



# SAFE QUIET LAKES

## 2013 LAKE ACTIVITY SURVEY

### SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Safe Quiet Lakes, a volunteer community group, commissioned a 2013 survey in Ontario's Muskoka region in cooperation with fourteen lake and resident associations to understand the spectrum of views on lake activities. Safe Quiet Lakes and our lake community partners will use results to educate and inform members and to develop priorities and strategies. They will also form a baseline to measure attitudinal and activity changes over time.

#### Report Highlights

*Respondents care deeply about their lake community and their water activities. They want their voices to be heard. Their perspectives are different, passionate and sometimes angry.*

- Almost everyone agrees these things are central to the cottage experience: safety; our responsibility to preserve the lakes, the sounds of nature, spending time near the water, swimming, paddling and power boating
- There is a direct correlation between the enjoyment people experience and their perception of the safety and quietness of their lake environment
- A large majority of respondents see significant issues on the lakes although a small group feels that the status quo is fine. The most frequently mentioned problems are:
  - Boats (particularly PWC's) going too fast close to shore
  - Loud boat engines
  - Large boat wakes
- Virtually everyone agrees that more communication and education is needed
- A strong majority believes regulation and enforcement is required for three issues: reckless boating, alcohol use by boat drivers and noise from boats. There is a divergence of opinion on other solutions.
- PFD use is lowest among young people, a group that drowning statistics indicate are at greatest risk
- There is a powerful appetite for more dialogue and help to deal with the problems on our lakes

The survey was conducted and analyzed by ERIN Research Inc. ([www.erinresearch.com](http://www.erinresearch.com)). The full report is available at: [www.safequiet.ca](http://www.safequiet.ca)

A total of 2,291 people completed the survey. This sample is very large and broadly based; therefore, the results can be used with confidence. Respondents also provided over 130 pages of comments and ideas, most of them constructive, many extremely passionate (and a few fundamentally suspicious of surveys like this.)

## Report Overview

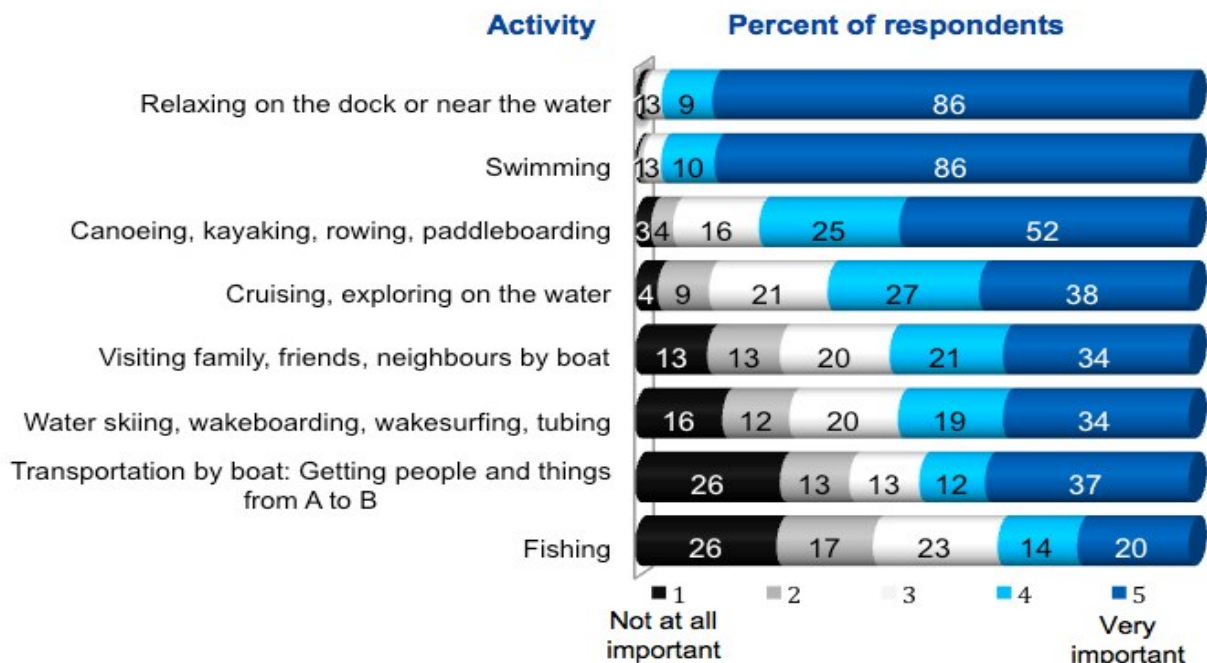
### What did we hear?

We heard a powerful consensus from respondents across ages, locations and boating preferences around a few key themes (see figure 1):

- Safety is critical to almost everyone
- We have a responsibility to preserve the natural state of the lakes for future generations
- We like to hear the sounds of nature
- We like to spend time near the water
- We like to swim and use boats – 80% of the respondents say their families use a canoe and a similar number use power boats

Perceptions of safety and quiet on the lake correlate directly to enjoyment – this is true for different age groups, those who use very small or human powered craft and those who use large power boats and participate in towing sports. Almost everyone feels that safer and quieter lakes are more enjoyable.

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



## **The most commonly cited problems**

The top five problems people experience on the lakes are:

- Boats going too fast close to shore
- Loud boat engines
- Large boat wakes
- Boaters not following the rules
- A lack of courtesy on the water.

Other issues that were mentioned by respondents include:

- The behaviour of PWC operators and the noise associated with PWC's
- Dissatisfaction with the current boat operators licensing system
- Loud music from boats (and cottages)
- Invasion of privacy by kayakers, canoeists and fishermen being too close to shore
- Resorts, camps and other commercial operations particularly relating to wakeboarding schools and the rentals of PWC
- OPP spot checks (responses indicating that there are both too few and too many)
- Frustration with the intrusiveness of aircraft, rafts and buoys
- Excessive use of fireworks.

Respondents' perception of the severity of the problems is affected by several factors:

1. Witnessing or being involved in an accident or close call: these individuals generally perceive there to be more problems
2. Horsepower: those with higher horsepower boats generally perceive there to be fewer problems
3. Traffic: those who live near a source of traffic such as a marina, channel, public wharves, or retail area experience more problems
4. Age: older residents perceive more problems than younger people
5. In addition, residents of some lakes report more problems than others.

## **Solutions for consideration**

There is a strong consensus around the need for more communication and education. However, respondents are split on both the right amount of enforcement and the need for additional regulations. There are very passionate proponents of both less and more regulation and a similar division with people pleading for both less and more enforcement. However, despite that split over 60% of respondents are aligned around the need for regulation and enforcement on four issues:

- Reckless boating
- Alcohol use by boat drivers
- Noise from above water exhausts (captain's choice switch)
- Limits on noise from boats

Many comments indicate that the desire for regulation and enforcement on these issues is tempered by discomfort with current enforcement, specifically OPP "spot checks" and the perception that these are a "nuisance" and don't address more critical issues.

There is a worrisome trend in PFD usage – the younger generation doesn't use PFD's to the extent that older people do. Drowning statistics in Ontario and in most jurisdictions around the world indicate that young, healthy males are the most frequent drowning victims and that appropriate use of PFD's saves lives.

## **Dialogue**

We were fortunate to receive a huge, unprecedented response to the survey. With close to 2300 responses and over 130 pages of detailed and largely thoughtful comments, the message from this level of participation is unmistakable: people care deeply about their lake community and want their voices to be heard. The perspectives are different, passionate and sometimes angry.

## **Where do we go from here?**

The detailed results of the survey will be shared with each of the lake associations who participated, the OPP, Transport Canada, elected officials locally, provincially and federally, marine manufacturers, area marinas and other community groups.

Safe Quiet Lakes will continue our communication and education campaigns and will work to facilitate dialogue between individuals and groups who want to address these issues in a constructive way.

More than 750 individuals voluntarily shared their email and contact information with Safe Quiet Lakes in completing the survey, and they will be kept informed of activities and opportunities for input.

Please join the dialogue by sharing your stories or ideas at [www.safequiet.ca](http://www.safequiet.ca) or volunteer to share our Boater's Code and our message of respectful boating.

## Thank-you

Thank you to ERIN Research Inc. and to everyone who participated in the survey. And thank-you to all of our survey and supporting partners listed below:

Township of Muskoka Lakes	Muskoka Lakes Association
Township of Seguin	North Alport Bay Ratepayers Association
Blackstone Lake Cottagers Association	Otter Lake Ratepayers' Association
Bruce Lake Family Association	Silver Lake (Port Carling) POA
Horseshoe Lake Cottagers Association	Skeleton Lake Cottagers' Organization
Kahshe Lake Ratepayers Association	South Muskoka Lake Community Association
Lake Joseph North Association	Star Lake Woods Association
Lake of Bays Association	Stephens Bay Association
Lake Rosseau North Association	Sugar Lake Association
Little Lake Joseph Association	Sunny Lake Cottagers' and Ratepayers' Association
Loon and Turtle Lake Cottage Association	
Moon River Property Owners Association	