

# *the Florida* **BOATER'S GUIDE**

**A HANDBOOK OF  
BOATING LAWS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**INCLUDES A FLORIDA FISH  
IDENTIFICATION GUIDE**



Any person born on or after January 1, 1988, must have a Florida Boating Safety Education ID Card and photographic ID to operate a vessel powered by a motor of 10 horsepower or more. To obtain the safety card, operators must complete a boater education course that is approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA). The How to Boat Smart program is nationally recognized and NASBLA-approved. By completing a boating safety course, you will be able to have a safer, more enjoyable time on the water. Many insurance companies offer a discount for successful completion.

# Now!

Florida boaters have three ways to become certified in boating safety with the



## 1. Over the Internet...

Learn what you need to be a safe boat operator online! The complete course with exciting visuals awaits you on the Internet. Interactive animations help you learn and retain information on boating safely in Florida. Successfully complete the online test, and you will receive a State of Florida boating safety identification card by mail. There is a nominal fee for online certification.

**Start today at [www.boat-ed.com/florida](http://www.boat-ed.com/florida)**

## 2. In a classroom...

Share the learning experience with other boaters and a qualified instructor. Call **850-488-5600** or log onto the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission website to locate the next classroom course in your area.

**Find a course at [www.MyFWC.com](http://www.MyFWC.com)**

## 3. By correspondence...

Study at home with the *How to Boat Smart* manual. Then take the certification exam at home and mail it to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for grading and certification.

**To learn more, call [850-488-5600](tel:850-488-5600)**

# *the Florida* **BOATER'S GUIDE**

## **A HANDBOOK OF BOATING LAWS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**



Free publication provided by the Florida Fish and  
Wildlife Conservation Commission

Published by Boat Ed®, a division of Kalkomey Enterprises, LLC, 740 East Campbell Road, Suite 900, Richardson, TX 75081, 214-351-0461.  
Printed in the U.S.A.

Copyright © 2004–2022 by Kalkomey Enterprises, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any process without permission in writing from Kalkomey Enterprises, LLC. Effort has been made to make this publication as complete and accurate as possible. All references contained in this publication have been compiled from sources believed to be reliable, and to represent the best current opinion on the subject. Kalkomey Enterprises, LLC is not responsible or liable for any claims, liabilities, damages, or other adverse effects or consequences to any person or property caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly from the application or use of the information contained in this publication. P0622

 **kalkomey™**  
[www.kalkomey.com](http://www.kalkomey.com)

# Table of Contents

## Boating Basics

### On the Water

Encountering Other Vessels . . . . .	4
Navigation Rules . . . . .	5
Nighttime Navigation . . . . .	6
U.S. Aids to Navigation System (ATON) . . . .	8
VHF Radio. . . . .	11

### Specifically for PWC

Steering and Stopping a PWC . . . . .	12
Engine Cut-Off Switch (ECOS) . . . . .	12
Reboarding a Capsized PWC. . . . .	13
Courtesy and Environmental Considerations . . . . .	13

### Specifically for Other Watersports

Paddlesports . . . . .	14
Airboats . . . . .	15

## It's the Law!

### Before Going Out

Registering Your Vessel . . . . .	16
Other Facts About Titling and Registration . . . . .	17
Who May Operate a Vessel . . . . .	18
Liveries (Boat/PWC Rental Facilities) . . . .	19
Hull Identification Number (HIN) . . . . .	19

### Required Equipment

Life Jackets . . . . .	20
Navigation Lights . . . . .	22
Fire Extinguishers . . . . .	24
Ventilation Systems . . . . .	25
Backfire Flame Control Devices. . . . .	25
Mufflers . . . . .	25
Visual Distress Signals (VDSs) . . . . .	26
Sound-Producing Devices . . . . .	27
Sound Signals . . . . .	27
Divers-Down Warning Device. . . . .	28

### On the Water

Unlawful Operation . . . . .	29
Boating Regulatory Zones . . . . .	29
Human-Powered Vessels Operating in the Florida Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) . . . .	31
Obstructing Navigation . . . . .	31
Homeland Security Restrictions. . . . .	31
Alcohol and Drugs . . . . .	32
Boating Accidents. . . . .	32
Discharge of Oil and Other Hazardous Substances . . . . .	33
Discharge of Trash . . . . .	33
Discharge of Sewage and Waste . . . . .	34
Protect Florida's Seagrasses . . . . .	35
Protect Florida's Waterways From Invasive Aquatic Plants. . . . .	35

### Specifically for PWC

Requirements Specific to PWC . . . . .	36
--	----

### Specifically for Skiing

Requirements for Towing Skiers. . . . .	37
---	----



# Florida Fish

## Saltwater Fish

Fish Listings .....38–45

## Freshwater Fish

Fish Listings .....46–47

## Stay up to date on new boating laws...

Be sure to stay abreast of new boating laws and requirements.

- For state boating law information, contact the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).
  - Call **850-488-5600**.
  - Visit the FWC website at **[www.MyFWC.com](http://www.MyFWC.com)**.
- For federal boating laws, visit the U.S. Coast Guard's boating safety website at **[www.uscgboating.org](http://www.uscgboating.org)**.

Information in this reference guide does not replace what is specifically legal for boating in Florida, which is found in the Florida Statutes, Administrative Code, and federal law.

# On the Water

Safe navigation on Florida's waterways is everyone's responsibility. All operators are equally responsible for taking action necessary to avoid collisions.

## Encountering Other Vessels

Even though no vessel has the "right-of-way" over another vessel, there are some rules that every operator should follow when encountering other vessels. It is the responsibility of both operators to take the action needed to avoid a collision.

**To prevent collisions, every operator should follow the three basic rules of navigation.**

- Practice good seamanship.
- Keep a sharp lookout.
- Maintain a safe speed and distance.

## Encountering Vessels With Limited Maneuverability

- When operating a power-driven vessel, you must give way to:
  - Any vessel not under command, such as an anchored or disabled vessel
  - Any vessel restricted in its ability to maneuver, such as a vessel towing another or laying cable, or one constrained by its draft, such as a large ship in a channel
  - A vessel engaged in commercial fishing
  - A sailboat under sail unless it is overtaking
- When operating a vessel under sail, you must give way to:
  - Any vessel not under command
  - Any vessel restricted in its ability to maneuver
  - A vessel engaged in commercial fishing

## Navigation Rules

There are two terms that help explain these rules.

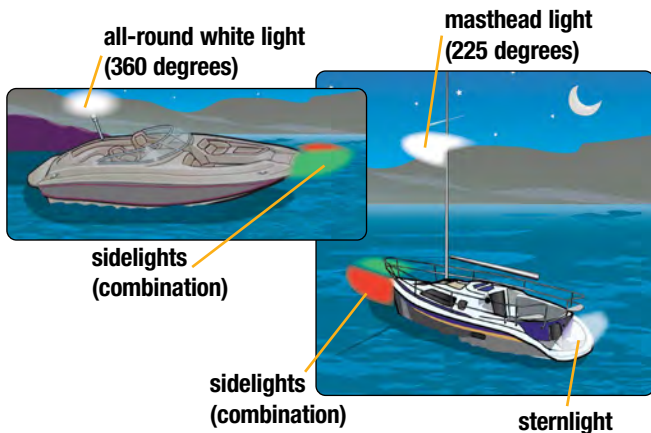
- **Stand-on vessel:** The vessel that should maintain its course and speed
- **Give-way vessel:** The vessel that must take early and substantial action to avoid collision by stopping, slowing down, or changing course

Power vs. Power		Power vs. Sail
	<p><b>Meeting Head-On</b>  <b>Power vs. Power:</b> Neither vessel is the stand-on vessel. Both vessels should keep to the starboard (right).   <b>Power vs. Sail:</b> The powerboat is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.</p>	
	<p><b>Crossing Situations</b>  <b>Power vs. Power:</b> The vessel on the operator's port (left) side is the give-way vessel. The vessel on the operator's starboard (right) side is the stand-on vessel.   <b>Power vs. Sail:</b> The powerboat is the give-way vessel. The sailboat is the stand-on vessel.</p>	
	<p><b>Overtaking</b>  <b>Power vs. Power:</b> The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.   <b>Power vs. Sail:</b> The vessel that is overtaking another vessel is the give-way vessel. The vessel being overtaken is the stand-on vessel.</p>	

## Nighttime Navigation

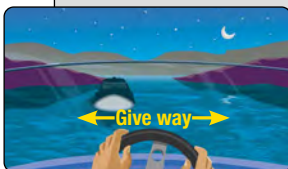
Be on the lookout for the lights of other vessels when boating at night. Several types of lights serve as navigational aids at night. There are four common navigation lights.

- **Sidelights:** These red and green lights are called sidelights (also called combination lights) because they are visible to another vessel approaching from the side or head-on. The red light indicates a vessel's port (left) side; the green indicates a vessel's starboard (right) side.
- **Sternlight:** This white light is seen from behind or nearly behind the vessel.
- **Masthead Light:** This white light shines forward and to both sides and is required on all power-driven vessels. A masthead light must be displayed by all vessels when under engine power. The absence of this light indicates a sailboat under sail.
- **All-Round White Light:** On power-driven vessels less than 39.4 feet in length, this light may be used to combine a masthead light and sternlight into a single white light that can be seen by other vessels from any direction. This light serves as an anchor light when sidelights are extinguished.

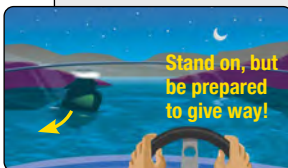




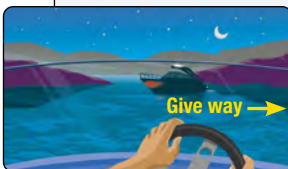
## Encountering Vessels at Night



When you see only a white light, you are overtaking another vessel. It is the stand-on vessel whether it is underway or anchored. You may go around it on either side.



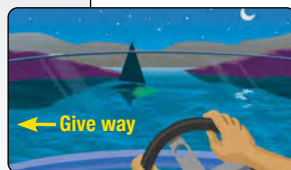
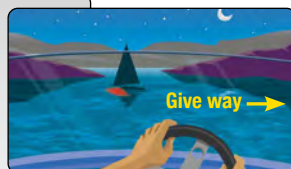
When you see a green and a white light, you are the stand-on vessel. However, remain alert in case the other vessel operator does not see you or does not know the navigation rules.



When you see a red and a white light, you must give way to the other vessel. Slow down and allow the vessel to pass, or you may turn to the right and pass behind the other vessel.

## Encountering a Sailboat at Night

When you see **only a red light** or **only a green light**, you may be approaching a sailboat under sail and you must give way. The sailboat under sail is always the stand-on vessel.



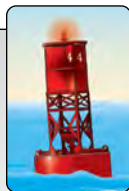
## U.S. Aids to Navigation System (ATON)

Buoys and markers are the “traffic signals” that guide vessel operators safely along some waterways. They also identify dangerous or controlled areas and give directions and information. As a recreational boat or personal watercraft (PWC) operator, you will need to know the lateral navigation markers and non-lateral markers of the U.S. Aids to Navigation System.

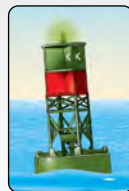
### Lateral Markers

These navigation aids mark the edges of safe water areas; for example, directing travel within a channel. The markers use a combination of colors and numbers, which may appear on either buoys or permanently placed markers.

**Red colors, red lights, and even numbers** indicate the right side of the channel as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream.



**Green colors, green lights, and odd numbers** indicate the left side of the channel as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream.



**Red and green colors and/or lights** indicate the preferred (primary) channel. If green is on top, the preferred channel is to the right as a boater enters from the open sea or heads upstream; if red is on top, the preferred channel is to the left.



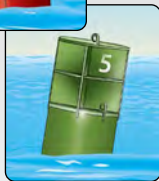
### Red Right Returning

is a reminder of the correct course when returning from open waters or heading upstream.

**Nuns** are red cone-shaped buoys marked with even numbers.



**Cans** are green cylindrical-shaped buoys marked with odd numbers.



**Lighted Buoys** use the lateral marker colors and numbers discussed above; in addition, they have a matching colored light.

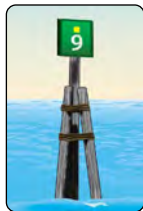
**Daymarks** are permanently placed signs attached to structures, such as posts, in the water. Common daymarks are red triangles (equivalent to nuns) and green squares (equivalent to cans). They may be lighted also.



### Intracoastal Waterway System

The Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) is a chain of channels that provide an inland passage along the U.S. coast. Buoys and markers in this system are identified by yellow symbols and serve a dual purpose—they are navigation aids for both the lateral system of markers and the ICW. If following the ICW from New Jersey to Brownsville, Texas, in a clockwise direction:

- Any marker displaying a yellow triangle should be passed by keeping it on the starboard (right) side of your vessel.
- Any marker displaying a yellow square should be passed by keeping it on the port (left) side of your vessel.



## Non-Lateral Markers

Non-lateral markers are navigation aids that give information about topics other than the edges of safe water areas. The most common are regulatory markers (shown below) that are white and use orange markings and black lettering. These markers are found on waterways throughout Florida.



### Information

Squares indicate where to find food, supplies, repairs, etc., and give directions and other information.

### Controlled

Circles indicate a controlled area, such as speed limit, no fishing or anchoring, ski only or no skiing, or “slow, no wake.”



### Exclusion

Crossed diamonds indicate areas off limits to all vessels, such as swimming areas, dams, and spillways.

### Danger

Diamonds warn of dangers, such as rocks, shoals, construction, dams, or stumps. Always proceed with caution.



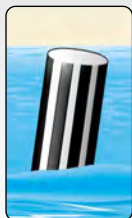
## Mooring Buoy

Mooring buoys are white with a blue horizontal band and are found in marinas and other areas where vessels are allowed to anchor.



## Other Non-Lateral Markers

**Safe Water Markers** are white with red vertical stripes and mark mid-channels or fairways. They may be passed on either side.



**Inland Waters Obstruction Markers** are white with black vertical stripes and indicate an obstruction to navigation. You should not pass between these buoys and the nearest shore.



## VHF Radio

You should always monitor weather developments. One way is to tune a VHF radio to the frequencies listed below. A VHF radio is also useful if you need to summon help due to a boating emergency.

### VHF Frequencies Broadcasting NOAA Weather Reports

162.400 MHz	162.500 MHz
162.425 MHz	162.525 MHz
162.450 MHz	162.550 MHz
162.475 MHz	

### Recreational boaters are given access to these VHF channels:

6	Intership safety communications only
9	Communications between vessels (commercial and recreational) and ship to coast
13	Strictly for navigation purposes by vessels at bridges, locks, and harbors
16	Distress and safety calls to USCG and others, and to initiate calls to other vessels
22	USCG broadcasts of severe weather warnings and other safety warnings
24-28	Public telephone calls (to marine operator)
68, 69, 71	Recreational vessel radio channels and ship to coast

# Specifically for PWC

A PWC is considered an inboard vessel and comes under the same rules and requirements as any other vessel. PWC operators must keep in mind that there are specific considerations when using a PWC.

## Steering and Stopping a PWC

A PWC is a quick, highly maneuverable vessel that is a lot of fun to operate. Many PWC operators and passengers are injured on Florida's waters because they become too comfortable with the speed and maneuverability of their vessels. This tendency leads to several operator mistakes that usually result in severe injury or death. These mistakes are:

- **Riding too close to another PWC or a fixed object.** The PWC in front of or beside you can change direction in an instant, often leading to a high-speed collision. Keep lots of distance between you and any other vessel or object.
- **Turning without looking.** You may not realize that another vessel is behind you, and any abrupt turn (like a 180-degree turn) is likely to result in a serious collision. Making abrupt turns in an area where any other vessels are nearby is not only dangerous but also is a violation of Florida law.
- **Trying to turn without power.** Even though PWC manufacturers have made improvements in "off-throttle steering" capabilities, PWC will not turn effectively when the throttle is released. In the event of a near collision, one's natural tendency is to reduce power and turn—but PWC do not turn this way. Pay close attention to your surroundings, and stay away from other vessels or objects so that you don't make this often fatal mistake.

## Engine Cut-Off Switch (ECOS)

- Most PWC and powerboats come equipped with an emergency engine cut-off switch (ECOS). If properly worn, this safety device is designed to shut off the engine if the operator is thrown from the proper operating position. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) requires that operators of vessels equipped with an ECOS use the device at all times.
- The ECOS works by attaching a lanyard between the operator and the switch. If the lanyard is removed from the switch, the engine will shut off. You must wear the safety switch lanyard while operating a PWC.

steering control



steering nozzle

### Remember...

Beginning April 2021, a new federal rule requires operators of recreational vessels less than 26 feet in length to use the ECOS if the vessel is equipped with such a device. Operators must use the ECOS whenever the vessel is operating on plane or above displacement speed.

Be sure to check with the state boating agency where you are boating to determine how this new USCG rule applies locally. For more information on this requirement, visit [www.uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/engine-cut-off-switch-faq.php](http://www.uscgboating.org/recreational-boaters/engine-cut-off-switch-faq.php).

## Reboarding a Capsized PWC

After a fall, the PWC could be overturned completely. You should be familiar with the proper procedure to right the PWC and to reboard from the rear of the craft.

- Most manufacturers have placed a decal at the rear or bottom of the craft that indicates the direction to roll your PWC to return it to an upright position. If no decal exists, check your owner's manual or ask the dealer. If you roll it over the wrong way, you could damage your PWC.
- Practice reboarding with someone else around to make sure you can handle it alone. Don't ride your PWC if you are very tired because reboarding would be difficult. Also, avoid riding where there are strong currents or winds, which could hamper your reboarding efforts.

## Courtesy and Environmental Considerations

When operating your PWC, always be considerate of the effect you may have on the environment and others enjoying the waterways.

- Jumping the wake of a passing boat, or riding too close to another boat, creates special risks and is prohibited. Visibility around the boat making the wake may be blocked, both for the PWC operator and for oncoming traffic.
- Vary your operating area, and avoid repetitious maneuvers. Avoid congregating with other PWC operators near shore, as this can increase noise levels.
- Avoid making excessive noise near residential and camping areas, particularly early in the morning.
- Avoid maneuvers that cause the engine exhaust to lift out of the water; this causes increased noise levels. Do not modify your engine exhaust system if the result is more noise.
- Do not operate a PWC in shallow water (less than 24 inches deep). Bottom sediments or aquatic vegetation can be sucked into the water pump and damage your PWC and the environment.
- Avoid creating a wake, which can cause erosion, when operating near shore or in narrow streams or rivers.
- Do not dock or beach your PWC in reeds and grasses. This could damage fragile environments.
- Take extra care when fueling your PWC in or near the water. Oil and gasoline spills are very detrimental to the aquatic environment. Fuel on land if possible.
- Never use your PWC to chase wildlife, such as birds feeding near shore, waterfowl, or other animals.

# Specifically for Other Watersports

## Paddlesports

Paddlers (those who boat in small crafts, such as canoes, kayaks, and rafts) should follow the same safe practices as any other small vessel operator.

■ When paddling, you should:

- Know how to paddle or swim in strong currents, and be an experienced swimmer.
- Wear a personal flotation device (life jacket) at all times.
- Never paddle alone. Paddle with someone familiar with the waterway.
- Never overload the craft. Tie down gear, and distribute weight evenly. Don't move around in the craft as that can make it unstable.
- Check your craft for leaks.
- Map a general route and timetable when embarking on a long trip. Arrange for your vehicles to be shuttled to the takeout point.

■ If paddling on a lake, watch the weather, and stay close to shore. Head for shore if the waves increase.

- When approaching rapids or low-head dams, go ashore well upstream, and check them out before continuing. Be aware of any dangers ahead. Steer clear of drop-offs and dams. Carry your craft around low-head dams.
- Stay away from strainers. Strainers are river obstructions that allow water to flow through but block vessels and could throw you overboard and damage or trap your craft. Strainers may include overhanging branches, logjams, or flooded islands. Strainers are also notorious for causing death by drowning.

■ If you capsized:

- Float on the upstream side of the vessel. You can be crushed on the downstream side if you run into an obstruction.
- Do not attempt to stand or walk in swift-moving water. The current could pull you under if your foot becomes trapped between submerged rocks.
- Float on your back with your feet and arms extended. Float with your feet pointed downstream to act as a buffer against rocks. Don't fight the current. Use the current to backstroke your way to shore.





## Airboats

- Airboats are designed to operate well in shallow water and marshlands, but their high center of gravity and lack of flotation make them susceptible to capsizing and/or sinking.
- An airboat is propelled by air pushed through the vessel's aircraft-like propeller. The propeller creates a column of forced air that passes by the rudders, which permits steering. Consequently, they are best steered and controlled through acceleration.
- Unlike most other boats, airboats are incapable of going in reverse. Their forward momentum is slowed only by deceleration and the friction and displacement of the water.
- Safe and courteous airboat operation is very important for airboaters. The airboat operator must always be aware of the potential effects their boat may have on others. The “prop wash” can throw water spray, sand, or other objects toward others behind their boat, and a small, unstable boat may even be capsized by the forced air.
- Many outdoorsmen and waterway residents find airboat sound levels objectionable. ***Muffling an airboat's exhaust with an automotive-style factory muffler, underwater exhaust, or other manufactured device capable of adequately muffling the sound of the exhaust of the engine is required in Florida,*** and operators should take additional steps to reduce airboat sound. This includes slowly accelerating to planing speed, operating just fast enough to keep the boat on plane, and avoiding running “dry” and power-loading onto trailers.
- Airboats fall under the same guidelines as other vessels in regard to safety equipment to be carried. In addition:
  - All airboats operating on Florida waters must be equipped with a rectangular flag, at least 10" x 12" in size and international orange in color, which is displayed at least 10 feet above the bottom of the boat.
  - There may be some areas of the state where airboats are prohibited from operation.



# Before Going Out

All operators are required to obey laws that regulate your vessel's registration, titling, and operation.

## Registering Your Vessel

- You must have a Florida Certificate of Registration and validation decal to operate a vessel legally on public waters in Florida. The only exceptions are:
  - Non-motorized vessels less than 16 feet in length
  - Non-motorized canoes, kayaks, racing shells, or rowing sculls of any length
  - Vessels used *exclusively* in private lakes and ponds
- The Certificate of Registration and validation decal are issued by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.
  - The registration and decal are obtained by submitting the proper application and fee to your county tax collector's office. Additional information and application forms are available at [www.flhsmv.gov/resources/forms/](http://www.flhsmv.gov/resources/forms/).
  - Fees for registration are based on a vessel's length.
- *The Certificate of Registration must be on board and available for inspection by an enforcement officer whenever the vessel is operated.*
- The vessel's registration number and validation decal must be displayed as follows.
  - Number must be painted, applied as a decal, or otherwise affixed to both sides of the bow and placed where it can be observed clearly.
  - Number must read from left to right on both sides of the bow.
  - Number must be in at least three-inch-high bold **BLOCK** letters.
  - Number's color must contrast with its background.
  - Letters must be separated from the numbers by a space or hyphen equal to the letter width: **FL 3717 ZW** or **FL-3717-ZW**.
  - Decal must be affixed to the port (left) side of the vessel within six inches of the registration number. The decal may precede or follow the number.
- If your vessel requires registration, it is illegal to operate it or allow others to operate your vessel unless it is registered and numbered as described above.

REG. FEE	INIT. FEE	COUNTY FEE	SALES TAX	TITLE FEE
\$53.00	\$	\$2.75	\$0.00	\$
PLATE ISSUED	DATE	INTERNET KIOSK FEE	VOLUNTARY CONT. TOTAL	GRAND TOTAL
	03/30/22	\$0.00	\$	\$56.35
FLORIDA VESSEL REGISTRATION				
VESSEL # FL 3717 ZW DECAL # 00000502 EXP 02/28/23				
HIN 5010010506 TC 19/04 1996 SER				
DL # S4557357200				
HULL # 68455				
PROPUL. OUTBOARD FUEL GAS				
USE # PLANE TYPE # CHAIN LENGTH 28'6" ISSUED 03/30/22				
JOHN D DOE				
123 SOMEWHERE ST				
CITY, FL 32955				

### Validation Decal



**Spaces or hyphens  
should appear here.**

## Other Facts About Titling and Registration

- A Certificate of Title proves ownership. All vessels are required to have a Certificate of Title except:
  - Non-motorized vessels less than 16 feet in length
  - Vessels used *exclusively* on private lakes and ponds
  - Vessels documented with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)
- Vessels must be registered and numbered within 30 days of purchase.
- A Certificate of Registration is valid for one or two years. For vessels owned by:
  - **An individual:** The registration will expire on the last day of the month that is prior to the owner's birth month.
  - **More than one person:** The registration will expire at midnight on the date of birth of the vessel owner whose name appears first on the registration.
  - **A company, corporation, government entity, boat dealer, or manufacturer:** The registration is valid for only one year and will expire on June 30.
- The owner of a registered vessel must notify the county tax collector within 30 days if he or she changes address.
- The owner of a registered vessel must notify the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles within 30 days if the vessel is sold, stolen, destroyed, abandoned, or lost.
- If your vessel has a current and valid registration or certificate of number from another U.S. state or territory, you may operate it in Florida for 90 days before you are required to register it in Florida.
- Larger recreational vessels owned by U.S. citizens may (at the option of the owner) be documented by the USCG. Call the USCG at **1-800-799-8362** for more information. Documented vessels operating on Florida waters must have a current vessel registration either from Florida or another state.

## Who May Operate a Vessel

To operate a vessel powered by a motor of 10 horsepower or greater, a person born on or after January 1, 1988, must have completed a boater education course approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), or passed an approved equivalency exam.

- Vessel operators who are required to have completed a boating education course or exam must carry on board their Florida Boating Safety Education ID Card (plastic or electronic) issued by the FWC **and** a photographic identification card.
- These persons are exempt from carrying a Florida Boating Safety Education ID Card on board:
  - Operators who have their course completion certificate showing successful completion of an FWC– and NASBLA–approved boating safety course **and** a photographic identification card. The certificate must give the operator's first and last names, date of birth, and the date they passed the course. The course completion certificate:
    - Is valid for 90 days from the date the certificate was issued **and...**
    - Is not a permanent replacement for the Florida Boating Safety Education ID Card.
  - Persons licensed by the USCG as a master of a vessel.
  - Persons operating on a private lake or pond.
  - A non-resident who has in his or her possession proof that he or she has completed a NASBLA–approved boater safety course or equivalency examination from another state.
  - Operators who are accompanied on board by a person who is exempt from the education requirement or by a person who is at least 18 years old, possesses the required identification card, and is attendant to the operation of the vessel and responsible for any violation that occurs.
  - Persons operating a vessel within 90 days after purchase who have a bill of sale on board and available for inspection.
- No one under 14 years of age may operate any personal watercraft (PWC) on Florida waters at any time, even if such person possesses a Florida Boating Safety Education ID Card.
- No one under the age of 18 years may rent/lease a PWC.
- It is also illegal for the owner of a PWC to knowingly allow a person under 14 years of age to operate a PWC.

Students may choose to receive their Boating Safety Education ID Card either as a plastic card **or** as an electronic version—not both. The electronic version of the card can be displayed on a portable electronic device, or it can be displayed via a printed-out copy. The electronic card is the same as the plastic card for the purposes of proof of completion of the boating safety requirements.

## Liveries (Boat/PWC Rental Facilities)

Facilities renting vessels and anyone renting from them must follow these regulations.

- The facility is prohibited from renting a vessel that does not have the proper safety equipment, exceeds the recommended horsepower or load capacity, or is not seaworthy.
- The facility must provide pre-rental or pre-ride instruction on the safe operation of any vessel. Renters must acknowledge they have received required instruction.
- All renters who are required by law to have a boater education ID card must present the card or its equivalent before the facility may rent to him or her.
- PWC liveries must provide instruction to renters (see below for details).
- PWC liveries must not rent to anyone under the age of 18 years.
- You should only rent from a livery that is properly permitted, as required by law.

### PWC Liveries Must Instruct Renters

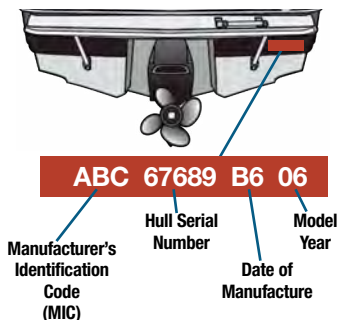
PWC liveries must inform renters about the safe and proper operation of a PWC.

This includes information on:

- Reckless operation; and noise, nuisance, and environmental concerns
- Operational characteristics of the PWC to be rented: propulsion, steering, and stopping characteristics of jet-pump vessels
- Safe vessel operation and vessel right-of-way rules: the location and content of warning labels, how to reboard a PWC, the applicability of the Navigation Rules to PWC operation, and problems with seeing and being seen by other boaters
- Responsibility of the operator, and safe and proper operation of the vessel
- Local characteristics of the waterway where the vessel will be used

## Hull Identification Number (HIN)

- The Hull Identification Number (HIN) is a unique 12-digit number assigned by the manufacturer to vessels built after 1972.
- Hull Identification Numbers:
  - Distinguish one vessel from another.
  - Are engraved in the fiberglass or on a metal plate permanently attached to the transom.
- You should write down your HIN and put it in a place separate from your vessel in case warranty problems arise or your vessel is stolen.
- It is illegal to destroy, remove, alter, or deface the HIN.



# Required Equipment

When preparing to go out on a vessel, the owner and/or operator of a vessel is responsible for carrying, storing, maintaining, and using the safety equipment required by the USCG.

## Life Jackets

- All vessels must have at least one wearable life jacket, sometimes also called a personal flotation device (PFD), that is USCG–approved and of the proper size for each person on board.
- In addition to the above requirement, vessels 16 feet in length or longer must have one throwable device that is USCG–approved on board and immediately available.
- Children under 6 years of age must *wear* a USCG–approved life jacket at all times while on any vessel less than 26 feet in length that is underway upon Florida waters. (“Underway” means any time except when the vessel is anchored, moored, docked, or aground.) Life jackets must be used in accordance with the USCG approval label.
- Vessels operating on waters outside the geographical boundaries of Florida (three miles or the edge of the Gulf Stream, whichever is greater, off the Atlantic coast or nine miles off the Gulf of Mexico coast) are subject to the federal life jacket regulation for children. On these waters, each child under 13 years of age who is on an underway recreational vessel must *wear* an appropriate USCG–approved life jacket unless the child is below deck or in an enclosed cabin.
- Each person on board a PWC, and anyone being towed behind a vessel, must *wear* a non-inflatable USCG–approved life jacket. Inflatable life jackets are not to be worn on PWC or while water-skiing.
- Besides being labeled “USCG approved,” all life jackets must be:
  - *In good and serviceable condition.*
  - *Readily accessible*, which means you are able to put the life jacket on quickly in an emergency.
  - *Of the proper size for the intended wearer.* Sizing for life jackets is based on body weight and chest size.



This is an example of what a new life jacket label looks like. Regardless of the label, make sure you read it, always look for the USCG approval number, and ensure you pay close attention to directions or recommendations on the label.



Company Name Company Address Company website if available Made in U.S.A.	Let's Certification Mark	Use: Fasten all closures and adjust for a snug fit. Inspection: Inspect your life vest before each outing. Do not use if your life vest shows signs of wear, damage, or rot. Care and Storage: Dry thoroughly after each outing. Store in a dry, cool place out of direct sunlight.
USCG Approved 160.064XXXXXX TC Approved 52XXXXX-A AND CANUL 12402-6	Certifying Lab Identification and address	
Model: XXXX Style: XXXX Lot No. XXXX		
Approval conditions state that this device must be worn to be counted as equipment required by vessels meeting Transport Canada or USCG regulations.		



### Wearable Offshore Life Jackets (Type I)

These vests are geared for rough or remote waters where rescue may take a while. They provide the most buoyancy, are excellent for flotation, and will turn most unconscious persons face up in the water.



### Wearable Near-Shore Vests (Type II)

These vests are good for calm waters when quick rescue is likely. They may not turn some unconscious wearers face up in the water.



### Wearable Flotation Aids (Type III)

These vests or full-sleeved jackets are good for calm waters when quick rescue is likely. They are not recommended for rough waters because they will not turn most unconscious persons face up.



### Throwable Devices/Not Wearable (Type IV)

These cushions and ring buoys are designed to be thrown to someone in trouble. Because a throwable device is not designed to be worn, it is neither for rough waters nor for persons who are unable to hold onto it.



### Special-Use Devices (Type V)

These vests, deck suits, hybrid life jackets, and others are designed for specific activities, such as windsurfing, kayaking, or water-skiing. *Since special-use devices are designed for specific activities, these PFDs—and all PFDs—must be used in accordance with their labels.*

## Navigation Lights

The required navigation lights must be displayed between sunset and sunrise and during periods of restricted visibility.

### Power-Driven Vessels When Underway

**If less than 65.6 feet long**, these vessels must exhibit the lights as shown in illustration 1. Remember, power-driven vessels include sailboats operating under engine power. The required lights are:

- Red and green sidelights visible from a distance of at least two miles away—or if less than 39.4 feet long, at least one mile away—on a dark, clear night.
- An all-round white light or both a masthead light and a sternlight. These lights must be visible from a distance of at least two miles away on a dark, clear night. The all-round white light (or the masthead light) must be at least 3.3 feet higher than the sidelights.

### Unpowered Vessels When Underway

Unpowered vessels are sailboats or vessels that are paddled, poled, or rowed.

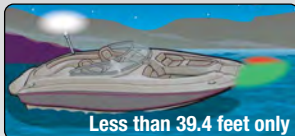
- **If less than 65.6 feet long**, these vessels must exhibit the lights as shown in illustration 2. The required lights are:
  - Red and green sidelights visible from at least two miles away—or if less than 39.4 feet long, at least one mile away.
  - A sternlight visible from at least two miles away.
- **If less than 23.0 feet long**, these vessels should:
  - If practical, exhibit the same lights as required for unpowered vessels less than 65.6 feet in length.
  - If not practical, have on hand at least one lantern or flashlight shining a white light as in illustration 3, to be displayed in time to avoid a collision.

### All Vessels When Not Underway

**All vessels** are required to display a white light visible from all directions whenever they are moored or anchored away from dock between sunset and sunrise and/or during periods of restricted visibility.



## 1. Power-Driven Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet



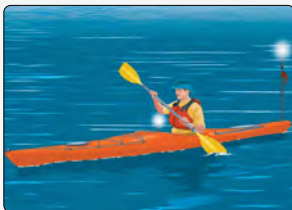
The masthead light and sternlight may be combined as an all-round white light on vessels less than 39.4 feet long.

## 2. Unpowered Vessels Less Than 65.6 Feet



An alternative to the sidelights and sternlight is a combination red, green, and white light, which must be exhibited near the top of the mast.

## 3. Unpowered Vessels Less Than 23 Feet



To prevent a collision, vessel operators should never leave shore without a flashlight. Even if you plan to return before dark, unforeseen developments might delay your return past nightfall.

## Fire Extinguishers

**Effective April 20, 2022**, any non-rechargeable (disposable) fire extinguisher that is older than 12 years should be removed from service. Refer to the date of manufacturing stamped on the bottle; for example, “05” means “2005.”

- All non-exempt vessels, including PWC, are required to have a Type B USCG-approved fire extinguisher on board.
- *While a vessel may be exempt from the fire extinguisher requirement, all vessel operators are encouraged to carry a fire extinguisher on board.*
- Approved types of fire extinguishers are identified by the following marking on the label—“Marine Type USCG Approved”—followed by the size and type symbols and the approval number. Only USCG-approved fire extinguishers are legal for use on vessels.
- When required by the USCG, fire extinguishers must be on board the vessel and readily accessible—where they can be easily reached. When deciding on a place to store a fire extinguisher, make sure to consider how easy it is to reach in the event of a fire. It is recommended that the fire extinguisher be conspicuously and securely mounted on its intended hanger or bracket.

The following information is **effective April 20, 2022**.

- Vessels that have a **model year** of 2018 and newer may carry only 5-B or 20-B rated fire extinguishers with date stamp.
- Vessels with a model year between 1953 and 2017 may carry either:
  - Unexpired 5-B or 20-B rated fire extinguishers *or...*
  - B-I or B-II rated fire extinguishers that are in good and serviceable condition.

**Model Year** means the period beginning June 1 of a year and ending on July 31 of the following year and being designated by the year in which it ends.

Use this chart to determine the size and quantity required for your vessel.

### Fire Extinguisher Requirements

Classification	Foam	Carbon Dioxide	Dry Chemical
type & size	minimum gallons	minimum pounds	minimum pounds
5-B	1¼	4	2
20-B	2½	15	10
Length of Vessel	Without Fixed System		With Fixed System*
Less than 26 ft.	one 5-B		none
26 ft. to less than 40 ft.	two 5-B (or one 20-B)		one 5-B
40 ft. to less than 65 ft.	three 5-B (or one 20-B and one 5-B)		two 5-B (or one 20-B)

\*refers to a permanently installed fire extinguisher system

*Note: One 20-B portable fire extinguisher may be substituted for two 5-B portable fire extinguishers. For vessels with a model year between 1953 and 2017, one 20-B/B-II portable fire extinguisher may be substituted for two 5-B/B-I portable fire extinguishers.*

- Extinguishers must not be expired or appear to have been previously used. They must be maintained in good and serviceable condition. Good and serviceable condition means that the fire extinguisher on board:
  - Is charged and indicates it is charged if the extinguisher has a pressure gauge reading or indicator **and...**
  - Has a pin lock that is firmly in place **and...**
  - Does not show visible signs of significant corrosion or damage **and...**
  - Has a discharge nozzle that is clean and free of obstructions.

## Ventilation Systems

The purpose of ventilation systems is to avoid explosions by removing flammable gases. Properly installed ventilation systems greatly reduce the chance of a life-threatening explosion.



- All gasoline-powered vessels constructed in a way that would entrap fumes must have at least two ventilation ducts fitted with cowls to remove the fumes.
- If your vessel is equipped with a power ventilation system, turn it on for at least four minutes both after fueling and before starting your engine.
- If your vessel is not equipped with a power ventilation system (for example, a PWC), open the engine compartment and sniff for gasoline fumes before starting the engine.

## Backfire Flame Control Devices

Backfire flame control devices ensure that any engine backfire is dispersed into the atmosphere and substantially reduce the chance of explosion or fire.

- All motorboats built after April 1940 with inboard-mounted gasoline engines (this includes inboards, inboard-outboards, and airboats) must have a backfire flame control device mounted securely to each carburetor.
- Backfire flame control devices must be:
  - In good and serviceable condition
  - USCG-approved (must comply with SAE J-1928 or UL 1111 standards)

## Mufflers

- All vessel engines must be equipped with an effective muffling device. Vessel operators may not hear sound signals or voices if the engine is not muffled adequately, and the noise is irritating to other people.
- The use of any type of exhaust cutout that allows exhaust to bypass the engine muffling system is prohibited.
- Muffling an airboat's exhaust with automotive-style mufflers or another device manufactured to effectively muffle the sound of engine exhaust is required in Florida.

## Visual Distress Signals (VDSs)

- Vessels less than 16 feet in length must carry at least three night signals if operating between sunset and sunrise on **coastal waters**.
- Vessels 16 feet in length or greater must carry at least three day signals and three night signals on coastal waters. A total of three combination day/night VDSs may be substituted for this requirement.
- It is prohibited to display VDSs on the water except when assistance is required to prevent immediate or potential danger to persons on board a vessel.
- If pyrotechnic VDSs are used, they must be dated. Expired VDSs may be carried on board, but a minimum of three unexpired VDSs must be carried in the vessel.



### Day

Handheld Orange Smoke  
(Pyrotechnic)

Floating Orange Smoke  
(Pyrotechnic)

Orange Flag (Non-Pyrotechnic)

### Night

Electric Light  
(Non-Pyrotechnic)

### Day and Night

Red Meteor (Pyrotechnic)

Red Flare (Pyrotechnic)



### Arm Signal

Although this signal does not meet VDS equipment requirements, wave your arms to summon help if you do not have other distress signals on board.

## Coastal Waters

Vessels must observe the VDS requirements when on Florida's coastal waters. Coastal waters are the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and all bays, sounds, harbors, rivers, inlets, etc., where any entrance is over two miles wide to the first point where the distance between shorelines narrows to two miles.

## Sound-Producing Devices

All vessels are required to carry an efficient sound-producing device, such as a whistle or horn, that is audible for at least one-half mile. Larger vessels also may be required to carry a bell or gong per federal Navigation Rule #33, which can be found at [www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=navRulesContent](http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=navRulesContent).



### Sound Signals

Some common sound signals that you should be familiar with as a recreational boater are as follows.

#### Changing Direction

- **One short blast** tells other boaters, "I intend to pass you on my port (left) side."
- **Two short blasts** tell other boaters, "I intend to pass you on my starboard (right) side."
- **Three short blasts** tell other boaters, "I am operating astern propulsion." For some vessels, this tells other boaters, "I am backing up."

#### Restricted Visibility

- **One prolonged blast** at intervals of not more than two minutes is the signal used by power-driven vessels when underway.
- **One prolonged blast plus two short blasts** at intervals of not more than two minutes is the signal used by sailing vessels.

#### Warning

- **One prolonged blast** is a warning signal (for example, used when coming around a blind bend or exiting a slip).
- **Five (or more) short, rapid blasts** signal danger or signal that you do not understand or that you disagree with the other boater's intentions.

## Divers-Down Warning Device

State law requires that scuba divers or snorkelers display a divers-down warning device whenever they are in the water. A divers-down warning device may not be displayed when divers are out of the water.

- A divers-down warning device may be a divers-down flag, buoy, or other similar warning device. These devices are designed for, and used by, divers and dive vessels as a way to notify nearby boaters that divers are in the water in the immediate area. The device must be displayed prominently when in use. The divers-down warning device must meet these requirements.
  - The divers-down warning device must contain a divers-down symbol.
    - The symbol is a red rectangle or square with a white diagonal stripe.
    - If the symbol is rectangular, the length may not be less than the height or more than 25% longer than the height.
    - The width of the stripe must be 25% of the height of the symbol.
    - If multiple stripes are displayed, all of the stripes must be oriented in the same direction.
  - The size of the divers-down symbol depends on whether the divers-down warning device is displayed from the water or from a vessel.
    - On the water, the divers-down symbol must be at least 12 x 12 inches in size.
    - On a vessel, the symbol must be at least 20 x 24 inches in size. The divers-down warning device also must be displayed at the highest point of a vessel so that its visibility is not obstructed in any direction.
  - If the divers-down warning device is a divers-down flag, the flag must:
    - Display the divers-down symbol on each face **and...**
    - Have a wire stiffener or be otherwise constructed to ensure it remains fully unfurled and extended, even when there is no wind or breeze.
  - If the divers-down warning device is a buoy, the buoy must:
    - Have three or four sides with the divers-down symbol displayed on each of the flat sides **and...**
    - Be prominently visible on the water's surface and not displayed on the vessel.
- Boaters must make reasonable efforts to stay at least 300 feet away from divers-down warning devices in open water and at least 100 feet away in rivers, inlets, or navigation channels.
- Boaters approaching divers-down warning devices closer than 300 feet in open water and 100 feet in rivers, inlets, or navigation channels must slow to idle speed.



# On the Water

In addition to the laws mentioned previously, here are some other Florida regulations that apply when vessel operators are on Florida's waters.

## Unlawful Operation

Florida law states that it is unlawful to operate a vessel in a reckless or dangerous manner. Specifically, the law designates these operating practices as illegal.

- **Reckless or Careless Operation** of a vessel or manipulation of water skis, aquaplanes, or similar devices is the failure to exercise the care necessary to prevent the endangerment of life, limb, or property of any person. Some examples are:
  - Boating in restricted areas without regard for other boaters or persons, posted speeds and wake restrictions, divers-down warning devices, etc.
  - Failing to follow the navigation rules
- **Improper Speed** is operating at speeds greater than posted speeds and that are not reasonable and prudent based on boating traffic, weather conditions, visibility, or other potential hazards. If no limits are posted, you should operate a vessel so that it does not endanger others. Vessel speed always should be maintained so that the vessel can be stopped safely. Specifically, it is illegal to:
  - Operate at a rate of speed that endangers the life or property of any person.
  - Operate at greater than "idle speed, no wake" in a posted "no wake" zone.
- **Exceeding Maximum Loading or Horsepower** is the failure of a vessel operator to ensure that his or her vessel is loaded safely and not overpowered. Florida law prohibits a person from operating a monohull vessel less than 20 feet in length while exceeding the maximum weight, persons, or horsepower capacity as displayed on the capacity plate installed by the vessel manufacturer.

Manatees may be in many places. During most of the year, manatees may be found in fresh or salt waters, preferring calmer rivers, estuaries, bays, and canals. In the winter, manatees seek warmer waters and often congregate in the discharge areas near power plants or natural warm water springs. Boaters should avoid manatee habitats and use caution when traveling in known manatee travel corridors. It is illegal to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal, including manatees. Any act that disrupts a manatee's normal behavior is punishable by a fine of up to \$50,000, one-year imprisonment, or both.



## Boating Regulatory Zones

On Florida waterways, there are signs restricting boat speed. Florida regulates boat speeds in certain areas either for protection of manatees or for boating safety purposes. It is important that boat operators look for signs, understand what they mean, and abide by the speed regulations.

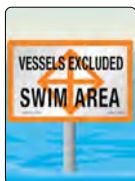
Below are the most common signs for boating regulatory zones.

**“Idle Speed, No Wake” Zone:** A designated area where vessels must be operated at a speed no greater than that which is necessary to maintain steerage and headway. The vessel should not produce a wake at this speed.



**“Slow Speed, Minimum Wake” Zone:** Areas where vessels must be fully off plane and completely settled in the water. Any wake created by a vessel in one of these zones must be minimal (very small). If your vessel is traveling with the bow even slightly elevated while in one of these zones, it is not proceeding at “Slow Speed” as required by law.

**Maximum 25 MPH, 30 MPH, and 35 MPH Speed Zones:** Controlled areas within which a vessel must not exceed the posted speeds.



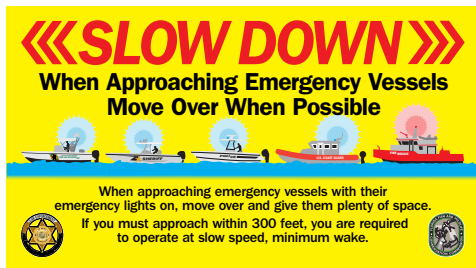
**Vessel Exclusion Area:** An area marked with a vertical diamond shape with a cross in the center that indicates all vessels or certain classes of vessels are excluded from the area.

**Critical Wildlife Areas (CWAs):** CWAs are established to give wildlife the space needed for nesting, roosting, and foraging. CWAs are clearly marked with signs or buoys to alert boaters to areas that are closed to public access.



**Temporary Zones:** Areas established for emergency vessels with their emergency lights activated (“Move Over Law”). If a vessel approaches an emergency vessel—such as one belonging to the FWC, a local marine unit, or the USCG—with their lights activated, that vessel must operate at slow speed, with a minimum wake, within 300 feet of the emergency vessel. In addition, temporary zones are established for construction vessels that display an orange flag. A vessel must operate at slow speed, with a minimum wake, within 300 feet of a construction vessel engaged in construction and displaying a construction flag.





## Human-Powered Vessels Operating in the Florida Intracoastal Waterway (ICW)

A person may only operate a human-powered (unpowered) vessel—such as a canoe, kayak, or other paddlecraft—within the boundaries of the marked channels of the Florida Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) under the following conditions:

- Only when the marked channel is the only navigable portion of the waterway available due to vessel congestions or obstructions in the water. (In this case, the operator of the human-powered vessel shall exit the ICW as soon as possible.)
- Only when crossing the channel is done in the most direct, continuous, and expeditious manner possible and does not interfere with other vessel traffic in the channel.
- Only during an emergency endangering life and limb.

## Obstructing Navigation

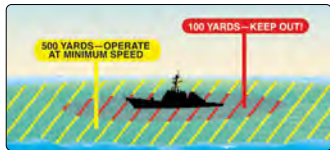
It is illegal to:

- Anchor a vessel in the traveled portion of a river or channel in a way that will prevent or interfere with any other vessel passing through the same area.
- Moor or attach a vessel to a buoy (other than a mooring buoy), beacon, light, or any other navigational aid placed on public waters by proper authorities.
- Move, displace, tamper with, damage, or destroy any navigational aid.

## Homeland Security Restrictions

Recreational boaters have a role in keeping our waterways safe and secure.

- Observe and avoid all security zones, including restricted areas near dams, power plants, etc. Do not stop or anchor beneath bridges or in the channel. Violators can expect a swift and severe response.
- Keep a sharp eye out for anything that looks peculiar or out of the ordinary. Report all activities that seem suspicious to the local authorities or the USCG.



## Alcohol and Drugs

Florida's laws against boating under the influence (BUI) of alcohol or other drugs are as strict as those for driving a vehicle while impaired.

- Florida law prohibits anyone from operating any vessel or using water skis, a sailboard, or similar device while intoxicated due to alcohol or any combination of alcohol, controlled substances, or drugs.
- Florida law states that a person is considered to be “under the influence” if he or she has a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08 or higher, or is under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs to a degree that impairs his or her normal abilities. A blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 to 0.08 also may indicate a person is “under the influence” if accompanied by other competent evidence.
- By operating any vessel on Florida waters, you have consented to be tested for the presence of alcohol, drugs, or other intoxicating substances if requested by a peace officer. Refusal to submit to testing is punishable by a civil penalty of \$500 and is also a crime if you have ever been fined for a previous refusal.

**.02 Law** Florida takes a strong stand against underage drinking while operating a vessel. Commonly referred to as the “.02 Law,” those boaters under 21 years of age who are found with a measurable breath alcohol level of 0.02 or higher are subject to receiving a citation with minimum mandatory sentencing. If a person under 21 is above a 0.08 breath alcohol concentration, he or she also can be charged with BUI.



Just remember this simple rule:  
***Don't Drink and Boat!***

## Boating Accidents

- An operator involved in a boating accident must:
  - Stop his or her vessel immediately at the scene of the accident unless the action would endanger his or her own vessel, crew, or passengers ***and...***
  - Give assistance to anyone injured in the accident ***and...***
  - Give his or her name, address, and identifying number of his or her vessel to the other vessel's operator and/or owner of damaged property.

- Vessel operators involved in an accident must report the accident by the quickest means possible if the accident has resulted in:
  - A death or disappearance of a person **or...**
  - An injury causing a person to require medical attention beyond first aid **or...**
  - Damage to the vessel and other property of \$2,000 or more.
- The report of the accident must be made to:
  - The Division of Law Enforcement, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (call **1-888-404-3922**, or **\*FWC** from a mobile phone) **or...**
  - The sheriff of the county where the accident occurred **or...**
  - The police department of the municipality in which the accident occurred.
- Failure to report an accident and failure to render aid are both criminal offenses.

## Discharge of Oil and Other Hazardous Substances

- You are not allowed to discharge oil or hazardous substances into the water.
- You are not allowed to dump oil into the bilge of the vessel without means for proper disposal.
- You must dispose of oil waste at an approved reception facility. On recreational vessels, a bucket or bailer is adequate for temporary storage prior to disposing of the oil waste at an approved facility.
- If boating on federally controlled waters and your vessel is 26 feet or longer, you must display a 5 x 8-inch placard made of durable material, fixed in a conspicuous place in the machinery spaces or at the bilge pump control station, stating the Federal Water Pollution Control Act's law.

If your vessel discharges oil or hazardous substances into the water, immediately call the National Response Center at **1-800-424-8802**. Also notify the State Watch Office by calling **1-800-320-0519**.



## Discharge of Trash

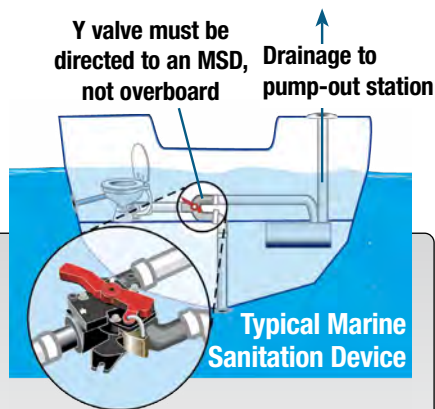
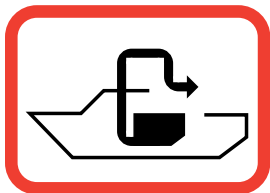
It is illegal to dump refuse, garbage, or plastics into any state or federally controlled waters. Many forms of litter can kill birds, fish, and marine mammals.

- You must store trash in a container while on board and place it in a proper receptacle after returning to shore.
- If boating on federally controlled waters and your vessel is 26 feet or longer, you must display a Garbage Disposal Placard that is at least 4 x 9 inches and notifies passengers and crew about discharge restrictions.

## Discharge of Sewage and Waste

If you have a recreational vessel with installed toilet facilities, it must have an operable, USCG-certified marine sanitation device (MSD) on board.

- All vessels 26 feet or more in length that have an enclosed cabin with sleeping facilities must be equipped with a toilet if on Florida state waters.
- On a vessel other than a houseboat, the toilet may be portable or a permanently installed toilet properly attached to an MSD.
- Every houseboat must be equipped with at least one permanently installed toilet properly attached to a Type III MSD.



### Types of MSDs

- **Type I MSD\***: Required for vessels over 26 feet and under 65 feet long and uses a combination of maceration and chemical treatment to kill bacteria just prior to discharge.
- **Type II MSD\***: Required for vessels 65 feet and longer and uses a combination of maceration, septic treatment, and chemical treatment to kill bacteria just prior to discharge.
- **Type III MSD**: Consists of holding tanks or portable toilets. Type III MSDs have the least effect on the environment because the waste is to be discharged on shore into a local sewage treatment facility.

*\*There may be a Y valve that directs untreated waste material for discharge or directs waste material for treatment prior to discharge. The Y valve must be secured to direct waste to the MSD at all times within Florida waters (three miles or the edge of the Gulf Stream, whichever is greater, off the Atlantic coast or nine miles off the Gulf of Mexico coast).*

## Protect Florida's Seagrasses

Seagrasses are plants totally adapted to living underwater. Their canopy of leaves and net of roots create a stable and protected habitat for marine life.

- Seagrass benefits the environment by providing habitat for young stages of fish, crustaceans, and shellfish, which are important to commercial and recreational industries. Seagrass stabilizes bottom sediments and filters nutrients from the water, aiding the growth of other marine life.
- Seagrass loss in watersheds of estuarine and marine systems is caused by human activities, such as dredge and fill activities, coastal development, nutrient pollution, degraded water, propeller scarring, and interruption of natural hydrology.
- If boating in shallow areas or seagrass beds, you could see a mud trail in your wake where your propeller has churned up the bottom, clouded the water, and likely cut seagrass roots. If you see this trail, you should: stop your vessel, tilt your motor out of the water, and pole or walk your vessel out of the shallow area or seagrass bed.



Destruction of seagrass in aquatic preserves is a violation of Florida law and carries a penalty of up to \$1,000. Avoid damaging seagrass by knowing your boat's operating depth and navigating in marked channels. Anchor only in bare sandy bottoms.

## Protect Florida's Waterways From Invasive Aquatic Plants

- Managing non-native aquatic plants that have been introduced into Florida's waterways costs millions of dollars each year. These invasive aquatic plants can edge out beneficial native submersed plants and lower oxygen levels, resulting in fish kills; hamper the feeding of sport fish, producing stunted fish populations; negatively impact local economies; threaten human health by creating ideal mosquito breeding habitats; restrict water flow, resulting in flooding; reduce lakefront aesthetics and property values; and increase the sedimentation of waterways.
- Non-native aquatic plants, such as hydrilla, water lettuce, and water hyacinth, are invasive weeds that can cause significant environmental harm.
  - Help slow the spread of these species and prevent additional invasive aquatic species from becoming established.
  - Clean all aquatic plants (even small fragments) and mud from your boat and trailer before leaving a waterway.

# Specifically for PWC

PWC operators must obey laws that apply to other vessels as well as obeying additional requirements that apply specifically to the operation of PWC.

## Requirements Specific to PWC

- Everyone on board or being towed behind a PWC must *wear* a USCG–approved life jacket at all times. Inflatable life jackets are not to be worn on PWC. Life jackets must be used in accordance with the USCG approval label.
- An operator of a PWC equipped with a lanyard-type engine cut-off switch (ECOS) must attach the lanyard to his or her person, clothing, or life jacket.
- PWC may not be operated during the hours between one half-hour after sunset to one half-hour before sunrise. Due to navigation light requirements, PWC without navigation lights may operate only between sunrise and sunset.
- No one under the age of 14 years may operate any PWC.
- No one under the age of 18 years may rent or lease a PWC. A person must be at least 18 years of age to sign the rental agreement.
- A PWC must be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner. It is illegal to:
  - Weave your PWC through congested waterway traffic.
  - Swerve at the last possible moment in order to avoid collision (as in spraying another person or vessel, or playing “chicken”).
  - Jump the wake of another vessel unreasonably or unnecessarily close to that vessel or when visibility is obstructed.



# Specifically for Skiing

Vessel operators towing persons on water skis, an aquaplane, or any similar device have additional laws.

## Requirements for Towing Skiers

- All persons being towed behind a vessel on water skis or any other device must *wear* a USCG–approved life jacket. Inflatable life jackets and ski belts are not approved for towed water sports such as skiing and wakeboarding. Life jackets must be used in accordance with the USCG approval label.
- Every vessel towing a person(s) on water skis, an aquaplane, or any similar device other than a parasail must have either:
  - A person on board, in addition to the operator, observing the towed person(s) at all times (To find the recommended capacity for your PWC, check the owner's manual.) *or...*
  - A wide-angle rearview ski mirror designed to allow the operator to observe the towed person at all times. Note that factory-installed mirrors on PWC may not meet this requirement.
- Every vessel towing a person on a parasail or similar device must have a person, in addition to the operator, observing the towed person(s) at all times. Rearview mirrors are not acceptable when towing persons on parasails.
- Persons may be towed behind a vessel on water skis, an aquaplane, a parasail, or any similar device during the hours of one half-hour before sunrise to one half-hour after sunset only.
- A reasonable distance must be maintained from a person in the water, another vessel, a bridge, a wharf, a pier, a dock, a buoy, a platform, a piling, or a channel marker. It is illegal to cause the person being towed to collide or be likely to collide with any object or person.

## Remember...

Vessel operators must never tow a person on water skis or any other device near anything that the skier could collide with, such as a pier, a dock, or another boat.

# Common Saltwater Fish in Florida

## Common Size Key

- 1 A few inches to a foot or more
- 2 Up to two feet
- 3 Up to three feet
- 4 A few feet to as many as six feet



1 Black Sea Bass



1 Lane Snapper



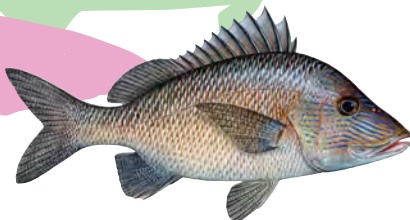
1 Mahogany Snapper



1 Red Porgy



1 Pinfish



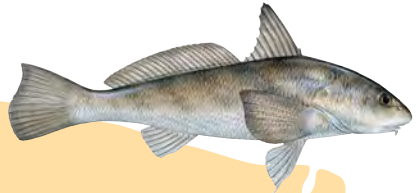
1 White Grunt

Illustration on pages 38–45: Courtesy of Diane Pebbles





**1 Atlantic Croaker**



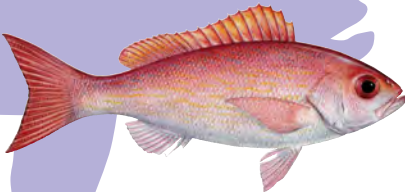
**1 Southern Kingfish (Whiting)**



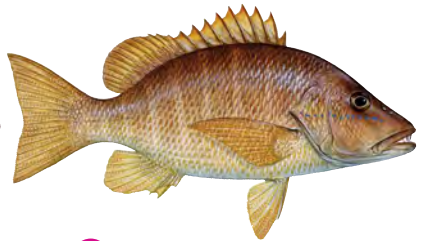
**1 Gulf Kingfish (Whiting)**



**1 Queen Snapper**



**1 Vermilion Snapper**



**1 Schoolmaster Snapper**



**2 Bonefish**



**2 Florida Pompano**



② Tripletail



② Gray Snapper



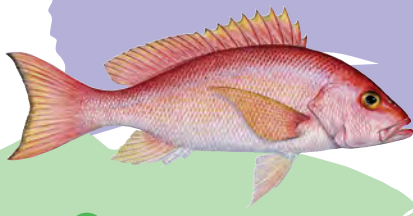
② Blackfin Snapper



② Dog Snapper



② Mutton Snapper



② Silk Snapper



② Hogfish



② Sheepshead



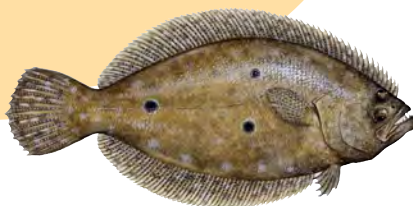
2 Sand Seatrout



2 Silver Seatrout



2 Spotted Seatrout



2 Gulf Flounder



2 Weakfish



2 Striped Mullet



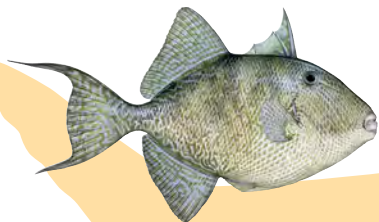
2 Cero Mackerel



2 Spanish Mackerel



**2 Yellowtail Snapper**



**2 Gray Triggerfish**



**3 Common Snook**



**3 Gag Grouper**



**3 Black Grouper**



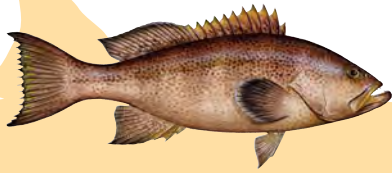
**3 Red Grouper**



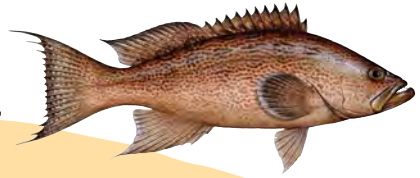
**3 Nassau Grouper**



**3 Yellowfin Grouper**



**3 Yellowmouth Grouper**



**3 Scamp Grouper**



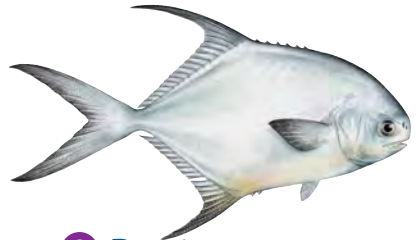
**3 Bluefish**



**3 Crevalle Jack**



**3 Banded Rudderfish**



**3 Permit**



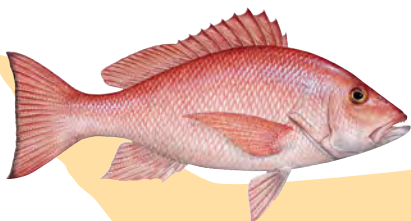
**3 Lesser Amberjack**



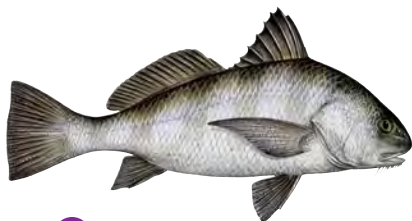
**3 African Pompano**



**3** Cubera Snapper



**3** Red Snapper



**3** Black Drum



**3** Red Drum



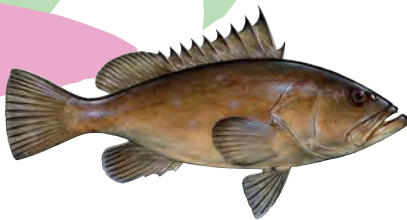
**3** Blackfin Tuna



**4** Tarpon



**4** Atlantic Goliath Grouper



**4** Warsaw Grouper





4 Cobia



4 Greater Amberjack



4 King Mackerel



4 Yellowfin Tuna



4 Wahoo



4 Dolphinfish

# Common Freshwater Fish in Florida



**Flier**



**Redbreast Sunfish**



**Warmouth**



**Spotted Sunfish**



**Bluegill**



**Redear Sunfish**



**Suwannee Bass**



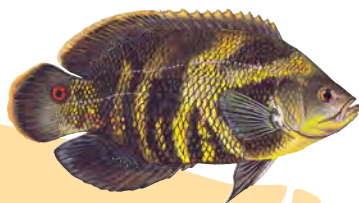
**Sunshine Bass**

Illustration on pages 46–47: Courtesy of Duane Raver, Jr.





**Black Crappie**



**Oscar**



**Largemouth Bass**



**Striped Bass**



**Butterfly Peacock Bass**



**Channel Catfish**



**Chain Pickerel**



**Longnose Gar**

# FLORIDA

*Fish and Wildlife  
Conservation Commission  
Supports Anglers' Legacy*



**Make a Difference**  
**Show Someone New How to Fish**

Share that great feeling and build our fishing resources for tomorrow – resources that depend on license sales and need help. Go to [AnglersLegacy.org](http://AnglersLegacy.org) and **Take the Pledge** to take someone new fishing. You can build the legacy for tomorrow.

SHARE THE LEGACY TODAY   **TAKE THE PLEDGE**   [GO TO ANGLERSLEGACY.ORG](http://GO TO ANGLERSLEGACY.ORG)

*Anglers' Legacy™*

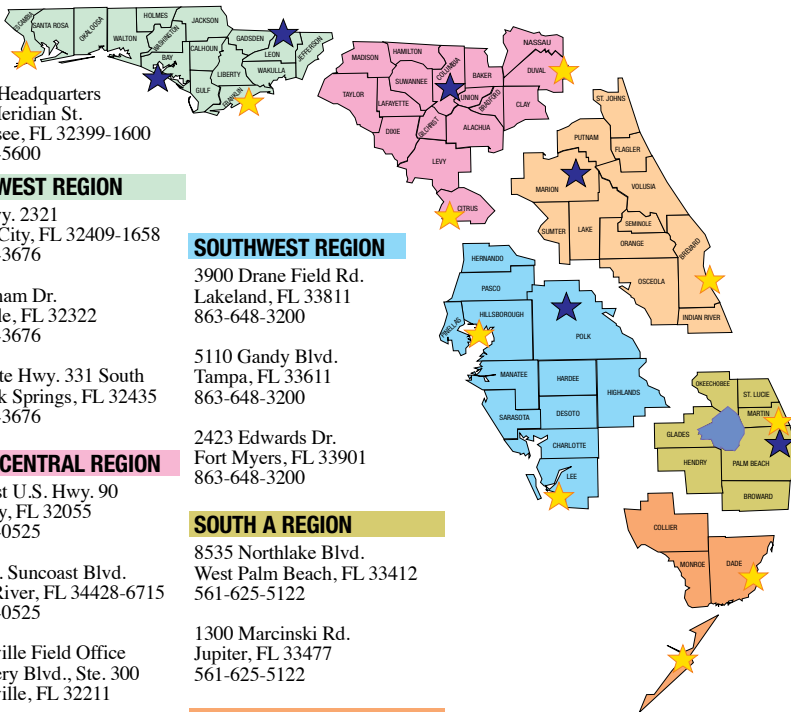
A national mission from  **TAKE ME FISHING®**



# FLORIDA

## *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*

### Regional Boundaries and Contact Information



General Headquarters  
620 S. Meridian St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600  
850-488-5600

#### **NORTHWEST REGION**

3911 Hwy. 2321  
Panama City, FL 32409-1658  
850-265-3676

287 Graham Dr.  
Carrabelle, FL 32322  
850-265-3676

7733 State Hwy. 331 South  
DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435  
850-265-3676

#### **NORTH CENTRAL REGION**

3377 East U.S. Hwy. 90  
Lake City, FL 32055  
386-758-0525

10247 N. Suncoast Blvd.  
Crystal River, FL 34428-6715  
386-758-0525

Jacksonville Field Office  
644 Cesery Blvd., Ste. 300  
Jacksonville, FL 32211

#### **NORTHEAST REGION**

1239 S.W. 10th St.  
Ocala, FL 34471  
352-732-1225

1-A Max Brewer Memorial  
Pkwy.  
Titusville, FL 32796  
352-732-1225

#### **SOUTHWEST REGION**

3900 Drane Field Rd.  
Lakeland, FL 33811  
863-648-3200

5110 Gandy Blvd.  
Tampa, FL 33611  
863-648-3200

2423 Edwards Dr.  
Fort Myers, FL 33901  
863-648-3200

#### **SOUTH A REGION**

8535 Northlake Blvd.  
West Palm Beach, FL 33412  
561-625-5122

1300 Marcinski Rd.  
Jupiter, FL 33477  
561-625-5122

#### **SOUTH B REGION**

2796 Overseas Hwy. #100  
Marathon, FL 33050  
305-956-2500

3200 N.E. 151 St.  
North Miami, FL 33181  
305-956-2500

401 Shell Island Rd.  
Naples, FL 34113  
305-956-2500



# Florida... Boating just doesn't get any better.



## Next time you're on the water, enjoy some of the world's best fishing, too!



MyFWC.com

Buy an instant fishing license at 1-888 Fish Florida (347-4356) and get the most out of your boating experience. Remember to "Wear IT Florida" and report boating or fishing violations to Wildlife Alert at 1-888-404-3922. We'll all be better off when you enjoy the best fishing and boating in the world—safely and sustainably.



WearItFlorida.com