

# **Pennsylvania RBS Performance Report I**

## **October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023**

### **Administration**

- **Maintain liaison with representatives of the boating industry, clubs, organizations, private citizens, and federal, state, and local officials to inform them of and engage them in portions of Pennsylvania’s Boating Program.**
  - Throughout the performance period, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (Commission) staff met with the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power Squadrons, Pennsylvania Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs, Pennsylvania Water Trail Partnership, Pittsburgh Safe Boating Council, Erie Safe Boating Task Force, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, Pennsylvania State Fire Academy, Pennsylvania National Guard, National Marine Manufacturer’s Association, River Management Society, and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators’ (NASBLA) members, staff and committees, as well as numerous sportsmen’s clubs, boat rental businesses, and other boating-related stakeholders.
- **Conduct a minimum of one Boating Advisory Board and four Commission meetings to formulate appropriate regulations and approaches to improve boating safety in Pennsylvania.**
  - The Boating Advisory Board (BAB) held regular meetings on December 5, 2022; February 6, 2023; June 5, 2023; and a special meeting on August 14, 2023. During their meetings, the BAB received presentations from staff, discussed several boating-related topics, and voted to recommend the following items to the Commission. Amendments to 58 Pa. Code § 107.5 (Streams less than 200 feet across), § 109.3 (Personal watercraft), § 111.22 (Dauphin County), § 111.42 (McKean County), § 111.62 (Warren County), § 111.60 (Union County), § 97.1 (Personal flotation devices), § 111.3 (Armstrong County), § 111.20 (Crawford County), § 111.24 (Elk County), § 111.26 (Fayette County), § 111.27 (Forest County), § 111.32 (Indiana County), § 111.42 (McKean County), § 111.43 (Mercer County) § 111.56 (Somerset County), § 111.62 (Warren County), and § 111.65 (Westmoreland County), § 107.1 (Horsepower restrictions) and § 107.2 (Electric motors). Additional details can be found in the BAB meeting minutes which are available on the Commission’s website at <https://www.fishandboat.com/About-Us/Minutes-Agendas/Pages/default.aspx>.
  - The Commission held four regular quarterly Board meetings and two special meetings during the FFY 2023. During its quarterly meetings, the Commission approved all of the boating-related regulatory amendments recommended by the BAB. Additional details can be found in the Commission meeting minutes which are available on the Commission’s website at <https://www.fishandboat.com/About-Us/Minutes-Agendas/Pages/default.aspx>.
- **Advocate for the passage of laws that benefit boaters, particularly bills that address boating under the influence.**

- Act 28 of 2022 amended Title 30 (Fish) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to establish a calendar-year boat registration cycle that is valid from January 1 through December 31 (the previous cycle was April 1 through March 31). The Act is designed to improve customer service and provide more clarity for the boating public. As required by the Act, the Commission promulgated regulations to implement the amendment and modify its business practices to align with calendar-year boat registration, by the fall of 2023.
- **Inform U.S. Congressmen and State Legislators of projects and programs funded by Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund allocations to Pennsylvania.**
  - The Commission's Policy, Planning and Communications Office took advantage strategic opportunities throughout the performance period to inform State Legislators of programs funded by the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. Specifically, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Commission staff hosted a *Partner with a Payer* event on December 13-14, 2022, in Erie, PA. This event highlighted how federal excise taxes paid by fishing equipment manufacturers support fisheries conservation and public access. The event included a state fish hatchery tour, live steelhead collection, and visits to public access sites. Throughout the period, Commission staff also met with federal and state elected officials and other local partners regarding completed or potential new Boating Infrastructure Grant projects.
- **Participate in training and development opportunities to improve staff's knowledge and skills in boating safety, water rescue, boating accident investigation and reporting, grants management, access development, national education standards and outreach campaigns.**
  - Commission staff participated in out-service training and professional development opportunities consisting of boating conferences, meetings, courses, and workshops offered by various organizations such as the U.S. Coast Guard, National Safe Boating Council, International Association for Water Rescue Professionals, and NASBLA. These included the NASBLA Leadership Academy, 2023 International Association of Water Rescue for Professionals Conference, NASBLA Boating Accident Investigation-Level 1, BUI/OUI/Drug Recognition Training Courses, the NASBLA annual conference, NASBLA committee meetings, and the RBS BLA spring workshop.
- **Improve internal computer-based boating accident reporting systems to ensure accuracy of information collected and enhance submission, review, and transmittal to the U.S. Coast Guard in a timely manner.**
  - The Commission continued to review and streamline its internal reporting process and workflow for boating accident reports and investigation reports. The Commission ensured timely reporting of accidents and proper investigation.
- **Maintain computer-based boat registration and titling system.**
  - The Commission updated its boat registration and titling system and modified its business processes to align with the new calendar-year boat registration cycle for all new boat registrations and renewals to be issued beginning October 1, 2023. The Commission utilizes [HuntFish.pa.gov](http://HuntFish.pa.gov) to allow boat registrants to process

boat registration renewals on-line, purchase duplicate registration cards, and update their addresses.

- **“Equipment” is not charged to the RBS program; it is defined as a fixed asset with a per item cost of \$5,000 or more and a useful life of more than one year. “Supplies” are materials and supplies necessary for daily operations and may include office supplies, software, etc. “Other” items are items not associated with a specific budget category, such as telecommunications or data usage charges and utilities.**

## **Law Enforcement**

- **Conduct law enforcement patrols to ensure boaters’ compliance with existing laws and regulations regarding recreational boating.**
  - Enforcement of Pennsylvania's boating laws and regulations is performed primarily by a current complement of 94 Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs) including supervisory staff, and 54 part-time Deputy Waterways Conservation Officers (DWCOs). WCOs and DWCOs perform other duties beyond boat law enforcement, such as incident investigation, fish law enforcement, public relations, water pollution investigation, fish stocking, equipment maintenance and, of course, teaching boating safety education classes. In FFY 2023, WCOs issued, and the courts adjudicated, 981 summary citations for boating violations. Lack of life jackets or improper/inadequate life jackets onboard boats continued to be the most common boating violations. There were 10,561 warnings for boating violations issued by WCOs during the performance period.
  - WCOs also conducted 17,276 safety boardings on recreational boats. Patrols are conducted by vehicle, on foot, and primarily with the Commission's more than 85 patrol watercraft. Investigating boating accidents and boating under the influence (BUI) cases consume a large portion of field officers' time. WCOs made 38 arrests in FFY 2023 for BUI. Specialized BUI enforcement details were conducted throughout the state during Operation Dry Water and at other times on waterways with the highest recreational boating use, including Presque Isle Bay, Allegheny River, Ohio River, Monongahela River, Lake Wallenpaupack, Raystown Lake, Delaware River, Blue Marsh Lake, and several boating pools on the Susquehanna River. WCOs investigated several high-profile boating accidents that involved serious injury or fatalities on Commonwealth waters and investigated a total of 44 reportable boating accidents, the lowest number of incidents on record since the Commission started tracking accidents in 1988.
- **Provide necessary training, vehicles, and boats for law enforcement personnel.**
  - The Commission provided training to its law enforcement personnel at the state, regional, and district levels during FFY 2023. Training included mandatory in-service law enforcement, and boat operations and water rescue sessions. The Commission hosted a NASBLA Boating Accident Investigation-Level 1 course in which 18 PFBC WCOs and 22 other law enforcement personnel from around the country were trained. In addition, PFBC law enforcement staff participated in BUI/OUI/Drug Recognition Training Courses and all field officers received

instruction as part of their annual Experienced Officer Training program in FFY 2023.

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- **Weapons, personal flotation devices, and boat fuel are classified as “supplies.” Radios and other communications gear such as cell phones are considered “other” for budgetary purposes. “Equipment” is not charged to the program but includes such items as motor vehicles, trucks, watercraft, and server/network hardware.**

## **Education**

- **Continue to offer NASBLA-approved courses and process applications for boat operators to obtain a Boating Safety Education Certificate.**
  - **Classroom courses are delivered by: PFBC staff (education specialists, Waterways Conservation Officers) and other instructors (PA DCNR, USCG Auxiliary, USPS, school teachers, scout leaders, and volunteers)**
  - **Online courses are offered by a third-party contractor (i.e., Kalkomey)**
  - The Commission certified 17,756 students in NASBLA-approved boating courses from October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023. This is an increase of 1,289 certificates from FFY 2022. Since 2001, the number of boating safety education certificates issued annually remained generally stable with only minor fluctuations until 2020 when certifications increased by nearly 9,000, presumably because of COVID. Annual certifications now appear to be returning to pre-COVID numbers. A large majority of certificates are issued for successful completion of online boating safety education courses.
  - The Commission issued boating safety education certificates to 819 students who successfully completed an in-person PA Basic Boating classroom course, which is a decrease of 47 certificates over the previous year. The Commission presumes that not everyone who completed a boating course applied for a boating safety education certificate.
  - Commission-approved instructors and staff also taught the in-person PA Boating & Water Safety Awareness (BWSA) course in FFY 2023, with 302 of those students obtaining a boating safety education certificate. Approximately 50% of students successfully completing the course apply to the Commission for a boating safety education certificate. Students may complete the course but do not want or are not required by law to have the certification. Several instructors indicate they teach most, but not all, of the BWSA curriculum. That is, they teach components and/or specific skills but not the complete course which precludes students from applying for certification.
- **Continue to offer the Water Rescue Training Program to train water rescue volunteers and professionals in proper rescue techniques.**

- In FFY 2023, the Commission certified 3,685 students through the Water Rescue Program which meets or exceeds various levels (Awareness, Operations, Technician) of NFPA 1670 Standards. This is an increase of 536 students from FFY 2022. In FFY 2023, 1,816 students were certified in the Commission’s 2½-hour Water Rescue for the First Responder NFPA 1670 Awareness level program. The Commission has a trained in-state volunteer instructor corps of 196 individuals who provided more than 7,500 hours of training this past year. This is an increase from the previous year’s 186 instructors who provided more than 7,000 hours of training. The Commission’s Water Rescue program is the largest of its kind in the United States.
- **Continue to foster a close working relationship with the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the U.S. Power Squadron’s education programs for boating safety certification. Invite key representatives to Boating Advisory Board meetings and provide updated instructor information to all Auxiliary Flotillas and U.S. Power Squadrons in Pennsylvania.**
  - Commission representatives continue to attend USPS and USCG Auxiliary conferences, workshops, and (on request) teach the legal requirements section for their boating safety education courses. Representatives from the USCG Auxiliary, and USPS attended the Commission’s BAB meetings in 2023. The Commission partnered with the 5th Northern District to recognize outstanding Flotillas and Auxiliarists in Pennsylvania. Successful students in Auxiliary courses submitted 160 applications to the Commission for certification in FFY 2023, an increase of 45 certificates from FFY 2022. USPS course students submitted 121 applications to the Commission for certification in FFY 2023, an increase of 13 certificates. All approved courses that are reported to the Commission are listed on the Commission’s website at <https://www.fishandboat.com/Boating/Courses/Pages/In-Person.aspx>. Course information is also available from the Commission’s toll-free telephone number.
- **Produce and distribute boating safety literature; incorporate the “Wear It Pennsylvania” message into all boating safety materials distributed by the Commission.**
  - The PFBC reached anglers and boaters with more than 25 pages of boating safety regulations and information and a full-page, full-color safe boating advertisement in the annual Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook (more than 600,000 print copies produced). Also, the Pennsylvania Angler & Boater magazine (distributed six times a year to subscribers) contained a full-page advertisement in the May/June 2023 issue to promote National Safe Boating Week.
  - PFBC distributed free boating safety literature and publications at PFBC-staffed shows, expos, conferences/workshops and other special events. During the reporting period, PFBC also processed 119 requests for boating safety education materials.
  - The Commission updated its website during the performance period and reorganized its boating safety content to be more user friendly and impactful. There is a wide array of boating and water safety materials at

<https://www.fishandboat.com>, including an enhanced version of the Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook, links to water trails maps, and information on required safety equipment for boaters. The Commission also integrated boating safety information into its new marketing website ([www.explorepawaters.com](http://www.explorepawaters.com)) that focuses on engaging new anglers and boaters.

- **Participate in boating safety campaigns including “Wear It!”, Operation Dry Water, and National Safe Boating Week to promote boating safety and life jacket wear.**
  - For National Safe Boating Week, Commission staff premiered videos highlighting safe boating topics including life jacket wear testimonials, what to expect when encountering a WCO on the water, paddling safety and etiquette, cold water shock, and more. PFBC staff appeared on television and radio broadcasts, and numerous newspaper feature articles in major media markets across the state.
  - In partnership with the Pennsylvania State Legislature, the Commission produced 27 safe boating video clips for Legislators to circulate through their social media accounts and e-newsletters. These videos are available on the Commission’s YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@pafishboatmedia5409>).
  - The Commission hosted a National Safe Boating Week kick-off event at the grand opening of its recently acquired Winfield Access Area. Remarks presented at this event centered around a checklist of safe boating messages. Special guest speakers at this event included Commission staff, PFBC District 5 Commissioner, representatives from the PA Department of Transportation and Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, and local State Legislators.
  - In partnership with NASBLA, the PFBC held a large media event that served as the national kickoff to Operation Dry Water, a nationwide effort to educate the public about the dangers of BUI. The event included guest speakers and representatives from partner organizations including the PA Department of Transportation, PA State Police, PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Port of Pittsburgh Authority, Venture Outdoors, and Pittsburgh Safe Boating Council.
  - The Commission’s Bureau of Law Enforcement conducted 2,158 hours of patrols during Operation Dry Water weekend. Nearly 3,415 boaters were contacted, 213 citations were issued, and 6 BUI violations were reported during the weekend. WCOs participated in a number of interviews with local media to highlight the importance of safe and sober boating.
  - An important part of the Commission’s “Wear It!” messaging is its social media presence which catches viewer/visitor attention with posts and videos that reinforce life jacket wear, boating education certificates, and particularly, the agency’s mandated cold-weather life jacket regulation, occurring from November 1 through April 30.
- **Promote boating safety through special events, news releases, radio messages, public service announcements, radio and TV interviews, and the Commission’s webpage and social media accounts.**
  - In 2023, the Commission used several forms of media to promote the “Wear It Pennsylvania!” brand. This included messaging on the Commission’s boat

registration renewal mailers, registration mailers and boating safety education certificate mailers. In addition, 40,000 vessel identification stickers that included the “Wear It” logo were sent out to purchasers of unpowered launch permits and an additional 40,000 stickers were distributed at sport shows and regional law enforcement offices to help re-connect unregistered boat owners with their vessels and reduce unnecessary inquiries regarding “loose” vessels.

- PFBC’s website ([www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com)) promoted the “Wear It!” campaign with select and updated web pages (<https://www.fishandboat.com/Boating/Basics/Equipment/Pages/Life-Jackets.aspx>), placement of web banners on the home page, and other pages on the site with links to USCG and National Safe Boating Council resources. During May 17-27, the PFBC’s website received a substantial 20% increase in direct website traffic visitation.
  - The Commission also issued three news releases fully devoted to safe boating practices, as well as 10 news releases which included safe boating messaging, during the reporting period.
  - In addition to the programs and special events held specifically during National Safe Boating Week, the Commission used other special events to deliver the “Wear It!” safe boating and life jacket-wear message to attendees during the reporting period. Additionally, boating safety courses were offered at some sports shows.
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### Navigational Aids

- **The Commission defines an aid to navigation as a device external to a vessel intended to assist a boater in determining position or safe course, or warn of dangers or obstructions to navigation.**
  - The Commission does not utilize state specific markers.
  - The Commission delineates hazards with informational aids such as Danger Dam or Danger Rock/Shoal.
  - The Commission defines an aid to navigation (ATON) as a device external to a vessel intended to assist a boater in determining position or safe course, or warn of dangers or obstructions to navigation.
- **Maintain a current computer-based inventory of all aids to navigation in Pennsylvania including data on the body of water, location, jurisdiction, number of aids, type of aid, wording of aid, maintenance responsibility, and approximate set and removal date.**
  - The Commission maintains computerized records of all ATON on Pennsylvania waters. The inventory is managed by a dedicated staff person and is kept current

through the cooperative efforts of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, federal and state agencies, and the Commission's WCOs.

- **Continue to maintain a numbering system for all aids with emphasis on determining the exact location of each aid and purpose.**
  - The Commission continues to operate an extensive ATON Program. The aids/floating structures are currently permitted. Ongoing efforts have resulted in locating and permitting private aids/floating structures on state waters. The Commission continues to work with GPS and GIS technology to generate body of water maps showing the location of Commission-owned aids with plans to extend to privately owned aids.
- **Partner with the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary to provide for the timely reporting of problems within the ATON system.**
  - The Commission has requested Coast Guard Auxiliary assistance with observing and verifying ATON. While on patrols, the Auxiliary observes aids and verifies positions on reports provided to the Commission. Those aids that are missing, damaged, or off-station are reported and corrective action is taken. This system has resulted in greater reliability of aids in Pennsylvania waters.
- **Include use and identification of aids in boating safety educational materials.**
  - The Commission developed and maintained an ATON webpage (<https://www.fishandboat.com/Boating/Basics/Safety/Pages/ATON.aspx>) that includes basic information for boaters; the *PFBC's Guidelines for ATON Plans* for consultants, engineering firms and others who develop ATON plans; and the *PFBC's Aids to Navigation Policy Manual* for individuals, engineering and consulting firms for the planning and placement of navigational aids to ensure safe boating and the protection of property and natural resources.
  - Approved boating safety education courses, including those produced by the Coast Guard Auxiliary, USPS, and the Commission, include information on ATON. The Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook is distributed at in-person boating education classes and it contains a full-color graphic of ATON and their use. In addition, information on ATON appears on the PFBC website.
- **Place information and warning signs (as necessary) at Commission access sites and hazardous areas.**
  - Aluminum/fiberboard (4' x 4') warning signs are routinely placed at public launch sites to provide boaters with necessary regulatory and safety warnings as part of the Commission's overall ATON Program.
- **Review ATON plans for bridge construction projects for state agencies and local governments.**
  - The Commission reviews all ATON plans for rehabilitation or replacement of bridge projects on waterways. Technical guidance is provided to engineering firms and PA Department of Transportation for the placement of signage and buoys around bridge projects to avoid accidents and allow for continued safe navigation through construction areas.
- **Evaluate and, if necessary, procure contracted services of private organizations to place, maintain and remove aids to navigation. The Commission does not have a dedicated ATON vessel to maintain ATON and contracts this service.**



- The Commission awarded contracts in FFY 2023 for the placement, maintenance and removal of ATON. The contracts for these Commission-owned ATON are part of our Boating Safety Program. These contracts allow for timely installation and maintenance of aids and allow the Commission’s WCOs to focus on primary safety and enforcement duties.
- **Review and process all requests to install floating structures on Commonwealth waters submitted by state, local governments, organizations, and individuals.**
  - The Commission reviewed, approved and assigned a permit number for the installation of 6,994 floating structures on Commonwealth waters in FFY 2023, an increase of 230 from FFY 2022. The majority of new ATON continues to be associated with bridge construction/rehabilitation activity.
- **Conduct site visits to ensure compliance with Chapter 113 of Title 58, Pennsylvania Code (Aids to Navigation and Obstructions to Navigation).**
  - The Commission’s WCOs routinely check the placement of regulatory ATON. ATON are also checked to ensure placement and serviceability by the USCG Auxiliary.
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#### **Boat Registration & Fees**

- **Maintain a computer-based PFBC boat registration and titling system (RATS).**
  - **Initial registration forms:**  
<https://www.fishandboat.com/Transact/Forms/BoatRegForms/Pages/default.aspx>
  - **Online renewal transactions:** <https://huntfish.pa.gov/>
- **Receive and deposit revenues from registration, titling and associated fees.**
- **Provide an effective and cost-efficient method of registering and titling boats, assuring that Pennsylvania receives and deposits revenues expeditiously and the boat owner receives registration and titling certificates promptly and courteously.**
  - The Commission utilizes a computer-based Registration and Titling System to process new boat registrations, issue renewals, and maintain all boat registration data. Developed in 2020, HuntFish.pa.gov allows boat owners to process boat registration renewals on-line. In addition, boaters can purchase duplicate registration cards and update their addresses via this application.
- **Include the status of any ongoing improvements to your registration process**
  - Act 28 of 2022 amended Title 30 (Fish) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to establish a calendar-year boat registration cycle that is valid from January 1 through December 31 (the previous cycle was April 1 through March 31). The Act is designed to improve customer service and provide more clarity for the boating public. As required by the Act, the Commission promulgated regulations to implement the amendment and modify its business practices to align with

calendar-year boat registration by the fall of 2023. The Commission began issuing new calendar-year registrations and renewals beginning October 1, 2023.

- **Funding used for this category supports printing of the boat registration/boat safety portion of the *Pennsylvania Fishing Summary & Boating Handbook*, production and issuance of boat registration stickers and cards, registration and titling database management, boat registration and titling personnel costs, etc.**
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**Public Access & Construction (if applicable)**

- RBS funds are not used to fund this program area.

**Subawarding: This section may or may not apply to your program.**

- Does not apply.