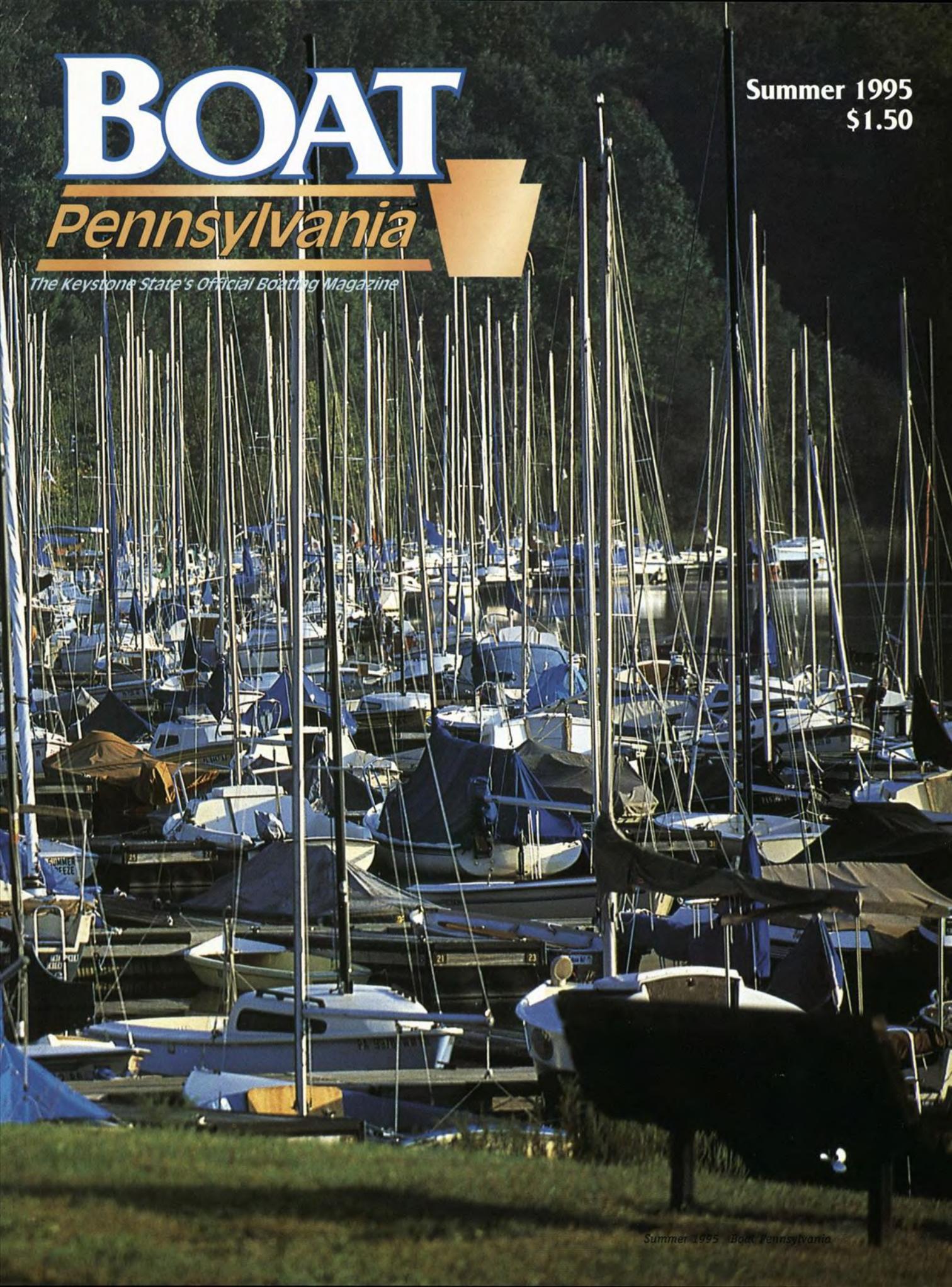


BOAT

Pennsylvania

The Keystone State's Official Boating Magazine

Summer 1995
\$1.50



Viewpoint

Personal Watercraft



John Simmons
Director
Bureau of Boating
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

Finally, the boating season is here. The spring cleaning is completed. We have mowed the grass, cleaned out the garage and washed the windows. Now it's time to get out on the water and enjoy boating.

Ah! The thrill. The exhilaration. The solitude. But wait a minute. I'm not alone out here. Where did all these other people come from? Don't they know that this is my lake? What are they doing here?

For some, the new boating season is an awakening. We all like to remember the times when we had the waters all to ourselves. Unfortunately, there are fewer and fewer places where we can go in Pennsylvania to be truly alone. Last year, the Commission registered more than 322,000 boats. This represents another of the 4 percent annual increases in boat registrations experienced over the past decade. It reflects an increase of more than 12,000 boats from the previous year. No new waters are open for boaters, so the demand on the available waters is increasing.

Personal watercraft (PWC) are becoming a major factor in recreational boating. The 12,000 PWC registered in Pennsylvania represent almost 4 percent of all registered motorboats. Dealers sold 3,000 of these devices last year. Nationally, more than one-third of all new boats sold were personal watercraft. At this rate, personal watercraft could dominate the recreational boating scene in a few short years.

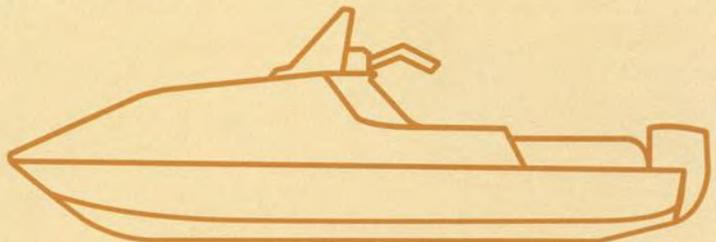
The entry of the personal watercraft has presented a dilemma to boating administrators and providers. Boaters operate these craft differently than traditional craft. Operated only by one or two passengers, more PWC are required to support the same number of participants as a traditional boat. They are both fast and extremely maneuverable, leading to operation characterized by many as unsafe. Statistically, these boats present little danger to other boaters. Accidents tend to occur with single boats or with other personal watercraft. Seldom are other boaters or water users in danger from these craft. Nevertheless, their operation is often an annoyance to other users of the waters, particularly owners of property near congregations of these craft.

Personal watercraft, however, are not the only problem. The number of other boats also creates a share of conflict. Boats today tend to be bigger and more powerful than ever before. A common perception is that the goal of many boaters is to see how fast they can go. Fortunately, we know that most boaters are extremely careful about their operation. The operation of a few, however, is all that it takes to turn opinion against everybody else.

Does this mean that we can no longer have fun on the water without being hassled or regulated every time we turn around? Not at all. What it does mean is that we have to be more careful about our boating. We have to look out for the other guy more than in the past. We have to ensure that safety directs our every action, and we have to be vigilant. We have to be good captains of our boats. We have to watch out for our crew and for our fellow boaters.

All boaters should take the time to assess the consequences of their actions. If we fail to take personal responsibility for our actions and of those around us, we will see an increase in conflicts, accidents and regulation.

Boating is one of the state's most important recreational pursuits. If we all contribute in our own small way, we can ensure that boating will be safer and enjoyable for everyone.



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On the cover

Boats await the day's activity early in the morning at Lake Nockamixon, Bucks County. Photographed by Darl Black.

If you're looking for the lowdown on central Pennsylvania's best open-water boating, check out the article that begins on page 4. Along these lines, powerboaters will want to read about "the elastic solution," on page 6, how to avoid severe weather, on page 20, what happens when a WCO boards your boat, on page 24, and how to maintain your outboard, on page 30. Furthermore, water skiers should turn to page 14 for advice on how to choose a slalom ski. On page 8, paddlers can find sound advice on how to buy that first canoe, and on page 16, read up on how to plan a successful overnight canoe trip. Lastly, is a jetboat right for you? The information on page 12 can help you decide.—Art Michaels, Chief, Magazines and Publications.

