

# USAGE OF IOWA LAKES: Evidence from the Iowa Lakes Valuation Project

**THE LAKES OF IOWA ARE POPULAR** destinations for single- and multiple-day recreational trips among Iowans. In 2002, approximately 62% of Iowans visited a lake in Iowa at least once, and each resident averaged about eight unique visits a year.

As Iowa tries to balance federal water quality requirements, the economic viability of rural areas, and concerns for the environment, it is more important than ever to understand the value that Iowans place on preserving and restoring lakes. A critical step in this process is to understand the trends in usage of lakes over time.

The Iowa Lakes Valuation Project is an ongoing economic study to advance our understanding of lake visitation patterns and preferences of Iowans related to over 130 important lakes in the state. The data for this continuing study have been collected over a period of eight years via five random population surveys of over 8,000 Iowa residents annually. The surveys were conducted by researchers at Iowa State University with funding from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. By gathering usage data in each year of the four-year periods from 2002 to 2005, a solid baseline of usage has been established that characterizes Iowans patterns of lake usage across the state.

To evaluate how lake usage may have changed from the baseline period, a fifth survey was completed in 2009. This fact sheet provides a summary of a few of the key findings from the 2009 survey as compared with the baseline usage patterns.

## Some key findings from the survey

- A large proportion of respondents reported taking at least one single-day trip during the 2009 calendar year. Specifically, approximately 60% of respondents took at least one single-day trip, and 2% took at least one over-night trip.
- The average number of single-day trips reported by all respondents was 8.6. When considering only individuals that took at least one trip to a lake, the average number of single-day trips was 14.5.



## About the survey design and implementation

- The 2009 survey was sent to 10,000 Iowa households: 4,600 Iowa residents who responded to the 2005 Iowa Lakes Survey and 5,400 additional randomly selected households
- Over 6,000 respondents returned the survey by mail, generating a 61.3% response rate among deliverable surveys
- Respondents answered questions about which lakes they used and how many trips they took during 2009



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- Overall, Iowa lakes experienced an increase in the intensity of visitation from the baseline period to 2009. Specifically, the average lake in Iowa experienced nearly a 33% increase in visitation. The increase in the population of Iowa accounts for only about 3 percentage points of that increase.
- Of the four lakes with the highest increase in visitation, three had undergone major restoration efforts.
- Economic activity associated with lake visitation varied by type of lake and duration of stay. The weighted average of spending per visitor party ranged from about \$68 to \$165 for the five lakes from which detailed expenditure data were collected.
- Overall, direct spending per lake averaged over \$9 million which supported over 100 jobs.

- These economic impacts vary considerably by size and location of the lake. Small, rural lakes with visits of 30,000–40,000 per year can generate over \$2 million in spending.
- Twelve of the lakes generate spending of over \$40 million annually.

### Sample Survey Result

