

# Responsive Management



## **Hunters' and Anglers' Attitudes Toward Boating Safety, the Use of Personal Flotation Devices, and Methods to Communicate the Benefits of Wearing Personal Flotation Devices: Focus Group Results**

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Conducted by Responsive Management for BoatU.S. Foundation

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Focus Group Results**

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## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted for BoatU.S. Foundation to better understand sportsmen's attitudes toward boating safety and Personal Flotation Device (PFD) use, and to identify specific mediums, as well as characteristics about those mediums that might increase PFD use and best communicate the benefits of PFDs to hunters and anglers that boat. This study involved two focus groups. The first focus group was conducted in Greensboro, North Carolina, with anglers who boat. The second focus group was conducted in St. Louis, Missouri, with hunters who boat. These categories were operationally defined as individuals who fished from a boat within the past year and individuals who hunted from a boat within the past year.

These focus groups were designed to build upon the research that was conducted for BoatU.S. Foundation in 2001, where messages that were intended to communicate the importance of wearing a PFD were tested on focus group participants. In 2001, focus groups with hunters and anglers that boat were also conducted in Greensboro, NC and St. Louis, MO. In the 2004 focus groups, three participants from the previous focus group in St. Louis, MO also attended the focus group in 2004. Previous focus group participants were contacted and invited to participate in the 2004 focus groups to explore whether or not attitudes had changed toward boating safety and the use of PFDs.

These focus groups are also part of a larger study for BoatU.S. Foundation, which included a nationwide telephone survey of 800 anglers and hunters who boat. The results of the focus groups and telephone survey will be used to develop promotional materials designed to educate anglers and hunters about the importance of wearing a PFD while boating.

A focus group is a type of qualitative research that produces results with high content validity on the total range of opinions but is not random survey samples (Babbie, 1998). They are useful in the development of an understanding of attitudes, issues and concerns. Focus groups will not yield results that can be replicated with statistical accuracy. However, focus groups are an important method to test messages because they allow for extensive probing, follow-up questions, group discussion, and observation of emotional reaction to various messages. These are aspects that cannot be measured in a traditional telephone or mail survey. Therefore, this report should be viewed as qualitative in nature.

The focus groups in this study were conducted using standard research methodology for qualitative research. The methodology for these focus groups was formal (St. Louis, MO) and informal (Greensboro, NC). One-way mirrors and unobtrusive observation occurred (Krueger 1988; Frey & Fontana, 1994). For a complete discussion of the uses of focus group research, see Morgan and Krueger (1997). Responsive Management has used these techniques in other studies on outdoor and recreation topics (Bissell & Duda, 1993, 1995; Duda, Bissel & Young, 1998).

The analysis of these focus groups was an iterative process. The moderator took notes and observations at the time of the focus group. Later the audio and videotapes were reviewed in detail. The tapes were reviewed a second time, and verbatim transcripts were made. The transcripts were then reviewed and edited for the most relevant comments. Excerpted transcripts and the final report and analysis were then prepared.

Comments from the focus groups are included to demonstrate attitudes toward the topics of discussion. Comments appear in *italics* and are verbatim unless noted by [brackets], which indicate paraphrasing for clarity. No attempt has been made to correct grammar unless the meaning was lost.

## FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

### ANGLERS' AND HUNTERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD SAFETY AND THE USE OF PFDs

#### ANGLERS

Anglers who boat were concerned about safety issues while boating. However, there was variation in how much the focus group participants thought about boating safety and PFD use. More focus group participants said that they wore PFDs than those who said they did not. Only one person said that he generally did not wear a PFD while fishing from a boat. However, even though a majority of the anglers said that they wear a PFD, most of them admitted that they did not keep the PFD on at all times while boating.

Although the anglers were concerned about safety while boating, they were more concerned about the actions of *other people* on the water than their own actions causing an accident. For example, the focus group participants expressed strong opinions about the reckless behavior of *other boaters* on local lakes. They felt that the behavior of other boaters presented a greater danger to them than not wearing a PFD.

The focus group findings suggested that anglers did not consider themselves to be *boaters*, but rather, *anglers who boat*. They felt that there was a key difference between the behavior of anglers using a boat compared to general boaters that did not necessarily fish while boating. One angler even said that most of the accidents in the area were among recreational boaters, rather than anglers.

*Falls Lake is the worst – I've seen two accidents with jet skis. I try to get there at daybreak and leave by 10 am. After that, it's a mess, like the freeway. Some people don't care, they are just having a good time riding, and they try to go as fast as they can.*

*One of my pet peeves is the jet skis. They have no respect for anybody. I've seen a couple slow down if they see you are fishing, but they think it's cute to come down and spray you with water. The cigar boats have no regard for the smaller boats – they don't even slow down. When you talk to the North Carolina Marine Fisheries – you might as well be talking to the wall. They would rather catch someone without a life jacket on the boat. I've had them stop me when other boats were making infractions.*

*The best example of safety that I know of – a friend of mine was up in Lake Lure. He was going to take a couple of people up there. As he went across the lake, here came one of*

*those boats riding high on the front end, and it caught his hand on the gunnel – killed one person on the boat and almost drowned another. The driver said he didn't see the smaller boat.*

*In this area, most of the accidents aren't coming from anglers, but rather from recreational boaters, like from water skiers. There have been several cases of boats running into each other. The sheriff department has cramped down on boating safety in Rockingham County. But in Davis County, they have a big lake and have a horrible record with pleasure boats. I think most of the problem is not towards anglers, in this area, but with boaters.*

Safety issues were more important to those focus group participants who had been exposed to previous bad experiences. Among those having had a bad experience, the negative experience was either a personal turning point or reinforced the importance of wearing a PFD. The “personal” experience could be a specific incident that happened to the individual, or an incident that involved a close friend or family member. One angler talked about how a PFD saved his grandson from drowning while they were boating and fishing.

Nevertheless, the personal experiences of the focus group participants did not make them wear a PFD *all of the time*. Despite their personal experiences, most of the focus group participants were inclined to wear a PFD only when the boat was in motion, rather than the entire time on the boat. Many of the anglers felt that the least safe part of boating is when the boat is in motion.

*When my grandchildren go on the boat, they are required to wear a vest the whole time. They can't take it off because the law says you can't. I had a situation near Wilmington... there's a deep hole where you can catch flounder. All day we had been catching minnows, and my grandson would run up and down the beach part. When we were in the deep hole, I put the anchor overboard, the boat swung around, and my grandson stepped overboard because he thought it was shallow, and he went completely out of sight. If he hadn't had a life jacket on, the current runs through there so fast, he would have drowned before I saw him. I ran my arm down in the water and caught the life jacket – he was on his way back up when I caught him, but still, there's no telling where he would have gone because the current was so fast. That, to me, is a real test to show that you need to wear the jacket all the time.*

*You never really think about it – I got into wearing the life preserver because I went overboard one time. No, I wasn't wearing one when that happened. I slipped on a wet deck, and if there hadn't been someone else in the boat, it would have kept running. After that, I decided that when I would run the boat, I would always wear a life vest. Now, I will take it off, whenever I power back or troll, because of the heat. I wear it more than 50% of the time – I wear a ski vest. They are easier to get in and out of. I have 3 on my*

*boat, but that's all the people I allow on the boat, because it's only a 15 footer. If I'm not mistaken, a child under 16 has to wear one.*

*I used to not wear a life jacket, but I had it in a boat. About 15 years ago I was fishing at Falls Lake, and as I was coming up the lake, I saw a 15 foot john boat going around in circles in the lake. There were two other fellows watching it in a boat – they didn't know what happened. Out there in the water was a life preserver, so I went and picked it up. The other boat and myself created wakes to wash the boat up to the bank. We found out there was a fellow in the boat that did not have his life preserver on and drowned. And he was up at the ramp when we got up there. So after that, as long as my boat is in motion, I have the life preserver on. Whenever I stop, I take it off. I am a little concerned about wakes from other boats knocking me over say, when I'm reeling in a fish, but I think I could grab hold of something before I hit the water.*

PFD discomfort was a common reason that the anglers gave for not wearing a PFD. The anglers commented that PFDs are uncomfortable, hot, and bulky, especially during the summer.

*When we're trolling, or when we're fishing, there's no way that I can wear that thing. It's hot, uncomfortable, and bulky.*

*You have to go back to the design – they [PFDs] are uncomfortable and hot.*

Another, but less common reason that anglers stated for why they wear a PFD was because they hoped to be a positive influence on their children or grandchildren. One angler mentioned that it is easier to convince his children to wear a PFD if he also wears one. This angler felt that promotional items regarding the importance of PFDs would be successful if they targeted the entire family.

*I wear it [a PFD] all the time, except when I'm at anchor. It's easier to convince my kids to keep it on if I wear it too; it's harder to explain it if I keep taking it on and off. My kids like to ask questions, so that's one less question you have to deal with. It's habit, and if I died because I didn't have a life jacket on, I would hate to be the person to have to tell my kids. Those types of promotional items would be good...if you "family-ize" it.*

Another reason for not wearing a PFD was a perception that certain types of boats are safer than others. For example, one angler said that he never wore a PFD on his pontoon boat, but always wore a PFD while canoeing. His perception was that a PFD is not needed on a pontoon boat because the boat is more stable than other types of boats.

An interesting finding was that the connection was not made between the risk of drowning and *falling* into the water. Many of the focus group participants felt there is a greater risk of drowning after being *thrown* into the water (such as after a collision with another boat)

rather than falling out accidentally while fishing. The focus group findings suggested that anglers may need to be educated on the importance of wearing a PFD all of the time while fishing from boat, because there was an apparent lack of awareness of drowning risks even if they are fishing from a “stable” boat.

*Like I said, when we're fishing [I don't wear a PFD]...but let me preface this by saying that the boat I fish off of is a pontoon boat – it's fairly stable. Pontoon boats are so wide, that I can see not having to wear a life preserver, because all you're going to do is fall out, you're not going to get thrown out of it, and it's not going to turn over. It's got a railing around where people are going to be inside.*

*I think if you are required to wear a life jacket on a pontoon boat you should have to wear one on a pier – it's like the same thing.*

Confidence in swimming ability and around water was also related to the anglers not wearing a PFD while boating. Several anglers suggested that having confidence on the water implied that one is an experienced angler. One angler noted that only inexperienced boaters wear PFDs. The focus group findings suggested that PFDs carry somewhat of a stigma among anglers, that is, that if you “know what you are doing” out on the water, you don't need to wear a PFD.

*It's basically inexperienced canoeists that wear life preservers. I'm a very good swimmer and so is my wife, so we've never been that concerned about wearing a PFD.*

## **HUNTERS**

Hunters who boat were also aware of safety issues while boating. All of the focus group participants except for two said that they wore a PFD while hunting and boating. However, as with the anglers, the majority of hunters who said they wore a PFD admitted that it was usually only while their boat was in motion and not while still. Most of the hunters said that they only wore a PFD when the boat was in motion because they were on their way to a hunting blind. Once they arrived at the blind, the hunters felt that it was safe to remove the PFD because they were no longer in the boat.

The hunters said that they were more likely to wear a PFD at the beginning of the hunting trip as they gathered their gear and used the boat to arrive at their hunting destination, in the early morning, and in the dark. The hunters viewed their boat as a means to arrive at their hunting destination and did not think of themselves as boaters. As with the anglers, the hunters who boated on a pontoon boat were less likely to wear a PFD because of the perception that

pontoon boats are stable and safer than other types of boats that are commonly used for hunting. One hunter seemed to doubt the capabilities of a PFD of preventing drowning, especially when a hunter falls into extremely cold water.

*I don't want you to think that I sleep and eat in it, but I have it on most of the time when I'm in the water. You don't wear it for comfort; safety is the only reason. I had a personal experience but nobody had a life jacket on – fortunately the water was shallow. It was pitch dark, and 5 in the morning.*

*Depends on the weather, or the water. If the water is calm, and I'm in my pontoon boat going 15 mph, then I won't worry about it. If it looks safe, then no, but if it doesn't look safe, then I wear one [a PFD].*

*I hunt about 50 days out of the year. I wear life jackets all the time. I hunt in canoes and john boats. I've actually in the summer put on heavy waders and my life jacket and jumped in the lake to see if I would float, and I did, so it's a good thing to do. It's good having that security.*

*I don't wear one generally. But if it's 4 in the morning and I'm going up the Mississippi River to a duck blind then yeah, I do. Like [XXX] said, coming back, though, no. The thing I'm thinking about is that at that time of year, if you get thrown in, your life expectancy in the water is 15 minutes, even if you can swim because of the cold.*

*It seems like the recreational people would have more accidents than the hunting and fishing folks, because they are pretty crazy.*

For one hunter in the focus group, wearing a PFD was simply a matter of common sense.

*I don't know what caused me to start wearing one [a PFD] – it just seems like common sense. I don't wear one while I'm fishing in the summertime when it's warm but all the time when I'm hunting I do. It is just part of the gear that gets put on. No one taught me, but everyone I hunt with does the same. With my mass [size] and neoprene waders, I think I could last a long time in the water. Life jackets nowadays are lighter and more comfortable, they aren't like they were 10 years ago. It's just part of the gear, it goes with me every time I go hunting.*

As with the anglers, exposure to a bad experience seemed to be the “necessary” catalyst of change. One of the focus group participants reexamined his safety practices after losing a friend on a boating/hunting trip. Another hunter also talked about a bad experience.

*A friend of ours drowned while hunting, and that's what convinced me to wear a life jacket.*

*Since last time we were here, I was one of the confirmed non-wearers. I just didn't see the need to wear one. But I had one of those 24 foot cruisers come across the front of my boat, and he showed me real fast why I needed one. My boat went down like a rock. I wasn't wearing a life jacket then. Luckily my son was in a boat near me, otherwise, I wouldn't be here tonight.*

However, even though a bad experience was the turning point for several hunters in terms of wearing a PFD, one hunter admitted that she had been uncomfortable on the water several times but yet still did not wear a PFD. Even though her son had fallen overboard before, the event was not enough to encourage her or her family to wear a PFD.

*I don't wear one generally, but if I were to go out on the Mississippi River in a small boat, I would have one on because I just don't trust the River, but on the lakes and smaller rivers, I don't wear one. I think I've been in a couple of situations where I wish that I had had one on, and some deep-sea episodes where I wish I had one on. As a mother, I would think that I would insist that my son has one on. But honestly, we have them in the boat, and they're easily accessible, but we don't wear them. Luckily, I've managed to escape death several times. I've never gone over. When my son went over he wasn't wearing one, but we got him.*

Confidence in weather and water conditions was a common reason for not wearing a PFD. One hunter noted that the sight of his vehicle from the water and the shallow depth of the water where his group hunts from was a factor that caused him to not wear a PFD. The hunters gave the impression that it was not necessary to wear a PFD if the weather was nice and the water looked calm.

*I hunt with five guys – we spend a lot of time on the Mississippi River. I maybe missed two weekends out of the season. We're on the river a lot. Most of the time going out in the dark, we have our life jackets on. Most of the time coming back, in the daylight, sometimes we don't. Where our blind was the last two years, we could see the vehicles where we parked. So the distance was only about 400 yards, and we were in a slough that was maybe 4 feet deep, depending on where the stumps were. We tore up more props than anything.*

*Depends on the weather, or the water. If the water is calm, and I'm in my pontoon boat going 15 mph, then I won't worry about it. If it looks safe, then no, but if it doesn't look safe, then I wear one [a PFD].*

Another common complaint about PFDs was their bulk and the fact that the hunters felt they are uncomfortable. Difficulty in mounting a gun while wearing a PFD was noted by several

of the hunters. Very few of the hunters were familiar with the various types of PFDs, including the types that are designed for greater comfort and mobility.

*Yes. That's [comfort] the big problem in the summer. They aren't comfortable when you don't have a shirt or jacket on. Maybe if there were different designs, like with the duck hunting kinds.*

*Another issue is the bulk – it's not comfortable to fish with, and you can't mount a gun. I like the idea of the autoinflatable kind, so if something does happen, it will inflate. I've never seen those though.*

*You can get kinds that autoinflate, or ones where you have to pull a strap. The kids' kind inflates after 3-5 seconds.*

Although the focus group participants expressed various reasons for not wearing a PFD, an important point to note is that the three hunters that also participated in the 2001 focus groups said that their behavior had changed since the original focus group discussions. They said that they had not worn PFDs at the time of the previous focus groups, but they admitted that their attitudes had changed. This finding suggests that information and education on boating safety and the use of PFDs can and will have an impact on sportsmen's behavior regarding PFD use while hunting/fishing from a boat.

## **COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS**

Anglers and hunters who boat shared several commonalities in their opinions about boating safety and PFD use. Both groups of sportsmen agreed that boating safety precautions are important; however, a majority of both groups wore PFDs only part of the time while boating. Interestingly, the angler group showed greater concern about the actions of *other boaters* on the water (such as reckless behavior driving a boat) than the possibility of their own actions causing an accident. It is possible that this attitude is situational, since many of the lakes in the Triad and Triangle areas of North Carolina are known to get crowded at times. However, this attitude suggests that anglers do not consider themselves to be primarily boaters; rather, they think of themselves as *anglers who boat*. The hunters shared similar opinions in that they viewed their boat as a means to arrive at their hunting destination and did not consider themselves to be recreational boaters.

Anglers and hunters who had been affected by a boating accident (or nearly affected) were more likely to wear PFDs in contrast to anglers and hunters who had not had a personal

experience (including having lost a friend) with an accident or near accident. However, despite the personal experiences, most of these sportsmen said that they would still sometimes remove their PFD, especially while the boat was not in motion. There was a clear lack of awareness in both groups of sportsmen regarding the potential dangers of not wearing a PFD all of the time while boating.

One of the major complaints about PFDs was that they are hot, bulky and uncomfortable. For hunters, it was very difficult to mount a gun. Confidence in and around the water was also an important reason for not wearing a PFD, but more so for anglers than for hunters. Both groups also stated that their PFD use depended upon the type of boat they are on. Anglers and hunters said that they generally did not wear a PFD when boating on a pontoon boat, because they felt that this type of boat is very stable and had a very low risk of tipping over. Clearly, the sportsmen were not aware or concerned about the potential dangers of simply falling into the water, regardless of the type of boat they are on.

Hunters seemed slightly less concerned about safety issues in part because they viewed a boat simply as a means to arrive at their hunting destination (usually a blind).

Overall, there was not a significant amount of change regarding anglers' and hunters' attitudes regarding the reasons for not wearing a PFD from the 2001 focus groups. The sportsmen complained about similar reasons for not wearing a PFD in the 2004 focus groups, such as lack of comfort and simply having the belief that wearing a PFD is not always necessary because of good weather and water conditions. Although the focus group participants provided many reasons and excuses for not wearing a PFD, an important point to consider is that the three hunters that had also participated in the 2001 focus group said that their attitudes and behavior had changed. These hunters said that they used to not wear a PFD but that because their awareness and concern had been elevated (through attendance at the 2001 focus group), they currently wear a PFD more often than before. This finding is a positive finding for BoatU.S. Foundation, because it suggests that sportsmen's attitudes can be changed through education.

Also, the 2004 focus group report noted a high degree of resistance from hunters and anglers when the moderator mentioned the idea of mandated PFD use. This issue was raised by a hunter in the 2004 focus group and provoked a discussion among the focus group participants on the possibility of a mandate. A majority of the hunters were not in favor of mandated PFD use; however, the level of defiance appeared to be less than what was documented in 2001. It is

possible that sportsmen are becoming slightly more aware of the importance of wearing a PFD, even if they still choose not to wear one.

## **EXPOSURE TO ADVERTISEMENTS ON BOATING SAFETY AND THE USE OF PFDs**

### **ANGLERS**

When the focus group participants were asked to name any type of advertisement or information they had seen in the past year about boating safety or the use of PFDs, very few had seen anything. Of the anglers who could recall seeing advertisements, very few could remember the details of the advertisements, such as who sponsored them, where they saw them, or the specific content. Only one angler recalled seeing commercials on boating safety on the North American Fishing Club shows. Although the anglers could recall having seen or heard some type of advertisement on general boating safety, they did not recall seeing advertisements that specifically mentioned PFDs. The anglers were somewhat surprised that they had never seen professional anglers on television shows talking about the importance of wearing a PFD while fishing from a boat.

*I never recall seeing any kind of commercial on boating safety on any of the Saturday morning fishing shows. I don't recall ever seeing one. If you could get some of the people like Bill Dance to promote them [PFDs] and safety, not just general safety...*

*I don't ever hear anybody say that you have to wear your life jacket. Not on the fishing shows, like Bill Dance, or anywhere.*

*I have seen a commercial once or twice about boating safety but I can't remember where.*

*Anybody ever watch North American Fishing Club shows? They promote safe boating. I think it was on their program that I saw a commercial.*

The anglers felt that television stations would be an effective medium to educate anglers about boating safety and the importance of wearing a PFD. The anglers noted that local television stations would probably be very receptive to broadcasting these types of messages or programs.

*The TV stations in this area are good about running programs like that, so if the Coast Guard would come around with a program, like channel 8 over in High Point has some*

*very interesting programs. I'm sure the local TV stations would run it on the morning shows. The Wildlife Network or Boating America...on channel 8 they run programs, because the Coast Guard auxiliary is over there. They do programs during the summer about checking boats for things like having a fire extinguisher. But that's about the only time I see it.*

## **HUNTERS**

Hunters also agreed that they rarely, if ever, saw advertisements or information on boating safety and the importance of wearing a PFD while hunting and boating. However, the hunters seemed to have a greater awareness of advertisements than the anglers did. One hunter mentioned that he had been to a boat show where PFDs were given to the first group of people that arrived at the boat show. Another hunter said that he had recalled seeing a commercial sponsored by Boat U.S., but could not recall what the commercial was about. The hunters mentioned that they had seen a few commercials on other aspects of boating safety, such as not drinking and boating, but nothing on the importance of wearing a PFD.

*I guess with all the outdoor programs I've watched I've probably seen advertisements, but nothing sticks in my mind. I couldn't recall a single one, or what it was about. Maybe they need to come up with something that sticks in people's minds.*

*At the boat shows, they give a certain amount away [of PFDs] for the first people that come in the door and I think they also give out some literature on life jackets. It was All State Insurance.*

*I've seen a commercial with the Boat US name, but I don't remember the specifics.*

*I have seen a few on drinking and boating, but nothing on safety or life jackets. And I watch quite a few of the hunting and fishing programs.*

*So maybe they aren't really doing anything at all.*

*Like I said, I've probably seen them, but nothing sticks in my mind.*

*There's not really a lot of hype or advertising or impetus of safety of that nature [PFD use], at least I don't think so.*

A few hunters recalled seeing the television commercial where lures were tossed into an open tackle box and statistics are given regarding the number of fish caught with each type of lure. The commercial ends with a statistic of how many fishermen were pulled out with a dredging hook, and the hook is dropped into the tackle box. The large hook hitting the metal

tackle box knocks out the sinkers and lures previously in the box and produces a loud noise. The hunters recalled seeing this commercial on a fishing show, but could not name the specific time or place that they had seen it. This was the only television commercial (of those that were presented to the hunters at the 2001 focus group) that the hunters specifically remembered seeing. As with the anglers, the hunters could recall seeing advertisements reminding sportsmen to not drink and operate a boat.

*I remember one, with the lure box. There was a grappling hook. I saw it on the tube [television], but I can't remember where. I know I saw it more than once.*

*Wasn't it on a fishing show?*

*It was a boating safety advertisement, but I think it was on a fishing show.*

*I think it was Saturday or Sunday morning, when they have the fishing shows.*

*I know I've seen commercials where they had something about life jackets, but the only one that sticks in my mind was the tackle box and grappling hook one.*

*I think as it gets closer to the summer season, I can recall seeing ads that say, don't drink and boat, but I don't remember anything that said to be sure and wear your life preserver.*

A few hunters also mentioned that they had seen signs posted at area lakes and rivers reminding them about boating safety and wearing a PFD. The hunters liked the idea of posting signs near boat ramps because the signs served as a last minute reminder to wear a PFD.

*Up at Mark Twain [lake] they have signs by the boat ramps. And they show a boat in a crash and tell you to wear your life preserver. It's a good reminder being right there at the boat ramp.*

*I've seen that on the rivers too, like the Snake River. There needs to be a heavier impact to elevate the awareness.*

The hunters from the 2001 focus group felt that there had been only a slight, if any, increase in advertisements and information on PFDs and boating safety in the two years that had passed since the 2001 focus group. The hunters said that they had seen postings at the boat ramps, including the 11x17 plastic orange notice sign. The focus group participants acknowledged that it was possible that if they went back and read articles in their sporting magazines they would probably find advertisements on boating safety and PFDs, but they could

not recall seeing anything in the magazines. Some of the hunters suggested that the advertisements must not be “eye-catching” if they could not recall seeing them. One hunter mentioned that the only time he paid attention was when something bad happened, such as a drowning.

*{Since last time, do you think there has been an increase in advertisements?}*

*Not really. Maybe once or twice I've seen something on the boat ramp.*

*I don't think I've seen as much in the media as postings around the water at launch sites.*

*I don't notice a whole lot more advertisements. I've seen a few more of the orange signs at the boat ramps. But I'm leaning towards what [XXX] said, if they spend the dollars to advertise, they would come off better putting advertisements on sporting shows. I belong to Ducks Unlimited, and they've never said anything in any of their publications.*

*I belong to them too [Ducks Unlimited] and I've never seen a thing.*

*I also belong to Bass Masters, and North American Hunter, and I've never seen anything.*

*I bet if you went back and read through the articles you would notice stuff on life jackets and safety, it's just that you pass over it and don't notice.*

*It might be in there, but maybe we're not looking at it. But then it must not be very pronounced, or large or have much of an impact if we're not seeing it.*

*We hear it when somebody drowns. Then it would be a big deal.*

*I have the impression since the last time we were here that around launch sites, I have seen more materials posted, or suggestions, sheets tacked on trees. It's an impression, not documented, and maybe that's because my awareness was elevated.*

## **COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS**

Hunters and anglers who boat said that they seldom or never saw messages or promotional materials that stress the importance of PFDs and boating safety. Overall, the hunters seemed to be more aware of promotional materials than the anglers. In general, both groups could recall seeing television commercials but could not remember specifics such as where or when they saw the commercials. However, several hunters said that they had seen the commercial featuring the tackle box, and most of the hunters also recalled having seen postings, including the orange notice sign, at lakes, rivers, and boat ramps. Postings were much more

commonly seen than other types of media regarding boating safety and PFDs. The hunters noted that they belonged to several conservation organizations but were not aware of efforts the groups were making to educate their members about these issues.

The 2001 focus group participants expressed similar opinions to those of the 2004 focus group participants; that is, that hunters and anglers who boat are seeing little advertisements or other promotional materials on boating safety and PFDs. If they are seeing advertisements, they are clearly not recalling many of them. However, despite the low awareness levels, the 2004 focus group participants could recall seeing more promotional materials than the 2001 focus group participants. Organizations that are working to promote boating safety and the importance of wearing a PFD should continue to target hunters and anglers and increase the promotion of boating safety and PFD use.

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION**

Anglers and hunters who boat were asked who they felt would be the most influential in delivering messages to encourage PFD use. Several sources of information were presented for the focus group participants to consider: the U.S. Coast Guard, BoatU.S., state fish and wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, North American Hunter/North American Outdoor Group, Ducks Unlimited, the NRA, their wife, their children, or a hunting/fishing partner were all possible sources of information.

### **ANGLERS**

Anglers who boat were most likely to be persuaded to wear a PFD if they heard/saw the message coming from the professional anglers on television shows. The focus group participants said that they can easily relate to the professionals on the shows, and many felt that they have a personal connection with those individuals. The anglers said that they would be comfortable hearing the message from the professional anglers if they knew that the U.S. Coast Guard supported the message. The focus group participants felt that anglers would respond better to the professionals on the television shows rather than a generic member of the U.S. Coast Guard. Another suggestion was to encourage some of the NASCAR participants to make an appearance on the fishing shows, since NASCAR is also popular in many states. One angler also suggested

that owners of some of the fishing lakes, such as Duke Power, could become more involved in the promotion of boating safety and PFD use.

*The guys on the fishing shows, as long as I know they have Coast Guard backing; usually you know these guys or you watch them for a long time and you can identify with them. When the Coast Guard comes out with their uniforms, my mind goes to sleep.*

*If you could get a bunch of those NASCAR guys – they go fishing with Bill Dance. Get Ricky Rudd, and get them to talk about it, maybe right before a NASCAR race. The kids also watch.*

*You're in the south, and bass fisherman are close to NASCAR – you could have those guys come out and do some promotions on boating safety.*

*Some of the companies that own the lakes, like Duke Power – it seems like they could get something going like that. The Coast Guard could approach them. You have to keep it in the practical sense.*

All of the focus group participants expressed a strong interest in providing education to children about boating safety and the use of PFDs. The anglers felt that if children are taught about the importance of wearing a PFD, then they might be able to influence their parents or grandparents to also wear one.

*I think [XXX] has the right idea – he shows his kid and lives the example. Advertising aimed at kids would work, like the anti smoking advertisement. They can bug the parents to do the right thing.*

*You could go to the teachers' meetings to work on getting programs in the schools. The teachers can help you build up the program and get the kids excited about what you are talking about.*

*I still think that going to the kids is a good idea. Fathers are traditionally the fishermen in the family. Fishing is some of the best times I've spent with my son. Parents listen to their kids.*

*If you can get the children, the parents will follow.*

## **HUNTERS**

For hunters, the sources that would most effectively convey these messages were conservation organizations, such as Ducks Unlimited and professionals. In fact, some of the hunters said that they would listen to Ducks Unlimited more than the U.S. Coast Guard. The

hunters felt that Ducks Unlimited is a credible organization, and they suggested that Ducks Unlimited develop its own PFD brand, which could be added to the already existing clothing line.

*What about the Ducks Unlimited dinners? They could have life preservers. They have their own clothing line, so they could sell vests.*

*What about Delta? That's another group, because they touch a lot of people.*

*DU is very credible. For guys my age, they will take their word over the Coast Guard's word. I always look at the Feds as big brother trying to push it down my throat. If I don't want it, then it's my personal choice. If you give them Bill Dance, or somebody that they respect, they are more likely to wear it, even if they just show them putting it on, they don't even have to talk about it.*

As with the anglers, the hunters also felt that children should be targeted as possible audiences to teach about boating safety and the importance of wearing a PFD. Several hunters admitted that they would wear a PFD more often if their children or grandchildren encouraged them to wear it. In fact, one hunter said that he would listen to his children more than his wife in terms of encouraging him to wear a PFD.

*Someone mentioned before having more information for the kids. That's where everything needs to start. That's where the peer pressure comes from where you'll start teaching people.*

*My four year old harps on us to put on our life jackets.*

*My grandson was harping on me to wear one [a PFD] ever since he could talk.*

*The kids will put the pressure on grandpa, grandpa, their parents. If not that, it will help that generation if you can't save ours.*

*I would listen to my kid over my wife – my wife would be more like nagging.*

## **COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS**

Anglers who boat were most likely to be persuaded to wear a PFD by professional anglers on television shows. The anglers felt a personal connection with the professionals and were comfortable hearing the message from them. However, several anglers noted that the professionals seldom wear PFDs on their television shows. Hunters, in contrast, preferred to hear the message from conservation organizations, especially a group such as Ducks Unlimited.

Although hunters also suggested having professionals promote PFD use, they felt closer to Ducks Unlimited. They felt that Ducks Unlimited is a very credible organization and would be comfortable hearing the message to wear a PFD from the organization.

Both groups of sportsmen emphasized the importance of educating children about boating safety and wearing a PFD. Hunters and anglers admitted that they would be influenced to wear a PFD if they were reminded by their children and/or grandchildren to wear a PFD. These attitudes were similar to the attitudes of the hunters and anglers in the 2001 focus groups. However, the hunters and anglers in the 2004 focus groups expressed a stronger interest in educating children about boating safety and PFDs than did those in the 2001 focus groups.

## **ATTITUDES TOWARD SPECIFIC MEDIUMS AND METHODS TO COMMUNICATE BOATING SAFETY AND THE USE OF PFDs**

### **ANGLERS**

The anglers had numerous ideas about how to communicate the importance of wearing a PFD. Suggestions for placement of advertisements to encourage anglers to wear a PFD while boating included:

- Billboards on major roads leading up to fishing lakes/locations.
- Signs/posters near boat ramps.
- Brochures about PFDs at public marinas.
- Advertisements in magazines such as Field and Stream, Wildlife in North Carolina, North American Fishing Club, BASS times, and the NRA magazine.
- Professional anglers such as Bill Dance wearing a PFD on fishing shows.
- In-store displays at stores that sell outdoor equipment, such as at Cabela's, Bass Pro, Sports Authority, Dick's, K-mart and Walmart.
- Displays at marinas or stores that sell boats, such as Triad Marinas.
- Radio stations (AM) and talk radio. In Greensboro, the anglers suggested WSJS.
- Saturday morning and Sunday evening fishing shows.
- Commercials or news stories about PFD use and boating safety on the local evening and morning news stations.

- For children – Saturday morning cartoons, junior fishing tournaments, school programs on water safety.
- Stories in the local Sunday newspapers, or other papers with an Outdoors Section.
- Advertisements in catalogues for stores such as West Marine.

Overall, the anglers felt that television would be an effective medium to promote boating safety and the importance of wearing a PFD, as long as the advertisements were targeted to fishing shows or the local news stations. The anglers felt that it was very important for the professional anglers to wear a PFD on the television shows. They felt that it would be an inconsistent message to show commercials encouraging anglers to wear a PFD if the professionals themselves are not wearing one. This could, in fact, potentially harm efforts to educate anglers about wearing a PFD.

The anglers felt that television commercials would be most effective if they show local celebrities or professionals fishing in areas that they recognize.

*Local celebrities and footage seems to catch my attention and draw me into the commercial and message.*

*I like to watch local fishing shows – I don't want to watch someone fishing in Mexico or up in Canada.*

Another popular idea was the placement of billboards on major roads leading up to fishing lakes or other fishing locations. The anglers also strongly supported placing signs reminding anglers to wear a PFD near boat ramps or other put-ins.

Anglers also suggested placing in-store displays about PFDs at outdoors stores or stores that sell outdoor equipment, including Walmart. Another suggestion was to target the major fishing magazines, such as Field and Stream and BASS times with articles or advertisements about PFDs and boating safety.

The anglers recalled the campaign that took place several years ago to encourage people to wear seat belts. Even though wearing a seat belt is mandated by law, the anglers noted that the campaign used consistent, repeated messages to reach the general population. They felt that over time, anglers could be encouraged to wear a PFD while boating, but that the message must be very visible and repetitive.

## **HUNTERS**

Hunters also had numerous ideas for increasing awareness of PFD use and boating safety issues. Suggestions for where advertising could be placed to encourage hunters to wear a PFD while boating included:

- Signs/posters near boat ramps.
- Advertisements or stories in sporting magazines, such as Field and Stream, North American Hunting Club, Sports Afield, and the Ducks Unlimited publication. Hunters were particularly interested in seeing advertisements for the different types of PFDs, especially ones that are designed for greater comfort and mobility.
- Advertisements in catalogues for sporting stores, such as Cabela's and Bass Pro.
- Documents about PFD requirements and designs could be given to individuals when they purchase a boat.
- Pamphlets in outdoor stores that describe boating requirements. Information about PFDs could also be included. One hunter said that when he went to West Marine to buy a PFD for his grandson, there was a poster describing the requirements and appropriate sizes of PFDs for children, and he felt it was very helpful in terms of learning about PFDs and helping him buy the appropriate PFD for his grandson.
- Information presented at the time of purchasing a hunting and/or boating license.
- For children – commercials on the Saturday morning children's television programs, presenting information in the Greenwings magazine and the Missouri Conservationist kids' magazine (or any other state agency kids' magazine).
- Accident reports for people not wearing a PFD while hunting and boating could be placed in a migratory bird digest (or other places where hunters might check waterfowl population numbers for the season).
- Articles or statistics about boating/hunting accidents attributed to not wearing a PFD could be placed in each state's conservation magazine. For example, in Missouri, it is the Missouri Conservationist. According to a hunter, *“Every state has a conservationist type magazine they put out in every state. If you put articles in there about boating safety... they key primarily on hunting and fishing. I've never seen anything about boats in the Missouri one.”*

The hunters who boat also agreed that television would likely have an impact on encouraging hunters to wear a PFD while boating. As with the anglers, the hunters felt that the best avenue for promoting boating safety and PFD use would be on the hunting and fishing shows. The hunters also supported the placement of signs at or near boat ramps, and the placement of billboards along the side of roads leading up to major lakes or rivers.

*I lean towards TV, like on the fishing/hunting shows. They are mostly on Saturday and Sunday.*

*In-store displays – if they would put informational pamphlets right where the life jackets are sold, it would be helpful. Something in there could explain how kids 7 and under have to wear one. I never knew that, I just did it because I didn't want my kids to fall overboard. Billboards around the roads leading to the lakes would also be good.*

*Posters are important around the lakes, because we all have seen them. Post them at the ramps, or where you park your boat. I don't think you could have too many of them. The ones at Mark Twain are a pretty good size.*

*I would rank the posters at the launch sites number one. Along with brochures at those places where you could get more information, there's five different kinds of life vests. And I would say articles and ads in hunting and fishing publications and boating safety classes.*

*Billboards around lakes, posters in sporting stores.*

*I like TV, especially hitting the hunting and fishing shows. I think you need to hit the sporting shows and children's shows. I like posters at the launch sites, and the in-store displays. Like when you are at Bass Pro, it would be nice to have the information there.*

*TV has the biggest impact of all media, so you have to go with TV. All the fishing and hunting magazines, and stores like Cabela's. I like schools. If you capitalize on the schools, you'll get the best outcome.*

The hunters were very interested in hearing *statistics* on accidents that occurred with hunters because they were not wearing a PFD. Even though they realized that the statistics are smaller than for anglers, the hunters felt that knowing how many deaths occurred each year from drowning (and not wearing a PFD) would have a lasting impression on other hunters who boat. The hunters said that they always paid close attention to the statistics on other types of hunting accidents. They often read accident reports and if the accident was due to a careless action, they would be mindful of situations like that in the future.

*When I read the deer hunting accident reports, it makes me more aware of leaning a loaded gun against the truck or not doing stupid things that other guys have done. When I read those articles about how accidents have happened, I pound it into my sons' heads not to do that.*

Hunters also strongly supported posting “reminder” signs at boat launch sites to encourage PFD use. Hunters also supported the idea of placing advertisements or articles in the hunting and fishing magazines that are commonly read by sportsmen.

### **COMPARISON OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS**

Anglers and hunters who boat agreed that television would likely have a positive impact on encouraging sportsmen to wear a PFD while fishing or hunting from a boat. Anglers stressed the importance of showing professionals wearing a PFD on the television shows. Both groups agreed that the promotions would be most effective if they were shown on the television shows that are traditionally viewed by sportsmen, such as the weekend fishing and hunting programs. Both groups also strongly supported the placement of signs or posters at boat launch sites, because they felt it would serve as “last-minute” reminder to wear a PFD. Interestingly, the orange “notice” sign was not highly received by anglers and hunters in the 2001 focus groups, but several hunters from the 2004 focus group recalled seeing the signs at area lakes and they did not have any negative reactions.

The hunters were very interested in hearing or reading about statistics regarding the number of hunters that died from not wearing a PFD in a given year. They acknowledged that this number is smaller than for anglers, but were still interested in this information. Anglers, on the other hand, did not mention an interest in this type of information.

Both groups also supported the placement of advertisements about various types of PFDs and articles on boating safety in conservation and outdoor magazines, such as Field and Stream, BASS times, North American Hunter, and the Ducks Unlimited magazine. There was also strong support for articles in children’s magazines, such as the children’s version of the Missouri Conservationist.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

The focus groups with anglers and hunters who boat produced several important findings, including the following major points:

- Anglers and hunters who boat are aware of potential dangers, in general, while boating. Although most of the focus group participants said that they wore a PFD while boating, most of the hunters and anglers admitted to wearing a PFD only while the boat is in motion.
- Anglers were more concerned about the actions of *other boaters* on the water than the possibility of their own actions causing an accidental drowning.
- Both anglers and hunters did not consider themselves to be recreational boaters. Rather, they viewed themselves as *anglers and hunters who boat*. This suggests that messages targeted to general boaters may not have as great of an impact on sportsmen who boat regarding PFD use and boating safety. Aside from the sportsmen who had experienced a bad situation on the water, it was almost as if the anglers and hunters could not believe that an accident could occur while hunting and fishing from a boat. They felt that boaters, especially those that drove their boat recklessly, were at much greater risk for drowning than the typical hunter or angler that boated. Perhaps this attitude is what encouraged the hunters to be interested in statistics regarding the number of deaths that occur each year from not wearing a PFD. The focus group findings suggested that hunters and anglers need to be educated and convinced that they are at risk for drowning if they do not wear a PFD while boating.
- PFD discomfort was a common reason for why hunters and anglers did not wear a PFD while boating. Both groups of sportsmen said that they are hot and uncomfortable. Hunters said that wearing a PFD makes it difficult to mount a gun. Any education efforts that are designed to increase PFD use among sportsmen that boat should consider promoting the fact that stores sell PFDs that are designed for greater comfort and mobility. Hunters and anglers need to be made aware that PFDs are not only big, orange, bulky vests, but that they also are available in the form of lightweight vests that do not restrict mobility.
- The focus group findings suggested that hunters and anglers are not being exposed to very much information, advertisements or promotional materials on boating safety and the importance of wearing a PFD.
- For anglers who boat, the best source of information on boating safety and PFD use appears to be a message coming from a professional angler on a fishing show.

- For hunters who boat, the best sources of information on boating safety appears to be conservation organizations, especially Ducks Unlimited.
- For both anglers and hunters who boat, children and/or grandchildren would be likely to influence them to wear a PFD while boating.
- The focus group findings suggested that television would be an effective mechanism to target hunters and anglers who boat. Anglers said that they would be interested in hearing information about boating safety and PFDs from professional celebrity anglers. However, it was very important to the anglers that the professionals also wear a PFD when they promote the message. The focus group findings suggested that the professionals may not even have to talk about PFD use; rather, that wearing one may be enough to get the message across to viewers.
- Both anglers and hunters agreed that signs at or near boat ramps or other put-ins would be an effective medium to remind sportsmen to wear a PFD. Both groups also supported the placement of billboards along roads leading up to major lakes and rivers.
- Anglers and hunters stressed the importance of educating children about boating safety and wearing a PFD. Both groups said that they would wear a PFD if they were reminded by their children and/or grandchildren.
- The focus group findings suggested that hunters and anglers are receptive to being educated about boating safety and PFDs; they simply are not being exposed to many promotional materials or information. BoatU.S. Foundation and other organizations should consider increasing the amount of promotional materials that are distributed.
- The focus group findings suggested that hunters and anglers are not receiving much information or encouragement about the importance of wearing a PFD. The hunters and anglers suggested that the advertisements need to be much more concentrated in terms of where they are placed. These preliminary findings also suggest that messages which are serious, and attempt to recreate an accident may be most successful in encouraging hunters and anglers who boat to wear a PFD. The focus group findings showed that for both hunters and anglers, having had a personal bad experience, or having a close friend or family member have a bad experience, was enough of an impetus for changing the behavior of several of the focus group participants. Even though many of them admitted to not wearing a

PFD all of the time, the personal experience was enough to make them wear it more often than they previously had worn it.

- The focus group findings showed that there was slightly less defiance against mandated PFD use in the 2004 focus groups compared to the 2001 focus groups. This may suggest that hunters and anglers who boat are becoming more receptive to the idea of wearing a PFD, even if they currently choose not to wear one. Even though the sportsmen gave many reasons for not wearing a PFD, the findings from the focus groups are still positive regarding the impact that information and education can have on hunters and anglers who boat. The three hunters who participated in the 2001 and 2004 focus groups specifically said that their attitudes had changed after attending the 2001 focus groups. Previously, the three hunters had not worn a PFD while hunting and boating but said that they did wear one now. Even though they admitted to not wearing a PFD all of the time while hunting from a boat, it was a marked improvement over their past behavior.

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