



SIERRA CLUB

NORTH STAR CHAPTER

North Star Chapter
2300 Myrtle Avenue Suite 260
Saint Paul, MN 55114

February 27, 2023

Re: Testimony on SF 553

The Sierra Club aims to help everyone enjoy the recreational benefits of our natural resources in a manner that protects the environment now and in the future. I wish to thank {bill's authors} for introducing this boater education and permitting bill again this session. Minnesotans will benefit from this bill if it is enacted. To ensure the support of boaters, shoreline owners, environmentalists, and others, I offer the following amendments to the current language. These amendments will get more boaters trained sooner and help develop course content commensurate with Minnesota's needs.

Proposed Amendments

- *Adult Operator Definition:*

We wish to see the bill amended in a manner that will increase the number of trained boaters in fewer years. Currently, this bill has only 40-year-olds and younger (as of 7/1/2028) requiring training over the next 5 years. Boaters older than 40 years will not require training. Which means it will take another 30+ years for age related attrition to occur before most boaters will have their permits. This amendment will significantly increase the number of boaters trained in the next 5 years. The sooner boaters are trained, the sooner public safety and the environment will benefit.

Subd. 3. Adult operator.

"Adult operator" means a motorboat operator, including a personal watercraft operator, who is 12 years of age or older and who was:

- (1) effective July 1, 2025, born on or after July 1, 2004;
- (2) effective July 1, 2026, born on or after July 1, ~~2000~~ 1996;
- (3) effective July 1, 2027, born on or after July 1, ~~1996~~ 1987; and
- (4) effective July 1, 2028, born on or after July 1, ~~1987~~ 1978

- *Watercraft Safety Program:*

Amending the bill's language will give more authority and responsibility to our local stakeholders for determining course content. This should strengthen boaters' support for this bill and give Minnesotans a greater say in protecting our environment. Including the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators in a supportive and advisory role will help us benefit from their expertise in pursuit of state-based goals.

Sec. 4. [86B.304] WATERCRAFT SAFETY PROGRAM

(a) The commissioner must establish a water safety course and testing program for personal watercraft and watercraft operators and must prescribe a written test as part of the course. The commissioner must also establish a working group of Minnesota-based interested parties to develop course content and implementation. The commissioner must also include the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators in a supportive and advisory role to ensure potential reciprocity with other states and cohesion with our current training program. This course must be available online. The course must be approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators and must be available online. The course must include content on what boaters must do to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species and protect all aspects of lake and river ecology based on sound peer-reviewed scientific studies. Furthermore, the course must include instruction on how boaters can reduce conflicts among user groups. The commissioner may allow designated water safety courses administered by third parties to meet the requirements of this paragraph and may enter into reciprocity agreements or otherwise certify boat safety education programs from other states if they that are substantially similar to essentially the same as our in-state programs especially with regard for public safety and environmental protection. The commissioner must establish a working group of interested parties to develop course content and implementation. The course must include content on best management practices for mitigating aquatic invasive species, reducing conflicts among user groups, and limiting the ecological impacts of watercraft.

Summary

The goal is to ensure that:

- all Minnesotans are represented in the development of the course content,
- the environment is protected for future generations and their recreational pursuits,
- public safety is at the highest level possible for everyone using our lakes and rivers, and
- all boaters will have access to areas where they can operate their boats knowing they will not infringe on others' enjoyment or damage the environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SF 553

Mark Strand
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