

NASBLA Model Procedure for: Abandoned, Derelict or At-Risk Recreational Vessels

Adopted September 16, 2026

DEFINITION OF ABANDONED VESSEL

"Abandoned vessel" means any vessel that:

- (a) Has remained on or immediately adjacent to private property (for more than [xx] days) without the consent of the owner(s) or person(s) in control of the property; or
- (b) Has been found adrift or unattended in or upon the waters of the State or public property, and is found to constitute a hazard or obstruction to the use of the waters of the [State] or presents a potential health or environmental hazard; or
- (c) Is left unattended on or along the waters of the State or public property for more than [xx] days and does not bear a valid registration; or
- (d) Is physically inoperable and left unattended on waters of the State or public property for more than [xx] days

DEFINITION OF DERELICT VESSEL

"Derelict vessel" means any vessel that is moored, stranded, wrecked, or left unattended for more than [xx] days including:

- (a) Is sunk or partially sunk, or
- (b) Is aground without the ability to extricate itself absent mechanical assistance, or
- (c) Remains on waters or public property after a marine casualty, such as a boating accident, extreme weather or fire, or
- (d) In a neglected or deteriorating condition such that the boat's hull, steering or propulsion systems are compromised due to missing, incomplete, damaged, broken, or inoperable components.

DEFINITION OF AT-RISK VESSEL

"At-risk vessel" means any vessel that is not being addressed by the vessel owner in a reasonable timeframe through removal, repair, salvage, securely stored, junked or an acceptable alternative arrangement, and:

- (a) Is at risk of becoming a derelict vessel, or
- (b) Involving any of the following circumstances:
 - a. Vessel is taking on or has taken on water without an effective means to dewater, or
 - b. Vessel remains adrift on public waters during an extreme weather event, or
 - c. Vessel has broken loose or is in danger of breaking loose from its current location, or
 - d. Vessel does not have effective means of propulsion for safe navigation

PROCEDURE:

Public, State, or Federal Land/Waterways

- Any person who finds or comes into possession of a vessel other than through normal purchase, loan, rental, charter, or gift shall notify local law enforcement within [xx] hours. Any person finding an unoccupied or unattended vessel indicating an emergency shall notify law enforcement without delay.
- The notification shall include a description of the vessel and the specific location where it was found or recovered.
- The law enforcement agency shall initiate an abandoned, derelict or at-risk vessel investigation consistent with state law.
- If the vessel is under contract or agreement for recovery or removal, the law enforcement agency shall notate such within their abandoned, derelict or at-risk vessel investigation and permit a reasonable timeframe for recovery and/or removal of the vessel.

Private Property

If the vessel is abandoned on private property and the claimant owns or has an interest in the vessel, a notarized statement is required stating how and when the claimant came into possession of the vessel, including the claimant's name, address, date and signature.

Marine Business or Public Facilities

A marine business includes an entity that repairs, remanufacturers, restores, alters, stores, cleans or holds for brokerage or consignment sale any boats, related equipment or watercraft trailers. This term includes, but is not limited to, a marina, watercraft dealer, watercraft trailer dealer, boat club, yacht club, repair facility, or storage facility. 'Related equipment' includes a boat in the possession of a marine business, including a motor, or found in or on a boat in the possession of a marine business.

Public facilities include municipal, county, port authority, state and federal marinas or docks, etc. operated by those agencies.

If the vessel was abandoned at a marine business or public facility and was entered into a contract for service with the vessel owner, a copy of the contract(s) is/are required, if in existence. In cases where the marine business or public facility made repairs to the vessel, a copy of the repair bill is required.

(a) Notice to owner(s) and/or secured party(ies)

- a. If the vessel has a registration number assigned by [State Agency], or any other state, or if there are any other means of identifying the owner(s) and /or lien holder(s), the claimant, interested party or state agency, must make a good faith effort to notify the owner(s) and/or lienholder(s) at their last known address.

Acceptable notification methods include:

- (i) By certified mail, return receipt requested;
 - (ii) in person;
 - (iii) by direct, individual, verifiable electronic means, including email or other forms of online direct messaging; or
 - (iv) publicly accessible digital media, including social media. Must also include (i), (ii) or (iii)
- b. Affix a physical notice to the vessel in a conspicuous location that identifies the vessel to be abandoned, derelict or at-risk, identifies the investigating agency, and advises the time period to reclaim or remove the vessel.

(b) Contents of notice must:

- (i) Describe the vessel and include make, year, color, and any identifying numbers such as a hull identification number, federal documentation number, or state registration number;
- (ii) Give location where vessel was located and identified as abandoned, derelict or at-risk, and where the vessel is currently located, if it differs from the abandoned, derelict, or at-risk location;
- (iii) Inform the owner(s) and secured party(ies) of a right to reclaim the vessel within [xx] days, subject to payment of reasonable restitution and penalty costs authorized by state law;
- (iv) State that failure to claim the vessel will constitute a waiver of all rights, title and interest in the vessel and may result in removal, destruction, sale, donation, or other disposition as provided by state law; and
- (v) If ownership is not claimed and vessel removed within [xx] days after receipt of the letter, claimant will apply to the [State Agency] for registration and/or title.

(c) Notice by publication:

- a. If the [State Agency] is unable to determine the last registered owner(s) or the identity of any secured party(ies) of the abandoned/salvaged vessel, or if the certified mail notice is returned "undeliverable," the claimant, interested party or state agency shall:
 - (i) Public notice/advertisement, to appear for [xx] consecutive days, in a newspaper of general circulation and by verifiable electronic means, such as publicly accessible digital media, within the county or city where the vessel is located.
 - (ii) The notice by publication shall contain the information required under

contents of notice.

(d) Ownership rights:

- a. After the time period specified in the notice, the owner of the abandoned, derelict or at-risk vessel shall relinquish all ownership rights in the vessel.

(e) Application for registration and/or title:

- a. If the owner(s) or secured party(ies) fails to claim the vessel within [xx] days after the certified mail or after the notice by publication is given, the claimant may apply to the [State Agency] for registration and/or title, or other disposition authorized by state law.
- b. The application must be accompanied by the following:
 - (i) The completed and notarized affidavit for Abandoned, Derelict, or At-Risk Recreational Vessels, including facts of discovery, reporting, investigation, and notice.
 - (ii) Receipts for certified mail to identified owner(s) and lienholders) or original copies of the notice of publication as required; and
 - (iii) A certificate of Deletion issued by the U.S. Coast Guard if the vessel bears, or previously bore, an official documentation number issued by the Coast Guard or other evidence that federal documentation has been terminated.
 - (iv) Any investigative report or certificate issued by the law enforcement agency confirming compliance with state statutes or regulations governing lost property or abandoned, derelict, and at-risk vessels.

(f) Issuance of Registration and/or Title:

- a. Upon receipt of the documentation demonstrating compliance with this procedure and applicable state law, the [State Agency] shall issue a registration and/or title in the name of the applicant, subject to any surviving perfected security interests recognized by state law.
- b. All costs incurred in investigation, notice, removal, storage, destruction or disposition of an abandoned, derelict or at-risk vessel are the responsibility of the vessel owner or responsible party and may be collected, as provided by state law.
- c. The applicant for registration and/or title shall bear all administrative costs associated with issuance of the registration and/or title, unless reimbursed under a vessel removal grant or cost-recovery program.

**AFFIDAVIT FOR REGISTRATION/TITLING ABANDONED,
DERELICT & AT-RISK RECREATIONAL VESSEL**

STATE OF _____

I certify that I have complied with the provisions of the Code of [State] or Regulations of the [State] pertaining to an abandoned and/ or salvaged vessel described below:

Location of where vessel was found: _____

Condition of vessel: _____

Present Location of abandoned vessel: _____

State Registration Number: _____ Make of vessel: _____

Hull Identification Number: _____ Year Built: _____ Length: _____ Color: _____ Hull

Material: _____ Propulsion Type: _____

Type of vessel: _____

I hereby submit the following documentation to obtain a certificate of title and/or registration pursuant to [Cite state law or regulation] for the vessel which is abandoned on [property or waters] for a period of at least [xx] months/days:

1. The receipts for and a copy of the certified mail, return receipt requested, which notified the last registered and/or titled owner(s) and all lienholder(s), if any, of the location of the vessel and my intention to apply for a certificate of title and/or registration if the vessel is unclaimed after 30 days notice. (If Post Office returns the notification as undeliverable, attach to this form).
2. Original copies of the public notice of intent published for [xx] consecutive days in a newspaper of general circulation and by verifiable electronic means in the county or city where the lost/abandoned vessel was found.
3. If the vessel was registered and/or titled in another state, a letter from the registration authority stating the last known owner/lien holder name and address.
4. An application for certificate of number and/or title and all applicable fees.

Signature of Applicant

State of _____

County of _____

Sworn and subscribed before me this _____ day of _____, 19 _____.

My commission expires: _____ Notary Public _____

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear (Vessel Owner(s)/Lienholder(s)):

The following vessel, owned or secured by you, has apparently been abandoned for more than [xx] days or [xx] months on the property of: (list name, address and telephone number).

Description of Vessel: Registration Number, Hull Identification Number, Make, Model, Length, Year Built, color and other identifying features.

Notice is hereby given that application for title and/or registration will be made in accordance with the Code of {State} or Regulations of the [State Agency] if this vessel is not claimed and removed from the property listed above within 30 days of this notice.

Notice is further given that failure to claim the vessel will constitute a waiver of all rights, title and interest in the vessel.

Sincerely,

SAMPLE NOTICE OF PUBLICATION:

Notice is hereby given that the following vessel has apparently been abandoned for more than [xx] days or [xx] months on the property of: (list name, address and telephone number).

Description of vessel: Registration Number, Hull Identification Number, Make, Model, Length, Year Built, color and other identifying features.

Application for title and/or registration will be made in accordance with the Code of {State} or Regulations of the [State Agency] if this vessel is not claimed and removed from the property listed above within 30 days of this notice.

Notice is further given that failure to claim the vessel will constitute a waiver of all rights, title and interest in the vessel.