2.5.2. Use limits

- Users support existing use limits with generally no changes; private floaters are one exception wishing for a larger share permit allocation to private users.
- 83% of users denied a lottery permit were able to still float the Rogue that year.
- Users would rather reschedule or make a different type of trip on the Rogue than go to another river. (Authors note this survey does not include those users that were unable to get a permit and chose to go to another river.)

2.5.3. Achievement of management objectives

- Most users “believe the wild and scenic river values are being protected, free flowing conditions are being maintained, and river oriented recreation opportunities in a primitive setting are being provided” (p. 121).
- 55-60% of users feel water quality and the river’s natural, wild, and primitive condition is being maintained.
- Lowest rating was for goal of improving fish and wildlife habitat.

2.5.4. Existing river problems

- All nonmotorized users feel the number of jet boats, danger from jet boats and competition over campsites are problems or will soon be problems.
- Anglers most oppose jet boat use.
- Private floaters are most concerned about campsite competition.
- Six conditions approaching problem status: amount of litter, presence of human waste, not enough toilets, failure to use firepans, too many floaters, congestion at put-in/take-out sites.
- Although only noted by a small percentage of sampled visitors, user conflicts are occurring and should be addressed.

2.5.5. Potential solutions

- Majority of users would support the following regulation alternatives: limiting float party size to 15 people, more toilets at campsites, and increased enforcement of river regulations.
- Suggestions with some support: limits on jet boat use, extending permit season for nonmotorized use, scheduling nonmotorized launches during permit season, camping only at designated sites, campsite reservation system, and catch and release fishing.
- Extending the float permit season will be tough with slightly more than half of commercial users in support, and slightly more than half of private floaters opposed.

- There is agreement that all groups would oppose the following: further limits on floating or angling use, issuing fewer permits, issuing more permits, a take-out at Marial.

3. Key Discussion Points

- The wild section of the Rogue recreation experience is evolving. “When certain desired alternatives are unavailable from a favorite river like the Rogue, many users instead change their expectations and accept whatever experience they find on site.” (p. 126).
- Users generally agree the description of a wild river provided in the survey is being met.
- Most users felt in 1977 that ecological conditions were acceptable and 1991 users have a similar assessment. Authors note users’ experience definitions have shifted, which may hinder managers efforts in maintaining the resource.
- Limits on jet boat use was most important for all nonmotorized users, with 49% of motorized users also showing some support.
- There are two distinct user types on the Rogue, those not as bothered by encounters and those seeking more solitude and fewer encounters.

4. Management Recommendations

Regarding management plan revision, three key areas are discussed:

4.1. Management Goals and Objectives

- “managers must agree on a set of experience opportunities to be provided on the wild section” (p. 124)
- Utilize the river experience classification model found in “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) for River Management” in conjunction with the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) system for planning.
- ROS for River Management provides guidance for dealing with issues such as motorized use on wild and scenic rivers.
- Resource and social inventories are necessary for long-term planning.

4.2. Ecological Impacts

- Site impacts inventories and monitoring are needed to determine if ecological changes are occurring.
- Site inventories can help provide standards, which would provide managers with useful measures for judging program effectiveness.
- Minimizing evidence of human activity (e.g., reducing litter) “is likely to decrease perceptions of crowding” (p. 127).

4.3. Social Impacts

- “Multiple tolerance norms among two or more groups make setting standards for impacts on a single river a seemingly discriminatory, but necessary process” (p. 128).
- The type of encounter, where it occurs, may have more significance to the user than the encounter itself.
- Suggest different strategies to address crowding: scheduling launch times, designating campsites, campsite reservation system. These strategies may also alleviate conflicts.

5. Research Design

Survey research, random sample, stratified by weekday, weekend, holidays, time of day, and specific user type

5.1. Study Area

40 miles – confluence at Grave Creek to Watson Creek

5.2. Data Collection Instruments

On-site contact card and in-depth follow up mail survey (included in report) – users were contacted at Foster Bar and Gold Beach take outs as well as several trail locations for hikers. Separate surveys versions were created for each user group.

5.3. Study Population

In 1991 - Floaters and motorized boaters (late June to September 15), after permit season floaters (September 15 to mid-October), hikers (July 1 to mid-October), and anglers (September 15 to mid-November).

5.4. Sample Size

1,064 surveyed (648 floaters, 73 anglers, 268 motorized boaters, 75 hikers)

5.5. List of Variables and Operational Definitions

5.5.1. Use patterns and demographics

Frequency of use, years since first trip, total trips, use of Rogue over time, type of use, expectations of future visits, demographic characteristics. Additional variables are included for each user group:

- Floaters – first trip information, type of trip, put-in locations, launch time, group size, fishing as an activity, travel distance.
- Anglers – frequency of fishing, usual fishing spot, time of day, number of nights camping or lodging, group size, travel distance
- Motorized boaters – use of wild section, put-in location, fishing as an activity, overnight stay camping or lodging, travel distance.

- Hiker – section of trail hiked, group size, night on trail, season of use.

5.5.2. Ecological conditions

5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (p. 137) for the following items: excessive litter, trampled vegetation, excessive timber harvesting visible from river, attraction site overuse, campsite overuse.

5.5.3. Social contacts and conflicts

- Perceived crowding - used nine-point scale where users rated the experience from “not at all crowded” to “extremely crowded” (p. 135)
- Encounters – number of parties expected to see on trip and how that number compared to actual encounters (i.e., less than expected, as expected, more than expected, or no expectation).
- Reaction to unexpected encounters – were asked a series of questions based on response to expectation compared to actual encounters.
- Encounter norms – acceptable river encounters per day, acceptable jet boat encounters, acceptable amount of time in sight of others, acceptable number of stops due to another group, acceptable number of nights camping within sight/sound of another party.
- Coping strategies – series of questions asked to obtain preferred encounter levels.
- User conflicts – users were asked if rude behavior is a problem on the river, user conflicts are a problem, interference from others on the trip, what user group(s) caused the problem.

5.5.4. River experiences

Type of experience currently offered and desired experience with three choices: “wilderness,” semi-wilderness,” and “undeveloped recreation” (p. 44).

5.5.5. Acceptability of current management strategies

Questions were asked about appropriate activities and facilities for the wild section, the permit system, use limits and its effects, accomplishment of 1972 management objectives, problem identification, and strategies for improving river conditions.

6. Theories Used in Study

N/A