

**Division of Boating and Waterways**  
**August 2024**

**REPORT:** Boating Education and Outreach, Interpretation and Education Division

**PRESENTER:** Melissa Miranda, Boating Education and Outreach Manager

**SUBJECT:** Boating Education and Outreach Unit

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**Program Overview:**

State Parks provides essential education and outreach on boating safety and boating law. The Boating Education and Outreach Unit works closely with boating safety partner organizations throughout California to provide consistent statewide messaging to both youth and adults.

Due to the 2018 Transformation within State Parks, the Boating Education and Outreach Unit was transferred out of the Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) and into the Interpretation and Education Division. This transition has proved to be mutually beneficial for both divisions. Funding for these programs remains in the Harbors and Watercraft Revolving Fund.

Program areas include:

- *California Boater Card (CBC).* Implement and maintain the legally mandated CBC program that requires operators of motorized vessels to obtain a CBC.  
[californiaboatercard.com](http://californiaboatercard.com)
- *Boating Safety Courses.* Review boating safety courses from outside vendors for state compliance and maintain a listing of approved courses for the CBC. Administer the DBW home study course through maintaining National Association of State Boating Law Administrators NASBLA and state compliance; distribute course books; grade exams and mail certificates to successful test takers.  
[californiaboatercard.com/course](http://californiaboatercard.com/course)
- *Youth Education.* Provide free educational curriculum and supplemental resources to meet the California Education Code requirement to provide elementary age education to California students on boating and water safety.  
[dbw.parks.ca.gov/AquaSmart](http://dbw.parks.ca.gov/AquaSmart)
- *Outreach.* Participate at boat shows, outdoor shows, safety fairs and state and county fairs. Engage with boaters through virtual platforms. Distribute DBW publications and outreach materials to safety partner organizations and individual boaters.
- *Life Jacket Programs.* Provide access to life jackets through statewide life jacket loaner stations, life jacket trade-in events and distribution through safe boating partners. [dbw.parks.ca.gov/LifeJackets](http://dbw.parks.ca.gov/LifeJackets)

## Program Summaries:

### **California Boater Card**

On Sept. 18, 2014, Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. signed into law [Senate Bill 941](#), which prohibits the operation of motorized vessels in California without a valid operator card developed and issued by the Division of Boating and Waterways. Possession of the card requires operators to take a boating safety education course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and the Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW), pass the corresponding exam, and apply and pay for the California Boater Card (CBC). As of January 1, 2024, boaters 60 years of age and younger are required to carry a California Boater Card while operating any motorized vessel on state waterways. By 2025, all boaters, regardless of age, will be required to carry the card.

The Division began accepting applications in November of 2017 and has been issuing cards since February 2018. To date, the Division has issued over 263,000 cards. From August 2023-August 2024, 72,730 California Boater Cards were issued. That is an increase of 32% from the previous reporting period. A total of 277,000 cards have been issued.

The first rulemaking package for the California Boater Card, which established the fee for the card, was approved on December 16, 2019 and is now part of the [California Code of Regulations](#). A second rulemaking package has been drafted and is in the beginning stages of the review process. This package will include how to apply for a California Boater Card, division standards for boating safety courses and exams, and explanation of exemptions.

The annual program report was posted to the DBW website on April 1, 2024 as required by legislation.

Boater engagement for the CBC program is coordinated through the DBW media campaign. Outreach includes Google search advertisement, digital advertising, social media, and select in-person events. CBC marina posters are also strategically located at launch ramps and boating facilities throughout the state. Outreach will continue with a focus on Google search advertising to accurately reach the target demographic. This method has proven to provide the best return on investment.

### **Boating Safety Courses**

The Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) offers a free, NASBLA approved home study course called the California Course for Safe Boating. This is an introductory safe boating course and is one of the approved courses that meets the education

requirement for the California Boater Card program. The Boating Education and Outreach Unit within the Interpretation and Education Division oversees the home study course program.

The home study course is now primarily available online. The exam packet with Scantron to record exam responses may be ordered from the Division. To complete the course, the exam responses must be recorded on the enclosed Scantron and mailed to DBW for scoring. Scantrons are processed and scored by the Boating Education and Outreach Unit. A certificate of completion and congratulatory letter is mailed to each successful test taker. The certificate can then be used as verification of course completion for the California Boater Card. Unsuccessful examinees are also notified through the mail and provided with another copy of the exam and answer sheet.

From August 2023 to August 2024, 10,000 exam packets were requested and 4,536 completed exams, an increase of nearly 2,000 exams from the previous reporting period. The pass rate was 99.14%.

The home study course was revised in 2021 to include updated boating safety information and received recertification through the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). NASBLA oversees all boating safety course review and follows the National Boating Education Standard approved by American National Standard (ANSI). NASBLA certifications are valid for three years.

Additionally, the Boating Education and Outreach Unit reviews boating safety courses from outside vendors for state compliance and maintains a listing of approved courses for the CBC. There are currently 17 approved courses that meet the education requirements for the California Boater Card program.

## **Youth Education**

In accordance with Section 51879.7 of the California Education Code, the Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) is responsible to provide fundamental water safety training for all the children of the state so that California's youth will be able to enjoy water recreation while avoiding its hazards. DBW provides the AquaSmart program and other youth outreach to fulfill this requirement.

The AquaSmart activity book was upgraded in 2017 to become a multi-grade level publication and continues to be one of the most popular publications offered by DBW. The activity book meets the current Next Generation Science Standards and is appropriate for grades K-8. This publication is distributed at education and outreach events and to schools statewide. The activity book is also available to order through the DBW Online Ordering site. About 26,000 books were distributed through safe boating partners from August 2023 to August 2024.

## **Outreach**

Division of Boating and Waterways' (DBW) boating safety outreach is focused on areas that will engage high volumes of boaters and for an audience identified to meet a target demographic. In-person events may include boat shows, sportsmen's shows, safety fairs, marina events and water tournaments. DBW was represented at the International Sportsmen's Expo, Sacramento Boat Show, Pacific Sail and Power Boat Show, Fred Hall Long Beach, Stanislaus County Fair, and Kern County Fair.

In 2023, the Boating Education and Outreach Unit along with the Clean and Green boating program began partnering with California State Parks that offer recreational boating opportunities to launch free, on-the-water paddlesports safety and instruction to underserved communities for kids, adults, and families. This program focuses on boating and water safety, teamwork, and clean boating practices. Millerton Lake State Recreation Area boasts the most robust program serving nearly 200 participants across 17 programs in 2024. They partnered with community organizations to reach a diverse audience including Latino Outdoors – Fresno Chapter, Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, The Latino Equity, Advocacy & Policy Institute, and the Hmong Club at a local high school.

Silverwood State Recreation Area, Candlestick State Recreation Area, Jedediah Smith Redwood State Recreation Area, and Folsom Lake State Recreation Area also offer similar programs.

Alongside the California Coastal Commission and the Clean and Green Boating program, the boating education and outreach team hosts a podcast called Dockside that helps listeners “save and enjoy the waters you love” by sharing clean and safe boating practices. The podcast currently has 25 episodes with over 4,000 downloads with topics ranging from boating safety to clean boating practices.

Digital engagement including social media and online advertising remain a focus for boater education and outreach. A unique benefit to digital advertising is this platform allows us to geotarget boaters in specific Accident Target Areas (BATAs) to engage the optimal audience with safe boating messaging. Our digital reach continues to evolve as online platforms offer more ways to engage with our audience.

## **Life Jacket Programs**

Life jackets are used as an educational tool to promote water safety, safe boating and as an opportunity to teach proper fit and use. Throughout the past year, about 3,000 life jackets were distributed to California boaters.

Life jacket loaner stations provide boaters with access to safety resources. There are currently more than 125 life jacket loaner locations throughout the state that DBW helps

provide support for start-up and maintenance. Each loaner station is operated by independent partner organizations such as marinas, fire departments and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Some loaner stations are stand-alone boards by waterways while others may be located inside a building. State Parks provides ongoing support to loaner stations by replenishing depleted life jacket supplies to existing loaner stations and adding additional loan stations throughout the state. New loan stations added over the past year include Morro Bay Harbor, Upper Kern River Campgrounds, Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, Auburn State Recreation Area.

Life jackets and life jacket loan stations can be requested by contacting the Boating Education and Outreach Unit.