

Hells Canyon Visitor Profile and Recreation Use Study

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River(s): Snake (Hells Canyon)
Research Topic(s): Boater characteristics, Crowding, User preferences, User expectations, Recreation experience, Trip characteristics, Perceptions of management, User motivations
Type of Publication: Report

1. Study Purpose

To describe the recreationists on the Snake River in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area, how they use the river, their preferences for management, and their perceptions of the river.

2. Findings

Response rate: 77%

2.1. Visitor Profile

2.1.1. Demographics

- 33% from Idaho, 26% from Washington, 18% from Oregon
- 57% rafters, 41% power boaters
- 3/4 male, 1/4 female
- 66% were between 30-49 years old, 19% >50, 15% <30; this age breakdown carried through each user group (private power boater, commercial power boater, private floater, and commercial floater)
- Well educated

2.1.2. Frequency of river trips

- Private boaters have visited Hells Canyon more than commercial boaters
- Snake River is a favorite river among majority of visitors
- Only private floaters (60%) stated similar types of recreation experiences on other rivers (the main and lower Salmon and Colorado River)
- Power boaters and floaters almost exclusively stay within their craft type

- Over half spend two to four days on the river; commercial power boaters spent the least time, next longest was private power boaters, then private floaters, and lastly commercial floaters (3-6 days)
- Floaters travelled in larger groups than power boaters

2.1.3. Recreational activities

- Camping, viewing wildlife, and photography were most popular activities followed by fishing, swimming, and visiting cultural sites
- Floaters indicated most important activity was rafting; private power boaters said fishing, and commercial power boaters said power boating

2.1.4. Trip planning

- Most visitors relied on friends/relatives and prior experience when deciding to visit Hells Canyon
- Books and river guides were used more by floaters
- Most visitors planned well in advance (1 to 6 months); permit requirements during a regulated use season required floaters plan in advance

2.1.5. Reasons for taking a river trip

- Important reasons were: viewing scenery, boater rapids, excitement, getting away from the routine, being with friends
- Power boaters and floater generally agreed on the reasons for visiting
- Floaters differed with power boaters on 'peace and quiet,' generally floaters were more strongly favored this
- Private power boaters more strongly favored fishing as a reason than other groups

2.1.6. Visitor expectations

- 22% felt there were more floaters on the river than expected; 43% felt there were more power boaters than expected
- Power boaters and floaters each thought there were more of the other craft on the river than expected
- 2/3 of visitors reported not feeling crowded; 1/3 indicated some level of crowding identifying Rush Creek to Pittsburg Landing and the mouth of the Salmon as congested areas
 - | Reasons for feeling crowded included: campsites taken, too many people, too many power boaters
- 3/4 indicated no problems from other parties that affected their trip; 1/4 reported some type of problem (camp conflicts, rude behavior, power boaters)

2.1.7.Likes/dislikes and problems encountered

- Beaches for camping and cultural sites added to their experience
- Three most common dislikes: litter/junk along riverbank, low water levels, and fluctuating water levels
- Most visitors did not encounter problems on their trip; less than 25% of visitors indicated a minor or major problem with the following: power boats and power boat noise, rude boaters, and people at put-in/take-out

2.2. Management Guidelines

Boaters were asked to respond to a variety of questions regarding increased use in Hells Canyon in the future.

2.2.1.Guidelines highly favored

- Management actions to protect the natural resources and recreation experience
- Increase boater etiquette and understanding of management practices
- Equity in regulations across all user groups

2.2.2.Attitudes toward decreasing/increasing use

- Commercial floaters generally favored/accepted decreasing use; more private floaters than not would accept decreases; private power boaters do not favor; and commercial power boaters either have no opinion or would accept decreases
- Most visitors would accept floating increases (though 20% of private power boaters opposed)

2.2.3.Attitudes toward a shorter regulated use season

Generally visitors do not support a shorter season, though some would accept a shorter season

2.2.4.Attitudes toward assigned launch times and campsites

- Majority of commercial floaters, private floaters, and commercial power boaters support assigned launch times and support assigned campsites during high use season
- Over half of private power boaters would favor or accept assigning times and sites, but over one-third oppose

2.2.5.Attitudes towards briefings and regulations

- Most boaters were not opposed to attending a short briefing before launch (1/4 of private power boaters opposed)
- Floaters strongly favor requiring fire pans and carry out ashes
- Floaters would accept/favor carrying out human waste; 46% of private power boaters oppose this

2.2.6. Attitudes towards limiting motorized use to historic types

All but private power boaters strongly supported this; majority of private power boaters would accept this, but nearly 1/3 opposed

2.2.7. Attitudes towards noise limits and aircraft

- Most boaters would favor/accept "reasonable" noise limits
- Floaters and commercial power boaters favor aircraft flight and landing restrictions in the river corridor; private power boaters were divided

2.3. Facility Development

- The most needed facilities: human waste facilities, dumpsters, restrooms at campsites, camping facilities at put-ins/take-outs
- Boat ramps, parking, picnic tables, and information displays were adequate

3. Key Discussion Points

- Overcrowding is not perceived to be a problem.
- Perceptions were fairly similar across boater groups; generally all boaters "highly value the scenery, the excitement, the natural splendor, the historic and cultural attractions, and the escape from daily routine" (p. 45)

4. Management Recommendations

- "Strong support for policies to increase boaters' awareness of river etiquette and understanding of management practices." (p. 45)
- Moderate facility development is supported.
- Limiting power boats and noise was supported.
- Litter, water level fluctuation and noise are considered problems.
- New regulations should apply equally to all groups.
- Management policies that protect river qualities are strongly supported.

5. Research Design

Survey research, random sample, by subpopulation (private power boaters, commercial power boat passengers, private floaters, and commercial float passengers)

5.1. Study Area

Section of Snake River in Hells Canyon National Recreation Area

5.2. Data Collection Instruments

Mail questionnaire (included in report) sent to a random sample drawn from contact cards and self-issue river trip permits

5.3. Study Population

Floaters and power boaters in Hells Canyon National Recreation Area during April 15, 1988 to April 14, 1989

5.4. Sample Size

1,492 boaters surveyed

5.5. List of Variables and Operational Definitions

5.5.1. Visitor Profile

Age, education, frequency of river trips, recreational activities, information sources used, trip planning, motivations, expectations, visitor preferences, management issues.

5.5.2. Management Preferences

General management guidelines, attitudes toward use limits/expansion, regulation of use season, assigned launch times and campsites, regulations, craft limitations, noise limits, and aircraft.

5.5.3. Facility Development

Attitudes toward facility development, signs and displays, and other amenities.

6. Theories Used in Study

N/A