

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Benefits of Watercraft Patrol on
Lake Lavon in Collin County, Texas**

**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

**By
Tony Bradley**

**Collin County Sheriff's Office
McKinney, Texas
June 2010**

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of watercraft patrol in responding to emergency calls for service thereby establishing the need for watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon in Collin County, Texas. From 2004 to 2008, there were 30 calls for service for boating accidents, and 13 people drowned on Lake Lavon (Collin County Sheriff's Office, 2008; US Army Corps of Engineers, 2008). The research demonstrated that drowning accidents and other boating related criminal offenses, such as boating while intoxicated, decrease with the utilization of watercraft patrol and boater education. The argument for allocating resources for watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon is relevant to law enforcement due to the potential for increased efficiency in responding to calls for service.

The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of law enforcement marine patrol literature, an examination of four law enforcement lake patrol programs, and interviews with three law enforcement personnel responsible for watercraft patrol on North Texas Lakes. The researcher discovered that the existing literature supports the benefits of providing patrol on water surfaces. Support for the need of watercraft patrol was emphasized in the interviews of law enforcement agencies. Positive feedback from citizens as well as an increase in the ability to respond effectively to calls for service on the water surface was reported by respondents. This paper will establish the need for, and provide a rationale for, Collin County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	
Introduction	1
Review of Literature	2
Methodology	6
Findings	7
Discussions/Conclusions	10
References	13
Appendix	

INTRODUCTION

Lake Lavon, located in southeast Collin County, Texas, is a popular destination spot year-round. Fishing, boating, swimming, hiking, and camping attract approximately 1.6 million visitors to Lavon's 38,327 acres each year (US Army Corps of Engineers, n.d.). The number of visitors is expected to increase as Collin County has consistently ranked in the top 20 fastest growing counties over the last decade. Collin County's population is more than 740,000 and growing (US Census, 2007).

The Collin County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) is responsible for calls for service on Lake Lavon. While CCSO has a trained dive recovery team, it does not have a watercraft in their motor fleet or utilize water patrol. When responding to emergency calls, officers must rely on the Texas Parks and Wildlife and the US Army Corps of Engineers for use of their watercraft, which are not located on the lake, thus increasing their response time. This paper will explore improving the effectiveness of the Collin County Sheriff's Office when responding to emergency calls for service on Lake Lavon by utilizing watercraft patrol. Improving response time and effectiveness can mean the difference between performing a rescue mission as opposed to a recovery mission. This is relevant because the increasing number of visitors, combined with the lack of watercraft patrol, raises concerns about the ability of CCSO to respond to calls involving intoxicated boaters or other criminal activity, boating accidents, medical emergencies, and general public safety issues. This paper will examine the issues and obstacles officers face when responding to calls for service on the waters of Lake Lavon, assess the impact watercraft patrol and training would have in overcoming these obstacles, and consider the public relations component of having watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon.

The method of inquiry consisted of examining marine patrol literature and several law enforcement lake patrol programs, as well as interviews with the law enforcement personnel responsible for watercraft patrol on North Texas Lakes. The literature from professional journals, periodicals, articles, books, and Internet resources supports the benefits of providing patrol on water surfaces. This argument was also supported in the interviews with law enforcement agencies. The respondents received positive feedback from citizens and stated they were able to respond more effectively to calls for service on the water surface. Finally, data gathered from the Collin County Sheriff's Office records section pertaining to calls for service at Lake Lavon from 2004 to 2008 will demonstrate the need for watercraft patrol.

It is anticipated that this research will illustrate the benefit of a visible law enforcement presence on the waters of Lake Lavon. It is the researcher's conclusion that a law enforcement presence will greatly increase public safety, and through community awareness, the boating community will build a positive relationship with the Collin County Sheriff's Office. The researcher proposes that watercraft patrol is necessary. Furthermore, the research indicated that there is significant grant funding for this endeavor. Collin County administrators will benefit from this research, as it will provide critical information to assist them with decision-making related to law enforcement patrol of Lake Lavon.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The US Corps of Engineers maintains demographics and statistics on lakes and parks. Lake Lavon is approximately 38,327 acres, including 16 parks, 244 picnic sites, 19 four-lane boat ramps, 5 beaches, 167 camping sites, 6 group shelters, and a 9 mile

equestrian and hiking trail. The lake has approximately 21,400 acres of water surface. The US Army Corps of Engineers estimated that 1.6 million people visit Lake Lavon each year. A variety of species of game fish at Lake Lavon attracts local anglers. Additionally, there are two privately owned marinas and one fishing pier (US Army Corps of Engineers, n.d.).

The US Army Corps of Engineers Rangers maintain public safety and law enforcement at the lake; however, the Collin County Sheriff's Office and the City of Wylie have primary jurisdiction. The City of Wylie has jurisdiction over four parks, and the Collin County Sheriff's Office is responsible for everything else on land and water. The Collin County Sheriff's Office and the City of Wylie do not have any type of watercraft in their fleet. According to James Murphy, US Army Corps of Engineers, the Corps' role is reactive, responding to emergencies at Lake Lavon, instead of a proactive one. All three agencies respond to emergency calls for service, though none of the agencies actively patrols the waters of Lake Lavon. The absence of watercraft patrol results in the agencies responding as a recovery mission versus a rescue mission. According to the Collin County Sheriff's Office, from 2004 to 2008, there were 30 calls for service related to boating accidents. Additionally, 13 people drowned (J. Murphy, personal communication, September 1, 2008). Calls for service will continue to increase along with the increase in the population and boat traffic. Collin County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state of Texas, according to the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) (n.d.). Collin County added over 10,000 persons in 2007, increasing the population to 748,050. By comparing this with Collin

County's population in 2000 of 491,675, it is easy to see why it is considered one of the fastest growing counties in the state (NCTCOG, n.d.).

Training specific to marine law enforcement is a critical component of implementing watercraft patrol (Brent, 2006). While decisions related to equipment, staffing, procedures, and protocols have to be resolved, Lindsey (2006) argued that training should be the first consideration. He argued that completing an intensive curriculum enables the officers to minimize the risk of personal injury and better serve the community. Law enforcement marine training must include the opportunity to operate equipment in real-world conditions. Watercraft inspection, risk assessment, personnel recovery, health and medical issues, and towing are topics that should be included in the curriculum (Lindsey, 2006).

The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) worked to develop public policy for recreational boating safety. According to NASBLA (n.d.), the mission is, "to strengthen the ability of the state and territorial boating authorities to reduce death, injury, and property damage associated with recreational boating and ensure a safe, secure and enjoyable boating environment" ("NASBLA's mission," para. 1). NASBLA offers the Tactical Operator's Training Course for law enforcement officers. Procedures, techniques, and tactics parallel the Coast Guard's training. Additionally, NASBLA promotes the Boat Operations and Training Program (BOAT), which establishes a national standard for the training, qualification, and credentialing of marine law enforcement. The training covers topics such as boating under the influence, boat handling, crewmember responsibilities, weapons employment principles, first aid,

water survival, pursuit tactics, and hazards to life and property, to name just a few (NASBLA BOAT Program Manual, n.d.).

The increased incidents of boating under the influence (BUI) prompted 46 states to initiate “Operation Dry Waters,” a BUI awareness campaign. A self-proclaimed BUI defense attorney advised the public that Alabama has little tolerance for boating while intoxicated. As proof, he stated that on one weekend in July of 2009, officers made eight arrests for boating under the influence (Eversole, 2009). The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department reported that between 1997 and 2004, there were 404 fatalities on Texas lakes and 1,598 citations for BUI’s (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, n.d.).

The literature illustrated that marine law enforcement programs are as diverse as the communities they serve. However, all the programs studied for this paper respond to medical emergencies and criminal activity. The majority also have a component for public education and awareness regarding water and boating safety. Another common component is that the programs began out of an increase in population and boat traffic on waterways where the law enforcement agency had jurisdiction and responsibility (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, NC; Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, TX; Massachusetts State Police, MA; King County Sheriff’s Office, WA). Most of the programs have officers dedicated to marine patrol year-round and utilize personal watercraft as well as boats with enclosed cabins. Funding for programs varies from department to department. Many manufacturers of personal watercraft (PWC) offer a loan program by which the law enforcement agency uses the PWC, on loan, for an agreed upon length of time. Additionally, funding opportunities can be explored through criminal justice and homeland security grants.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon will increase public safety and reduce response time for calls of service to the Collin County Sheriff's Office. The researcher speculates that boat related accidents, drownings, and incidents of boating while intoxicated will decrease due to the presence of CCSO watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon. The researcher further hypothesizes that by providing boater safety and public awareness, the public will respond favorably to the presence of the CCSO watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, law enforcement marine programs, and data sources. Additionally, three North Texas law enforcement agencies with water patrol units on five area lakes will be selected for interviews regarding the design, implementation, and success of their watercraft patrol programs. The instrument used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon will include analysis of data related to Lake Lavon usage, analysis of calls for service data, and a questionnaire utilized in interviews with local law enforcement agencies that have watercraft patrol.

The interviews will consist of six standard questions and will give the opportunity for the representatives to contribute other pertinent information. The standard questions will pertain to the geographic size of the lake, number of visitors annually, number of officers patrolling the lake, number and type of watercrafts utilized, funding for lake patrol, and, lastly, resident and visitor response to watercraft patrol. Of the three agencies selected for the interview, 100% participated. The information obtained from

the survey will be analyzed by comparing the size of the lake and number of visitors per year to the number of watercraft patrol.

FINDINGS

Table I. Collin County Sheriff's Office Calls for Service at Lake Lavon

Year	Boating Accidents	Drownings	Total Calls for Service
2004	10	3	452
2005	4	4	518
2006	5	2	964
2007	4	3	1125
2008 (Jan.-Oct.)	7	1	1101

It is important to recognize that in 2006, a severe drought occurred and was followed by flooding in 2007, which limited the use of the Lake Lavon. The calls for service increased every year from 2004 to 2008 in spite of the extreme weather conditions in 2006 and 2007. The total calls for service represent all calls generated on the water and in the lake parks, such as traffic stops and family violence calls. The explosive population growth in Collin County contributed to an increase in visitors to the lake as well as an increase in boat traffic.

Currently, patrol officers respond to calls for service on Lake Lavon. This takes them away from their district. With no watercraft, they must locate the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) personnel or the US Army Corps of Engineers personnel

to use their boat. Neither agency maintains a watercraft on the lake. The delay in response time is critical. Patrol officers do not receive specialized training on water rescue, boat operations, or other important aspects to responding to calls on the water.

North Texas law enforcement agencies with marine patrol provided valuable information. The interviews revealed a commitment on each of the agency's part, as well as dedication and passion to the program on the part of each of the supervisors. It was clear that they had gained knowledge and experience in this area of law enforcement.

Joe Pool Lake is a 7,470-acre lake located to Dallas County, Texas and has approximately 100,000 visitors annually. The lake falls under multiple law enforcement jurisdictions. In the late 1980s, these jurisdictions signed an inter-local agreement, which gave one department sole jurisdiction on the water. This department provides four full time officer who utilize two boats, two jet skis, four all terrain vehicles, one Suburban, and five patrol vehicles. A supervisor for the lake patrol unit stated that their city makes lake patrol a high priority. This department utilizes the personal watercraft loan program through Yamaha. The supervisor stated that marina owners and lake residents are very receptive to having a full time law enforcement presence on the lake. He also stated that having lake patrol allows them to attempt rescues as opposed to only recoveries.

Lake Weatherford is an 8,000-acre lake located in Parker County, Texas and has approximately 80,000 visitors annually. The police department responsible for this lake provides patrol on the waters of Lake Weatherford by utilizing school resource officers, who are water safety and marine certified, during the summer months and on holidays.

They operate in a boat that was purchased with seized funds. A supervisor stated that the police department recognized the necessity of being able to access all citizens within their jurisdiction whether on land or water. They also work closely with the game warden to provide boater safety education for citizens. He reported that citizens have responded extremely positive to having patrol on the water.

Another department interviewed patrols the waters of Lake Lewisville, Lake Ray Roberts, and Lake Grapevine. Lake Lewisville is located in Lewisville, Texas and is made up of 29,592 acres of water and surrounded by 9,000 acres of land with 16 parks and 5 marinas. The City of Lewisville and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department manage the parks, while the US Army Corps of Engineers manages the lake. The Lewisville Police Department patrols the parks and is responsible for calls for service. The department interviewed provides four marine first-responder-trained deputies along with assistance by reserve deputies to patrol the waters of Lake Lewisville and Lake Roberts from the months of May through September. There are two boats and two personal watercrafts in their fleet. One boat and one personal watercraft reside at Lake Lewisville, and the remaining watercraft fleet resides at Lake Ray Roberts.

Lake Ray Roberts is a 25,600-acre lake northern portion of Denton County and consists of two state parks and six satellite parks. Lieutenant Sanders stated that they do respond to Lake Grapevine when they receive requests for watercraft patrol. According to Lieutenant Sanders, the agency fully supports the water patrol, and it is well received by marina operators, residents, and boaters. Marina operators and residents are very vocal with their support for watercraft patrol and continually express appreciation to the sheriff. The Denton County Sheriff's Office works with the US Army

Corps of Engineers and the Texas Parks and Wildlife to provide water and boater safety courses to the public. The primary focus on all three lakes is to enforce the laws, particularly boating while intoxicated.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not the presence of law enforcement on Lake Lavon will benefit the Collin County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) in responding to calls for service. The purpose of this research was to determine if increased efficiency in responding to calls for service would reduce the number of deaths due to accidents on Lake Lavon. The research question that was examined focused on the feasibility of implementing a CCSO watercraft patrol program. The researcher hypothesized that CCSO would increase efficiency in responding to calls for service with the utilization of watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon. The researcher concluded from the findings that watercraft patrol are successfully used in other jurisdictions and are a viable option for CCSO. There is sufficient evidence for the need for watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon. The Collin County Sheriff's Office would decrease its response time to emergency medical and criminal activity calls by implementing a marine patrol. NASBLA (n.d.), Brent (2006), Lindsey (2006), US Army Corps of Engineers (n.d.), and TPWD (n.d.) support the usage of specially trained marine law enforcement officers for water patrol. The examination of existing marine law enforcement programs across the United States underscores the importance of the reduction of response time. They also tout the increase in community awareness and positive regard for law enforcement.

Perhaps the most compelling and relatable information is from the law enforcement agencies in North Texas who utilize watercraft patrol. They reported a

reduction in boating while intoxicated incidents, increased water safety, and an increase in positive public relations. Lake Lavon's 38,327 acres make it one of the largest lakes in North Texas, and with 1.6 million visitors each year; it has one of the highest number of visitors. Collin County is one of the fastest growing counties in the state; therefore, it can be expected that the number of visitors to Lake Lavon will also increase. Due to an increase in boating traffic, there is an increased potential for accidents. Boater education will mitigate boater inexperience, boating while intoxicated, and the use of the proper flotation devices and safety equipment. Deputies assigned to the watercraft patrol would also be responsible for boater education. Currently, the CCSO employs four School Resource Officers who could be utilized in the summer months for watercraft patrol. Grant research should be conducted to support additional staff positions that may be needed for year round coverage. Whether through the use of the personal watercraft loan program or by utilizing seized funds or equipment, area law enforcement agencies have successfully found a way to provide this service while keeping expenses to a minimum. While all accidents are not preventable, there is a need for dedicated patrol on Lake Lavon to provide safe boating and a recreational environment. Additionally, patrol on the waters of Lake Lavon would make rescue, as opposed to recovery, a more viable option. A watercraft patrol program is instrumental in preventing needless injury or death through the education of boaters, enforcement of laws, and a timely response to calls for service.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The reason why the findings did support the hypothesis is probably due to successful implementation of watercraft patrol by other departments. Limitations that might have hindered this study

resulted because there is a limited amount of literature on the subject of marine law enforcement patrol. The study of watercraft patrol is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because of the potential for increased efficiency in responding to calls for service on Lake Lavon. The Collin County Sheriff's Office, Lake Lavon visitors, residents, and marina owners will benefit from the results of this research on watercraft patrol on Lake Lavon due to improved response time and enhanced community relations.

REFERENCES

- Brent, D. (2006). *The Challenges and Issues of Marine Law Enforcement*. Huntsville, TX: The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina Police Department, Lake Unit. (n.d.). Retrieved from
<http://www.charmeck.org/Departments/CMPD/Support+Services/Lake+Unit/home.htm>
- Collin County Sheriff's Office. (2008). *Computer aided dispatch records*. McKinney, TX: Communications.
- Eversole, S.D. (2009, July 2). Alabama Marine Law Enforcement Arrest Drunken Boaters During Weekend Campaign. Message posted to alabamaduylawyerblog, archived at
http://www.alabamaduylawyerblog.com/2009/07/alabama_marine_law_enforcement.html
- Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, Texas. Marine Safety Patrol. (n.d.). Retrieved from
http://co.jefferson.tx.us/sheriff/LawEnforcement/marine_safety.htm
- King County Sheriff's Office, Washington. *Marine Unit*. (n.d.). Retrieved from
<http://www.kingcounty.gov/safety/sheriff/Enforcement/Specialized/MarinePatrol.aspx>
- Lindsey, B. (2006, May). Maritime first responder course. *Law and Order*, 54, 74-83.

Massachusetts State Police. *Massachusetts State Police Marine Section*. (n.d.).

Retrieved from

http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eopsterminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Homeland+Security+%26+Emergency+Response&L2=Response&L3=Emergency+Tactical+%26+Response+Teams&sid=Eeops&b=terminalcontent&f=msp_units_msp_marine_section&csid=Eeops

National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. *About us*. Retrieved from

<http://nasbla.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3285>

National Association of State Boating Law Administrators. *BOAT Program Manual*.

Retrieved from

http://www.nasbla.org/files/public/BOAT/BOAT_Manual_Vol1_100809.pdf

North Central Texas Council of Governments. (n.d.). *Current Population Estimates*

Retrieved from <http://www.nctcog.org/ris/demographics/population.asp>

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. *Texas Lakes*. (n.d.) Retrieved from

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/fish/recreational/lakes/>

US Army Corps of Engineers, Ft. Worth District. *Lavon Lake*. (n.d.)

Retrieved from <http://www.swf-wc.usace.army.mil/lavon/>

US Census Bureau, Population Estimates. (2007, March 27). Retrieved from

<http://www.census.gov/popest/counties/CO-EST2006-08.html>

APPENDIX

Survey Questions

1. What is the geographic size of the lake your agency patrols? What is the number of lakes your jurisdiction patrols with watercraft patrol?
2. What is the annual number of visitors to the lake your agency patrols?
3. How many officers does your agency utilize for watercraft patrol?
4. How many and what type of watercraft does your agency utilize? What other equipment does your agency utilize for watercraft patrol?
5. How does your agency fund watercraft patrol?
6. What has the response been from visitors to the lake, citizens and marina owners and occupants?