

Kenai Recreation Study • Major Findings and Implications

13. "Drift-only" issues

This chapter provides information from the follow-up survey about "drift-only" issues on the Lower and Middle River. The survey briefly described the current situation:

Mondays in May, June, and July are "drift-only days" on the Lower and Middle River (from River Mile 4 to Skilak Lake). On these days, fishing from a motorized boat is not allowed (and guides are also not allowed). Some people have suggested adding more "drift-only days" on these segments, but with drift guiding allowed. Please tell us whether you support or oppose the following "drift-only" actions.

Follow-up questions asked about general support for additional drift-only days (and how many), and preferred days and months.

General support / opposition for "drift-only" days

Two separate questions asked respondents whether "in general, more 'drift-only' days should be added" to the Lower River and Middle River. A third question asked, "If drift only days are added, they should be on different days on the two segments (so there will always be one segment available for powerboats)." Responses were given on a 5-point scale from "strongly support" to "strongly oppose" with a "neutral" option (see Figure 13-1).²

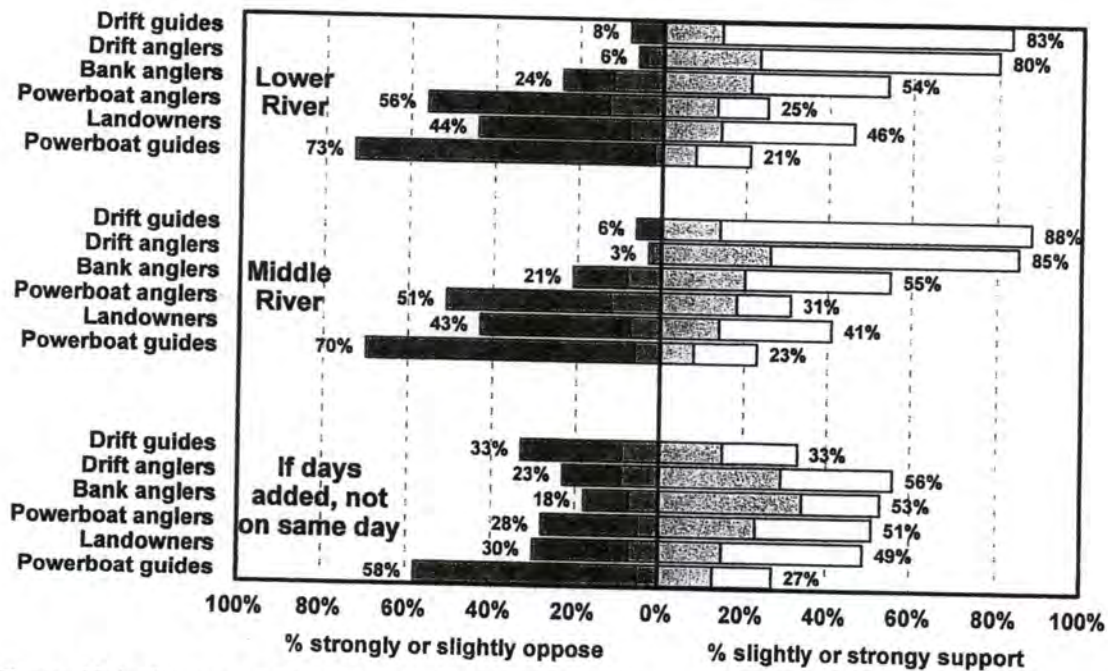


Figure 13-1. Percent support or oppose "drift-only" days on different segments for different groups.

² Respondents uninterested in these segments or the issue could skip them; among users, 51% of landowners, 50% of drift anglers, 44% of powerboat anglers, and 32% of bank anglers answered them. Among guides, 88% of drift guides and 78% of powerboat guides answered them.

Prospective use of “drift only” days by guides

Guides were asked, “If additional ‘drift only’ days are added, would you offer guided drift fishing or sightseeing trips on those days (assume guides would be allowed to operate)?” Responses (Figure 13-2) show 94% of drift guides and 65% of powerboat guides said “yes.”

These “intentions to participate” suggest the level of guided use on additional drift only days. If current peak July powerboat guide use on the Lower River ranges from 150 to 200 boats, the number of guided drift boats on drift only days might range as high as 100 to 130 boats. Add 30 to 40 drift guides that already float the Middle River, and total guided use on ‘new’ drift only days might be as high as 170 boats. Assuming unguided use equaled current Monday use, total boats on drift only days could approach 300 boats, more than double the highest drift only Monday in 2009.

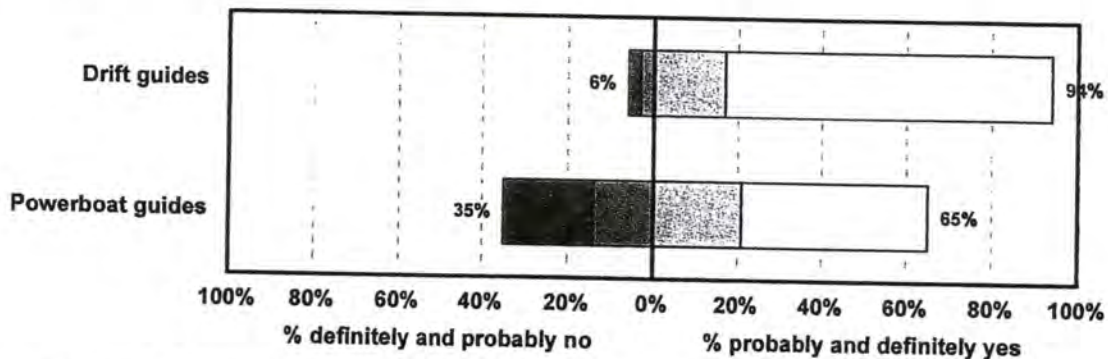


Figure 13-2. Percent of drift and powerboat guides reporting they would use drift only days.

Guides who said they would not use additional drift only days were asked to specify their reasons. Responses are given in Figure 13-3 (percents sum to greater than 100% because respondents could check any that apply). Findings include:

- The two most important reasons are that clients or the guides themselves prefer to fish from a powerboat.
- Logistics of shuttles and insufficient launch sites to provide a diversity of trip options are also important reasons. Verbatim comments highlighted the added challenges of drift trips (e.g., need for parking at put-in and take-out, need for appropriately-spaced launches, need for launches to access best fishing locations such as downstream of Eagle Rock, inability to come and go from a riverside dock).
- Half of the guides checked the physical demands of rowing. Some comments also noted that the challenges of rowing (particularly for unguided users) might encourage more anchor use, which may have habitat and social competition impacts.
- Fewer guides said they did not have a drift vessel available, would have less flexibility to reach fishing hot spots, or would be unable to match powerboat success rates. Almost none said they would have to learn new fishing techniques or skills.