

(a holiday), when 33 PWC trailers were observed parked at boat ramp parking lots throughout the recreation area. On that same day, 88 non-PWC boat trailers were observed in the same parking lots.

The highest use for a non-holiday weekend occurred on Saturday, June 23, 2001, when 26 PWC trailers were observed in parking lots throughout the recreation area, compared to 270 non-PWC boat trailers in the same parking lots. Visitors were attracted by the 12 largemouth black bass tournaments taking place at the lake that day and the pleasant weather conditions (bass tournaments occur every weekend during the summer). The highest holiday weekend use day was Sunday, May 26, 2002, when 38 PWC trailers (and 296 non-PWC boat trailers) were observed at launch ramps.

On busy summer weekends, PWC use can comprise between 8% and 20% of total boating activity. On summer weekdays this percentage tends to increase due to fewer out-of-town bass tournament fishermen on the lake. PWC use on summer weekdays can comprise between 19% and 40% of total boating activity in the evenings after 6:30 p.m., when local PWC owners visit the lake after work.

PWC use occurs primarily between May and September, with April and October also showing steady visitation. Weekday PWC users are primarily local residents who arrive after work, while weekend users come from areas farther away. PWC users are usually on the water all day on weekends. Park staff has indicated that PWC users generally operate for two to three hours on weekday evenings, and from four to eight hours on weekends. The increased amount of time in the water can be attributed to users taking turns riding one craft.

PWC operators have been observed traveling throughout the lake, either singly, in pairs, in small groups, or in association with a motorboat or houseboat. Within Amistad National Recreation Area, PWC use has been allowed wherever motorized boats have had access. This includes the arm of the Rio Grande, the Devils River, San Pedro Canyon, and the Pecos River.

Areas of heaviest PWC use are Devils River north of buoy P and San Pedro Canyon east of buoy A. Most of the personal watercraft launching from Rough Canyon travel up Devils River. In addition, many personal watercraft launching from Diablo East and Spur 454 travel up Devils River past buoy P. In contrast, only one or two watercraft travel up the Rio Grande past buoy 28. No PWC have been seen using the Pecos River.

The San Pedro arm of the lake (at the end of Spur 454) attracts a large number of PWC operators because it is one of the few areas where bystanders, usually friends and relatives of the PWC operators, can drive close to the shoreline to observe PWC activity or take turns riding. As a result, this location is one of the primary destinations for PWC operators. Another popular destination for PWC operators is the Indian Springs area in the upper Devils River section of the lake. While en route to Indian Springs, PWC operators tend to either travel in a direct line or explore some or all of the coves between their launch and destination points.

People who rent the 56- to 65-foot houseboats from Amistad Lake Marina often tow personal watercraft with the houseboat (two or three personal watercraft have been observed being towed). The boats are permitted to travel to most areas, so PWC use is dispersed. These tagalongs are the only personal watercraft likely to use the upper Rio Grande area (north of buoy 28).

Park staff has never seen personal watercraft used on the Pecos River. However, some PWC users may access the Pecos River without park staff knowledge. The park estimates that if PWC use occurs in the Pecos River, it would amount to less than 10 craft per year.

Resource Protection and Public Use Issues

Amistad National Recreation Area Environmental Assessment

As a companion document to this proposed rule, NPS has issued the *Personal Watercraft Use Environmental Assessment for Amistad National Recreation Area*. The Environmental Assessment (EA) was open for public review and comment from April 3, 2003, through May 3, 2003. Copies of the environmental assessment may be downloaded at <http://www.nps.gov/amis/pwc.pdf> or obtained at park headquarters Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm, just west of Del Rio at 4121 Hwy 90 W. Mail inquiries should be directed to: Amistad National Recreation Area, HCR 3 Box 5J, Del Rio TX 78840, Phone (830) 775-7491.

The purpose of the environmental assessment was to evaluate a range of alternatives and strategies for the management of PWC use at Amistad to ensure the protection of park resources and values while offering recreational opportunities as provided for in the National Recreation Area's enabling legislation, purpose, mission, and goals. The analysis assumed alternatives

would be implemented beginning in 2002 and considered a 10-year period, from 2002 to 2012.

The environmental assessment evaluates three alternatives concerning the use of personal watercraft at Amistad National Recreation Area. Alternative A would allow PWC use under an NPS special regulation in accordance with past park practices, and state regulations. That is, after the effective date of a final rule, PWC use would be the same as it was before November 7, 2002 when the park closed to PWC use under the service-wide regulations at 36 CFR 3.24. Alternative B would continue PWC use under a special regulation, but specific limits and use areas would be defined. The no-action alternative would eliminate PWC use entirely within this national park system unit.

Based on the environmental analysis prepared for PWC use at Amistad National Recreation Area, alternative A is the preferred alternative and is also considered the environmentally preferred alternative because it would best fulfill park responsibilities as trustee of this sensitive habitat; ensure safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings; and attain a wider range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.

This document proposes regulations to implement alternative A at Amistad National Recreation Area.

The NPS will consider the comments received on this proposal, as well as the comments received on the Environmental Assessment when making a final determination. In the final rule, the NPS will implement alternative A as proposed, or choose a different alternative or combination of alternatives. Therefore, the public should review and consider the other alternatives contained in the Environmental Assessment when making comments on this proposed rule.

The following summarizes the predominant resource protection and public use issues associated with PWC use at Amistad National Recreation Area. Each of these issues is analyzed in the *Amistad National Recreation Area, Personal Watercraft Use Environmental Assessment*.

Water Quality

Most research on the effects of personal watercraft on water quality focuses on the impacts of two-stroke engines, and it is assumed that any impacts caused by these engines also