

Small Boating Fast Growing Outdoor Sport

By VINCENT THOMAS
Assemblyman

The fastest growing recreational activity in California is small boating. More than 210,000 owners of boats ranging from skiffs to ocean-going yachts now give themselves and their families hours and days of care-free pleasure on our thousands of miles of inland and coastal waters. The number of such craft is estimated to have increased 10 times during the past 10 years.

Every community located on a waterway has its scores of enthusiastic boaters, but the trees haven't stopped there. Thanks to convenient boat trailers, thousands of Californians whose homes are miles from the nearest navigable water take their own boats with them to their favorite lake, river, or bay. Selling small boats, and supplying their owners' needs for gear and fuel, has become a thriving industry. New lake and river resorts have appeared all over the State, and older ones have taken a strong new lease on life.

As might have been expected, this rapid expansion in boating has produced some problems for your state legislature. To enable dealing with them on a orderly basis, a law was passed in 1957 which set up the Small Craft Harbor Commission, and authorized an operating division in the Department of Natural Resources. In the same session, a Senate Interior Committee on Small Boat Harbors was also set up.

The first and basic problem to be attacked by your legislature was the need for harbor facilities for small craft. Boats, like cars, have to be parked. When they are too large to be hauled out of the water after every use, harbors, marinas, or mooring areas must be provided where they can be safely stored, and where service facilities can be made available. Legislation authorizing local government units to finance small boat harbors by issuing revenue bonds was passed. In the regular budget for the current year, a \$5 million loan fund was established from which communities can borrow to build needed facilities. In addition, your legislature passed a constitutional amendment which will appear on your November ballot, which will authorize issuance of \$60 million in state bonds, \$10 million of which will be earmarked for construction of small boat harbors.

But the problems arising from increased use of small boats for recreation do not stop with harbor construction. Much money will be needed for development and improvement of all our waterways to make them more useful and safer. Safety laws regulating boat operation, and means of enforcing them will have to be devised and enacted. Widespread use of small boats has created a problem of sanitation which may require changes in our laws relating to waterway pollution control.

These and other related items are being carefully studied by the Senate interim group, which has scheduled a series of hearings in various parts of the State in the immediate future. Financing waterway development will be a leading topic at these meetings. One suggestion that the committee is studying carefully is that improvements be paid for by earmarking revenues from the gas and fuel taxes paid on fuel for boating. The committee has mailed thousands of questionnaires to boat owners all over the State in order to determine how much boat fuel is actually being used. It hopes that every owner who receives the form will fill it in and return it promptly.

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