

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION		
ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES		
	Administrative Procedures for Watercraft Assignment and Utilization	Procedures for Policy ADM 270
		EFFECTIVE DATE: 7-22-2022
		AMENDED:

GENERAL INFORMATION

A watercraft is defined as a craft designed as a means of transportation on water with or without mechanical propulsion. All watercraft owned, leased, or rented by the State of Florida are considered "state-owned watercraft" and are not segregated in this procedure. All Department watercraft will be used for official business only and in the most efficient, effective, and economical manner. Watercraft operators shall be in compliance with this policy and Section 287.17, Florida Statute (F.S.), at all times and must meet the minimum standards for operation and safety as provided by this policy.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

The Department's Boating Safety Advisory Board will consist of the Department's Agency Safety Officer (ASO) and Boating Safety Officers (BSO) as appointed to represent their program area.

The Boating Safety Advisory Board will meet semi-annually or at the call of the ASO to address safety concerns presented by program area BSO's.

The Boating Safety Advisory Board will review, and update workplace safety rules based on incident review findings, inspection findings, employee reports of unsafe conditions or work practices, and address suggestions and concerns.

WATERCRAFT PROCEDURES

Assignment

The Division/District/Office Director, or designee, is responsible for the assignment and proper use of all watercraft within their Division/District/Office.

Each Division/District/Office will formulate and implement procedures governing the assignment and operation of watercraft within their program area to comply with this Directive, Section 287.17, F.S., and Chapter 60B-1, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.).

Use and Safety

State-owned watercraft will be used for official business only or to relieve emergency situations.

To operate state-owned watercraft, other than in emergency situations, operators must possess a current and valid Department-approved watercraft operator's certification for the class of watercraft which they are operating and have it recorded in the applicable training tracking program.

Classes are:

- Class A-1 – Watercraft less than 12 feet, canoes, kayaks, SUPs or any other manually propelled watercraft
- Class A-2 – Watercraft 12 feet to less than 16 feet and all powered canoes
- Class 1 – Watercraft 16 feet to less than 26 feet
- Class 2 – Watercraft 26 feet to less than 40 feet
- Class 3 – Watercraft 40 feet to less than 65 feet
- Special Class – Airboats

Each Division/District/Office which utilizes watercraft in the performance of its duties will designate qualified watercraft operators to serve as Boating Safety Instructors (BSI). BSI are responsible for providing appropriate training in boating operation and safety for Department employees and/or volunteers prior to their operating the vessel. The BSI will also be responsible for reviewing compliance with this policy and reporting non-compliance to the BSO/ASO. BSI will also ensure all boating safety training is entered into the applicable training tracking program. (See below regarding Airboat BSI.). A list of approved BSIs will be maintained by each Division's/District's/Office's SPM.

To become a qualified BSI, one must:

- complete the DEP boating safety course as outlined in this policy;
- be designated by their manager as possessing the ability to conduct the boating courses for their Division/District/Office/Park; and specific class of watercraft.
- assist with teaching one boating class with an authorized BSI or complete the BSI Class conducted by the Office of Safety and Loss Prevention.

To be authorized to operate state-owned watercraft, other than Class A-1, personnel must successfully complete an approved Florida Fish & Wildlife (FWC) [Boating Safety Course](#) or have a valid U.S. Coast Guard Operator of Uninspected Passenger Vessels (Charter Boat Captain) License. They must also complete the applicable portion(s) of the requirements listed below for the specific class of watercraft to be operated.

- Class A-1
 - Complete the [DEP Canoe & Kayak Operation Practical Exam, DEP 51-033](#), under an approved BSI. A list of approved BSIs will be maintained by each Division's/District's/Office's Safety Program Manager (SPM).
 - Upon successful completion of the practical exam, Class A-1 watercraft operators will be allowed to operate this class of watercraft.
- Class A-2, Class 1 & Class 2 trailered watercraft:
 - Successfully complete all skills on [Watercraft and Trailing Operation Checklist](#) with an approved BSI for the specific class of watercraft being operated.
 - Upon skills sign-off detailed in the step above and submission of proof of completing an approved boating education course, watercraft operators are certified for the class of watercraft which was operated during testing.
 - A watercraft operator who becomes qualified at a higher class of vessel is also qualified to operate lower classes of vessels in this category. Class A-1 watercraft will require additional training as outlined in this policy.
- Class A-2, Class 1, Class 2 and Class 3 non-trailered watercraft:
 - Successfully complete the Boating skills portion of [Watercraft and Trailing Operation Checklist](#) with an approved BSI for the specific class of watercraft being operated.
 - Upon skills sign-off detailed in the step above and submission of proof of completing an approved boating education course, watercraft operators are certified for the class of watercraft which was operated during testing but not trailering.

- A watercraft operator who becomes qualified at a higher class of vessel is also qualified to operate lower classes of vessels in this category. Class A-1 watercraft will require additional training as outlined in this policy. Note: The trailering portion of the DEP Watercraft & Trailering Authorization Form will need to be completed if the lower class of vessel is trailered.
- Special Class - Airboats:
 - All DEP Airboat Operators must gain a minimum of 10 hours of logged “stick” time/operating time with a qualified Airboat Operator prior to taking the DEP Airboat Operating Exam/Field Practical under an Airboat BSI as detailed in the [DEP Airboat Operators Training Course](#).
 - Upon skills sign-off detailed in the step above and submission of proof of completing an approved boating education course, airboat operators will be certified a DEP Airboat Operator.
 - All Boating Safety Instructors (BSI) for Airboats must:
 - Be a certified DEP Airboat Operator;
 - Have logged a minimum of 50 hours of logged “stick” time/operating time in total;
 - Assist with teaching one Airboat Operators class with an authorized Airboat BSI;
 - Be designated by their manager as possessing the ability to conduct the boating courses for their Division/District/Office/Park.
 - Airboat BSI will ensure that all boating safety training is entered into the applicable training tracking program and, optionally, issue certificates
 - A list of Airboat BSIs will be maintained by each Division’s/District’s/Office’s SPM.

Supervisors who receive a new employee with previous watercraft certification should verify their boating qualifications. New employees without prior boating experience can gain “on the job” training by a DEP certified operator on the class vessel they will be operating prior to enrolling in the watercraft certification class.

Persons other than Department employees are prohibited from riding in state-owned watercraft **UNLESS** they are:

- Official state volunteers on official business.
- Department staff and family members leaving or returning to their island residence.
- Other governmental employees (includes city, county, state and federal) on official business.
- Individuals being transported in emergency situations.
- Transported in connection with official travel being performed in state-owned watercraft and the purpose of travel can be more usefully served by including individuals other than those identified above and provided there is:
 - no additional expense to the state,
 - the conveyance of these individuals has been approved by the Program Area Director or designee, and
 - the individual has signed a [General Release Form, DEP 55-001](#). The Program Area is responsible for maintaining a file of the documentation.
- Riding in a watercraft in conjunction with a visitor(s) on educational guided tours, elected official(s), or rental service offered by the Department.
- Assisting boat operators whose vessel has been incapacitated and/or are in danger of sinking or other threat to life, safety or injury. Transporting non-DEP personnel while towing an incapacitated vessel is not authorized unless failure to remove the boater(s) would endanger their health or safety.
- Exceptions to this policy may be granted on a case-by-case basis, in writing, by Program Area Directors or designee when justified to be in the best interest of the state. This written exception will be maintained in the Director’s Office. A copy shall be emailed to the ASO.

General Safety

All state-owned watercraft must be operated in a safe and courteous manner and in compliance with all applicable federal, state or local laws or ordinances. This includes meeting the watercraft safety equipment

requirements per [FWC Requirements](#) and any additional requirements adopted by the Department. All watercraft will have the required safety equipment in accordance with [FWC's Safety Equipment for Recreational Vessels](#).

It is the sole responsibility of the watercraft operator to be knowledgeable and conform to all state boating rules and regulations during operation. Any fines and/or penalties resulting from failure to operate a watercraft in compliance with these regulations are the personal responsibility of the operator.

The operation of a state-owned watercraft while under the influence of alcohol or a controlled substance is a violation of Policy DEP 420, Drug-Free Workplace and Drug Testing and may result in criminal prosecution and disciplinary action pursuant to Policy DEP 435, Conduct of Employees. This also applies to the transport of alcoholic beverages or controlled substances. An exception to this policy is granted to departmental personnel to transport personal items such as groceries to their island residence.

The Department will provide a U. S. Coast Guard approved Personal Flotation Device (PFD) for all employees/volunteers and occupants utilizing state- owned watercraft, including kayaks and canoes. Operators and occupants of all watercraft will wear a PFD during operation of watercraft. Fanny packs (also called belt packs) are not acceptable PFDs for departmental watercraft.

Exceptions to this policy on PFD use:

- Occupant(s) preparing for snorkeling or diving to enter the water or re-accessing the vessel.
- Persons below deck or in deck cabins on watercraft larger than 40 feet.
- Operators and occupants of the Department authorized tour boat and ferry boat operations where an ample supply of PFDs of the appropriate number and sizes for all occupants are on board and immediately accessible to the occupants in compliance with U.S. Coast Guard Regulations. The operator of the vessel may require the occupants to wear PFDs when necessary. Operators shall clearly communicate to all passengers the accessibility, location, and proper usage of PFDs prior to departure. Children under the age of six are required to wear a PFD on all vessels less than 26 feet in length, while the boat is underway.
- Exceptions to this policy on PFDs may be granted in writing by the Division/District/Office a Directors on a case-by- case basis when needed for the efficient operation of a Program Area. This written exception will be maintained in the Division/District/Office Director's office. A copy shall be emailed to the ASO.

Any employee/volunteer or other authorized personnel operating a departmental watercraft must file an electronic or hard-copy float plan with their immediate supervisor or designated alternate , unless responding to an immediate emergency where there exists a threat to life, safety or injury. An example float plan can be found on the DEP [Water Safety and Information](#) intranet page.

A float plan shall be filed prior to each departure from the launch of mooring location and should include a description of the boat, who is on board, where you expect to be, how long you expect to be there, and estimated time of return. Instruct the person holding the float plan to notify the Coast Guard or other appropriate agency if you do not return within a reasonable time after your scheduled arrival (considering weather, etc.). If your plans change, notify the person holding the float plan to avoid possible activation of search and rescue resources.

An exemption for the electronic or hard copy float plan may be granted in writing by the Program Area Director to the operators of boats that follow clearly defined, routine routes and staff/volunteers engaged in routine maintenance of these established routes. Radio notification shall be made for routine trips along established routes.

Prior to the first use of the day of any assigned watercraft, the vessel shall be inspected using the [Boating Inspection Checklist, DEP 51-037](#).

Accidents

If a watercraft related accident or incident occurs, refer to [ADM 310, Fleet, Fuel Card and Motor Pool](#). In addition, if the accident/incident involves personal injury beyond immediate first-aid, death, disappearance of any person under circumstances which indicate death or injury, or if there is damage to the vessel(s) and/or personal property, you must, by the quickest means possible, give notice to one of the following: the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the sheriff of the county in which the accident occurred, or the police chief of the municipality in which the accident occurred, if applicable per FWC requirements.

Group Volunteer Projects or Non-Certified Paddlers for Class A-1 Watercraft

Paddlers who do not possess a valid Department-approved watercraft operator's certification for Class A-1 watercraft can operate a state-owned watercraft or their personally owned watercraft as a volunteer or employee of the agency, only if they attend a Paddling Safety Briefing led by DEP Class A-1 trained staff.

Project Trip Leaders or DEP Class A-1 trained staff conducting the safety briefing must file a [DEP Float Plan, DEP 54-034](#) and include a review of safety information and provide demonstrations and procedures on general safety, persons overboard, and watercraft swamping. When possible, pre-trip information should be provided to volunteers prior to the day of the trip. A [Paddling Safety Briefing Form, DEP 51-030](#) shall be completed and kept on file in the administrative office of the event.

- Pre-trip Information should include:
 - volunteer project goals
 - what to bring on watercraft (gloves, shoes, water, hat, sunscreen, etc.)
 - expected duration of trip
 - minimum skill level for trip (none, beginning, intermediate, etc.)
- Safety Information Review should be conducted just prior to group departure and include:
 - Expected weather conditions for the trip
 - Potential hazards (currents, boat traffic, rocky bottoms, etc.)
 - Required watercraft items (PFD with whistle, paddle, etc.)
 - PFD use and requirements (properly fit, worn securely while on water)
 - Whistle usage (attached to PFD, types of signals)
 - Buddy system (if possible, pair beginner with experienced paddlers)
 - Boating etiquette and outdoors ethics
 - Group watercraft positioning (stay within 100 feet of others in group)
 - Lead/sweep watercraft designation (lead watercraft not to be passed, sweep is last watercraft in group)
 - Location of the first kit (must be in the lead watercraft)
 - Paddle Board (SUP) users must wear their leash at all time while on the water
- Safety Demonstrations should include:
 - Inspection and proper fitting of PFD
 - Safe watercraft boarding and exiting procedures
 - Safe loading, storage and unloading of recovered materials (trash, invasive vegetation, etc.)
 - Effective paddling techniques
- Overboard and Watercraft Swamping Procedures should include the following steps:
 - Maintain control of your paddle or have a group member retrieve it for you
 - Notify lead or sweep watercraft if a group member falls overboard
 - The lead and/or sweep watercraft will signal "all stop"
 - If able, and conditions allow, paddler can re-board as instructed
 - If unable to re-board, proceed to nearest shore or shallow water