

BOAT

Pennsylvania

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VIEWPOINT

Pulling Together

During the 25 years since the original boat law was written, boating and its management has faced dramatic changes. The major thrust of the regulatory program used to be the modification and fine-tuning of the basic regulations about equipment requirements and boat operation. These were straightforward requirements carried out through thoughtful interpretation of known information.

The regulatory process is plotting a different course today. Regulation proposals are now directed at resolving boater-boater and boater-landowner conflicts. Boats are either too big, too fast, too many or too different. Boaters are either too young, too old, too conservative or too wild. Some are even too intoxicated.

Requests are being received almost daily for regulations to restrict the operation of boats. The most frequent restrictions proposed are the banning of personal watercraft, speed limits, boat operator licensing and the institution of boat launching permits to limit the number of boats. Some people have requested the closing of public launch sites to restrict access to property owners only.

Some of these proposals are reasonable and implementable. Many, however, are blatantly discriminatory. The waters of the Commonwealth are public waters and all citizens have the right to use these waters if they do so in a safe and legal manner.

Elimination of a certain class of boaters simply because they do not fit a certain use pattern is not the best way to manage boating. Just because a boat is bigger, faster or more maneuverable is no reason to ban the use of that boat.

Some states have placed severe restrictions on the operation of personal watercraft. Several states have enacted speed limits. A growing number of states require mandatory education. Time of day restrictions and zoning are becoming more prevalent.

It is not known whether any of these regulations will have a lasting impact on boating safety. One thing is certain: Boating is not the unrestricted sport that it once was. As more and more boats enter the waters of the nation, there will be increasing calls for restrictions on boat size and horsepower, for boat operator licensing, for restrictions on the numbers of boats that can be launched and for speed limits and slow, no-wake zones.

To combat further restrictions, boaters must become knowledgeable in their sport. Take safe boating courses. Organize and become self-regulating. Promote boating safety among fellow boaters. Be considerate of property owners—they have a bigger investment to protect than you do.

Most of all, obey the laws we already have. There isn't enough money to have a field officer on the water all the time. If the laws were observed all the time and not just when waterways conservation officers were present, the demand for additional restrictions would not be as great.

Boating is supposed to be fun. We shouldn't have to wonder all the time whether we are breaking a special regulation. Nor should we have to travel great distances to find a place that permits our chosen type of boating. We can coexist with one another. Let's pull together for better boating in Pennsylvania.



John Simmons
Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish Commission

John F. Simmons

Pennsylvania Fish Commission

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The covers

This issue's front cover shows 16-year-old kayaker Colby Mackley negotiating the York County portion of Muddy Creek. Ray Moose, Jr. took the photograph. If you're thinking of learning to paddle, or if you'd like to improve your skills, check out the story beginning on page 25. Then you'll want to dive in to the canoeing adventure that begins on page 7. If you're a sailor filled with the competitive spirit, be the first to feast your eyes on page 4. Do you trailer a boat? Don't miss page 10! Finally, the Fish Commission would like to know what you think, and if you fill out and send in the reader survey on page 23, you could let the Commission know your ideas.

This issue's back cover shows water skier Jason Kartaz zipping along on Youghiogheny Lake. Russ Gettig took the picture.