

IMPROVING BOATING SAFETY IN ALABAMA



Celebrating Alabama's Progress
Certified Public Manager® Program
CPM Solutions Alabama 2026



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The research, findings, and recommendations presented in this white paper do not represent the views of any agency or organization, but rather the collective educational research and analysis from a diverse group of participants in the Certified Public Manager® Training Program.

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Introduction

The Current State of Boating Safety in Alabama

The current state of boating safety in Alabama positions the state right in the middle of national safety metrics, ranking 21st in boating safety out of 50 states on the 2026 America's Boating Safety Index (Boat Booker, 2026). The goal of this paper is to make recommendations that aim to improve Alabama's boating safety ranking in the coming years.

Project Statement and Tasks

The Boating Safety in Alabama CPM Solutions Project Team will support the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) Marine Patrol's mission to enhance safety on Alabama's waterways by raising awareness of the importance of boating safety, examining primary causes of boating accidents, assessing the effectiveness of education and training efforts, and developing research driven recommendations that enhance safety for both motorized and non-motorized vessels. The recommendations will seek to inform strategies that improve public awareness, strengthen education, and support decision making for ALEA and its partners. This will be accomplished by answering the four following questions that guided the research:

1. Why are increased efforts to improve boating safety needed in Alabama?
2. What are the primary causes and patterns of boating accidents among motorized and non-motorized vessels in Alabama?
3. What is Alabama doing well to support boating safety in Alabama?
4. What can we learn from other states' efforts to strengthen boating safety?

The Boating Safety in Alabama Team has provided recommendations based on our research that will enhance boating safety on Alabama's waterways.

Background

To research the need for increased efforts to improve boating safety, our team explored the positive impact of Alabama's waterways on recreational tourism, researched statistics and stories regarding boating safety in Alabama, and identified the key stakeholders who are working to promote boating safety in Alabama.

Alabama benefits financially from recreational tourism associated with its waterways. In 2024, Alabama attracted 29 million tourists which generated \$23.9 billion. Many of these tourists vacationed at Alabama's beaches, hotels, state parks, and campgrounds (Alabama Tourism Department, 2024). These areas are often in close proximity to waterways which are enjoyed by tourists. Baldwin and Jefferson Counties are the largest travel-concentrated counties in the state (Alabama Tourism Department, 2024). As Baldwin County houses the majority of Alabama's beaches, it's no surprise that it experiences the highest seasonality of any county in the state in terms of travel and tourism activities. Approximately 68% of Baldwin County's lodging taxes for 2024 were collected during the 2nd and 3rd quarters, which align with the warmer spring and summer months (Alabama Tourism Department, 2024). Additionally, Baldwin County experiences the highest travel related employment of any county in Alabama at 65,523 employees, more than double the next highest, Jefferson County, which has 32,383 travel related employees (Alabama Tourism Department, 2024). Baldwin County is the largest example of the impact of Alabama's waterways on recreational tourism in the state and it was highlighted to show the positive impact of the state's waterways. Other areas of the state in proximity to waterways experience similar patterns but are harder to quantify than Baldwin County as tourism plays such a large role in Baldwin county's economy.

With the large number of recreational users of Alabama's waterways, occasionally accidents happen and some of them, tragically, are fatal. According to the United States Coast Guard (USCG) 2024 Recreation Boating Statistics report, there were 81 boating accidents in Alabama resulting in 8 fatalities. This represents an increase in boating accidents over the previous three years, with only 2020 having more for the five-year period. However, 2024 had the least number of fatalities over the same period (USCG, 2025). One of the more recent and publicized boating accidents in Alabama involved a collision between a bass boat, who's driver was participating in a Major League Fishing tournament, that was traveling 67 mph and collided with another stationary vessel. The collision resulted in the death of three individuals in the stationary vessel as well as multiple felony charges including three counts of reckless manslaughter against the driver of the bass boat (ABC 33/40, 2025).

Findings and Analysis

Primary Causes of Boating Fatalities, Injuries, and Incidents among Motorized and Non-motorized Vessels

To guide the research and aid in the development of recommendations to prevent and reduce the number of boating incidents, the team researched the primary causes of boating incidents, injuries, and fatalities nationally among motorized and non-motorized vessels. As expected, there are similarities among the top primary contributing factors for these three categories of boating incident types. Our team was tasked with improving boater safety, so a heavy emphasis is on the primary causes of boating injuries and fatalities. However, there will still be quite a bit of emphasis on the primary causes of total incidents as reducing the total number of incidents should also reduce the number of injuries and fatalities that occur.

For each of the three incident type categories (incidents, injuries, and fatalities), the USCG tracks the following five categories of primary contributing factors: operation of vessel, loading of passengers or gear, failure of boat or boat equipment, environment, and miscellaneous (USCG, 2025). Of these five categories, operation of vessel is the category responsible for the majority of incidents for each incident type. While the operation of vessel category and its contributing factors will be the main focus of this section, the final recommendations will also address the contributing factors in the other four categories shown below.

Operation of Vessel

- Boating Under the Influence
- Operator Inexperience
- Operator Inattention
- Excessive Speed
- Improper Lookout
- Navigation Rules Violation
- Sharp Turn
- Inadequate Onboard Navigation Lights
- Drug Use
- Restricted Vision
- Failure to Vent

Loading of Passengers or Gear

- Improper Loading
- Individuals on the Gunwale, Bow, or Transom
- Overloading
- Improper Anchoring

Failure of Boat or Boat Equipment

- Machinery Failure
- Hull Failure
- Equipment Failure

Environment

- Weather
- Hazardous Waters
- Force of Wave/Wake
- Dam/Lock
- Missing or Inadequate Navigational Aids
- Congested Waters

Miscellaneous

- Unknown
- Other
- Sudden Medical Condition
- Ignition of Spilled Fuel or Vapor

As a fatality is the most severe outcome of a boating incident, the data pertaining to this incident category will be analyzed first. Of known contributing factors, alcohol is listed as the primary

contributing factor in 20% of boating fatalities, making it the leading known contributing factor in fatal boating accidents (USCG, 2025). In the operation of vessel category, operator inexperience, operator inattention, excessive speed, and improper lookout round out the top five primary contributing factors of death in boating accidents. However, none of these primary contributing factors were responsible for even half of the fatalities caused by alcohol use. There were six other primary contributing factors in the operation of vessel category (navigation rules violation, sharp turn, inadequate onboard navigation lights, drug use, restricted vision, and failure to vent), but these factors were insignificant in comparison to the top five primary contributing factors in this category. The environment category has two primary contributing factors, weather and hazardous waters, that are the 2nd and 3rd leading primary contributing factors of death in 2024 behind alcohol, with both causing over 50 deaths each (USCG, 2025).

The primary contributing factors of injuries in 2024 will be analyzed next. In the operation of vessel category, improper lookout was the leading primary contributing factor of injuries in 2024, accounting for nearly 350 injuries. Operator inattention, excessive speed, operator inexperience, alcohol, and navigation rules violation are five other significant primary contributing factors in this category as each of these was the primary contributing factor in over 150 injuries in 2024 (USCG, 2025).

A similar analysis to the primary contributing factors of total boating incidents in 2024 was performed. For the operation of vessel category, operator inattention was the leading primary contributing factor of incidents in 2024, with it being the primary cause of over 550 boating incidents. Similar to the primary contributing factors for injuries, improper lookout, operator inexperience, navigation rules violation, and alcohol rounded out the top 6 primary contributing factors of incidents, with each of these causing over 200 incidents. In the failure of boat or boat equipment category, machinery failure was the leading primary contributing factor, accounting for nearly 300 incidents. In the environment category, both weather and hazardous waters accounted for over 150 incidents (USCG, 2025).

Many of these primary contributing factors (operator inexperience, navigation rules violation, weather, hazardous waters, etc.) could be attributed to the education of the operator. When the level of instruction was known, 69% of fatalities occurred on vessels where the operator did not receive boating safety instruction. On the contrary, vessels with operators that had received a

nationally approved boating safety education certificate only accounted for 19% of deaths (USCG 2025). With operator education in mind, navigation rules violations were a contributing factor in 55% of incidents, 34% of deaths, and 63% of injuries (USCG 2025).

The primary contributing factors that resulted in fatalities from boating incidents were discussed above. However, it is important to consider the actual cause of death in these incidents. In 2024 where cause of death was known, 76% of fatalities from boating incidents were due to drowning, making it the number one cause of death in boating incidents. Where Personal Flotation Device (PFD) usage was known, 87% of drowning fatality victims were not wearing a PFD (USCG, 2025). While there should certainly be a heavy focus on incident prevention, it's inevitable that incidents will occur, and it is equally important to reduce the severity of these incidents by taking measures to prevent the causes of death as well.

Thus far, all of the information in this section has applied to all registered vessels in the United States, including both motorized and non-motorized vessels. Non-motorized vessels include rowboats, sailboats, paddlecrafts, and other similar vessels. The majority (76.5%) of registered nonmotorized vessels are paddlecrafts, so this portion of the research will focus on this vessel type. Of the 11,674,073 registered vessels, the 821,081 non-motorized vessels represent a minority at only 7.6% of all registered vessels. However, incidents involving this relatively small number of vessels account for 31.3% of all boating fatalities. Paddlecrafts account for 5.4% of registered vessels, yet account for 26% of all boating fatalities (USCG, 2025). Per 100,000 vessels, the motorized vessel fatality rate is 3.5. In comparison, the fatality rate of paddlecrafts is 22.75 fatalities per 100,000 vessels (USCG, 2025). A more alarming statistic is the fatality rate per casualty of paddlecrafts compared to motorized vessels. For motorized vessels, there were 2,335 casualties observed and 373 of these casualties were deaths. This results in a 16% fatality rate per casualty. For paddlecrafts, there were 216 total casualties with 143 of these being deaths, resulting in a 66.2% fatality rate per casualty. These data show that when a boater is injured while aboard a paddlecraft, there is a significantly higher chance of a fatality than when a boater is injured in a motorized vessel. After reviewing the data regarding drowning, it's not surprising that of the 143 paddlecraft fatalities in 2024, 124, or 86.7%, were due to drowning (USCG, 2025).

Boating Safety Successes in Alabama

The State of Alabama has a history of improving boating safety through its enactment of multiple rules and regulations aimed at promoting safe boating on its waterways. Additionally, Alabama offers various educational and training programs which teach boaters safety and the “Rules of the Road” on Alabama’s waterways. Alabama also engages in multiple outreach programs that help increase awareness and provide safety tips to Alabama boaters.

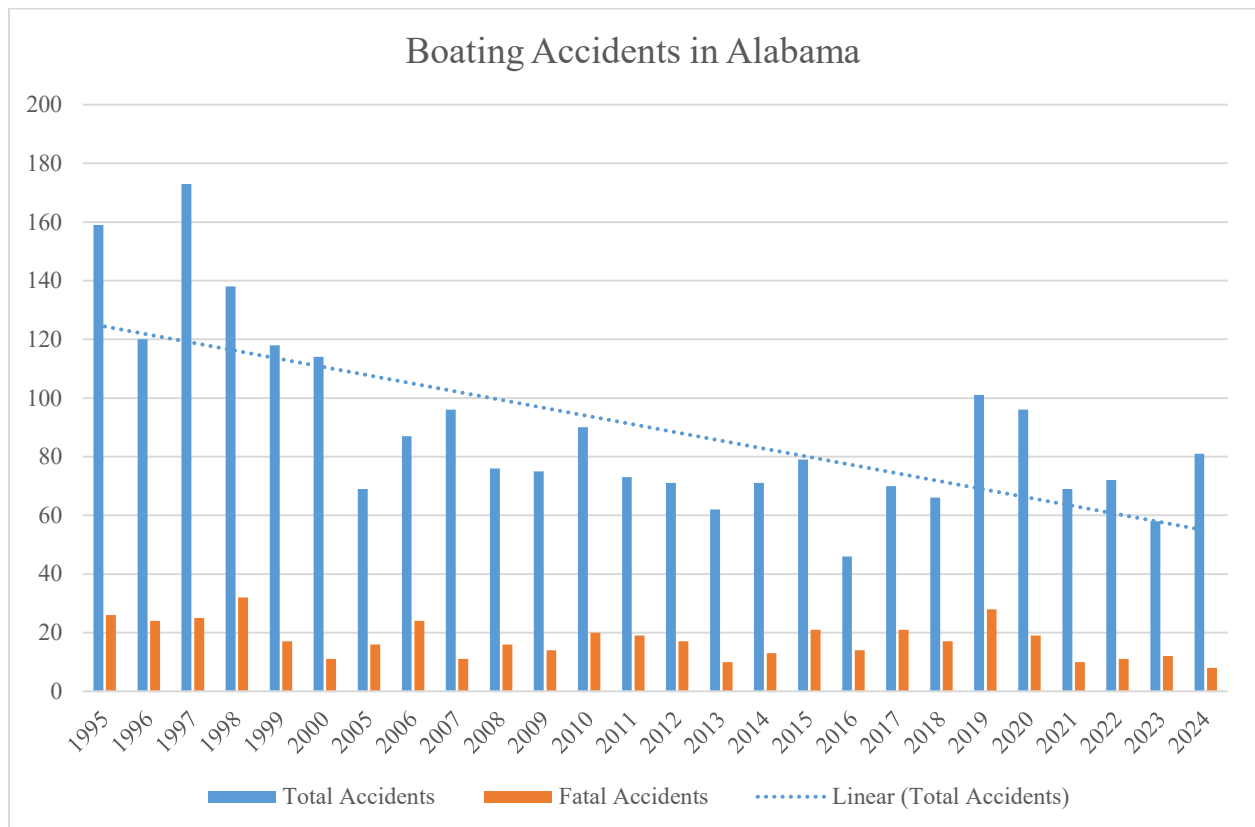
Alabama boaters are required to obtain an Alabama Boater Safety Certification to operate a motorized vessel within the state under the Boating Safety Reform Act and Roberson/Archer Act of 1994. The Roberson/Archer Act of 1994 is named after three Alabama children-Lauren Archer, age 4, and Katey and Ashleigh Roberson, ages 5 and 9, who were tragically killed in boating accidents in 1993 (Boat Alabama Certification Manual, 2017). The requirement became enforceable on July 17, 1997 and was the first such requirement in the United States. The certification can be obtained through an online or in-person Boating Safety Course approved by the Alabama Marine Patrol Division or by passing a written examination.

Data from 1995 through 2000 (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2000) and 2005 through 2024 (U.S. Coast Guard, 2026) show that accidents throughout the State of Alabama have decreased since the Boating Safety Reform Act went into effect even though the expected number of watercrafts has increased. The data are shown in the following table and chart.

Year	Total Accidents	Fatal Accidents
1995	159	26
1996	120	24
1997	173	25
1998	138	32
1999	118	17
2000	114	11
2005	69	16
2006	87	24
2007	96	11
2008	76	16
2009	75	14
2010	90	20
2011	73	19

Continued from previous page		
Year	Total Accidents	Fatal Accidents
2012	71	17
2013	62	10
2014	71	13
2015	79	21
2016	46	14
2017	70	21
2018	66	17
2019	101	28
2020	96	19
2021	69	10
2022	72	11
2023	58	12
2024	81	8

Note: Data from 2001-2004 not available.



There are a variety of opportunities for boating safety education that allow citizens to obtain their vessel license in the state of Alabama. The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's (ALEA) Marine Patrol Division offers free in-person classes across the state that offer opportunities for hands-on training along with relevant and important information concerning the specific bodies of water in the area where the course is taught (ALEA, 2026). Another option is to attend one of three State-Approved online boating courses: BoatED Plus Interactive, BoaterExam.com, and Recademics (ALEA, 2026). These online courses are approximately four hours long and culminate with a certification exam. The third method for obtaining the vessel operator class on an Alabama Driver License is to pass a 25-question exam available at any ALEA Driver License Examining Office. Upon course completion or a passing score on the exam, boaters may add the vessel operator class to their Alabama Driver License (ALEA, 2026).

The Alabama Boating Safety Enhancement Act, effective January 1, 2002, set the minimum age for operating a motorized vessel with direct adult supervision at 12 years of age and without direct adult supervision at 14 years of age. In order to operate a motorized vessel from the ages of 12 to 14 years of age, the individual must have an Alabama Boater Safety Certification and have someone 21 years or older with a vessel license seated in a position to take immediate control of the vessel, if necessary. Individuals over the age of 14 may operate a vessel without adult supervision as long as they have Boat Operators Certificate (Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, Marine Patrol Division, n.d.).

Alabama enacted Act 2024-394, effective October 1, 2024, requiring all non-resident boaters to possess a valid boating safety certification or vessel operator's certification issued by their home state or country to operate motorized vessels on its waters (The Cullman Tribune, 2026). However, those who do not have one of these two certifications must obtain a Nonresident Alabama Boater Safety Certification under the same terms and conditions as Alabama residents (The Cullman Tribune, 2026). This regulation helps ensure out-of-state boaters abide by Alabama's boating laws and safety practices.

Alabama enacted Act 2023-363, effective January 1, 2024, requiring the use of a vessel's emergency cut-off switch or "kill switch" (if equipped) for all vessels less than 26-feet in length with a motor that is three horsepower or greater. This Act brought state law into compliance with federal law, which requires all such vessels constructed after January 1, 2020 to be equipped with

an emergency cut-off switch. ALEA states, “This requirement is aimed at protecting occupants of the boat and other vessels from runaway boats by ensuring the engine immediately stops when the operator leaves the helm or is displaced for any reason” (ALEA, 2024a). Per WSFA 12, on May 24, 2026, a 70-year-old-man was thrown from and then struck by an 18-foot vessel that he was operating on Lake Demopolis. The individual later passed away from his injuries at Whitfield Regional Hospital. “Investigators say [the individual] was not wearing a personal flotation device and that he was not using an emergency cut-off switch at the time of the accident” (WSFA 12, 2026).

The Wakeboarding and Wakesurfing Law stipulates that wakeboarding or wakesurfing on Lewis Smith Lake, Lake Wedowee, Shoal Creek, Lake Martin, and Lake Weiss is prohibited “...between sunset and sunrise, on portions of water where the width is less than 400 feet, within 200 feet from any shoreline, dock, pier, boathouse or other structure...and while not wearing a personal flotation device approved by the United States Coast Guard” (ALEA, 2024a). This Law “...seeks to mitigate potential hazards associated with these activities...” (ALEA, 2024a).

In addition to implementing regulations and patrolling State waterways, ALEA often engages personally with the community in efforts to promote boating safety. Through its public awareness initiatives, ALEA is hoping a more educated and aware population of boaters will adopt safer boating practices. According to A. Wasden (personal communication, June 5, 2026), ALEA partners with outside organizations and agencies regularly to improve boating safety throughout the state of Alabama. Some of the outreach efforts accomplished in May of 2026 were:

- **National Safe Boating Week Proclamation Ceremony (May 14, 2026):** ALEA joined Governor Kay Ivey, the U.S. Coast Guard, and other boating safety partners for a proclamation ceremony recognizing National Safe Boating Week in Alabama. The event highlighted the importance of boating education, life jacket use, and safe recreational boating practices ahead of the summer season.
- **Kayak Safety and Paddlesports Safety Course (May 16, 2026):** ALEA partnered with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Montgomery Whitewater, and the Alabama Canoe Association for a kayaking safety event focused on paddlesports safety education. Participants received hands-on safety instruction, equipment demonstrations, and guidance on navigating Alabama waterways safely.

- **Historic Gulf States Boating Safety Press Conference (May 20, 2026):** ALEA joined boating safety officials from the other five Gulf Coast states in an unprecedented regional press conference promoting National Safe Boating Week. Through coordinated messaging and outreach, the partnership emphasized life jacket use, sober boating, and responsible vessel operation throughout the Gulf Coast region.
- **National Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day:** ALEA engaged employees from multiple divisions and units across the Agency in support of this national awareness initiative. Personnel wore life jackets throughout the workday, helping reinforce the message that life jackets save lives. The campaign also generated significant public engagement through ALEA's social media platforms, extending boating safety messaging to thousands of Alabamians.
- **Alabama Boys State Visit (May 29, 2026):** During the Alabama Boys State visit, ALEA hosted students at Agency Headquarters and provided an overview of the Agency's various divisions and statewide public safety responsibilities. Marine Patrol personnel spoke with participants about boating safety, waterway enforcement, and career opportunities in marine law enforcement, helping educate the next generation of leaders on the importance of safe and responsible boating.

A. Wasden (personal communication, June 5, 2026) also indicates that ALEA participates in "...boat shows, public safety events, school presentations and outdoor recreation programs..." throughout the year. "We just launched ALEA's annual '101 Days of Summer Safety' campaign which runs throughout Labor Day. During this time, marine-related safety tips will be shared heavily on ALEA social media, as well as highway safety and beach safety to include ALEA's Rescue Swimmer detail."

Boating Safety Successes in Other States

Part of the research aimed at improving boating safety in Alabama focused on successful practices that other states are using to prevent boating accidents and fatalities. Several states were identified that have reduced the number of boating accidents and fatalities over a number of years and our team has identified the best practices utilized by those states that may be useful to implement in Alabama. The states that were analyzed are Texas, Florida, Missouri, Washington,

Minnesota, and Pennsylvania. From the research regarding the primary causes of boating fatalities, injuries, and incidents among motorized and non-motorized vessels and some of the best practices of other states, the Boating Safety team has identified five areas where improvements could be made within the state of Alabama to reduce the number of boating incidents and the severity of these incidents. Those five areas of focus are to increase the usage of Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs), to decrease the use of alcohol by boat operators, to increase the education of boat operators, to improve outreach, and to increase the presence of law enforcement on Alabama's waterways. In this section, the rationale for evaluating each particular state will be explained followed by the five focus areas and the best practices used by some of these states that could also be used in Alabama to improve boating safety.

Texas

Between 2020 and 2024, Texas experienced a decrease in total number of boating incidents from 281 to 174. In terms of severity of these incidents, Texas's fatality rate per 100,000 registered vessels dropped from 5.9 in 2023 to just 4.9 in 2024 (USCG, 2025).

Florida

Between 2020 and 2024, the total number of boating incidents in Florida dropped from 804 to 632. Additionally, Florida has the highest number of registered recreational vessels in the country at 1,171,432 registered vessels (USCG, 2025).

Missouri

Between 2021 and 2024, the total number of boating incidents in Missouri dropped from 195 to 128. In terms of severity of these incidents, Missouri's number of fatalities dropped from 28 in 2021 to 14 in 2024 (Missouri State Highway Patrol, 2025). Missouri was also chosen because its average fatality rate per 100,000 registered vessels was 3.63, significantly lower than Alabama's fatality rate of 4.89 over the same time period.

Washington

The team chose to evaluate the practices of the state of Washington because this state's approach has shown a 68% decrease in boating incidents between 2020 and 2024 (USCG, 2025).

Additionally, Washington has invested nearly \$86 million between 2021 and 2024 to support several aspects of boater safety efforts (Stidham, M., & Eadrick, A., 2025).

Minnesota

Between 2020 and 2024, the total number of boating incidents in Minnesota dropped from 105 to just 58. In terms of severity of these incidents, Minnesota's fatalities were reduced from 16 in 2020 to just 8 in 2024 (USCG, 2025). Minnesota was also chosen because its average fatality rate per 100,000 registered vessels was 1.07, significantly lower than Alabama's fatality rate of 4.89 over the same time period.

Pennsylvania

The team chose to evaluate the practices of the state of Pennsylvania because its average fatality rate per 100,000 registered vessels was 3.35, significantly lower than Alabama's fatality rate of 4.89 over the same time period (USCG, 2025).

Assessing Laws to Increase Personal Flotation Device Usage

Nationally, the #1 cause of death in a boating incident is drowning, which accounts for 76% of fatalities. In paddlecrafts alone, this number is 86.7%. In all drowning fatalities, 87% of victims were not wearing their PFD (USCG, 2025). It is reasonable to conclude that wearing a PFD could prevent the majority of drowning related fatalities. There are two primary methods that states use to increase PFD usage: outreach/education and legal requirements. Since improvements in outreach and education are covered in subsequent sections, this section will focus on state regulations regarding PFD usage. Figure 1 shows the number of drowning fatalities in Alabama from 2019 to 2024. From this figure, there appears to be no trend in drowning fatalities with respect to year. Between 2019 and 2024, Alabama has had as many as 13 and as few as 5 fatalities due to drowning in boating accidents per year.

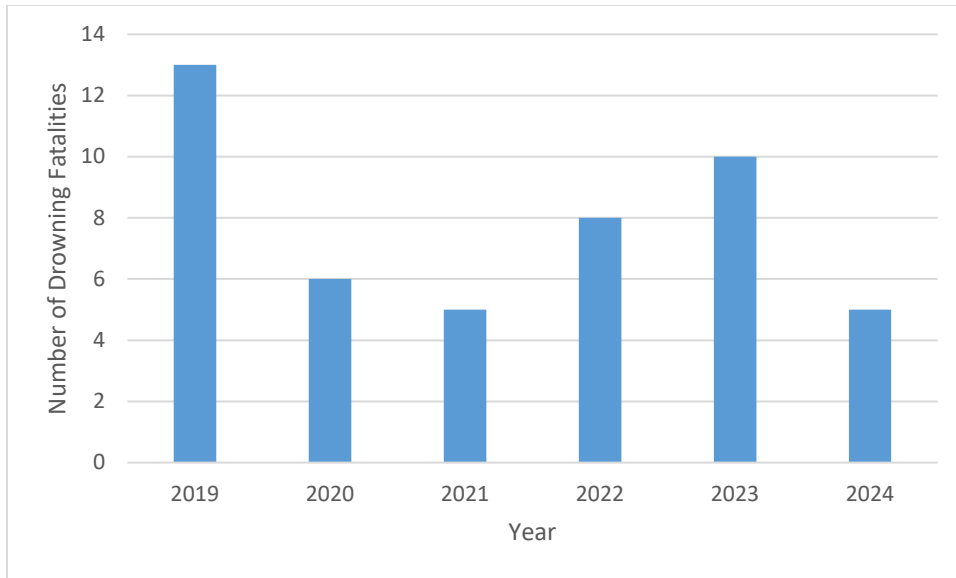


Figure 1: Drowning Fatalities by year in Alabama. Sources: USCG, 2020; USCG, 2021; USCG, 2022; USCG, 2023; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025

In 2024, Alabama had a drowning fatality rate of 2.02 fatalities per 100,000 registered vessels. However, in 2019, this rate was significantly higher at 5.29 (USCG, 2020). While 2024's drowning fatality rate appears relatively good, it's important to realize that drowning fatalities are often sporadic. In an effort to prevent high drowning fatality years such as 2019 in the future, it's important to look at other state's regulations regarding PFDs. Federal law requires PFDs to be worn by children under the age of 13 (BoatUS Foundation, 2026). Alabama also lags behind regional safety leaders like Louisiana, which extends the mandate to minors aged 16 and under (U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety Division, n.d.). Currently, Alabama requires all children under the age of 8 to wear a life jacket while onboard any vessel unless they are in an enclosed cabin (U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety Division, n.d.). In addition to Louisiana, the following table compares the age requirements for Alabama to other states discussed in this paper. Note that all states require the use of PFD for all persons on a personal watercraft (PWC) such as a jet ski.

States	Age Requirement for PFD usage
Alabama	all children under the age of 8 while onboard any vessel unless in an enclosed cabin or enclosed sleeping area regardless of whether the vessel is in operation
Texas	Passengers younger than 13 years of age while underway
Missouri	anyone under age 7 on board any vessel, unless they are inside a totally enclosed area of the boat such as the cabin area of a houseboat or day cruiser.
Washington	any person 12 years of age or less on vessel under 19' in length.
Florida	Children under 6 years of age must wear a USCG-approved Type I, II or III PFD at all times while on any vessel less than 26 feet in length that is underway.
Minnesota	Children under 10 .
Pennsylvania	Children 12 years of age and younger shall wear an approved Type I, II, III or V PFD while underway on any boat 20 feet or less in length and all canoes and kayaks.

Source - U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety Division, n.d.

Decreasing Alcohol Use by Boat Operators

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, alcohol is the leading contributing factor in fatal boating accidents representing 20% of deaths (USCG, 2025). It's illegal to operate a vessel and drink alcohol in all 50 states. Boating under the influence (BUI) can apply to multiple substances. Regarding alcohol, all states have a legal limit of 0.08% for blood alcohol level (BAC) with the exception of Utah (0.05%) and North Dakota (0.10%) (The Network for Public Health Law, 2019). There are varying penalties associated with violating the BAC limits based upon the state and number of offenses. To evaluate the relative strictness of state penalties for BAC limit violations, only first and second offense penalties will be included in this analysis.

In the state of Alabama, the blood alcohol content (BAC) is 0.08% for adults and 0.02% for anyone under the age of 21 years old. This applies to all vessels except those less than 12 feet in length that are used in farm ponds less than 50 acres in size. Alabama's penalties for boating under the influence (BUI) vary in severity depending on the number of offenses. The first offense ranges from a minimum fine of \$600-\$2,100, imprisonment for up to a year, or both in addition to vessel operation privilege suspension for 90 days. The second offense results in fines

ranging from \$1,100-\$5,100 and imprisonment for up to a year having a mandatory jail sentence of no less than 5 days or community service of no less than 30 days. (Find Law, 2024)

The state of Utah has the lowest legal BAC limit in the U.S. with 0.05% for adults and a zero tolerance of 0.00% for anyone under the age of 21. Those in violation of a first or second offense can receive a class B or A misdemeanor with imprisonment ranging from 48-240 hours, service work programs, fines between \$700-\$800 and 24/7 sobriety program participation. (Find Law, 2025b)

In Florida, the BAC limit is 0.08%. Those in violation are subject to a minimum fine of \$500 or more than \$1,000 and not more than 6 months in jail for the first offense. In the event of a second offense, fines range from a minimum of \$1,000 to more than \$2,000 and no more than 9 months in jail. However, the penalties are stricter for anyone who has a BAC of 0.15% or higher which results in fines of \$1,000-\$2,000 and up to 9 months of imprisonment for the first offense and fines of \$2,000-\$4,000 and up to 12 months of imprisonment for the second offense. (Online Sunshine, 2026)

Texas labels alcohol consumption with operating a vessel as boating while intoxicated (BWI) and their BAC limit is also 0.08%. First time violators can expect a class B misdemeanor, a minimum imprisonment of 72 hours up to 180 days, a fine not to exceed \$2,000, and a driver's license suspension of 90 days to a year. Second time offenders receive a class A misdemeanor and a minimum imprisonment of 30 days. However, if a boater is found to have a BAC of 0.15% or more during a first offense, it becomes a class A misdemeanor, and penalties increase to fines of up to \$4,000 and jail time of up to 1 year. (Trichter & Legrand, n.d.)

The state of Washington has a BAC limit of 0.08%. Those in violation receive a misdemeanor for the first offense and a gross misdemeanor for the second offense. Additional penalties can include a court order requiring the violator to pay restitution for any injuries or damages resulting from the offense. (Washington State Legislature, n.d.)

Missouri has a legal BAC limit of 0.08%, but officers are authorized to make arrests for BUI if the vessel operator shows any signs of impairment regardless of their BAC. The first BUI offense is a class B misdemeanor with fines of up to \$1,000 and up to 6 months of imprisonment. Second offenses result in a class A misdemeanor with up to \$2,000 in fines and a year of

imprisonment. (Joseph Hollander & Craft LLC, 2025) Missouri not only has limitations on BAC but also with the presence of alcohol on the vessel. No person is allowed to possess or use on the vessel any device that is intended for rapid consumption of alcohol (ex. Beer bong) or possess large volume alcoholic containers that hold more than four gallons of alcoholic beverage. Violation of either of these laws will result in a class A misdemeanor. However, these are not in effect if the person is on the Mississippi River, Missouri River, or Osage River. (Find Law, 2025a)

Pennsylvania has the same BAC limits as Alabama with 0.08% for adults and 0.02% for anyone under the age of 21 years old. First offense penalties include minimum probation of 6 months, a \$300 fine, and successful completion of an approved boating safety course. Second offense penalties include minimum of 5 days imprisonment, fines of \$300-\$2,500, and successful completion of an approved boating safety course (Oneclc, n.d.).

Based on the number of incidents and deaths with alcohol as a contributing factor from 2020-2024, Alabama's average number of incidents was 8.6 and number of deaths was 1.8. The following table compares the incidents in Alabama to the other states that were evaluated. Note that the lower incidents in Pennsylvania may be attributed to greater numbers of marine officers, which supports the recommendation to increase the number of marine Troopers in Alabama.

Average Annual Alcohol-Related Boating Incidents and Fatalities by State, 2020-2024		
State	Average Annual Incidents	Average Annual Fatalities
Alabama	8.6	1.8
Utah	3.8	1.8
Florida	35.6	14.0
Texas	17.4	5.0
Washington	4.6	2.3
Missouri	9.0	2.0
Pennsylvania	3.6	2.0

Sources – U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety Division

Evaluating Boater Education Requirements

Providing proper boater education is one of the most important things that a state can do to decrease boating incidents and fatalities. The knowledge that a properly educated boat operator receives could potentially help them avoid every single primary cause of boating incidents, injuries, and fatalities that are discussed in this paper. This section aims to compare Alabama's boater education requirements with those of other states to determine if having stricter boater education requirements could have an effect on boater safety. The boater education requirements of boat rental businesses, or liveries, is of particular interest as Alabama currently doesn't have legislation requiring a boat operator to possess a vessel license to operate a rental boat within the state.

Alabama requires every operator of a motorized vessel to obtain an Alabama Boater Safety Certification, which must be added as an endorsement to the individual's Alabama Driver License or issued as a vessel-only license. This statewide requirement demonstrates Alabama's strong commitment to ensuring that all vessel operators have foundational safety knowledge (Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, Marine Patrol Division, n.d.). The state also enforces age-based operator rules, including eligibility for certification beginning at age 12, supervised operation for individuals aged between 12 and 14 and independent operation beginning at age 14. These requirements help ensure that younger operators receive proper training before navigating Alabama waters independently (Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, Marine Patrol Division, n.d.).

One state of interest regarding boater education is Texas. Texas has a mandatory education requirement, which dictates that any individual born on or after September 1, 1993, must successfully complete an approved boater safety course (Brazos River Authority, 2026). To facilitate compliance, the state offers diverse instructional pathways in both digital and traditional settings. For instance, organizations such as the BoatUS Foundation, Boat Ed, and iLearnToBoat provide state-approved online courses. Conversely, individuals who prefer in-person instruction can access programs through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), America's Boating Club in Houston, and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, or enroll in practical, hands-on academies like the Baywatch Boating Academy in Corpus Christi. With regards to boat rentals, Texas heavily regulates commercial boat rental companies, legally

classified as liveries, to ensure consumer safety. According to Koski (2026), liveries are strictly required to provide renters with all necessary safety gear alongside comprehensive operational and regulatory instructions. This mandate includes detailing the rules set forth by the Texas Water Safety Act, providing localized navigation information, and requiring operators to sign an acknowledgment form confirming receipt of this vital instruction.

In Section 327.395 of the Florida Statutes, specific age and vessel-based training thresholds are established. Under this law, anyone born on or after January 1, 1988, who operates a vessel equipped with an engine of 10 horsepower or more must successfully complete an approved boater safety course and possess a valid Florida Boating Safety Education Identification Card. To facilitate compliance with these legal mandates, Florida offers diverse educational pathways that accommodate various learning preferences. Residents can access approved boating safety classes through both in-person and digital platforms. For those seeking an accessible, self-paced option, the BoatUS Foundation provides a state-approved, free online course that fully satisfies the statutory requirement (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, n.d.).

Conversely, boaters who prefer an immersive, practical learning environment can utilize private companies, such as Freedom Boat Club, which offers hands-on training courses for a fee. These specialized programs are taught by U.S. Coast Guard-certified captains, ensuring that operators receive high-quality, professional instruction in real-world environments (Mason, 2026).

Outreach Methods

Many of the primary causes of boating incidents could be addressed through improved informal education and public outreach. One way to achieve this is by effectively using ALEA's website and social media presence. This section highlights several state's exceptional websites and social media presences that provide ideas that Alabama can use to improve its digital outreach over a variety of platforms

Texas, Florida, Missouri, and Washington have some particularly high-quality websites that are discussed in the following paragraphs.

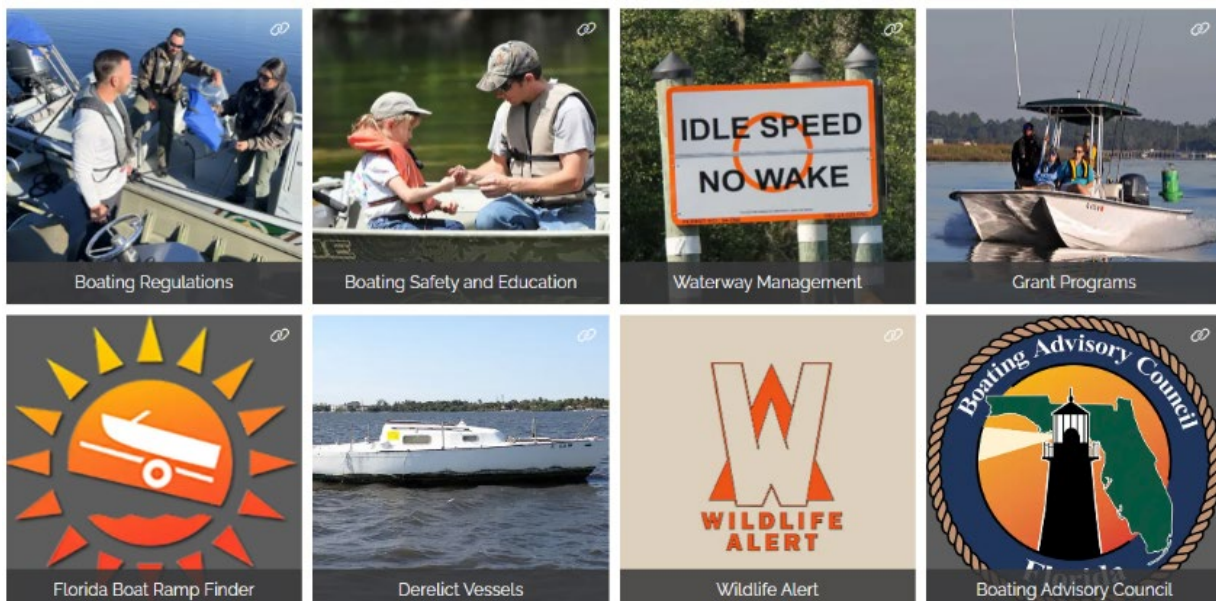
-Texas

The State of Texas Parks and Wildlife website is a great boating safety tool for the state. The website clearly includes several separate areas of concentration such as registration, ownership,

education, safety requirements, licenses/certifications, laws, etc. These areas are clearly visible at first glance at the site. In addition, it is very interactive with links to informational videos and useful apps. This website is easy to navigate and has topics clearly displayed for easy access. The wide range of information listed on the site allows the user to have access to a full range of boater knowledge, with links to online renewals and water safety, without having to visit separate sites. The website also includes links to aquatic areas, such as lakes, rivers and streams that any boater in the state can enjoy, including recreational opportunities such as fish and wildlife.

-Florida

The State of Florida's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's website is an information hub for boating residents and visitors to the state. The homepage of the website includes eight separate areas of concentration such as regulations, boating safety and education, waterway management, grant programs, boat ramp finders, derelict vessels, wildlife alerts and advisories. These sections include frequently asked questions and provide updated information through links to social media platforms. The photos are clear and have several options that are available by



(Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, n.d.)

subject matter in finding information. The site includes subjects that can be accessed through a drop-down feature which allows headings to be focused areas, without crowding with too much verbiage. The website also includes links to educational videos and general information that could assist any residential or out-of-state boater with safety tips, alerts and upcoming events.

-Missouri

The Missouri State Highway Patrol Water Patrol Division website serves as an exceptional benchmark for digital public safety by seamlessly blending emergency accessibility, localized hazard education, and administrative transparency into a cohesive user experience. Crisis communication is prioritized through a high-contrast red emergency banner featuring a dedicated hotline (1-800-525-5555), paired with active field graphics that establishes immediate visual trust and operational presence. Furthermore, the website eliminates bureaucratic friction by bypassing generic contact forms in favor of a permanent resource sidebar and specialized, role-based "task desks" such as dedicated emails for buoy permits, regattas, and safety education which allow citizens to connect directly with specific coordinators.

Beyond administrative efficiency, the platform proactively addresses safety through targeted public courtesy campaigns, multimedia wake awareness resources, and hyper-localized tools like the *Limited No Wake Cove Map* for vessels over 40 feet. By integrating empirical data, such as public boating statistics and drowning reports, alongside direct links to external nodes like the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of Revenue, the website builds public trust through rigorous data transparency. For states like Alabama looking to modernize their digital infrastructure, adopting Missouri's structured layout offers a direct path to reducing citizen friction, improving regulatory compliance, and delivering critical safety data when every second counts (Missouri State Highway Patrol, n.d.).

-Washington

The Washington State Parks Boater Education & Safety website excels by utilizing a highly visual, card-based interface that transforms critical regulatory and survival data into intuitive, bite-sized navigation blocks. By pairing high-quality field imagery with distinct sections such as mandatory card requirements, diverse course formats, and cold-water survival risks, the site drastically lowers the barrier to entry for novice boaters seeking compliance. Furthermore, Washington actively expands its safety outreach beyond traditional motorized vessels to target paddle-sports enthusiasts, visually framing its programming with imagery of young kayakers and paddle safety participants to ensure inclusivity across all watercraft demographics.

A standout best practice of Washington's digital design is its focus on actionable, community-driven resource tools rather than just static text. The implementation of an interactive GIS map within their Life Jacket Loaner Program allows users to instantly pinpoint free, public-use life jacket stands near their exact water access point. This seamless integration of real-world utility with digital maps directly addresses a physical safety barrier at the precise moment a boater plans their trip. Additionally, the platform successfully bridges the gap between state governance and public education by offering downloadable "Water Safe Washington" K-8 school curricula, effectively turning a standard state portal into an interactive public safety pipeline (Washington State Parks, n.d.).

In terms of social media presence, Florida, Texas, and Washington are great examples of states that effectively use a variety of social media platforms. While Alabama uses Facebook, Instagram, and X, Florida, Texas, and Washington all have an additional presence on YouTube. Florida maintains a strong social media presence through videos, graphics, and public safety announcements focused on life jacket use, boating laws, and preventing impaired boating. Their approach combines education with visual content that appeals to a broad audience. Texas stands out for its highly engaging content, including safety tips, educational videos, and real-life stories that encourage public interaction and reinforce safe boating practices. Washington operates one of the most comprehensive boating safety programs, using year-round campaigns, professional graphics, and targeted messaging to keep boating safety top of mind for the public year-round. The most successful boating safety programs share several common characteristics: consistent messaging, a strong emphasis on life jacket wear, effective use of videos and graphics, seasonal safety campaigns, and active public engagement.

Law Enforcement Presence

The responsibility for protecting Alabama's waterways and enforcing boating laws falls primarily on the Marine Patrol Division of the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA). Marine Patrol Troopers enforce boating regulations, conduct safety inspections, assist stranded boaters, investigate incidents, respond to emergencies, perform search-and-rescue operations, and educate both new and experienced boaters on safe boating practices.

The work performed by Marine Patrol Troopers is essential to public safety. Troopers promote safe boating through visible patrols, boater education programs, vessel inspections, and

enforcement of laws designed to encourage safer boating practices. They also provide immediate assistance when accidents occur, often being the difference between life and death in emergency situations. Given the abundance of Alabama's waterways and the number of vessels operating on them, maintaining an adequate number of Marine Patrol Troopers is critical.

To evaluate whether Alabama's current staffing levels are sufficient, a comparative analysis was conducted using data from Alabama as well as Pennsylvania, Missouri, and Minnesota. These states were selected because reliable information is available regarding the number of officers whose primary responsibility is marine law enforcement. This distinction is important because, in most states, boating law enforcement is carried out by conservation officers, game wardens, and natural resource officers who have multiple responsibilities and may be required to spend time performing other law enforcement duties. To ensure a meaningful comparison, only states where comparable staffing figures could be obtained were used.

Although vessel registration requirements vary somewhat among states, vessel registration totals provide a useful baseline for evaluating enforcement workloads. Three-year averages from 2023 through 2025 were compiled for registered vessels and dedicated Marine Patrol staffing levels, as well as boating fatalities. The data were obtained from published annual reports and through communication with boating law administrators in each state.

From 2023 through 2025, Alabama averaged 254,096 registered vessels and 47 Marine Patrol Troopers (D. Brooks, personal communication, July 24, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025; ALEA 2023; ALEA 2024; ALEA 2025). During the same period, Pennsylvania averaged 279,302 registered vessels and 87 officers (M. Sweppenhiser, personal communication, May 11, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025), Missouri averaged 280,333 registered vessels and 67 officers (M. Petlansky, personal communication, July 17, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025), and Minnesota averaged 772,209 registered vessels and 195 officers (L. Dugan, personal communication, June 04, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025).

When adjusted for staffing levels, Alabama averaged 5,406 registered vessels per Trooper. By comparison, Pennsylvania averaged 3,210 registered vessels per officer, Missouri averaged 4,184, and Minnesota averaged 4,345. Alabama's vessel-to-officer ratio was substantially higher than each of the comparison states.

Pennsylvania employed approximately 85 percent more dedicated boating law enforcement officers than Alabama while maintaining just over 5 percent more registered vessels. Missouri employed approximately 43 percent more officers despite having a comparable number of registered vessels. Although Minnesota had significantly more registered vessels overall, its staffing levels resulted in a lower vessel-to-officer ratio than Alabama's. The data suggest that Alabama's Marine Patrol Troopers are responsible for substantially more registered vessels than their counterparts in each comparison state.

Average Registered Vessels and Marine Patrol Staffing (2023–2025)			
State	Registered Vessels	Enforcement Officers	Vessels per Officer
Alabama	254,096	47	5,406
Pennsylvania	279,302	87	3,210
Missouri	280,333	67	4,184
Minnesota	772,209	195	3,960

The staffing disparity becomes particularly significant when viewed alongside boating fatality data. During the same three-year period, Alabama averaged 11.33 boating fatalities annually (D. Brooks, personal communication, July 24, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025). Pennsylvania averaged 9.3 fatalities (M. Sweppenhiser, personal communication, May 11, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025), Missouri averaged 10 (M. Petlansky, personal communication, July 17, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025), and Minnesota averaged 7.7 (L. Dugan, personal communication, June 04, 2026; USCG, 2024; USCG, 2025).

Because the number of registered vessels differs among the states, fatality rates per 100,000 registered vessels provide a more meaningful comparison. Alabama experienced an average fatality rate of 4.44 deaths per 100,000 registered vessels. Pennsylvania's fatality rate was 3.35, Missouri's was 3.59, and Minnesota's was 0.96.

Average Annual Boating Fatalities (2023–2025)		
State	Average Annual Fatalities	Fatalities per 100,000 Registered Vessels
Alabama	11.33	4.44
Pennsylvania	9.3	3.35
Missouri	10.0	3.59
Minnesota	7.67	0.96

Alabama's fatality rate exceeded that of every comparison state. Many factors can influence boating fatalities. However, the combination of comparatively high fatality rates and comparatively low staffing levels is difficult to ignore.

With only 50 Marine Patrol Troopers currently responsible for more than 250,000 registered vessels operating across thousands of miles of waterways, maintaining comprehensive statewide coverage presents a significant challenge. Greater Trooper presence allows for more contact with boaters, more safety inspections on the water and at the boat ramps, more opportunities for public education, and stronger enforcement of boating laws, especially those designed to reduce impaired boating, reckless behavior, and other unsafe practices. The actions of these Troopers help prevent accidents before they occur.

The data indicate that Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's Marine Patrol Division is staffed at a significantly lower level than comparable states when measured against the number of registered vessels. At the same time, Alabama experiences the highest boating fatality rate among the states examined. While staffing levels are only one factor affecting boating safety, investing in additional Marine Patrol Troopers would likely improve boating safety, reduce accidents, save lives, and better protect one of Alabama's most valuable natural resources. As boating activity continues to grow, expanding the Marine Patrol Division is a practical and necessary step toward making Alabama's waterways safer for everyone who uses them.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on research performed by the Boating Safety in Alabama CPM Solutions Project Team. Successful implementation of these recommendations can be measured by the improvement in Alabama's boating safety statistics in subsequent years.

Legislate Personal Flotation Device (PFD) Usage

Increase PFD Age Requirement to 13 and Under

To effectively mitigate drowning deaths on Alabama waterways, the state must address a critical legislative gap in its current boating safety regulations. Currently, Alabama law only mandates Personal Flotation Device (PFD) wear for children under the age of eight. This threshold falls significantly short of not just the federal minimum standard, but also regional standards as previously referenced in the Assessing Laws to Increase PFD Usage section. Observational data underscores the danger of letting voluntary compliance dictate safety; the 2024 Life Jacket Wear Rate Observation Study demonstrates that life jacket usage plummets by nearly 47% the moment children outgrow legal mandates, dropping from an 80.0% wear rate among ages 6–12 to a staggering 33.2% during adolescence (ages 13–17). By failing to extend mandatory wear laws into adolescence, Alabama's current legal framework inadvertently enables a culture of non-compliance at the exact developmental stage where risk-taking behaviors increase.

This drop in life jacket usage directly corresponds with a tragic spike in adolescent and young adult drowning statistics. Nationally, the drowning rate for males nearly triples at age 15, and drowning ranks as the third leading cause of injury-related death for individuals aged 15 to 24, following only motor vehicle crashes and falls (Stop Drowning Now, n.d.). A common defense against expanding mandatory wear laws is the assumption of personal swimming proficiency. However, local data reveal that two-thirds of drowning victims were classified as "good swimmers" (Russell, 2026). Because natural water sources present unpredictable variables like sudden currents and underwater hazards, swimming ability alone cannot substitute for a fastened life jacket. Compounding this issue is the reality that water incidents occur without warning, occasionally exacerbated by improperly fastened equipment—evidenced by a recent Alabama fatality where a young man who could not swim jumped into the water wearing an unbuckled PFD (D. Brooks, personal communication, May 28, 2026). Raising the mandatory wear age to at

least align with the federal standard of 13, if not 16, provides a vital regulatory safety net for this highly vulnerable demographic.

Mandate PFD Usage for Paddlecraft

Furthermore, updating the mandatory age requirement is especially critical given the rapid rise of paddlecraft usage, which exposes younger boaters to disproportionate risks under current regulatory loopholes. While Alabama strictly requires life jackets to be worn by anyone operating a personal watercraft (PWC) like a jet ski, paddlecraft, such as kayaks, canoes, and stand-up paddleboards, are only legally required to have a wearable PFD on board, rather than actively worn. This loophole ignores the physical vulnerability of non-motorized vessels, which are highly susceptible to sudden capsizing. According to the U.S. Coast Guard, while paddlecraft represent just 5.4% of registered vessels, they account for an alarming 27.7% of all boating fatalities (USCG, 2025). Most troubling is the fatality-to-casualty ratio: motorized vessels yield a 16% fatality rate per casualty, whereas paddlecraft yield a staggering 66.2% fatality rate per casualty (USCG, 2025). Because 86.7% of these paddlecraft deaths are caused by drowning, mandating that both adolescents and adults wear PFDs on these inherently unstable vessels is a highly targeted, data-backed measure that would fundamentally reduce the severity of accidents on Alabama waters.

Implement Website Revision

To drastically improve regulatory compliance and increase ease of use, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) should consider changes to the Marine Patrol division's current digital interface. Presently, the Marine Patrol web section features a very basic, stark design that lacks graphics, interactive maps, or calendars, rendering it difficult for the public to navigate. To transform this platform into an engaging public asset, ALEA should implement a welcoming, custom homepage utilizing inviting fonts, strategic color palettes, and structured content sections (Esterline, 2026). Integrating the fundamental elements of elite civic design including a simple layout, clear affordances, smooth user interactions, and website-optimized branding will fundamentally elevate user experience and establish institutional professionalism (Symsoft, 2025). Furthermore, by shifting to plain language writing alongside high-quality graphics, the state can ensure vital regulatory guidelines are instantly understandable to novice and experienced boaters alike.

Improve Website Navigation

A critical upgrade to this infrastructure would involve replacing the current static layout with a highly visual, comprehensive architecture modeled after the Texas and Florida state portals. Restructuring the homepage into prominent, intuitive hubs distinctly separating registration, titling, licensing, education, and local water laws improves information accessibility at first glance. Incorporating Florida's uncluttered drop-down menus and interactive tools, such as automated boat-ramp finders, would turn Alabama's platform into an all-in-one recreational hub. To ensure public safety notices are impossible to miss, ALEA should incorporate a specialized homepage notification center to dynamically highlight time-sensitive warnings and safety alerts directly on the user's screen (Esterline, 2026). This real-time visibility should be paired with searchable interactive calendars that automatically remove outdated information, keeping the public effortlessly updated on local water safety courses, town halls, and marine events (MunicipalOne, n.d.).

Improve Communication

Beyond administrative consolidation, Alabama could modernize its portal to prioritize proactive crisis communication and direct citizen engagement, following successful methodologies established by the Missouri State Highway Patrol. ALEA could feature a high contrast emergency banner prominently displaying a dedicated Marine Patrol hotline for real-time hazard reporting and crisis response. To eliminate administrative friction, the website should transition away from generic contact forms in favor of specialized, role-based "task desks." Transitioning to direct communication channels such as specific, permanent sidebar email links for regional buoy permits, regatta scheduling, and localized safety coordinators will immediately connect citizens to the correct personnel. Integrating hard empirical data, including active drowning reports and public boating statistics, alongside external links to federal nodes like the U.S. Coast Guard, will cultivate public trust through systemic transparency while delivering critical safety info when every second counts.

Improve Visuals

Finally, Alabama could significantly lower the barrier to entry for vulnerable demographics by shifting to a highly visual, community-driven interface modeled after Washington State's digital framework. Utilizing a card-based layout featuring authentic, high-quality imagery helps the

public perceive the organization as highly professional and trustworthy (Esterline, 2026). Crucially, Alabama's portal must expand its visual representation beyond traditional motorized watercraft to actively target the growing demographic of paddle-sports enthusiasts. Integrating an interactive GIS mapping tool directly into the website would allow kayakers and boaters to instantly pinpoint public resources, such as local Life Jacket Loaner stands, at the exact moment they plan their trip. By supplementing these visual changes with downloadable, public school-oriented water safety curricula, Alabama can successfully transform a standard state regulatory portal into a dynamic, life-saving public safety pipeline.

Reduce Boating Under the Influence (BUI) Incidents

In order to reduce accidents and deaths caused or related to Boating Under the Influence (BUI), the number of vessels being operated by impaired boaters must be reduced. There are three main methods for reducing vessels being operated by impaired boaters. The first method to reduce the number of impaired boaters on the water is to enhance the visibility of Marine Patrol. It is recommended to increase the number of Marine Patrol Troopers actively on the water or to have a presence at public boat ramps as discussed earlier to enhance visibility. The second method is to increase the consequences of being caught operating a vessel while impaired. The third method of reducing the number of impaired boaters on the water is public outreach and educational efforts.

Increase Penalties

Evaluating penalties for BUIs in other states have helped shape the recommendations for increasing consequences in Alabama. One recommendation is to not only suspend vessel operation privileges for 90 days but to also suspend the impaired operator's driver license for 90 days similar to Texas. Not only does this increase the penalty for operating a vessel on the water, it also eliminates a potential impaired driver from the road, as there is a likelihood of the operator disregarding laws for both means of travel. A second recommendation to increase BUI penalties is to implement a minimum jail time like Utah and Texas. A third recommendation is the court requiring a violator to pay restitution for injuries and/or damages for the offense similar to what is done in Washington. A recommendation taken from Pennsylvania is to require a violator to attend a Boating Safety Course before vessel operation privileges are reinstated. Lastly, Florida

and Texas laws have a tiered BAC law that increases the penalty based on the offender's level of impairment.

Strengthen Outreach and Education Efforts

Public Outreach and educational efforts for reducing the number of impaired boaters on the water is the ideal method to reduce BUI related accidents. This of course removes an impaired operator from the water but also eliminates the consumption of Marine Police's time dedicated to BUI arrests and the court system's enforcement of penalties. Some ideas taken from other states social media posts are from Florida to increase education with visual content, from Texas with more real-life stories, and from Washington who conducts year-round campaigns. Posting additional stories and year-round campaigns would be a great addition to the summer campaigns ALEA already conducts. Lastly, having a greater presence in schools is a great method to educate future operators about the dangers of operating while impaired.

Require Boating Safety Certification for Boat Rental

Ideally, the State of Alabama would require all livery operators to obtain an Alabama Boater Safety Certification, as required for all other vessel operators within the State. However, at a minimum, it is recommended that Alabama adopt regulations similar to Texas, which requires the inclusion of all necessary safety gear and comprehensive operational and regulatory instruction (Koski, 2026). This required instruction would set a minimum standard for all vessel operators, greatly enhancing safety for everyone on the water.

Increase Staffing Levels of Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's Marine Patrol Division

Conversations with Marine Patrol personnel suggest that the Marine Patrol Division has a more difficult time attracting Troopers than the Highway Patrol Division. One likely contributing factor is that the Marine Patrol Division has significantly lower public visibility. Unlike Highway Patrol Troopers, who are frequently seen on Alabama's roadways and are widely recognized by the public, Marine Patrol Troopers primarily operate on the state's waterways and are typically less visible to most residents. As a result, many prospective applicants may be unaware of the Marine Patrol Division as a potential career opportunity or may have only a limited understanding of its responsibilities and mission.

Increase Public Outreach

To improve recruitment, the Marine Patrol Division could increase its public outreach by highlighting its operations and successes through news media and social media platforms. Publicizing search-and-rescue missions, boating safety enforcement, disaster response, marine investigations, and community engagement activities would help educate the public about the Marine Patrol Division's role in protecting Alabama's waterways as well as showcase the diversity and rewarding nature of its work. By increasing public awareness of its mission and career opportunities, the Marine Patrol Division may be able to attract a larger pool of qualified applicants.

Appoint a Dedicated Marine Patrol Trooper as a Recruitment Coordinator

Due to the specialized nature of the Marine Patrol Trooper position, ALEA should consider assigning an experienced Marine Patrol Trooper to serve as the dedicated recruitment coordinator for the division. Currently, recruitment efforts are conducted centrally by ALEA for both the Highway Patrol Division and the Marine Patrol Division. While this approach provides consistency across the agency, it may not adequately address the unique qualifications, skills, and lifestyle associated with marine law enforcement.

A Marine Patrol Trooper serving as the recruitment coordinator would bring firsthand knowledge and credibility to the hiring process. Having performed the job, the recruiter could effectively communicate the responsibilities, challenges, and rewards of the position while answering applicants' questions from personal experience. This authenticity can help attract candidates who are genuinely interested in a career on the water rather than those simply seeking a traditional law enforcement position.

Throughout our interviews, Marine Patrol Troopers consistently demonstrated a genuine passion for their work and mission. That enthusiasm would be a valuable asset in recruiting efforts, as it is likely to resonate with prospective applicants and attract individuals who are well-suited for the unique challenges of law enforcement in a marine environment.

Focus Recruitment Efforts

Recruitment efforts should also be tailored to audiences that are more likely to already have the interests and many of the skills necessary to succeed as Marine Patrol Troopers. Rather than

relying solely on traditional law enforcement recruitment methods, outreach should target individuals who already participate in water-based recreational and professional activities. Opportunities include boat shows, marinas, fishing tournaments, fishing clubs, marine retailers, outdoor recreation expos, and boating safety courses. Establishing a presence at these events allows recruiters to engage directly with individuals who have existing boating knowledge and are likely to share a passion for the water.

Additionally, recruitment efforts should emphasize outreach to military veterans, particularly those who served in the United States Coast Guard and United States Navy. These individuals often possess valuable experience in vessel operations, navigation, emergency response, while operating in challenging and high-pressure environments. Their background and competencies would likely make them strong candidates for the Marine Patrol Trooper position.

Promote Marine Patrol Division as an Elite Unit

The Marine Patrol Division could promote itself as a more prestigious, highly specialized assignment within ALEA. The Division could be framed as an elite unit, similar to the specialized units in the military. This could make the Marine Patrol Division more appealing to law enforcement officers seeking advanced responsibility and career distinction. The Division could also increase the visibility of high-risk rescues and complex missions, which would help garner public respect and enhance the Division's internal pride. This, in turn, would make the Marine Patrol Trooper assignment more desirable, improving both recruitment and retention.

Implement Cross Training and Ride-Along

One factor that may discourage both current Troopers and prospective applicants from pursuing a career in marine law enforcement is a lack of familiarity with the marine environment or a fear of working on the water. To address this challenge, the ALEA could establish opportunities such as ride-alongs, job shadowing, and internships within the Marine Patrol Division. These programs would allow interested individuals to gain firsthand exposure of the day-to-day responsibilities of Marine Patrol Troopers, including vessel operations, boating safety enforcement, search and rescue missions, emergency response, and interactions with the boating community. Experiencing these duties would provide participants with a realistic understanding of the position while helping them develop confidence and familiarity with operating on Alabama's waterways. Increased exposure may reduce anxiety associated with working on the

water and entice qualified candidates who might otherwise overlook a career in the Marine Patrol Division. One Trooper with the Marine Patrol division of ALEA stated that he was originally a highway patrol Trooper and wanted to follow his sergeant over to the Marine Patrol when his sergeant moved for a promotion. Since this Trooper had never driven a boat, the sergeant suggested he try a ride along first. On his day off the Trooper went on a ride-along and fell in love with being on the water and knew he wanted to make the move.

Similarly, ALEA could implement a cross-training program that enables new and current Highway Patrol Troopers to gain experience performing law enforcement duties in a marine environment. Providing highway patrol personnel with specialized marine training would broaden their professional skill sets while increasing awareness of the unique responsibilities and challenges associated with the Marine Patrol Division. Exposure to marine enforcement operations may spark greater interest among experienced Highway Patrol that could lead to the Troopers pursuing permanent assignments within the Marine Patrol Division. An additional benefit to the Marine Patrol Division is that the positions would be filled by Troopers who are already familiar with ALEA's policies, procedures, and organizational culture.

In addition to its recruitment benefits, cross-training would provide ALEA with greater operational flexibility. Highway Patrol Troopers that are trained to perform marine law enforcement duties could be deployed to Alabama's waterways during periods of peak boating activity, special events, holiday weekends, or during emergency response operations. Developing a workforce capable of supporting both highway and marine operations would maximize existing personnel resources, improve statewide coverage, and enhance ALEA's ability to protect the public on Alabama's roadways and waterways.

Establishing ride-alongs, job shadowing opportunities, internships, and cross-training programs would provide ALEA with additional strategies for strengthening the Marine Patrol Division's workforce. By increasing exposure to marine law enforcement and equipping Troopers with specialized skills, these initiatives would expand the pool of qualified applicants while improving ALEA's organizational flexibility. Collectively, these efforts would support ALEA's ability to meet current and future staffing needs while enhancing the agency's ability to protect Alabama's waterways.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation	Strategic Action	Responsible Party
Legislate Personal Flotation Devices	• Increase PFD age requirement to 13 years and under • Make PFD usage mandatory for paddlecraft	Legislation
Implement Website Revision	• Make the website easier to navigate • Streamline communication • Add visuals and graphics	Information Technology
Reduce Boating Under the Influence Incidents	• Increase penalties for violating BUI laws • Strengthen Outreach and Education Efforts	ALEA's Marine Patrol Division
Require Boating Safety Certification for Boat Rental	• Create and pass legislation that requires a boating safety certification for renting a boat	Legislation
Increase Staffing Levels of Alabama Law Enforcement Agency's Marine Patrol Division	• Increase public outreach • Appoint a dedicated Marine Patrol Trooper as a recruitment coordinator • Focus recruitment efforts • Promote Marine Patrol Division as an elite unit • Implement cross training and mandatory ride-along	ALEA's Marine Patrol Division

Conclusion

Enhancing safety on Alabama's waterways is an important mission of the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency. The Boating Safety in Alabama CPM Solutions Project Team aimed to support this mission by examining primary causes of boating accidents, assessing the effectiveness of education and training efforts, and developing research driven recommendations that raise awareness on the importance of boating safety and enhance safety for both motorized and non-motorized vessels. The recommendations provided in this paper provide strategies that improve public awareness, strengthen education, and support decision making for ALEA and its partners to enhance the safety of boaters on Alabama's waterways.

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