

# A Boating Angler's



*by Art Michaels  
photos by the author*

*Accept your own limitations and the limits of your boat and motor.  
Know what your boat, motor and fuel capacity can  
do by design and what they can't do.*





*Maintain your boat, motor and trailer. Routine preventive maintenance saves a lot of money in the long run. Neglect your equipment and sooner or later you will pay dearly. If you did not winterize your rig this season, do so now.*

Wintertime and the approaching new year are good times to consider how you'll prepare for next season. Let this alphabetical list help you get ready.

**ACCEPT** your own limitations and the limits of your boat and motor. Know what your boat, motor and fuel capacity can do by design and what they can't do. Don't exceed your boat's capacity limits, which are prescribed on its capacity plate. View more information on capacity plates at [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/legal7.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/legal7.htm).

**BRUSH** your boat clean. Aquatic nuisance species can cling to your boat, motor and trailer. By cleaning your equipment, you can prevent these hitchhikers from moving to new homes in waterways where they don't belong. For more details on aquatic nuisance species, visit [www.protectyourwaters.net](http://www.protectyourwaters.net). See also [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/so2001/fall01play.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/so2001/fall01play.htm).

**CREATE** ways to make your tasks easier, make your procedures work more smoothly and save time. You can get good fodder for this idea by keeping an eye on other anglers' boats. Check out how others set up their boats for storing gear, for fishing and for trailering. Look at the tackle and the electronics. Scan the consoles and cockpits for ingenious, time-saving aids.

Train yourself to observe others in this way and

you may be surprised to learn how much useful information you can glean just from using your "educated eye."

**DON** your PFD and insist that everyone aboard your boat does the same. Even though having a life jacket aboard and readily available satisfies the legal requirement in many cases, a PFD is practically worthless unless it's worn. Both Fish & Boat Commission and Coast Guard accident statistics suggest that many boating accident victims could have survived had they been wearing their PFDs.

Wearing a PFD is certainly no guarantee that you'll survive an accident. However, the fact is, wearing a lifejacket when you end up suddenly and unexpectedly in the water would probably keep you afloat long enough so that you can gather your wits and effect your own rescue.

**EQUIP** your boat correctly and thoroughly. Know the legal equipment requirements for your boat, and know what you should keep aboard your boat for safety's sake.

Sure, you have the equipment you need, but when it's time to replace items, be sure you get what's right. For instance, is your anchor really the right design and the right weight? Do you have enough anchor line? When did you last check your fire extinguisher? What's the condition of your fuel lines and steering cable?

If you have a question on boating safety, especially an inquiry about federal requirements for equipment aboard your boat, call the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Boating Safety Hotline for answers and information. The toll-free number is 1-800-368-5647.

The *Pennsylvania Boating Handbook* includes a wealth of



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practical information in addition to explanations of legal requirements. If you need a new copy, contact: Educational Media Services, PA Fish & Boat Commission, P.O. Box 67000, Harrisburg, PA 17100-7000, or view the *Boating Handbook* online at [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/main/handbookMAIN\\_11.jpg](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/main/handbookMAIN_11.jpg).

**FORECAST** often. Tap your resources to predict the weather and water conditions, and act accordingly. Do you own a weather radio for checking marine forecasts and local weather? Keeping a close eye on weather systems and understanding how fish are affected by the weather can help you decide when to go fishing. You can also obtain Lake Erie marine forecasts online at: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/marine/zone/gtlakes/clemz.htm>.

**GROW** as an angler and a boater. Find out from local bait shops where you can find good fishing in spots you've never tried. Experiment with new fishing methods. Give new gadgets and equipment a fair chance. Share your expertise with others, and learn from them.

**HELP** other boaters learn new skills, especially the young and other novices. Set an example.

**INSPECT** your boat and equipment regularly. Torn PFDs or ones in poor condition don't work properly and can't be counted toward the legal requirement. Rusted hooks and old line won't catch fish, and a dead battery is exactly

what you don't need six miles from the launch ramp.

**JOIN** boating, fishing and conservation groups. These organizations can help you reap benefits as nothing else can. In strength your political voice can be loudest. In boating and



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fishing clubs you can also find new friends, gain fishing know-how and learn the locations of some top-producing secret spots.

**KNOW** how to tie a half-dozen or so knots well. You don't need a college degree in knot-tying to be a better fisherman and boater. All it takes is knowing how to tie several knots well for a few different applications. If you're happy with your knot-tying skills, try learning one or two new ones each season.

**LEARN** to operate your electronics skillfully. Considering the price and versatility of electronics, it pays to learn to use them proficiently. Anglers who can operate their GPS units, VHF radios and depthsounders well are better anglers and boaters than are those who are less skilled with this gear. Read and reread the owner's manuals, and learn new functions regularly on each electronic item.

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**PONDER** piloting your boat. Coast Guard statistics show that most boating accidents are caused by operator inattention, and that collisions are the most common kind of accident. The dangerous times are when you're heading out and when you're coming home. The dangerous places are crowded spots like harbors, inlets and access areas.

In addition, don't think you're invulnerable because you're an old hand. Coast Guard statistics show that experienced boaters are involved in more accidents than novice boaters.

Polished boat operating skills can help you put your boat over fishing spots more accurately, and knowing how to negotiate a variety of water conditions can help you get to and from places more comfortably. Practice docking, launching and retrieving in tricky currents and winds. Honing this skill helps you protect your equipment investment in addition to increasing your safety.

You'll find sobering analyses of boating accidents at the Commission's web site. Read the 2001 Pennsylvania Boating Accident Analysis, the latest complete information, at [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/fatal01.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/fatal01.htm).

**QUESTION** what you don't understand about your boat—how it's built, how things work and why things happen as they do. When you understand why

now. Where do trailerboaters have the most frequent problems? The trailer hubs.

**NURTURE** the boating skills at which you're weakest. Taking a boating course is a terrific way to sharpen your boating skills, whether you're a novice or an old hand. Taking a boating course and earning a Pennsylvania Boating Safety Education Certificate is easy and convenient. Personal watercraft operators are required to complete a safe boating course and pass an exam. Boating anglers aren't required to take a course and pass an exam, but at stake are your safety and the well-being of everyone aboard your boat, so taking a course and earning a Boating Safety Education Certificate is surely in your best interests.

For more information, visit the Commission's web site on boating courses at [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/98boatco.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/98boatco.htm). The page includes course descriptions. Courses are listed by county and by date. For Internet and video courses, visit [www.boat-ed.com/pa/index.htm](http://www.boat-ed.com/pa/index.htm).

**ORGANIZE** everything on your boat. Have you ever found an item on your boat that you forgot you had? Have you ever tried to find something on your boat and couldn't remember where it is? Make sure your equipment is placed where you can find it. This winter, go through your boat's storage areas to keep tabs on what's there, what needs to be replaced, what needs to be added, and what needs to be removed.



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things work the way they do, you gain more control over the boat, and you can become a better angler and boater by using the equipment more skillfully.

Similarly, question what you don't understand about fishing and boating. The more you learn and understand, the more successful your trips will be.

**ROUTINIZE** as much as you can. Work from a checklist when you go fishing, as airplane pilots use a checklist to take off and land. Make a list of everything you need to bring on a trip, and make different lists for different kinds of fishing trips. Lists can eliminate your forgetting things on trips.

**STUDY** navigation charts and learn to identify aids to navigation (ATON). You ought to be able to identify ATON day and night. For details on ATON in Pennsylvania, visit [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/operation5.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/operation5.htm). You'll also find ATON information in the *Pennsylvania Boating Handbook*.

**TITLE** your boat. Any boat that is purchased, transferred or sold must be titled if the boat is powered by an inboard or inboard/outdrive engine, including personal watercraft and documented recreational vessels, and if its model year is 1997 or newer; if it's 14 feet in length or longer; if it's currently titled in Pennsylvania; or if it's currently titled in another state when Pennsylvania becomes the state of principal use.

Boat owners who register and title their boats have more security than those who don't. Titled boats are easier to identify and much more difficult to sell illegally.

For complete details on titling, read the Boat Registration and Titling Frequently Asked Questions at [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/faqreg.htm#2](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/faqreg.htm#2).

**UNDERSTAND** the nautical rules of the road. Learn to "see ahead" and anticipate other boaters' courses and actions. Study the rules of the road to know who has the right of way in various boating situations. Don't assume that other boaters know the rules of the road as well as you might. Consult the *Pennsylvania Boating Handbook* for information on rules of the road. You'll find more instruction on rules of the road at: [http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/boating/6\\_2\\_b.htm](http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/boating/6_2_b.htm).

**VEST** some knowledge in your fishing partners on how to operate your boat. If you become incapacitated, someone aboard your boat will have to pilot the craft home and use the VHF radio or cell phone to summon help.

**WATCH** your wake, and watch out for damaging wakes others might cause. In a small boat, come about and quarter into a gigantic overtaking surge. Slow down when you cut through an oncoming wake, again quartering the boat. Then resume your original course and go about your business.

The danger zones for wakes are usually crowded spots like access areas and narrow inlets bordered by rock walls and bulkheads. Crowded places are dangerous because many boats create many wakes, and rocky inlet walls and bulkheads telegraph wakes without diminishing their intensity.

Observing no-wake, minimum-height-swell rules is vital to everyone's safety. The choice is simple. Either we obey the rules or more stringent regulations will have to be enacted.

**X**stands for what's unknown. Safe boating anglers realize that they don't know everything. That's why they approach fishing in a boat cautiously and defensively. Always pilot your craft as if other boaters know nothing about piloting.

The unknown also holds fishing and boating thrills. Breathtaking sunrises and sunsets, unusually big fish, remarkably pleasant weather, great company—these things and other unexpected pleasures keep you coming back for more.

**YOU** are the catalyst to make each trip fun yet safe. You have to juggle all the elements that keep fun and safety balanced.

**ZAP** your boating and fishing with zest. Take on a new challenge by fishing for an unfamiliar species. Fish with a new method. Rediscover an old strategy you left behind years ago. Putting zing into your fishing and boating makes them more fun, more challenging and more rewarding. ☐

## Internet Resources

### Capacity plates:

[http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/legal7.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/legal7.htm)

### Aquatic nuisance species:

[www.protectyourwaters.net](http://www.protectyourwaters.net)

[http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/so2001/fall01play.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/so2001/fall01play.htm)

### Pennsylvania Boating Handbook online:

[http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/main/handbookMAIN\\_11.jpg](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/main/handbookMAIN_11.jpg)

### Lake Erie marine weather forecasts:

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/marine/zone/gtlakes/clemz.htm>

### Fish & Boat Commission web site on boating courses:

[http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/98boatco.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/98boatco.htm)

### 2001 Pennsylvania Boating Accident Analysis:

[http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/fatal01.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/fatal01.htm)

### Aids to navigation in Pennsylvania:

[http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/operation5](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/boatcrs/02boathandbook/operation5)

### Boat Registration and Titling Frequently Asked Questions:

[http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/faqreg.htm#2](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/faqreg.htm#2)

### Rules of the road:

[www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/boating/6\\_2\\_b.htm](http://www.boatsafe.com/nauticalknowhow/boating/6_2_b.htm)