

Division of Boating and Waterways
November 2025

REPORT: Boating Education and Outreach, Interpretation and Education Division

PRESENTER: Melissa Miranda, Boating Education and Outreach Manager

SUBJECT: Boating Education and Outreach Unit

Program Overview:

State Parks provides essential education and outreach on boating safety to promote safe and responsible recreation on California's waterways. The Boating Education and Outreach Unit collaborates with boating safety partner organizations throughout the state to advance public safety goals by reducing accidents, increasing compliance with boating laws, and fostering a culture of safe boating practices. These efforts ensure the delivery of consistent and effective statewide messaging to both youth and adult audiences.

As part of the 2018 Transformation within State Parks, the Boating Education and Outreach Unit was transitioned from the Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) to the Interpretation and Education Division. This realignment has been mutually beneficial to both divisions by enhancing collaboration and program delivery. Program funding continues to be supported through 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
- *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
- *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
- *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

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, 2025, all boaters are required to carry a California Boater Card while operating any motorized vessel on state waterways.

The Division began accepting applications in November of 2017 and has been issuing cards since February 2018. To date, the Division has issued over 432,256 cards. From August 2024-August 2025, 144,608 California Boater Cards were issued. That is an increase of 198% from the previous reporting period. A total of 432,256 cards have been issued.

During the past year, the Boater Card application system was successfully transitioned to the State Parks reservation system platform to ensure compliance with statewide information technology standards and to promote greater consistency across departmental systems. While the transition has been seamless for applicants, with the user experience remaining largely unchanged, the migration establishes a more secure and sustainable foundation for program operations. Planned Phase II enhancements will focus on improving data management and expanding reporting capabilities to support program evaluation, policy development, and long-term operational planning.

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](#).

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 2024 to August 2025, 30,000 exam packets were requested, and 10,700 exams were received back for grading, an increase of over 6,000 exams from the previous reporting period. The pass rate was 98.87%.

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).

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 16 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, originally upgraded in 2017 to serve multiple grade levels, continues to be one of the Division of Boating and Waterways' (DBW) most requested and widely utilized educational publications. Designed to align with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), the publication provides age-appropriate

content for students in grades K–8 and serves as a key resource in advancing boating and water safety education among California’s youth.

The *AquaSmart* Activity Book is distributed broadly at education and outreach events, provided directly to schools across the state, and made available for order through the DBW Online Ordering site. Over the past reporting period, approximately 4,000 copies were disseminated in partnership with Safe Boating partners statewide, underscoring its continued value and demand.

To further increase accessibility while reducing reliance on printed materials, DBW has also made the lessons available as printable documents through its website. This digital option expands reach to educators, parents, and community organizations while supporting sustainability and cost reduction goals.

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.

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 34 episodes with over 5,000 downloads with topics ranging from boating safety to clean boating practices.

Digital engagement, including social media and online advertising, continues to be a central strategy for advancing boating education and outreach. The Division of Boating and Waterways (DBW) media campaign remains one of the most cost-effective and efficient tools available for reaching the boating community. A key advantage of digital platforms is the ability to geotarget audiences within Boating Accident Target Areas (BATAs), ensuring that safe boating messages are delivered to boaters in regions with the highest need. This targeted approach maximizes impact by engaging the optimal audience with timely and relevant safety information.

As digital platforms evolve, DBW continues to expand its ability to reach boaters through multiple channels, including social media, streaming video, and other online formats. Between January 1, 2025, and September 30, 2025, DBW’s digital outreach campaign generated a total of more than 10.4 million impressions. Impressions are a measure of how many times the boating safety messages were displayed to users online.

- January 1 – April 30, 2025 (FY 2024/25): Paid social media advertising on Meta platforms produced approximately 5.6 million impressions.
- May 1 – September 30, 2025 (FY 2025/26): Paid social media generated 2.1 million impressions, while digital video placements through Over-the-Top (OTT) and Online Video (OLV) streaming services produced 2.8 million impressions.

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 2,500 life jackets were distributed to California boaters.

Life Jacket Loaner Stations continue to play a vital role in promoting boating safety by providing the public with convenient access to properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets at no cost. These stations serve as an essential safety resource to help reduce preventable drownings.

Currently, more than 131 Life Jacket Loaner Stations are established statewide that DBW helps maintain. DBW provides support and resources for both start-up and ongoing maintenance. Each station is operated in collaboration with independent partner organizations, including marinas, fire departments, county agencies, and the United States Army Corps of Engineers. Stations may vary in format. Some consist of stand-alone boards located adjacent to waterways, while others are housed within public facilities such as visitor centers or community buildings.

State Parks maintains active support for these stations by replenishing depleted life jacket inventories and strategically expanding the program to underserved regions. Over the past year, several new Life Jacket Loaner Stations were added, including those at the Hupa Reservation at the Tish Tang Campground, San Francisco Parks and Recreation Department, Dos Rios State Park, Donner Lake, Mokelumne Fire Department, and Tomales Bay State Park. These additions strengthen the statewide network of resources available to boaters and underscore DBW's commitment to advancing public safety and access to lifesaving equipment.

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