



May 09, 2022

Chair Bill Ingebrigtsen  
Minnesota Senate Bldg, Room 3207  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Rick Hansen  
407 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

**Re: Coalition Support for Boater Education Language in SF4062**

Dear Chair Ingebrigtsen, Chair Hansen, and members of the Conference Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and leaders in the lake and recreational boating communities, we continue to ask for your support to expand the recreational boating safety education program in Minnesota. **We encourage the conference committee to adopt the House position in Article 2 Page R60, lines 32.18 – 37.5 in SF 4062 to bring Minnesota’s boater education program current.**

Boating and lake life is woven into the fabric of life in our great state, as many Minnesotans use their boats to enjoy our many lakes and rivers. In fact, Minnesota ranks second in the nation for registered boats with more than 825,000 registered boats, which equates to nearly one boat for every six people. Since 2019, Minnesota boat registrations have increased by 16,000.

With continued growth and popularity of boating also comes a responsibility to look out for our community through establishing safety standards and best practices to protect aquatic ecology, to mitigate and stop the spread of aquatic invasive species, and decrease conflicts among user groups so that all can enjoy the waters in a responsible manner for years to come. As outdoor recreation is at an all time high, now is the time to implement boater education to ensure all are safe on the water and the best stewards of the resource.

Including the boater education language in the omnibus will address several key issues:

**Safety:** Boater education is a proven way to dramatically improve boater safety on the water. According to the latest report from the U.S. Coast Guard, the rate of boating fatalities rose 25% in 2020 from 2019. Accidents were up 26.3%. The report also indicated 77% of deaths happened on watercraft where the operator had not received boating safety instruction. It’s a no brainer – education helps save lives and prevent accidents. In 2021, Minnesota saw one of the deadliest years on the water since 2005 – with 18 boating fatalities. In 2022, we’ve already seen 2 tragic deaths on the water. As our use and traffic has increased, but the resource has not changed – it is imperative to educate boaters on best safety practices.

**Aquatic Invasive Species:** According to the National Marine Manufacturers Association, 95% of boats in the United States are towable boats smaller than 26 feet. This is a monumental opportunity to directly reach boaters on tailored information regarding aquatic invasive species such as the Clean, Drain, Dry and Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers programs.



**Reducing User Conflict:** As outdoor recreation is at an all-time high, Minnesotans have turned to our best resource: our lakes and rivers. Increased use of varying products from paddle craft to fishing boats to water sport boats to sail boats has increased user conflict. There is opportunity to have educational information on conflict reduction so all users can enjoy the water. Additionally, there would be opportunity to educate users on the impact of their wake as well as towed water sports best practices, encouraging more user responsibility which will improve the lake for all.

**Taking the Course:** A stakeholder group will be established to work with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on the course content and implementation. The course will be available for free, at no cost to the user, via paper version if requested from the DNR. Otherwise, users may take the course online through a third-party vendor like other recreational product requirements for \$24.95. It is imperative that the course be easily accessible for all. If someone has taken the course to fulfill the youth requirements, that would suffice for the education requirement if born on or after July 1, 1987.

We are proud to work in a coalition together to bring Minnesota's boater education program current. Minnesota is the only state in the top 5 boating states that does not have a requirement that extends beyond youth. The time to act is now.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you on improving boater safety in the days ahead.

Sincerely,

Joe Shneider  
President,  
Minnesota Coalition of Lake Associations (MN COLA)

Jeff Forester  
Executive Director,  
Minnesota Lakes & Rivers Advocates (MLR)

Matt Gruhn  
President,  
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas (MRAA)

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