

# BOAT

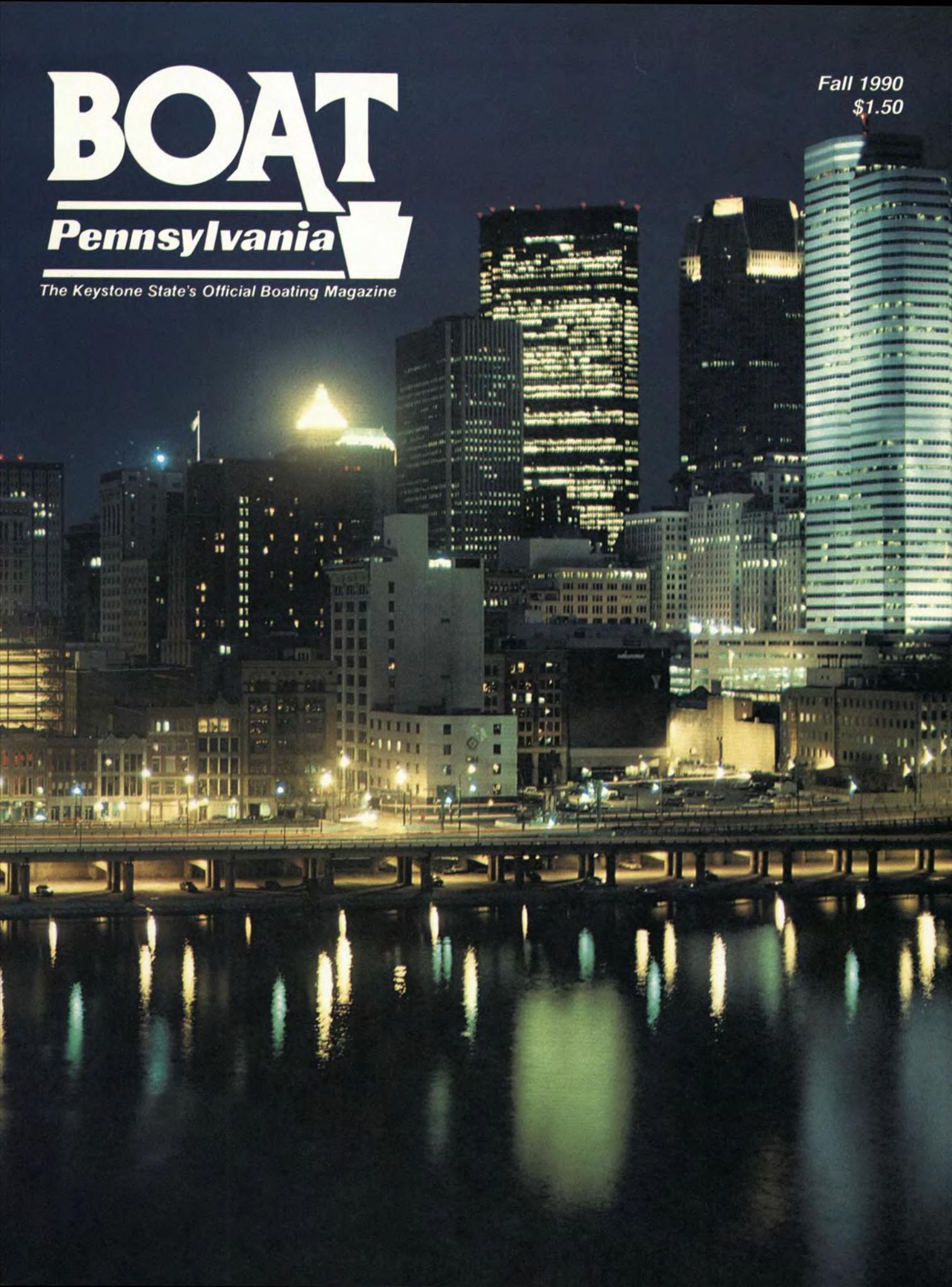
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## Pennsylvania



The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine

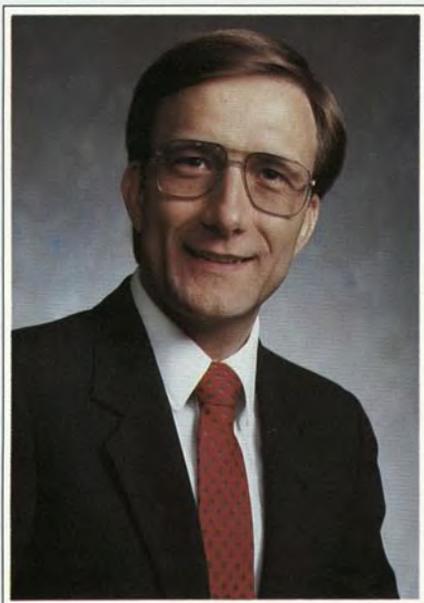
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# Viewpoint



## ***Demands of the Boating Public***



**John Simmons**  
Director  
Bureau of Boating  
Pennsylvania Fish Commission

I have just returned from a variety of public meetings held for different reasons across the state. Senator Lemmond called a Senate Game and Fisheries Committee hearing at Lake Wallenpaupack to consider local citizen concerns for boating safety in the region. Chairman Sedney called two meetings of the Boating Advisory Board—one, in Erie to discuss mandatory education and the need for a boat registration fee increase; the other, in Pittsburgh to discuss a recent city ordinance enacted to improve boating safety on the Three Rivers.

Despite the tripling of the number of registered boats in the past 25 years, the number of fatalities has decreased. Boating today is probably safer than it has ever been. Although great progress has been made in promoting boating safety, a common thread still runs through these kinds of meetings. The boating public is demanding more safety education and law enforcement.

In 1965, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the U.S. Power Squadrons provided the bulk of the motorboat safety courses. Local paddling and sail clubs offered training for their members and the public. The Fish Commission's programs were still in their infancy.

Today, 25 years later, we have a much more coordinated and aggressive boating safety education program. All groups are working together for safe boating. Students are attending courses at a record pace. In many areas, instructors cannot keep up with demand.

Voluntary education has proven to be beneficial, and now many people are talking about making the program mandatory. Once people attend a course, they become aware that the class was just what they needed to enable them to enjoy their sport fully.

Enforcement is an important component of safe boating. Education works for the boater concerned for his safety and the safety of others who take to the water, but enforcement is the only way to ensure the regulation of those among us who continuously disobey the common tenets of safe boating. One bad boater is enough to create problems for everyone. With the increase in the number of boats and the addition of new boating waters, the need for more enforcement is apparent. But the number of law enforcement officers charged with enforcing boating laws and regulations has not increased in the past 20 years.

The boating safety ordinance enacted by the city of Pittsburgh is an example of what can happen in reaction to a frustration with current conditions. This ordinance would place operator age restrictions, require mandatory education, require the wearing of personal flotation devices and create a two-mile-long slow, no-wake zone on the Three Rivers at the Point.

City officials are concerned with the safety of their residents. The inability of local and state governments to provide an adequate level of law enforcement seems to be the underlying reason for the call for these regulations. The city does not have jurisdiction over boating except to enforce state regulations. However, it can easily be seen what can happen when the state is not responsive to local needs.

What can be done to make the situation better? Whether we like it or not, mandatory education may be coming. Despite the number of people taking courses voluntarily, mandating a minimum knowledge of boating rules, regulations and boating safety seems to be the wave of the future. More and more states are enacting mandatory education statutes. Today, 16 states have education standards. The verdict is still out whether these requirements have any impact on safety, but the argument is that even a little bit may help and that it can't hurt.

More enforcement officers need to be put on the water during peak periods. At one time an officer could, through judicious use of deputies, cover several boating waters. Today, this is simply not possible. Not only can they not cover more than one area, but many areas need two or three officers to provide coverage over critical periods. Volunteer deputies have been a tremendous help, and without them we could not have gone this far with our program. But we can no longer rely on volunteers if we are to improve law enforcement coverage. The training and expertise needed are just too involved.

The boating deputy has progressed a long way since the early days of boating. He is well-trained and motivated. Properly used during the peak of the boating season, he can continue to be invaluable in boating safety enforcement. It's time we pay our deputies a decent wage to have them available when needed the most.

None of these improvements will come without cost. The boat registration fee, which is the base for all our programs, has not increased since first established in 1963. For 27 years the Commission has been attempting to run a program on inadequate funding. Despite our efforts, we have not been successful in obtaining even a modest increase in fees. Today, registration fees should be \$16 and \$24, allowing for increases represented by the consumer price index. The Commission has proposed modest increases of only \$10 or \$15. Many of you have expressed support for these fees, telling us that it costs that much to fill up a gas can or buy a few fishing lures.

The boaters of the Commonwealth must let their state senators and representatives know that they support a fee increase. We will again be approaching the Legislature with a fee increase package. A fee increase is essential by 1992 to maintain current programs. If one is not received, the progress made in boating safety will slip. If it does slip, we will surely face further boat operation restrictions.

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**The cover**

This issue's wraparound cover shows the Pittsburgh skyline and the Allegheny River aglow. This busy boating area has hundreds of amazing stories, one of which begins on page 4 of this issue. The article on page 16 has something for all boaters, and on page 28 you can get an insider's view of some important training. If you own a boat with an inboard/outdrive motor, please turn to page 19. Paddlers won't want to miss the story on page 10, and water skiers should scan the story starting on page 8. Lastly, everyone's seen docks made with 55-gallon drums, but reading the story about drums on page 14 might surprise you.