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## **Visitor Access to Non Motorized Boating Areas**

Participation in non-motorized boating activities, such as canoeing and kayaking, has constantly increased over the last three decades. Due, in part, to increased participation in these activities by visitors, agencies and organizations responsible for these areas are finding it increasingly difficult to provide quality tourism experiences. This paper explores one area of concern, non-motorized boat access points. The authors investigate and discuss different access point development, management, funding options, and stakeholder involvement. Impacts that can occur to the natural environment without formal access points are also addressed.

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*Key words:* Non Motorized Boating, Ecotourism, Environmental Impacts, Stakeholders

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## **Biography**

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Nature based tourism activities such as non-motorized boating (canoeing, kayaking, rafting) have been increasing in popularity over the last three decades (Eagles, 2001). In 2004, more than 41 million Americans participated in canoeing and kayaking alone (Cordell, Green, Betz, Fly, & Stephens, 2004). Non-motorized boating was one of the top six outdoor recreation activities along with driving for pleasure, swimming, picnicking, golf and rowing that increased in participation for American adults from 1994 to 2003 (RoperASW 2004). This rise in non-motorized boating activities can be attributed in part to outdoor adventure films, new boating design materials, new paddling techniques, demographic changes among participants, and the increased desire of tourists to view nature (Boyd, 1998; Manning, Valliere, Wang & Jacobi, 1999). With this increase in non-motorized boating activities, there is a need to investigate, understand, and address management issues associated with providing these types of experiences to visitors. This paper explores one main area of concern, access points. Specific issues that are addressed include environmental impacts, development options, management of access points and funding.

Non-motorized boating often takes place on public land or in public waters. In addition, to the rise in popularity of non-motorized boating activities, there has been an increase in the use of public lands and water resources for such activities. Due in part to increased use of these public areas, federal, state, and local agencies and organizations are finding it increasingly difficult to provide quality tourism experiences for visitors (Brissette, Hass, Wells & Benson, 2000). These agencies and organizations are simultaneously trying to sustain and manage natural resources, on which nature based tourism depends while attempting to provide access to these natural areas.

Therefore, a primary area of concern with regards to non-motorized boating is the access points. Access points are trails or walkways leading to rivers that allow boaters to either place their boats into the water or take their boats out of the water. The access points are the areas that are normally the most impacted by non-motorized boating activities. Formal access areas may be parking areas with dirt trails, paved launch ramps, or roadside-to-the-river trails. Ferguson (2002) noted that without adequate formal river access areas, non-motorized boaters would use whatever routes are convenient to gain access to the water.

In many cases where there is not adequate access the rivers, boaters hike down steep slopes, trespass through private property, and/or damage the soil and vegetation. For example, A. Somers (personal communication, 2004) indicated that boaters damage vegetation and can over time create trails that expose the soil to erosion. Soil erosion will vary among boaters depending on their shoe type, walking style, the weight of their boat, and the type of soil located in the access area. In addition, waterlogged soils such as those found around access points are more susceptible to damage than other types of soil (Buckley, 2001). The degree of vegetation impacts by non-motorized boaters depends on the pressure applied, how many times a plant is stepped on, and the type of plant species. With this understanding, it can be concluded that to reduce environmental impacts by visitors' individuals who provide formal access points need to take environmental impacts into consideration when developing and managing access areas. Prior to establishing access points it is necessary to identify and understand the stakeholders' interests. A stakeholder is defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organizations objectives" (Freeman, 1984 p. 46). Stakeholder groups that should be involved in the process include the boaters, outfitters, governmental agencies, landowners, other users of the river, and local residents. It is vital that these groups are

identified and their interests and opinions understood before any type of management plan is implemented.

Factors including development and management strategies (i.e. types of access points desired by visitors, facilities, and services) and long term funding options should be considered when proving non-motorized boating access. When considering these factors the question arises, who should play a role in developing and managing access points and what types of access facilities are needed for the visitor to have a quality tourism experience?

As previously indicated, the majority of established access areas are on federal, state, or county owned properties. Typically these government agencies are responsible for maintaining and patrolling access areas. Managers and researchers should consult visitors and stakeholders about their needs so that effective management strategies can be implemented. Management strategies may include types of facilities provided, maintenance of the access areas, environmental impacts of visitor use and long term funding for maintenance of areas.

Funding for access points is often difficult to generate and is usually less than the funds needed to manage recreation sites. Generating revenue from non-motorized boating activities can come in many forms including user fees, boater registration, grants, and permits. Braswell (2005) notes that a combination of funding strategies should be used for the development and long-term management of access points.

In addition, there is a need to develop methods and techniques to further understand the stakeholder's role in the development and long-term management of non-motorized access points. Educating stakeholders about an array of funding options will assist in generating support for the long term management of non-motorized boating access points. This will in turn help to develop a sustainable tourism market for non-motorized boating activities.

As the popularity of non-motorized boating increases so does the need to investigate and understand the specific issues that are related to this activity. There is a need to address the management of non-motorized boating and the areas in which the activity takes place. Non-motorized boating should be addressed, not just as a recreational activity, but also as an ecotourism attraction. As more areas seek to promote similar activities as tourist attractions, management and marketing plans need to consider the protection of natural resources so the tourists' experience is positive. The only way that this can be accomplished is to begin studying the issues specific to non-motorized boating as they relate to sustainable tourism and resource management (see table 1).

Table 1. Research Initiatives Related to Non-Motorized Boating

Access Management	Resource
Location of Access Points	Carrying Capacity
Responsibility of Management	Limits of Acceptable Change
Types of Management	Quality Control
Access Funding	Stakeholders
Federal Funding	Identification
State/ Local Funding	Inclusion
Non-profit Funding	Support
Impact Assessment	Visitor Experience
Economic Impact	Conflict with other users
Environmental Impact	Satisfaction
Social Impact	Education

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