

## **NDF&G June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009 newsletter**

### **Summer Safety Encouraged on the Water**

Summer is traditionally a time when families enjoy outdoor activities by gathering with friends and relatives at a favorite recreation site. Nancy Boldt, boat and water safety coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department says family outings and commotion go hand-in-hand, and that is why it is important to be alert and safe near water.

“Personal flotation devices are the single most important part of safety on the water,” Boldt said. “They are worn to save your life.”

North Dakota law requires all children ages 10 and younger to wear a personal flotation device while in boats of less than 27 feet in length. The law also requires all personal watercraft users to wear a life jacket, Boldt said, as well as anyone towed on skis, tubes, boards or other similar devices.

Water users should make sure to wear life jackets that are the appropriate size, and in good condition. It is also important that children wear a PFD while swimming. “It doesn’t matter how good you can swim because after being in the water for a period of time kids become tired or develop cramps,” Boldt said.

Failure to wear a PFD is the main reason people lose their lives in boating accidents. The National Safe Boating Council warns boaters that most drowning victims had a life jacket available, but were not wearing it when they entered the water. It is difficult to put a life jacket on once you are already in the water, Boldt said.

When purchasing a PFD, Boldt suggests considering the most prevalent water activity. Water skiers and tubers should wear a life jacket with four nylon straps rather than one with a zipper, because straps are stronger than zippers upon impact with water. Anglers or persons paddling a canoe should opt for a PFD that is comfortable enough to wear for an entire outing.

Water skiers and tubers are reminded it takes three to ski and tube. When a person is towed on water skis or a similar device, an observer other than the operator is required on the vessel.

“Know what is below the water’s surface, especially near shore,” Boldt said. “Larger objects can be hidden, potentially leading to a significant injury.”

It is important for swimmers to know the depth, as serious injuries can occur from diving into water. “To be safe, never dive into the lake because you never know what is below the surface,” Boldt said.

North Dakota boaters also are reminded that marine VHF radios are an important part of boat safety that should not be improperly used by operators. Boldt said they are intended for boat operators who are in distress and facing an emergency situation.

Regulations to help ensure safe boating this summer are found in the 2008-10 North Dakota Fishing Guide. A more comprehensive listing is available in the 2008-10 North Dakota Boat and Water Safety Guide or the Boat North Dakota education book. These guides are available online at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov), by emailing [ndgf@nd.gov](mailto:ndgf@nd.gov), or at a local Game and Fish Department office.

### **Be Courteous at Boat Ramps**

Summer weekends at area lakes are often busy with people fishing, tubing, pleasure boating or enjoying time on a jet ski. Because of all the activity, boat ramps are usually congested and people can become frustrated and lose their patience.

Nancy Boldt, boat and water safety coordinator for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, urges operators to plan accordingly when taking a boat to a lake or river this summer.

“There are a few simple procedures that will help speed up the process of launching and loading a boat,” Boldt said. “But most importantly, if you see someone struggling at the ramp, help.”

### **Launching**

Don't pull onto ramp until your boat is ready to launch.

Prepare for launching in the parking area. Remove covers, load equipment, remove tie downs, attach lines and put in drain plug, before backing onto the ramp.

When ready, pull into line to launch. Wait your turn. Be courteous.

It takes at least two people to efficiently and courteously launch a boat: one to handle the boat and one to take care of the tow vehicle.

Launch on the designated side of the ramp.

### **Loading**

Know which side of the ramp is designated for loading.

Don't block the loading area with your boat until your tow vehicle is ready to load. Wait until you are clear of the launch area to unload gear.

As soon as your trailer is in the water, load and secure your boat to the trailer.

Remove boat and trailer from the water as quickly as possible.

Get clear of the ramp. Pull into the parking area to finish securing your boat and unload gear.