

OCTOBER 2025

Your Lakes, Your Views - 2025

Survey Summary Report

Study conducted by Earnscliffe Strategies on behalf of Safe Quiet Lakes

Background:

Safe Quiet Lakes has been tracking how perceptions of various Ontario lake issues have evolved over the past 12 years through four surveys conducted in 2013, 2017, 2021, and this opinion research in 2025.

Survey Objectives:

Respondents were asked about their lake activities including choice of watercraft, perceptions about quality of life and safety on the lake, and views on regulation and enforcement.

Methodology:

Earnscliffe conducted a 15-minute online survey that over 7,100 lake users participate in. The open survey link was distributed through the Safe Quiet Lakes opt-in email list, Lake Associations throughout Ontario, and other community outreach. The survey was in the field from June 16 to July 25, 2025.

Community-based research is a powerful way to gather essential data to underpin education, communication, advocacy, work and conversations between stakeholders. Direct community engagement provides rich insights and builds goodwill with community members by demonstrating the value of their perspectives.

Summary of the key ideas found in the 2025 Survey:

The 2025 survey yielded an enormous and high- quality data set and insights. In addition to answering questions, the 7,000+ survey participants provided over 160,000 words of passionate comments and ideas.

Consistent with past surveys, the results show that the lakes have a deep attraction and often profound meaning for their users. Lakes and cottages are in many cases hubs for three generations of family and friends, experiencing and stewarding nature, and enjoying a variety of lake activities.

The majority of lake users feel their experience is near ideal, but many also feel the quality of experience on the lakes is threatened, particularly by new wake generating technology, noise, and reckless boating behaviours.

There are many areas of strong ongoing consensus among lake users. Most agree that lake communities support mixed use, and need community norms of behaviour, complemented by regulation and enforcement.

There is a very strong consensus that all lake users have responsibility for environmental stewardship and power boat operators have more responsibility for the safe coexistence of lake activities.

A majority also say there is a need for action and there are reasonable solutions available to protect the quality of experience, particularly related to noise and enhanced wakes.

There is a small group of power boating enthusiasts (10% of respondents) that are outside the consensus and hold radically different views from the other respondents on questions of risk, responsibility, and solutions.

Insights:

- The responsibility consensus is a powerful finding and a huge positive for the lake communities to build on. There is strong general agreement on what the problems are, who is responsible, and majority agreement on many solutions.
- There is a strong consensus among 90% of the respondents who do not classify as “power boating enthusiasts” that the lakes are for mixed use (different activities on the water) and that mixed use requires respect, adherence to norms, and accommodation of others.
- The 10% of lake users who are power boating enthusiasts hold radically different views from the consensus on responsibility, enforcement, regulation, concerns, and perception of risk.
- There is broad consistency in both the joys and concerns across lakes and regions in Ontario.
- PWC’s remain the type of watercraft that generates the highest level of concern.
- Wakes are clearly a growing issue, and while very few people believe that “do nothing” is the right answer, most are open to collaborative solutions.
- Collaborative solutions like keeping enhanced wake activities at a designated distance from shore and setting no wake zones are seen as the most effective solutions for managing enhanced wakes.

- There is still strong concern about noise, so people expect ongoing advocacy and communication on that issue.
- Renters are considered to be a problem by many commenters and need to be a priority for education.
- In the midst of overall consistency with previous surveys, there is also change. Paddle boarding is now nearly as popular as canoeing, and wake surfing that barely registered in earlier surveys is a top concern. New technologies only represent 1% of boating today (e-foils and jetboards) but the community needs to stay alert to their growth because there is a delicate usage balance on the lakes.

The 160,000 words in the comments is about twice the length of the average novel - a resounding indication of the passion respondents feel about the time they spend on the lakes.

We encourage you to read the full report which can be found on our website:
<https://safequiet.ca/news/survey-results/>