Water-based recreation, such as boating, is popular throughout the Northern Forest, but conflicts between users can arise as different stakeholders compete for the same resources. NSRC researchers studied differences and similarities in stakeholder values, beliefs, and attitudes towards motorized boating, non-motorized boating, and personal watercraft use (e.g. jet skis) in the Saranac Lakes Wild Forest area of New York’s Adirondack Park. The forest area contains 79,000 acres of state land and 142 bodies of water.

Researchers first interviewed 20 land managers and used interview results to write mail surveys sent to landowners, business owners, and campers. About 420 landowners, 440 campers, and 25 business owners responded. Surveys revealed important differences concerning the beliefs and attitudes towards participation in non-motorized and motorized boating, indicating a potential source of social conflict between local residents and campers. Important similarities among stakeholders were identified concerning the attitudes and beliefs towards personal watercraft, indicating an opportunity for consensus-building by land managers with regard to management of this type of boating.

Study findings were presented to state land managers and will be used in creation of the Saranac Lakes Unit Management Plan. Results can also be used by forest managers throughout the Northeast to better understand differences in perceptions among stakeholder groups towards water-based recreation. Detailed study results can be found at http://www.esf.edu/for/kuehn/reports.htm/.

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