

Nicola Lake Action Plan

Nicola Lake & Area Recreation Survey Report

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Report submitted to
Fraser Basin Council
by
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Introduction

This report discusses the research carried out around Nicola Lake and outlines the findings from a research project during the summer of 2013 around Nicola Lake. The intention of the research was answer questions related to recreational use of the Nicola Lake area, including:

- Who are the recreationists?
- What types of recreation do they do?
- What do recreationists value about Nicola Lake and area?
- What are Nicola Lake's recreation infrastructure and assets?

Background

In 2012, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD) and the City of Merritt initiated a planning process for Nicola Lake. The Thompson region of the [Fraser Basin Council](#) supported this work by helping to form the Nicola Lake Working Group. The group's goal to develop a short term [Nicola Lake Action Plan](#) was achieved in June 2013. This document reports the result of research activities undertaken to address the fourth goal of that Action Plan to "sustainably manage multiuse lake recreation."

Research Methods

An intercept survey of recreational users was identified as the most suitable tool to survey recreationists over the summer period. The survey combined quantitative and qualitative survey questions (See Appendix A). The survey was administered by two summer students¹ to 98 visitors to [Monck Provincial Park](#) and 11 at Quilchena Golf Course during the summer of 2013. The same survey was also posted online to gather responses from interested individuals but the responses are not included in the statistical measurements given the voluntary nature of this type of survey. However, the feedback, particularly the open-ended comments from the online surveys was rich and that information has been included where appropriate.

Research Results

This section discusses the characteristic of the 107 survey respondents, the types of behaviours they were engaged in and identifies the values and perceptions of the recreational respondents.

Respondent Characteristics

This section discusses the demographics of the respondents as well as the origin of the respondents.

¹ The students were also carrying out activities related to increasing awareness about invasive species and delivering on all of the education areas outlined in the Plan.

Respondent Demographics

Sixty one (57.0%) of all respondents were male and 42 (39.3%) were female (Table 1). The dominant majority of the respondents belonged to the categories of 36-50 (61 respondents, 57.0%) and 51-65 (25 respondents, 23.4%) years of age. Of the remaining, 13 (12.1%) were between 20 and 35 years of age, and 1 (0.9%) was 65 and over.

Table 1 Respondent Gender and Age

Respondent Characteristic	Response	Frequency (N=107)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	61	57.0
	Female	42	39.3
	Unknown	4	3.7
Age	Under 20	0	0
	20-35	13	12.1
	36-50	61	57.0
	51-65	25	23.4
	65+	1	0.9
	Unknown	7	6.5

Visitors vs. residents

Chart 1 shows the breakdown between respondent origins; 24 respondents (22.4%) identified themselves as residents of Nicola Lake/Merritt, and 83 (77.6%) were visitors to the area. Table 2 shows the communities of residency of the respondents. Only one respondent was from outside BC; the others were all BC residents from 5 of the 6 provincial tourism regions. The Lower Mainland was the largest origin (79.5%) of visitors to Nicola Lake and area. The Thompson, Cariboo, Okanagan and Vancouver Island regions each represented around 4% of the visitors.

Chart 1 Respondent Origin (n 107)

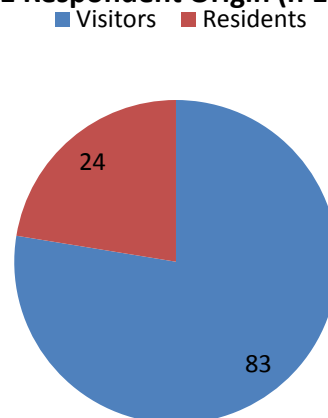


Table 2 Respondent origin

	Region	Community	Number of respondents	Percentage	
Residents	Thompson Cariboo	Merritt	23	21.4	
		Southern Cariboo	1	0.9	
Visitors	Lower Mainland	Burnaby	1	0.9	
		Coquitlam	6	5.7	
		Delta	2	1.9	
		Langley	7	6.6	
		Maple Ridge	5	4.6	
		New Westminster	1	0.9	
		North Vancouver	9	8.4	
		Port Coquitlam	3	2.8	
		Port Moody	2	1.9	
		Surrey	15	14.0	
		Vancouver	5	4.6	
		West Vancouver	1	0.9	
		Abbotsford	3	3.8	
		Chilliwack	5	4.7	
		Fraser Valley	1	0.9	
		Thompson Cariboo	Kamloops	4	3.7
		Okanagan	Vernon	1	0.9
			Kelowna	3	2.8
			Okanagan Valley	1	0.9
		Vancouver Island	Courtenay	3	2.8
	Nanaimo	1	0.9		
Northern BC	Fort St. John	1	0.9		
Quebec	Vaudreuil-Dorion, QC	1	0.9		
	Unknown	1	0.9		
Total			107	100	

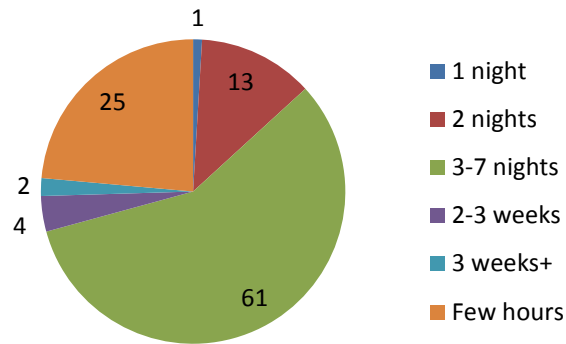
Recreational Behaviours

This section discusses the length of visitors stay, the type of accommodation and provides a prioritized list of the recreational activities they were engaged in.

Length of stay

Most visitors (75, 70.1%) to the lake stayed less than 7 nights, with 2 nights (13, 12.3%) and 3-7 (61, 69.1%) nights being the most common length of stay. Staying for a few hours was preferred by just under a quarter (25, 23.4 %) of respondents. Only a few visitors stayed one night (0.9%) or more than one week (5.6%).

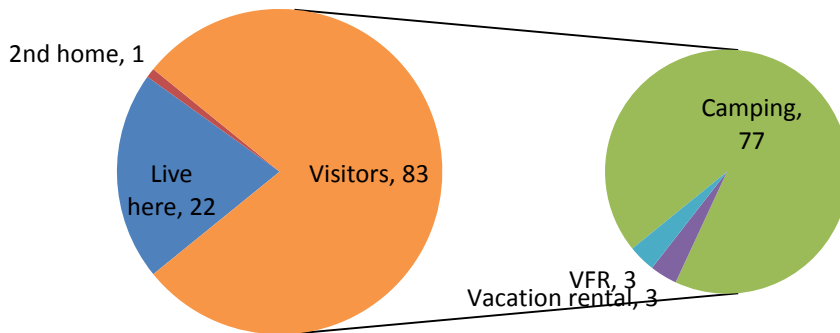
Chart 2 Length of stay (n=106)



Accommodation

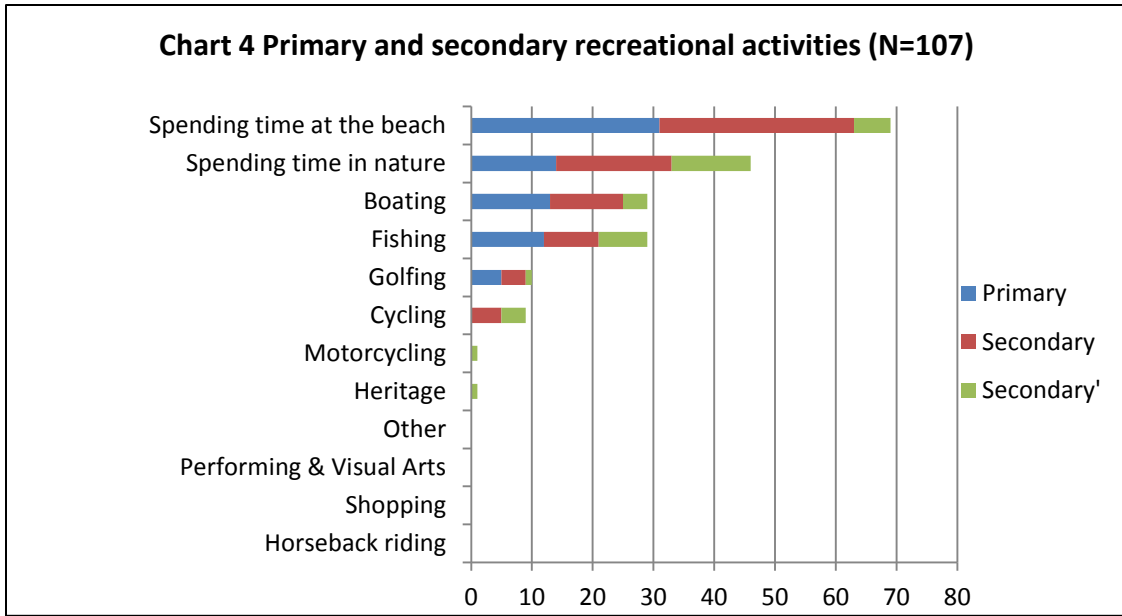
Excluding residents, camping was the most common type of accommodation at Nicola Lake, used by 92.8% of all visitors. This is most directly related to the fact that the bulk of the interviews were carried out at Monck Provincial Park where camping is a popular activity. Vacation rentals and VFR (visiting friends and family) were each chosen by 3.6% of visitors. .

Chart 3 Accommodation at Nicola Lake (n=106)



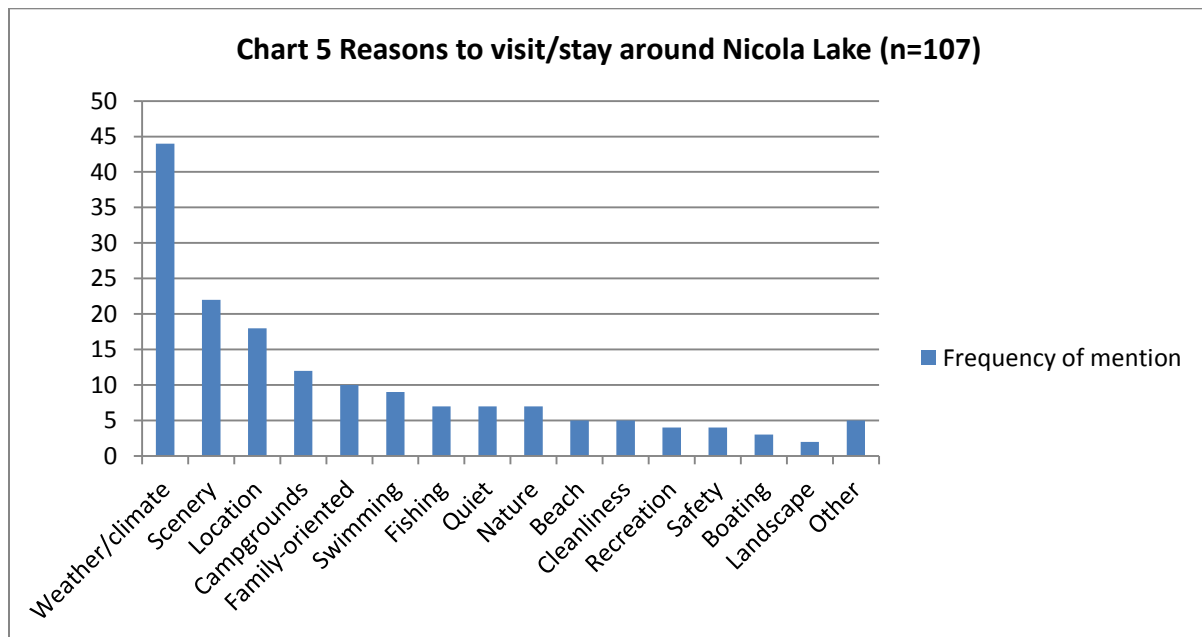
Recreational activities

Respondents were asked to identify one primary and two secondary recreational activities that they engaged in during their visit to the lake. (Chart 4) Spending time at the beach was the most popular amongst all activities, identified by 29.0% of respondents as their primary activity, and by 29.9% as secondary. Other activities in which respondents often participated were spending time in nature (13.1%, 29.9%), boating (12.1%, 13.1%), fishing (11.2%, 15.9%), , golfing (4.7%, 4.7%) and cycling (0%, 8.4%).



Recreational User Values and Perceptions

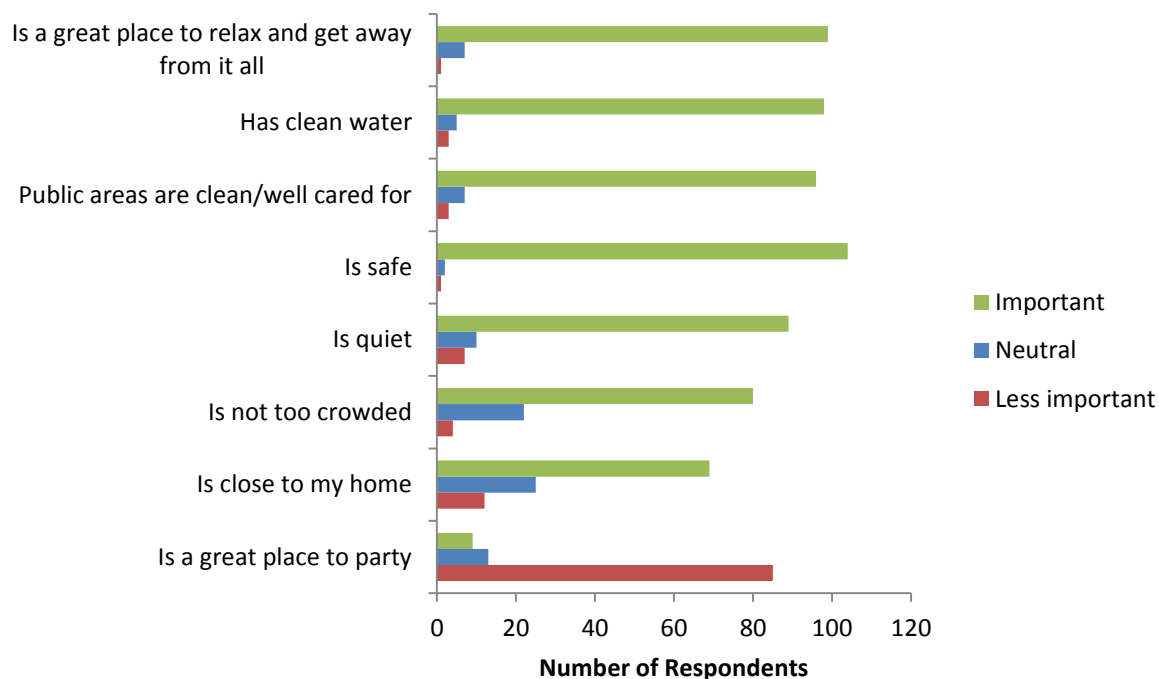
When asked about what made the lake a good place to visit, 44 (41.1%) respondents mentioned the hot, dry climate and sunny weather in the region was the primary reason to visit/stay at the lake, followed by beautiful scenery (20.6%), convenient location (16.8%), well-managed campgrounds (11.2%) and family-oriented settings (9.3%). Recreational activities such as swimming (8.4%), fishing (6.5%) and boating (2.8%) also attracted 8.4%, 6.5% and 2.8% of visitors respectively. Quiet, close to nature and cleanliness of the area were among other characteristics appealing to visitors.



Attributes' level of importance

Respondents were asked to consider eight contributing factors of their experience at the lake and ranked the importance of each factor on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being extremely important and 1 being not at all important. All suggested factors but one were determined as important. Specifically, the majority of respondents agreed that being able to relax (92.5%), cleanliness of the water (91.6%) and public areas (89.7%) and safety (97.2%) were extremely important or somewhat important. Quiet (83.2%), not too crowded (74.8%) and close to home (64.5%) were also considered quite important. On the other hand, partying (8.4%) is of little importance for the respondents when deciding to spend time at the lake.

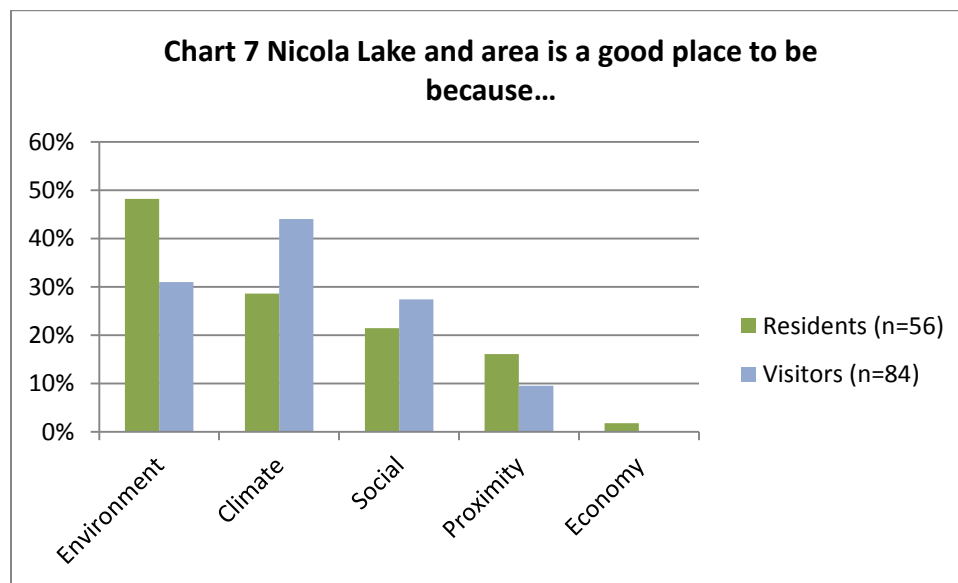
Chart 6 Level of importance when deciding to spend time at Nicola Lake and area (n=107)



The open-ended comments from visitors and residents gathered through the intercept and online questionnaires provided further information as to why people believe “Nicola Lake is a great place to be.” (Chart 7) A higher percentage of resident than visitor respondents appreciated the environmental qualities of this area; all comments related to ‘Environment’ included: “to watch wildlife, unspoiled environment, natural beauty, beautiful lake/place, natural habitat, enjoy nature, scenery/scenic, clean water, and wilderness.”

A higher percentage of visitors than residents commented on the climate, using such phrases as: “fantastic wind, warm sunny weather, warm dry climate, great weather, warm, like the Caribbean, sunny, hot and dry.” A slightly higher percentage of visitors than residents commented on the social aspects of why Nicola Lake was a good place to be; these included: “not too many boats, peacefulness/quiet of the lake, less crowded, variety of recreational activities, not covered with big

noisy boats, family orientated, clean and safe, and kids can play safe.” A few respondents also mentioned they appreciated the close distance to Merritt and Merritt’s amenities or from their home” (e.g., Lower Mainland).



Desired improvement

Respondents were asked to suggest three ways to improve their experience at and around Nicola Lake. They were provided with a list of suggestions but also had opportunity to come up with their own options. (Table 3) Installing public showers was the most often suggested improvement (29.9%), followed by suggestions to remove milfoil (10.3%) or related comments to “clean up the lake.” Respondents also wanted a bigger variety of recreational activities (6.5%), more educational programs (6.5%) (including educational camps and installation of an info booth), dog-friendly areas (5.6%) and more shade (3.7%).

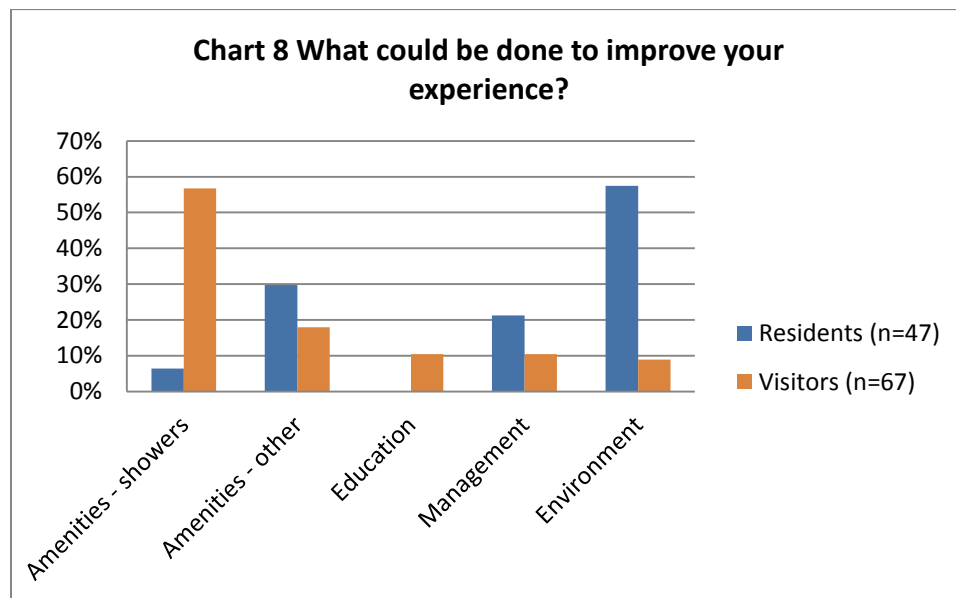
Table 3 Areas of improvement desired by visitors to Nicola Lake and area

Suggestions	Frequency	Percent (%)*
Public showers	32	29.9
Cleaner water/clearing of milfoil	11	10.3
Bigger variety of recreational activities	7	6.5
Educational programs	7	6.5
Dog area	6	5.6
More shade	4	3.7
Better manage noise volume (e.g., parties, fireworks, boats)*	4	3.7
Improved safety on the lakes*	3	2.8
Improved boater behavior*	3	2.8
More places to eat*	2	1.9
Less crowding on the beaches/parks*	2	1.9
More/better public boat launches, docks*	1	0.9

Suggestions	Frequency	Percent (%)*
Improved parking*		
Needs a marina with gas bar*		
More/cleaner public washrooms*		
Better management of boat discharge, litter and waste*		

**Options provided in the original list of suggestions*

The open-ended comments from visitors and residents gathered through the intercept and online questionnaires provided further information as to “What could be done to improve the respondent’s experience at Nicola Lake and area?” (Chart 8) Visitor respondents overwhelmingly want showers to be made available to them. Both groups wanted other amenities including: “[keeping] speedboat traffic away from swimming area, volleyball or badminton nets, campsite hookups, boat rentals, private/adult only beach, trail upkeep/extension/improvement, concession stand/store, roped off area for children, and more playgrounds.” Resident respondents were more likely to comment on environment issues such as: “cleaner water, milfoil, (re)forestation, water quality. Resident respondents too were more likely to want management actions such as: “create recreation areas where loud/large wake boats are required to stay, enforcing rules and covenants related to residential development and foreshore modification, limit the amount of development in the vicinity of the lake, road maintenance/access, rowdy drinking, and irresponsible and noisy boating.”



Potential repulsive factors

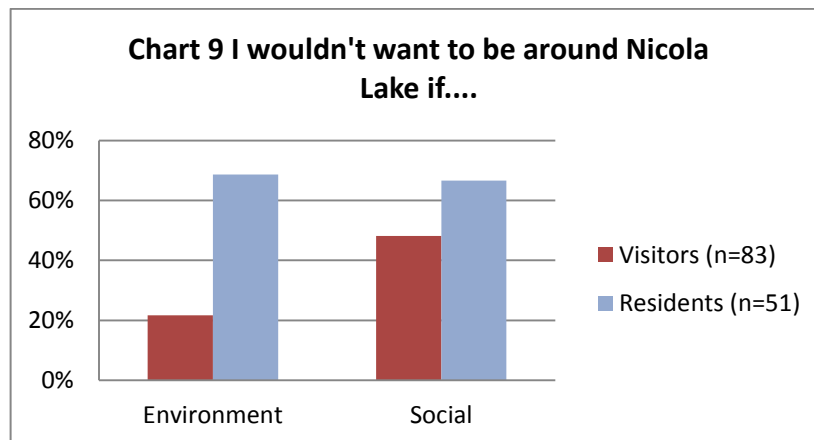
When asked about factors that could be detrimental to their experience and prevent them from visiting, nearly half (43.9%) of respondents indicated that too much partying, crowding and too much noise was their number one concern. (Table 4) Poor water quality (pollution, dirty water, milfoil infestation) (21.5%), restricted access due to weather condition, forest fire or highway closure (13.1%), dirty recreational areas (10.3%), dangerous wildlife (7.5%) and safety concerns (6.5%) were also negative factors that could impact their decision to visit.

Table 4 Potential repulsive factors of visiting Nicola Lake and area

Responses	Frequency	Percent (%)*
Partying/crowding/too much noise	47	43.9
Poor water quality	23	21.5
Restricted access	14	13.1
Dirty	11	10.3
Animals/bugs	8	7.5
Unsafe	7	6.5
Other	6	5.6

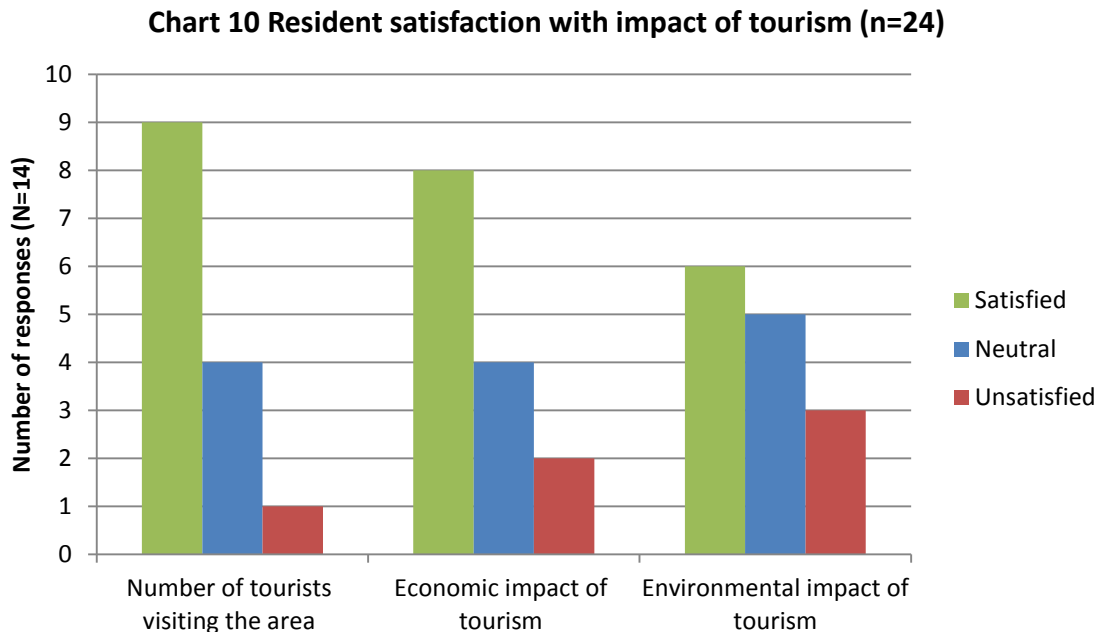
The open-ended comments from visitors and residents gathered through the intercept and online questionnaires provided comments on when “I wouldn’t want to be around Nicola Lake if...” (Chart 9) Resident respondent’s comments were substantially more centered on issues related to ‘environment’ than were visitors. Both groups were concerned about weeds and pollution: visitor respondents were concerned about the impact on themselves (e.g., swimmers itch, dangerous animals) while resident respondents’ comments also referred to development (e.g., “development take over all the shoreline, enough development on the lake already, and if natural environments especially riparian and shoreline environments are not protected and valued”).

A higher percentage of resident than visitor respondents comments were related to social impacts. Both groups were concerned about Nicola Lake becoming a party place, too crowded/busy, unsafe and too noisy.”



Resident satisfaction with tourism

Residents were asked to rank, on a scale of 1-5 (1=very unsatisfied, 5=very satisfied), their satisfaction with the impact of tourism, namely, number of tourists in the area, economic impact and environmental impact. This question received 14 qualifying responses. Despite the smaller sample, it can be assumed that respondents were generally satisfied with the number of tourists (64.3%) and the economic impact of tourism (57.1%) in the area. It is important to note that these resident respondents were less satisfied (42.9%) and more unsatisfied (21.4%) with the impact of tourism on the environment compared to the other impacts. (Chart 10)



Resident respondents' open-ended comments were reviewed to identify suggestions on how to develop tourism; these were grouped under three areas (in order of popularity):

1. **Environment** – comments included:

The Nicola Valley and associated regions, i.e. grasslands etc. are increasingly being used and abused by visitors to the area.

There appears to be a growing environmental impact on the Lake from both tourism and residents, something I am NOT satisfied about.

Too many tourists, way too much environmental impact, way too many boats, not enough ways for property owners to protect their land from erosion, trespassers, garbage etc. I suppose there is some spinoff benefit economically in that without tourism, we would be lacking some businesses in Merritt that rely on tourism but there is very little "real" impact for me.

The tourists are not impacting the environment much. FLNRO is impacting the environment badly with their irresponsible water management of the Nicola Lake Dam.

2. **Improved amenities** included suggestions for: “showers, store that is more convenient, wharf, restaurant, gas, and marina.”
3. **More recreational activities** were suggested such as: “more water activities for families, recreation rentals, more family activities, and horseback riding.”

Lastly, residents suggested there be better management such as more law enforcement.

Conclusion

The primary quantitative and qualitative recreation research carried out in the Nicola Lake and area in 2013 answered key questions. As the intercept questionnaire was administered to Monck Park, and largely to visitors (78%), the research findings are more correctly a better sample of who stays at the Park, rather than in the area as a whole. Data analysis of the intercept visitors showed that the largest group of visitor recreationists were males, that the majority of respondents were 36-50 years of age, and the largest market origin was from the Lower Mainland (80%), followed by the Okanagan (6%), Thompson Cariboo and Vancouver Island regions (5% each). There was only one out of province visitor identified. The majority of intercept visitor respondents were camping for 3-7 nights. Twenty two intercept resident respondents lived in the area full time.

‘Spending time at the beach’ was the first choice of recreational activities for both visitor and resident respondents followed by ‘boating,’ fishing,’ and ‘golfing.’ Infrastructure and assets related to recreation were identified as part of the summer research: a Google based map showing these assets can be accessed through Fraser Basin Council offices in Kamloops.

The values and perceptions of resident and visitor recreationists who responded to either the intercept or online survey are discussed in the report. Overall, respondent recreationists were equally concerned about their health (clean water, clean public areas, and safety) and that their recreation area is quiet and not too crowded. They were not looking for a ‘place to party.’ When resident and visitor respondent groups were compared, a higher percentage of residents appreciated the environmental qualities of the area. One resident respondent wrote, “*the natural beauty and serenity make this a great place to relax and enjoy nature.*” Visitor respondents were more likely to appreciate the warm, dry climate.

When asked what could be done to improve their recreational experience, visitor respondents overwhelmingly asked for public showers. Resident respondents were primarily concerned about environmental related issues related to milfoil, clean water and forest cover. Both groups wanted more amenities including swimmer areas (boat free), trail improvements more than they wanted better management (limit development, enforce rules, restrict boat noise, etc.). However, when asked to complete the statement, ‘I wouldn’t want to be around Nicola Lake if...,’ nearly 45% of respondents

indicated that the social factors of partying, crowding, too much noise would keep them away, followed by poor water quality (22%). When the visitor and resident respondent groups were compared, it was clear the resident respondents care more about the natural environment and visitors, who have a choice to go elsewhere, were concerned about conditions that would impact their enjoyment of Nicola Lake.

When residents were asked about their satisfaction with tourism, they seemed overall to be satisfied with the number of tourists visiting the area, moderately satisfied with the economic impact of tourism and less satisfied (and more unsatisfied) with the environmental impact of tourism. One respondent noted, *“Tourists often do not share a sense of community with the residents and treat the Lake and the surrounding area as an ‘anything goes’ holiday destination without thinking of the long term implications of shoreline erosion, accumulation of pollutants and introduction of potentially invasive species.”*

What Nicola Lake has to offer and protect was summed up nicely by a resident that wrote, *“These people are [t]here because it is convenient, inexpensive and adventurous. We are still a place where the dogs run free and the children too but are well watched.”*

Appendix A Nicola Lake Recreation Survey

Date _____ Loc/Event _____ Surveyor Initials _____ Survey # _____

1. Are you a (select one)

Visitor to the Nicola Lake and area	Resident of Nicola Lake/Merritt (within 50 kms)
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2. What is your primary recreational activity while spending time around Nicola Lake? (Put '1' in list below) What 2 other recreational activities will you do while at Nicola Lake? (Put '2' in list below)

Spending time at the beach	Golfing	Performing & Visual Arts activities
Spending time in nature	Cycling	Other
Boating	Heritage activities	
Fishing	Horseback riding	
Motorcycling	Shopping	

3. Would you please finish the following sentence....*Nicola Lake and area is a good place to be because (why do they visit/stay around area?)*

4. On a scale of 1-5, please rate how important each of the following characteristics are to you when it comes to spending time at Nicola Lake and area (1 being not important at all and 5 being extremely important). *Nicola Lake and area...*

	1	2	3	4	5
<i>a. is a great place to relax and get away from it all</i>					
<i>b. is a great place to party</i>					
<i>c. is quiet</i>					
<i>d. is safe</i>					
<i>e. has clean water</i>					
<i>f. public areas are clean/well cared for</i>					
<i>g. is not too crowded</i>					
<i>h. is close to my home</i>					
<i>i. Other</i>					

Comments

5. What could be done to improve your experience at Nicola Lake? (List 3 things)

Improved parking	Better manage noise volume (e.g., parties, fireworks, boats)
More places to eat	Needs a marina with gas bar
More/cleaner public washrooms	Less crowding on the beaches/parks
	Improved safety on the lakes
More/better public boat launches, docks	Better management of boat discharge, litter and waste
Improved boater behavior	Other

Comments

6. Please finish the following sentence, "I wouldn't want to be around Nicola Lake if..... (i.e., Why would individual choose *not* to visit/stay at Nicola Lake?)

FOR RESIDENTS

7. How satisfied are you with the following on a scale of 1-5 (1 being not satisfied at all and 5 being extremely satisfied)?

	1	2	3	4	5	D/K
The number of tourists visiting the area (i.e., is it too crowded, do you want more tourists?)						
The economic impact of tourism (i.e., how much tourism contributes to the economy)						
The environmental impact of tourism						

8. Do you have any ideas or comments on developing tourism around Nicola Lake and area (i.e., improved infrastructure, new/improved activities, no more tourism).

FOR VISITORS

9. How long will you stay in/around Nicola Lake on this trip?

A few hours	Between 3-7 nights
1 night	Between 2 - 3 weeks
2 nights	More than 3 weeks

10. Where are you staying?

Camping	I have a holiday home here (i.e. second home)
Staying with friends/relatives who live here	I live here year round
Rented holiday accommodation	

11. Where is your permanent address?

Canada (get 1 st 3 digits postal code)	United States (get state)	International (get country)
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FOR EVERYONE

12. Gender

Male	Female
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13. Age

16-20	20-35	36-50	51-65	65+
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