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BOAT

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VIEWPOINT

The Future of Boating in Pennsylvania

The boating program in Pennsylvania covers many areas, including boat registration, law enforcement, education, information, public relations, access and administration. Pulling all these functions together into a cohesive package is an interesting and rewarding experience. As state boating law administrator, I become involved in a myriad of activities each day with none quite the same as the day before. A day's work may include responding to a request from a legislator, developing a workshop for the Corps of Engineers, discussing the construction of an access area with the Commission engineers, and solving a problem with the boat registration computer system. Working closely with the various Commission program managers, the Bureau of Boating represents the Commonwealth's boaters wherever and whenever needed.

This task is not always easy, because the sincere desires of various boating groups are not always compatible with one another. We attempt to develop and manage our programs



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so that the majority of boaters are at least moderately satisfied most of the time. Our efforts do not always succeed. We sometimes take much criticism for our actions.

Oftentimes we are in a no-win situation, arbitrating differences between various factions of the boating community. Our attempt to register unpowered boats is an example of such a situation. The owners of these boats are philosophically opposed to registration, and no amount of explanation of the benefits they receive from Commission programs seems to convince them that they should help support those programs.

On the other hand, the increasing presence of unpowered boats on the state's water resources and facilities constructed with motorboat registration fees has motorboat owners upset and calling for equity.

Powerboaters pay the registration fees to support law enforcement safety patrols, educational programs, the publication of safety literature and the development of safety information programs. Powerboaters pay for the acquisition, development and maintenance of boating access sites, which today number in excess of 225.

Powerboaters pay for the administration of the boating program. The operators of unpowered boats pay nothing for the use of these services. We believe that this inequity must be rectified, and the Commission will continue to press for legislation that will register all boats in the Commonwealth.

As everyone knows, a knowledgeable boater is a better boater. The more informed the boating population is, the fewer would be the problems that occur even on congested waters. To increase the knowledge of Pennsylvania boaters, the Commission has developed a series of educational programs aimed at making better boaters. It is our goal to make education available to all boaters who want training and to provide the type of training that is needed. This cannot be accomplished with Commission staff alone. Consequently, we have solicited the support of teachers in the public school systems, camp counselors, scout leaders, volunteer firemen, and very important, volunteers from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and U.S. Power Squadrons. Each year this cadre of volunteers trains thousands of individuals in the practices of safe boating.

We do not believe that mandatory education is the solution to the Commonwealth's accident problem as has been suggested by some. The majority of the

accidents in Pennsylvania would not have been prevented by book knowledge. Only an attitude change that causes boaters to be aware of the consequences of their actions can prevent these accidents. We do believe, however, that education will result in a more enjoyable experience as more boaters are aware of the basic rules of courtesy and boat operation. We encourage education and will continue to develop and present courses that address the needs of our boaters.

It is the goal of the Commission to provide adequate access to the waters of the Commonwealth. Despite the number of accesses built in recent years by the Commission and other state and federal agencies, there remains a vast amount of water where good access is not yet available. Marina slips are in short supply in many areas, and even though the public sector is providing many slips, more need to be built. The Commission will encourage continued development by the private sector and will direct its own limited development efforts to construct access areas where the need is greatest.

The enforcement of laws and regulations has continued to grow in importance as the number of boats using our waterways grows. In 1987, over 250,000 boats were registered in Pennsylvania. Some 100,000 unpowered boats ply our waters and annually thousands of out-of-state boats travel to our state and enjoy our lakes and rivers. Boating has grown at the rate of about 4.5 percent per year over the past 15 years. The number of law enforcement officers has not.

With the graduation of a new class of waterways conservation officers in June, every district will have a full-time officer assigned for the first time in many years. This will not last long, however, because retirements will again deplete the ranks of this first line of Commission employees. More officer presence is needed on the most popular waters, but under the current budget restrictions, expansion is not possible. The Commission will continue to do the best that it can with available resources and continue to rely heavily on the deputy force that has served us so well over the years.

The future of boating in Pennsylvania is limitless. It will continue to expand, placing additional burdens on the Commission, our natural resources, and on our patience. Proper planning and the cooperation of all involved will ensure that all of us have the opportunity to participate in the sport we love.

John Simmons



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FIREPROOF! by Cheryl Kimerline

Know what kind of fire-fighting equipment you need on your boat and how to use it 4

Paddling Slippery Rock Creek by Thad Bukowski

This waterway is one of Pennsylvania's finest outdoor treasures 6

Eyewear for Boaters by Sal Fertitta

Look over the details of this topic so it doesn't become a burning issue 10

Kids Page! by Cheryl Kimerline

Go with the flow with some river fun 13

Sailing Faster by Bob Ricketts

Go faster where most sailors have not gone before 14

Low-Tech Canoeing Gear by Cliff Jacobson

Avoid the money pinch when you gear up, but don't sacrifice quality or efficiency 22

Skiing on Your Knees by Bruce Kistler

Kneeboarding's popularity has increased greatly in recent years. Use this information to take the plunge 25

Caring for Your Water Ski Gear by John M. Cornish II

Make your water ski gear last a long time and keep it in tip-top shape when you want to use it 28

Trailing to Adventure by Bill and Bert Schill

Trailing leads to exciting times around the continent, around the country, and around Pennsylvania 30

The covers

This issue's front cover, photographed by Kevin O'Brien, shows a maneuver that often pops up in the life of a paddler. Find out where you could put yourself in this position by checking out the article that begins on page 4. If you're a sailor, don't miss the fast-paced article on page 14, and if you trailer a boat, see page 30.

This issue's back cover, photographed by David Brownell, shows the results of applying the information in the article on page 28. Lastly, no matter what kind of boating you like, the article on page 10 has something for you.

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