

YOUR LAKES, YOUR VIEWS

Muskoka and Georgian Bay Regions Lake Activity Survey 2021



Safe Quiet Lakes

Research commissioned by Safe Quiet Lakes

Conducted by ERIN Research Inc.

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HIGHLIGHTS

Responses to the 2021 survey, *Your Lakes, Your Views* came mainly from the Muskoka and Georgian Bay regions and also drew from Haliburton, Eastern Ontario and beyond.

- **5,951** respondents participated in the 2021 survey, an 81% increase over 2017.
- **1,100** of these participants came from the Georgian Bay region, which participated in the survey for the first time.
- **130 plus** lakes and rivers are represented in the Muskoka and Georgian Bay Regions and beyond.
- **6,000 plus** written comments: the volume and content of these reveal that people care deeply about the lakes and are passionate about their views on how they should be shared.
- **99%** of respondents have one or more boats of some kind; 91% have one or more power boats and 95% have one or more non-powered craft.
- **70%** have between 3 and 8 boats. Overall, there is an average of 2.3 power boats and 4.2 non-powered boats per family.

OVERALL PERCEPTION OF THE LAKE EXPERIENCE

- **Two-thirds or more** perceive that there is more boat traffic, more boat noise, and a greater impact of boat wakes today than five years ago.
- **44%** rate their experience of the lake as “close to ideal”. Perceptions of safety, noise and boat traffic all contribute to the quality of the lake experience.
- **34%** rate their lake as “Very safe,” and this group gives **an average** rating of **9.3 out of 10** for the overall quality of their lake experience. The **2%** who consider their lake “Not at all safe” rate overall quality at just **3.4 out of 10**.
- **7%** consider their area to be “Very quiet” in terms of boat traffic and rate the **overall quality of their lake experience at 9.4 out of 10**. The 17% who consider their area of the lake to be “Very busy” rate the **overall quality of their experience at 6.5 out of 10**.
- As a result of the increases in boat traffic, noise and wakes, there is a small but statistically significant decline in the overall quality of experience rating for the big three Muskoka lakes. This trend is not evident beyond the three larger Muskoka lakes, but it will be of concern to all in the survey area.



TOP PLEASURES

Survey respondents love their lakes and express their feelings clearly and often passionately in their comments.

"The natural beauty and the respect our area has for the environment. It is an oasis in a turbulent world!"

"We like the range of activities that multiple generations enjoy. Canoes in the early morning, waterskiing before lunch, paddle boarding in the afternoon, swimming all day."

"I love everything about being at the cottage, early mornings, sunrises, full moons, chipmunks, herons, kingfishers, friendly, helpful neighbours. Family and friends visiting."

"We love all of the activities, but try to minimize our impact on others at all times. The lake is why we are here. We must protect it and all that lives in, on and near it."

- **Three** activities hold almost universal appeal. Interestingly, none of these activities involves a boat. Each group below gave the activity the very high importance rating of 4 or 5 out of 5.
 - **95%** rated relaxing on the dock or near the water as a top pleasure.
 - **96%** rated swimming as a top pleasure.
 - **92%** rated enjoying nature on the lake or by the shore as a top pleasure.
- All other major lake activities are based around a boat of some kind.
 - The paddling, canoeing, kayaking, rowing, paddleboarding community compose the largest group of boaters: **86%** rated these activities as a core pleasure.
 - **68%** rated cruising as a core pleasure.
 - **57%** rated visiting friends and neighbours by boat as important.
 - **54%** rated transportation/getting things from A to B as important.
- **Substantial minorities** are also attracted to fishing, towing sports and recreation such as wakeboarding and tubing, and the wind-based sports such as sailing and windsurfing.



TOP CONCERNS

Top problems associated with unsafe and inconsiderate boating

- Boat noise, especially from personal watercraft and sound systems
- Boat wakes
- Boats operated at high speeds, especially when close to shore.

Top contributors to unwanted noise

- 57% view personal watercraft as contributing to unwanted noise.
- 42% sound systems on boats
- 42% from modern power boats
- 35% from towing sports such as wakeboarding, water skiing, tubing.

Non-boating sources such as fireworks and construction, which are outside the mission of Safe Quiet Lakes, are not major concerns to most people, but are significant irritants to some.

KEY SOLUTIONS

- **90%** of respondents, including 89% of power boat owners, agree that motorboat operators have more responsibility to ensure the safe coexistence of activities on the lake.

Education and communications

- **78%** of all respondents support increased education and communication about responsible boating. This proposal receives the strongest support of all the proposed actions included in the survey. Support is up by more than 15 percentage points from 2013.

A majority supports these specific actions

- **71%** support no wake zones to protect people and wildlife in sensitive areas.
- **67%** support frequent and consistent enforcement of laws about above-water exhausts.
- **70%** support stronger enforcement of boating while under the influence
- **67%** support establishing decibel limits on noise made by boats.



Regulation and enforcement

The 2021 data indicate a markedly greater acceptance of solutions that involve regulation and enforcement. The greater acceptance seems to have evolved in these ways:

- Increased boat traffic leads to a greater perceived need for authorities to monitor it.
- Increased paddling activity – which is due largely to people who also have motor boats – leads to more people feeling vulnerable on the water, and so a greater need for clearer rules and the presence of authorities.
- Bigger and faster boats in a limited space create more problems with wakes and congestion and so create a demand for regulation and enforcement; (a space that can safely accommodate a dozen 9hp tin boats operating at full speed cannot accommodate the same number of 24 foot wakeboats.)
- Media attention to high-profile and other tragic accidents puts a spotlight on risk, regulation and enforcement.

The regulation and enforcement issue was addressed using positive statements (e.g., “Increase patrolling of the lakes...”, and negative statements, e.g., “There is no need for additional enforcement”). In both instances the trend from 2013 to the present favours greater enforcement:

- **57%** support increased patrolling of the lakes today, up from **41%** in 2013.
- **18%** say there is no need for additional enforcement measures today, down from **31%** in 2013.

(Note: These two points apply to the three larger Muskoka lakes, where accurate trend data are available.)



EIGHT RECOMMENDATIONS

Eight major recommendations for the lake community emerge from the survey findings and the specific actions rated by participants.

- 1. Provide more education about responsible and respectful boating**
- 2. Ensure greater protection of shorelines and people from wakes**
- 3. Develop limits on noise levels on the lakes**
- 4. Enforce existing laws/regulations and increase OPP visibility**
- 5. Enhance laws/regulations especially re boat wakes, speed and noise**
- 6. Celebrate and build on the approaches of successful lakes, bays and rivers that share the space respectfully**
- 7. Continue to conduct comprehensive surveys of lake activity**
- 8. Monitor emerging issues and ideas raised in participant comments** including float planes, convoys and other groups of boats, use of PFDs, accidents, renters, day visitors and their boat use, the need for a PCOC practical on-the-water test, possible activity zoning options and alternative on-the-water patrolling. These matters should be monitored and explored in greater depth by multi-stakeholder groups in future years.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORWARD COURSE

The forward course will require close cooperation among lake associations, government jurisdictions, elected representatives, law enforcement agencies, emergency response organizations, boating associations, watersports organizations, marinas, resorts, manufacturers of watercraft, environmental groups, trade associations, and other interested stakeholders.

Call to Action: A summit meeting of these stakeholders held as soon as possible would lay the foundation for processing and acting on these recommendations in a co-operative and co-ordinated manner. The challenge is enormous and complex, but the treasure of the lakes is worth every effort.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The waters of the Muskoka and Georgian Bay regions are living testaments to our natural heritage as Canadians. The pandemic experience has been another reminder of the value of our connection to these treasured lakes and rivers.

Safe Quiet Lakes is a volunteer community organization that works to ensure that our lakes and rivers are as safe and quiet as cottagers and residents wish them to be.

As part of its mission **to ensure the sustainable enjoyment of a treasured shared resource**, Safe Quiet Lakes commissioned research in cooperation with more than 50 lake and resident associations to understand the spectrum and intensity of views on lake activities.

The 2021 survey now includes for the first time the views of cottagers and residents of the eastern and northern shore of the Georgian Bay region. This is the third broad survey undertaken by Safe Quiet Lakes and it is one of the largest lake life and boating surveys in North America.

The research updates results from earlier research and explores new themes arising from discussions with stakeholders.

This study will be used to help educate and inform lake communities and stakeholders about the perspectives and ideas of lake users, and will inform the priorities and plans of Safe Quiet Lakes and its partners.

The 2013 and 2017 research projects were designed, conducted and analyzed by ERIN Research Inc. in consultation with Safe Quiet Lakes as well as lake and resident associations in the region of Muskoka.

The 2021 research was conducted by ERIN Research Inc in conjunction with the Marketing Research and Analysis program of Algonquin College, with the support of Safe Quiet Lakes.

The full 2021 survey report is available on the Safe Quiet Lakes website, www.safequiet.ca.



1.2 METHOD

Design and fielding

The survey was developed by ERIN Research Inc. and Safe Quiet Lakes with input from the Marketing Research and Analysis program of Algonquin College, and in collaboration with numerous partner lake associations in the Muskoka and Georgian Bay regions. The 2021 survey contains core questions from the 2013 and 2017 surveys as well as new material to reflect changing input from lake stakeholders.

The survey was implemented online by Algonquin College. Most respondents took 10-15 minutes to complete it.

The primary mode of contact was via Lake associations, who emailed their members a link to the survey on or about May 20, 2021. Two reminders were sent in the following weeks.

Participation was also encouraged by communication on social media, public announcements, volunteer presence and signage at community events and in local media. These initiatives directed participants to a survey link on the Safe Quiet Lakes website.

In most instances, the email lists that associations maintain have contact information for only one or two family members. In order to gain as broad and diverse participation as possible, the introductory email and reminders encouraged recipients to share the survey link with other family members, neighbours, and friends.

The survey was open from May 20 through July 12, 2021.

Response

The 2021 survey attracted more lake association partners than in previous years, partly because of interest in the results of the 2013 and 2017 surveys and the ongoing education and advocacy activities of Safe Quiet Lakes. The Georgian Bay Association joined the survey in 2021 and this geographic expansion increased the response by more than 1,000 individuals. In addition there were more than 600 responses from beyond the Muskoka and Georgian Bay regions, most from Ontario.

In all the survey received 5,951 completed responses, an increase of 81% over 2017.

In addition to the numerical data, respondents wrote more than 6,000 comments, many of them detailed. As the volume and content of the comments reveal, people care passionately about the lakes and welcome the opportunity to voice their opinions and share their ideas.

Respondents included relatively high proportions of older persons and of males, reflecting the composition of the lake association email lists. Data were therefore weighted by age and gender to make results representative of the population as a whole.



Weighting is a standard procedure in survey research. Consider a survey with 30 respondents, 10 of whom are women and 20 men. The real population has equal numbers of women and men, so a representative sample should have 15 of each. The weights that apply in this example are 1.5 for women (1.5 times the original 10 women gives 15) and 0.75 for men (.75 times the original 20 men gives 15). Weighting preserves the initial number of respondents (15 plus 15 is 30 in this example). In *Your Lakes, Your Views*, 12 weights were calculated: 6 age groups for each of women and men.

Verbatim comments

The verbatim comments included in the report were selected to represent the diversity and tone of comments provided by respondents. They do not necessarily reflect the number of comments on any theme. For example, there were more than 50 calls for bans on wakeboats, but only two have been included. In contrast, there were just two comments about the risk swimmers create for themselves by swimming in inappropriate areas, and one is included. The verbatims and the quantitative data together tell the story of the lakes.

Reporting format

Some survey questions use 5-point scales, e.g., “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”. When reporting average agreement, the more intuitive and reader-friendly 10-point format is used. The scales correspond as shown below¹:

<i>Question on the survey:</i>	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
The mix of boaters and activities on my lake co-exist very well	1	2	3	4	5	
<i>0 - 10 scale used for reporting the average result:</i>	0	2.5	5.0	7.5	10.0	
(see Figure 4 for an example)						

Content

Most of this report presents results for all survey respondents. The two exceptions are:

- Chapter 7 addresses the issue of convoys of cruisers on Georgian Bay; and,
- Chapter 5 and several other short sections describe trend data across the three surveys – 2013, 2017 and 2021. The larger geographic area included in each survey could have an impact on results, so analysis of trends is restricted to the three larger Muskoka Lakes (Joseph, Rosseau and Muskoka) and their connecting waterways. The survey method for these lakes was consistent across surveys and ensures an apples-to-apples comparison.

¹ The 0 to 10 scale provides the same information as the 5-point scale but makes it easier to understand the result. An average score of 7.0 out of 10 has clear meaning for most people, while the corresponding average of 3.8 out of 5 may not.



1.3 RESPONSE BY REGION

The 2021 survey encompasses the Muskoka region, Parry Sound, the eastern and northern shore of Georgian Bay, and a number of other lakes particularly in Eastern Ontario. Table 1 shows the unweighted returns for each region. For all tables and charts that follow, results are weighted on the basis of age and gender to reflect the Ontario population.

Table 1. Survey response by region

Region	Number	Percent
Georgian Bay area	1,111	19
Lake Muskoka, Lake Rosseau, Lake Joseph, Little Lake Joseph	1,772	30
Lake of Bays	598	10
Other lakes and rivers in Muskoka and nearby regions	1,787	30
Other lakes and rivers in Ontario	662	11
Lakes and rivers in other Provinces, Territories or States	21	<1
Total	5,951	100



1.4 RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The “typical” respondent owns a cottage, has been coming to Muskoka or Georgian Bay for more than 20 years, is located on open water rather than a river, and shares their space with children, teens or young adults. Despite the 71% increase in overall response from 2017, the respondent characteristics shown in Table 2 remain almost unchanged from 2013 and 2017.

Table 2. Respondent characteristics

Characteristic	% of respondents
Are you/your family currently...	
Owners of a cottage or residence near a lake	96
Renters of a cottage or residence near a lake	1
Guests in a cottage or residence near a lake	2
Campground users	<1
Guests at a resort, hotel, motel, B&B, etc. near a lake	<1
Day boaters on the lake	1
Are you located on...	
Open water	77
A channel, river or other narrow water	23
How many years have you been vacationing or living in the region?	
Less than 5 years	5
5 to 10 years	8
11 to 20 years	14
More than 20 years	73
Are there children or young adults sharing the space on the lake with you on a regular basis?	
Age 5 and under	34
6 to 11	33
12 to 17	31
18 to 24	32
There are no children in our household	25
Base number of respondents	5,951



2. JOYS OF THE LAKES

Survey respondents love their lakes, and express their feelings clearly.

"The natural beauty and the respect our area has for the environment. It is an oasis in a turbulent world!"

"We like the range of activities that multiple generations enjoy. Canoes in the early morning, waterskiing before lunch, paddle boarding in the afternoon, swimming all day."

"I love everything about being at the cottage, early mornings, sunrises, full moons, chipmunks, herons, kingfishers, friendly, helpful neighbours. Family and friends visiting."

"Being out on the water, all watersports, Relaxing on my dock watching boats go by and watching the impact of the early morning sun with the shadows on the far shore."

"I have been on our lake my entire life. I love it all. I love the birds and animals, the sound of the water, the stormy weather. "

"Watching loons, otters and beavers. ducks, buffleheads and mergansers in the Spring and Autumn."

"A respectful sharing of the water between people on shore and those on the water. We love all of the activities, but try to minimize our impact on others at all times. The lake is why we are here. We must protect it and all that lives in, on and near it."

"Watching young people enjoying their time on or in the water getting out on the water be it on a SeaDoo, boat, kayak, paddleboard or canoe."

"Boating: Wakeboarding, slalom skiing, wake surfing, wake skating, tubing... it's an amazing healthy sport on the water. It increases athleticism and joy for everyone involved."

"I love our little lake and community. Sitting on the dock in the peace of the morning and sunset. To swim and paddle board, with a daily water ski. Watching people having a blast doing water sports of their choice while being surrounded by the beauties of nature."

"Boating destinations such as restaurants, sight seeing."

"The beautiful forest and nature around us in the Muskoka region. The peace and the quiet that it can provide. And most importantly the wildlife that we get to see."

"A strong community where both education and respect for one another is strong and therefore visual pollution of signage and aggressive enforcement of regulations is not required. A balance of peaceful enjoyment and recognition that boats are a primary vehicle and tool for many water access properties."



2.1 LAKE ACTIVITIES

Three activities hold almost universal appeal. Interestingly, none of these activities – relaxing by the water, swimming, and enjoying nature by the shore – involves a boat.

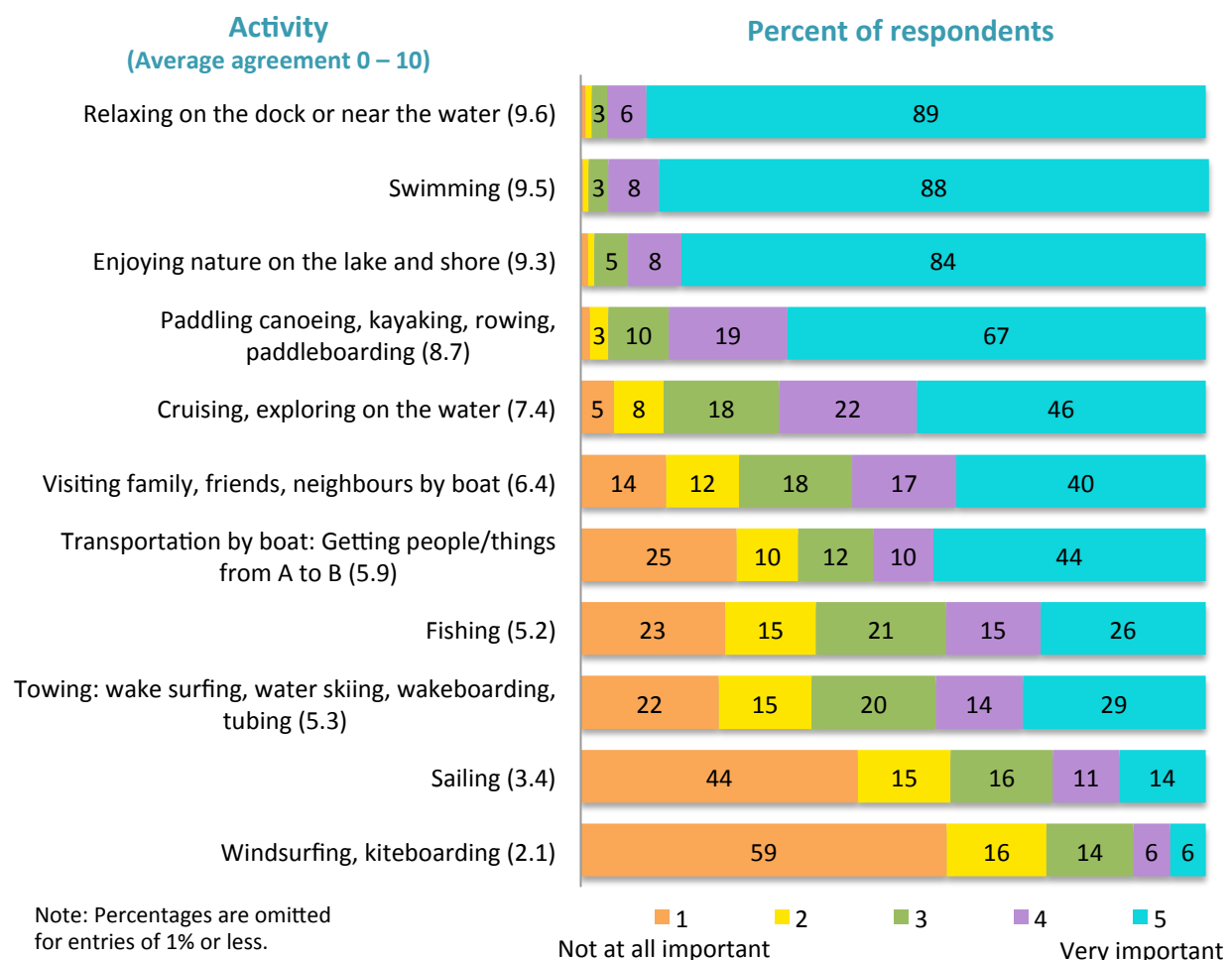
All other major lake activities are based around a boat of some kind. The several communities that co-exist on the lakes can be defined by their choice of boats. The paddling community (paddling, canoeing, kayaking, rowing and paddleboarding) compose the largest group of boaters: 86% rated these as 4 or 5 out of 5 in importance.

A majority of respondents rated cruising, visiting friends, and transportation as important.

Substantial minorities are attracted to fishing, towing sports and recreation such as wakeboarding and tubing, and the wind-based sports such as sailing and windsurfing.

These communities share the same water, and of course many people belong to several communities at the same time. But when tensions arise on the water, the feelings about the boats and activities illustrated in Figure 1 are generally front and centre.

Figure 1. How important are these activities to you and your family?





2.2 BOAT OWNERSHIP AND USES

Boat ownership is almost universal among survey respondents, with 99% owning one or more boats:

- 91% have one or more power boats.
- 95% have one or more non-powered boats.

The types of boats that people use depend somewhat on their location. For example, power boats of all sizes are more common on Georgian Bay, where a larger proportion of cottages are water access.

The types of boats in use have changed since 2013. The most pronounced trend is an increase in the use of kayaks and paddleboards. Figure 15 on page 36 shows trends in boat use for the three larger Muskoka lakes, where the survey method has been consistent over the three iterations of the research, making an accurate comparison possible. Not only are there more paddling boats on the water, but more people find that paddling is a central activity. The proportion who rate paddling as “Very important” increased from 50% in 2013 to 68% in 2021 on the three larger Muskoka lakes.

The proportion of people who use power boats has not changed materially, remaining at more than 90%, so the new paddling enthusiasts are mainly people who also have power boats and enjoy the activities that they offer. But paddling brings a unique appreciation of risk and vulnerability, and the greater number of paddlers may contribute to other trends that are apparent in 2021, including a slightly decreased sense of safety on the larger lakes and a greater openness to regulation and enforcement measures that were less supported in the past.

Figure 2. What boats will your family use this year?

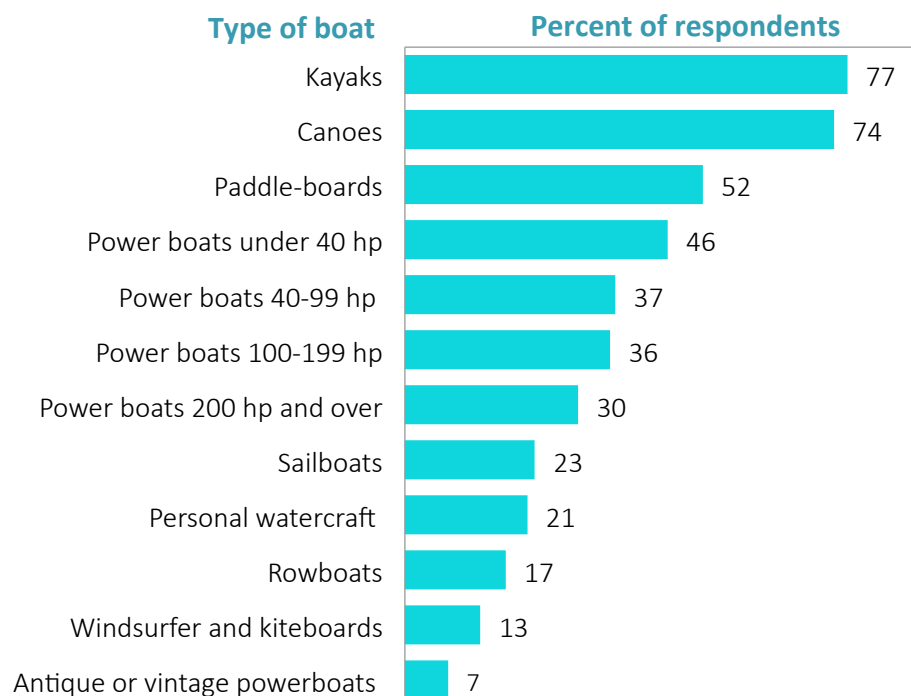
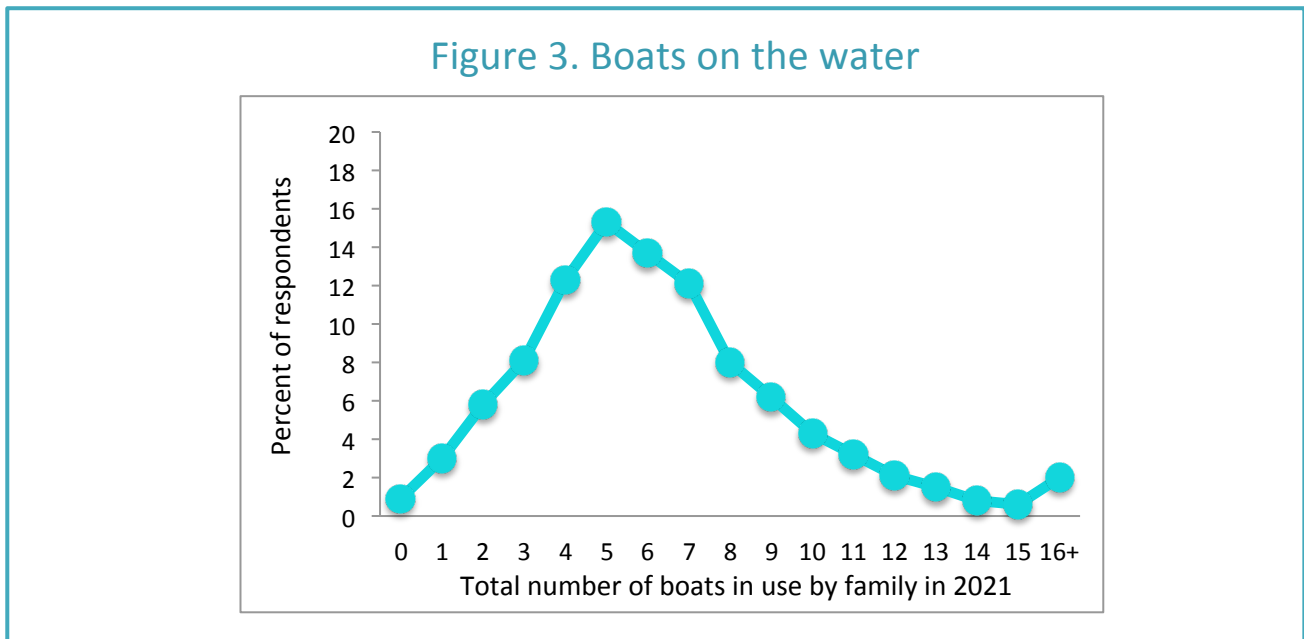




Figure 3 shows that most respondents have between four and eight boats. Overall, there is an average of 2.3 power boats and 4.2 non-powered boats per family.

The two percent of respondents with more than 15 boats include some individual respondents, but also camps, marinas and other businesses.





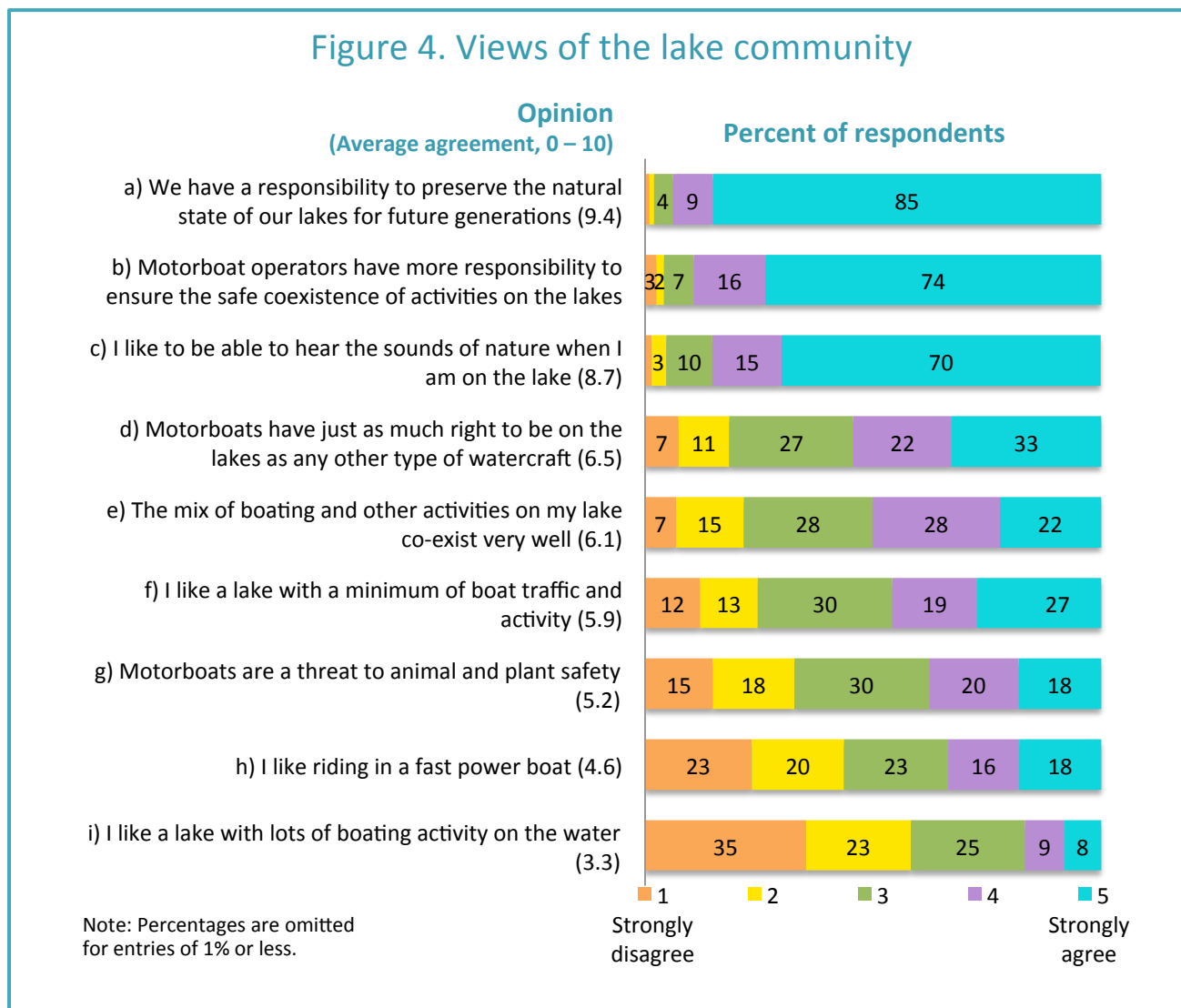
2.3 THE LAKE COMMUNITY

Figure 4 presents a set of opinions that might be heard in conversations on the dock or at the marina. All sides of these positions are well represented in the comments.

Three ideas attract almost universal agreement:

- We have a responsibility to preserve the natural state of the lakes;
- Motorboat operators have more responsibility for ensuring safety on the water (89% of motorboat owners agree with this statement); and,
- Enjoying the sounds of nature on the lake.

Consensus dissolves at this point: the remaining opinions each illustrate a sharp divide between those who value the pleasures and activities that motorboats enable and those who value the tranquility of an environment without motorboats they consider intrusive.





3. WHAT DRIVES THE QUALITY OF THE LAKE EXPERIENCE?

"Enjoying nature, birds, ducks, loons, the smell and sounds of the lake, the forest, star gazing, swimming, canoeing, clean air, being with family.."

"I enjoy the sound of a motor boat racing down the lake, safely."

"[Having] a quiet healthy lake with fewer idiots in fast boats & watercraft speeding up & down the lake."

"Peaceful coexistence with nature and a safe place for the family to relax."

"I am concerned the older members on the lake will sooner or later not let the college or younger generations have a fun summertime. We young people love to have a fun time without rules.."

"I believe all people deserve to recreate the way they want to as long as it is done safely."

"I recognize that there are many different ways people enjoy the lakes, and I appreciate the effort to find the best balance."

"Everything can be enjoyed within reason. A 4 foot surf wake isn't reasonable. Excessive noise is not reasonable. Not giving right of way to smaller crafts is not reasonable. Paddlers who would have motor boats removed entirely are unreasonable. I believe education is the difference and everyone can reasonably share the water."

"It only takes one thoughtless neighbour in a bay or on a small lake to ruin a great lake experience."

"Being able to share waterskiing with close friends while also being able to get up early to go for a morning paddle."

"We go to the cottage for quiet and rest ... not noise and unsafe practices." "If the boat sizes, wakeboarding and jet skis continue to increase as they have over the past ten years, the Muskoka lakes will lose their appeal and their value."

"First and foremost nature, then sunrise, sunsets, shared time together with family members & friends, canoeing, kayaking, paddle board, swimming, fishing, bonfires with singalongs, gardening."

"The simple fact of the lake being there. We spend as much time as possible on our dock just enjoying the lake."



3.1 QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE

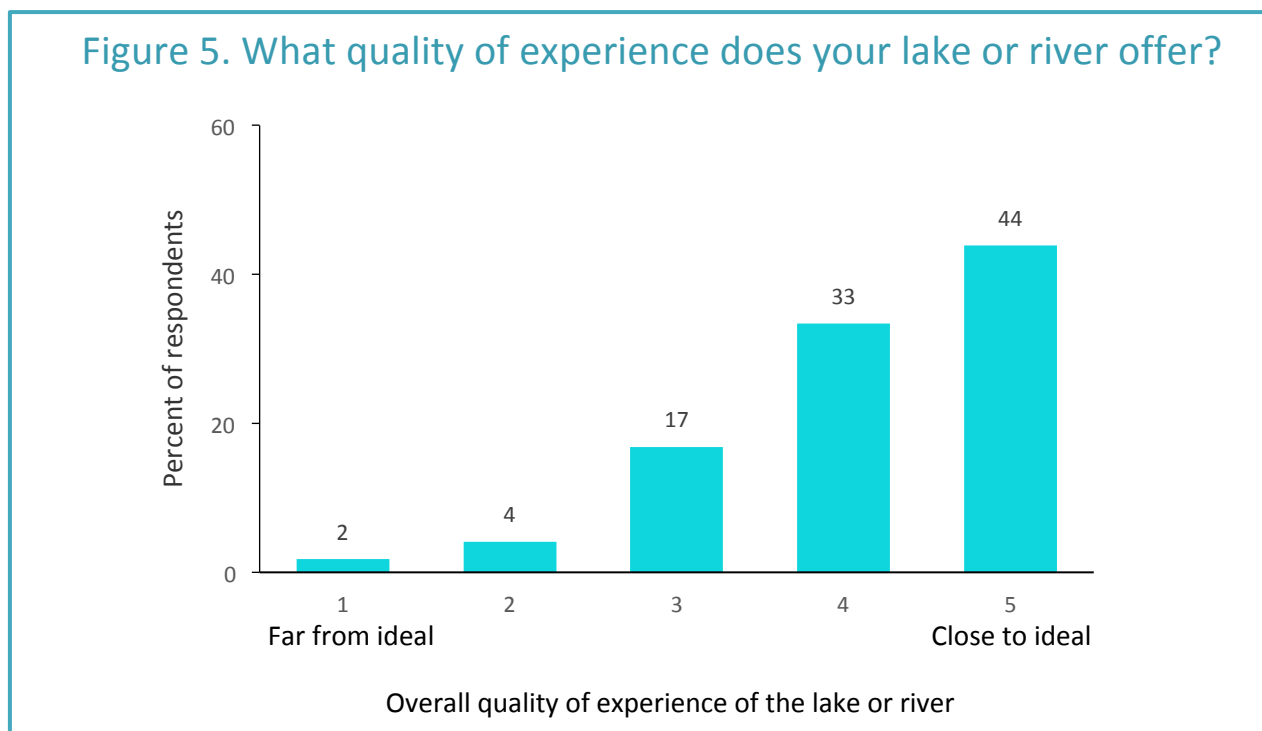
As an overall appraisal, respondents rated the quality of their lake environment on a scale ranging from “Close to ideal” to “Far from ideal” (Figure 5). The large majority, 77%, rate their experience as “Close to ideal” or nearly so (either 4 or 5 out of 5). Only 2% rate their lake experience as “Far from ideal.” Many participants commented on the privilege of enjoying the lakes.

The 2021 results again indicate that safety, quiet, and a low volume of boat traffic are important factors that contribute to an ideal lake experience.

Two additional drivers are a) the centrality of power boats to people’s life and recreation, and b) the stresses that exist between devotees of towing and paddling activities.

The data are clear that the ideal lake is both safe and quiet, but people differ as to what “safe” and “quiet” mean. Is that powerful motor an invasion of my privacy, or is it the sweet sound of a well-tuned machine? Is that big launch gliding safely across the water, or is its wake about to overturn my canoe?

The remainder of this chapter quantifies each of these relationships.





DRIVER 1 - SAFETY

Figure 6 combines two measures:

- The perceived safety of the lake, rated from 1 to 5 (the blue columns); and,
- Overall quality of experience, scored from 0 to 10 (the orange line).

Clearly, those who consider their lake environment to be safe have a better overall experience.

The leftmost column represents the 1% of respondents who find their lake “Not at all safe”. On average, this group rates their overall experience of the lake at just 3.4 out of 10.

The rightmost column represents the 34% percent of respondents who find their lake “Very safe”. On average, this lucky group rates their overall experience of the lake at 9.3 out of 10.

Written comments suggest that perceived threats to safety centre on high speeds, wakes, dangerous operation of boats, and operators not following the “rules of the road” through either negligence or ignorance.

While incidents such as collisions or swamped boats are fortunately uncommon, the more widespread consequence of unsafe boating is to make some people fearful of being on or in the water. Each boating season lake users are reminded of the hazards and risks on the water by disturbing and sometimes fatal incidents. This concern was expressed frequently in the comments, as the verbatims on the following page illustrate.





"Peace and quiet enjoyment of nature without being endangered in a canoe by a power boat or its wake."

"The serenity of wind, water and natural sounds. Paddling around our island, close to shore without fear of motorboat traffic."

"Worst consistent safety hazard is only having one person on a SeaDoo towing someone ... no spotter looking backward."

"Markers, floating rafts, large balls or play toys out too far. These are really a safety hazard. You do not own the lake!"

"I have to choose the day of week and time of day very carefully to be able to paddle and kayak safely."

"We have nearly flipped in our canoe when wake boards go by—our boats have been damaged when boats go by with their large wakes—we witnessed a whole group of young people in canoes being tossed about—with gear getting wet—as large boats created very big waves that hit the shore and came back again—no-one ever looks back to see what their wake does!"

"A max speed on lakes would be very useful - 80km/h."

"At dusk there is always a boat racing up and down our lake. Very dangerous for those who are just finishing fishing or out for a late day kayak paddle."

"Safety should be everyone's concern - the hospital is far away ..."

"Our lake has a boating sub-culture that is unfortunately long standing, full of entitlement, abrasiveness and aggressiveness. It's a "race lake", and unless there's consistent police presence and enforcement, until property taxes or enforcement tickets rise sufficiently to push these outliers off the lake, this will remain a very polarizing and dangerous lake for those who don't find it entertaining to "buzz the shore" or have evening "races" with high speed boats around the lake."

"I hate seeing tubers with no watch person in the boat, just the driver. It's usually a parent towing their children!"

"Night boating without lights is my biggest concern. We have a water access cottage and have to get around the lake often at night and have encountered several times a summer, boats without lights."

"Swimming safely has also become more of an issue as boats are hugging blind corners close to where we swim and wakes can overwhelm."

"There is not enough focus on drinking and boating, after 3:00 pm there is way too many people driving boat while under the influence."

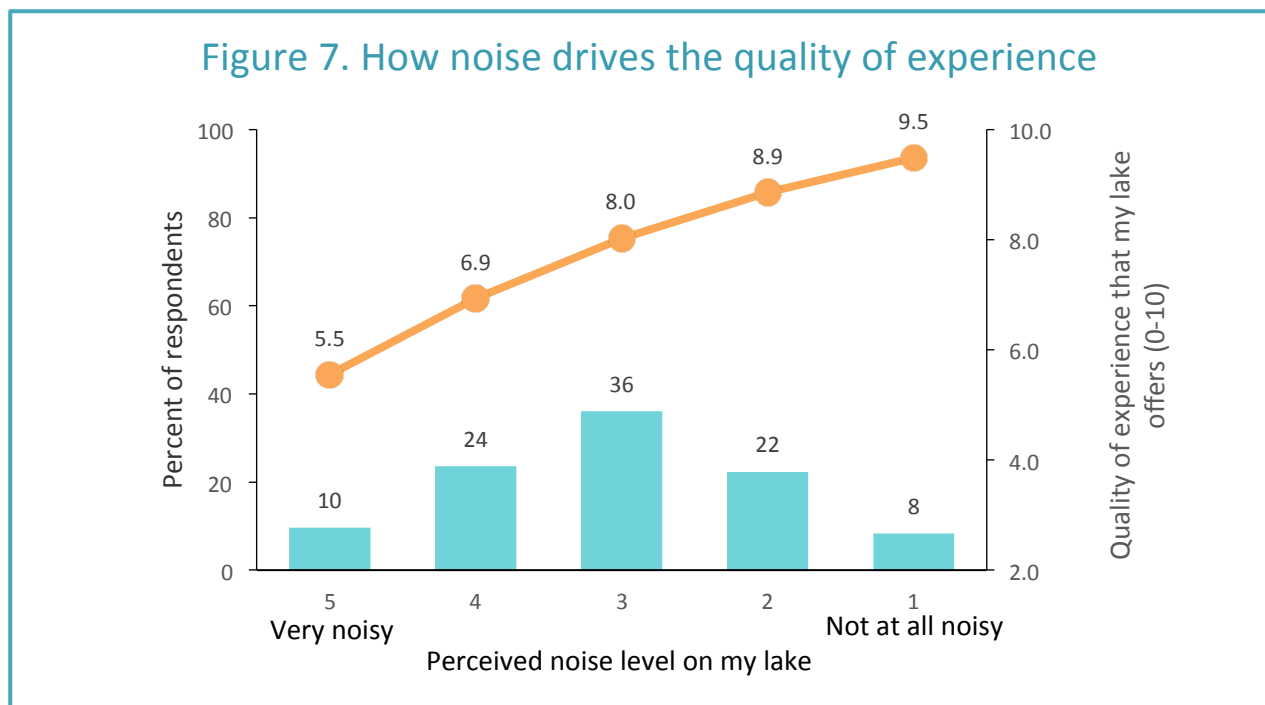


DRIVER 2 - BOAT NOISE

Just 8% of respondents find their lake “Not at all noisy”, and this fortunate group rates overall quality of the lake at 9.5 out of 10. As the noise level goes up, the quality of experience drops (Figure 7). The 10% who consider their lake “Very noisy” rate their overall experience at 5.5 out of 10.

One might ask whether respondents with more or bigger power boats are accustomed to noise, and so tend to perceive their surroundings as “not noisy”, but this is not the case. There is very little relationship between the perceived noise level of the lake and the boating equipment that one uses. Those with large engine power boats and those who just paddle are equally likely to see their lake as noisy or not noisy. The single exception is PWC owners: 25% of this group rate their area as “Noisy” (4 or 5 out of 5) compared to 36% of those who do not own a PWC. So, either PWC owners tend to live in quieter environments, or they are somewhat less sensitive to noise.

Sources of noise are discussed in Section 6.2. PWCs top the list of contributors to unwanted noise, followed by other types of boat engines and sound systems in boats and on the shore. The written comments are also strongly weighted toward concern about the noise from personal watercraft, but sound systems on boats and the noise from float planes appear to be growing issues.





"Loud cruisers with 'captain's choice' capabilities should be forced to use quiet exhaust in more protected/densely populated areas."

"Sound systems on wakeboard boats (speaker systems pointed backwards) are atrocious and infringing on my right to enjoy the lake - one can hear them from a couple of km+ away."

"Not sure what the issue with noise is. We all need to get along on the lakes. People don't want more signs on the lakes and waters. We don't come here for that."

"People using noisy powerful racing boats should be using the outside channel."

"Enforcement of noise rules re boats and personal watercraft would make a huge difference. I'm not against boats, just the noise - if we have mufflers on cars, why not on boats and PWCs."

"Personally I think sound systems on boats should be banned or at least seriously limited."

"I only get to visit my family at the lake a couple times a year (although there is family there all summer) and it's a time to let go and just have some fun. Restrictions, especially noise restrictions would ruin that wonderful time."

"Establish decibel limits. Set minimum shore clearance. "Cigar boats and/or "poker runs" are menace to the enjoyment of the lake. Laws must be implemented and enforced. Their noise levels suggest they have absolutely no regard for anyone else on the lake, whatsoever."

"I look forward to the day when all watercraft are electric powered, so we won't hear engine noise on PWCs and boats."

"Regulations should be enacted to force Bombardier and other PWC producers and fast power boats to reduce/eliminate their deliberate noise."

"High speed boats (i.e., cigarette boats) that are designed for oceans, or the Great Lakes have no place on these lakes. They're extremely loud and dangerous for anyone on the water."

"Having an above water exhaust does not mean a boat is excessively loud. There are however a small number of boats that ruin the peace despite being over 4 kms away. Target these high-performance boats and not everyone who has an above water exhaust."

"Float planes need to be stopped. The noise is unbelievable."

"If 'noise' is a problem for someone, they are free to go to a more remote location."

"Between the noise of their boat engines and their loud music, the beautiful tranquility of the lake is lost. Engine noise is disruptive. I come to the cottage for peace and quiet."

"I have concerns about visitors staying at rental properties who want to experience the full cottage experience with swimming, canoeing, water-skiing, rental boats and watercraft, etc. during their short stay, without regard for the noise and congestion they create and their unsafe actions. ("I'm here for a good time, not a long time.")"



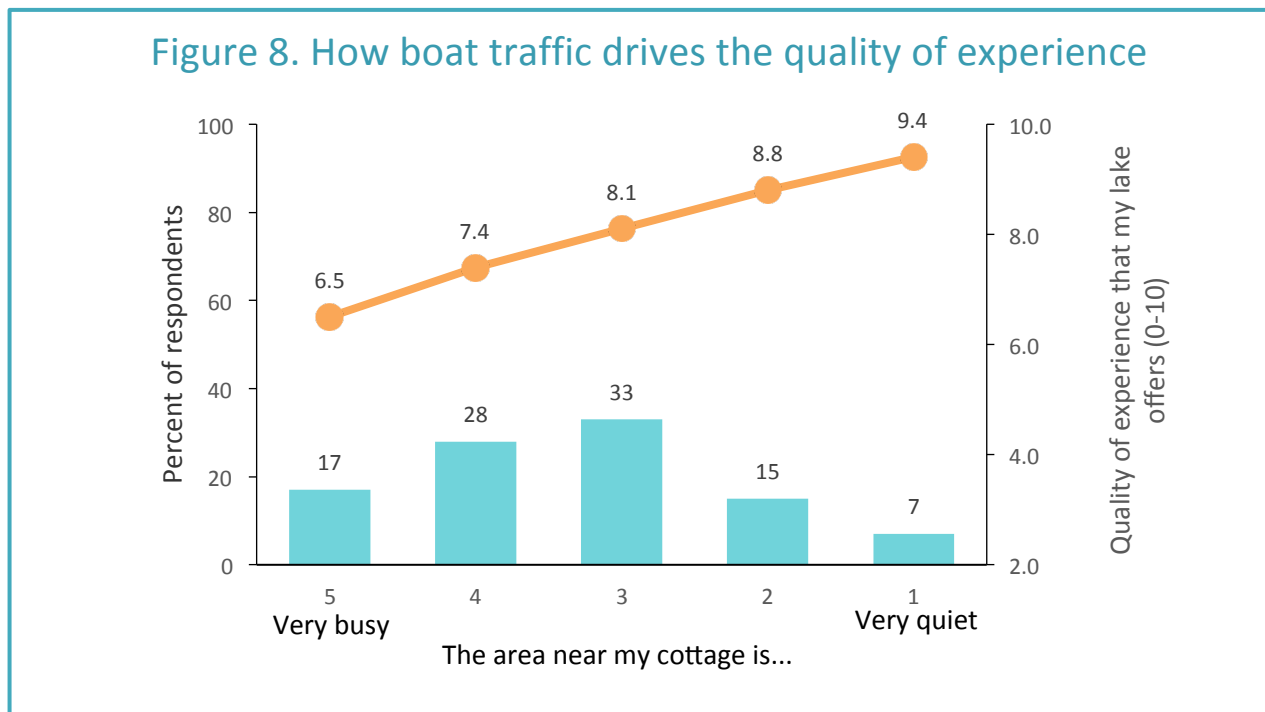
DRIVER 3 - BOAT TRAFFIC

As Figure 8 illustrates, the 17% who consider their area of the lake to be “Very busy” rate the overall quality of their experience at 6.5 out of 10.

At the other end of the spectrum, the 7% who consider their area to be “Very quiet” (in terms of boat traffic) rate overall quality at 9.4 out of 10.

Overall, 45% of respondents describe their area as “Busy” (4 or 5 out of 5) and 22% describe their area as “Quiet” (1 or 2 out of 5).

The three drivers discussed so far are related: increased boat traffic implies increased boat noise, and for some at least, it reduces the sense of safety.²



² The correlations are .70 between traffic and noise, and -.44 between traffic and safety.



"I would like to see guidelines for the size of boat and activities permitted on certain lakes. My lake is getting overrun with larger boats that create large wakes."

"We live on the Trent Severn - boat traffic is to be expected. However SeaDoos and jet skis have increased significantly. Their owners also seem to be less aware of the rules. It is a safety hazard."

"I'd like a curfew on certain days and times for quiet boating/paddling/sailing activities only."

"Lack of consideration for human powered craft and swimmers has become a major safety problem."

"In the last few years, the increase in traffic and PWCs and speeding, large wakes, too close to shores has somewhat diminished my enjoyment of the lake."

"Because of the increased traffic, we are no longer able to kayak, canoe, paddle board or take the kids tubing between 10:00 AM and 6:00PM."

"Would love to see wake boats banned outright. They have no place on our lakes."

"OPP needs to park a boat(s) in the river to set "the tone" on what is acceptable and safe boating practices in small busy waterway."

"I realize being on a busy part of the lake (narrows) that boat traffic is inevitable, however the last few years have brought more SeaDoos blasting in circles off the end of our dock."

"I feel that our very small lake has become over-populated and the municipality has allowed too many homes/cottages to be built. The boat numbers and boat traffic have become unsafe."

"I believe that there are many motor-free lakes in Ontario and people should purchase there if they do not like boat traffic or noise. We regulate way too much to appease the few these days."

"Enforcement of views at either end of a spectrum i.e., no motor boats or excessive traffic will be impossible. Education is the key as is tolerance."

"Over the years the boat traffic and noise has increased significantly with a significant number of boats going too fast and coming too close to the dock. This causes safety concerns."

"Biggest hazard is human powered craft where operators take zero responsibility to make themselves visible and to stay away from motor boat traffic. Bicycles on highways don't have the same rights as cars, so quit pretending that kayakers have the same rights as power boat operators on lakes."

"As a sailor, I find most motor boats are careful, but many operators show no understanding of the needs of a sailing vessel to cut back and forth, depending on the wind."

"There should be very limited times for taking off and landing of float planes."



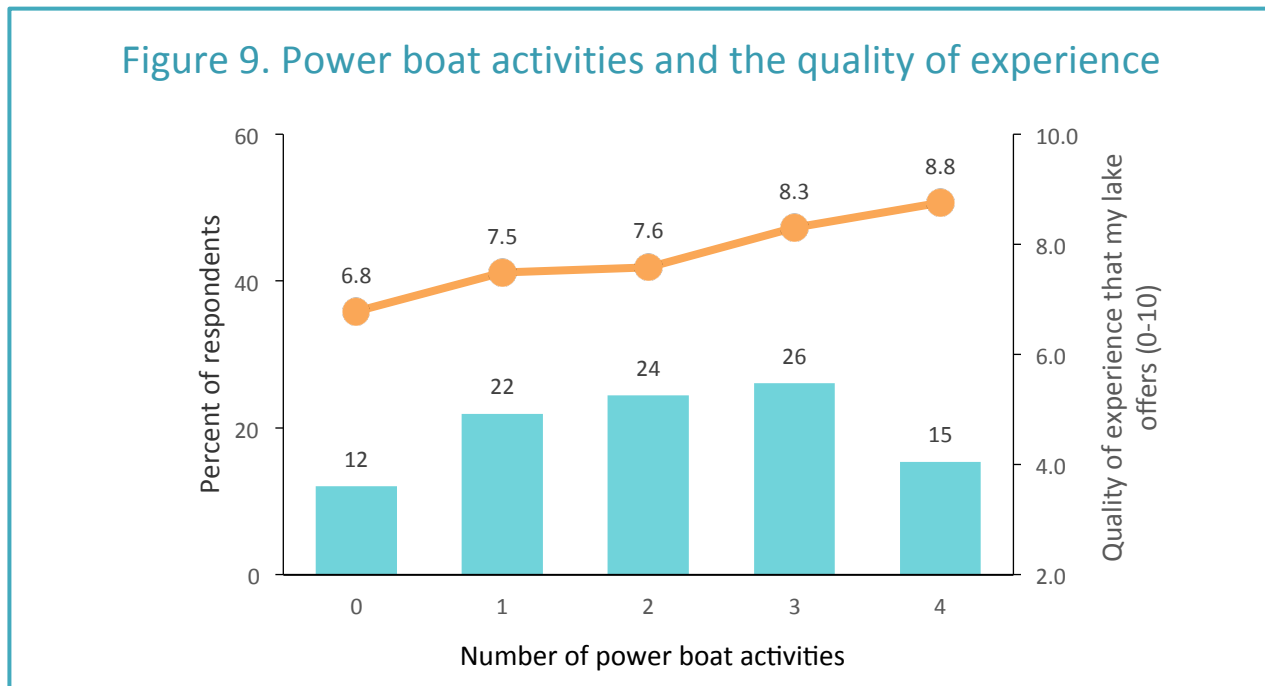
The impact of power boats on quality of experience

When friction arises on the water, it frequently centres on boats and the activities that go with them. It is valuable to look at the lake experience from the perspectives of the various groups of boaters.

To begin with, simply participating – or not participating – in activities that rely on power boats has an impact on one’s outlook. Four power boating activities were set out earlier in Figure 1: cruising, transportation, visiting friends and the towing sports. Some people rated all of these activities as important (4 or 5 out of 5), while others rated some or none as important.

The more power boating activities that a person rates as important, the better is their overall lake experience. Figure 9 illustrates the effect – the 22% of respondents who rated all four as important rate their overall lake experience at 8.5 out of 10 while the 14% who rate none as important rate their overall experience 6.5 out of 10.

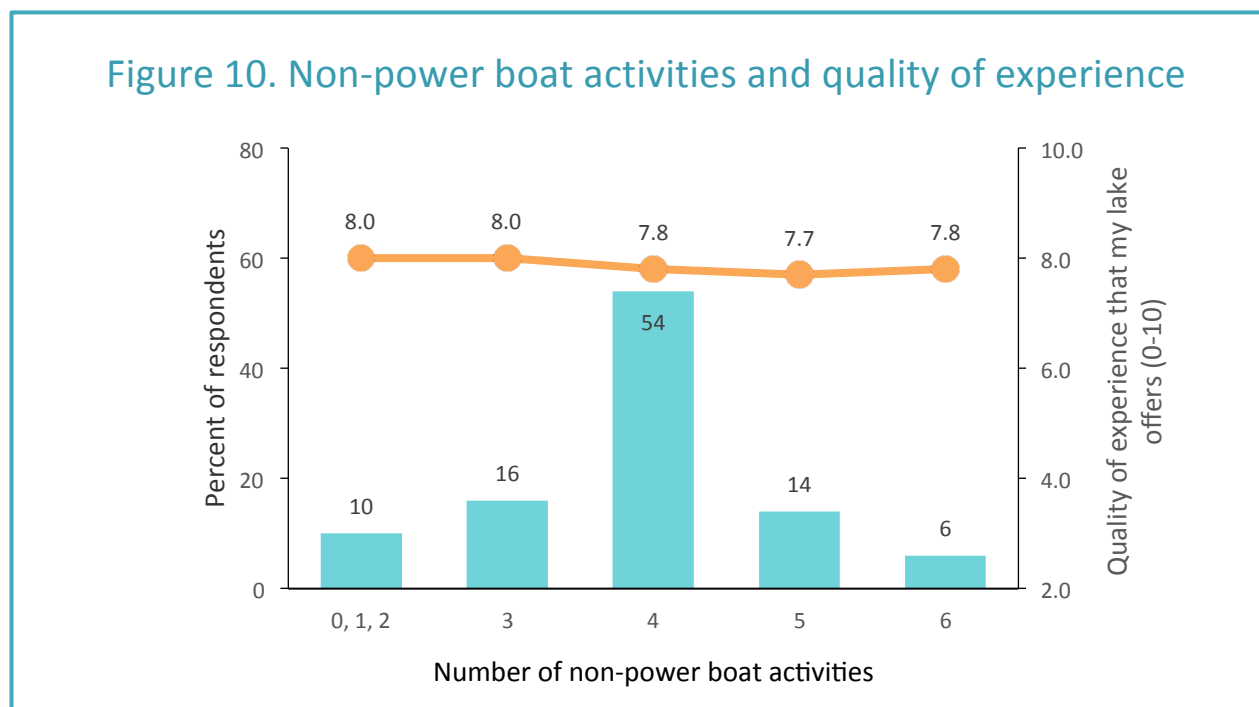
(Most of those who rated none of the four activities as important (the “zero” column Figure 9) do in fact have power boats – they just do not find this set of activities to be important.)





Perhaps it is not power boat activities that create a better lake experience, but *all* activities. Perhaps engaging in more activities of any kind increases one's overall experience.

But the data do not support this hypothesis. As Figure 10 shows, people who engage in more or fewer non-power boat activities rate their overall lake experience at essentially the same level. It appears that participation in power boating activities *per se* underlies the more positive ratings of overall lake experience. This finding is consistent with the 2017 survey results.





The impact of towing and paddling sports on quality of experience

The 2017 survey explored the tensions and concerns about behaviour that can arise among different groups of boaters. The paddling activities and the towing sports define opposite ends of the spectrum on many issues. They define opposing perspectives on safety, noise, boat wakes and regulation. Respondents' written comments provide eloquent (and often emotional) descriptions of both positions.

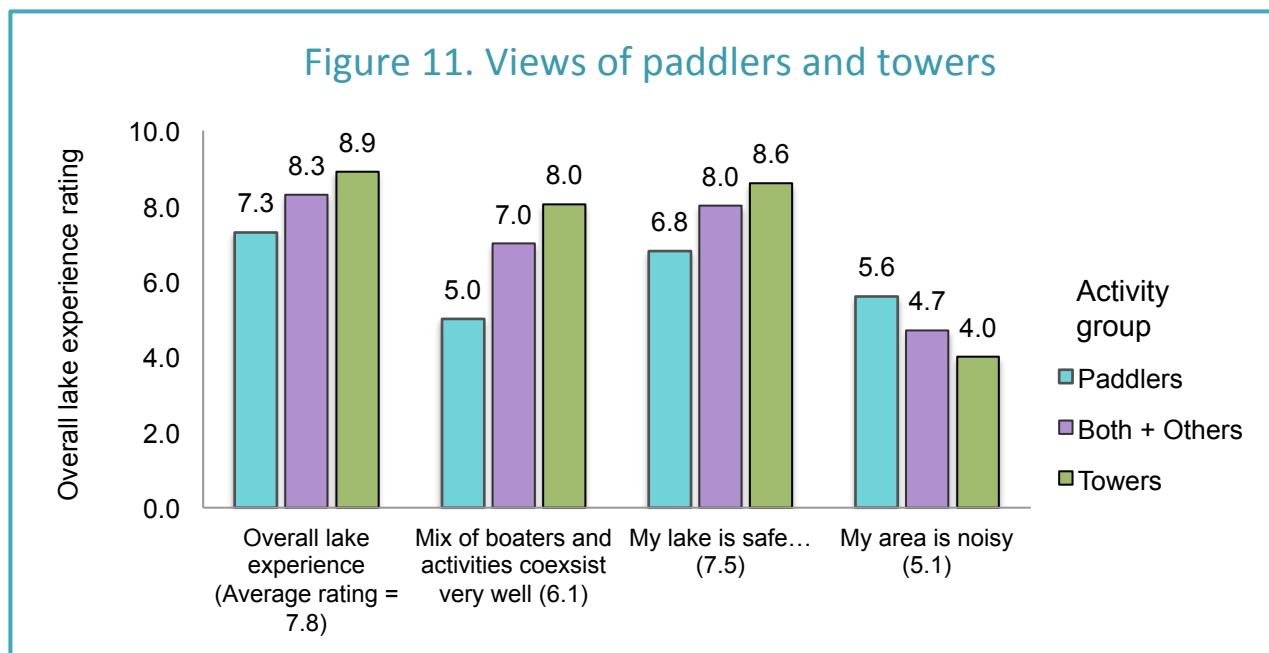
The 2021 survey confirms the centrality of this dynamic over the expanded geographic reach.

Paddlers and towers are defined based on the activities in Figure 1:

- Towers are the 7% of respondents who rated the towing sports as important (4 or 5 out of 5) and the paddle sports as not important (1, 2 or 3 out of 5).
- Paddlers are the 50% who rated paddling or rowing as important and who rated towing as not important.
- In the middle is a “Both” group – the 35% who rated both paddling and towing as important.
- Finally, 8% did not rate either paddling or towing as important. Most of this group rated other activities as important, e.g., sailing, swimming, observing nature.

The “Both” and “Neither” groups fall between the towers and paddlers on most measures, and they are combined in the following descriptions.

Figure 11 illustrates the differing perspectives of these groups. In a nutshell, the towers' outlook is consistently the most cheerful; the paddlers are the most negative, and the Both/Other respondents lie somewhere between.





It is important to consider alternative explanations for the differences in outlook. One might imagine that the towers are younger than the paddlers, and this is in fact the case: 62% of paddlers are age 45+ while 60% of towers are under age 45. The “both” group is evenly spaced along the age distribution. But age has only a minute impact on ratings of safety, noise etc. The paddler/tower distinction has a much larger impact.³

Consider, as a hypothetical example, a canoeist who rated paddle sports as very important, and who does not consider towing sports or any of the other power boating activities to be important. On the water, the canoeist is in a relatively vulnerable position, lacking control over the traffic around. A calm moment can be transformed in an instant by a tow boat, or a PWC doing figure eights, or indeed by any large boat whose wake bounces off the rocky shore creating chop that requires focussed attention to stay upright. Even if 99.9% of power boaters are driving safely, the potential for danger arising from the other 0.1% can be alarming for paddlers. The canoeist hears the sounds of every power boat in the area. If canoeing is what you do on the water, you are continually aware of noise and potential danger.

A wake surfer’s view is different. You understand that, as a power boat operator, you have increased responsibility for the safety of yourself and others. You feel comfortable that you are operating your boat safely, with adequate regard for other craft in the area. You don’t hear other boat noise above that of your own engine or sound system. You generally travel at slow speed and if a nearby boat is driving erratically, you can easily avoid it. You are in control. Your experience does not involve a constant sense of danger or of intruding noise.

The canoeist and the wake surfer have different minute-by-minute experiences on the water. One is in control of their situation, and one is at the mercy of larger, faster boats that change the boating environment. Over time, thousands of individual events combine into a well-defined sense of quality of life that the lake offers.

A final important point about these groups is that the balance between towers and paddlers is shifting. There are proportionately more paddlers in the 2021 survey – 50% of all respondents today are paddlers, compared to 37% in 2017, and there are proportionately fewer towers – 7% today compared to 10% in 2017. These percentages are approximate as they are based on the entire sample, whose geographic area has expanded somewhat in 2021. However, the trend also holds for the more statistically rigorous comparison based on the three larger Muskoka lakes. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

The shift toward paddling activities may mean that some boaters feel less in control and more at risk than they once did, for at least part of their regular boating experience. This change may well underlie the marked increase in support for regulation and enforcement that is discussed in Chapters 5 and 8.

³ Statistically, age accounts for 1% of the variance in ratings of safety and the paddler/tower distinction accounts for 8%. The corresponding figures for noise are 1% and 4%, for quality of experience are 1% and 4%, and for mix of activities and 4% and 14%.



"I do believe that cottagers and boaters need further education on how to co-exist. New boaters don't understand the effect and size of their wake, nor do they understand the "rules of the road."

"The lake is big enough for all sports to co-exist. Respect should be given to all forms of water activities including power sports and non-power sports."

"Common courtesy needed by PWC operators with respect to noise, antics and speed."

"High-powered speed boats that race up and down lake creating unbelievable noise and rooster tails... are a danger to wildlife, other boaters and themselves."

"More respect to boaters by kayaks. Boats are restricted to the middle of the lake as our lake is narrow. Kayakers constantly in the middle of the lake, stopped, yell at boats for creating a wake while skiing."

"Find jet skis particularly noisy and wake surfing boats extremely problematic for other boats and shoreline erosion."

"We have a smaller 14 ft. aluminum. I am comfortable driving the boat and thankfully I experience respectful driving around our boat, given it is much smaller than the average boat on the lake. Sometimes, I have experienced persons driving who don't realize they can swamp our smaller boat but for the most part, other drivers have been very respectful of us."

"Please note that wake surfing creates huge, powerful wakes which are far more dangerous to shoreline and kayak/canoers than a boat going FAST. This activity needs to be dealt with separately from speeding."

"I've been coming to our lakes since I was a child and frankly there was more boat traffic in the 60's and 70's. The difference now is that many boaters just buy a cottage and get a large boat and have never handled a power boat before. Even if they have a license there is no substitute for experience particularly in controlling the size of your wake and knowing general safety and common sense."

"During 40 years of cottage ownership, there has been an increase of cottages & boats on our lake. Most disliked are overpowered boats going fast with large wakes, weekend loud parties, boats cruising too close to our shore/dock, and temporary visitors who appear to have no knowledge of boating safety or respect for others."

"On most weekends and especially long weekends canoeing or kayaking is a challenge because of the large wakes from power boats."

"High speed racing boats are a menace. If allowed, there should be strict hours of operation and locations. Jet skis should have engine noise limits. Canoes, kayaks and low-powered disappearing propeller boats and like should be protected by lowering speed limits and distance-circumventing regulations."

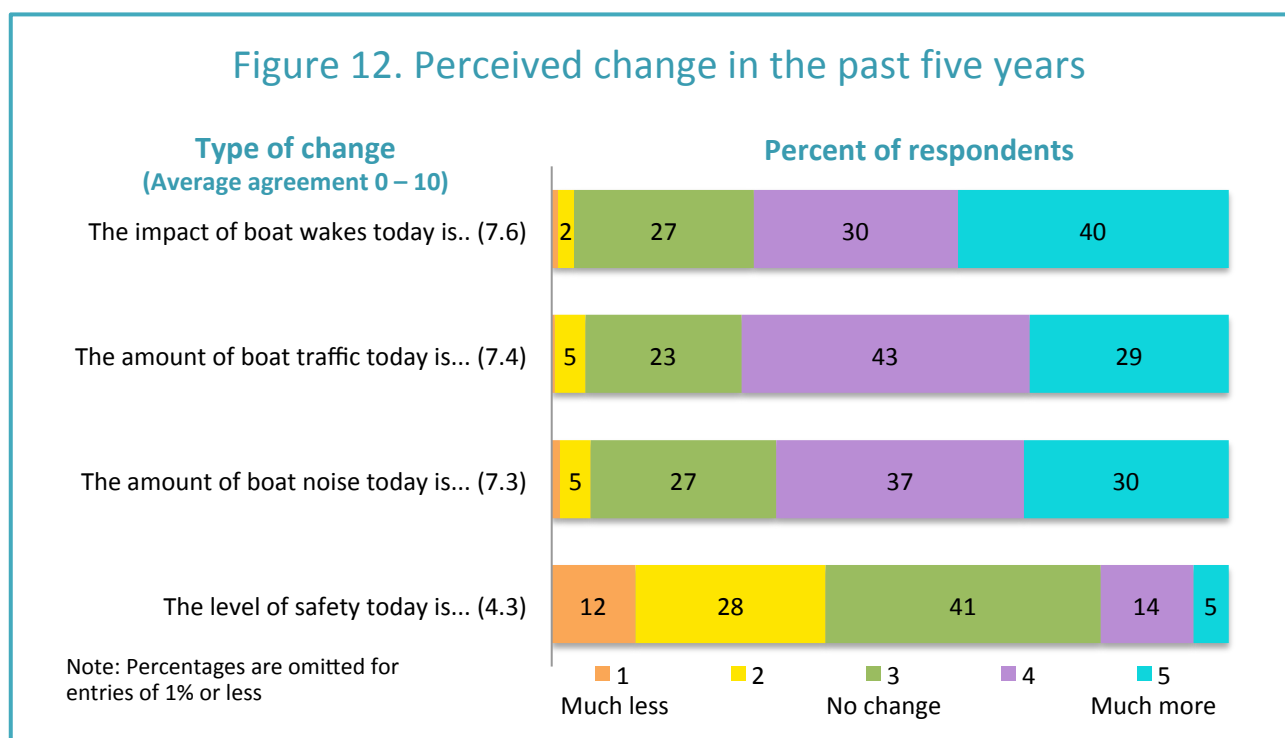


4. PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE

Two thirds or more of the respondents find that, compared to five years ago, there is now:

- A greater impact of boat wakes;
- More boat traffic; and,
- More noise.

The level of safety is seen as unchanged for 41% of survey participants, lower for 40% and higher for 19%.





"Wake boarding boats have damaged our shoreline more in the last 5 years than in the previous 40 years. They are the biggest danger to the environment compared to all other boats."

"Peace and quiet. Over the last 60 years the volume and speed of boat traffic has grown exponentially."

"In recent years there's a ridiculous volume of music coming from some boats and noise from above water exhaust."

"Feeling safe...that the association is taking care of our land, water and nature (which they are not with allowing huge boats and massive cottages and developments to take place). I've enjoyed it for 30 years up until the last few...now I feel Muskoka is going in the very wrong direction and the association is not taking care of what is a gift to us all."

"The lake is busier and the wildlife has dwindled since we arrived in 1972. Less respect for other cottagers and wildlife. More rentals so people are there for a short time, very noisy, irresponsible in boats often, not respecting cottages or wildlife."

"We enjoy listening to nature - lapping water, birds and not loud boats and constant boat traffic which is why we picked our cottage locale. There is a concerning trend of people buying bigger, more powerful and noisier boats. 30 years ago a 16 ft. boat was a good size boat to own. Now you would be swamped by the huge wakes of the newer boats if you ventured out into the very busy areas in a boat that size."

"I truly pity people on Muskoka, Joseph and Rosseau who have to put up with those who feel entitled to blast their way around noisily in the name of personal fun. I have had the misfortune of visiting friends a couple times on Joe and am astonished by the crap they have to put up with."

"Peace and quiet. We have had that for years, but there are more wake boats coming on the lake and jet skis. These people seem to have no regard for neighbours or nature."

"We have owned a cottage on this lake for almost 20 years. Every summer more fishing tournaments start earlier and earlier, some at 5 am waking up the lake residents and speeding down the lake."

"The number of loud boats has grown substantially in the last few years. Many people play music loudly, the wake from the boats is so much that we have to replace our water line every year, and we no longer feel safe going for a swim down past a few cottages due to boat traffic and too many vessels going in and out of docks."



5. TRACKING CHANGE: 2013 - 21

The three iterations of the survey (2013, 2017, 2021) have used a consistent research method and have involved large numbers of respondents. This provides a sound basis for tracking change over time.

The larger geographic area included in each survey could have an impact on results, so analysis of trends is restricted to the three larger Muskoka Lakes (Joseph, Rosseau and Muskoka) and their connecting waterways. This ensures an apples-to-apples comparison.

This said, results from outside the three larger lakes echo those of Joseph, Rosseau and Muskoka at almost every step. The one apparent exception is noted in the discussion of Figure 14 on the following page.

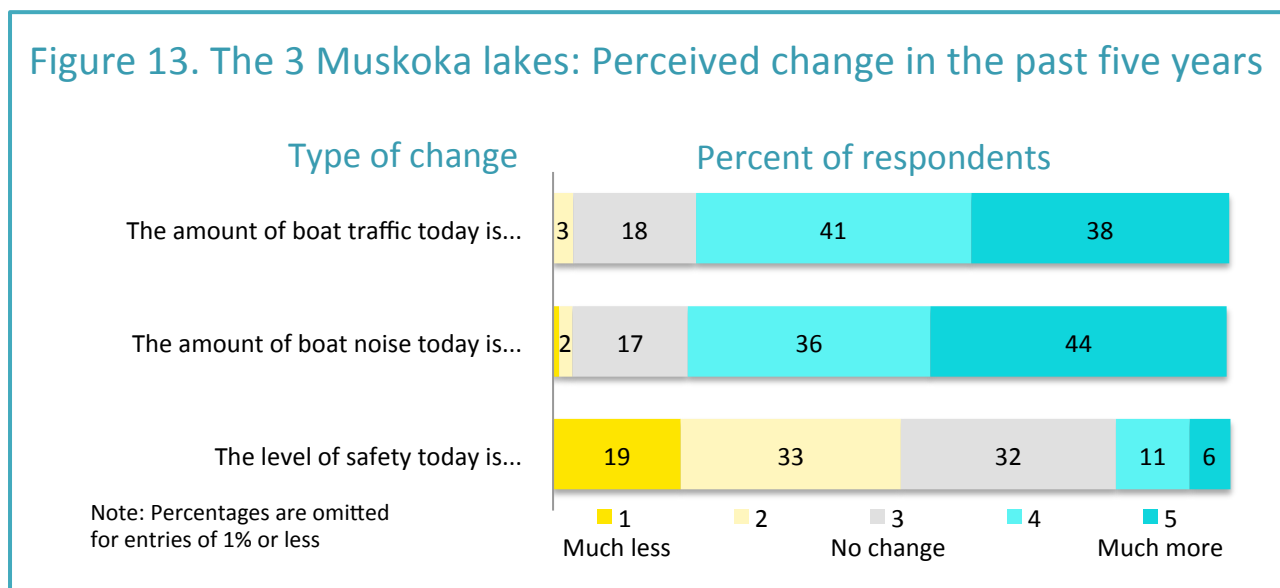
Perceptions of change

Figure 13 shows that those boating on the three larger Muskoka lakes definitely perceive that change has occurred over the past five years.

- Large majorities, in the order of 80%, perceive increases in boat traffic and boat noise.
- **Just over half, 52%, perceive that the level of safety in their area has gone down.**

Comparing these results to the full survey population, shown in Figure 12, it is apparent that somewhat more people on the three larger lakes perceive change on these measures.

The analyses that follow quantify how big these changes have been, what might underlie them, and what we might expect in the coming years.





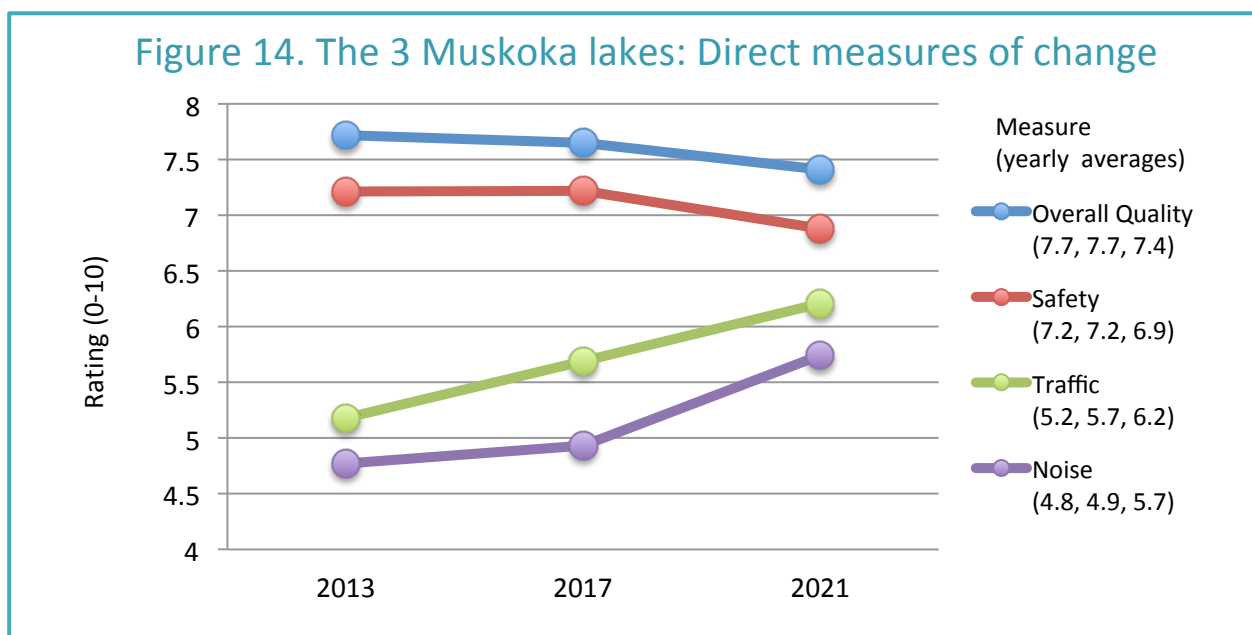
Direct measures of change

People report that things have changed, but did conditions really change? By how much? In each survey, respondents rated the levels of boat traffic, boat noise, and safety that they experienced.

Figure 14 shows that these ratings did indeed change over the three survey periods. There are distinct perceived increases in boat traffic and boat noise, and a small but statistically significant drop in the safety rating.

Overall quality of the lake experience has also dropped significantly in 2021: this is to be expected as quality of experience is dependent on traffic, noise, and safety, which all worsened over the period.

Sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 following explore factors that contribute to safety, noise, and the impact of boat wakes. In 2021 residents of the three larger Muskoka lakes rate most of these factors as more problematic than residents of other regions.



However, the survey areas beyond the three larger Muskoka lakes echo the trends on the larger lakes at almost every step. The safety and overall quality ratings are the only exception: these ratings appear to be flat outside the three larger lakes. It is important to note, once again, that the geographic area outside the three larger lakes has grown in each successive survey, so that rigorous statistical tracking of trends outside the three larger lakes is not possible.

This degree of change in these core measures for the larger lakes over just eight years is a concern. A slip of 4 percentage points in the overall quality rating is an unsettling result in an area as popular as the Muskoka region, and is a metric stakeholders and policymakers will need to monitor closely.



Trends in boat usage on the 3 larger Muskoka lakes

To imagine what the future might hold we can consider other trends in the survey and also developments in the community.

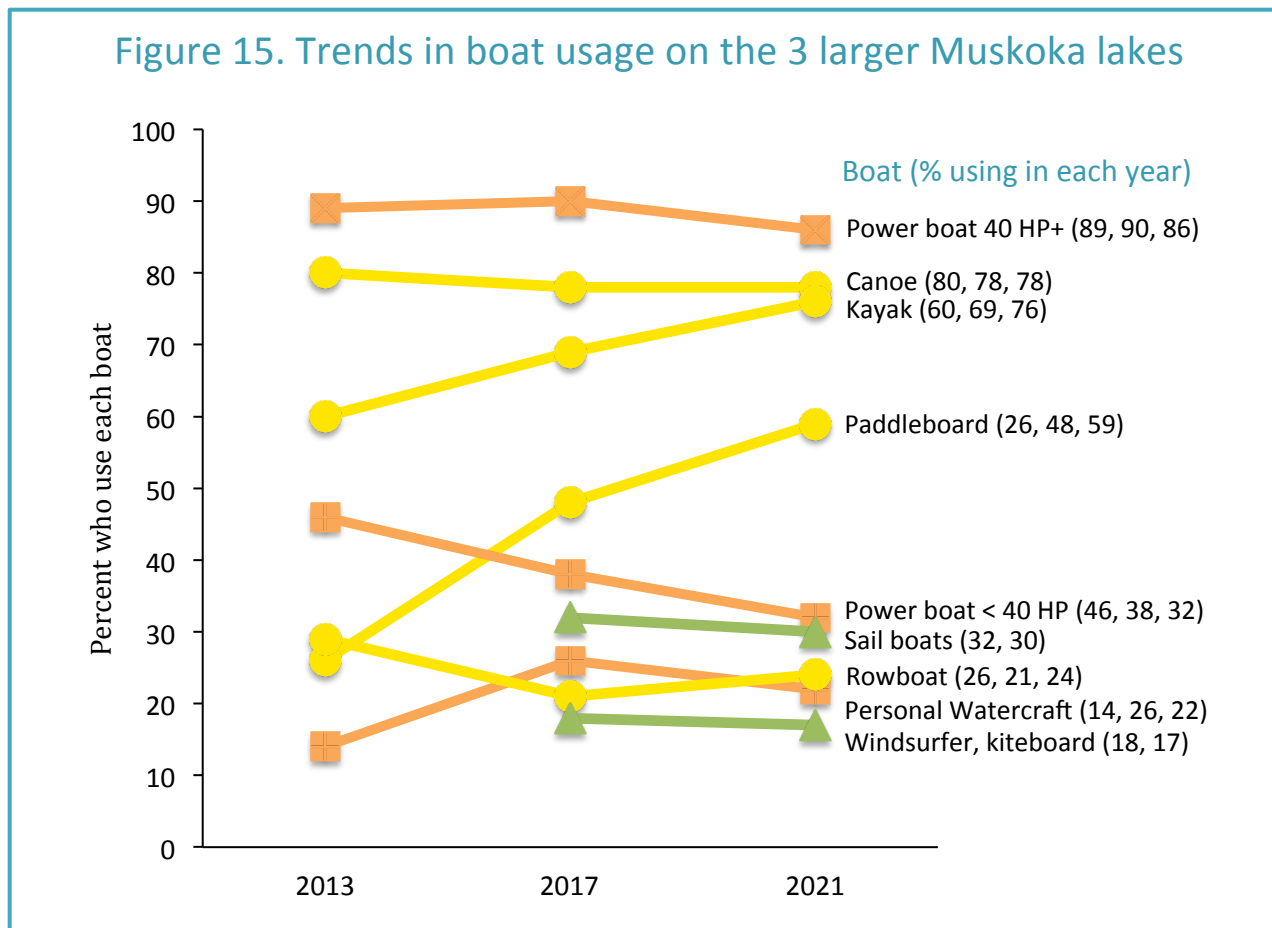
Eight years has produced dramatic change in boat usage (Figure 15) on Lake Joseph, Lake Muskoka and Lake Rosseau. At a high level:

- Use of human powered boats (marked in yellow) has increased overall.
- Use of motorized boats (orange) is steady to lower.
- Use of wind powered boats (green) is unchanged.

The proportion of cottagers who use kayaks and paddleboards has increased dramatically, but their growing popularity does not seem to have eroded the use of canoes and rowboats.

The use of smaller power boats, under 40 HP, has been declining steadily. The data do not suggest a reason, but the trend to larger boats has been going on for decades and is noted frequently in the comments.

Looking further ahead, there is some speculation that electric boats will begin to replace gasoline powered boats in the not-too-distant future.





Trends in activities on the 3 larger Muskoka lakes

If the types of watercraft in use are changing, the activities that those boats enable will also change.

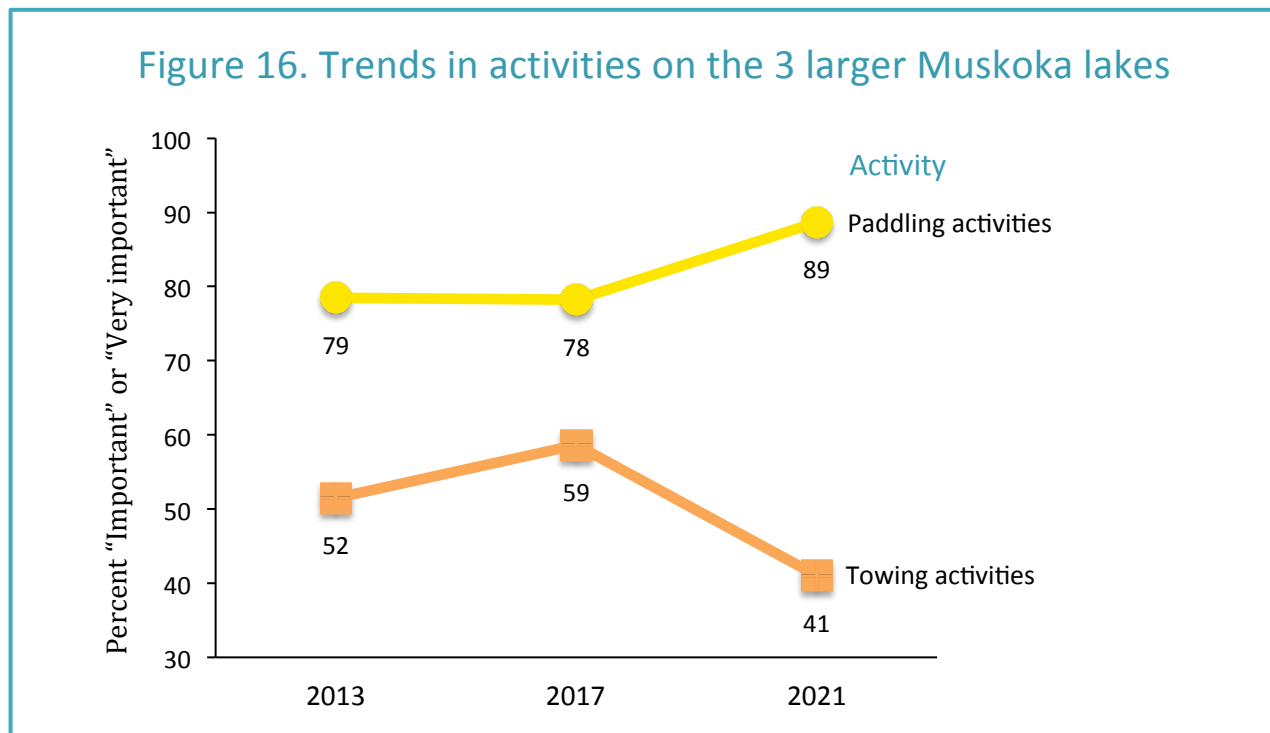
Along with the increase in paddling boats (Figure 15), there is an increase in the proportion of people who rate paddling and rowing as “Important” or “Very important” (Figure 16).

The towing sports include water skiing, wakeboarding, wake surfing and tubing. There is no lack of boats that are capable of towing on the lakes – 86% of respondents have a boat of 40 hp or more, and some towing activities can be done with smaller boats. Nonetheless, the proportion of respondents rating towing as “Important” or “Very important” dropped to 41% in 2021, from 59% in 2017.

It appears that some people on the three larger lakes are paddling more and towing less.⁴

This pattern is also evident in the balance of paddlers and towers on the three larger lakes (“paddlers” being those who paddle but do not tow, and “towers” being those who tow but do not paddle). Paddlers account for 52% of all respondents today compared to 32% in 2017, and towers account for 6% of respondents today compared to 12% in 2017.

It is reasonable to conclude that the shift toward paddling activities at least partly explains a constellation of other changes including increased perceptions of boat noise and traffic, decreased perception of safety, and the increased support for regulation and enforcement discussed on the following page. The view from the canoe is different than that from the cruiser.



⁴ Activities other than paddling and towing, i.e., swimming, fishing, cruising, sailing, windsurfing, relaxing on the dock – show no meaningful trends over this period.



Trends in future strategies for the 3 larger Muskoka lakes

The slippage in ratings of the overall quality of experience indicates that the lakes are not functioning as a shared space as effectively as they once did. Figure 17 suggests that clear majorities of residents see solutions to some of the most persistent problems. (See Figure 37 for the response of all survey respondents to these questions.)

Education and communication about responsible boating has been and remains the most broadly supported suggestion.

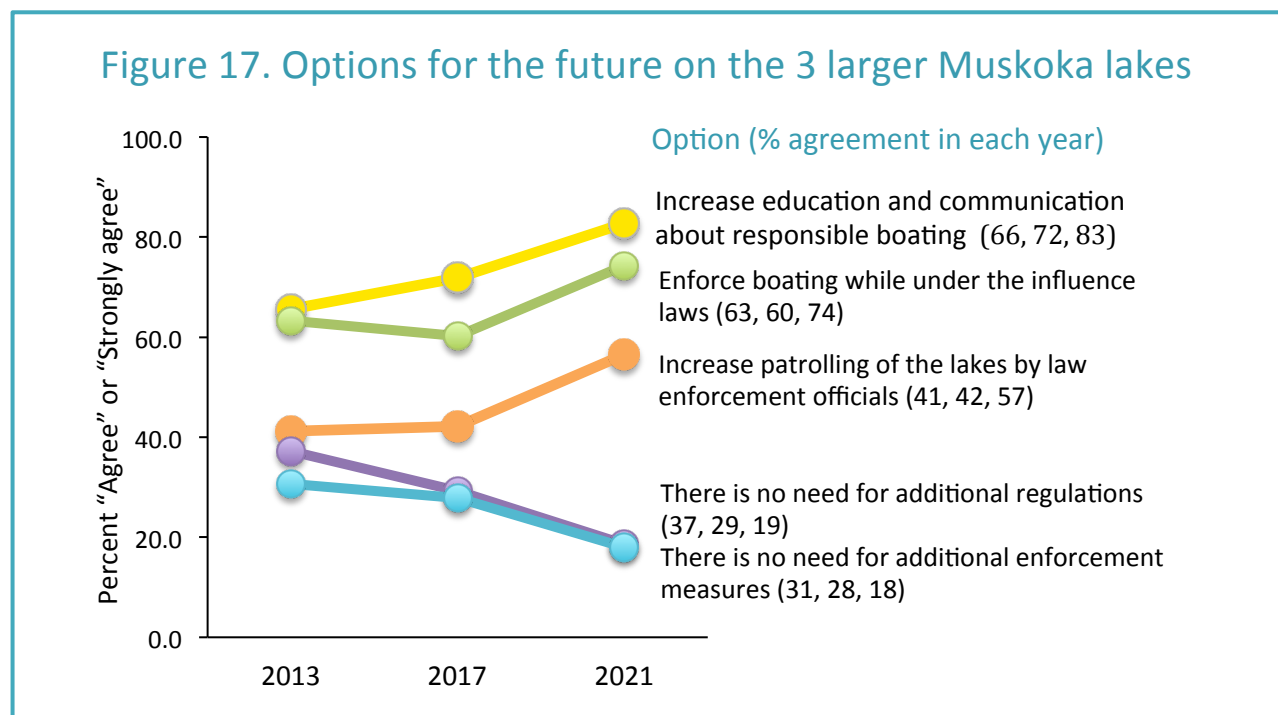
In 2013 and 2017 there was only moderate support for greater enforcement and regulation, but 2021 sees a jump in support for four regulatory solutions (Figure 17):

- Greater enforcement of boating while under the influence laws;
- Increased patrolling of the lakes by law enforcement officers;
- A large decrease in the proportion of people who see no need for additional regulations; and,
- A sizable decrease in the proportion of people who oppose additional enforcement. (This said, those who oppose greater regulatory intervention and enforcement do so very vigorously in their comments.)

Not shown in Figure 17 but also worth noting;

- The proportion of residents supporting decibel limits on boat engines rose from 63% in 2017 to 78% in 2021.
- The proportion supporting no wake zones in sensitive areas rose from 70% in 2017 to 79% in 2021.

These trends may represent a tipping point where the quality of experience has started to slip and there is a growing willingness to accept otherwise unattractive regulation and enforcement.





6. VIEWS ON TOPICAL ISSUES

“Presently, I only row before 8 am as I don’t feel safe any later in the day. When sailing, I’m forever watching 360 degrees because so many boaters don’t know the basic rules of the water. And paddle boarding is a nightmare due to the colossal waves from wake surf boats.”

“The OPP need to get a handle on the reckless driving of powerboats and jet skis. It greatly deteriorated over the last 10 years.”

“Let people enjoy the lake as they wish but in a respectful manner. This is not something you can regulate. We are too regulated. “

“I don't think it is fair to include all boats into one category. Wakeboard boats are designed to create a large wake whereas ski boats are designed to have the smallest wake possible, especially at high speeds. Seadoos, Waverunners are the most dangerous as they don't seem to know any rules and can be found to be going very fast close to shore. They pull tubes and skiers with no spotters.”

“Boaters appear to have a "no rules" approach to their activities. Entitlement? Ignorance? Inexperience?”

“Water is the key here. People enjoy water differently. The lakes are for everybody. Whether you ski or wakeboard to sail or canoe.”

“Big concerns are new cottagers with no boating experience buying big powerful boats with no understanding of their power, speed or noise. Renters renting boats with no respect for others. People renting boats elsewhere and trailering them to the lakes with no respect. Marinas should be held more responsible about to whom they sell and rent and the expertise of those consumers.”

“Mutual respect and common sense by cottagers, especially renters. Understanding the simple physics of boat wakes with respect to speed, hull plowing, and water depth - especially renters.”

“People who respect everyone’s right to enjoyment. For example, I’m ok with jet skis in general but not when they do donuts incessantly in front of our property and not their own. Boat manufacturers could do a much better job with signage in their boats to remind people to respect others and nature.”

“I enjoy sharing the waters with knowledgeable and informed boaters who understand why it’s important for all types of watercraft operators to feel safe when they choose to venture forth on the water. Those of us who row, sail, canoe and paddleboard shouldn’t be relegated to doing so before 8 am for fear of ignorant power boaters capsizing them by driving too close or creating tsunami like waves while wakesurfing.”



6.1 VIEWS ON SAFETY

The survey described seven potentially risky behaviours and asked what level of threat to safety each posed in the area where the respondent lived.

Power boats present a significant concern for safety in three ways:

- When they do not follow “the rules of the road” (60% gave this a 4- or 5-out-of-5 rating);
- When they travel at high speeds (rated 4+ by 59%); and,
- When they create large wakes that endanger small craft or swimmers (rated 4+ by 49%).

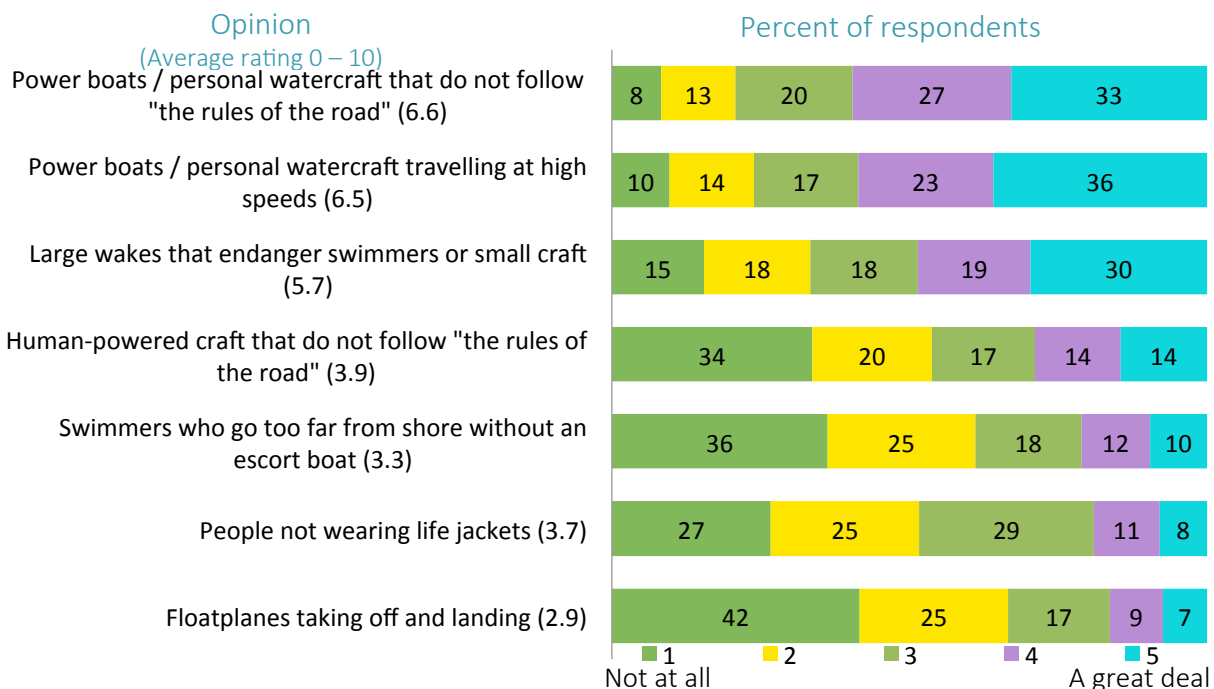
Human powered craft that do not follow the rules of the road are a matter of concern as well, but were rated 4+ by just 28%.

Swimmers who stray away from shore without spotters were also mentioned in the comments as a potential risk for power boaters.

The question about floatplanes is new in 2021. Floatplanes make up a tiny fraction of traffic on any lake, so it perhaps surprising that 16% of respondents consider them a safety risk – a view reinforced by a recent collision in the area between a float plane and a canoe.

These results are largely consistent across regions, however participants from the three larger Muskoka lakes see three elements as greater threats than those in other regions. These are: power boats that do not follow rules of the road, power boats travelling at high speed, and floatplanes taking off and landing.

Figure 18. Do these elements affect safety on the water in your area?



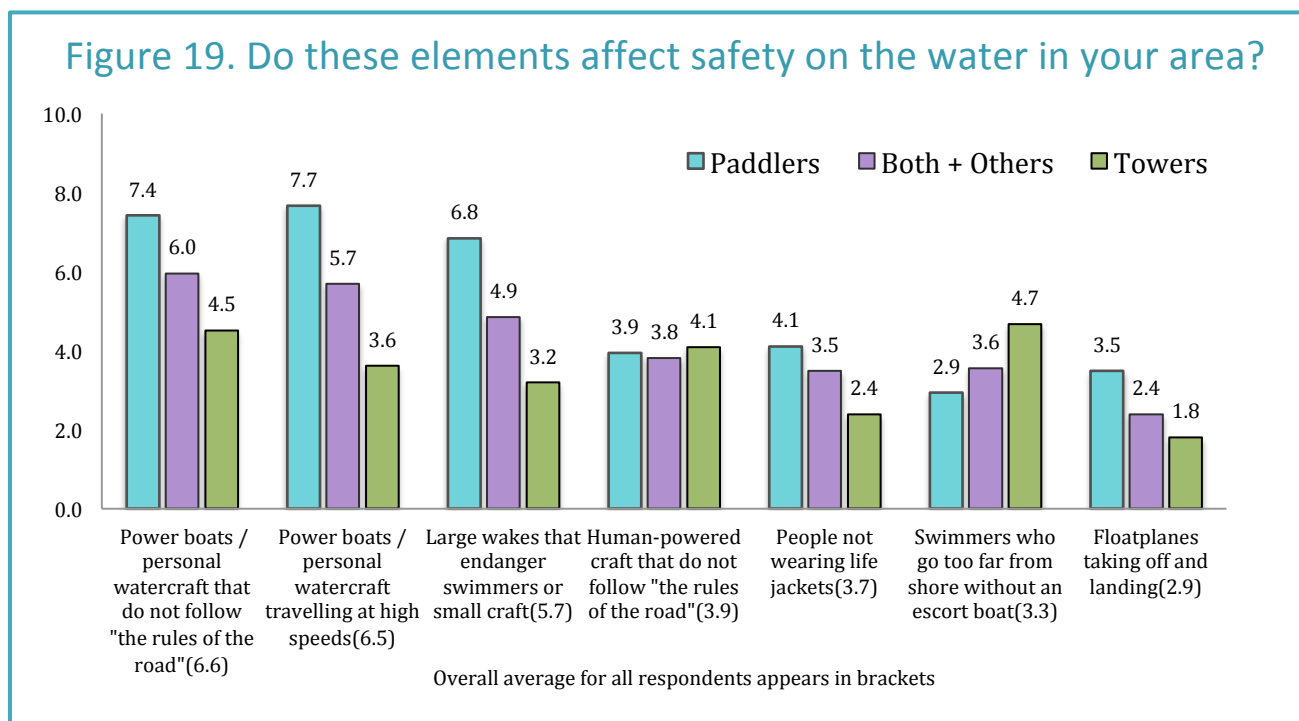


How paddlers and towers view threats to safety

All seven behaviours pose some level of threat to safety to some respondents (Figure 19).

Paddlers see power boats as a significant threat, while towers do not. The paddlers' relative lack of control over their environment, as described on page 30, is a primary reason.

Towers do not consider any of the seven items to be a major threat, but unescorted swimmers are their greatest concern.



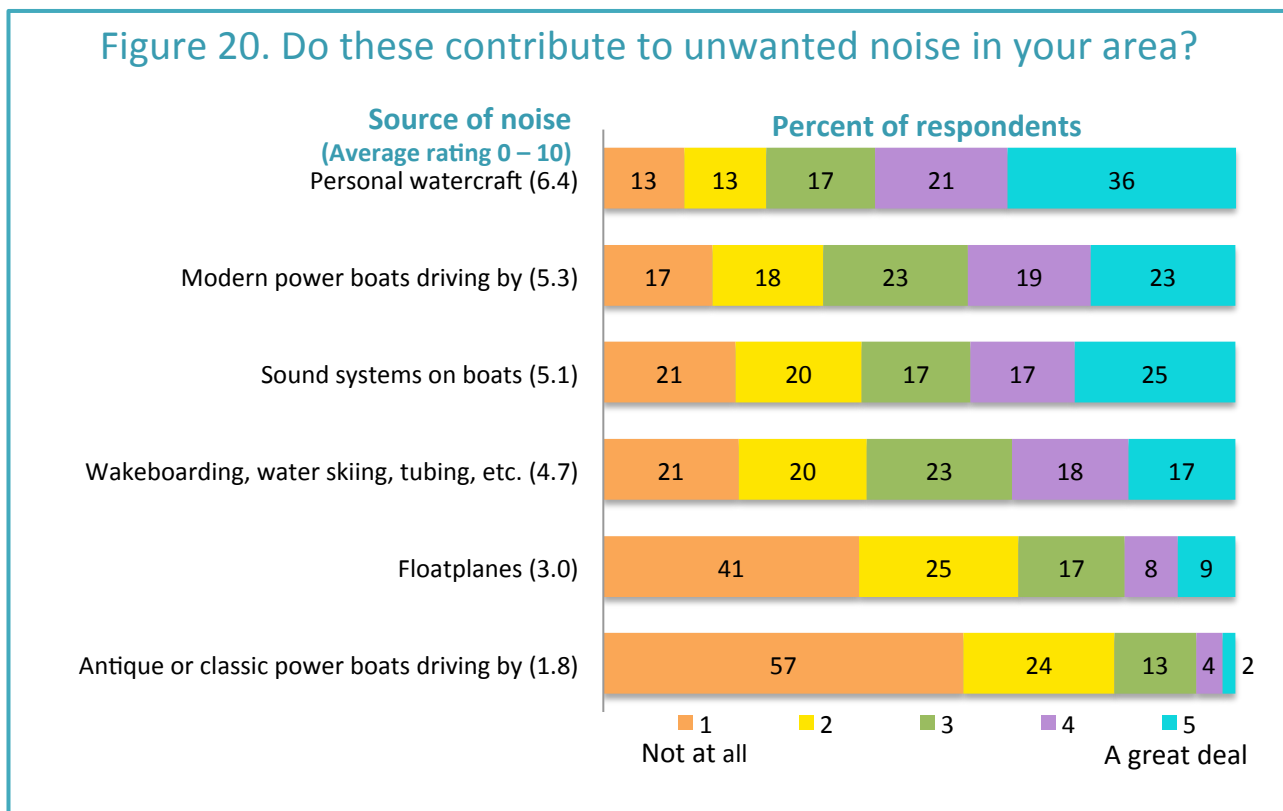


6.2 VIEWS ON NOISE

Figure 20 describes a clear hierarchy of sources of noise:

- Personal watercraft lead the list. PWCs constitute 14% of all power boats in use by survey participants (based on the numbers underlying Figure 3). While PWCs are relatively few in number, 57% of respondents find that they contribute to unwanted noise (at 4 or 5 out of 5). Their ability to irritate stems in part from the apparently erratic manner in which they are sometimes driven – stopping, starting and changing speed. Based on participant comments, groups of PWCs operating in this manner can give the impression that their drivers may not be paying full attention to their surroundings and those that they are sharing the lake with.
- “Modern power boats” make up 81% of all power boats. There are a lot of them, so their position as number two in the list seems appropriate.
- We have no estimate of the number of boats with sound systems, or how many people play these systems at a level that impinges on others. It seems likely to be a single-digit percentage of all power boat traffic. Still, as a source of noise annoyance, these few boat operators stand equal to the full complement of modern power boats.
- Vintage power boats make up 5% of all power boats and most respondents do not consider them an annoyance.
- Float planes and helicopters can make a great deal of noise and are a growing concern for some, but many or most respondents do not have them nearby at this point.

The three larger Muskoka lakes rate these issues as more problematic than other areas (except for antique boats and PWCs where there is little difference across regions).



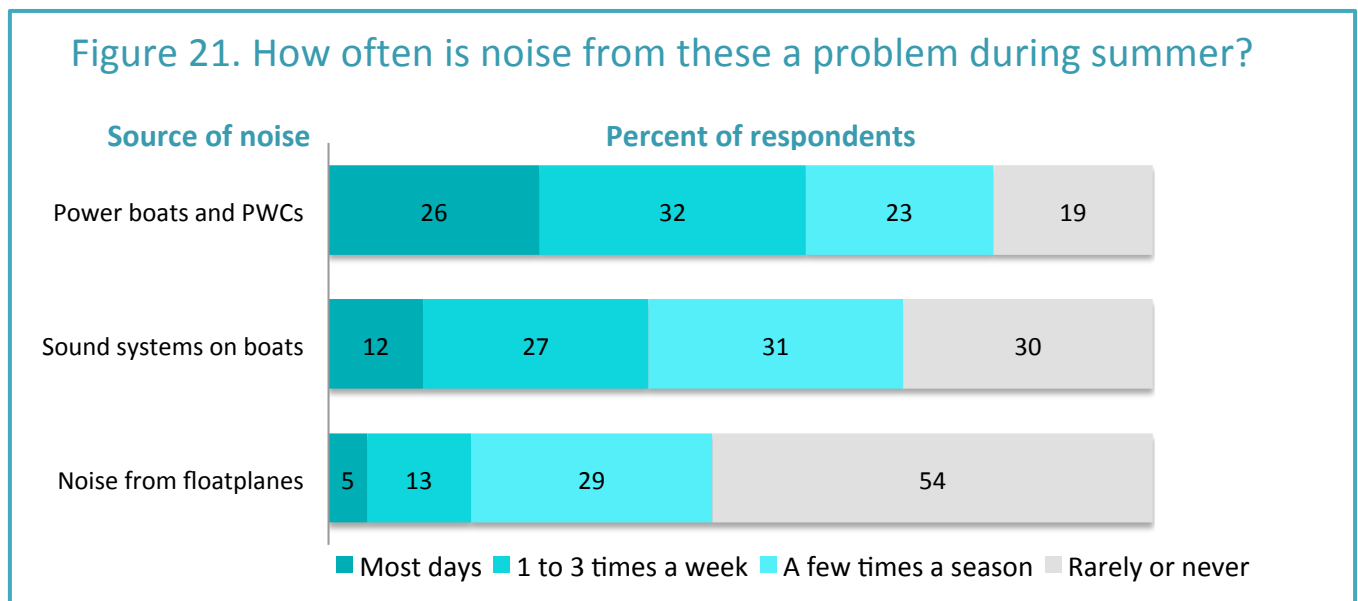


How often is noise a problem?

Powerboats and PWCs are the most frequent source of noise, reported several times a week or more by 58% of respondents followed by sound systems on boats at 39% and noise from floatplanes at 18%.

Considering all three sources of noise together:

- 2% of respondents reported that all three sources were present on most days; ... and at the other end of the spectrum,
- 14% reported that all three occurred rarely or never.





"People who respect others by boating safely. In my area you can see kids on Seadoos going round and round for a great amount of time, creating noise and a lot of damaging wake."

"Watching too many boats go by. As with anything in life, there are abusers, but most people are good. Boat and PWC manufacturers should be more accountable for noise reduction re: engines, exhaust & sound systems."

"Hearing nature and families - not the stereo system of short- term rental big party groups drinking and boating."

"If you don't want some noise and boats, then go to the Yukon."

"Feeling safe swimming in front of cottage. Not being subjected to excessive racing boat noise (above water exhaust)."

"Enjoying the sounds of the loons and other water fowl. Feeling that I am not being bombarded by stereo music from wake boats far away that are much too loud."

"Speed and noise from boats in my view now pose a greater concern than impaired boaters."

"At least three floatplanes and two helicopters pass overhead each day. I am in a quiet bay so not much boating activity, but planes are main source of noise."

"The most offensive issues in our area, and in our previous cottage location on an inland lake, are noisy boats due to exhaust configurations and due to excessive speeding, dangerous waves and ignorance of impact on smaller boats docks and shoreline, and noise from sound systems on boats..."

"Above water illegal exhaust is by far the most disturbing noise that can be heard over great distances. There is zero enforcement on these laws in Georgian Bay and the boat owners know it and ignore the laws."

*"Above water exhausts and outboard racing engines are THE WORST PROBLEM on the Lakes. Why should we have to listen to some ***** boat when they are so far away we don't even know where they are...but can still hear them loud and clear."*

"Adding more police on the lake is not a solution if they just hassle law abiding people. The police need to go after the people who are obviously breaking the law with large noisy boats making huge waves and making lots of noise with open exhausts or loud music."



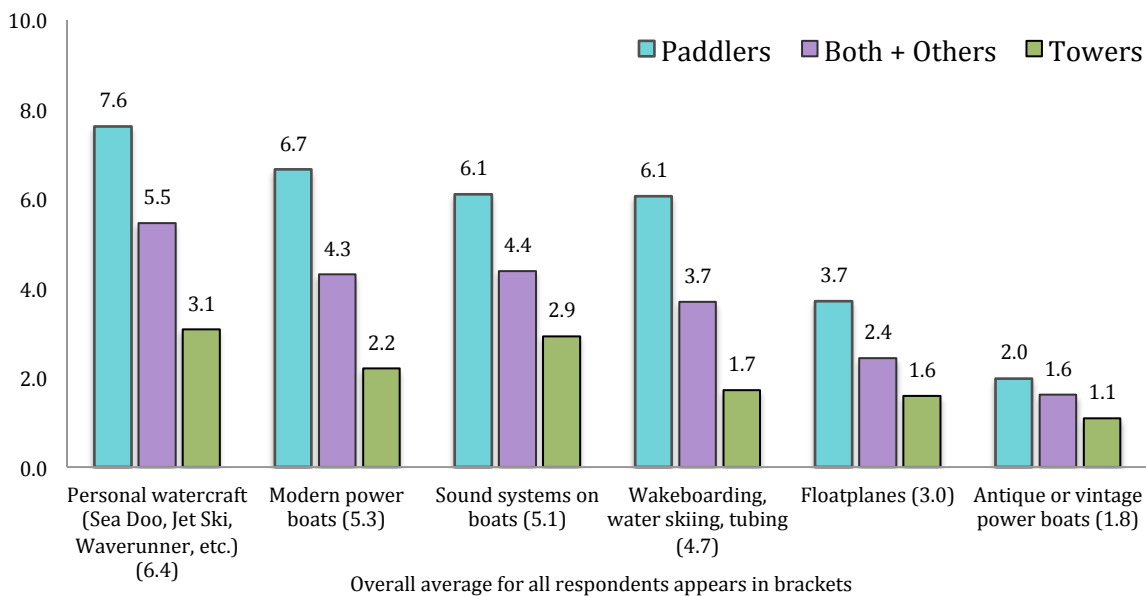
How paddlers and towers respond to noise

Is that boat noise an invasion of my personal space and a signal of heightened risk, or is it the sweet sound of a well-tuned machine?

Paddlers are most concerned about the various noise sources and towers are the least concerned.

As with other measures, those who enjoy both paddling and towing activities, along with those having other interest other than paddling and towing, occupy the large middle ground.

Figure 22. Do these contribute to unwanted noise near your cottage?



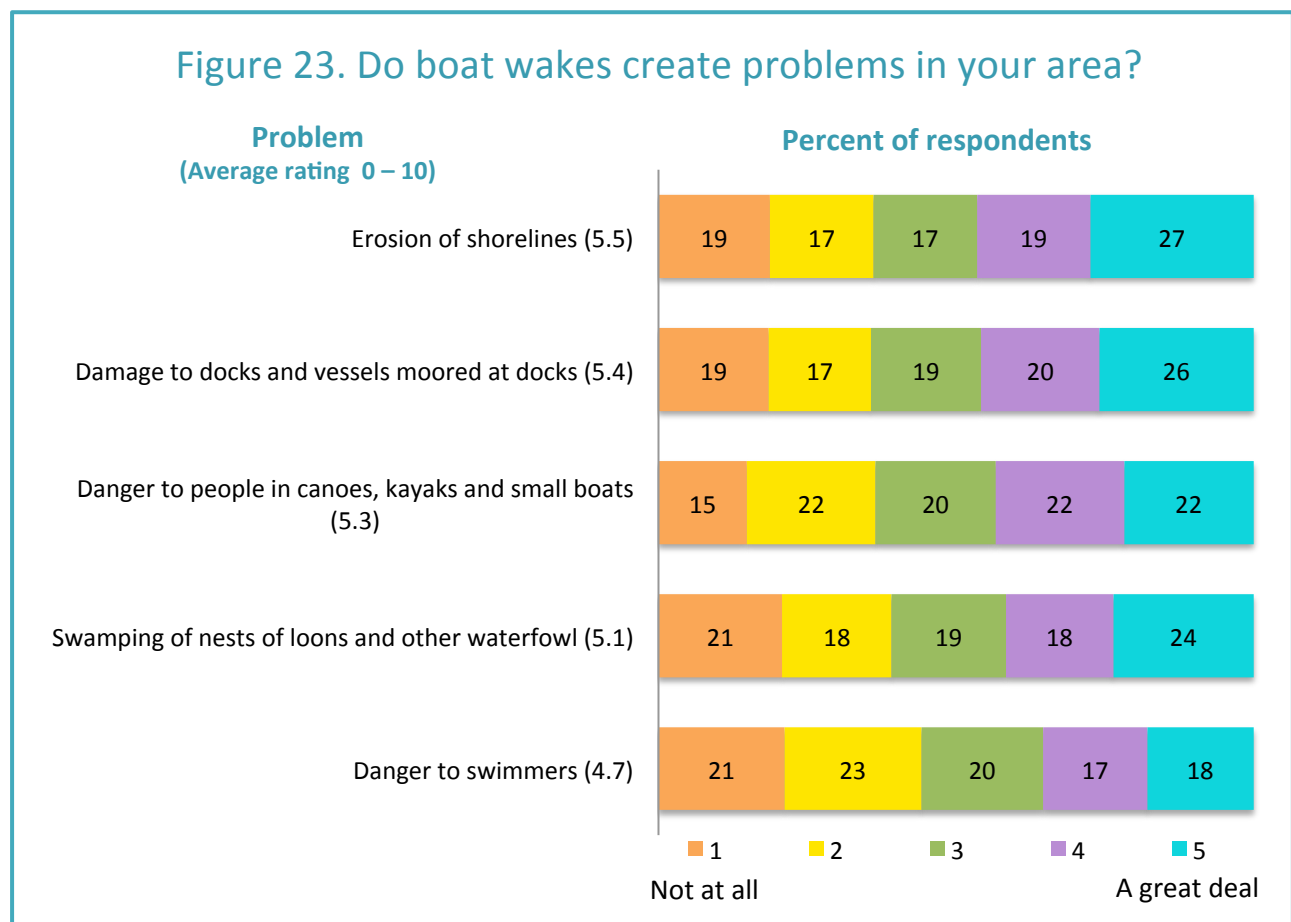


6.3 VIEWS ON BOAT WAKES

Figure 23 shows five possible impacts of boat wakes. Respondents are evenly split on their response to each one. This suggests that the impacts might be highly correlated, and in fact they are. People who see erosion, for example, as a problem tend to see the other four issues as problems too.

Conversely people who say that damage to docks is not a problem also tend to say that none of the other issues are problematic.

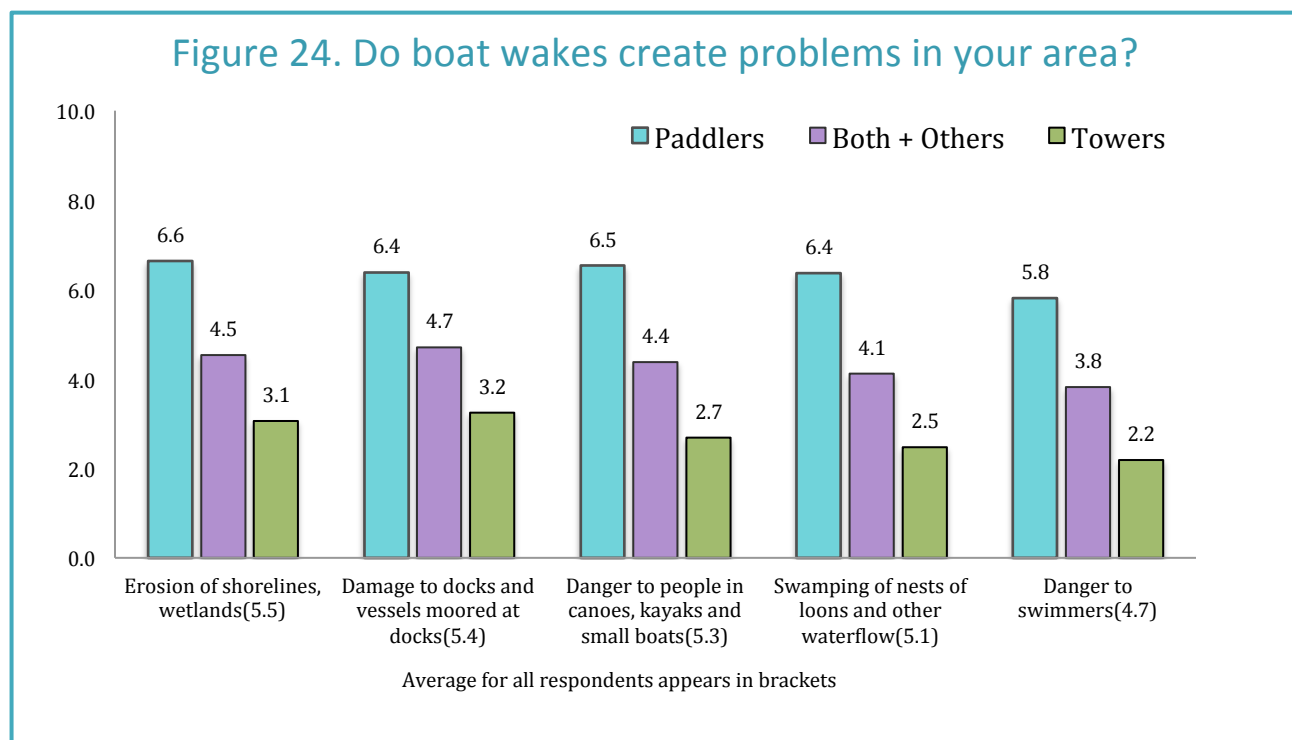
These views are consistent across the survey area, with the proviso that the problems are seen as slightly more severe in the three larger Muskoka lakes, and slightly less severe in Georgian Bay and other areas beyond Muskoka.





How paddlers and towers view boat wakes

Paddlers and towers form distinct camps on the impact of boat wakes. Paddlers see a significant impact of wakes on safety, the environment and property, while towers do not.





6.4 VIEWS ON BOATING CLOSE TO SHORE

Boats driving close to shore are an issue for some but not others.

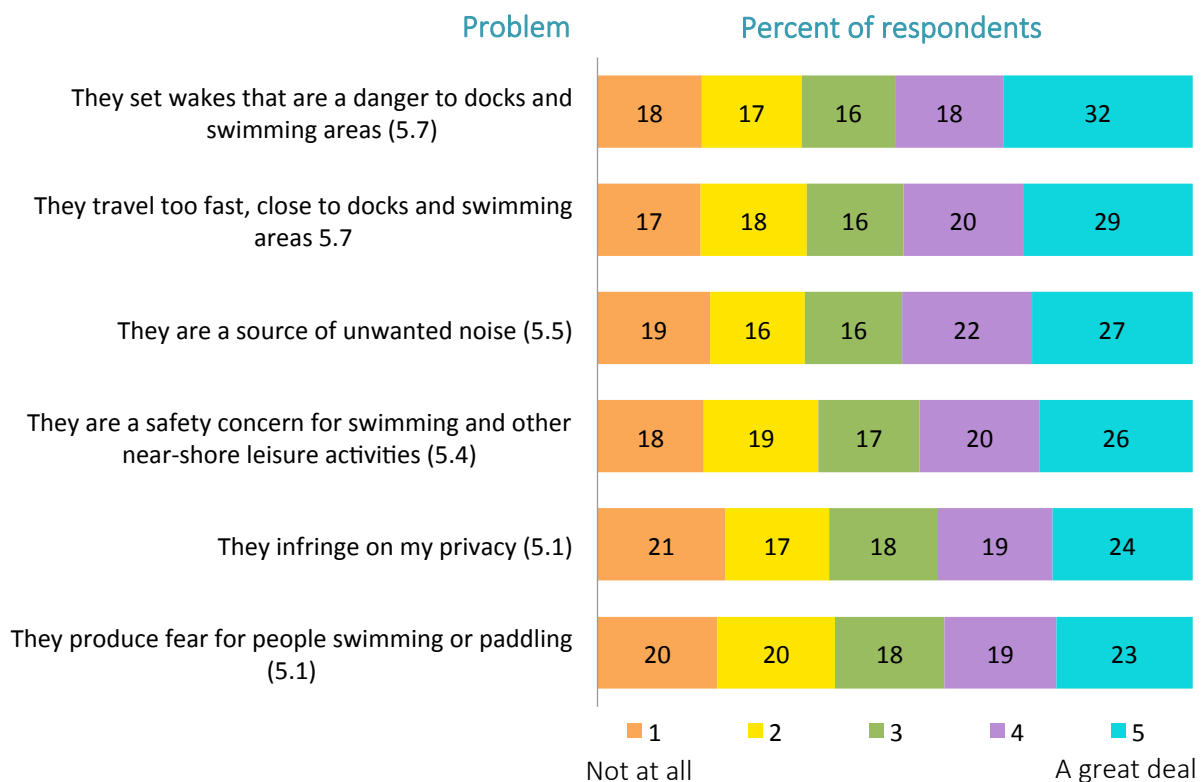
Of the six issues associated with boats driving close to shore:

- 20% see **none** of these issues as critical (i.e., they rated all of them at 1 or 2 out of 5).
- 24% see **all** of these issues as critical (i.e., they rated all of them at 4 or 5 out of 5).

One might expect that those in rivers and channels would experience more problems than those on open water, but this is not the case – there is virtually no difference between these groups.

Paddlers and towers divide sharply in their response to these questions. The data are not shown here but closely resemble Figure 22 and Figure 24.

Figure 25. Do boats driving close to shore create problems near you?





"Quiet boating, keeping a respectful distance from shore, especially wake boats, which need to stay as far out as possible."

"Wake boats are too large for our lake. They should only be on larger lakes, not when they are 50 ft. from shore."

"Boats going too fast, too close to my dock and shoreline creating wakes that are slowly damaging the shoreline."

"Wake boats are getting worse and causing a severe hazard to our young children and adults swimming near our dock. SeaDoo drivers must be told to keep speed down near the shore i.e., go to the 30m line and then open up - not from the dock like a spacecraft."

"Feeling safe on a shoreline without the fear of boats driving too close, frequently there are a few boats that drive right along the drip off towing skiers and it's concerning when you swim out at times."

"This survey should have split cottage owners from renters ... renters don't care and are there to go nuts for a short period of time. There is a lack of knowledge on how to operate PWC's, the safety component, the noise, the closeness to shore."

"We live on a small bay - renters are a big problem especially in the summer months with radios on docks, excessive speed close to shore."

"We have boaters and wake boarders and skiers too close to shorelines."

"In the last few years the increase in traffic and PWCs and speeding, large wakes, too close to shores has somewhat diminished my enjoyment of the lake."

"Education on boating too close to shore or impact of your activities on the lake to others is important. We cottage on a large lake so we can enjoy water sports and boating and while shoreline erosion and noise needs to be considered, the ability to boat and enjoy water sports is one of the attractions of larger lakes."

"The level of either poorly educated, careless or ignorant boat drivers is a serious and growing issue on the lakes. This extends beyond the lack of care they exhibit while driving far too closely to docks at far to fast a speed. These same boat drivers clearly don't understand how to safely operate their boats - driving too closely to other boats, driving on the incorrect side of boats, buoys and non-powered boats etc. It's become somewhat scary to be out driving on the lakes."

"Swimmers without visible floats endanger themselves. At times they are hard to see."



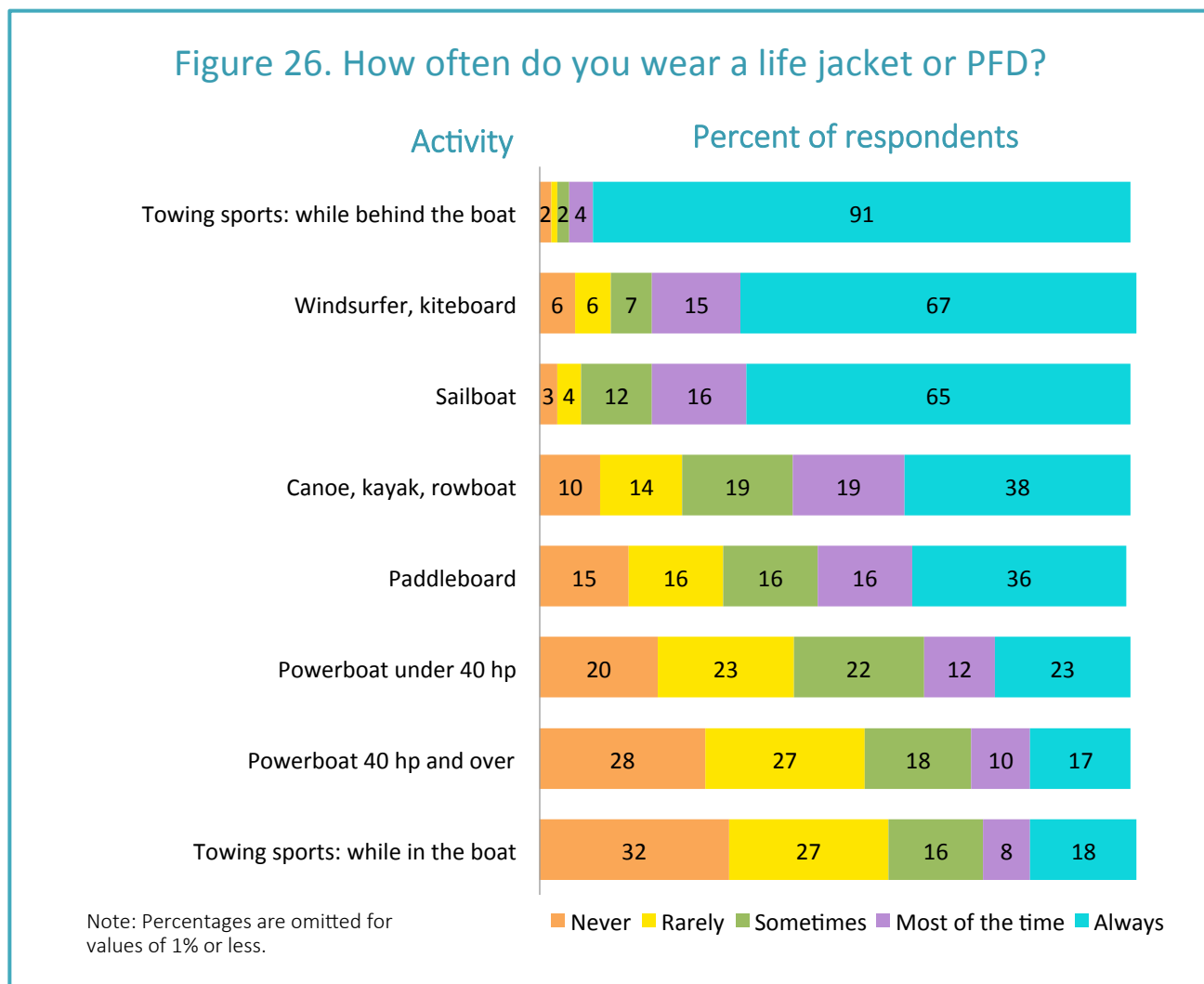
6.5 BOATING SAFETY

Transport Canada’s *Safe Boating Guide* states that all boats must carry a life jacket or Personal Flotation Device (PFD) for each person in the boat or being towed by it. The *Guide* states no requirement to wear the device, except for inflatable PFDs which a) only count as life saving equipment when they are worn, and b) do not count as life saving equipment on PWCs.

How often life jackets and PFDs are actually worn depends on the activity. Figure 26 shows that 95% of participants in towing sports wear them all or most of the time while being towed behind the boat.

A majority wear life jackets/PFDs all or most of the time in boats that rely on wind or human power – windsurfers, kiteboards, sailboats, paddleboards, rowboats, kayaks and canoes.

One-third or fewer respondents report wearing life jackets all or most of the time in power boats.



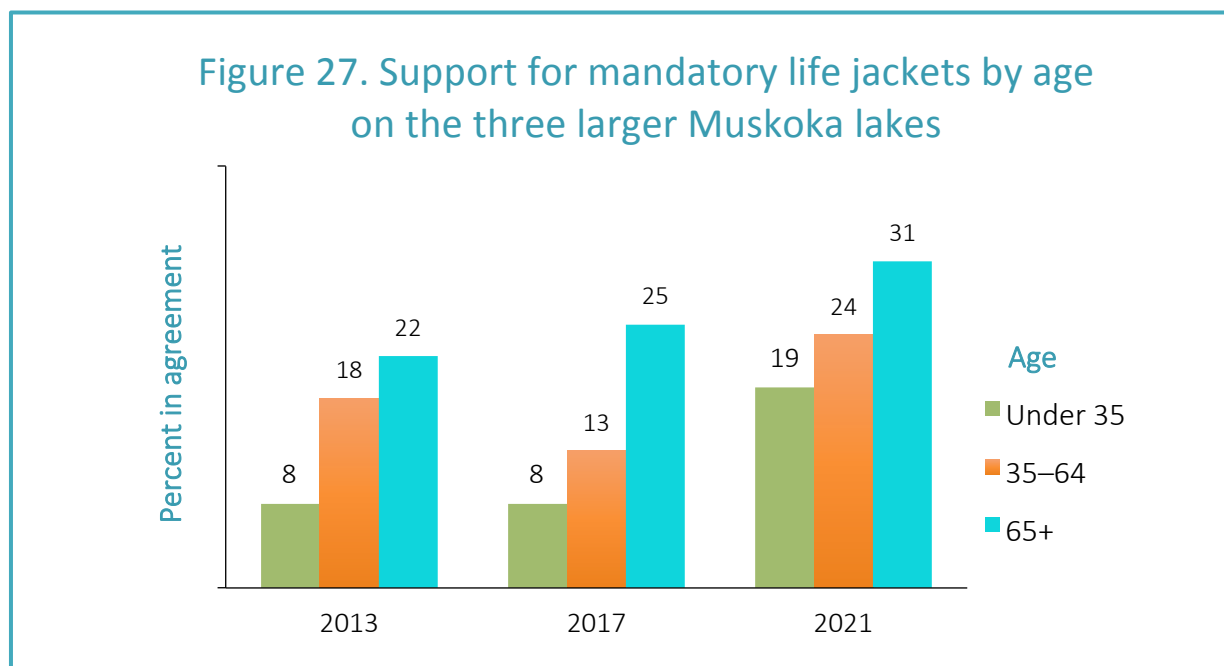


Eighty-seven percent of drownings in Ontario involve people who are not wearing life jackets. This raises the question: Should life jackets be mandatory in boats, like seat belts in cars?

Twenty-eight percent of all respondents in the 2021 survey agreed or strongly agreed with this proposition (see Figure 37).

While only a minority agree with this position today, support appears to be growing. To check the trend, we need to narrow our focus to the three larger Muskoka lakes, which provide a consistent sample. The proportions advocating mandatory life jackets was steady at around 15% in each of 2013 and 2017, but jumped to 24% in 2021.

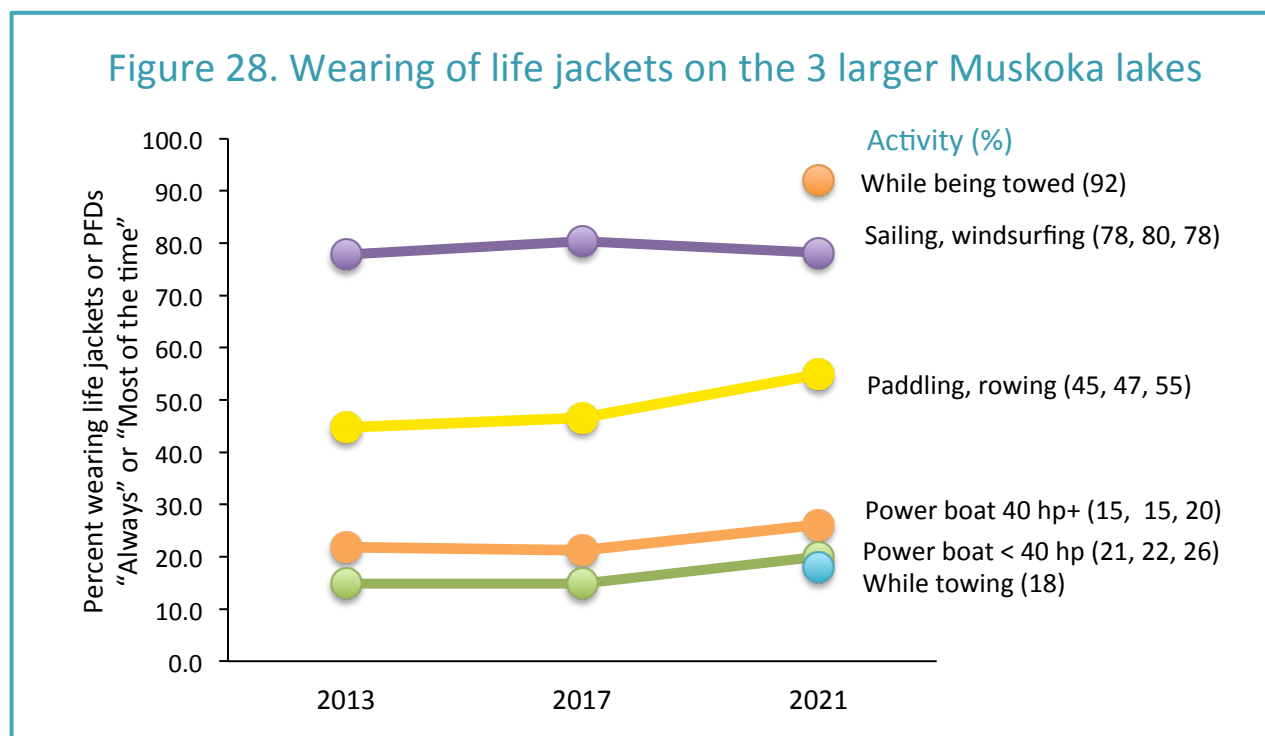
Age is a complicating factor, in that younger respondents tend to disagree with any increase in regulation or enforcement. However, Figure 27 makes it clear that support for mandatory life jackets is increasing among all age groups.





Supporting the idea of wearing life jackets is one thing; actually wearing them is another.

Again, looking at the three larger Muskoka lakes, there has been a small but statistically significant increase in the proportion of paddlers who wear life jackets since 2013. The trend lines are also up for power boats, at a borderline level of statistical significance.



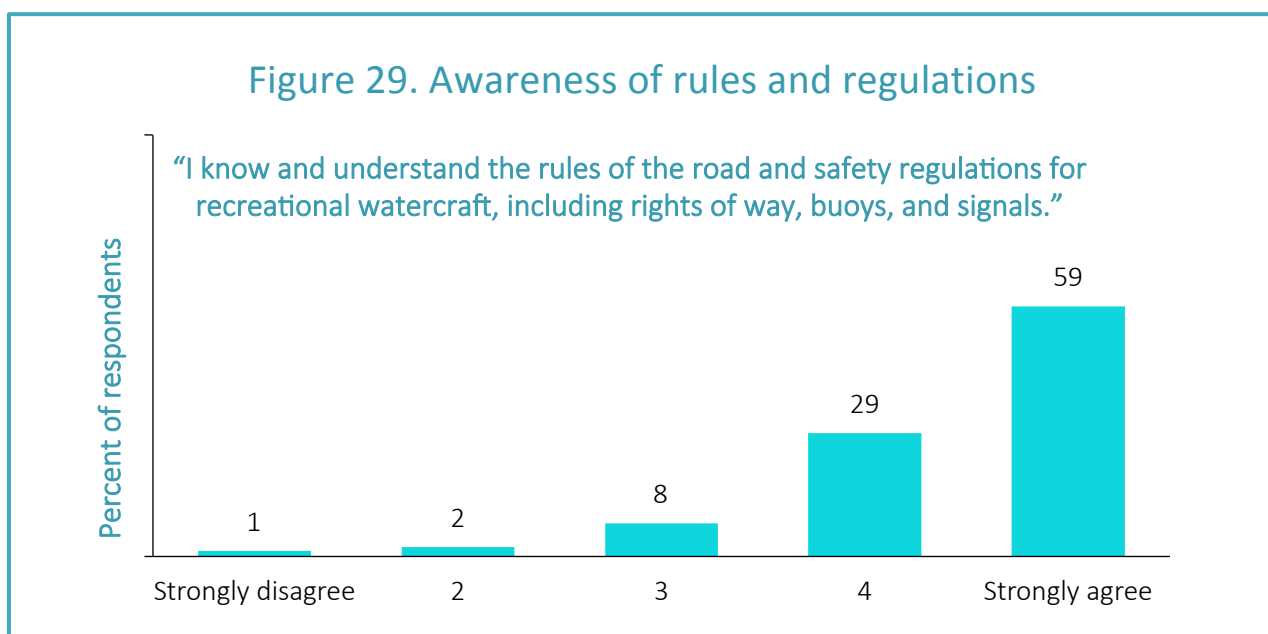


The vast majority of respondents, 89%, hold a Pleasure Craft Operators Card (PCOC).

- 55% have at some time taken a boating safety course related to the PCOC.
- 18% have taken other boating safety courses.

Most survey respondents are confident in their knowledge of boating rules and regulations – 59% strongly agree that they “know and understand the rules of the road and safety regulations for recreational watercraft, including rights of way, buoys, and signals.” The comments indicate very little support for the current PCOC system.

Not everyone operates a boat, and the 11% who are uncertain of boating rules and regulations may fall in this group.





"A safe boating experience [means]not having to worry about other boaters not following the rules when I am boating."

"Mandatory lifejackets are going too far. Weather, cold water, substance use and boating alone are the best indicators for needing to use a lifejacket."

"We don't need more enforcement or rules which limits everybody's freedoms in the name of solving the behaviour for the few that lack common sense and decency."

"I strongly object to mandating the wearing of life jackets in any boat. The key factor should be skill with that particular kind of watercraft and the ability to swim. Additional factors would include the time of year, water and wind conditions and so on. Mandating the wearing of life jackets is an extension of the nanny state and generally does not affect anyone but the individual."

"We do not need to wear life jackets consistently on non-motor boats and pontoon boats. The lake is small and help is available. There is too much police presence on our lake. It seems harassing."

"Self-enforcement has worked my entire life. No need to burden OPP with more enforcement on the lakes, they are busy enough."

"The police stop lots of boats to check out life jackets and generally try to ruin your day but they never stop boats for speeding close to shore. They never set up speed traps and they never pull over large power cruisers. Why?"

"I am a swimmer so Seadoos and Jet Skis are my biggest concern. If they would pay close attention to driving and not talking to their passenger that would be wonderful."

"The license requirement is useless as it does not train them how to drive a boat. There needs to be a proper course just like courses kids have to take when they start driving a car."

"People are the problem, not the boat. Instead of OPP checking for life jackets, they should monitor boat operators for skill; underage PWC operators."

"PLEASE mark the rocks in the lake. This is the number one issue, no-one takes responsibility for this causing great harm to people's safety. Complainers will always complain but PLEASE mark the rocks."



6.6 ANCHORING RAFTS AND BUOYS

Anchoring some obstacle to keep boat traffic at a distance from a dock or swimming area is a common practice.⁵ Anchored objects include plastic buoys, rafts, boats, plastic decoy ducks and inflatable water toys.

Overall, 41% of respondents report using any of three strategies to keep boats at a distance, i.e., anchoring a raft, anchoring a buoy, or placing signage nearby.

Figure 30 shows that rafts and buoys are equally popular strategies.

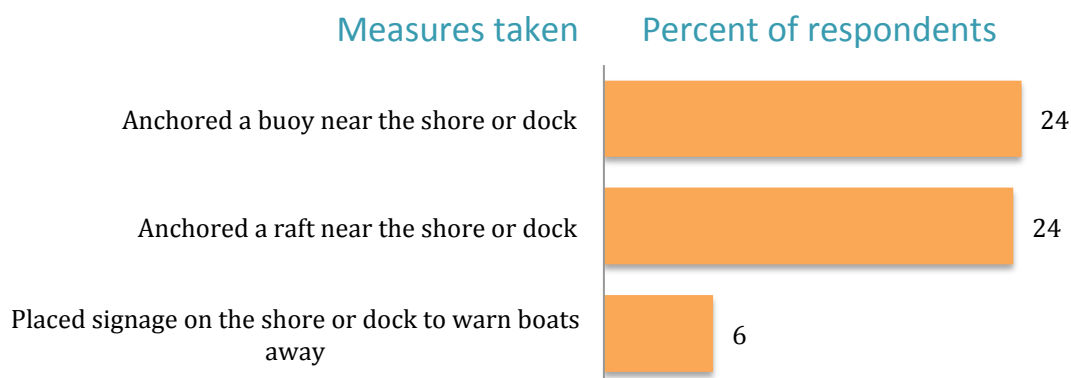
Note that these results do not imply that 41% of cottages have a raft or buoy in the water. That number may well be larger, as some residents place rafts or inflatables or lily pads for purely recreational purposes.

In 2021, the use of rafts and buoys was similar in the three larger Muskoka lakes and elsewhere:

- 42% in the three larger Muskoka lakes
- 40% in the rest of the survey area.

The difference is not statistically significant.

Figure 30. Have you taken any of these measures to keep passing traffic at a distance?



Note: Respondents could choose more than one option.

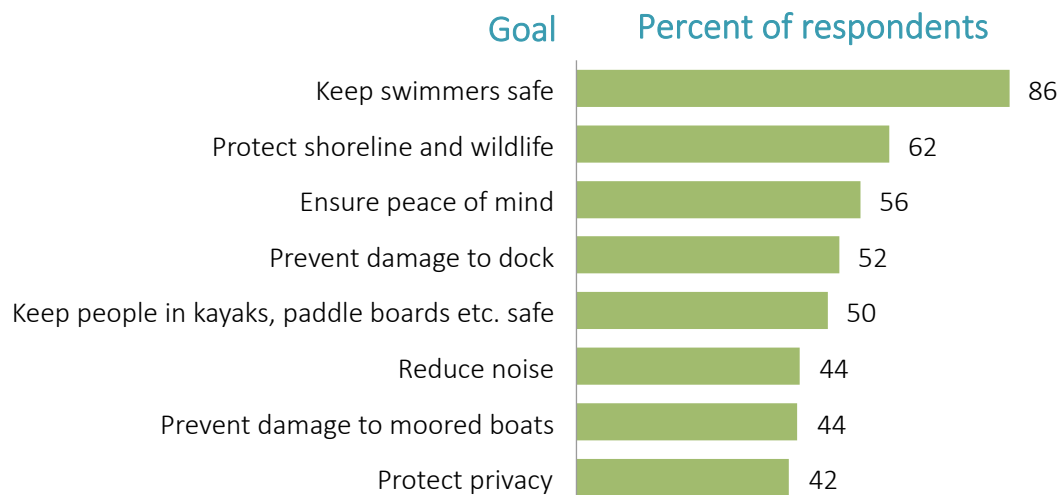
⁵ Many may be unaware that anchoring a buoy or other object in a navigable waterway is subject to Transport Canada regulations and may require approval. A summary of requirements can be found at <https://safequiet.ca/resources/faq/>



Keeping swimmers safe was the most frequently mentioned goal (86%) among respondents who took measures to keep boats away from shore (see Figure 27).

Other commonly cited goals include protect shoreline and wildlife (62%), ensure peace of mind (56%), and prevent damage to the dock (52%).

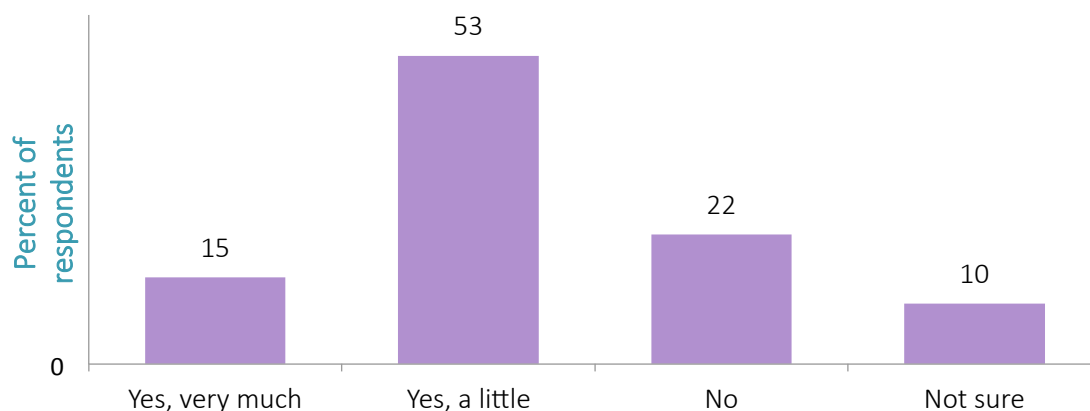
Figure 31. What were your goals when you took these measures?



Note: Respondents could choose multiple goals.

Figure 32 suggests these measures have mixed success: only 15% believe that their actions kept the passing traffic away “very much.” Half (53%) are of the opinion that the measures helped “a little.” One in five (22%) believe that these measures were not effective.

Figure 32. Did your actions help to keep passing traffic at a distance?





Trend in anchoring rafts and buoys

The 2013 and 2017 surveys also asked whether respondents had anchored a raft or buoy (signage was not included as an option in these surveys). Using the three larger Muskoka lakes as the basis for comparison, 2021 shows an increase in the use of these devices. The proportion of respondents who anchored either a raft or a buoy or both was:

- 34% in 2013
- 33% in 2017
- 39% in 2021.



6.7 RESOLVING NOISE AND SAFETY PROBLEMS

How often do issues of concern arise?

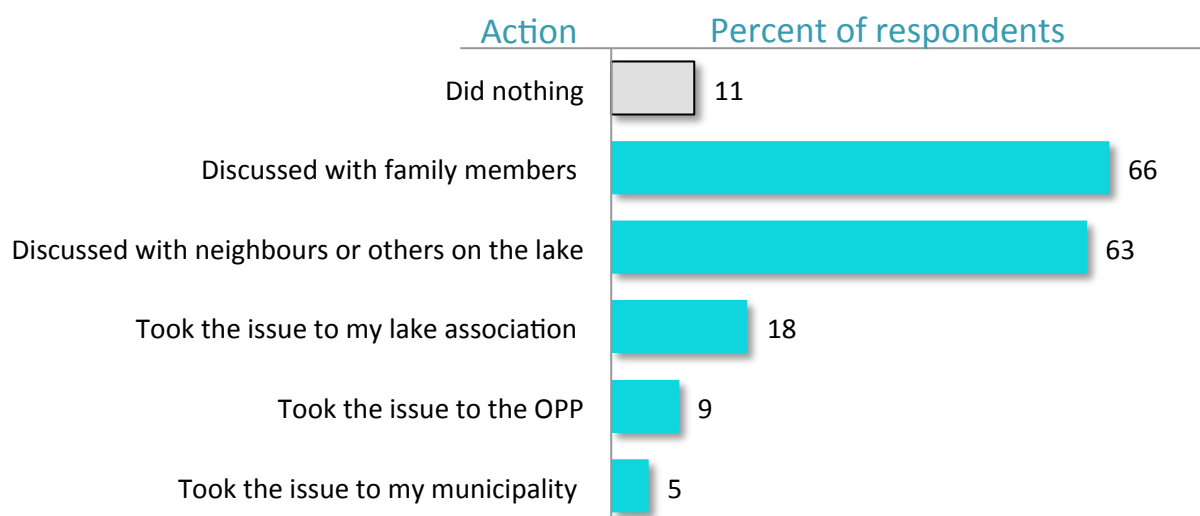
The survey asked, “Within the past year, have you had a concern about noise, boating behaviours or water safety that you wanted to discuss with others?”, and 63% said “Yes”.

Cataloguing all the issues that concerned people was not possible in this survey, but based on the comments they ranged from minor to serious.

Most respondents kept their concerns within the family (66%) or discussed the issue with neighbours (63%).

Of those respondents who took their concerns further, the largest proportion went to the lake association (18%). Smaller proportions contacted the OPP (9%) or their municipality (5%).

Figure 33. Within the past year, have you had a concern about noise or water safety that you wanted to discuss with others?



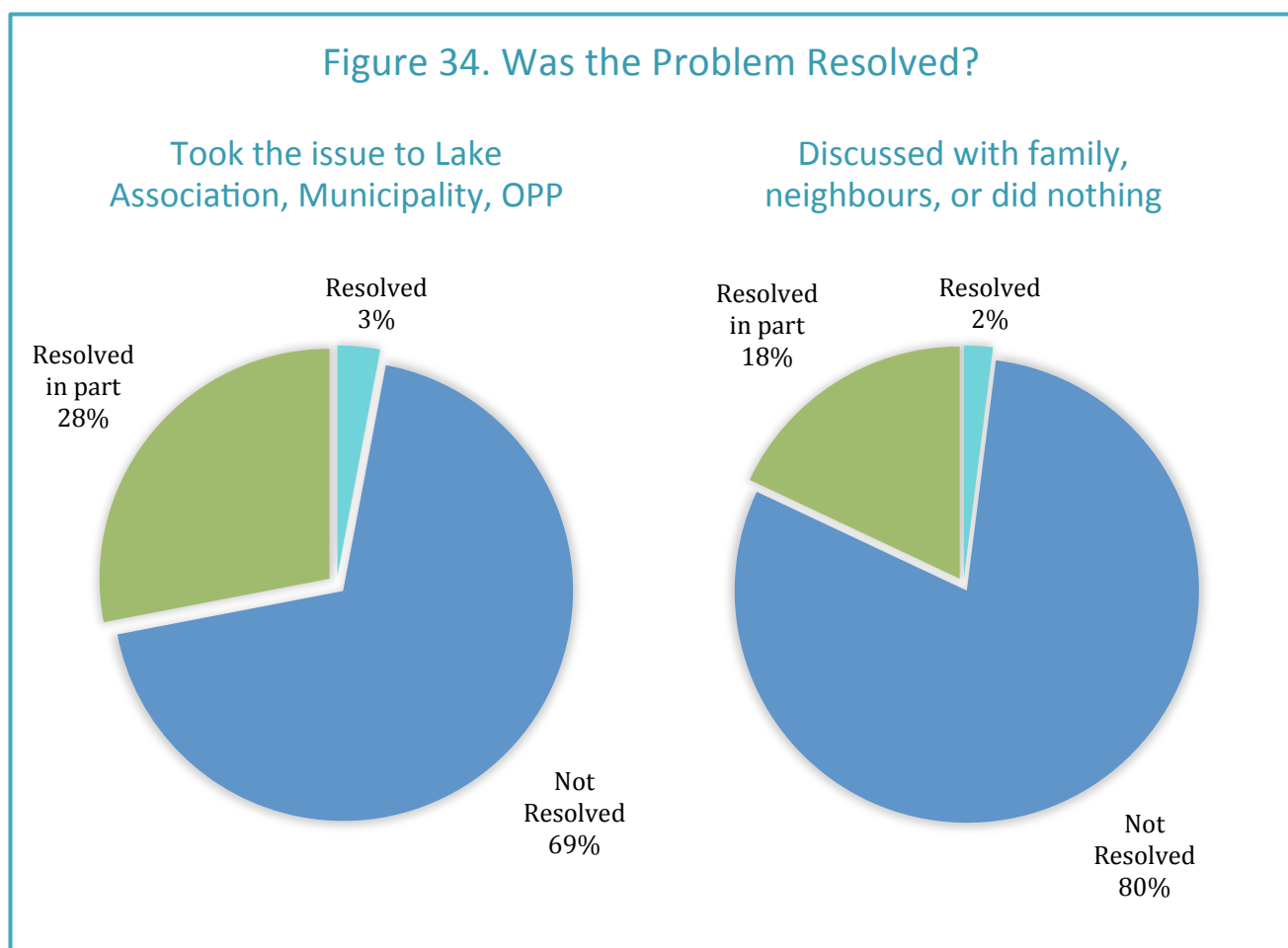


The results in Figure 34 suggest that persons taking their concerns to the lake association, the OPP or the municipality were more successful in getting their concerns addressed (30%) than those who kept their concerns confined to the home or neighbours on the lake (18%).

The experience of those who approached their association, the OPP and their municipality was very similar. Complete or partial resolution was reported by:

- 30% of those who approached their association;
- 33% of those who approached the OPP; and,
- 32% of those who approached their municipality.

Similar to the 2013 and 2017 surveys, views from participants on the OPP vary widely. Many comments describe further intervention by the OPP as the only hope to achieve balance on the lakes. Many others fear that OPP presence signals a “police state” on the water, the opposite of the freedom they seek. Critics of the OPP find them more focussed on what the commenters consider to be minor compliance issues such as lacking a whistle or a heaving line.





“OPP enforcement can be heavy handed in our area. There should be reasonable cause to pull boaters over - not just to check for safety equipment/licence/ownership/etc. Just like a traffic stop with a car - unless its a specified RIDE program then police should just stop those that are breaking the rules.”

“Extra policing is not going to help in the least. Too great an area to cover. Too ineffective.”

“Very disappointed that when the OPP visit the lake, Facebook notifications are posted and the boats/PWC disappear. Yet these same people want the unsafe boating and/or operators fined for their antics. Can’t do it if they are warned to get off the lake.”

“Rather than burden the OPP with added policing of the lakes, Safe Quiet Lakes or some other body could be empowered by the OPP or the MNR to stop bothersome and dangerous boaters and to inform them of corrections, i.e. slower speeds, staying farther from shore, smaller wakes, turning down sound systems, etc.”

“Increased OPP lake and road checks - speed on both is increasing - dangerously. Watercraft proximity and speed to swimmers and docks must change - very unsafe- Establish and enforce a straight out straight in rule for boats departing and returning to docks - the high speed in close - crossing at ends of neighbour docks is both dangerous and damaging to shorelines and other watercraft.”

“OPP enforcement has increased on our lake. I have no issues with the increased enforcement, so long as the officers use common sense before issuing tickets. When the situation at hand is not taken into context before issuing senseless fines, there is a quick erosion of support for increased police presence on the lake.”

“OPP do not have the resources to patrol regularly and when they appear seem more focused on checking for fishing licenses, boat licenses and safety equipment like a water proof flash light than ticketing dangerous operators or those operating off muffler.”

“Police should enforce other issues and not worry about safety kits/checks as much.”

“I have not put emphasis on new laws, but feel we have very little enforcement of existing laws. The alcohol consumption we see on boats is frightening.”

“Police are more interested in hassling fishers because of the prejudicial belief that they are likely to have alcohol on board. Police very seldom bother with aggressive or noisy boaters and almost never bother wealthy yacht owners.”



7. GEORGIAN BAY

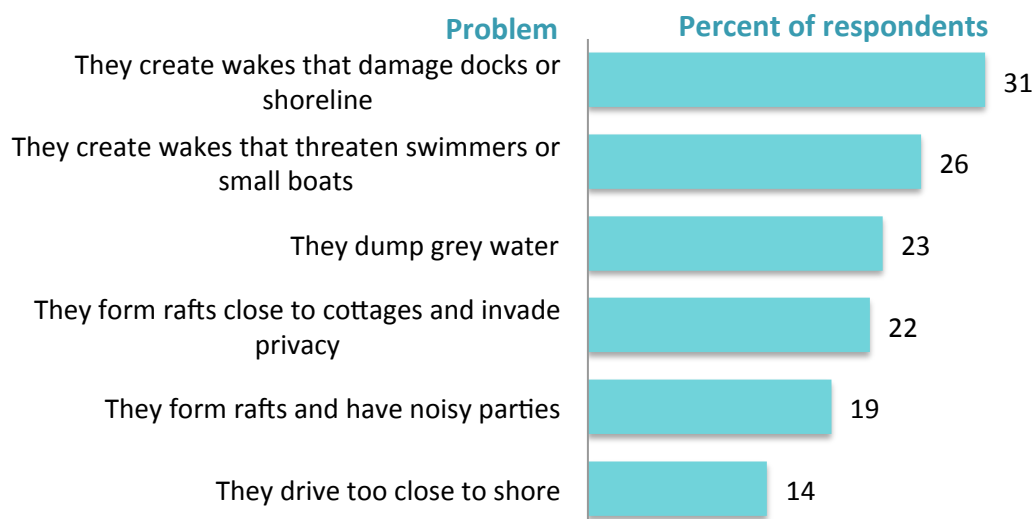
For the first time, the Safe Quiet Lakes survey includes the 19 local cottage associations that make up the Georgian Bay Association (GBA). Responses were received from 975 persons in the areas served by the GBA, 83% of whom are members of their local Georgian Bay Association. In addition, there were 136 responses from elsewhere on Georgian Bay.

A current major concern on Georgian Bay are “convoys” of cruisers and houseboats that travel together and have various impacts on the shoreline residents nearby.

Residents of the areas represented by the GBA were asked about their experience with these convoys. Figure 35 gives results for the 18 GBA associations that are on the open water of Georgian Bay. (The other association represents Blackstone Lake, an inland lake where convoys are not an issue).

Overall, 49% of respondents describe one or more problems with convoys, the largest issue being wakes that threaten docks, shorelines, small boats, and swimmers.

Figure 35. Do you experience problems with “convoys” of cruisers?

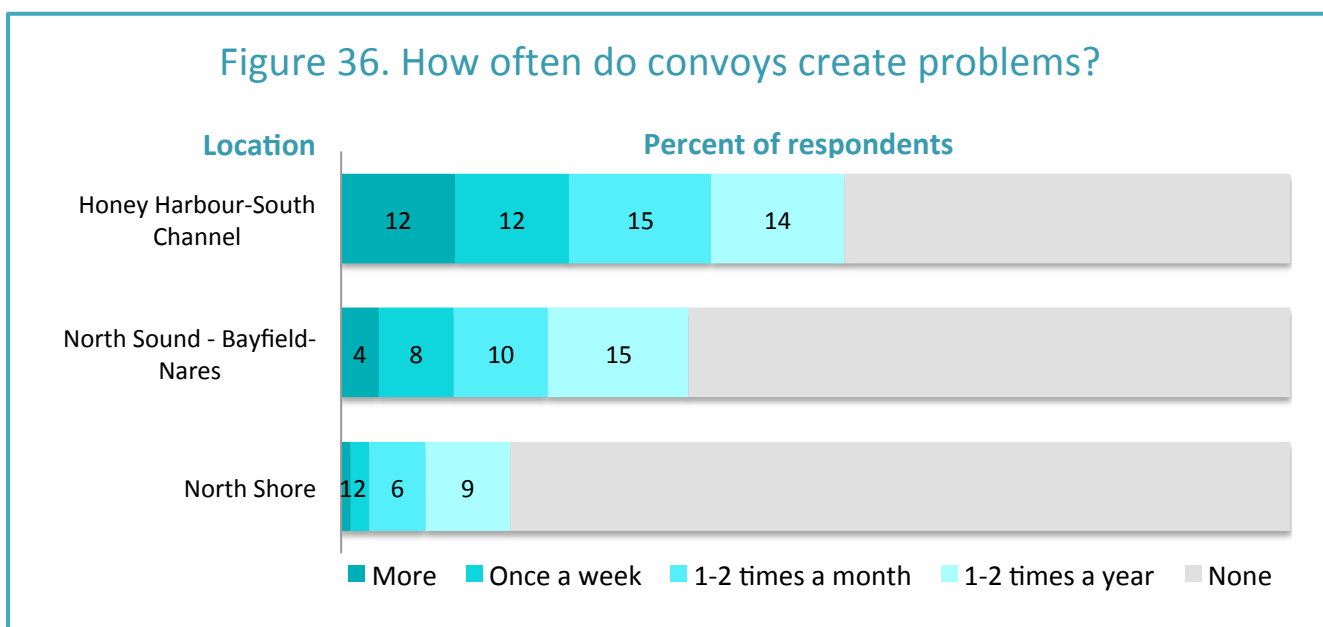




Southern portions of Georgian Bay report the most issues with convoys. The proportions of residents identifying one or more convoy problems are:

- 62% in the area from Honey Harbour to Sans Souci and the South Channel;
- 43% from North Sound to Bayfield-Nares; and,
- 21% on the North Shore (Key River to Bay of Islands).

In addition to reporting more problems overall, the southern locations confront convoy problems more frequently than those further north (Figure 36).





"Majority of boaters are polite. It is the large convoys from marina groups that are the problem."

"I am grateful to experience the waters of Georgian Bay, especially the 30,000 islands area. I want them to be clean, swimmable and safe."

"An increasing concern is the number of people marketing live-aboard houseboats, which can be towed and anchored providing a floating cottage with no responsibilities."

"Floatplanes are a danger to boaters. They land in areas with lots of boats. They create a hazard and will sooner or later be in an accident with a boat."

"Large boats are a huge problem. I consistently see pollution from grey water at my swimming rock. They swamp our small watercraft that we use to travel to and from our marina."

"On Georgian Bay, the main problem is wakes from larger transient boats."

"Boats have every right to travel in convoys. They should have no right to do so with unmuffled/through-hull exhausts, which destroy the enjoyment of the area for virtually everyone within miles."

"Convoys should be required to file a "flight plan," and be subject to hefty tolls going through the areas they traverse."

"Large convoys are creating a bad name for boating in a number of areas by having no respect for cottages or other boaters in the area they visit."

"PWC convoys blast down these channels with no regard to wildlife, other small craft, or proximity to cottage docks."

"Convoys rafting in front of cottages blaring music, driving recklessly in zodiacs in lagoons disturbing habitats etc. Perhaps a joint marketing program with Georgian Bay biosphere etc. at the point of sale to motorboats, cruisers regarding safety and environment issues."

"Education regarding wakes, shoreline damage and speed close to shore have had very little effect. Inconsiderate boaters are on the increase."

"Large power boat drivers that 'plough' through our channel seemingly unaware of their large wake."

"Larger wakeboats are a real issue. Produce very large wake that is eroding shoreline."

"PWCs are going in areas that are protected habitat and scaring turtles, nesting loons, etc."

"Canoes and kayaks are far more likely to cause damage to fragile wetlands because they can access them. By and large, power boats stay on established channels."



8. THE FORWARD COURSE

Common Ground and Divergent Views

Overall, the lakes are seen as a happy environment. Respondents wrote several thousand comments describing the joys of life on the water and the ways in which the different communities of boaters can share the space.

There is much common ground: All residents value a safe and quiet environment. All the different boating communities recognize that noise and a lack of safety reduce the quality of life on the lakes.

Consistent with this, there is a widespread consensus around safety: almost nine out of ten (88%) respondents believe they know and understand the rules of the road and safety regulations on the water, rating their knowledge as a “4” or “5” out of 5. Almost nine out of ten (89%) of motorboat operators agree that they have a higher degree of responsibility for ensuring safety on the water.

Lake users can continue to take pleasure in the successful elements of our lake environment; it's the frictions and tensions that create a need for dialogue, strategies, and policies.

The changing lake environment

The central conflict is similar to that described in previous surveys – how can people who enjoy fast noisy boats, some with big wakes, share the lake with those who like to spend time paddling quietly in smaller and much less stable craft? For convenience, we refer to these two groups as paddlers and towers, recognizing that many boaters have a foot in each camp. There is no contradiction for many people in the region in racing around in a powerful towboat one day, then shaking your fist at a similar boat the next day when it disturbs your meditative canoe ride.

This tension is heightened in 2021, in part because the lake environment has changed. Respondents feel that the lakes have more traffic and more noise than before. Their perceptions are backed up by tracking data for the three larger Muskoka lakes (see Figure 17).

People's activities have also changed. There are more paddlers on the water than before. Most new paddlers are also power-boaters, but paddling brings a unique appreciation of risk and vulnerability, and this may contribute to the slightly decreased sense of safety on the larger lakes.

Changes in traffic, noise, paddling and safety are all connected, and together they appear to underlie a greater openness to regulation and enforcement measures that were less supported in the past.

Specific Actions Needed

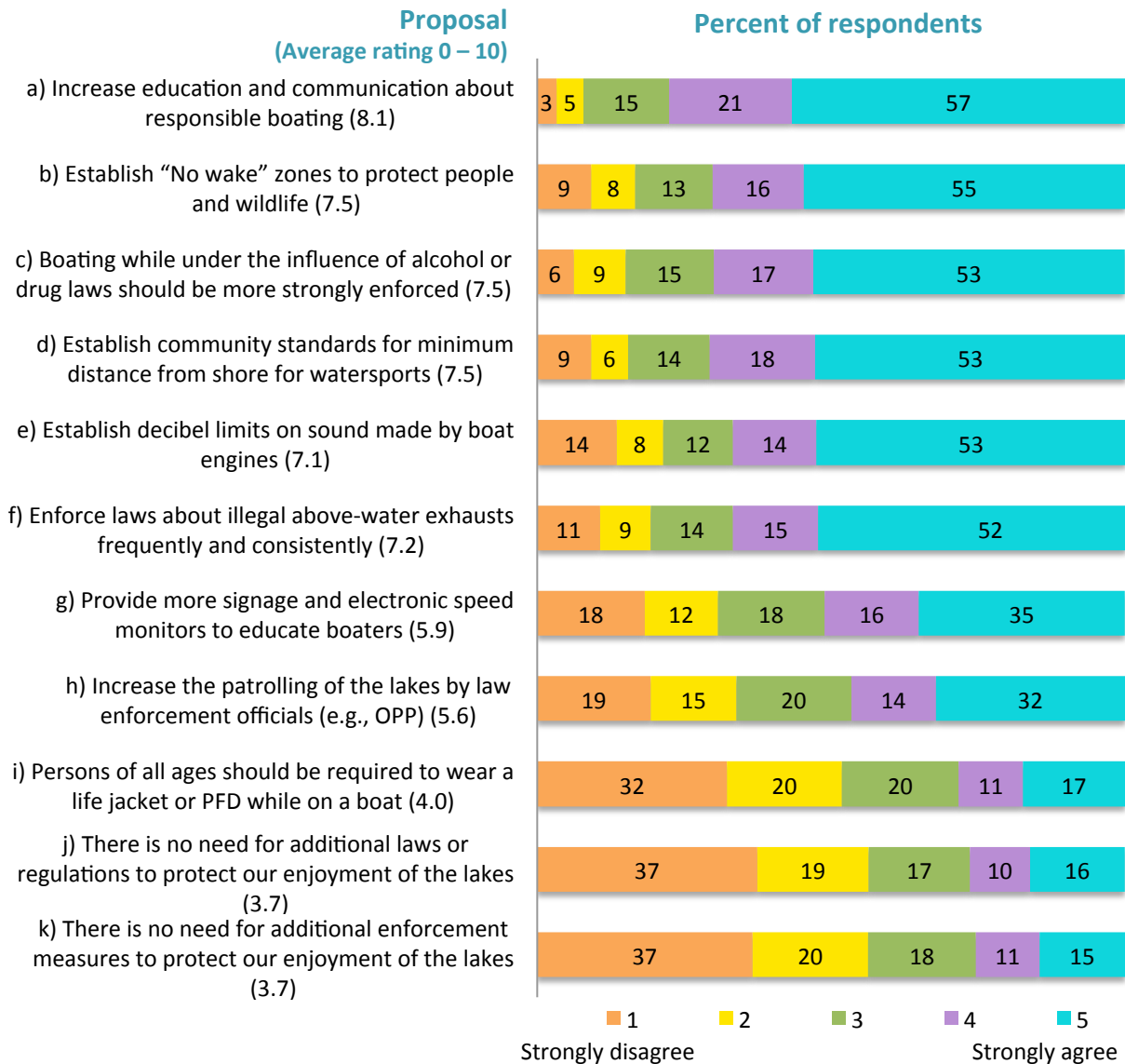
Stakeholders have proposed many ideas to improve the lake environment and the survey asked respondents to weigh in on eleven. Options a) and g) in Figure 37 relate to education while the rest address various aspects of regulation and enforcement.

Figure 37 shows the average response to each proposal on a scale from 0 to 10, as well as the percentage choosing each point on the scale.

Figure 17 reported trends over time on the larger Muskoka Lakes for several of these measures.



Figure 37. To what extent do you agree with the following proposals intended to enhance the boating experience on your lake?



Paddlers and towers

Paddlers (50% of respondents) and towers (7% of respondents) take opposing positions on most proposals. Paddlers strongly agree with items b, d, e and f (with average agreement scores above 8.0 on each item), while towers oppose each of these proposals (average agreement scores near 4.0). Towers tend to agree that there is no need for more regulation or enforcement (average scores of 6.5 and 6.3) while paddlers disagree (average scores of 2.5 on each).



Enforcement

The 2021 data indicate a markedly greater acceptance of solutions that involve regulation and enforcement. The greater acceptance seems to have evolved in these ways:

- More boat traffic leads to a greater perceived need for authorities to monitor it.
- More paddling activity leads to more people feeling vulnerable on the water, and so a greater need for the presence of authorities.
- Bigger and faster boats create more problems with wakes and congestion and so create a demand for regulation and enforcement,
- Media attention to high-profile and other tragic accidents puts a spotlight on regulation and enforcement.

Many of those who advocate for more enforcement do so grudgingly. Others vociferously protest any amount of regulation, and some worry that enforcement will mean dinging people for minor infractions while the egregious offenders carry on as before. So, any steps in this direction must be done carefully, with sensitivity and monitored for effectiveness.

One critical measure might be increased OPP presence on and near the water. Police boats are rarely seen outside a few high-traffic areas. Further afield, the sight of a police boat may cause alarm – what have I done wrong, or has there been an accident?

If police boats were as common on the water as police cruisers are on the highways, police presence could come to be seen as normal. A more visible presence might well encourage people to pay more attention to operating their boats in a respectful manner and observing safe practices. It might also help to dissuade the problem boaters.

Moving ahead

The forward course will require close cooperation among lake associations, government jurisdictions, elected representatives, law enforcement agencies, emergency response organizations, boating associations, watersports organizations, marinas, resorts, manufacturers of watercraft, environmental groups, trade associations, and other interested stakeholders.

The strong alternative views expressed in the comments indicate a need for continuing dialogue between groups of lake users, some of whom, particularly the “paddler” and “tower” groups have significantly different visions for the appropriate balance of use.



"The lack of bureaucratic laws and policies makes boating activities a more enjoyable leisure pastime, as it is a free space where overbearing laws are absent. I don't take this as licence to misbehave by any means but as a place where I can feel free."

"Mandate that all boat renters have completed and obtained a pleasure craft operator license in addition to on-water proficiency and safety courses."

"The OPP drive by our area very regularly so I do not see adding more as a productive use of Tax Payers money. Greater awareness and education reaches more people and will produce a greater rate of return."

"I am generally pleased with the OPP enforcement of the waterways I boat in. Unfortunately, they are not around when someone does something unsafe, but that is understandable."

"Our only concern is the lack of visible police enforcement on our lake. We very rarely see an OPP boat on our lake. How much trouble could it be for the local OPP detachment to drop a boat into our lake periodically to demonstrate that enforcement of the Small Vessels Regulations of the Canada Shipping Act are being enforced."

"The cigarette boats are a significant issue in our area. I am surprised that there was no reference to them in your survey. A boat with twin 250HP skippered by a yahoo is an accident waiting to happen in addition being a noise maker. A boat size to engine ratio would be a good way to limit them."

"Everyone who is 16+ should have to take a power squadron course in order to drive a boat or personal watercraft."

"Responsible boating/decibel limits needed."

"The boater safety card is a joke, people don't know or care about the rules. Mostly, the wakes are an issue. Also, 9k doesn't work, it needs to be NO WAKE. In the United States they enforce no wake with heavy fines and the operator is liable for the wake they create. It works."

"Boaters' licences should be mandated and checked. They should especially be required for rental PWCs, where they are not mandatory today."

"We have allowed the marinas to push wake boats without understanding the potential consequences. I would love to see much stricter regulation - boating should be a privilege not a right."

"Noise needs to be more enforced. Sunday morning rally should have police checks to ensure all those are meeting safety standards, for speed and noise within distance of shoreline."



"Please can there be regulations about bass fishing tournaments in regards to participants speeding and noise of boats in early morning. Very dangerous, very loud and not pleasant to wake up to. I think the loons hide every weekend."

"The 10-30 law needs to be made more well known. Boaters are well within 30 meters of shore and well over 10 km. They present a danger to swimmers, docks and wildlife."

"The biggest sound issue on most lakes is the use of above-water exhaust systems on some high-end power boats, such as Donzi and Tuff. Using above-water exhaust is not allowed within five nautical miles (9.26 km) of shore, but it is almost never enforced. I firmly believe there is no need for a new law, just enforcement of the existing law and penalties for those who make loud above-water exhaust noise within 9km of shore."

"More regulations for marinas on the lake."

"Stop the Sunday morning poker run on Lake Muskoka. Reduce noise and speed of power boats. Help boaters understand right of way rules."

"I do enjoy watching the annual power boat poker challenge. It's noisy, but it's only once a year, and it brings needed revenue to local businesses."

"The fast boat drivers know they are being dangerous and a nuisance but they don't care. The only way to stop them is to restrict speed, anywhere within 100 meters of the shore."

"10km speed limit within 30m from shore should be changed to no wake. Many boats without a speedometer have no clue how fast they're going."

"It might be a good ideal that rental companies of power boats help to educate the renter of the rules of the lake since most people are from out of town or country and are not familiar with regulations of the lake."

"The "online" system to get a PCO card is a joke."

"Wake board boats should be required to fill and empty their ballast in an open area away from shore, to avoid large wakes hitting land."

"Don't allow people fishing to come so close to property and docks."

"The existing rules of speed limits within 30 metres of shore are exactly what is needed to reduce noise, safety issues, shore erosion, and risk to wildlife. We already have a good law in place but it is not well known nor being enforced. Best to work on enforcing laws already in place or new ones will be added and be equally ineffective."

"I imagine it must be very difficult gaining a consensus on the matters addressed in this survey."



RECOMMENDATIONS

Eight major recommendations emerge from the survey findings and the specific actions in Figure 37.

1. Provide more education about responsible and respectful boating

There is strong and growing support for doing more to educate and communicate with people in the community about responsible boating. Almost four fifths (78%) of respondents agree with the approach of education as a complement to regulation and enforcement.

2. Ensure greater protection of shorelines and people from wakes

Almost three quarters (71%) favour minimum distances from the shore for water sports and the same proportion (71%) favour no-wake zones to protect human, animal, bird and plant life. 92% rated enjoying nature on the lake or by the shore as a top pleasure. This interest was also a major theme in the verbatims.

3. Develop limits on noise levels on the lakes

Two in three respondents (67%) favour limits on noise from engines on the lakes. Two thirds (66%) support more enforcement of existing laws that ban above-water exhausts. Respondents expect more engagement and support on lake issues from boat manufacturers and marinas.

4. Enforce existing laws/regulations and increase OPP visibility

Notwithstanding the widespread support for increased education, only 26% agree with the statement, "There is no need for additional enforcement measures to protect our enjoyment of the lakes." Support for different enforcement measures varies, however:

- 70% of respondents favoured increased enforcement of alcohol and drug laws; and
- 46% favour increasing patrolling of the lakes by the OPP.

5. Enhance laws/regulations especially regarding boat wakes, speed and noise

In Figure 37, more than half of respondents (56%) disagree, and only 26% agree with the statement, "There is no need for additional laws or regulations to protect our enjoyment of the lakes".

6. Celebrate and build on the approaches of successful lakes, bays and rivers who share the space respectfully

People love the lakes and some areas have found a healthy and respectful balance for the different uses. Governments, law enforcement and community groups should study successful approaches in order to improve safety and the quality of experience that people enjoy.



7. Continue to conduct comprehensive surveys of lake activity

Sharing data that is collected and analyzed by third party opinion researchers gives the community a picture of trends in the lake community over time. This report documents trends in the activities that people value, the boats they use, noise, boat traffic, safety, the overall quality of experience that the lakes provide, and potential solutions to problems. Sharing a common research foundation supports dialogue and problem-solving among stakeholders.

8. Monitor emerging issues and ideas raised in participant comments

A number of issues registered considerable concern as illustrated by the verbatims. These include:

- Float planes
- Convoys and other groups of boats
- Use of PFDs
- Accidents
- Renters, day visitors and their boat use
- The need for a PCOC practical on-the-water test
- Possible activity zoning options and,
- Alternative on-the-water patrolling.

These matters should be monitored and explored in greater depth by multi-stakeholder groups in future years.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORWARD COURSE

The forward course will require close cooperation and creative problem-solving among lake associations, government jurisdictions, elected representatives, law enforcement agencies, emergency response organizations, boating associations, watersports organizations, marinas, resorts, manufacturers of watercraft, environmental groups, trade associations, and other interested stakeholders.

Call to Action: A summit meeting of representatives of these stakeholders held as soon as possible would lay the foundation for processing and acting on these recommendations in a co-operative and co-ordinated manner. The challenge is big, but the treasure of the lakes is worth every effort.



"30+ years on lakes, and I'm a boating safety instructor; lack of education and understanding on impacts of boat wakes on small craft, swimmers and shorelines are a HUGE issue in this region."

"My late father taught us all how to waterski at a young age. Never willing to put safety or community welfare at risk himself, he taught us proper boating safety and boating etiquette when it comes to operating pleasure craft and engaging in water sports. My hope is that steps can be taken to increase community awareness on proper boating behaviours when it comes to operation of power boats around non-powered watercraft, and responsible operation (use of PFDs, non-use of alcohol before or during boating)."

"I believe the laws are sufficient, they just need to be enforced more frequently."

"Wake boats/boarders should be banned on small and medium sized lakes and a certain distance from shore on larger lakes."

"Wakesurfing should have more education. A simple map given to drivers where they should drive: Green = centre of bay/lake yellow = just outside of centre Red= Beyond those zones and nearer any shore."

"PWCs should require a better user testing system. (Not a test today, rent for the weekend user)."

"What works for Georgian Bay does not compare with what works on inland lakes."

"The lake is treated like a playground rather than the natural resource that it is. Need to establish an ethic of care and respect, not of consumption and the hedonistic pursuit of 'fun'."

"I understand that some people enjoy peace and quiet on the lake, but the lake is for everyone. You can't just change the rules to your convenience."

"Unfortunately, there are a large number of entitled people who don't give a damn about others, so more enforcement is probably necessary."

"The #1 problem that reduces enjoyment of the lake is Airbnb renters. People who don't respect lake courtesy rules and noise."

"We have a "good thing" at our cottage and on our lake, however with the pandemic AND with new cottage owners on the lake, we are seeing a need for some basic awareness and education about the topics and issues raised in this survey. Some of the most common courtesies and respectful practices AND safety protocols are obviously not known or followed by many."

"Unfortunately, an entitled few are responsible for the majority of problems."



"Often the culprits are a few bad apples. More education is often preaching to the converted. Fast very noisy ocean-going boats should not even be sold for our lakes and rivers and persistent owners of such boats who spoil life for everyone should be heavily fined. Appropriate use and safety measures should be reinforced at rental outlets. Boats and personal water crafts are rented out to people who have NEVER driven a boat and no nothing about the lake. This practice is absurd."

"Clearly, waterskiing is significantly different and less of a wake issue than wake surfing and wakeboarding. Waterskiing by its nature is very respectful and responsible. The other towed watersports can be careless and reckless (tubing), or disrespectful (wake surfing close to shore)."

"I hope and pray something will be done. I have never seen anyone out on the lake - patrolling the speed or the noise. Where is the LAW ENFORCEMENT? Where are the rules enforced and fines/penalties? Shame on all boat dealers who think selling 'Miami Vice' style boats is acceptable -- all for greed. nothing for peace, calm, enjoyment of nature."

"Enlist the co-operation of marina owners to help educate boaters about these issues (more signage at marinas.)"

"The rare time the OPP are on the lake they are never around when you need them and the By Law officer has no power in this area. There has to be a better solution. It feels like the Wild West on the water."

"People should be allowed to enjoy the lake as they wish, as long as it does not endanger people, other watercraft and property. I don't think noise should be a big factor really. It's a lake, to be used for recreation. There will be noise. People need to lighten up."

"Don't come up north with a bunch of fancy ideas for change. It's not your choice and you're not going to infringe on my enjoyment."

"I think that there are some very huge boats on our lake, that are meant for Georgian Bay. I feel that there should be a limit on the size of boat allowed on lakes."

"Have OPP stop boats for real and visually evident cause instead of random safety checks."

"Biggest concern is the number of "new" cottagers/boaters that have no idea how to drive a boat, do not understand it is different than driving a car and do not know the rules of the water. There needs to be a proper course just like courses kids have to take when they start driving a car."

"Work with the marinas who sell jet skis and wake surfing boats to increase awareness and inform buyers they have a responsibility to not damage shoreline or other people's property."

"Consideration, communication, cooperation."