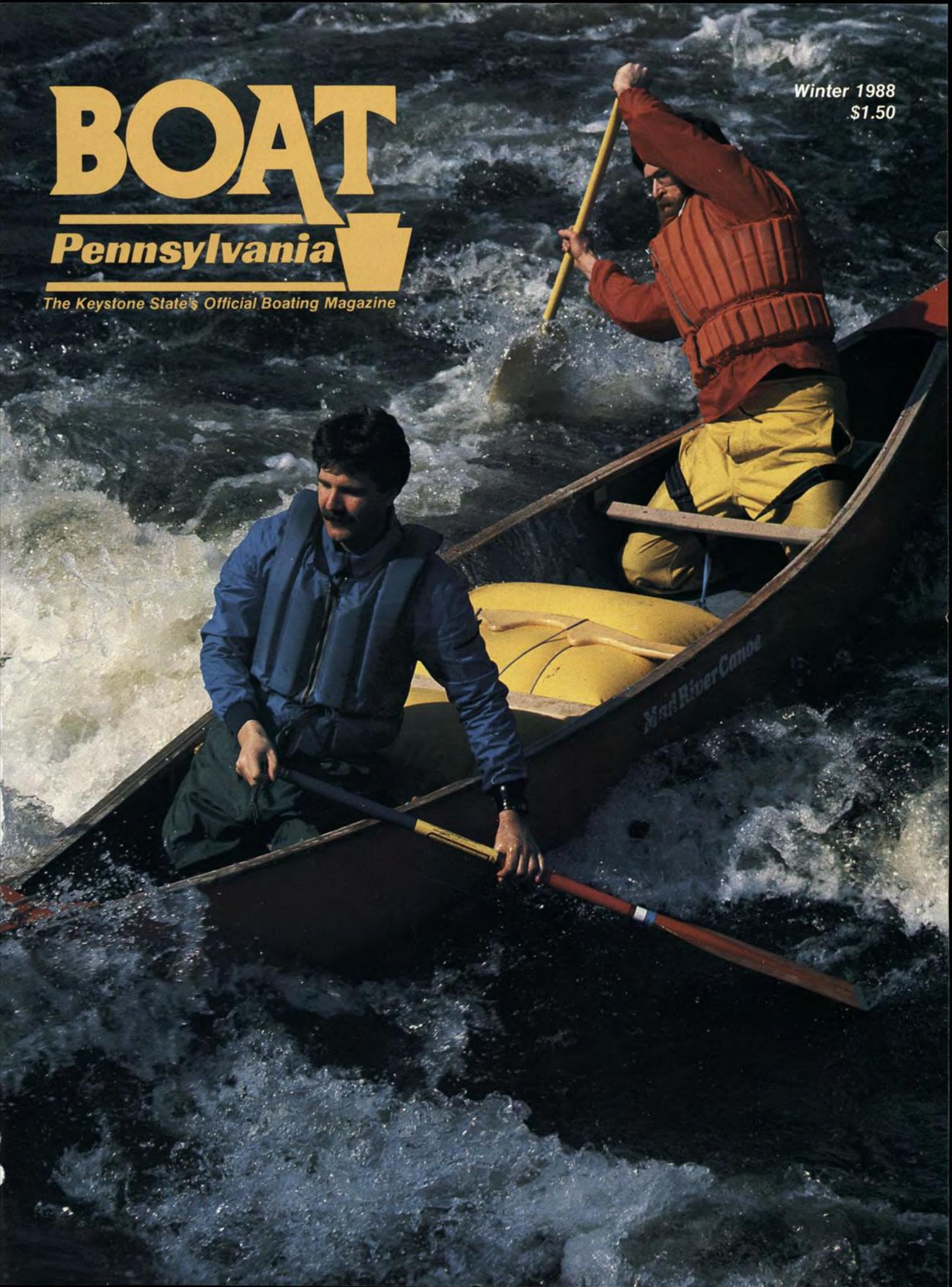


BOAT

Pennsylvania

The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine

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VIEWPOINT

Marine Fuels Tax



John Simmons
Acting Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish Commission

As we look out our windows, see the snow blowing and watch the water harden, it seems strange to be thinking about another boating season. But winter will be over before we know it and it will again be time to drain the antifreeze and wax the hulls. Around the Fish Commission we are already putting the finishing touches on the 1987 annual reports and preparing for another year.

One of the reports that we don't mind doing is the annual petition for refund of marine fuels tax. Each year the amount of gasoline used in motorboats is calculated from information supplied by boat owners on their annual registration renewal notices. On petition to the Pennsylvania Department of Treasury, the Commission is granted a refund of all tax paid on this fuel for use in funding its boating programs.

The marine fuels tax contribution to the Boat Fund has been substantial. In 1987, Pennsylvania boaters reported using 11,685,968 gallons of gasoline. This calculates to a reimbursement of \$1,402,316 at 12 cents per gallon. About 30 percent of Boat Fund revenue in 1987 was attributed to the marine fuels tax. Since 1971 over \$18 million has been deposited in the Boat Fund from this source of revenue. This is more than is collected from registration fees, which amounts only to about \$14 million over the same period.

The marine fuels tax has in large part been the reason why an increase in the registration fees has been avoided since 1964. Were it not for this source of revenue, registration fees would have to be at least twice what they currently are.

As impressive as these figures sound, we think that the boaters of Pennsylvania may be shortchanging themselves. A national study has shown that boating uses about 1.08 percent of all gasoline sold. But in Pennsylvania the percentage is less than one-quarter of one percent. There may be several reasons for this discrepancy. One of which is that 60 percent of the boats registered in Pennsylvania are under 16 feet in length and would, by the nature of the engines used, typically use less gasoline.

We think there is another reason that has a far greater impact. Of the 250,000 boats that were registered last year, 70 percent recorded a figure in the fuel use block of their registration renewal application. Some 30 percent of these registrants reported using no gasoline at all. It seems odd that over 50,000 boats would be registered and then not be used at all during the year. Could it be that the owners of these boats simply marked zero instead of taking time to estimate the actual amount used, not realizing the effect that this has on the tax refund?

Considering these statistics another way, only half of Pennsylvania's boat registrants reported using any gasoline. If the other half used an average amount of fuel, the total amount of fuel reported on our petition for refund could be off by a substantial amount because the calculated average use per boat would be much lower than the actual use.

How do you stack up? The summary of the 1987 boat registration fuel survey shows that registrants with boats under 16 feet used an average of 23 gallons of gasoline. Registrants with boats 16 to 26 feet averaged 90 gallons. Registrants with boats 26 to 40 feet used 233 gallons and registrants with boats over 40 feet used a whopping 237 gallons each. Unfortunately for the fuel tax refund, only 153 boats are registered in this category and the contribution from this group is limited. The average boater in Pennsylvania uses relatively little fuel in the enjoyment of his sport, but combined with the total number of boaters the total usage results in a substantial contribution to the funding of the boating programs in Pennsylvania.

Safety patrols, education, and facilities construction and maintenance depend on the receipt of the marine fuels tax refund for full and adequate funding. When completing this portion of your registration renewal, be sure to provide the Commission with an accurate estimate of the amount of fuel purchased for use in your boat. The tax has already been paid. It is only a question of whether or not the Commission gets this money for use in developing programs that benefit the boaters of the Commonwealth.

John Simmons

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Editor/Art Michaels
Graphic Designer/Ted Walke
Photographer/Russ Gettig
Circulation/Eleanor Mutch
Staff Assistant/Rose Ann Bartal
Staff Assistant/Charlene Glisan



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The cover

R. Hamilton Smith photographed the canoeists on this issue's front cover. This time of year might not be the best for paddling, but there's still plenty to do. For the details, see page-16. Waterways conservation officers cover a lot of ground—and water—on patrol, and one WCO's story begins on page 4. For some boating details on Presque Isle Bay, turn to page 7. For some cruising information on Blue Marsh Lake, check out page 14. And for information on the new get-wet sport, see page 28.

This issue's back cover, photographed by Paul Jenkins, shows an ice boater plying the hard water of Presque Isle Bay.

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