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BOAT

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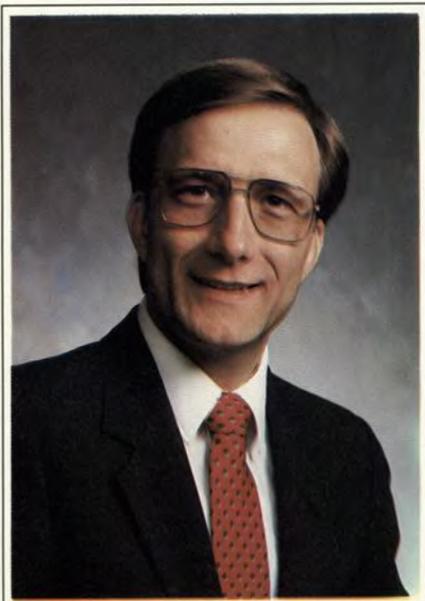
The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine



Viewpoint



The U.S. Recreational Vessel Fee



John Simmons
Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish Commission

As many of you know, Congress included an onerous tax on boaters in its Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990. This tax requires the owners of certain recreational boats used on the navigable waters of the United States to pay an annual Recreational Vessel Fee (RVF) ranging from \$25 to \$100. This fee is effective now through 1995. Generally, it is intended to help decrease the federal deficit by raising some \$718 million over the five years of the program. None of the money collected goes to the Coast Guard to increase or improve services.

The Recreational Vessel Fee applies to any vessel over 16 feet in length that is manufactured or operated primarily for pleasure. Exempt are boats powered solely by oars, paddles or poles; vessels owned or operated by volunteer fire departments, rescue squads or similar organizations; those used for public safety purposes; and those owned by the Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of America or the YMCA primarily for training youth in boating, seamanship and navigation skills.

The most often asked question is, where does the fee apply? The Coast Guard, charged with administering this fee, has determined that the fee applies in: a) territorial waters of the U. S. (coastal waters or ocean out to three miles); b) internal tidal waters (high and low tides daily); c) navigable non-tidal waters from which a 16-foot powered boat with a displacement type hull can navigate to tidal waters (connecting waters, canals, locks, etc.) during most of the boating season.

In Pennsylvania, the fees apply in the following areas: a) the Delaware River to Trenton Falls and all tributaries to the extent of navigation; b) Lake Erie including Presque Isle Bay; c) the length of the Ohio and the Monongahela rivers; d) the Allegheny River to Mile 70 just north of East Brady; and e) the Youghioghny River to Mile 3.0; the Beaver River to Mile 2.0; the Little Beaver River to Mile 1.0; the Cheat River to Cheat Dam; Redbank Creek to Mile 1.5; and Crooked Creek to Mile 1.5.

All boats subject to the Recreational Vessel Fee must display a pair of RVF decals within six inches of the location of the vessel's registration or identification numbers on the forward half of the vessel. An individual set of decals must be purchased for each boat subject to the provisions of the act.

The Recreational Vessel User Fee became effective on July 31, 1991. A lenient enforcement policy was followed by the Coast Guard until October 1, 1991. From now on, Coast Guard boarding officers will enforce the fee and civil penalties up to \$5,000 may be imposed on boaters who fail to obtain the required decals.

This is a federal user fee and the Fish Commission has no part in the collection or enforcement of the provisions of the act. Fish Commission officers will not look for the decals, nor will they in any way assist the Coast Guard in its enforcement. We have also been assured that the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary will not participate in reporting boats without decals and that decals won't be required for Courtesy Marine Examinations.

Although efforts are under way in Congress to repeal this fee, quick action is unlikely and any repeal will probably not affect the need for a 1992 decal. Pennsylvania boaters who use waters with regular Coast Guard patrols are encouraged to purchase their decals to avoid an unpleasant encounter with federal authorities.

You can obtain information on how to get the decals by calling the Coast Guard toll-free Boating Safety Hotline at (800) 368-5647. Persons wishing to purchase the decals using a credit card can call (800) 848-2100.

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The covers

This issue's front cover shows paddlers plying the swirling, inviting Brandywine Creek in Chester County. The photo was taken by Bill Schill. The back cover shows Mike Fogg humming along on the lower Susquehanna River. Art Michaels snapped the picture. And speaking of humming along, the article on page 6 provides the lowdown on some fine southwest Pennsylvania cruising, and paddlers should check out the article on page 16 for advice on picking a perfect canoe for Pennsylvania waters. If you plan to send your child to summer camp next year, don't miss the vital information on page 4, and if you tow a boat, the results of the experiments detailed in the article on page 23 may surprise you.