



Boating Safety Account Continuation Review

April 1, 2016

Submitted By:

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Executive Summary:

The United States Coast Guard's 2011 National Recreational Boating Survey reveals that recreational boating continues to be one of the nation's most popular outdoor recreational activities, as well as an important generator of income and employment. Men, women, and children residing in all regions of the country enjoy recreational boating. North Carolina reflects this trend with 374,823 registered vessels for 2015. From mountain lakes to coastal waters, North Carolina offers a diverse selection of boating opportunities. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) is tasked with a mission "To conserve North Carolina's wildlife resources and their habitats and provide programs and opportunities that allow hunters, anglers, boaters and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy wildlife associated recreation." The Wildlife Commission's Strategic Plan further defines this mission, advocating "all North Carolina citizens have the opportunity for safe and readily available participation in hunting, fishing, boating and other wildlife-related activities." NCWRC provides safe and readily available boating access through the Boating Safety Program as funded through the Boating Safety Account. The primary focus of the boating safety program is to protect the lives, welfare, and property of people using state and joint jurisdiction waters.

NCWRC is dedicated to providing and increasing safe and readily available boating opportunities in all North Carolina waterways. To improve and increase recreational boating opportunities in North Carolina, effective and productive partnerships have been formed among boating agencies, organizations, stakeholders, and local communities. These partnerships include boaters themselves, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and multiple state and local government entities. In addition to partnerships, NCWRC provides multiple services needed to accommodate North Carolina's recreational boaters. These service areas include: development of boating regulations and safety laws, a law enforcement presence, assistance and response in emergency situations, education and safety instruction, access to public waters of the state, identifying and marking boating hazards and boat registration and titling services.

Boat registration fees and taxes on fuel provide the majority of the funding for North Carolina's boating program. In addition to state funds deposited in the Boating Safety Account, the WRC receives a federal grant from the United States Coast Guard. The Recreational Boating Safety (RBS) Grant allows North Carolina and other states to supplement the boating safety program to address specific safety concerns and enhance the welfare and enjoyment of the boating public without further increasing taxes and fees charged to boat owners or users.

As you read this report, you will find a wealth of information that is crucial to the safety and overall condition of North Carolina's recreational boating community. In addition, you will be able to better measure the relationship between funding resources provided by the Boating Safety Account and the impact of those resources to North Carolina's recreational boating community.

- Boating services are provided by NCWRC on a "user pay, user benefit" basis. The State of North Carolina Boating Safety Program is funded directly from the Boating Safety Account. These funds contribute directly to the enjoyment and safety of millions of North Carolina's recreational boaters.
- North Carolina's 374,823 registered vessel owners receive 43,510 hours of recreational boating safety efforts. North Carolina Wildlife Officers spent 32,875 hours on actual water patrol. Of those patrol hours, approximately 3,763 were spent on night patrol when alcohol use and dangers are increased. While on boating patrol, officers inspected 8,006 boats and issued 1,329 citations and 2,725 warnings for unsafe boat operation.
- Wildlife Officers annually conduct over 2,400 pre-launch boating safety checks at 300 locations statewide, 327 boating education programs including 243 in class boating safety courses, and over 8,000 safety and compliance checks. Additionally, Wildlife Officers annually patrol all 100 counties including 35,790 sq. miles of water up to three miles offshore.

- NCWRC partners with over 150 local municipalities to provide and maintain 238 free Boating Access Areas (BAA) to 80 different bodies of water. NCWRC boating access area program provides recreational and commercial boaters free access 24-hours a day to the state's waterways.
- NCWRC operates a 24/7 customer support system which links boat registration and license agents in a statewide communications network with point of sale capabilities. Vessel registration services are available immediately at agent locations. Automated telephone renewals further benefit the boating public by offering instant boat registration renewals. On-line boat renewals through the agency's website are also provided and are increasingly utilized by the public.

The 2015 General Assembly has selected the Boating Safety Account to undergo a Continuation Review (CR). The 2015 legislative budget provides that the final report of the CR is to be presented by April 1, 2016. As you read this report, you will find a wealth of information that is crucial to the safety and overall condition of North Carolina's recreational boating community. In addition, you will be able to better measure the relationship between funding resources provided by the Boating Safety Account and the impact of those resources to North Carolina's recreational boating community.

Continuation Review Legislation

The General Assembly has selected the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Boating Safety Account to undergo a Continuation Review (CR). Section 6.20 S.L. 2015-241 of the final budget outlines the requirements of the program. The Fiscal Research Division provided the instructions for the final report of the CR that is to be presented by April 1, 2016.

Section 6.20. (c) The continuation review reports required in this section shall include the following information: (1) a description of the fund, agency, division, or program mission, goals, and objectives, including statutorily required functions and functions performed without specific statutory authority. (2) The performance measures for the fund, agency, division, or program and the problem or need addressed. (3) The extent to which the fund, agency, division, or program objectives and performance measures have been achieved. (4) A detailed accounting of all sources of funds for the fund, agency, division, or program. (5) Recommendations for statutory, budgetary, or administrative changes needed to improve efficiency and effectiveness of services delivered to the public, including recommendations regarding whether to transfer the program to the Division of Motor Vehicles or to elsewhere in the Department of Transportation. (6) The consequences of discontinuing funding or of continuing funding with a source other than a transfer from the Highway Fund. (7) Recommendations for improving services or reducing costs or duplication. (8) The identification of policy issues that should be brought to the attention of the General Assembly. (9) Other information necessary to fully support the General Assembly's Continuation Review Program along with any information included in instructions from the Fiscal Research Division.

Boating Program Statutory Authority

Chapter 75A in the general statutes addresses boating and water safety. The purpose of the article (75A-1) is to promote safety for persons and property in and connected with the use, operation and equipment of vessels, and to promote uniformity of laws relating thereto. Article 1 of the chapter is the boating safety act and Article 4 is the Vessel Titling Act.

§ 75A-1. Declaration of policy.

It is the policy of this State to promote safety for persons and property in and connected with the use, operation, and equipment of vessels, and to promote uniformity of laws relating thereto. (1959, c. 1064, s. 1.)

In 75A-3, the statute goes on further to establish the Boating Safety Account within the Wildlife Resources Fund.

§ 75A-3. Wildlife Resources Commission to administer Chapter; Boating Safety Committee; funds for administration.

(a) The Commission shall enforce and administer the provisions of this Chapter.

(b) The chair of the Commission shall designate from among the members of the Commission three members who shall serve as the Boating Safety Committee of the Commission, and who shall, in their activities with the Commission, place special emphasis on the administration and enforcement of this Chapter.

(c) The Boating Safety Account is established within the Wildlife Resources Fund created under G.S. 143-250. Interest and other investment income earned by the Account accrues to the Account. All moneys collected pursuant to the numbering and titling provisions of this Chapter shall be credited to this Account. Motor fuel excise tax revenue is credited to the Account under G.S. 105-449.126. The Commission shall use revenue in the Account, subject to the Executive Budget Act and the Personnel Act, for the administration and enforcement of this Chapter; for activities relating to boating and water safety including education and waterway marking and improvement; and for boating access area acquisition, development, and maintenance. The Commission shall use at least three dollars (\$3.00) of each one-year certificate of number fee and at least nine dollars (\$9.00) of each three-year certificate of number fee collected under the numbering provisions of G.S. 75A-5 for boating access area acquisition, development, and maintenance. The Commission shall transfer on a quarterly basis fifty percent (50%) of each one-year certificate of number fee and fifty percent (50%) of each three-year certificate of number fee collected under the numbering provisions of G.S. 75A-5 to the Shallow Draft Navigation Channel Dredging and Lake Maintenance Fund established by G.S. 143-215.73F. (1959, c. 1064, s. 3; 1961, c. 644; 1963, c. 1003; 1981 (Reg. Sess., 1982), c. 1182, s. 2; 1993, c. 422, s. 1; 1995, c. 390, s. 13; 1999-392, s. 5; 2006-185, s. 1; 2007-485, s. 4.1; 2013-360, s. 14.22(a); 2013-380, s. 3; 2014-100, s. 14.19(b).)

Boating Safety Account Current Environment

The Boating Safety Account funds the North Carolina Boating Safety Program through revenue generated from vessel registration and titling fees, and the United States Coast Guard Recreational Boating Safety Grant (RBS). In addition to these funding sources, motor fuel excise tax revenue is credited to the Boating Safety Account under G.S. 105-449.126. The credit to the Wildlife Resources Fund is one-sixth of one percent (1/6 of 1%) of the amount that is allocated to the Highway Fund from the excise tax on motor fuel.

The funds are credited to the Wildlife Resources Fund on a quarterly basis. Revenue credited to the Wildlife Resources Fund under this section may be used only for the boating and water safety services. These services areas include: administration and enforcement of activities relating to boating and water safety including education, waterway marking and improvement, and for boating access area acquisition, renovations, development, and maintenance.

Fund Sources

Funds to support the Boating Safety Account are derived from three revenue sources:

- **Vessel Titling and Registration Fees**
- **Motor Fuel Excise Tax**
- **Recreational Boating Safety Grant (Federal)**

Vessel Titling and Registration Fees - The Vessel Titling Act provides for the distribution of vessel registrations and titles by the Commission and authorizes the fees to be charged. All vessel fees are deposited into the Boating Safety Account. Quarterly, the Commission transfers fifty percent (50%) of each one-year certificate of number fee and fifty percent (50%) of each three-year certificate of number fee collected under the numbering provisions of G.S. 75A-5 to the Shallow Draft Navigation Channel Dredging and Lake Maintenance Fund established with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). For fiscal year 2014-2015 \$5,026,335 was transferred to the Shallow Draft Navigation Channel Dredging and Lake Maintenance Fund established in DEQ.

Motor Fuel Excise Tax - Quarterly, the Wildlife Resources Fund receives an allocation from the Highway Fund.

G.S. § 105-449.126. Distribution of part of Highway Fund allocation to Wildlife Resources Fund and Shallow Draft Navigation Channel Dredging and Lake Maintenance Fund.

- (a) The Secretary shall credit to the Wildlife Resources Fund one-sixth of one percent (1/6 of 1%) of the amount that is allocated to the Highway Fund under G.S. 105-449.125 and is from the excise tax on motor fuel. Revenue credited to the Wildlife Resources Fund under this section may be used only for the boating and water safety activities described in G.S. 75A-3(c). The Secretary must credit revenue to the Wildlife Resources Fund on a quarterly basis. The Secretary must make the distribution within 45 days of the end of each quarter.

Recreational Boating Safety Grant - NCWRC receives a federal grant from the United States Coast Guard in the form of the United States Coast Guard Recreational Boating Safety Grant. It is important to note a state cannot receive more than one-half of the total cost of its RBS Program, and must provide matching funds from general state revenues, undocumented vessel numbering and license fees, or state marine fuel taxes.

The purpose of the RBS Grant is to assist all States and U.S. Territories with programs to protect recreational boaters. The RBS program is a federal appropriated budget authority program subject to annual appropriations. Funding for the program is derived from the federal tax on fuel used in motorboats. \$70 million per year may be transferred to the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Any remaining revenues in a fiscal year from the federal tax on motorboat fuel is transferred to the Sport Fish Restoration Account in the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund. Of the funds appropriated for the state grant program, the Coast Guard is authorized to retain not more than two percent for the costs of administering the state program, and up to five percent for grants to national nonprofit public service organizations to conduct national boating safety activities. The balance is allocated to the states as follows: one-third allocated equally among participating states, one-third allocated in the same ratio as the number of vessels numbered in the state bears to the number of vessels numbered in all participating states, one-third allocated in the same ratio as the amount of the state's prior-year expenditures for boating safety bears to the total prior-year expenditures for boating safety of all participating states

The federally allocated RBS Grant allows North Carolina and other states to elevate and expand the boating safety program to address specific safety concerns and enhance the welfare and enjoyment of the boating public without further increasing taxes and fees charged to North Carolina vessel owners or users. As of June 29th, 2015 the RBS Grant to North Carolina totaled \$1,549,425.80 which was matched 1:1 utilizing state funds allocated from the Boating Safety Account.

For North Carolina to retain its eligibility for RBS grant funding, the state Boating Safety Program must include: a vessel numbering system; a cooperative boating safety assistance program with coast Guard; sufficient patrol and other activity to ensure adequate enforcement of applicable state boating safety laws

and regulations; a state boating safety education program that includes the dissemination of information concerning the hazards of operating a vessel under the influence of alcohol or drugs; and a marine casualty reporting system.

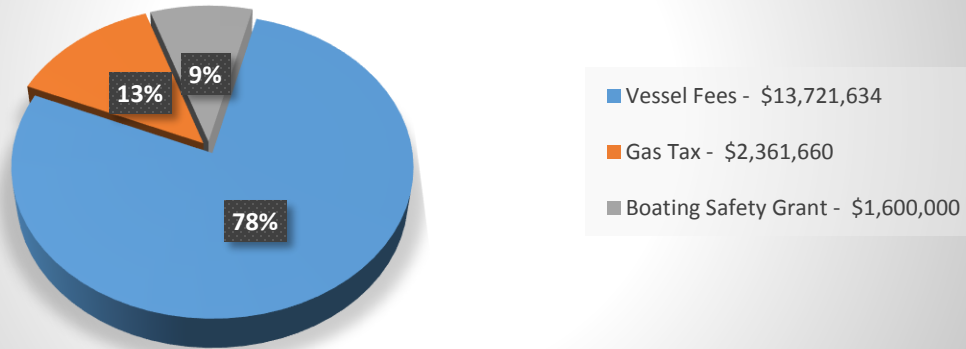
As previously stated, one-third of the funds from the US Coast Guard Recreational Boating Safety Grant is allocated in the same ratio as the amount of the state's prior-year expenditures for boating safety to the total prior-year expenditures for boating safety of all participating states. If NCWRC did not receive the motor fuel tax allocation, it would directly reduce our overall funding for the boating program and decrease the amount of funding NCWRC receives from the US Coast Guard Recreational Boating Safety Grant. The loss of state funding would be compounded by the proportionate reduction in the RBS grant award.

Boating Safety Program Objectives:

- To administer the state boating safety program and to provide services to boaters that will make boating activity safer and more enjoyable for all North Carolinians. To work with members of the North Carolina General Assembly, other state boating agencies and organizations, agencies of the federal government, national boating organizations, and the general boating public to identify recreational boating problems and to identify and take appropriate actions to diminish them.
- To administer the Recreational Boating Safety Grant according to established guidelines and procedures and to use these funds to enhance boating safety efforts in North Carolina.
- To administer the vessel registration and titling program for the State of North Carolina and to improve the level of service provided to the boating public through its expanded customer support system.
- To perform boating safety patrols on all public waters in North Carolina and enforce boating safety laws and regulations. To assist in search & rescue activities and to provide assistance to boaters in distress. To provide necessary equipment and operational funds to support boating law enforcement patrols and search & rescue efforts.
- To encourage safe boat operation by providing boating education courses and training programs, information and educational materials and booklets, promoting and assisting with press releases and public service announcements, and by direct interaction with boaters during equipment safety inspections and other opportunities. A comprehensive media campaign is utilized to make boaters aware of the new boating education law changes as necessary.
- To collect and to report boating accident information and to gather statistical data to identify various causes and contributing factors. This data is made available to the Coast Guard and entered into a Boat Accident Reporting Database.
- To enhance public safety on the water by identifying and marking physical hazards and dangers on the water that may go unnoticed by boat operators. To remove obstacles in or under the water and to open passages closed by silt or low water levels. To conduct routine buoy inspections and replace waterway markers that have moved station or need replacement.

Projected Revenues for Fiscal Year 2015-2016 is \$17,683,294.

FY 2015-16 Boating Fund Projected Revenues

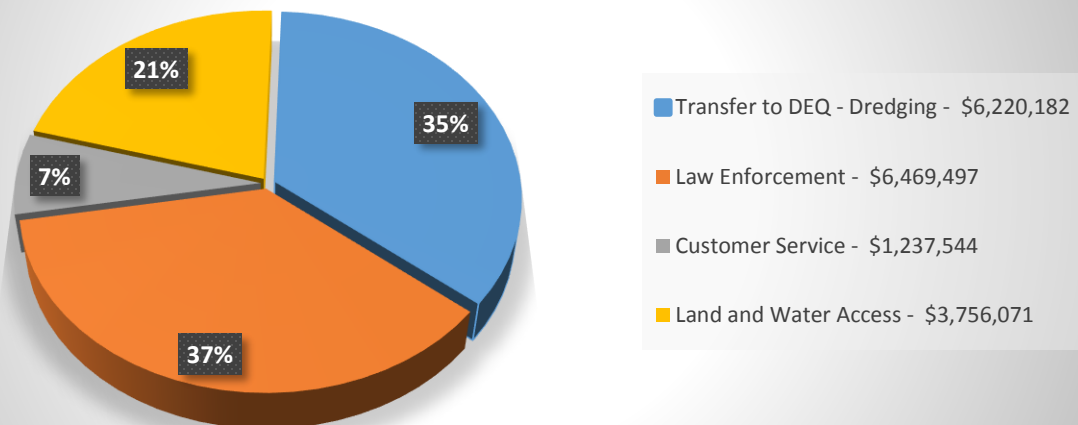


Funding Allocation

Funds from the Boating Safety Account are distributed to the following divisions and sections in support of the Boating Safety Program: Law Enforcement, Land and Water Access Section, and the Customer Service Section. Additionally, NCWRC transfers on a quarterly basis fifty percent (50%) of each one-year certificate of number fee (vessel registrations) and fifty percent (50%) of each three-year certificate of number fee (vessel registrations) collected under the numbering provisions of G.S. 75A-5 to the Shallow Draft Navigation Channel Dredging and Lake Maintenance Fund administered by the NC Department of Environmental Quality established by G.S. 143-215.73F.

Projected Expenditures for Fiscal Years 2015-2016 is \$17,683,294.

FY 2015-16 Boating Fund Projected Expenditures



Program Services

Law Enforcement Division

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's Law Enforcement Division (Division) is charged with enforcing the game, fish, and boating laws of North Carolina as established by the N.C. General Assembly, §113-136. Wildlife Law Enforcement Officers (WLEO) are state law enforcement personnel with arrest authority for state and federal violations. Wildlife Officers enforce the game, fish and boating laws to protect the natural resources of North Carolina and the safety of its citizens.

The foundation of the boating safety program is a visible and effective law enforcement effort. Without boating enforcement patrol, public compliance with safety laws and adherence to safe operating procedures would be reduced. In 2009, NCWRC revised its strategic plan and mission statement in direct alignment with enabling legislation and statutory authorities. The mission statement, "To conserve North Carolina's wildlife resources and their habitats and provide programs and opportunities that allow hunters, anglers, boaters and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy wildlife-associated recreation", directs the NCWRC's daily work. Goal number one in NCWRC's strategic plan is "All North Carolina citizens have the opportunity for safe and readily available participation in hunting, fishing, boating and other wildlife-related activities." This specifically charges NCWRC staff with providing opportunities for participation in a safe boating environment. This charge extends directly to the Law Enforcement Division.

WLEO's enforce the boating, hunting, trapping and inland fishing laws on all lands and waters of the state to protect the resources of the state and the safety of its citizens. Under G.S. 75A, WLEO's are charged with enforcing the boating laws and regulations on all 35,790 sq. miles of water in the state, and up to three miles offshore. WLEO's annually conduct over 2,400 free pre-launch boating safety checks, 327 boating education programs including 243 free boating safety courses, and over 8,000 safety and compliance checks.

Conspicuous patrolling is a fundamental element of accomplishing boating safety performance measures. The majority of NCWRC boats used for boating patrol are marked in a manner that identifies the boat as a law enforcement vessel. In addition, WLEO patrol vehicles are generally marked in a manner to identify the vehicle as a Wildlife Law Enforcement. On the NCWRC boating access areas, a parking space is reserved for WLEO's near the launching ramp. Parking a law enforcement vehicle in this space serves as a visual reminder to the boating public that a wildlife officer is patrolling the waterway. A highly visual presence serves as a deterrent to violations.

For fiscal year 2015 WLEO's spent 43,510 hours on recreational boating safety efforts during the period. The officers spent 32,875 hours on actual water patrol. Of those patrol hours, approximately 3,763 were spent on night patrol when alcohol use and dangers are increased. While on boating patrol, officers inspected 8,006 boats and issued 1,329 citations and 2,725 warnings for unsafe boat operation.

Year	Boats Checked	Citations / Arrests	Warnings	% Violations per Check	Operating while Impaired (OWI) Arrests	OWI per 1000 Check
2005	91,904	6245	9755	17%	470	5.1
2006	86,937	4983	9556	17%	291	3.3
2007	78,594	4895	8695	17%	357	4.5
2008	78,595	3852	7977	15%	256	3.2

2009	81,943	3709	8347	15%	370	4.5
2010	68,741	3248	6900	15%	304	4.4
2011	79,899	3495	8197	15%	313	3.9
2012	64,517	2347	6397	14%	265	4.1
2013	56,057	1753	5369	13%	180	3.2
*2014	19,468	1811	3765	29%	148	7.6
*2015	8,006	1329	2725	50%	108	13.5

*First two years of reasonable suspicion only boat stops.

In addition to on the water enforcement and patrols, the Division implements preventive measures in the form of Pre-launch Boating Safety Checks. The Division has conducted courtesy boating checks as part of boating safety events for several years. The pre-launch boating safety checks are generally held on holidays and weekends to accommodate the public. Each WLEO conducts at least two checks per month from May to August. At least one of these is required to be held on Saturday or Sunday. The checks are to be conducted between 9:00 am and 3:00 pm for a minimum two hour period to take advantage of times when most people launch their boats. It is preferred that the checks be held on NCWRC boating access areas. WLEOs are encouraged to cover all of the access areas in their districts at least once, alternating locations as much as possible. The goal of these checks is to address safety issues before the person launches their boat. These pre-launch checks result in bringing boaters into compliance, promoting safety on the waterways, providing positive interactions with the public, and saving the boating public money by preventing citations for these offenses.

The Division conducts ongoing media campaigns informing people of the mandatory boater education requirements. These campaigns utilize public service announcements, fact sheets, posters, and notification fliers. Circulation for the poster, fact sheet, and flier has exceeded 300,000 pieces with a total expected of 200,000+ over the next year. The Division currently participates in three statewide partnerships that seek to bring about awareness of the dangers of impaired operation of a vessel on our waterways.

- Operation Dry Water is a program with a nationwide emphasis on impaired operation that is held the weekend prior to the Fourth of July holiday period. NCWRC has been a partner in this effort since 2009. In 2015, 585 agencies from across the country participated in this three-day event.
- In 2011, staff from the NCWRC, the North Carolina State Highway Patrol, and North Carolina Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) teamed up to increase safety on and around our waterways. The program was named On the Road, On the Water, Don't Drive and Drink. In 2013, this program was expanded to include the US Army Corp of Engineers, NC State Parks, US Coast Guard, and many local police and sheriff's departments.
- Another partner for Operation Dry Water and On the Road on the Water – Don't Drink and Drive, (and other special boating operations) is the North Carolina Division of Public Health's Forensic Tests for Alcohol Branch. Their Breath Alcohol Testing (BAT) unit plays a role in providing mobile testing of impaired drivers and motorboat operators. These "BAT Mobiles" are marked with an anti-impaired operation message. These units are placed on boating access areas up to two hours prior to these operations to serve as reminder and a deterrent to operators who may operate while impaired.

The following table outlines a ten year history of boating incident rates for North Carolina.

Year	Registered Vessels	Boating Incidents	Fatal Boating Incidents	Incident Rate per 1000 boats
2006	370,291	217	22	.58

2007	371,255	169	20	.45
2008	325,491	157	18	.48
2009	368,004	154	21	.41
2010	314,105	154	23	.49
2011	348,478	142	25	.40
2012	391,711	151	23	.38
2013	386,884	143	17	.36
2014	380,617	130	23	.34
2015	374,823	166	21	.44

To supplement traditional vessel patrols, the Division has three fixed wing aircraft used for law enforcement operations. The aircraft are used for operations that focus on careless and negligent operation of vessels. Aircraft are useful in locating vessels operating without navigational lights at night and locating lost or overdue boaters. WLEOs often use no wake zones as areas to conduct inspections. These zones are typically high traffic areas where officers can maximize contacts in a cost effective manner. Because of the reduced speed of the vessels in these areas, it is also a safer environment for inspections. On inland lakes and barrier islands along the coast, sandbars or beach areas are popular locations for boaters to congregate. These areas generate complaints ranging from impaired operation to underage drinking. WLEOs target these locations because of the volume of boat traffic, boating congestion and the complaints from the public. Personal Watercraft (PWCs) generate numerous complaints from the public for operating too close to other vessels or to fixed structures such as docks. By utilizing aircraft, WLEOs can detect these violations and direct officers on the water to the violators.

General Statute 75A-11(a) specifies that boating incidents must be reported to the NCWRC within ten days of the occurrence under the following circumstances: Loss of life – if there is a loss of life the incident must be reported within 48 hours of the occurrence; a person in a boat loses consciousness or receives medical treatment; is disabled for more than 24 hours; actual physical damage to property (including vessels) is in excess of \$2000.00; or a person disappears from the vessel under circumstances that indicate death or injury.

The state electronically enters boating accident reports using the Boating Accident Report Database (BARD) reporting system. A state statistical report of 2015 boating accidents and causes was prepared and published prior to the National Safe Boating Week. This data is used to evaluate the effectiveness of boating safety programs but also focused attention on the need for safe boat operating practices just prior to the Memorial Day holiday weekend, which is the traditional start of the boating season. 2015 preliminary data indicates 21 fatal boating incidents and 145 non-fatal incidents totaling 166 boating safety incidents.

Education

North Carolina boating safety education law GS 75A-16.2 requires anyone born on or after January 1, 1988 operating a vessel with a motor of 10 HP or greater to complete a National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) approved boating education course. To meet the requirements of law, the NCWRC offers at no cost to the public a NASBLA approved boating education course online and via classroom settings. Boating education courses are designed for 6.0 hours of instruction and are taught by WLEOs, the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the U.S. Power Squadron. A link through the NCWRC web site for on-line boating safety courses and a schedule of planned boating safety courses has been developed and published so that that the public can be directed to the boating education course

nearest to them. NCWRC works with the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power Squadrons, and Boat US in an attempt to ensure that boating education programs are available statewide.

Online courses have become the method of choice for most individuals taking boating education classes. In 2012, over 32,911 or approximately 90% of all students received their boating education through online classes. These courses are self-paced and allow the student to log in and out of the course as many times as needed to complete the requirements. Once a student completes the boating education course, completion certificates are provided and a database containing the names and address of all students successfully completing the state course is maintained for internal regulatory purposes.

A media campaign promoting the Boating Safety education requirement was continued into this year. The NCWRC posts all boating safety related press releases on the web site found at <http://www.ncwildlife.org/Boating.aspx>.

In addition, materials were also purchased to promote boating safety and boating safety classes. These materials were distributed at boat shows, outdoor events, and by officers on patrol. Officers conducted 355 boating safety related programs for public and private groups to promote boating safety awareness. Below are 12 year totals for North Carolina boating education students. The sharp increase in students beginning in 2009 is reflective of the statute change requiring boaters under the age of 26 to successfully complete a boating education course before operating a vessel. Note: As of December 1, 2013 this statute changed to require any person born on or after January 1, 1988 to successfully complete a boating education course before operating a vessel.

Year	Boating Education Students	Year	Boating Education Students
2004	3,889	2010	31,253
2005	3,711	2011	41,379
2006	3,706	2012	35,532
2007	5,008	2013	16,844
2008	4,363	2014	11,599
2009	17,328	2015	20,317

Land and Water Access

NCWRC's Land and Water Access Section (LAWA) manages agency-allocated lands to conserve and/or restore wildlife habitats, and works to provide safe and readily available opportunities for hunting, fishing, boating and other wildlife-associated recreation through the construction, operation and maintenance of the agency's public infrastructure. As supported by the Boating Safety Account, LAWA administers the Boating Access Area Program and the Waterway Marking Program.

Boating Access Areas

NCWRC's boating access area program is nationally recognized and utilizes a network of partnerships to leverage and diversify boating access and opportunity. NCWRC has a team of employees that includes engineers, biologists, and technicians who facilitate recreational and commercial boaters free access 24-hours a day to the state's waterways. NCWRC boating access areas provide vessel launching ramps, and courtesy docks, parking areas, access roads and walkways, security lighting, dock signage, and waterway navigational signs. Our boating programs assure access to our waterways so that all North Carolina residents and visitors can enjoy North Carolina's waterways. In the past four years NCWRC has constructed or renovated approximately 60 boating access sites.

The boating access area program provides quality and safe public access to North Carolina's waterways for constituents and the public at large. G.S. 75A-5 mandates the Commission use at least three dollars (\$3.00) of each one-year certificate of number fee and at least nine dollars (\$9.00) of each three-year certificate of number fee collected under the numbering provisions of G.S. 75A-5 for boating access area acquisition, development, and maintenance. LAWA facilitates the construction, maintenance, and renovation of boating access area facilities statewide. Additionally, LAWA staff proactively identify and coordinate acquisition of land for the purpose of expanding public access opportunities. NCWRC provides access to public waters through the construction and maintenance of Boating Access Areas (BAA). NCWRC partners with over 150 local municipalities to provide 238 free BAA's to 80 different bodies of water. Boating Access Areas on average receive approximately \$700k-\$800k in gas tax revenue per fiscal year (fluctuation dependent on NC fuel consumption). BAA's received \$750,470.00 in gas tax revenue for fiscal year 2015. These funds are used on boating access areas commonly referred to as boat ramps.

In 2008, NCWRC funded a survey of anglers and boaters. The results indicated the chief concern among anglers is the need for improved public boating access areas or additional access areas to inland and coastal waters. NCWRC has made a concentrated effort to address that concern. In 2006, NCWRC conducted a statewide survey to determine the boating access needs of North Carolina's citizens. NCWRC worked with the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries and the N.C. General Assembly on legislation that resulted in increased acquisition and construction of boating and waterfront projects. NCWRC also spearheaded an agreement with the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT) that made it possible for DOT and NCWRC to work together on access areas at bridge crossings throughout the state.

To increase efficiencies NCWRC manages the Wildlife Inmate Services program (WISe) in partnership with N.C. Department of Corrections. WISe is an inmate rehabilitation program that is located at the Dan River Prison Work Farm in Yanceyville, NC. WISe trains inmates to build high quality docks, piers, kiosks, metal signs, and other products before the inmates complete their sentences. NCWRC utilizes inmate labor to manufacture signs and docks are transported and installed at boating and fishing areas statewide. Traditionally, it would take NCWRC staff 2-3 weeks to build on a BAA site. Utilizing inmate labor, NCWRC can manufacture and transport a dock to a BAA site in a fraction of the time previously required. This collaboration allows NCWRC to maintain a standardized brand at all Boating Access Areas while maintaining financial efficiency.

Waterway Marking Program

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) has delegated the statewide navigation authority and responsibility to State of North Carolina through an agreement that designates navigable waters in the State as "State Waters for Private Aids to Navigation." The State is to facilitate, modify, or remove maritime aids to navigation within joint jurisdiction waters. The Waterway Marking Program is administered by LAWA.

NCWRC maintains approximately 1,400 aids to navigation throughout the state. Routine maintenance checks are performed twice a year on all buoys in mid-April and again in mid-October in North Carolina's joint jurisdictional waters. These routine checks determine if each buoy is in the proper position and notes the general condition of each buoy and its associated hardware. Buoy and hardware purchases are made as needed utilizing funds from the Boating Safety Account. Field activities and maintenance are completed by 10 two-man crews working in various locations around the state. These crews are responsible for the placement and maintenance of buoys in public waters. There are also five employees assigned to our coastal boating access construction crew who assist, when needed, with buoy placement and maintenance. During the peak boating season (April through September), nine temporary workers also assist with waterway marking field activities.

In addition to maintenance, NCWRC is obligated year round to investigate potential hazards, missing markers or changes in the channels. These include danger, no wake, and channel marking buoys.

Registration and Titling

NCWRC operates the Vessel Titling & Registration section (Customer Service Section) which links boat registration and license agents in a statewide communications network with point of sale capabilities. With this system, boat registration services are available immediately at agent locations and mail service response times runs less than one week. Automated telephone renewals further benefit the boating public by offering instant boat registration renewals. On-line boat renewals through the agency's website are also provided and have been increasingly utilized by the public. These improvements in boat registration and titling services are needed and utilized by the public.

NCWRC offers boat registration services through its customer support system, which is supported and facilitated by the Information Technology Section (IT). The Internet based vessel registration system named "ALVIN" is maintained and operated by the Information Technology Division. ALVIN has the advantage of being 'real time', 24 hours a day, with computer based and directed vessel registration, titling, and renewal functions. The implementation of this system has made titling and registration streamlined, effective, and up to date. IT staff provides the software, servers, and support and maintenance tools the Customer Service Section. As a result, the NCWRC web site and the ALVIN application are available 24/7. The ALVIN system links boat registration and license agents in a communications network. IT also provides support for private business owners who are license/vessel agents. This multi-million dollar program allows the public to instantly obtain state-provided services at approximately 500 local businesses across the state. Boat registrations are processed and certificates of number and validation decals electronically printed on site. This system results in a faster and more efficient registration process for the public and reduces personnel costs.

In order to stay current with technology and customer expectations, NCWRC's Customer Service Section must, in order to stay current with technology and customer expectations, continue to maintain modern methods of communication and business transactions. The list below outlines a series of objectives and program areas the Customer Service Section facilitated in 2015. Funds from the Boating Safety Account were used toward development, implementation, and maintenance of the following programs.

- ALVIN is maintained and operated by the Information Technology Section. ALVIN has the advantage of being 'real time', 24 hours a day, with computer based and directed vessel registration, titling, and renewal functions. The implementation of this new system has made titling and registration streamlined, effective, and up to date. NCWRC staff have been trained in the new system with ongoing training statewide for new registration agents.
- NCWRC current online vessel registration renewal process requires less maintenance in order to function at acceptable levels. Ongoing enhancements and system support are still necessary to provide users a suitable and efficient renewal experience. Continuous monitoring, reprogramming, software updates, and maintenance is performed in order for the online vessel registration system to operate efficiently.
- The Customer Services Section implemented a digital imaging, filing, and retrieval system. Records, including boat registration and titling information, are stored electronically on a regular basis to optimize data management. Digital imaging is the preferred method of document tracking and storage. Documents electronically stored are permanently accessible. This has reduced the

costs of storing paper documents, make files readily accessible, and allows NCWRC to maintain files for an indefinite period.

- The NCWRC web site continues to be a viable tool to educate customers about vessel registration/titling and boating safety. The current site allows for boating safety students to obtain information and register for classes on-line. The current year's boating accident report is also maintained on the site.
- The Vessel Owner's and Operator's Guide is reprinted as necessary. In 2015, 15,000 copies of the Owners Guide and 100,000 of the operators guide were printed. These are also posted and maintained on the agency web site at <http://www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/BoatersGuides.aspx>.

Consequences of Discontinued or Altered Funding

The NCWRC Boating Safety Program provides the citizens of North Carolina a comprehensive set of services to enhance the enjoyment and safety of recreational boating. If funding for the Boating Safety Account were reduced or discontinued, the NCWRC's ability to provide these services would be less effective and efficient, and, ultimately, North Carolina's 374,823 vessel owners will experience a reduction in overall program performance and quality. In addition, this could result in an increase of boating incidents and fatalities. The impacts of reduced or discontinued funding would affect all three major program areas.

Law Enforcement Division:

A reduction or discontinuation of funding for the Boating Safety Account would directly affect the ability of the Law Enforcement Division to fund staff time as well as fuel, oil, and general maintenance for boats that are used to provide public safety services such as improving boating law compliance, assisting the public with medical emergencies, assisting stranded, lost, or overdue boaters, and assistance with other occurrences that only officers on the water can provide. This would also significantly affect the ability of WLEOs to respond quickly to boating accidents or search and rescue operations as well as the NCWRC's ability to meet federal boating accident reporting guidelines, specifically the ability to submit reports within the required 30 days.

The federal recreational boating safety grant and matching gas tax funds are used to purchase many of the patrol boats. If funding were reduced or discontinued, equipment functionality and safety may be reduced due to longer replacement intervals. The current replacement interval for boats is approximately 10 years. An increase in replacement intervals would increase the probability of mechanical breakdowns and equipment safety issues, as well as creating general appearance issues.

Reduced or discontinued funding would also affect the Law Enforcement Division's popular prelaunch safety check program that began in 2012. NCWRC provides over 2,400 prelaunch safety/compliance checks each year to the public. This program saves the public from hundreds of violations before the boater ever reaches the water. These prelaunch compliance checks may be reduced or eliminated to provide other necessary functions if funding is reduced.

Additionally, education efforts, including those required by GS 75A-16.2, would be affected by a reduction or discontinuation of funding. A change in funding would require NCWRC to shift resources away from providing classroom boater safety courses and move to the online training exclusively. Media campaigns for informing the public about boater safety, such as Operation Dry Water, and distribution of boating information publications, such as the NC Vessel Operator Guide, may be reduced to save costs.

These reduction could impact safe boating in a negative manner due to boaters being less prepared and educated.

Land and Water Access:

A reduction or discontinuation of funding would impact the NCWRC's ability to construct new boating access areas (BAA) and maintain existing ramps. NCWRC would shift work activities for those staff currently working on BAA construction and maintenance to other duties. This would result in less frequent maintenance of BAAs and a decrease in customer satisfaction.

Additionally, a reduction or discontinuation of funding would impact NCWRC's ability to fulfill the state's requirement with the U.S. Coast Guard under the "State Waters for Private Aids to Navigation." Staff that maintain and monitor the approximately 1,400 aids to navigation would be re-tasked to other duties. This would result in less frequent monitoring of buoys and markers and could increase the probability of accidents.

Registration & Titling:

A reduction or discontinuation of funding from the Boating Safety Account, would require the NCWRC to minimize staff dedicated to registration and titling. This would adversely impact NCWRC's ability to efficiently process 150,000 new and renewal vessel registrations on an annual basis. It would also impact our ability to record liens on vessels in a timely manner. 15A NCAC 10F .0102 requires the registration/title process be complete within 60 days of application.

Vessel owners need and expect a quick turnaround period when registering their vessels. A minimization of staff dedicated to registration and titling would increase hold times for the approximately 85,000 customers who contact NCWRC annually as well as increase the probability of delayed vessel transactions. It is also likely NCWRC would have to reduce the number of Vessel Operator's Guides produced annually. This publication which outlines boating regulations in North Carolina is currently provided to new vessel owners free of charge. If a funding decrease is realized the customer service experience for new and existing vessel owners would be adversely impacted.

Without the \$350,000 in vessel fees that IT receives from the Boating Safety Account, staff support for the vessel transaction process portion of the ALVIN system would be limited. As issues with collecting money from agents or completing vessel transactions arose, they would not be resolved in a timely manner.

The ALVIN system that is used for vessel registration and titling is the same software application that NCWRC uses for other licenses and permits, including issuing hunting and fishing licenses. Without this funding, the ALVIN system would not be able to be adequately maintained and could result in the failure of the system. NCWRC would likely have to find an alternative funding source or pass on funding for a third party solution to our customers.

NCWRC is committed to a pathway of financial self-sufficiency and a user pay model. Over the past 6 years, NCWRC has decreased its General Fund reliance 55%. NCWRC has adapted to these changes through a combination of realized operational efficiencies and increased receipts. NCWRC uses the revenue generated in the Boating Safety Account for the enforcement, boating access and waterway marking, and administrative support of the Boating Safety Program. If funding for the Boating Safety Account were discontinued or shifted to receipts currently received by NCWRC, it would significantly delay the ability of NCWRC to achieve fiscal autonomy from the General Fund.

Recommendations

- **Maintain current administrative, regulatory and budgetary authority of the Boating Safety Account and the programs it supports within NCWRC.**

Transferring the Boating Safety Account and related duties to the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) or elsewhere in the Department of Transportation is not recommended. NCWRC provides the citizens of North Carolina an efficient and effective set of services to enhance the enjoyment and safety of recreational boating. There is significant concern if the Boating Safety Account is transferred, the performance of the NCWRC's Boating Safety Program will diminish. NCWRC provides efficient and effective boating safety services and opportunities to the public. Each of the provided services is specific to NCWRC. No other state agency currently has the operating capability to administer and regulate boating safety services as required by state and federal law.

Currently, NCWRC utilizes a network of approximately 400 vessel agents to provide registration and/or titling needs of its customers. DMV is authorized to allow offices that provide vehicle titling and registration services and commission contractors under G.S. 20-63 to serve, upon agreement with the Wildlife Resources Commission, as vessel agents under G.S. 75A-5.2. A transfer of registration and titling services to DMV would decrease the number of locations available to the boating public, approximately 125 DMV office locations. Transferring these responsibilities to DMV would also require a substantial amount of funding and development to create a software application specifically capable of administering these services. Additionally, a transfer would impact documentation of applications, the database of customer information, and processes around the vessel registration and titling process while converting data to a new systems.

Furthermore, the NCWRC vessel registration system "ALVIN" is maintained and operated by staff. ALVIN is used for both vessel registration and license and permit sales. Some portions of the system are specific to vessel, but others (such as payment and shopping cart options, agent accounts and logins, etc.) are shared by license and vessel. There would be a financial impact to the NCWRC due to decreased economies of scale in losing about 20% of the transactions processed by ALVIN each year. The agency cost per transaction for licenses and permits would increase. In addition, NCWRC staff maintain ALVIN and NCWRC staff enforce boating laws, there are often changes to the system to accommodate specific requests from WLEO's. This would become an administrative challenge if NCWRC enforcement is relying on a system over which NCWRC has no control.

- **Maintain current allocated state funding levels for the Boating Safety Account.**

NCWRC is dedicated to providing and increasing safe and readily available boating opportunities in all North Carolina waterways. To continue to provide boating safety enforcement and recreational boating opportunities in North Carolina, NCWRC recommends the current state funded allocation levels to remain in place. Each program funded from the Boating Safety Account has the potential to be negatively impacted if funding is discontinued or reduced. Because of the leveraged funding model, the financial consequences to the citizens of North Carolina could far exceed non-receipt generated revenue. As of June 29th, 2015 the RBS Grant to North Carolina totaled \$1,549,425.80 which was matched 1:1 with state funds allocated from the Boating Safety Account. If the Boating Safety Account allocation is reduced or discontinued the state risks reversion

of RBS Grant dollars back to the federal government and, potentially, to be reallocated to other states. In addition, North Carolina would receive less federal money due to the calculation the US Coast Guard uses to allocate RBS Grant dollars.

Furthermore, a reduction in funding would have the potential to reduce NCWRC staff and Boating Safety Program efficiencies. The significance of the Boating Safety Program including performance objectives, will decrease in efficient productivity. Discontinued funding would reduce safe and readily accessible boating opportunities for millions of North Carolina's recreational boaters and vessel owners. Continued receipt of federal funds is contingent on specific criteria that must be met at the state level.

NCWRC is dedicated to providing and increasing safe and readily available boating opportunities in all North Carolina waterways. To improve and increase recreational boating opportunities in North Carolina, effective and productive partnerships have been formed among boating agencies, organizations, stakeholders, and local communities. These partnerships include boaters themselves, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) and multiple state and local government entities. In addition to partnerships, NCWRC provides multiple services needed to accommodate North Carolina's recreational boaters. These service areas include: development of boating regulations and safety laws, a law enforcement presence, assistance and response in emergency situations, education and safety instruction, access to public waters of the state, identifying and marking boating hazards and boat registration and titling services.