



Great Lakes Recreational Boating Safety
--an Overview--

A Report to the Natural Resources Management Committee
of the
Great Lakes Commission

FINAL REPORT

GREAT LAKES COMMISSION STAFF

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PREFACE

The Great Lakes Commission staff is pleased to submit this report to the Natural Resources Management Committee. The report was compiled, at the request of the Committee, with review by Great Lakes States' recreational boating program officials. The report is not a comprehensive overview of this issue area, but a compilation of responses to specific questions raised by the Natural Resources Management Committee. It is intended to assist in focusing Commission attention on critical regional issues. Observations regarding Great Lakes recreational boating safety and facilities development issues are welcome, and should be directed to Michael J. Donahue, Natural Resources Specialist, Great Lakes Commission, 2200 Bonisteel Boulevard, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.

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GREAT LAKES RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY

- AN OVERVIEW -

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GREAT LAKES RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY
- AN OVERVIEW -

REPORT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In Great Lakes waters, continuing increases in recreational boating activity indicate that enhanced funding levels may be needed to adequately provide for the construction and maintenance of small craft harbors of refuge, the timely deployment of well-trained search and rescue personnel, and a continuing commitment to boater safety education programs. However, both capital (i.e., harbor construction) and operational (i.e., search and rescue, education) programs at state and federal levels have been severely constrained via budgetary cutbacks and shifts in program priorities.

This concern was addressed by the Great Lakes Commission at its Semi-Annual Meeting in May of 1982. The staff was requested to explore recreational boating trends in the Great Lakes and the status of the aforementioned capital and operational components of boating safety.

Results of the staff effort are presented in this report. It is not an exhaustive status report on Great Lakes recreational boating safety, nor is it intended to be. It is presented to the Natural Resources Management Committee of the Great Lakes Commission as a reference source for baseline information to assist in focusing Commission attention on critical issues within this broad topical area. The report is not intended for wide distribution beyond the Natural Resources Management Committee, as it addresses specific questions of the Committee rather than providing a comprehensive overview of the subject area. Furthermore, all states did not provide comments on earlier report drafts. Some figures may require revision.

APPROACH AND FORMAT

Current usable data on recreational boating from a basin-wide perspective is somewhat limited. A literature search was first conducted to obtain available information and, where possible, boating statistics were extrapolated over a ten year period. Phone interviews with appropriate state and federal officials were conducted to determine anticipated changes in areas such as search and rescue, harbor of refuge construction and boater education programs.

Section I of the report consists of a set of tables designed to provide a regional overview of capital and operational components of Great Lakes recreational boating safety. Section II very briefly describes federal (i.e., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers) activity in harbor of refuge construction. Section III presents a state-by-state synopsis of safety boating related programs/projects. The final section (IV) presents selected topics the Commission may wish to explore in the future.

SECTION I

AN OVERVIEW OF GREAT LAKES RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY
FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

TABLE ONE
STATE & LOCAL BOATING SAFETY ACTIVITY

State	No. of State Vessels	No. of Local/Cnty. Vessels	*No. of State Officers	No. of Local/Cnty. Officers	State Marine Fuel Tax Program	**Major Source of Funding for Water Safety Programs	***Budget Dynamics (1981-82)	Lead Agency
Ill.	2	-	2	-	Yes	Registration Fees (R.F.)	Stable	Dept. of Conservation
Ind.	2	-	7	-	No	General funds (G.F.)	Decreasing	Dept. of Nat. Res.
Mich.	12	35	8	****300	Yes	R.F.	Decreasing	DNR Marine Safety Program
Minn.	35	2	-	2	Yes	G.F.	Decreasing	DNR
N.Y.	-	11	-	11	No	R.F.	Decreasing	County Sheriffs
Ohio	8	6	16	25	Yes	R.F.	Stable	DNR Sheriffs
Penna.	3	-	3	-	Yes	G.F.	Stable	PA Fish Commission Bureau of Waterways
Wis.	-	200	-	84	No	R.F.	Decreasing	Local Police Sheriffs

* Number of officers assigned full-time recreational boating safety responsibilities. Excludes personnel with additional responsibilities (i.e., conservation officers).

** Those states that have a Marine Fuel Tax program are benefiting from those funds. However, no one indicated that the existing allocations are providing a "major" contribution to boater safety activities.

*** Those states that reported a "decreasing" budget, indicated that the loss of federal grants is the overriding cause.

**** The state provides 2/3 and the counties 1/3 of the operating budget for Michigan's Marine Safety Program which includes SAR activities as well as off-water education programs. The state portion of the funds comes primarily from registration fees.

TABLE THREE

OVERALL STATUS OF HARBOR OF REFUGE CONSTRUCTION -
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

West Harbor, OH
Cattaraugus Creek, NY
Manitowoc, WI
Detour, MI

RECOMMENDED FOR CONSTRUCTION PENDING
ACCEPTABLE COST SHARING AGREEMENTS

Cedar River, MI
Beaver Bay, MI
Lutsen Harbor, MN
Port Ontario, NY

FEASIBILITY STUDIES UNDERWAY

Kenosha, WI
Lorain, OH
Illinois Beach State Park

SMALL PROJECTS STUDIES UNDERWAY

Barcelona Harbor, NY
Braddock Bay Harbor, NY
Cooley Canal, OH
Ogdensburg Harbor, NY
Burns Harbor, IN
Lake Calumet, IL
Ashland Harbor, WI
Bayfield Harbor, WI
Fond Du Lac Harbor, WI
Harrisville Harbor, MI
Huron Harbor, MI
Oconto Harbor, WI
Racine Harbor, WI
Sheboygan Harbor, WI
Two Harbors, MN

SECTION II

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES IN RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY

Inquiries regarding capital and operational aspects of recreational boating safety responsibilities were addressed to both the U.S. Coast Guard (Ninth District) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (North Central Division). A written response from the U.S. Coast Guard, which was to have included detailed budgetary information, has not yet been received. Information obtained from the Corps of Engineers is provided below.

HARBOR OF REFUGE CONSTRUCTION BY THE U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

The Corps notes that the term "harbors of refuge" can have several different meanings, as it can apply to all navigation projects on the Great Lakes, except for those that are not protected harbors. However, the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1945 did authorize the construction of 21 harbors along the Great Lakes shoreline solely as harbors of refuge. (Recommended by House Document 446, 78th Congress, Second Session.) In conjunction with existing harbors, these proposed facilities were to provide small craft shelters every 30 to 40 miles along the Great Lakes shoreline. To date 17 of these 21 harbors have been constructed, with one deauthorized and three yet to be constructed. Table Two (Section I) provides a listing.

Table Three (Section I) presents the current status of Corps of Engineers harbor construction in the Great Lakes.

Existing harbor facilities are listed, in some detail, in Appendix R-9 (Recreational Boating) of the Great Lakes Basin Framework Study (Section 4 - Lake Boating Analysis). Although somewhat dated (1975), it provides a valuable inventory, including the type of harbor, mooring capacity and distance to next harbor of refuge. In the interest of brevity, this material is not included in this report. It is, however, available upon request to the Great Lakes Commission.

SECTION III

STATE BOATING SAFETY SYNOPSES

ILLINOIS

I. Current & Proposed Boating Facilities

Approximately 92,000 Illinois boaters claim Lake Michigan as their principal place of recreation. The majority of the major marinas and protected harbor areas are in the Chicago Metropolitan area. The berthing capacity for the state is augmented by three other major harbors which bring Illinois' total berth capacity to approximately 5,400 slips. The majority of these are publicly managed.¹ 750-800 new public berths will be added to the Waukegan Harbor by 1983.² The Department of Conservation is investigating the construction of a safe water harbor of refuge in the Zion area. Additionally, should the World's Fair be approved for Chicago for 1992, the possibility exists that³ additional berths would be constructed in the Burnham Harbor area.

II. Management Aspects

The majority of the harbor areas in the Illinois portion of Lake Michigan are managed by the Chicago Park District and the Waukegan Port District. The current state of the economy is making it extremely difficult for these entities to obtain funds for expansion of facilities.⁴

III. Law Enforcement Activities

The Department of Conservation employs four officers and two vessels to oversee the state boating program; others can be called upon from nearby areas as needed. Eight new recruits are now being added to the lake area.⁵ Activities of the DOC permit the Coast Guard to concentrate efforts upon SAR activities.

IV. Budget Aspects

Harbor development is taking a low priority in state fiscal expenditures.⁶ Funding for boating safety projects comes primarily from registration fees and has remained stable in recent years. An active state marine fuel tax program also brings in approximately \$2 million/year as well. Law enforcement allocations for boater services are made with the continuing understanding that the Coast Guard will have to continue to have a significant role in providing for increasing boater needs.

million from local units of government, and \$50 million from the federal government.² Several expansion projects are underway but fall short of the estimated need.³

II. Law Enforcement Activities

The SAR activities of the Coast Guard are augmented by the presence of over 35 county sheriff vessels. Through a joint state/county Marine Safety Program as many as 300 marine deputies are employed during the summer months. Their duties include boating education as well as SAR activities. Many of these local units are quite active. One unit responded to over 500 SAR calls in 1981.⁴ The State Department of Natural Resources maintains 12 vessels and is active in augmenting Coast Guard activities.⁵

III. Budget Aspects

Seventy-five percent of registration fee revenues go to the DNR. The Michigan Budget Office had considered a \$600,000 cutback for the DNR in the 1983 fiscal year, which would have resulted in total elimination of state on-water safety operations.⁶ One hundred percent of the Marine Fuel Tax Program funds go to the Michigan Waterways Commission. However, the Commission states that these funds have been "static" over the last several years. As a group, local sheriffs received over \$1.3 million from the state for boating safety operations. Given inflation, it is believed the absence of additional funding will have a noticeable impact on the delivery of an adequate safe boating program.

MINNESOTA

I. Current & Proposed Boating Facilities

Approximately 76,000 Minnesota boats frequent Lake Superior waters. The total number of private and public berths in the Great Lakes waters of the state is approximately 700. Facilities in the Duluth area contribute more than 85 percent to the total capacity. Facilities are proposed for Silver Bay, Schroeder and the Two Harbors area. The total contribution of berths from these sites would be approximately 150. Most new facilities are being considered for financing through the DNR Public Access Program.² The Grand Marais area continues to be of interest to harbor planners who hope to increase its relatively small capacity in the future.

II. Law Enforcement

The state engages in only limited SAR activity. The Department of Natural Resources operates three vessels (one in each lakeshore county) with a complement of seven officers.³ All three county sheriff departments bordering the lake have a boating safety program and receive grant money from the state. Only Lake and St. Louis Counties have boats on Lake Superior. Cook County relies heavily on the USCG facility at Grand Marais. There are also USCG facilities at Duluth.

OHIO

I. Current and Proposed Boating Facilities

Approximately 120,000 Ohio boaters use Lake Erie as their principal place of recreation. Currently 25,000 private berths and 1,000 public berths are available to boaters. Ohio hopes to double its public berth capacity over the next decade primarily with proposed projects in Lorain and Geneva. Both projects, however, are experiencing planning and financial delays.

II. Management Aspects

The state operates only a few facilities. It prefers to match local unit financing and allow local units to manage the facilities.² In recent years, achievement of state goals have been slowed by many local units who are not eager to commit massive funds to projects, or by advocates of competing programs who resist such development.

III. Law Enforcement Activities

The DNR's Watercraft Division uses eight vessels and employs 16 officers who average 32 hours a week on the waters of Lake Erie. The Division works primarily as an "advocate" rather than an "enforcer" and leaves most SAR activities to the Coast Guard.⁴ Sheriff divisions, while popular in other states for water related functions, are not used extensively in Ohio. Moreover, the trend in the last decade points to the decreased presence of local law enforcement personnel on the waters of Lake Erie.

IV. Budget Aspects

Ohio has a marine fuel tax program, receives most of its budget from registration fee funds and exhibits stable funding and program resources at this time.⁵

PENNSYLVANIA

I. Current & Proposed Boating Facilities

Facilities in this state are somewhat limited given its short and bluffy shoreline. In 1980, approximately 10,000 boats were owned by Erie County residents. An additional 7,000 boats were owned by residents of the adjoining two counties. Within a two hour drive of Lake Erie there are well over 50,000 boats. A conservative estimate is that 20,000 boats are used on the waters of Lake Erie each year. To date, 1,420 private and public berths are available to boaters. Two rather large marinas are being contemplated. The J.D. Lampe marina has 120 berths with an additional 100 public berths planned, as well as 4 proposed public launch ramps. In addition, Pennsylvania has 19 existing and 5 proposed launch ramps along the Lake Erie Shoreline.² A Presque Isle project will also entail construction of a large marina if and when the legislature passes the Commonwealth's

II. Budget Aspects

Local governments are expected to pick up 25-40 percent of new harbor construction costs. While this local commitment is lower than some other states, few communities have indicated an ability to participate in new construction initiatives. The boating safety program is being funded primarily by registration fee revenues. There is no marine fuel tax fund. The total boating safety program budget has been cut 20% this year and recent studies are calling for the implementation of boat user taxes.

SECTION IV

SELECTED ISSUES FOR POTENTIAL CONSIDERATION BY THE GREAT LAKES COMMISSION

During compilation of this report, a number of specific issues for potential consideration by the Great Lakes Commission were identified. Several of these are presented below as a stimulus for discussion and identification of additional issues.

1. Effectiveness of Coast Guard Search and Rescue Activity

A 1981 Congressional report, "Semi-Paratus: The U.S. Coast Guard, 1981," included the following statement: "Although the Coast Guard is saving more and more lives each year, the figure compared to the amount of lives and property it believes it might have saved, has been steadily declining." Coast Guard statistics indicate that its SAR effort has declined from an 85.3% rate of effectiveness in 1977 to 69.4% in 1980. Lack of prompt response time is given as the overriding reason. An average Coast Guard vessel is approximately 27 years old. The declining readiness of ships, combined with the fact that 45 percent of Coast Guard personnel have less than two years experience, are cited as being of considerable concern, according to a 1980 report by the Government Accounting Office. Responding to these concerns and others, Admiral Hayes gave the following statement in testimony to the Oversight Committee in 1981: "Over the past ten years, since passage of the Federal Boat Safety Act of 1971, we have seen a definite decline in the fatalities per 100,000 boaters, but it seems now to have stabilized at a level that suggests we are getting to a point of no return on additional investment."

Topics for Possible Consideration

- A. The adequacy of funding for capital investment (i.e., vessels) and personnel is identified as a recreational boating safety concern. The Commission may wish to investigate the adequacy of funding for the Coast Guard's Great Lakes operations.
- B. The Coast Guard and other agencies are investigating the idea of user charges for services. Major justification comes from the viewpoint that such charges would discourage non-emergency calls and improve response time for legitimate emergencies. User charges would also ease budgetary concerns. The Commission may want to investigate the user fee concept further.

2. Boater Education and Safety Assistance

According to the Boat Owners Association (BOA) there has been a 72 percent drop in personnel involved with the Coast Guard's national boating safety education effort and its accident review program since 1977 (May/June 1982 Report). Over the same time there has been a 54 percent decline in the number of construction standards personnel.

The Department of Commerce is also in the process of trying to increase the price of navigation charts from \$4.50 to \$45.00 each. If such an increase is realized, it is quite probable that fewer boaters will

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III. Michigan

1. Boating Trends Report, Michigan Waterways Commission, p. 1.
2. Report, "Long Range Capital Outlay Needs for the Waterways Division." March 1982: p. 7.
3. Phone interview, Les Nichols; Department of Natural Resources, Waterways Commission.
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VIII. Wisconsin

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