

Boating Access Study

Virginia's Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) owns or cooperatively manages 230+ boating access (BOA) facilities. The task of providing regular maintenance to these widely dispersed facilities is constrained by personnel and other resource limitations. These limitations, combined with an increasing popularity of water-based recreational activities and other uses of BOA sites, bring additional, but different, management challenges. As a result, the ability of VDGIF to fulfill maintenance needs of existing facilities, while also trying to accommodate the changing demands and expectations of users, is being stretched.



To address these challenges, VDGIF and the Virginia Tech (VT) Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation are collaborating on a 3-year study to examine BOA issues across the Commonwealth, including an assessment and characterization of current and potential future use of BOA sites, users' preferences and satisfaction with facilities, and opinions and attitudes about issues related to accessing the state's waters. The study is gathering information from a diversity of BOA users through three phases: (1) regional focus groups, (2) on-site face-to-face interviews, self-reply surveys, and observational data, and (3) statewide mail and/or web-based surveys.

Phase I: Regional Focus Groups

- Purpose:
 - to gather information that identifies and properly frames issues of concern to BOA users and to gain better understanding of the personal values associated with each of those issues, and
 - to facilitate development and improve the quality of questions used in subsequent survey efforts.
- Public focus group meetings were held in each of the 4 VDGIF Administrative Regions across the Commonwealth during Spring 2016 (8 meetings in total).
- Participants were invited from a diversity of known interest groups and BOA users who recreate on Virginia's waters.

Phase II: BOA On-Site Data Collection

- From 1 May 2016 to 30 April 2017, study personnel will be collecting information at 20 pre-selected BOA facilities across the Commonwealth, using the following approaches:
 - on-site, face-to-face interviews with randomly-selected BOA facility users,
 - a detailed, self-administered, self-reply survey provided to consenting participants of the face-to-face interview process, and
 - randomized, hourly, "snap shot" observations of the type and extent of existing activities and use of BOA facilities.
- The 20 study sites were selected to represent the diversity of features, conditions, uses, and water types currently exemplified at VDGIF facilities across the state.



Phase III: Statewide Survey

- Fall 2016, a comprehensive mixed methods (i.e., mail and on-line) survey will be administered statewide.
- BOA facility users will be selected randomly from among the pool of current Virginia boat titles and registrations, and valid hunting, trapping, and fishing license holders.
- Additional BOA users not among the above listed groups will be selected randomly from membership lists of boating and paddling organizations and clubs, and water-related conservation and advocacy groups.

Boating Access (BOA) Management Plan Development

- Upon completion of the three information-gathering phases, VT will synthesize and present findings to a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composed of VDGIF staff members who are familiar with and have expertise in the operation and management of BOA facilities.
- The TAC will construct a draft management plan based on the information obtained from all three phases of this study.
- The proposed management plan will set forth and prioritize broad management goals, strategies, and guidance policies for the management of VDGIF-owned and cooperatively managed BOA facilities.

Public Review & VDGIF Board Endorsement

- Virginia citizens will have opportunity to review and provide feedback on the draft BOA management plan (expected winter 2017 on the VDGIF website) before the draft is presented to the VDGIF Board of Game and Inland Fisheries (expected spring 2018) for consideration and, ultimately, adoption and implementation.

Do you have questions or suggestions regarding this study? Contact Dr. Faren R. Wolter, Research Associate and Project Manager, at fwolter@vt.edu or 540.231.0961; or John Kirk, Region 1 Boating Access Maintenance Supervisor, at john.kirk@dgif.virginia.gov or 804.754.6895.

