

National Survey on Recreational Boating Policies and Practices

June 2025

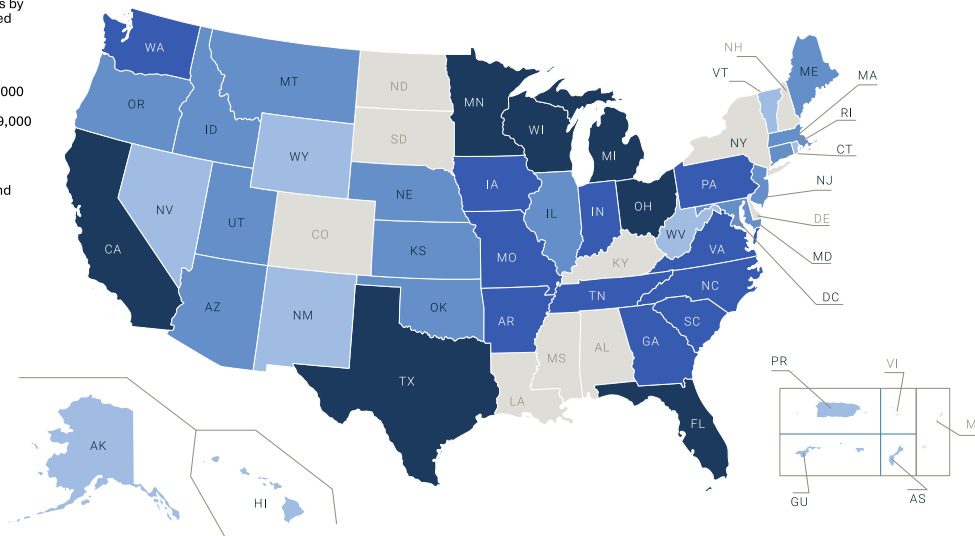
Background

In November and December of 2024 JLARC staff sent a survey to the boating law administrators in all states, territories, and Washington D.C. We received 44 responses, for a 78% response rate. Respondents are shown in the map below, along with relative number of registered boats as reported in annual Coast Guard boating safety reports.

JLARC staff would like to thank all boating law administrators who participated in the survey. We appreciate your time.

Survey respondents by number of registered vessels, 2023

- Under 50,000
- 50,000 to 199,000
- 200,000 to 499,000
- Over 500,000
- Did not respond



Survey results

The survey asked a series of open- and close-ended questions about boating-related laws, education requirements, and program administration. Results have been consolidated in this document. All responses are self-reported and not verified by JLARC staff.

Vessel registration requirements

Does your state require registration for motorized vessels?

- **Yes:** 44 respondents (100%)
 - Yes, for all motorized vessels: 38 respondents (86%)
 - Yes, with some exceptions: 6 respondents (14%)
- **No:** 0 respondents (0%)

Does your state require registration for human-powered vessels (e.g., paddle boards, kayaks, non-motorized sail boats)?

- **Yes,** registration required for all human-powered vessels: 4 respondents (9%)
- **Some.** Registration required only for sailboats or other boats over a certain length: 9 respondents (20%)
- **No,** registration not required for any human-powered vessel (but may be optional): 31 respondents (70%)

How does your state enforce registration?

Note: 33 respondents gave specifics on how registration is enforced. Remaining respondents either left the question blank, gave the law citation, or simply replied that registration is required. Since this was an open-ended question, other states or territories not included in the responses below may also have the same enforcement mechanisms.

- **Law enforcement officers:** 33 respondents (75%)
 - Law enforcement officers can specifically be marine officers or game wardens: 16 respondents
 - Local law enforcement officers specifically mentioned: 3 respondents
 - Officers conduct on water and/or boat ramp patrols: 11 respondents
- **Type of enforcement** specified by 14 respondents (there can be more than one type of enforcement action):
 - Citations or tickets: 11 respondents
 - Other fees/fines: 2 respondents
 - Vessel impoundment: 1 respondent
 - Summons for expired registrations: 1 respondent
 - Registration pre-requisite for other types of permits issued by the department: 1 respondent

Life jacket requirements

Are there statewide requirements to wear life jackets on motorized vessels?

- **Yes,** listed at least some kind of requirement: 38 respondents (86%)
(Respondents could list more than one requirement, so total exceeds 38)
 - Mandatory for everyone all the time: 5 respondents
 - Mandatory for everyone only in cold water months: 2 respondents
 - Mandatory for youth (ages vary between states): 18 respondents
 - Mandatory for certain sports/types of boats (e.g., personal watercraft): 28 respondents
- **No** requirements reported: 6 respondents (14%)

Are there statewide requirements to wear lifejackets on human-powered vessels (e.g., paddle boards, kayaks, non-motorized sail boats)?

- **Yes**, listed at least some kind of requirement: 27 respondents (61%)
(Respondents could list more than one requirement, so total exceeds 27)
 - Mandatory for everyone all the time: 6 respondents
 - Mandatory for everyone only in cold water months: 0 respondents
 - Mandatory for youth (ages vary between states): 17 respondents
 - Mandatory for certain sports: 7 respondents
- **No** requirements reported: 17 respondents (39%)

Boater safety education

For motorized vessels, does your state have a mandatory boating license, boater safety education card, or similar safety education certification?

- **Yes**, most or all boaters are required to have a safety card, certification, or course: 29 respondents (66%)
- **Some**. Required only in certain circumstances (e.g., personal watercraft operators 12-17 years old): 4 respondents (9%)
- **No** requirement, but optional courses may be available: 9 respondents (20%)
- No response: 3 states (5%)

For human-powered vessels, does your state have a mandatory boating license, boater safety education card, or similar safety education certification?

- **Yes**, all boaters: 1 respondent (2%)
- **Some**. Required only in certain circumstances: 1 respondent (2%)
- **No** requirement, but optional courses may be available: 40 respondents (91%)
- No response: 2 respondents (5%)

How are mandatory or optional boating safety education courses offered?

- Online and in-person options: 33 respondents (75%)
- Online only: 4 respondents (9%)
- In-person only: 5 respondents (11%)
- No response: 2 states (5%)

Who offers boater safety education courses in your state?

(more than one entity could be listed)

- State agency: 27 respondents (61%)
- State or local law enforcement: 23 respondents (52%)
- Private entity: 20 respondents (45%)
- Other—US Coast Guard: 12 respondents (27%)
- No response: 2 states (5%)

Does your state offer boating safety or enforcement training related courses for law enforcement?

- **Yes:** 38 respondents (86%)
 - Boating safety and enforcement training related: 32 respondents
 - Boating safety only: 2 respondents
 - Enforcement training related only: 4 respondents
- **No:** 4 respondents (9%)
- No response: 2 states (5%)

Administration

What agency houses the State Boating Law Administrator position?

- A law enforcement agency or division: 15 respondents (34%)
- A natural resources-based agency: 27 respondents (61%)
 - Fish and wildlife: 13 respondents
 - Parks and recreation: 9 respondents
 - Natural resources: 5 respondents
- No response: 2 states (5%)

Does your state evaluate or address equity related to recreational boating (for example, targeting outreach to underserved communities, translating materials to languages other than English, collecting data to evaluate equity)?

- **Yes:** 33 respondents (75%)
 - Safety materials or courses in Spanish or other languages: 26 respondents
 - Outreach to underserved, lower income, or minority communities: 12 respondents
 - Collects and uses data to evaluate equity and/or target safety programming: 4 respondents
- **No:** 9 respondents (20%)
- No response: 2 respondents (5%)

Grants

Does your state offer boating grants to local governments or other non-governmental organizations?

- **Yes:** 15 respondents (34%)
- **No:** 29 respondents (66%)

If yes, do these state-funded boating grants have matching requirements?

- **Yes:** 10 respondents
- **No:** 5 respondents

If yes, What kind of match? (more than one could be selected)

- Dollar match: 10 respondents
- In-kind donation: 4 respondents
- Volunteer time: 3 respondents