Enhancing Fishing Access Through a National Assessment of Recreational Boating Access

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This is a two-year project that has been funded under a multi-state conservation grant. SOBA is leading the study efforts, and partners in this study include: Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation (RBFF), National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA), Boat Owners Association of the United States (BoatU.S.), and Association of Marina Industries (AMI).

This study focuses on the intersection between boating and fishing activities. Recreational boating and fishing activities are intertwined and, consequently, as the number of participants in one activity falls, the other falls as well: conversely, as participation rises in one, it also rises in the other. This study is designed (1) to determine whether lack of boating access has contributed to decreases in participation and (2) to create assessment tools for boating access that states and regions can replicate to measure their boating access programs and needs.

The study began with a project kick-off meeting in January 2013. It will include a research review of similar efforts to assess boating access, identify obstacles and challenges, and develop a foundational context for assessment design. In addition to the research review, the study includes 4 focus groups with outdoor recreationists, 1 with boating professionals, and 1 boating industry/business.

The researchers will also complete a total of 3,300 telephone surveys nationwide: 3,000 surveys of boaters and anglers, 200 surveys of boating professionals, and 100 surveys of industry professionals and private business owners (e.g., marinas, docks, boating vendors). The surveys will assess values and priorities for boating access, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with boating facilities and infrastructure, and future needs.

Finally, the researchers will provide a comprehensive analysis of the telephone survey results, including regional breakdowns, extensive cross-tabulations, and nonparametric analyses. Year 1 will result in a report on the status of boating access nationwide, including an analysis of obstacles to boating access and their impacts on participation and recommendations about how to improve access in ways that might improve boating and fishing participation.

Based on the research, SOBA and its partners will work closely with boating industry partners and professionals to produce tools that states can utilize for conducting detailed statewide assessments in order to identify locally-specific approaches to improving public access. Year 2 will result in an assessment tool, adaptable at national, regional, and state levels, designed for repetition at periodic intervals to measure change, progress, and improvement in access and obstacles to access.