Beginning with the End in Mind: Implementation of Virginia’s Boating Access Site and Facility Management Plan

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries
States Organization for Boating Access
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Introduction

- DGIF is involved in roughly 230 boating access sites throughout Virginia
  - 87 Owned by DGIF
  - 143 managed through some form of cooperative agreement

- Rapid increase in popularity of new water-based recreational activities and other desired uses of boating access sites.

- These new activities brings different and additional challenges to DGIF when managing these sites.

- DGIF is having difficulty fulfilling maintenance needs of existing boating access sites while trying to accommodate the changing demands and expectations of diverse users.
To address these challenges, DGIF and VA Tech collaborated on a 3-year study.

Study was designed to:
- assess and characterize current and potential future use of BA sites
- users’ preferences and satisfaction with facilities, and opinions and attitudes about issues related to accessing the state’s waters
- to use this information to develop a guidance document for the DGIF boating access program moving forward
Study Overview

- Technical Advisory Committee was formed of DGIF staff
- Eight constituent focus group meetings held throughout the state
  - Consisted of power boaters and paddlers who were pleasure boaters, anglers, trappers, hunters, wildlife viewers, and livery guides
  - Used to educate about accepted uses and gain information from users
- One year of on-site data collection at a cross-section of DGIF boating access sites
  - On-site observations, face-to-face surveys, follow-up mail-in survey
- Mail Survey
  - Sent to cross section of paddlers, power boaters, hunters, and recreational anglers
Key Findings

- Overall positive response about current experience at DGIF facilities
- Many users did not understand funding mechanism and related restrictions and how DGIF manages the boating access sites
  - Indicates a need to clearly communicate and educate the public about current boating access and agency funding mechanisms, as well as any activity restrictions associated with federal funding
- Many users did not understand permissible and impermissible activities at DGIF managed boating access sites
  - Indicates a need to formalize agency policy clarifying acceptable uses and consistently enforce those uses on DGIF managed sites
Key Findings

- Many user groups and users would like to volunteer or partner to help achieve DGIF management goals at boating access sites
  - There is a need for additional outreach with potential partners

- 93% of users who were using the landing for permissible activities are already paying by existing mechanisms (hunting license, fishing license, boat registration)
  - Indicates a need to evaluate existing funding before developing proposed new alternative funding mechanisms
  - Indicates a need to develop targeted messaging and stakeholder engagement strategies to build support for boating access maintenance and facilities and/or alternative funding
Beginning with the End in Mind

- Finalized study in December 2018
- DGIF Board endorsed study May 2019
- Timeline established July 2019
- Adhoc Implementation Committee established August 2019
- Plan is to implement the first goals and strategies in September/October 2019
Beginning with the End in Mind: 
DGIF BA Site & Facility Management Goals and Strategies 

Goal 1: Conduct a Comprehensive Boating Access Site and Facility Inventory Assessment

- construct a comprehensive, up-to-date database that identifies and describes all existing DGIF wholly owned and cooperatively managed sites and facilities for which it has management responsibility.
- conduct a comprehensive assessment of future demands and needs for BA sites and facilities with an eye toward adopting a forward-looking view about BA site and facility management that shifts operational policy from opportunistic and/or reactive to transparent and strategic-based.
- develop and adopt region-specific boating access site and facility management plans, based on the types of water bodies to which access is provided and in response to the specific boating access demands confronted that are unique to each region.
Beginning with the End in Mind:
DGIF BA Site & Facility Management Goals and Strategies

Goal 2: Clarify DGIF’s Boating Access Site and Facilities Use and Activity Policies

- Define and clarify what constitutes allowable activities at and acceptable use of each boating access site in the DGIF boating access inventory.
- Formulate and adopt a legally binding and inclusive definition to resolve the current uncertainty about what constitutes a “boat,” “vessel,” “watercraft,” or other “personal conveyance device” upon the waters of the Commonwealth.
- Enforce the rules and regulations, as adopted, consistently at all BA sites.
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**Goal 3: Establish Formal Boating Access Site and Facilities Maintenance Policies and Operational Protocols**

- Formalize a policy that defines and prioritizes maintenance responsibilities and needs at DGIF BA sites and facilities, taking into consideration issues relating to safety, water accessibility needs, site aesthetics, budget considerations, ownership/partnership agreements, and a site’s physical and social limitations.
- develop and implement, within each administrative region, a formal process for evaluating and prioritizing needs and requests for BA site and facilities improvement and/or expansion, using clear and relevant criteria.
- complete an analysis of the current administration of funds used to support the Boating Access Program (BAP), and identify and adopt actions that maximize cost-effective and fiscally responsible use of available funds.
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DGIF BA Site & Facility Management Goals and Strategies

**Goal 4: Create and Formalize A Legally Sound and Fiscally Responsible Boating Access Site and Facility Acquisition and Closure Policy**

- Complete an examination of all property acquisitions and agreements into which DGIF has entered that provide BA access and evaluate whether and how those actions fulfill the agency’s mission of providing safe public boating access in fiscally responsible and strategically meaningful ways.
- Conduct a strategic evaluation of BA needs, by region and by water type, to identify and prioritize types and locations of critical unmet access need that will guide future acquisitions efforts.
- Examine and, where necessary, revise and enhance the Tiered Review Selection Protocol, then formally adopt this tool as the primary decision-making mechanism for use when evaluating potential sites for acquisition or entering into new collaborative boating access ventures.
- Develop and implement a formal policy on BA site closure and/or retirement.
Goal 5: Improve Awareness and Understanding of DGIF’s Boating Access Program and Pertinent Laws, Regulations, and Restrictions

- Create a professional development and communication plan that informs and clarifies understanding of the Boating Access Program among agency personnel.
- Develop and implement a targeted education outreach initiative for water-based recreational users about the DGIF Boating Access Program.
- Revise and disseminate an accurate, up-to-date information database on the inventory of DGIF maintained BA sites across the Commonwealth.
- Assure that agency staff convey a uniform and consistent presentation of agency policy on allowable uses and acceptable activities at BA sites.
Beginning with the End in Mind: Timeline

Boating Access Plan Implementation Timeline

- Comprehensive Data Base: 5 years
- Assessment of Future Demands: 5 years
- Region Specific Management Plan: 10 years
- Define Allowable Use: 5 years
- Define Boat: 2 years
- Consistently Enforce Rules and Regulations: 10 years
- Plan to Prioritize Site Maintenance Responsibilities: 10 years
- Plan to Evaluate and Prioritize Improvements and Expansions: 2 years
- Evaluate Funds and Maximize Cost Efficiencies: 2 years
- Examine Access Sites Agreements and Make sure meet mission: 2 years
- Evaluate BA Sites by Region and Water type to identify need: 5 years
- Update Tier Review Selection process: 2 years
- Update and Implement site closure policy: 2 years
- Implement Internal Communication: 2 years
- Target outreach with users: 2 years
- Update Information Database on Landings: 3 years
- Develop Consistent Agency Outreach on BA Uses: 10 years
Helpful Tips For Planning a Study

- Keep Mission in Mind: Provide Safe Public Boating Access
- Remember Boating Access crosses all agency divisions
- Establish good research partners
- Watch out for scope creep
- Study is time consuming, so plan accordingly
- Find similar studies in your agency and use staff from those studies as support for your study
- Study process is fluid, so make changes where needed
- Study captured great info that otherwise would not be possible
- Provides a baseline for informed decision-making for the future
Conclusion

**Key take home points**
- Met and heard from a diverse group of users
- Proposed approach will maximize our return on investment, ensuring that we are maintaining boating access infrastructure where it’s needed, to provide services needed, in the most efficient means practical
- 10-year document; interim evaluations will occur, with overall review and update in 2029

**Moving Forward**
- Working on implementing plan (through existing Land and Facilities Science Team and adhoc committee)
- Already have many of the documents and policies
  - Many just need to be updated
  - All need to be compiled in commonly accessible location
- Work with Outreach to craft appropriate internal and external messages about Boating Access in Virginia

**Your Study**
- I want you to be able to take from what I learned and implement a successful study
Where can you view DGIF’s Plan?

DGIF Boating Page at:

https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/boating/

Contact me at john.kirk@dgif.virginia.gov
Questions?