

24-hour Monitoring of Boat Ramp Use

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Abstract: The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's saltwater creel survey is conducted at boat-access sites from 1000 to 1800 hours. Fishing trips concluding outside of this time period are not intercepted. In particular, nighttime fishing trips concluding before 1000 hours are not intercepted, but these trips seasonally target specific fisheries, e.g., southern flounder (*Paralichthys lethostigma*) in the fall, which may account for a significant portion of the total harvest. We re-evaluated the 1000 to 1800 hour survey period and monitored nighttime boating activity at boat-access sites with surreptitiously placed "trail cams." These cameras were used coastwide from October through December 2007 to hourly record empty trailers parked at boat ramps used most often by nighttime flounder anglers. A total of 2,135 usable images captured 11,520 empty trailers, with the highest counts occurring between 0700 and 1800 hours. Boat ramp use declined from October to December. Nighttime activity was highest in November and concentrated along the middle Texas coast. Nighttime ramp use was low but evenly distributed from 2100 to 0500 hours. Trail cams are a cost-effective means of obtaining 24-hour trailer counts and are useful for identifying peak usage times and locations. Results can be used to assess the number of trips missed by the routine creel survey and to design special nighttime surveys.

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