

# An Assessment of Water-based Recreation Trends, Impacts and Economic Factors for Lake George, New York

*Lake George Recreation Study Plan for the Lake George Park Commission*

## Project Summary

### Purpose of the Project

The overall purpose of the project is to collect relevant information, to sample user perceptions, and to develop a flexible study plan to assist the Lake George Park Commission (LGPC) in fulfilling its legislative mission to provide reasonable public access to Lake George without congestion, over-crowding, or safety hazards. The resulting water-based recreation study plan will evaluate existing conditions of lake use overall and by sector, while compiling data and findings in a format useful as a benchmark for future assessments.

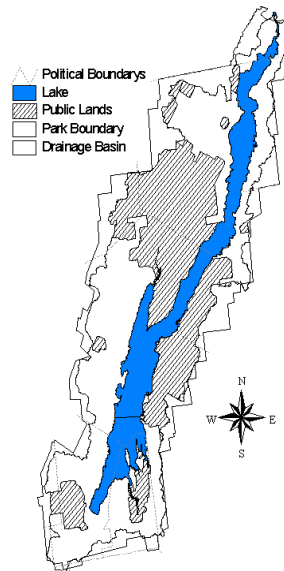
Toward that end, the research will include preparation of maps showing existing recreational use conditions, and development of a comprehensive recreational facilities inventory, both based in part on the Commission's GIS database of existing lakefront property and use classification. The findings and recommendations presented in the study plan will focus on evaluating current trends and future needs related to recreational use of the lake.

The data collection effort will include questionnaire surveys of different categories of lake users to identify user perceptions in terms of enjoyment, congestion, public safety, and threats to water quality. Data analysis on those and other data collected during the 24-month project will contribute to an accurate assessment of current

use and will contribute to recommended management strategies relevant to the mission of the LGPC. Those types of findings and recommendations include the following:

- Levels of satisfaction among recreational users of the lake and influences on satisfaction, such as type of use, location, and timing.
- Mitigation efforts for identified safety hazards,
- Techniques for reducing recreational use conflicts,
- Activities for optimizing public use and enjoyment of the lake,
- Approaches for reducing any identified recreation-related impacts on water quality or open space characteristics,
- Procedures for continued monitoring and assessment of lake-related recreational use.

*Lake George  
with boundary encompassing the  
Lake George Park*



The findings and recommendations are intended to enhance discussion and improve deliberation on Lake George recreational issues by the Commission, as well as among other interested groups and individuals.

The project has an ongoing public participation component to insure effective public and stakeholder group involvement throughout the research process of data collection, analysis, and reporting.

## Key Tasks to Be Completed

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There are eight main tasks comprising the Lake George Recreation Study Plan, outlined as follows:

- A. Meet with the Commission and key stakeholder groups and prepare a final detailed project scope, survey design, and schedule subject to approval.
- B. Prepare a comprehensive inventory and map of recreation facilities. Assemble existing relevant information about recreational use of Lake George and complete a literature review and summary of relevant research to produce an up-to-date database and map of existing public and private facilities, historic, scenic and recreational resources, and critical navigational and environmental areas. Evaluate the utility of this database for future planning.
- C. Collect data on the type, intensity, distribution, and timing of boating and other water dependent uses during a single boating season. This may include boat counts or use intensity surveys by other forms of direct observation.
- D. Design and administration of a survey instrument to sample attitudes and opinions about use, accessibility, satisfaction, conflicts, and safety concerns among lake users. It will be important to ensure that the various user segments are proportionally represented. Accordingly, a stratified survey design will be favored and sub-groups will be proportionately sampled, such as lakefront property owners, business owners, resident boaters, tourists, and recreational users.
- E. Enter and compile all data and perform data analysis consistent with the approved project design.
- F. Implement a public participation program of at least two contractor-organized public meetings to disseminate draft and final water-based recreation study plans, and at least three contractor-organized planning or “check in meetings” with Commission and stake-holder representatives.
- G. The reporting component includes a draft water-based recreation study plan that incorporates the following: results of the literature review; assessment of existing conditions; facility inventory and maps; usage data; user survey results, analysis, and conclusions; and, alternative management recommendations. A minimum of 90 days shall be afforded for public comment on the draft report.  
  

The final water-based recreation study plan will be prepared that includes the following, subject to the approval of the Commission: revisions to the draft, a summary of public comments and responses to those comments, and the final recommendations.
- H. An assessment of off-season recreational activities, including Fall and Spring camping and fishing and ice fishing, snowmobiling, ice boating, cross-country skiing, etc., will also be included that evaluates the trends and related impacts of those activities and offers key findings and management recommendations within the draft and final reports.

## Key Personnel and Relevant Research

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The personnel working on this project represent a partnership of two organizations with considerable expertise in the assessment of recreational use of lakes: Cornell University and Holmes & Associates of Saranac Lake. The two principal investigators -- Tommy Brown and Tim Holmes -- have worked together successfully on previous projects focused on lake-based recreation and tourism issues in the Adirondack region of Upstate New York. Jack Drury of Leading EDGE is also working with the team as the facilitator for the public meetings which are central to the success of this project.

### **Tim Holmes and Meg Van Dyck-Holmes, Holmes & Associates**

Holmes & Associates is an Adirondack Park-based research firm with expertise in systematic data collection, scientific analysis, technical writing, and in the design and deployment of database tools over the Internet. Their 14 years of research and assessment have played a major role in tangible benefits that continue to accrue to North Country residents in the form of a cleaner Lake Champlain, two vibrant Community Health Partnerships, revitalized tourism businesses and wood product companies, and the first phase of a new recreational pathway linking Lake Placid to Saranac Lake. In the process of engendering economic growth and improved quality of life, the firm has taken a special interest in new technologies. Holmes & Associates was awarded a Small Business Innovation & Research (SBIR) grant in 1999 for our research on e-commerce as a tool for rural economic development. In 2003, Holmes & Associates received recognition for *Excellence in Business* from the Plattsburgh State University School of Business and Economics.

Holmes & Associates now specializes in five main areas of research and assessment:

1. Recreation and tourism;
2. Economics of natural resource use;
3. Community health assessment and regional health planning;
4. Marketing & sales assistance to the private sector; and,
5. e-Commerce and other Internet tools (e.g., *AdirondackCraft.com*).

Clients include the Adirondack Museum, Paul Smiths College, Adirondack North Country Association (ANCA), North Country Community College, Adirondack Rural Health Network, and the Lake Champlain Basin Program. More information on Holmes & Associates is at [www.adirondackresearch.com](http://www.adirondackresearch.com).

Timothy P. Holmes holds an MA in sociology from the University of Idaho with an emphasis in rural sociology. After gaining post-graduate research experience in Idaho, Washington, and Alaska, Holmes settled in the Adirondack region of Upstate New York where he has directed over 40 major research projects and has managed numerous study teams of as many as nine researchers focusing their expertise on a particular issue. He has worked successfully in the private research sector since 1983 by applying systematic research and analysis to development of programs that are both effective and cost-efficient.

Margaret Van Dyck-Holmes has been a cartographer since 1984 when she began working in the cartography lab of the Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center located in Anchorage, Alaska. While employed there through 1987, she helped design and produce the Atlas of the Bering, Beaufort, and Chukchi Seas for NOAA. Her recent accomplishments include the Adirondack Park Paddlers' Map, published in

2004. She has also designed several tourist and visitor information maps for Chambers of Commerce, County Health Departments, and private business in the region. She has an M.S. in Geography from the University of Idaho, with an emphasis in Cartography.

More information on Holmes & Associates is available at: [AdirondackResearch.com](http://AdirondackResearch.com).

### **Tom Brown and Nancy Connelly, Human Dimensions Research Unit**

The Human Dimensions Research Unit (HDRU) is located in the Department of Natural Resources and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. HDRU has a history of more than 30 years of applied research. It has completed numerous studies funded by the Department of Environmental Conservation, NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation, and several other state agencies, as well as most federal natural resource agencies (e.g., National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).

Much of HDRU's readiness to undertake new projects and complete them on time stems from the fact that it employs a professional research staff in addition to utilizing its faculty and students. HDRU currently has a professional staff of four researchers with advanced degrees, in addition to its faculty leader and two faculty co-leaders. It also employs a full-time research aide and a part-time administrative assistant who work with survey implementation and data processing. Students and temporary assistants are employed as needed.

HDRU's faculty and staff all have interdisciplinary backgrounds that include public participation processes, conflict resolution, social carrying capacity, mail and telephone survey methodology, estimating recreation use, and outdoor recreation

management. More information on the Human Dimensions Research Unit can be found at its website: [www.dnr.cornell.edu/hdru](http://www.dnr.cornell.edu/hdru).

The HDRU leader, Tommy Brown, will serve as co-Principal Investigator for this project and Nancy Connelly, head of the survey research department of the HDRU, will direct the day-to-day tasks related to the survey work.

### **Jack Drury, Leading EDGE**

Since 2000, Jack Drury and Bruce Bonney have assisted numerous organizations in developing the skills necessary for high quality collaborative problem solving. All participants in their meetings and workshops gain new skills related to group discussion and decision making that include the following: team building, critical thinking, decision-making strategies, and situational leadership development, as well as communication and organization skills. Their specialty is in designing and facilitating meetings that allow organizations to accomplish very specific tasks and that maximize each participant's ability to contribute, while making the most efficient use of available time. Their company website includes more information on their services in that regard: <http://www.realworldlearning.info>.

Jack Drury will serve as public meeting facilitator for this project.

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