

*From the 1999 Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society
Midyear Meeting held in Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

Human Dimensions in Fishery Management: Norris Reservoir

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Keywords: angler survey, human dimensions, Norris Reservoir

In the early to mid 90's, there was increasing concern expressed by local anglers over the quality of fishing on Norris Reservoir in east Tennessee. Some anglers opposed to stocking striped bass in Norris Reservoir were well organized and quite vocal in their opposition to TWRA's management practices. Because of public concerns about management practices on Norris Reservoir, TWRA asked the Human Dimensions Research Lab in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries at the University of Tennessee to conduct a public opinion survey of TWRA and its management practices in November of 1995.

Participants in the statewide survey were 2,358 individuals, 16 years of age and older, randomly selected across Tennessee. An additional 1,258 participants were randomly selected and interviewed in the 11-county Norris Reservoir area which consists of 11 counties shown by previous surveys to be resident counties for those who fish Norris Reservoir. Using this approach, 249 anglers were randomly contacted in the 11 county area.

Those anglers who indicated that they had stopped fishing Norris Reservoir between 1980 and 1994 were asked the open-ended question "Why did you stop fishing Norris?" Approximately 14% said it was due to "poor quality fishing" and 1.2% said it was because of the striped bass. Nine percent (9%) said they were no longer interested in fishing and 2.2% went elsewhere to fish. The greatest constraint on fishing Norris Reservoir, however, was "time" (37.8%).

The Norris anglers were also asked, "Has the presence of striped bass in Norris Lake caused you to fish Norris Reservoir more, the same, or less?" Although only 1.2% mentioned (on their own) they had stopped fishing Norris because of striped bass, 30% of those familiar with TWRA said that they fished Norris less because of the presence of striped bass. On the other hand, 11% said that they fished Norris Lake more because of striped bass and forty percent (40%) indicated that striped bass had not affected their fishing of the reservoir. Fifty percent (50%) of the Norris anglers familiar with TWRA believe the agency when they say that striped bass prey on non-game fish. Thirty-six percent (36%) believe other people (not TWRA) who say that striped bass prey on game fish. Of those Norris anglers familiar with TWRA, 48% said "Yes" (continue to stock) and 35% said "No" (do not stock striped bass).

Norris Reservoir anglers who said they were somewhat or very familiar with TWRA expressed more dissatisfaction with TWRA's management of fisheries (21.1%) than did other anglers statewide who were familiar with TWRA (7.5%). Nevertheless, 67% of the Norris anglers and 72% of other anglers said they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with how TWRA manages the fisheries resources in Tennessee.

As expected, the public opinion survey indicated that there was greater concern about fisheries management in the Norris Reservoir area than in the remainder of the state, but overall, the majority of anglers indicated that they were satisfied with the management of the reservoir.

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