

SCDNR seeks public input on boater safety

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources will be conducting a series of public hearings starting next week in preparation of potential regulation changes. The meetings are aimed at discussing ways to make boating safer in the Palmetto state.

Among the meetings is one scheduled for 7 p.m. on Aug. 25 at the SCDNR Clemson Office auditorium at 311 Natural Resources Drive in Clemson.

According to Lt. Kim Leverich of the SCDNR, the number of recreational boaters in the state has increased accordingly with the state's population increase. Along with that growth has been an increased number of boating incidents, accidents and fatalities on South Carolina's waterways.

"The majority of our incidents and accidents involve recreational boaters across the state and we are looking for public input on ways that we can better educate boaters and make our waterways safer," said Leverich.

South Carolina has 8,000 miles of rivers, 460,000 acres of lakes and 3,000 miles of coastline. As of 2014, there were approximately 485,000 registered boats in South Carolina with thousands more registered each year. The Palmetto State consistently ranks among the top ten nationally for registered boats.



Phillip Gentry

Commentary

The last regulation changes regarding boating and boater safety were instituted in 1999 with the Boater Safety Act, which established minimum age requirements for operators of a motorized watercraft above 15 horsepower.

Leverich said this act came on the heels of increased popularity of personal watercraft and operation of these boats by teenagers. She said her department has seen a substantial decrease in incidents and fatalities among the younger age group after boater safety classes were made mandatory for operation of watercraft.

"We do see alcohol involved in many of our accidents, but the biggest contributors today are those operators over the age of 30 not keeping a proper lookout as well as operating at a safe speed," she said.

Many states have moved to requiring boaters to take a

safety class and to pass a test — similar to obtaining a driver's license — to be legal to operate a motorized watercraft. She said public input was being sought to determine what measures may need to be taken to increase boater awareness while reducing the number of accidents and fatalities.

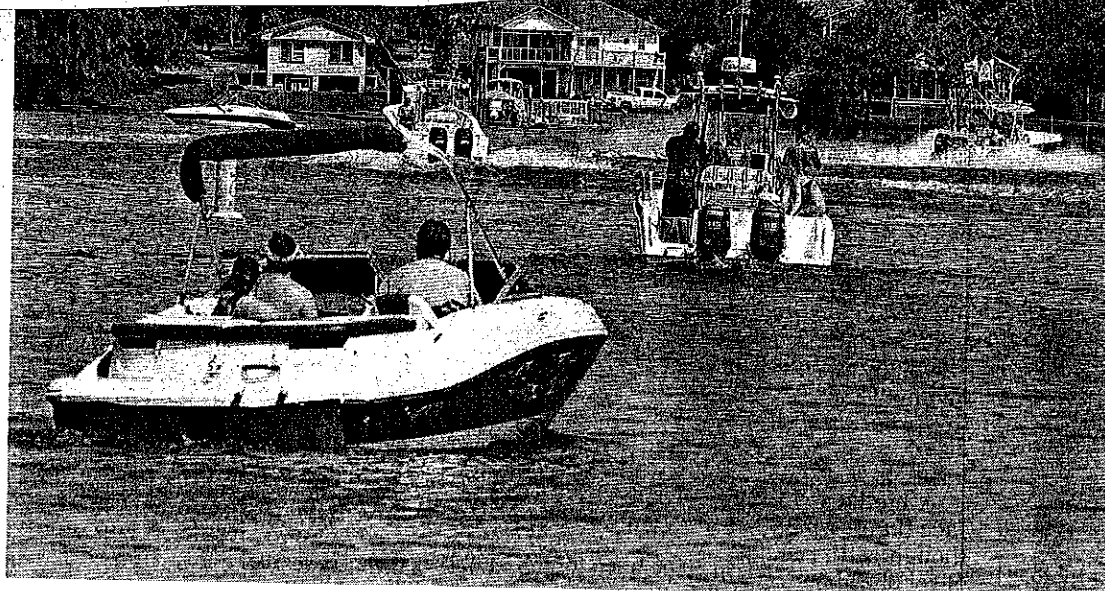
"Many adult operators tell us during incident investigations that they have been operating a boat their whole life, yet many of those folks do not understand the rules of the road when it comes to how and where they should be boating," said Leverich.

Prior to making recommendations to the State General Assembly regarding changes in boating laws or instituting mandatory boater safety training, DNR is seeking the public's input.

"It may not be more laws that we need," said Leverich. "The public may want to see more law enforcement officer presence on our waterways."

For more information about the meetings, contact Leverich at 800-277-4301 or LeverichK@DNR.SC.Gov.

Phillip Gentry is the host of "Upstate Outdoors" at noon Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM. This week's guest will be Derek Freeman and Trevor Callahan, winners of the 2015 FLW/TBF High School Bass Fishing World Finals. Contact Gentry at pgentry6@bellsouth.net.



The SCDNR has scheduled a series of public hearings regarding boater safety regulations.

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