

# A Day on Patrol



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*photos by the author*

On Saturday, July 1, 2017, I spent the day with several Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs) at Raystown Lake, Huntingdon County, to see first-hand what occurs during a day out on the water on patrol. This particular date was chosen as it was the second of three days of the national Operation Dry Water campaign. In partnership with the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) worked to increase boater awareness of the hazards associated with boating-under-the-influence and to decrease the number of accidents and deaths attributed to impaired boating and other unsafe boating practices. Last year in

Pennsylvania, 11 individuals died in boating accidents. Alcohol was a contributing factor in six of the cases. As of June 27, 2017, prior to the heightened enforcement weekend, PFBC WCOs had arrested 14 individuals for boating-under-the-influence.

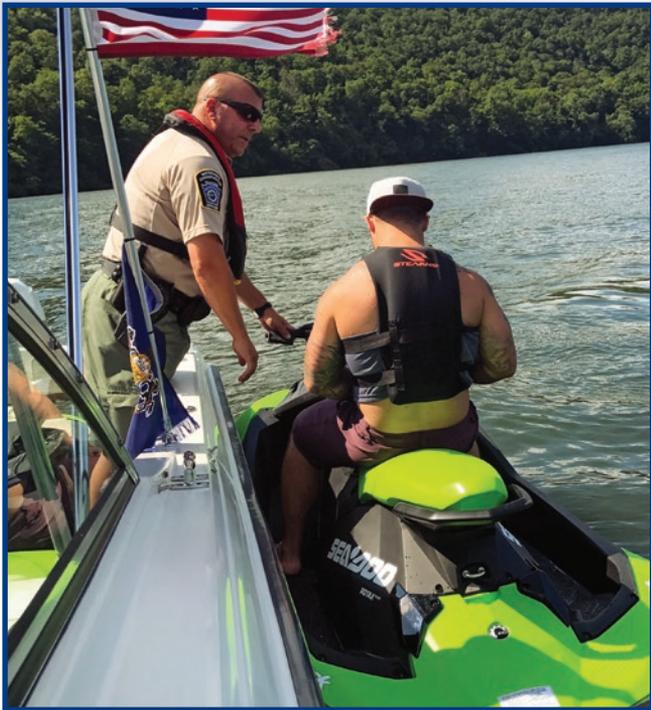
The day started off with four teams of officers meeting at the boathouse at noon. Captain Alan

Robinson rode with WCO Douglas L. Deppen (Lebanon/Southern Dauphin counties); Sergeant Craig A. Garman teamed up with Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officer (DWCO) Andy Carbaugh (Fulton County); WCO Sean Sauserman (Blair/Huntingdon counties) rode with WCO Corey Girt (Mifflin/Northern Huntingdon counties); and WCO Richard D. Morder (Perry/Juniata counties) was teamed up with WCO Anthony J. Quarracino Jr. (Southern Huntingdon County). I began my day with WCOs Morder and Quarracino.

A brief thunderstorm kept the four boats off the water until about 12:30 p.m. At that time, everyone was eager to begin patrolling the 29,000-acre project, which includes 12 public access areas, an 8,300-acre lake, picnic areas, beaches, boat launches, campgrounds, trails, hunting, fishing and marina concession stands. This property is operated and maintained by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Each patrol went off in a different direction to cover approximately 2,000 acres per boat.

The first stop of the day involved a boat that was lacking any visible registration, resulting in the first safety check of the day. After determining that the owners had recently purchased their new boat and had not yet obtained their assigned registration numbers, the WCOs checked for all necessary safety equipment including life jackets for all on the boat, a fire extinguisher, a sound-producing device and a throwable Personal Flotation Device. Everything checked out fine, and the adults seemed appreciative of the time taken by the officers to make sure that all safety equipment was in good condition.





WCO Anthony J. Quarracino Jr. checks the registration of a personal watercraft (PWC) operator.

The next stop was for a girl on a jet ski, also known as a personal watercraft (PWC). Again, it was the lack of a visible (or, in this case, a correct) registration that drew the eyes of the team. It turns out, the registration was valid, but the sticker had not yet arrived. Since the PWC operator had all of her paperwork, as well as all required safety equipment and her Boating Safety Education certificate, she, too, passed her safety check quickly.

The third stop for the day occurred, because the WCOs noticed a sunbather riding outside of what the manufacturer recommends as a safe seating area, and this person was afforded no protection from possible ejection. The officers educated the passengers that they can only sit on the rear platform of the boat if the boat is traveling at no-wake speed or anchored or drifting.

At this time, Captain Robinson radioed WCO Quarracino that he witnessed an operator driving his boat at greater than slow no-wake speed while inside a marked and designated “Slow No Wake Area” and that the vessel was coming towards the team. Rather than leaving his area and chasing the boat, WCOs Morder and Quarracino were able to intercept the boat operator as he came out of the cove. In this case, the safety check found a lack of a fire extinguisher onboard and education about slow no-wake regulations was shared.

If, during a routine stop, an officer suspects that an operator of a boat may be showing signs of impairment, a battery of Standardized Field Sobriety Tests (SFSTs) may be given to confirm or deny suspicion, and is conducted onboard the patrol boat. Unless a boat is being driven erratically, an officer cannot always know if a boat operator is boating-under-the-influence until the boater is stopped for a number of other possible reasons. With the large number of boats that are on the water, along with the limited number of officers available to patrol the waterways, officers must concentrate their time on stopping boaters who fail to meet the requirements of the Fish and Boat Code as visible through their binoculars or as reported to them by others.

On this particular day, each of the four teams were able to apprehend a boat operator who failed the SFSTs, remove them from the water, take them to the hospital for testing and then take them to the State Police Barracks to be processed. I was able to see two of the arrests. It takes about two hours from the time of the arrest on the patrol boat until the team is able to return to patrol. The four arrests took place during the hours of 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., but it took until about 8:30 p.m. until everyone was back on the water. At 11 p.m., the shift ended.

Throughout the course of the 11-hour shift, I witnessed 20 stops between the two patrol boats that I accompanied. Six were for missing or expired registrations, five were for having a passenger seated outside of the passenger carrying area on the motor cover or transom, seven were for a variety of safety infractions and two led to boating-under-the-influence arrests. In most cases, warnings were issued and education was provided. It was only in the cases where safety to the boat operator, his/her passengers or to others that a citation was written or an arrest was made. In all cases, the

professionalism of the officers was clearly apparent. □



Captain Alan Robinson and WCO Douglas L. Deppen patrol Raystown Lake, Huntingdon County.