

Recreational Use Survey Results

Lago Mar Canal

2004 – 2005

A recreational use survey was conducted from August 2004 through May 2005 at a location on Lago Mar Canal in Virginia Beach, Virginia. The purpose of the survey was to document the extent and type of use of the manmade waterway.

The rationale for the survey originated from a meeting between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers representative (Melissa Smith) and two representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Willard Smith and David Byrd). The meeting was called to discuss possible alternatives for restoring the hydrology in Lake Tecumseh (Brinson's Lake) and adjacent forested wetlands that have been impacted by drainage through the construction of Lago Mar Canal.

The initial proposal involved the installation of a berm across Lago Mar Canal. However, justification for that proposal was based on the belief that this would alleviate flooding to upstream residential areas resulting from elevated wind tides due to sustained southerly winds coupled with strong summer rain events. A subsequent U.S. Geological Survey modeling study initiated by our office concluded that the proposed structure in Lago Mar Canal would neither reduce nor increase flooding in these areas. Considering the lack of flood relief benefits and the potential disruption to recreational boating that may occur as a result of this option (see results of survey below), the in-canal water control structure was dropped from consideration. The other option being considered was the installation of a low level sheetpile structure at the manmade opening to Lake Tecumseh, where it enters Lago Mar Canal, in conjunction with a roller assisted boat access. This is the proposal for which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking permits. The Corps representative indicated that in order to evaluate project impacts, it would be necessary to undertake a recreational use survey to determine the extent of boat use on the canal.

Old Dominion University was contracted to conduct a survey of recreational users within the canal for a period of one year. The study incorporated three timeframes: a holiday weekend during the summer that would traditionally have high boat traffic (Memorial Day weekend, the Fourth of July weekend or Labor Day weekend); a two non-holiday weekends during the summer and; one weekend during each of three 3-month time periods representing the fall, winter and spring. Observations were made from dawn to dusk during each sampling day at a specified location (see Appendix A). Data collected included: weather, type of watercraft, presence/absence of motor, activity engaged in, direction of travel, the number of people in each watercraft, and whether the vessel has been previously recorded that day. See Appendix B for the scope of work and sample recreation use survey sheet. The results are provided in tabular form (Appendix C).

Of the 148 boats that were observed during the survey period, 118 (81%) were non-motorized and 20% were motorized. Motorized boats include runabouts, bass boats, jon

boats and personal watercraft. Non-motorized boats include canoes, kayaks and jon boats without motors. There were a total of 322 people observed on these boats, of which 243 or 75% were on non-motorized boats and 79 (25%) were on motorized boats. It should be noted that the total number of boats observed include many that were counted twice, going either to and from downstream or upstream.

General boating was the primary activity during the sampling period, constituting 68% of the activity observed on the boats. Fishing constituted 18% of the activity with 27 boats identified as engaged in fishing and personal watercraft use or waterskiing made up the remaining 14% with 21 boats.

The direction of boat traffic was roughly equally divided between upstream and downstream traffic, with 72 boats or 49% traveling upstream from the sampling point and 76 or 51% traveling downstream. This is not surprising, considering that many of the boats that were observed going downstream were the same ones later identified going upstream and vice versa.

The overwhelming majority of boats 119 or 80% were observed during the summer sampling period. Of the remaining 39 boats, 23 or 16% were observed during the spring period, 6 or 4% during the fall and none during the winter time frame.