Appendix VII – American Canoe Association Stance on Canoe and Kayak Boat Registration

AMERICAN CANOE ASSOCIATION

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ACA Stance on Canoe and Kayak Registration

The ACA is generally opposed to the registration of canoes and kayaks. While we recognize that states have an incentive to register canoes and kayaks, and also acknowledge that paddlers do impose some burden on boating administrators, we believe most legislative and regulatory proposals are excessive because the costs imposed on paddlers would be disproportionate to the services paddlers receive. Here are some of the reasons the ACA opposes registration:

- Canoes and kayaks do not present the same enforcement burden and costs as do other craft. Canoes and kayaks are not capable of breaking speed limits or putting other waterway users at risk. Canoes and kayaks do not require expensive access ramps like larger craft, they do not emit hydrocarbon pollution into our waters, and because they are quieter, they are less likely to disturb wildlife and waterfront homeowners. States should encourage paddling as a non-polluting, healthy, mode of transportation and recreation.
- Vessel registration typically requires the display of 3" registration numbers on the hulls of each vessel. Paddlers sometimes have trouble making these numbers fit on their craft, and also may have trouble making them stick for long periods of time because of the chemicals used in the manufacturing process.
- State boating agencies often resist suggestions that canoe/kayak registration dollars and the resulting revenue received from the Wallop-Breaux Trust Fund be set aside specifically to serve the needs of the paddling community. Paddlers are reluctant to support registration without assurances that state agencies would spend canoe/kayak registration monies on legitimate paddling-related needs.
- Many paddlers own numerous canoes and kayaks in order to accommodate the wide variety of water conditions and paddling objectives. Avid paddlers often own in excess of ten canoes and kayaks. Requiring registration of each canoe or kayak could easily result in a typical paddler paying far more for registration than other boaters.
- In addition to the registration fees, the multi-digit registration numbers often will not stay affixed to canoes and kayaks for more than a year and must be frequently replaced. In some states, registration will also result in the assessment of various local fees. Canoeing and kayaking are boating activities that are available to people of modest income, and the accumulation of used or new canoes and kayaks can stretch over many years. For these paddlers, the costs associated with registration can suddenly make owning/using these canoes or kayaks unaffordable.
- States with canoe and kayak registration unwittingly encourage their resident paddlers to go outside the state to paddle. Testimonials from paddlers in Ohio indicate that they will more frequently paddle in neighboring states to avoid registering all of their canoes and kayaks. This means that a state that enacts canoe and kayak registration can expect to lose some recreation-related revenue to neighboring states. Canoe/kayak registration requirements can adversely impact tourism revenue by discouraging out-of-state paddlers from visiting.

Federal law only requires states to register motorized vessels. Many states have also required that sailboats above a certain length also be registered. Beyond that, the decisions become much more arbitrary. Canoe and kayak registration seems to be largely driven by the realization that there are a significant number of canoes and kayaks in operation. State boating agencies associate those large numbers with revenue potential and the need and demand for services such as law enforcement and rescue personnel.

Registration categories are often established by vessel length. In the non-motorized realm, using boat-type and length to determine which craft should be registered is problematic. Canoes and kayaks come in a wide-variety of lengths, and any length-based registration law is likely to require some paddlers to register while ignoring others. Also, registering canoes and kayaks raises the question of whether such registration requirements are fair unless surf skis, sail boards, rowing shells, surfboards, rafts, and wave skis are also required to be registered.

What is the ACA position on canoe/kayak registration?

The ACA believes that states should encourage and support canoeing and kayaking as healthy, non-polluting activities. Most canoe/kayak registration proposals that ACA has seen to date are onerous plans that would have the result of discouraging participation in canoeing and kayaking. These registration proposals typically reflect a lack of understanding about paddlesports and a lack of research into the potential impact on paddlers.

State boating agencies should have a clear record of collaborating with, and serving the needs of the paddlesports community prior to seeking funding support from paddlers. Registration or any other legislative proposal affecting paddlers should be the result of collaboration between paddlesports clubs and organizations and state boating officials. Paddlers as well as state boating agencies should oppose registration efforts that are not the result of such collaboration.

The ACA will judge the merits of any registration bill that results from such collaboration on a case-by-case basis. ACA will oppose any proposal that fails to address the following issues:

- The merits of the registration proposal must outweigh the bureaucratic and financial burden to paddlers;
- The proposal must enjoy widespread support from paddlers in the state and be endorsed by a majority of the state's paddling clubs;
- The proposal cannot require the placement of traditional boat numbers;
- The proposal should have a fee structure that reflects the lower enforcement, access, and pollution costs associated with canoes and kayaks;
- The proposal should ensure that registration is convenient and affordable for paddlers that own multiple canoes and kayaks; and
- The proposal must include adequate guarantees that the funds derived from registration will be used to effectively serve the needs and interests of the paddlesports community.

If you have questions regarding the ACA's stance on canoe and kayak registration, send an email to stewardship@americancanoe.org.

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