

BOAT

Pennsylvania

The Keystone State Boating Magazine

Fall 1987
\$1.50



VIEWPOINT

Lake Resources and the Future



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Pennsylvania is blessed with many lakes. The 8,300-acre Lake Raystown is our largest lake, but the vast majority are much smaller. The Pocono Mountains area is particularly renowned for its numerous small lakes. Around the turn of the century, people began to see lakes as places where they could go to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. Summer communities sprung up around Conneaut Lake, Harveys Lake and Eagles Mere Lake. Cottages with few amenities were built and residents contented themselves sitting on screened back porches, contemplating their peaceful surroundings. In the evening it was not uncommon for lovers young and old alike to row around the lake in their wooden Adirondack boats to talk with each other and their neighbors and to enjoy the peacefulness that water brings to all of us.

In the early years, much of the access to these Chautauqua-like communities was by rail. As better roads were built, more and more people began to travel the long distances to share in the tranquility of lake communities. Additional cottages were built and soon many lakes were surrounded by dwellings. The cottages were so close that access to the lake by a non-property owner could only be gained across someone's lawn. The houses were also becoming year-round residences not just summer retreats.

Today, developers are building on lands far removed from the shoreline but through acquisition of lakeshore property they ensure access to even more people. Lake communities are not what they used to be.

Mass-produced boats and outboard engines have compounded the problem. Some 25 years ago, few could afford or wanted a motor larger than 25hp. Today, outboards are produced up to 235hp and the average of all motors sold is 60hp. Speed seems to be the ideal for many people. They no longer go to the lake to escape from city life, but rather to vent their frustrations through the feelings of power, authority and control and that they get from their boats.

This desire to unwind is understandable, but the effect it has on many of our lakes is that the idyllic situation of time gone by can no longer be attained. Most people who live by lakes have grown to accept this idea as fact. Big, fast boats are here to stay.

When boat operation becomes hazardous to users, however, something must be done to control boating. Every lake has its cowboy or its outsider who seems to disregard all courtesy and good boatsmanship. He operates his boat early in the morning or late at night. He comes too close to fishermen, docks and drifting boats. He roars up the lake and back—and has another beer. These kinds of operators make it difficult for the others who want to use the lake resource sensibly.

What usually happens next is a call for more law enforcement and regulation, such as restrictions on horsepower, speed, hours of operation, types of boat, age of operator and activity. Many lakes have these restrictions now. Many other similar lakes do not. Why? The people who use these lakes show consideration for others. They police themselves. They have established their own operating code of conduct and make sure that everyone observes the rules.

If you live on a development lake facing the problems of growing boating density, you can help. Join the property owners association, become active and form a safe boating committee. Establish some good rules for boating safety and courtesy and educate others of the benefits of these rules. Become aware of the problems and work toward solutions. Don't wait for a tragedy to happen. With a little effort regulation can be avoided and everyone can enjoy the sport safely.

Our lake resource is limited. It is up to all of us to protect it and to ensure its availability to future boaters.

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The cover

Staff photographer Russ Gettig caught water skier Terry Miller zooming around Youghiogheny River Lake. She's having fun, all right, and that's a good point about the Yough River Lake. The waterway offers great fishing and boating potential. For a detailed look at Yough River Lake, please turn to page 29. If sailing is your thing, the articles on pages 4 and 8 may grab you. Water skiers should check out the article that begins on page 24 for a fresh perspective on a unique aspect of the sport. Paddlers picking PFDs is the point on page 26, and protecting your outboard motor prop is the gist of the feature on page 14. Lastly, for a fascinating bit of Pennsylvania history, see page 16.

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Boat Pennsylvania (ISSN0888-1561) is published quarterly by the Pennsylvania Fish Commission, 3532 Walnut Street, Harrisburg, PA 17109. © 1987. Subscription rates: one year, \$4; single copies are \$1.50 each. Second class postage is paid at Harrisburg, PA. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to: Boat PA Circulation, Pennsylvania Fish Commission, P.O. Box 1673, Harrisburg, PA 17105-1673. For subscription and change of address, use above address. Please allow six weeks for processing. Send all other correspondence to: The Editor, Boat Pennsylvania, P.O. Box 1673, Harrisburg, PA 17105-1673. Editorial contributions are welcomed, but must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Submissions are handled with care, but the publisher assumes no responsibility for the return or safety of submissions in his possession or in transit. The authors' views, ideas, and advice expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the opinion or official position of the Pennsylvania Fish Commission or its staff.

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