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**An Evaluation of the Needs and Demands
for Access to Public Waters in Wisconsin**

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Introduction

The intention of this report is to identify the magnitude of user demands placed on public access sites. Fish Management Bureau Administrative Report No. 2 summarized the status of access to lakes in six counties, and found that approximately 70 percent of the lakes over 50 acres lacked adequate access. While this indicates many lakes in the state probably do not have adequate access, it was questioned what actual needs and demands there are for public access, and where these needs are greatest.

Discussion

There is much evidence that our surface waters receive considerable use. To cite one water related activity, in 1972 there were 810,291 resident fishing licenses and 405,315 nonresident fishing licenses sold. Certainly many of these fishermen were dependent to at least some extent on public access for their fishing pleasure.

As a further indication of surface water use, there were 284,508 boats registered in the state in 1973 (Table 1). In addition, it is estimated that there were an additional 300,000 unregistered boats and 300,000 nonresident transient boats using Wisconsin waters during the year*. This means there were approximately 900,000 boats operated in the state in 1973, or about one boat for every acre of inland lake surface water.

Table 1. 1973 Boat Registrations by District

<u>District</u>	<u>Number Registered Boats</u>
Northwest	18,605
West Central	39,312
Southern	42,740
Southeast	85,581
Lake Michigan	64,225
North Central	34,045
	<u>284,508</u>

Beulig (1965) compared the percentage of transient to moored boats by sampling every 250th boat registration application. Results are shown in Table 2.

* Information from Dale Morey, Supervisor of Boating Safety, DNR

Table 2. Percentage of Moored Boats and Transient Boats in Various Areas of the State (from Beulig 1965)

	1963-1964				1961			
	Transient	%	Moored	%	Transient	%	Moored	%
N.W. Area	14	60.9	9	39.1	14	25	41	75
N.E. Area	7	28.0	18	72.0	13	27	35	73
W.C. Area	9	50.0	9	50.0	15	43	20	57
E.C. Area	25	58.1	18	41.9	30	33	61	67
Southern Area	<u>51</u>	<u>63.8</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>36.2</u>	<u>71</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>45</u>
	106	52.2	84	47.8	143	40	216	60

It could be concluded from these figures that about half the boats registered in the state in 1964 were of the transient type.

As a check on his results, Beulig tabulated the numbers of transient boats for each area from the Law Enforcement Fishing and Boating Activity Report. Results are shown in Table 3. The percentage of transient boats statewide varied only one percent between reports, indicating fairly reliable results.

Table 3. Data on Boat Origins from Law Enforcement Division Report - 1964 (from Beulig 1965)

	Transient	%	Moored (incl. rented)	%
N.W. Area	534	52.1	492	47.9
N.E. Area	585	58.5	415	41.5
W.C. Area	123	52.8	110	47.2
E.C. Area	653	45.3	788	54.7
Southern Area	<u>390</u>	<u>47.2</u>	<u>436</u>	<u>52.8</u>
	2,285	51.2	2,241	48.8

Data from the 1973 Recreational Boating Report was used to identify recent trends in transient VS moored boats. Conservation wardens conducted surveys at various dates throughout the summer to compile this data. Table 4 is a summary of results.

Table 4. Transient vs Nontransient Boats in 1973
(data from 1973 Recreational Boating Report)

<u>District</u>		<u>Rented or Moored</u>	<u>Transient</u>	<u>% Transient</u>
Northwest	Resident	565	444	44
	Nonresident	<u>503</u>	<u>237</u>	<u>32</u>
	Total	1,068	681	39
West Central	Resident	287	315	52
	Nonresident	<u>285</u>	<u>283</u>	<u>50</u>
	Total	572	598	51
North Central	Resident	1,069	692	39
	Nonresident	<u>882</u>	<u>279</u>	<u>24</u>
	Total	1,951	971	33
Lake Michigan	Resident	1,162	1,411	55
	Nonresident	<u>1,304</u>	<u>892</u>	<u>41</u>
	Total	2,466	2,303	48
Southeast	Resident	457	239	34
	Nonresident	<u>232</u>	<u>112</u>	<u>33</u>
	Total	689	351	34
Southern	Resident	224	400	64
	Nonresident	<u>253</u>	<u>241</u>	<u>49</u>
	Total	477	641	57
Statewide	Resident	3,764	3,501	48
	Nonresident	<u>4,718</u>	<u>2,044</u>	<u>30</u>
	Total	8,482	5,545	40

This data indicates that a high proportion of boats operated in Wisconsin are of the transient type. Statewide, 40 percent of the boats surveyed were transient, with the highest percentage of transient boats in the Southern District (57%), and the lowest percentage in the North Central District (33%). Indications are that residents make greater use of transient boats (48%) than nonresidents (30%).

The number of transient boats in any district is probably somewhat dependent on presently available access. For example, the low number of transient boats in the Southeast District is probably partly due to the lack of access to many of the lakes in that district. Also, it should be noted that some moored boats probably make use of public boat landings occasionally.

If 40 percent of the approximately 900,000 boats operated in Wisconsin in 1973 were transient, then there were approximately 360,000 transient boats in the state during the year. Many of these boats undoubtedly made frequent use of public access, while others were probably in the state only a short time or made use of private facilities.

Past aerial surveys have indicated that at any one time approximately 10 percent of the boats on a lake are in use. If we assume that on a typical weekend, there are 300,000 transient boats in Wisconsin and that 10 percent of these boats are in operation and using public access, then 30,000 boats would be using public access sites at the same time.

The number of car-trailer parking spaces at public launching sites was calculated for 24 counties (Figure 1)**. There was a total of 6,826 car-trailer parking spaces in these 24 counties. If we assume this gives a representative picture statewide, then there are about 20,478 developed car-trailer parking spaces at boat launching facilities statewide. This includes lakes, rivers, streams and the Great Lakes.

Even if these figures are only approximations, they show there is probably not enough developed parking at access sites to meet present demand, even if this demand was spread equally over the state. Some of this demand is taken up by private commercial facilities. However, the general lack of adequate parking leads to parking on private property, along roadsides and in other undesirable places. This demand will almost certainly continue to grow.

As transient boats are by definition mobile, it is difficult to determine which areas of the state receive the most pressure. In a study by Threinen (1965), fish managers were asked to carry out a day-long survey of 38 access sites throughout the state to determine amount of use. All sites were surveyed on peak activity days (holidays, weekends). Results are shown in Table 5.

It was concluded that most access sites in the southern part of the state receive greater use than those in the north, and that heaviest use is found on lake sites near big cities and on river sites during peak fishing activities. It was noted, however, that some sites near major cities did not have high use, probably due to lack of familiarity with the site, inferior qualities of the waters, and competing situations.

** Data from Public Boat Access Site inventories.

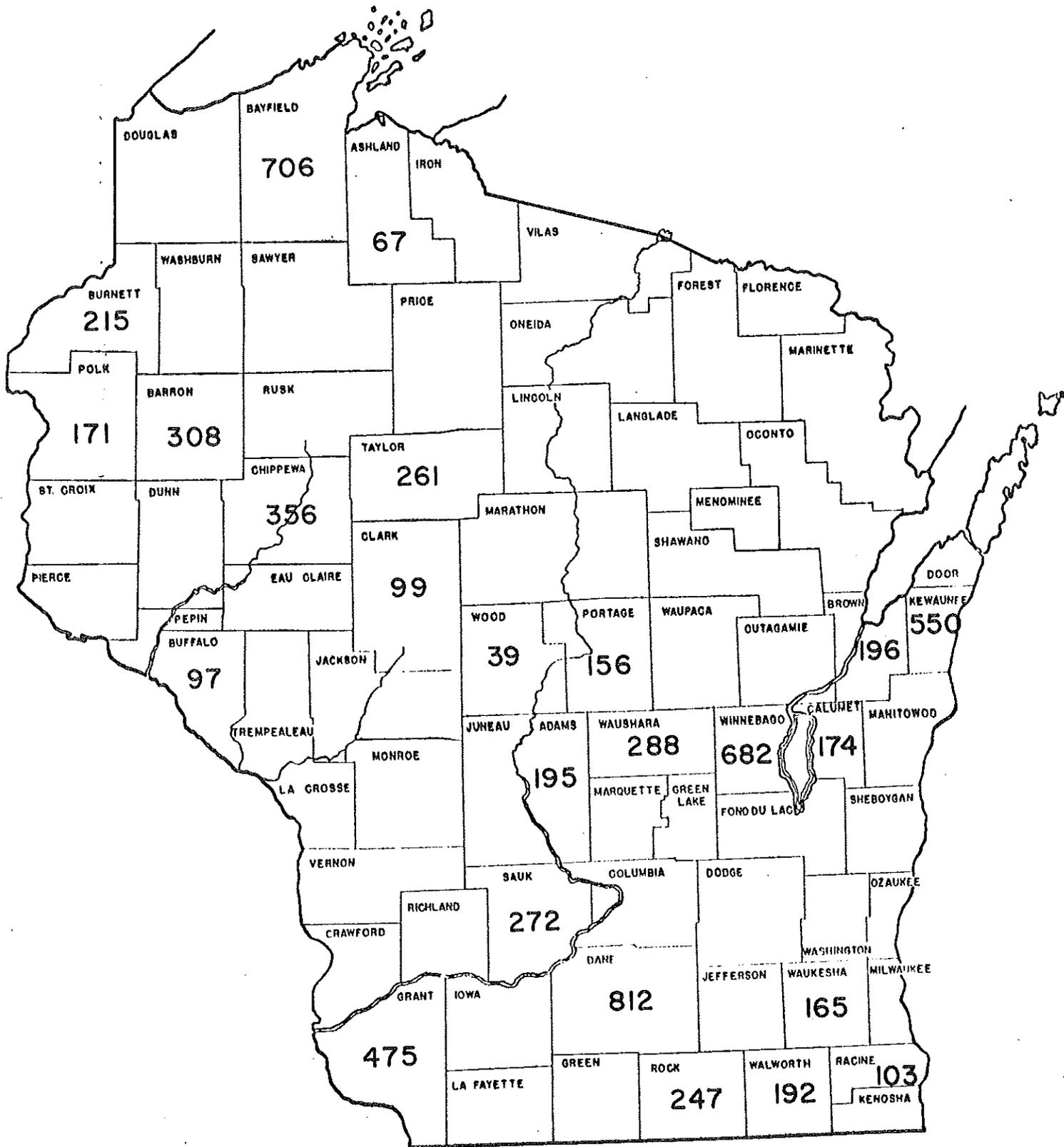


FIGURE 1. Number of car-trailer parking spaces at public launching sites in 24 counties.

Table 5. Numbers of Access Site Users During One-day Surveys on Various Lakes (from Threinen, 1965)

Northern Wisconsin

<u>Lake</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>No. Users</u>
Silver	Barron	9/5	2
Middle Eau Claire	Bayfield	9/6	2
Bardon	Douglas	7/4	3
Sea Lion	Florence	7/12	0
Lost	Marathon	7/4	0
Rice	Marathon	7/11	1
Bass	Marinette	7/12	2
Little Bearskin	Oneida	7/11	8
Bone	Polk	9/5	13
Amacoy	Rusk	7/4	15
Haymon Falls	Shawano	7/11	3
Upper Trout	Vilas	7/12	11
Potato	Washburn	9/7	1

Southern Wisconsin

Wolf	Adams	7/19	0
Gordon's Bay (Mississippi R)	Crawford	6/21	14
Kegonsa	Dane	6/21	7
Emily	Dodge	6/13	17
Cedar Falls	Dunn	9/7	5
Wisconsin River	Grant	6/21	7
Sugar River	Green	6/21	3
Lower Merrillian	Jackson	9/6	1
Johnson Creek (Rock River)	Jefferson	6/21	1
Kanow Park (Rock River)	Jefferson	6/21	1
Mary	Kenosha	6/21	14
Silver	Kenosha	6/21	53
West Alaska	Kewaunee	6/28	1
Bullhead	Manitowoc	6/6	11
Hartlaub	Manitowoc	5/23	9
Koshkonong	Rock	6/21	7
Long	Sauk	6/21	8
Trempealeau	Trempealeau	9/7	22
Nagawicka	Waukesha	6/21	72
Shadow	Waupaca	6/28	1
Wolf River	Waupaca	5/16	37
Big Silver	Waushara	6/13	8
Big Silver	Waushara	6/14	5
Fox River	Winnebago	5/16	26
Winnebago	Winnebago	6/13	12

Another indication of where most pressure is received may be found by looking at boat densities around the state. In a study of boating densities in 1974 (Cornelius 1974), conservation wardens took boat counts from airplanes on many lakes throughout the state. Boat densities (acres per boat) were calculated for the northern, central and southern portions of the state, with the results summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Boat Densities in Northern, Central and Southern Wisconsin in 1972 (from Cornelius 1974)

	<u>Number of Lakes Observed</u>	<u>Boat Densities (Acres per boat)</u>
Northern Wisconsin	641	63.1
Central Wisconsin	81	142.4
Southern Wisconsin	64	34.4
	<u>786</u>	<u>62.0</u>

As might be expected, most boating pressure occurred in the highly populated south, followed by the tourist oriented northern part of the state.

Most demand probably occurs on lakes within the "day use areas" of major population centers. People will only infrequently drive long distances for recreation. In a state park and forest visitor survey conducted in 1968, day use visitors were asked how far they traveled to reach the park they were at. Residents traveled an average of 43 miles, and nonresidents an average of 87 miles, both figures well within a "day use" range.

Figure 2 depicts areas within a one-hour driving time of several major population centers. Lakes within these areas probably receive the greatest pressures, with these pressures falling off with increasing distance.

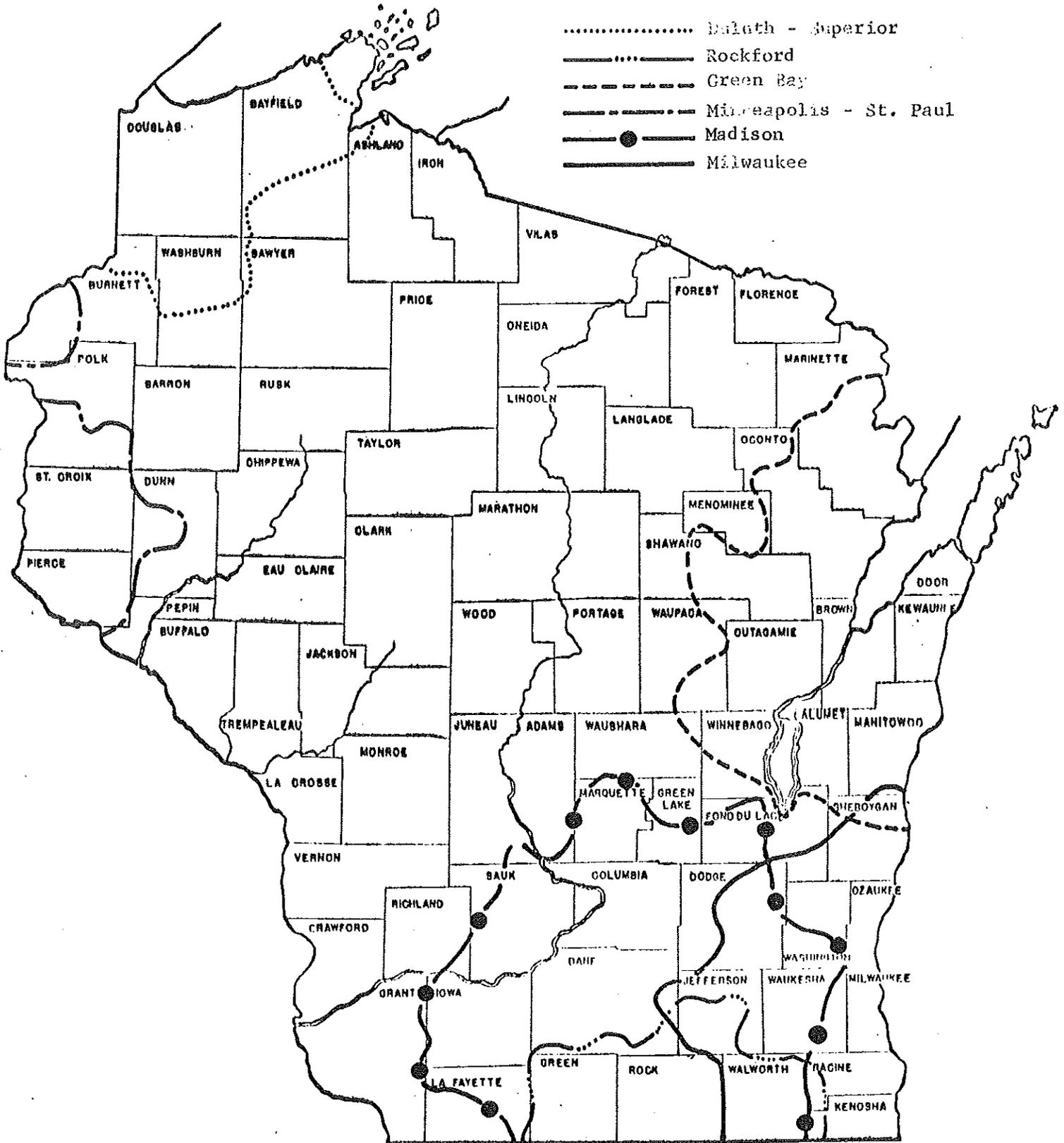


FIGURE 2. Approximate areas within a one-hour driving time of major population centers (from Department of Transportation).

Summary

All public waters deserve some type of public access commensurate with size. With an estimated 360,000 transient boats in the state in 1973, the practical need for access is apparent. Pressure for access will surely increase. Our lakeshores are rapidly reaching the point of complete development, and future increases in lake recreation will inevitably be in the form of trailered boats which need public access.

Needs for access are greatest on lakes within "day use areas" of major population centers. However, with recreational demands on all our lakes increasing, a viable statewide access program is needed if we are to satisfy user demands.

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