



**LIBRARIES**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON

## **Charting a new course: boating in the 1990s and beyond. [Supplement, Vol. 15, No. 3] [June 1991]**

Mecozzi, Maureen; Neeb, Bruce

[Madison, Wisconsin]: Wisconsin Department of Natural  
Resources, [June 1991]

<https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/WDI475V4RNI5J9D>

<http://rightsstatements.org/vocab/InC/1.0>

The libraries provide public access to a wide range of material, including online exhibits, digitized collections, archival finding aids, our catalog, online articles, and a growing range of materials in many media.

When possible, we provide rights information in catalog records, finding aids, and other metadata that accompanies collections or items. However, it is always the user's obligation to evaluate copyright and rights issues in light of their own use.



*Boating in the 1990's*

# CHARTING A NEW COURSE





# ATTENTION

## WATERS IN CONFLICT



With 9,561 miles of rivers and 1.1 million acres of water in nearly 15,000 lakes, it seems incredible that boaters could collide on Wisconsin's waters, let alone see another watercraft during an excursion. Add 6,439,700 acres of Great Lakes waters and 94,669 acres of the Mississippi River claimed by the Badger State and the possibility of an accident becomes even more remote.

Yet an average of 200 boating accidents occur on Wisconsin waters each year. With so much room to roam, why can't people avoid becoming boating statistics?

It's simple: More people are on the water, and increasingly, more of them aren't in what we

traditionally think of as "boats."

Our notion of water recreation changed over the past 20 years. Jet-Skis and wave riders, sailboards and kayaks now are as familiar as that former stalwart of Wisconsin waters, the flat-bottomed wooden rowboat. Boats haven't been forsaken for these popular water toys, however. Registration is at an all-time high, and it's likely a boat registered today comes equipped not with oars, but with a motor whose horsepower equals a decade of Kentucky Derbies.

More people, more and faster boats, more specialized watercraft and the same amount of water: It's a dangerous, sometimes deadly combination,

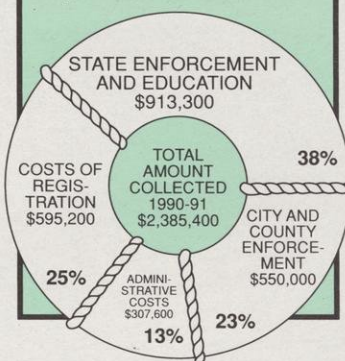
especially when people ignore or are ignorant of water safety rules and etiquette. While water users jockey for space at overcrowded boat landings, communities grapple with shoreline degradation and consider limiting access to lakes and rivers.

In the following pages, you'll read about some of the safety and access issues facing Wisconsin boaters. Whether we can enjoy our waters safely, without damaging the environment or interfering with the pleasure of other users, is a question worth pondering. Because as long as there's water, you can bet there will be people in it, on it and around it.

### HOW BOAT REGISTRATION MONEY IS SPENT



Boat registration fees fund safety courses, cover administrative costs for Wisconsin's boating program, and help pay salaries of state and local water patrols.



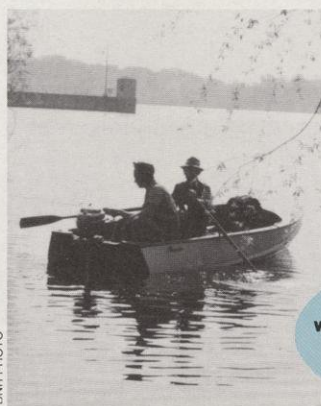
## READY OAR NOT HERE THEY COME



When a multitude of watercraft converge on one famous water, the results send a ripple through lakes and rivers statewide.

Sailboats in a regatta breeze past clusters of triple-decker yachts tied up for cocktails while water-skiers cross tow ropes, speedboats churn deep wakes, swimmers lounge on rubber rafts, kayakers practice Eskimo rolls, anglers curse the one that got away and jet-skiers buzz 'round and 'round like so many motorized gnats.

It's just another Saturday morning in paradise on Lake Geneva, southeastern Wisconsin's most popular inland water.



DNR PHOTO

Just a short drive from Milwaukee and Chicago, the 5,262-acre lake magnifies the conflicts that occur on waters everywhere when people in different kinds of watercraft want to use the same lake at the same time.

Quiet hours on the water. When boaters beef up the horsepower, silence becomes a thing of the past.



DNR PHOTO

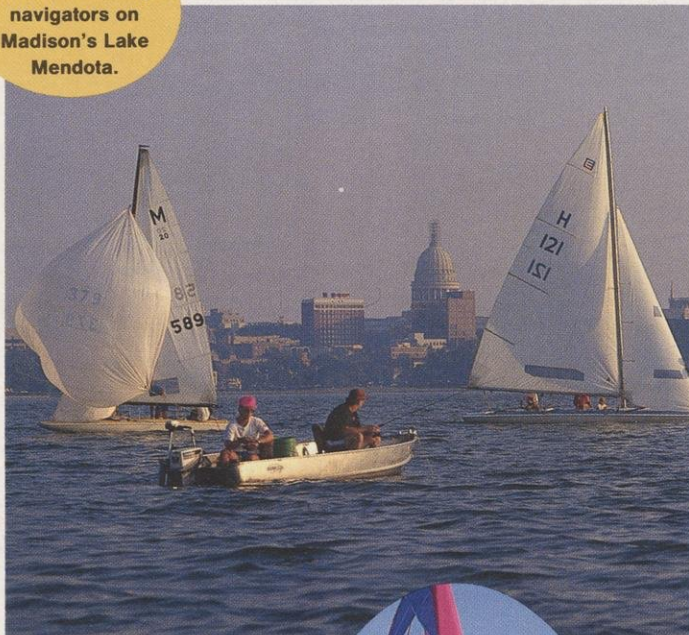
Personal watercraft made a big splash in accident statistic records.

"I'd say there are at least 5,000 boats and other watercraft anchored, moored or in use on Lake Geneva on any given summer weekend," says Bob Bramer, a DNR warden who's patrolled the lake for 18 years. "When you've got that many people on or around the water, there's bound to be difficulty."

Safety experts generally agree that one boat for every 10 acres of water is a reasonable



**C**lose quarters challenge navigators on Madison's Lake Mendota.



DNR PHOTO  
ROBERT O'LEEN

"carrying capacity." On a busy summer weekend, Lake Geneva may have one boat per acre.

Rick Wolff, law enforcement safety specialist in DNR's Southeast District, observes that the greatest number of conflicts arise when anglers and canoeists out for a quiet morning attempt to share the water with powerboaters and water-skiers looking for some rip-roaring fun: "You've got these 'cigarette boats' — sleek, 17 to 30 feet long, two big engines, capable of doing 70 mph plus — and they churn up the waves so fast the anglers are rocked off the lake by 9 a.m."

Wolff says a majority of skippers have more power than they can handle safely. The statistics support his view. Boat registrations increased from about 310,000 in 1970 to 498,000 in 1990. During that same time period, the average boat horsepower in the state jumped from nine hp to 55 hp, and boating violations rose from 1,000 to more than 5,000 per year.



ROBERT O'LEEN

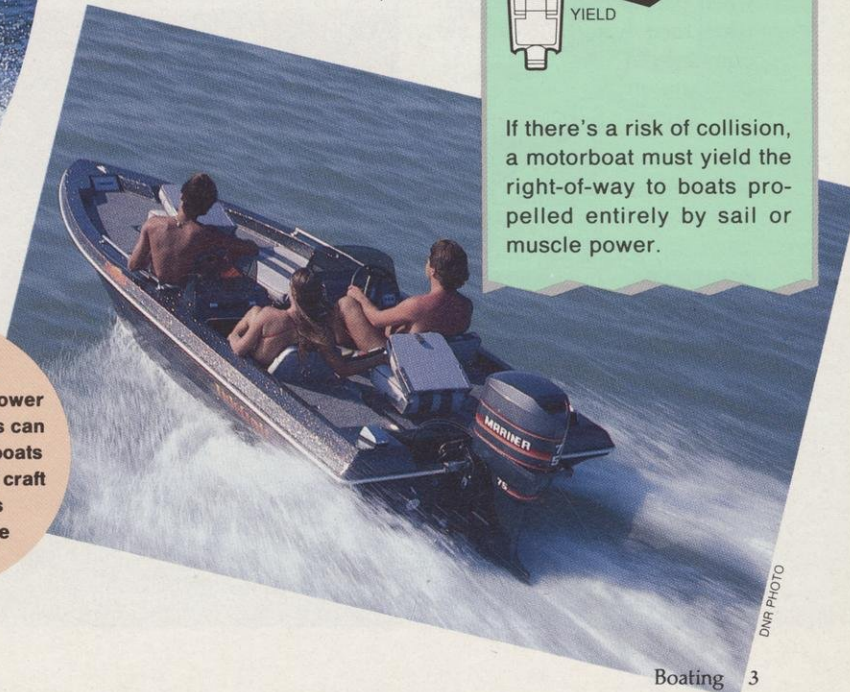
**S**peedboats have more horsepower than ever. Conflicts can arise when motorboats and wind-powered craft like sailboards cruise the same lake.

## SNOWMOBILES ON WATER

"Personal watercraft" (PWC) — the all-purpose name for wave runners, wave riders, Jet-Skis and water scooters — are the most recent entry in Lake Geneva's weekend water circus. "It's not uncommon to see a good 400 or so zipping around on a holiday weekend," says Wolff. "Depending on the kind of PWC, the driver sits on it like a bicycle, kneels or stands. They reach speeds up to 40 mph."

Personal watercraft users typically enjoy jumping across wakes and will follow close behind speedboats to catch a wave. The consequences of tailgating on the water are no different than on the highway.

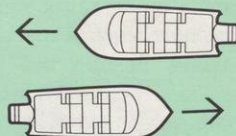
Since PWC's arrived on the boating scene about 10 years ago, they've leapt to the lead in accident rates statewide. Rented PWC's, the minority of the craft used on Wisconsin waters, ac-



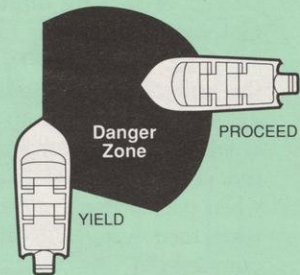
DNR PHOTO

## The right-of-way

When two motorboats approach each other head on, each boat should bear to the right and pass the other boat on its left side to avoid a collision.



When two motorboats approach each other obliquely or at right angles, the boat which has the other on its right side shall yield the right-of-way to the other.



If there's a risk of collision, a motorboat must yield the right-of-way to boats propelled entirely by sail or muscle power.





count for the high number of collisions.

"Most rental agents give some elementary training in PWC operation," says Bramer, "but it's only a brief introduction. Basically, you learn how to turn it on and steer."

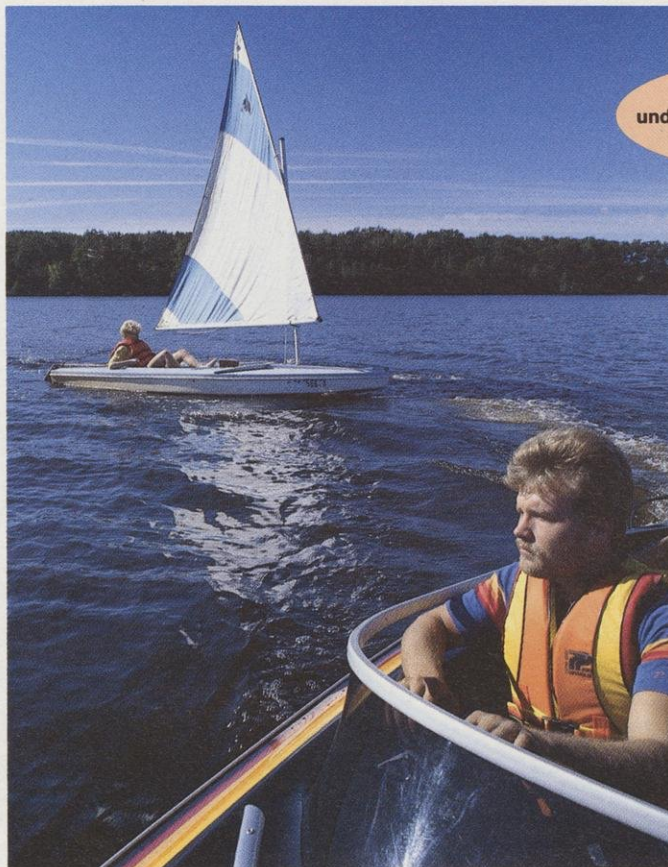
PWC's are not equipped with safety features like belts or mirrors, nor are riders required to wear helmets. Rental agents are not required to offer training, but their customers must observe the age restrictions for operating any motorized watercraft.

There's more to piloting a PWC or motorboat than knowing where to put the key. Guiding a canoe, kayak, sailboard or sailboat requires special skills as well. "Besides not knowing general boating rules and the regulations specific to Lake Geneva, we see a lot of people who lack a solid understanding of what their watercraft is capable of," says Wolff. "A sailboarder might drift out into the path of an oncoming motorboat and not be able to maneuver the board out of the way. Instead of slowing down, the motorboater opens the throttle and makes a sharp turn to avoid the sailboarder. The resulting deep wakes swamp the sailboarder and nearby canoeists. Things like this happen when people don't understand what their watercraft can and cannot do."



### Red flag

The **diver's flag** lets boaters on the surface know someone's down below. Boaters and water skiers should stay at least 100 feet away from the flag. Divers should take care to rise to the surface within 50 feet of the flag.



DNR PHOTO

**Safe boaters**  
understand and follow the water right-of-way.

says Bramer. Large, long, and relatively straight with few hidden bays, Lake Geneva offers enough wide-open space to accommodate a variety of water recreation.

Traffic congestion on Lake Geneva — the only Wisconsin lake with a stop-and-go light — is rivalled by congestion in Lake Geneva, the city on the northern shore. Boaters line up at busy launches, often backing up road traffic as motorists passing through the city on Highway 120 can attest. A limited number of parking spots for cars and trailers compounds the problem.

User conflicts on and off the water are as much a matter of timing as ignorance and stubbornness. "I think Lake Geneva is under-used on weekdays," says Bramer.

"You wonder how much people can tolerate, here or on any other lake," Wolff says. "If everybody wants to be on the same lake at once, they've got to adapt and learn how to share the water."

### TAKING TURNS

Some Lake Geneva users try to avoid conflict by scheduling events for times of day with the least amount of traffic. The lake's sailboating clubs usually hold regattas early in the morning, when winds tend to be

higher and fewer people are out on the water.

Although formal hours for specific activities — water-skiing, for instance — have been set on some lakes, Lake Geneva has no established user restrictions. "That's probably due in part to the lake's configuration,"



ROBERT QUEEN

**Two law enforcement units and two safety groups make Wisconsin waters safer. Clockwise from top right: Trygve Thoresen, U.S. Power Squadron; Hugo Tiedt, U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary; David Branley, Dane County Sheriff's Department; Tim Lawhern DNR Conservation Warden.**





# IN THE DRINK?

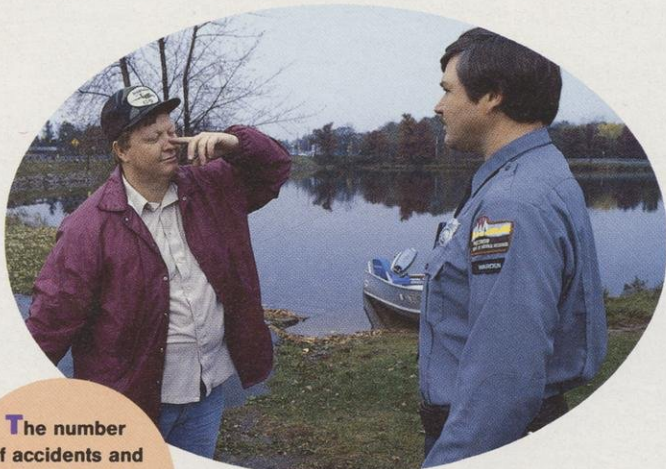
Do yourself and other boaters a favor: Stay off the water.

**I**n 1987, something happened that made Wisconsin waterways more dangerous. A law was passed boosting the penalties for driving drunk on Wisconsin's roads. Like suds from a beer mug, intoxicated operators began sloshing out onto lakes and rivers.

For many, the waterways provided a final frontier, a place where you could still enjoy a few drinks while operating a

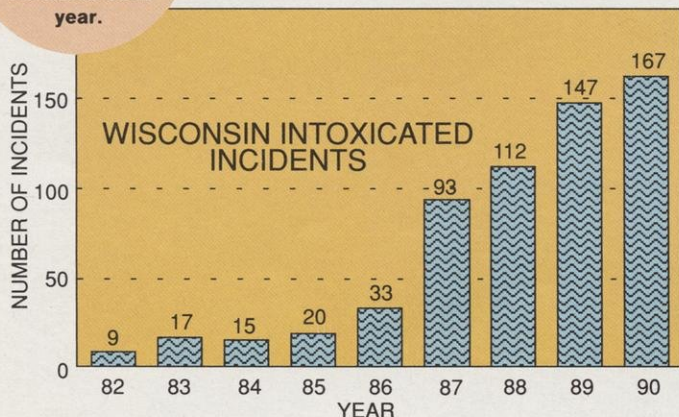
vehicle. It's a story law enforcement officers still hear when they talk with boaters they've arrested: "There's so much water, such a big, open area — I never thought anything would happen!" Page after page of Operator Boating Accident Reports tell the story differently:

*August 3, 1986 — a Downers Grove, Ill. man, legally in-*



**T**he number of accidents and incidents involving intoxicated boaters increases each year.

**P**ointing the finger at drunk boaters: Don't imbibe when you drive a boat or a car!

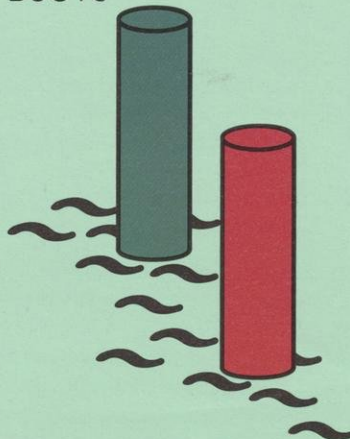


**DON'T FORGET**

## Waterway markers

Signs, buoys, lights and other waterway markers help boaters safely navigate unknown waters.

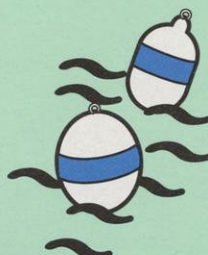
### CHANNEL MARKER BUOYS



**All-green and all-red companion buoys** indicate that the boating channel is in-between the buoys. In flowing water, such as rivers, keep the red buoy on the right side of the boat when traveling upstream.



**White buoys with black vertical stripes** show the center of the channel. Pass close to this buoy on either side.



**Boat-mooring buoys** are white with a single blue stripe between the top and the water line.

### REGULATORY BUOYS AND SIGNS

**A white buoy or sign with an orange diamond and cross** means boats must stay away from the area. The reason for the restriction is printed on the buoy in black letters.



**A white buoy or sign with an orange diamond** warns boaters of danger — rocks, dams, rapids, etc. The source of danger is lettered in black.



**A white buoy or sign with an orange circle** indicates controlled areas on the water, such as slow or minimum wake zones. The rules are printed in black.

**A white buoy or sign with an orange rectangle** gives boaters information or directions. The information is printed in black.

Buoy and PFD illustrations by Jeanne Gomoll.





## Know your PFD

Personal flotation devices can save your life in an accident. Keep them in good condition! In a boat under 16 feet in length, you'll need one Type I-V PFD for every passenger on board. In a boat over 16 feet, you'll need one Type I-II-III or V PFD for every passenger, plus at least one Type IV PFD (ring buoy or buoyant cushion.)



### TYPE I

#### Life preserver:

A jacket designed to turn an unconscious person's face up in the water.



### TYPE II

#### Buoyant vest:

A "horse collar" worn around the neck like a bib.

### TYPE III

#### Special purpose devices:

This type includes ski vests, anglers' vests, float coats.



### TYPE IV

#### Buoyant cushion, ring buoy:

Safety devices designed to be thrown, not worn.

### TYPE V

#### Special use device:

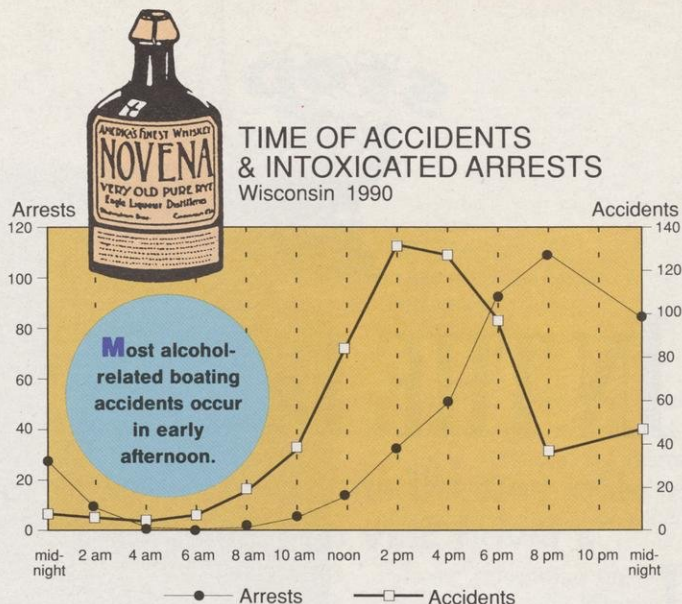
Approved by the U.S. Coast Guard for specific uses only, such as sailboarding and rafting.

intoxicated, takes his hands off the wheel of his 20-foot motorboat while traveling at a high speed across Lake Geneva. Thrown from the boat, he was killed after being struck by the boat's propeller.

June 11, 1989 — A Zion, Ill. fisherman slides over the side of his boat into Lake Koshkonong during a night of fishing and drinking. Jefferson County divers recovered his body six hours later.

June 23, 1990 — a Cottage Grove woman, windsurfing on Madison's Lake Mendota, dies after being run down by a 19-foot pleasure craft. The boat's operator, a woman in her late 20's, had a blood alcohol level 1.6 times the legal limit.

To stem the rising tide of drunk boaters, Wisconsin follows a strict OWI "operating while intoxicated" enforcement program. Unlike OWI laws for motorists, which penalize drivers only if their blood alcohol level reaches or surpasses .10, a boating OWI



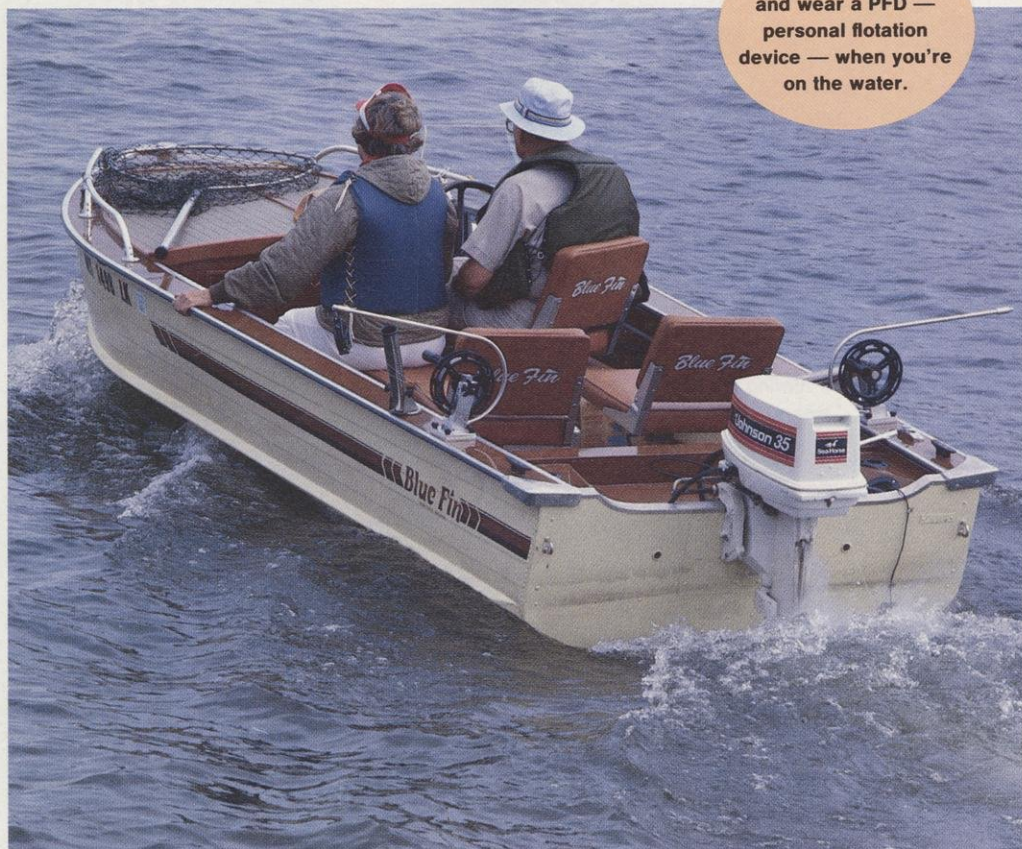
means you can face charges anytime you're slightly impaired.

Under the 1986 implied consent law, boaters asked to submit to a blood alcohol test by an enforcement officer must do so or face arrest. If an officer can demonstrate in court that alcohol impaired your ability to pilot the boat, you've set yourself up for a \$331 forfeiture, mandatory attendance at a boating safety class and mandatory alcohol counseling

carrying hundreds of dollars in associated costs. The future may bring more: In a public opinion survey conducted by DNR in 1990, 76.6 percent of the people queried favored suspending boat operator privileges for OWI.

Despite the penalties, alcohol continues to be a factor in about 42 percent of boating fatalities in the state. Clearly, it's best to save the cocktails for an extended shore leave.

**Drive carefully and wear a PFD — personal flotation device — when you're on the water.**







# LEARNING AND REMEMBERING THE ROPES

**PLAY  
SAFE**



## First class

There's no need to wait for the law to catch up with your needs: Take a boating safety class voluntarily and you'll feel more comfortable and more in control when you're on the water.

Boating classes offered by the DNR, the U.S. Power Squadron, the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary and other organizations give students a thorough grounding in proper boat handling techniques, traffic rules, waterway markers and weather signs. You'll also find out what you need to safely equip a boat and passengers.

Experienced boaters benefit from the classes, too — many who thought they knew it all found that a good safety course filled important gaps in their boating knowledge.

Wardens at DNR district and area offices keep a list of people interested in enrolling in boating safety courses. They'll be happy to give you the times and dates of the nearest class.

Safety classes keep boating skills sharp.

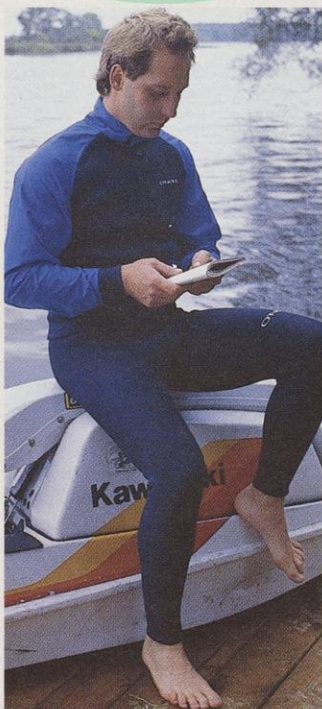
**M**ake no mistake about it — higher boat registration fees and mandatory boating safety testing and education are the wave of the future.

"About 5,000 people take boating safety classes each year," says Bob Tucker, a law enforcement safety specialist in DNR's North Central District. "It's a proven fact that those people have markedly fewer accidents than people who have not taken a class."

That stellar record led lawmakers and regulators to propose stricter safety regulations, such as requiring boating safety education classes for all people born after a certain date. Mandatory safety tests for all who operate boats of a certain size and horsepower could become law well before the decade ends; those who fail the test would have to enroll in a boating safety class.

To pay for safety classes and more boat patrols, expect to see

**Study your  
watercraft operating manual  
on shore for safe handling  
on the water.**



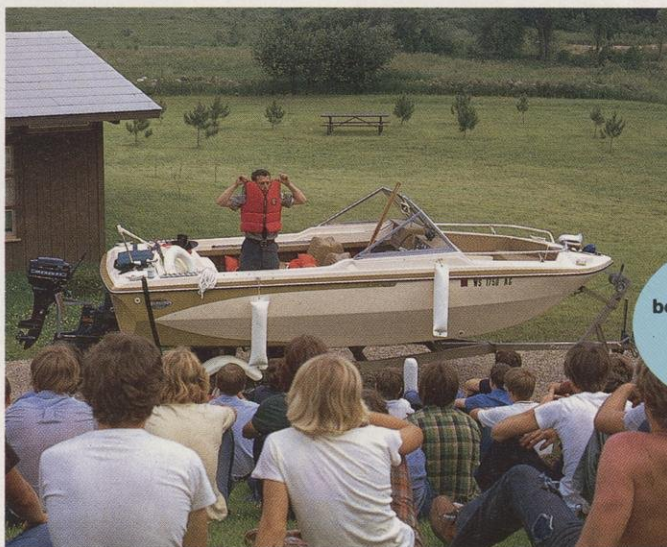
DNR PHOTO

a hike in the boat registration fee. Wisconsin's current fees range from \$6.50 to \$12.50 every two years, depending on the size of the boat. Some lawmakers have proposed doubling the fee for the big boats. Wisconsin's fees would still be a bargain at twice the price: Registering a 40-footer here might cost \$25 for two years, compared to nearly \$450 in Michigan. Sailboards, canoes and other watercraft now exempt from registration might also be charged a small fee.

Boaters themselves have asked for more safety instruction. About 70 percent of Wisconsin boaters surveyed in 1990 said they would favor using boating gas tax money to fund more safety education, and the same percentage felt personal watercraft operators should be required to take a boating safety course.



Pick up a copy of **Wisconsin's boating regulations** at any DNR district or area office, or write Boating Safety, Bureau of Law Enforcement, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707.



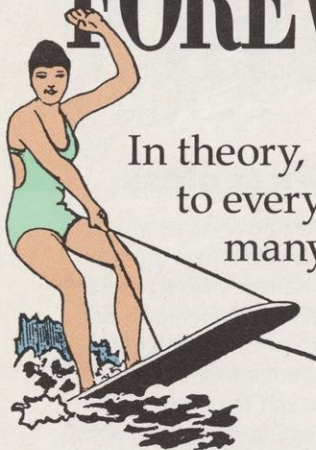
BOB TUCKER

**Statistics show  
boaters who take safety  
courses have fewer  
accidents. Enroll  
today!**





# FOREVER FREE?



In theory, lakes and rivers belong to everyone. In practice, many boaters may be denied their water rights.

**N**ational lawmakers drafting the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 recognized that lakes and rivers — the inland highways of a new country — should remain free and open to all people. Framers of the 1848 Wisconsin State Constitution echoed this idea, establishing free public use of the state's navigable waters.

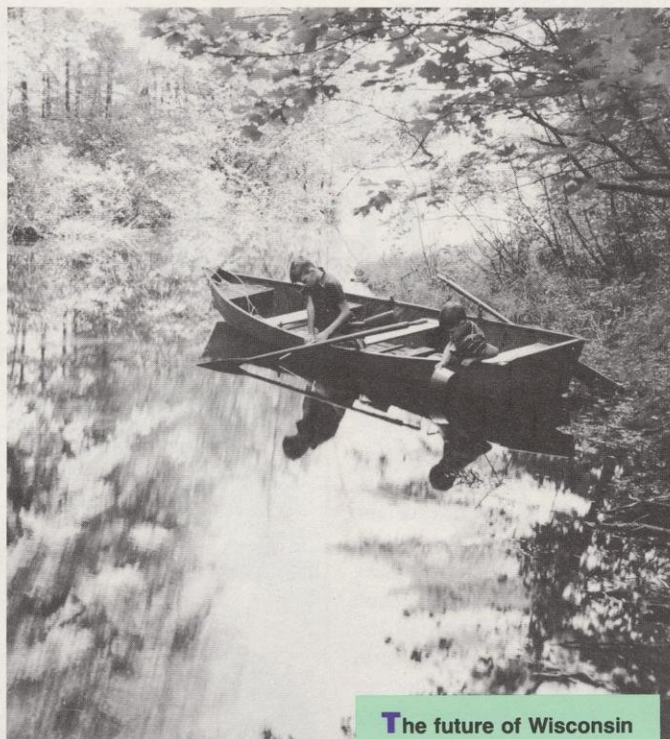
Seven score and three years later, the public has been left without good access to hundreds of Wisconsin's lakes and rivers.

Part of the problem can be found in local zoning ordi-

nances, which favor lake property owners over occasional users. But the high cost of acquiring land and constructing modern public boat launches has prevented more people from using their lakes and rivers than any township law.

In the coming years, the Department of Natural Resources plans to provide more and better lake and river access to the 1.3 million people who enjoy Wisconsin waters each year. Remote or environmentally sensitive lakes might be slated for walk-in or other low-impact access, while launches at bigger lakes and rivers would offer plenty of parking spaces and rest rooms.

The effort to open our lakes



DNR PHOTO

**T**he future of Wisconsin waters will be determined in the next decade by everyone who uses lakes and rivers in the state. Together we can make our waters safe and enjoyable for generations to come. Take part in discussions about boating issues when they arise where you live or recreate.

and rivers won't be cheap, and it's going to take cooperation from local governments, shoreline property owners and boaters. Take part when discussions about boating access arise where you live or recreate. And remember: By law, every citizen has a right to enjoy Wisconsin's waters.

**GOING STRONG**

**W**isconsin has plenty of water — share it sensibly.

PUBL-LE-303

© 1991, Wisconsin Natural Resources, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Produced by the DNR Bureau of Law Enforcement

Written by Maureen Mecozzi and Bruce Neeb

Cover photo: Locks on the Fox River, DNR Archive



ROBERT QUEEN