

Activities Supporting Recreational Boating In Washington Report 10-12

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JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND
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REPORT SUMMARY

Washington is rich in both marine and inland waters. With more than 264,000 recreational vessels registered in 2008, Washington ranked 19th in the United States for both the number of boats and boats per 100,000 persons. Recreational vessels include everything from canoes and kayaks to personal watercraft to power and sailing yachts.

In the 2009-11 Operating Budget (ESHB 1244), the Legislature directed the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to conduct a study of state recreational boating activities in Washington, with a focus on funding and organization. The Legislature also directed JLARC to examine approaches other states have taken to funding and organizing their state recreational boating activities.

Washington's State Recreational Boating Activities, Revenues and Expenditures, and Organizational Structure

Washington participates in 30 state recreational boating activities. These 30 activities fall into four categories: boating safety and education, marine law enforcement, infrastructure and access, and environmental boating.

JLARC examined revenues collected or received by the state and expenditures made for state recreational boating activities and found that:

- Washington collected or received \$70.9 million in the 2007-09 Biennium in boating-related revenue, including taxes, permits, and other charges, user fees, and federal grants.
- Washington spent \$54.0 million in the 2007-09 Biennium on state recreational boating activities across the four categories of activity. This includes money that was distributed by state agencies to local governments to support activities across the state.
- The state general fund was the fund that both received the largest amount of boating-related revenues and from which the largest amount of expenditures were made for recreational boating activities.
- About half the accounting funds with boating expenditures were not supported by any specific boating-related revenue sources.
- Fifty-six percent of the expenditures were in the category of infrastructure and access.

In order to reach these conclusions, JLARC had to identify Washington's state recreational boating activities. Washington law does not define either "state recreational boating program" or "state recreational boating activities" and there is no set of reporting codes that can be used to pull reports on boating in the state. To identify those activities that should be considered state recreational boating activities, JLARC asked whether a particular activity was a state activity and whether it was primarily concerned with recreational boating.

There are seven state agencies involved in state recreational boating activities in Washington. Each agency has a different focus and role. In terms of organizational structure, Washington's recreational boating activities are decentralized but coordinated through interagency working groups.

How Do Washington's Recreational Boating Activities, Funding and Organizational Structure Compare to Other States?

In order to identify the funding and organizational structures of other states' recreational boating activities, JLARC conducted a comprehensive survey of state boating law administrators and received responses from Washington and 32 other states representing every region of the United States. These responses provide the basis for the comparisons of Washington with other states.

- Washington has more state recreational boating activities than other responding states;
- Washington has more revenue sources for state recreational boating activities than other responding states;
- In terms of organizational structure, Washington is less centralized but has more interagency coordination than many of the other responding states;
- A state's organizational structure seems unrelated to both the number of activities in which it engages and the number of boating-related revenue sources it collects or receives. However, states whose State Boating Law Administrator was housed in a law enforcement office tended to engage in a narrower range of state recreational boating activities; and
- States with more state recreational boating activities generally had a broader range of boating-related revenue sources.