

Recommendations to Promote Paddlesports While Growing a Culture of Safety in the United States

2014 NASBLA White Paper

The members of NASBLA would like to engage paddling stakeholders to help grow the sport while growing a culture of safety at the same time.

Recreational Boating Safety Programs, while housed in a variety of agencies around the country, share a common mission helping their citizens get out and boat safely. NASBLA believes that paddle sports contribute to the wellness of participants by providing opportunities for exercise in our great outdoors and connecting them with their natural heritage. There are many benefits that flow from these growing sports to the individual and the greater community, and the states and territories would like to support these boaters by ensuring that they can recreate in a safe manner. Currently many states and territories are providing access to the water for the paddling community (as funding allows) and boating education classes are being devoted to paddling as a result of the increase in popularity. In fact, the NASBLA Education Standards Panel is in the process of revising the [2009 Paddlesports Education Standards](#) for such a course. States and territories are providing classes to these groups on a voluntary basis. Search and rescue efforts are provided, as needed, for these craft. The motorized boating community contributes to these amenities through various excise taxes in “user pay, user benefit” programs. In many states, the paddling community does not directly contribute to these services and states and territories are finding it difficult to accommodate the needs of the various boating groups.

Definitions

This paper uses the terms and definitions developed by NASBLA’s Engineering, Reporting & Analysis Committee in their 2013 document “Vessel Sub-Types for Optional Use with Authorized Vessel Types, Approved List, September 2013”. The term paddling as used here is meant to include the craft listed below but excludes rafts.

Paddlecraft: A vessel powered only by its occupants, using a single- or double-bladed paddle as a lever without the aid of a fulcrum provided by oarlocks, thole pins, crutches, or similar arrangements.

Canoe-Unspecified: A vessel typically pointed upwards at both ends and open on top; propelled by single-bladed paddles.

Canoe-Whitewater version: A vessel designed for whitewater; propelled by single-bladed paddles; generally has more bow and stern curvature (rocker) and supplemental flotation, in the form of bow, stern or center air bags, than its flatwater counterpart; may be outfitted for tandem, solo or both.

Canoe-Decked version: A vessel propelled by single-bladed paddles; has a spray-skirt to enclose the open portion of the canoe; the paddler kneels in it and uses a canoe paddle.

Kayak-Unspecified: A vessel propelled by double-bladed paddles, by one or more seated individuals facing the direction of travel.

Kayak-Whitewater version: A vessel designed for whitewater; propelled by double-bladed paddles; generally has more bow and stern curvature (rocker), which aids in maneuverability; generally uses a spray-skirt; generally, a shorter kayak, but may be as long as 12 feet.

Kayak-Recreational version: A vessel propelled by double-bladed paddles; typically has a large cockpit with or without a provision for sealing the opening to the body of the occupant (i.e., spray-skirt); typically less than 12 feet in length, with wider beam and larger cockpit than a touring version kayak.

Kayak-Touring version: A vessel propelled by double-bladed paddles; typically has built-in storage capacity for gear and provision for sealing the cockpit opening to the body of the occupant with a water-tight spray-skirt; normally longer and more slender in construction than a recreational version kayak. (Includes sea kayaks)

Kayak-Sit-on-top version: A vessel that one sits on top of, not inside of; propelled by double-bladed paddles; has a sealed, watertight deck surface into which seats and features might be molded; does not have an opening that can be sealed around the occupant, but may have thigh straps.

Paddleboard: A vessel, similar in appearance to a surfboard, but may vary significantly in length; intended to be propelled by a person, generally standing, with a single- or double-bladed paddle.

Key Issues

Growth of the sport may contribute to an increase in accidents

Paddling is growing in popularity. The Outdoor Industry Foundation published in their *2014 Participation Topline Report*¹ that paddle sports accounted for five of the top ten trending outdoor activities. Figure 1 shows the 3-year change in participation rates growth figures for these top five paddle sports.

Fatal accidents for paddle sports may be increasing over time as it becomes more popular. The graph (Figure 2) illustrates a small increasing trend in paddle sport fatalities from 2006 to 2013 however, the trend is probably more pronounced regionally. In 2013, the Outdoor Foundation published *the 2013 Special Report on Paddlesports* indicating there are significant differences among regions of the United States in Paddlesport participation. Kayaking, is most popular in the states bordering the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans but "... more than 40 percent of all [canoeing] participants — are located in the East North

Figure 1: 3-Year Change in Paddlesport Participation

Activity	3-year change
Stand up paddling	+24%
Kayak Fishing	+20%
Kayaking – recreational	+11%
Sea Kayaking and Touring	+8%
Whitewater Kayaking	+7%

¹ Available at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchParticipation2014Topline.pdf>

Central and South Atlantic regions of the country, which includes states bordering the Great Lakes and Atlantic Ocean².” Also, consider that, according to this special report, most of the participants that engage in paddle sports only go once or twice per year. This may mean that a large number of participants in the sport are casual, opportunistic or novice paddlers. This is a significant fact because casual boaters are unskilled and less likely to engage in basic safety behaviors. In 2001, the American Canoe Association in its report *Critical Judgment II*³ determined “...There is a particular need to reach the populations of infrequent or casual paddlers that are most involved in capsizes on calm water, and who are not likely to be wearing a PFD. A significant number of these victims were using a canoe for fishing when the accident occurred. This indicates that more effort should be focused on venues and resources that are popular with casual anglers.”

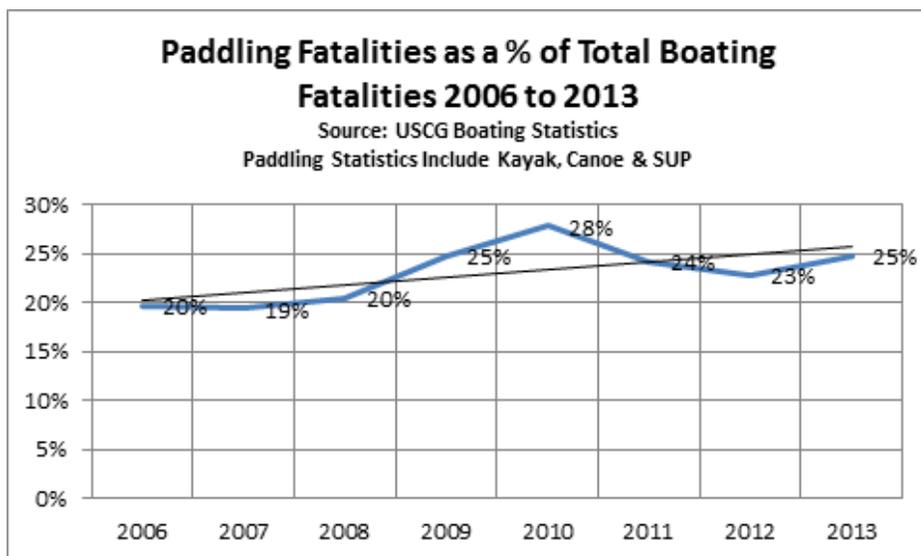


Figure 2

Search and rescue efforts for paddle craft have increased as the number of vessels have grown. In fact, in an effort to reduce costs from search and rescue efforts the US Coast Guard, in partnership with the New England Safe Boating Council, introduced an “If Found” sticker, urging paddlers to place them on their craft so that if an empty canoe or kayak is found floating, law enforcement know who to call instead of launching expensive and dwindling assets. After the success of the “If Found” sticker program, the American Canoe Association (ACA) followed suit and developed a similar “If Found” sticker directly targeted for paddlecraft. However, this initiative alone is not considered to be enough to greatly reduce the cost of local law enforcement efforts.

² Available at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchPaddlesports2013.pdf>

³ Available at: http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.americancanoe.org/resource/resmgr/sei-educational_resources/critical_judgement_ii_aca.pdf

Lastly, it is difficult to accurately gauge the popularity of paddle sports because these vessels are largely unregistered in the United States.

Engaging the human powered communities

Often, the paddling and motorized communities do not frequent the same venues. While NASBLA members can target a core group of boaters that buy from traditional marine retailers, many lack the resources to effectively engage those in paddling communities who do not necessarily consider themselves boaters and may not purchase their boat through a typical marine retailer.

The need for boating safety education

Many organizations provide education and instruction for the paddling community and standards are being formulated or revised for both knowledge courses and skill-based, on-water instruction in hopes this will result in increasing numbers of voluntary courses available. It is anticipated that states and territories will utilize these standards to develop course curricula; however, funding will be necessary to get these courses out to the boaters.

Lack of funding, growth in use of services

Nationally, the bulk of the funds provided by the Federal Government through the US Coast Guard for state recreational boating safety programs is derived from excise taxes on marine fuel, fishing tackle and small motor sales. As a result, the bulk of effort on injury prevention efforts and law enforcement are focused on motorized boating. The growth of paddlesports has placed additional demands on state boating safety programs. Traditional funding sources derived from motorized vessels are being diverted to assist this growing community of boaters. The paddling community is utilizing resources of state and federal agencies but, in the vast majority of states, does not contribute meaningfully to the funds needed to provide desired services.

The Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) provides a helpful case study of this trend. According to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Survey conducted by Oregon State Parks and Recreation Department, non-motorized use days in Oregon have increased by 300% over a ten (10) year period. Motorized boating use days have gone up as well, although not at the same rate, despite a decline in boat registrations over the same period. Through the OSMB Strategic Planning process, motorized and non-motorized boaters expressed the importance of engaging non-motorized boaters. In 2012, OSMB chartered a strategic project and established a non-motorized advisory committee to provide counsel and direction to the agency. As a result of this process, the advisory committee made draft recommendations for services and a fee structure to support those services. These recommendations are now being discussed through public outreach events to determine what, if any, action the Board should take in moving a program forward in the 2017 legislative session. OSMB is committed to taking the time to understand non-motorized boater needs and has allocated sufficient time in this project to engage its public in a meaningful and impactful way.

Recommended Next Steps

1. The subcommittee proposes that the NASBLA Executive Board engage key stakeholders, including, to the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), United States Fish and Wildlife (USFW), American Canoe Association (ACA), National Marine Manufacture Association (NMMA,), American Whitewater (AW) and others representing national paddling interests and industry, to initiate a discussion about these and other key issues to ensure that current and enhanced services will be available.
2. The subcommittee suggests that the stakeholder engagement should develop agreement on the following issues:
 - a. The range of services the paddling community desires from the states and territories;
 - b. What needs must be addressed by the states and territories to ensure a safety culture for these groups;
 - c. The level of funding necessary to provide those services;
 - d. The mechanisms used to collect those funds; and,
 - e. The process used to allocate those funds.
3. The subcommittee suggests that the work begun with this 2014 cycle of charges, including the info graphics developed to provide quick facts about paddling and the national paddling survey conducted by the Oregon State Marine Board, can serve as important tools to inform the conversation. Further, these initial efforts can be expanded as needed to support future work. For example, it may be very helpful if the infographic materials developed from the national data on paddling trends and accidents is designed so that so that the graphic can be made into a template that can be easily revised to show regional and state trends – copying the approach used by the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) in its economic impact data report.
4. The NASBLA Executive Board should stay in close contact with states pursuing financial initiatives with their paddle sport communities so the efforts work in harmony.

White Paper Drafted by NASBLA 2014 Education & Outreach Subcommittee for Non-motorized and Paddlesport:

Wade Alonzo, BLA (WA) Subcommittee Chair and Charge Leader

Charge Team: Ed Huntsman (USCG); MariAnn McKenzie (OR); Chris Stec (ACA)