

Summer 1994

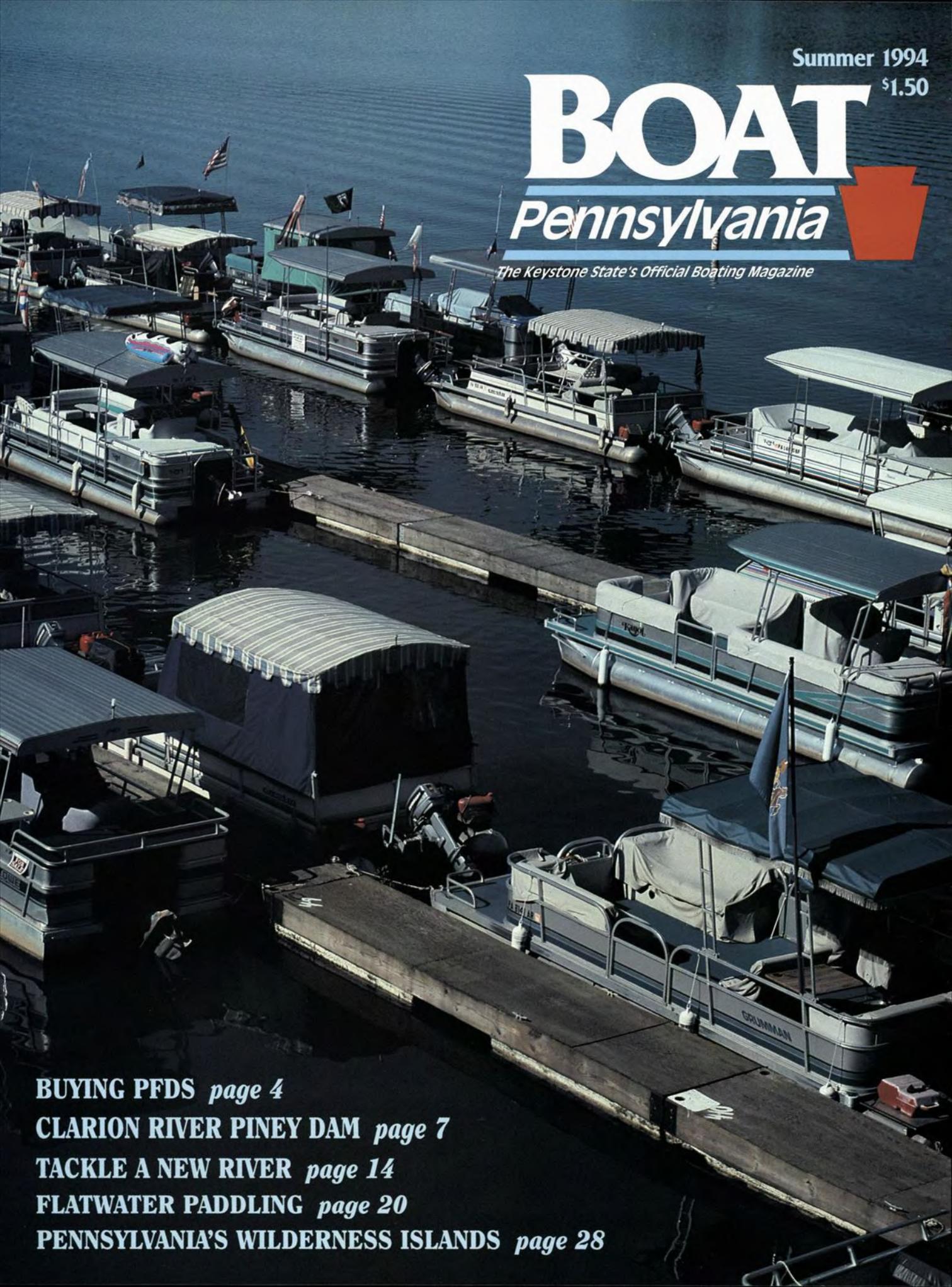
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BOAT

Pennsylvania



The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine



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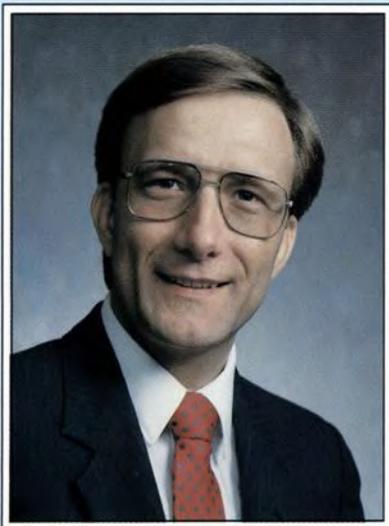
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Viewpoint

The Million Dollar Question



John Simmons
Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

What would you do with a million dollars? I know what I'd do. After taking care of some essentials, I'd plan a little fun. Buy something I didn't need. Go somewhere I'd never been.

What would the Commission do with a million dollars? Even at today's prices there is quite a bit we could do. We could buy 15 new vehicles, 20 new boats, replace a dozen motors, and reimburse deputies for their boating safety patrol work and have money left over. We could present a hundred boating safety education classes, print the *Boating Handbook*, provide grants to schools to offer boating safety programs to their students, produce this magazine and still have money left over. In short, we could do many of the things the boaters of Pennsylvania have come to expect and need.

But Pennsylvania is on the verge of losing nearly a million dollars in federal funding unless we do something about it. As many of you know, the Commission receives funding each year from the Aquatic Resource Trust Fund. This federal program is funded with revenues generated from taxes boaters and anglers pay on fishing tackle and gear, excise taxes on boat motors and imported boats, and the tax imposed on the fuel used in boats.

All together about \$340 million is generated for this fund each year, some \$200 million of which comes from motorboat fuel taxes. Congress has authorized \$70 million of these funds to go to the Boat Safety Account, which is split \$35 million to the Coast Guard and \$35 million to the states to help fund local boating safety efforts. The remainder of the money goes to the Sport Fish Restoration Account to fund fisheries programs.

In 1995, the Administration has requested that no money be appropriated for the Boat Safety Account. Their reasoning is that the program has run its course and has accomplished its goals. The number of fatalities is down and the states have taken up the majority of the funding for the program. The request for zero funding is presented in the name of deficit reduction.

There are two errors in this logic. First, even though it is true that the states make a significant contribution to the funding of boating safety programs primarily through registration fees, the federal funding remains crucial to the continuation of programs as we currently know them. In Pennsylvania, fully 20 percent of our annual budget for boating safety comes from federal funds. Without these funds we simply wouldn't have the same program we have today. Secondly, the failure to appropriate this money does nothing for the federal deficit because, by law, any money that is not appropriated to the Boat Safety Account rolls over to the Sport Fish Account. On paper it looks as if the Coast Guard is reducing expenditures when in fact no money is actually saved. It is simply shifted to another program area. This is money that you, the boater, have paid in fees and taxes to support your program. You deserve to get it back in the form of services.

The federal funds we have received from this program in past years represents over \$3.00 per registered boat. If Pennsylvania does not get this money, the programs outlined above will be severely cut back or eliminated. There is no question about it. We cannot lose 20 percent of our revenue without significant effect on program efforts. We expect that upwards of two-thirds of current boat patrols will be cut. This will have a significant effect on the level of safety that we have enjoyed in recent years and could put our safety programs back 20 years.

The Commission and the national associations we affiliate with are working with Congress to get these funds restored in the final budget. Unfortunately, our own budget year is approaching and we cannot project revenue that is not assured. We must plan as if that money will not be available, because, as I write this, it is not.

The boaters of this Commonwealth have supported the Commission and its need for revenue to provide a superior boating safety program. To lose this money—your money—would be an injustice and a travesty. If you, too, are concerned about the loss of this funding, contact your congressmen and senators. Let them know you want this funding restored. Tell them you want your money back in the program where it belongs.

What would you do *without* a million dollars?

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BOAT

Pennsylvania



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The cover

This issue's front cover, photographed by Art Michaels, is an upriver view of the Susquehanna River at the Walnut Street bridge in Harrisburg. If powerboating is your delight, check out Piney Dam on the Clarion River, on page 7, and when you're a guest aboard someone else's boat, be sure to follow the advice in the article on page 12. There's a wealth of flatwater paddling in Pennsylvania, and the article on page 20 details how it's done correctly and safely. The article on page 24 examines central Pennsylvania's best flatwater paddling waterways. Would you like to canoe on a new river this summer? Check out how to do that on page 14. Lastly, if you're a paddler or a small-boat enthusiast, the Middle Allegheny River's seven wilderness islands provide a special boating resource. That information begins on page 28.

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