**2024 Boat Census Survey**

**Introduction**

The Lake Ripley Management District completed the annual boat census survey on Lake Ripley on Wednesday, August 14th, 2024. It took two hours to complete the entire loop, starting at 9:00 a.m. and finishing at 11:00 a.m. The survey was conducted on the District’s pontoon boat. The survey crew included Lianna Spencer (Lake Manager), Andrew Sabai (Nature Preserve Technician), Tony Tobiasz (Watercraft Inspector), Jim Jermain (weed harvester), and Leo Allen (weed harvester). Andrew generously donated his equipment to videotape the entire shoreline. Lianna, Tony, Andrew, and Jim all counted vessels along the shoreline. Leo captained the pontoon for the duration of the trip.

As part of the Lake Ripley Management District’s ongoing carrying capacity study, the District conducts a boat census survey every summer to document the number of vessels moored on Lake Ripley. By completing this survey, we are able to document the population of local boats on the lake as well as the changes happening in our littoral and riparian buffer zones each year. We count all boats, motorized and non-motorized, as well as swim mats, boat lifts and piers.

**Methods**

The crew traveled clockwise on Lake Ripley. The pontoon was traveling slow enough to not create any wake the entire time; this gave the crew the ability to accurately count all vessels, swim mats, boat lifts and piers. Only moored boats were counted, so as not to count boats coming from elsewhere. Vessels counted included: pontoons, speed boats, fishing boats, jet skis, kayaks/paddleboards, non-motors/canoes, paddleboats, sailboats, and swim rafts/mats. We also counted piers, boathouses, and boat lifts. The weather was warm and sunny, and the temperature was 79°F. The survey was video recorded so that it can be watched later, if needed.

**Results**

This year, the crew counted 184 piers, 315 boats lifts, 195 pontoon boats, 112 speed boats, 26 fishing boats, 53 jet skis, 214 kayaks/paddleboards, 34 canoes/nonmotor, 17 paddleboats, 11 sailboats, and 30 swim mats, and 5 boathouses.

Since 2023, nine additional piers have been observed in Lake Ripley. Some of these piers were on shore and had not been placed in the water; these piers were still included in our count as they may have already been, or may yet be, placed in the water. Seven additional boat lifts were observed on the lake this year.

Increases were seen in the number of speed boats, fishing boats, jet skis, kayaks/paddleboards, canoes/non-motors, paddleboats, and sailboats. There were an additional eight speedboats, ten fishing boats, eleven jet skis, thirty-nine kayaks/paddleboards, ten canoes/non-motors, seven paddleboats, and three more sailboats. One category saw a decrease in number in 2024. Pontoon boats have decreased by nine. There were ten more swim rafts/mats than there were in 2023.

In total there were 662 vessels recorded on the lake, which is seventy-nine more vessels than the 2023 boat census survey. (Swim rafts/mats were not included in the referenced number as they are not vessels.) The biggest increase we saw this year was the thirty-nine additional kayaks/paddleboards!

**Discussion**

The District completes this boat census survey every year to document the change in motorboat activity on Lake Ripley. The data varies each year, with only one trend proving to be consistent. Since 2019, the number of paddleboards and kayaks have continuously grown larger. We did the survey roughly a month later than we had in the past. This year we had more rain than we have in the past two years, so we weren’t concerned about people pulling their vessels out of the water.

We saw an increase in the number of vessels on Lake Ripley since 2023. We saw seventy-nine more vessels on the lake, with the biggest increase in kayaks/paddleboards. In 2022 and 2023 we saw a large increase of paddleboards and kayaks, and there was another large increase this year, too. For the first time since 2019, the number of jet skis was larger, rising by eleven.