

Recreational Boating Association of Washington (RBAW) *2023-2024 Legislative & Regulatory Priorities*

State Legislative Priorities

- **Lakebay Marina:** RBAW will partner with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on funding 'asks' related to continued redevelopment and renovation work at the Lakebay Marina: 1) a Boating Facilities Program (BFP) competitive grant application for \$1.7 million, led by DNR; 2) a request for an earmark of \$1 million in the "Local and Community Projects" section of the 2024 Supplemental Capital Budget, to be led by RBAW; and other additional funding opportunities.
- **Watercraft Excise Tax (WET) Depreciation Schedule:** Over the last two years, as Department of Revenue has made annual updates to the WET Depreciation Schedule that it is statutorily allowed to set through rulemaking, RBAW has led formation of a broad-based coalition to push for the fairest schedule possible. While the Association has had some success in pushing for adjustments to the schedule for newer boats, RBAW continues to have strong concerns that the Depreciation Schedule for older vessels (purchased 15 years ago or more) is artificially high and leads to higher-than-necessary annual assessments. RBAW is working towards a fairer schedule for boaters and has had high-level meetings with the Department of Revenue that will focus on crafting an acceptable change to the state law governing the Depreciation Schedule (RCW 82.49.040 and WAC 458-20-23801).
- **Continued funding for the Lake Union Water Safety Initiative – AKA #MindTheZone:** RBAW successfully partnered with other stakeholders on a \$300,000 allocation in the 2022 Operating Budget for education and awareness work on Lake Washington, with RBAW receiving ½ of that allocation for the on-shore initiative that was branded as #MindTheZone. That state funding lapsed in June 2023, however RBAW secured \$122,000 in the City of Seattle's budget for 2023-2024. RBAW will look for an additional \$73,000 from the State Legislature in 2024 to enhance continued operations.
- **Derelict Vessels and Derelict Structures – Continued Support of DNR Programs.** RBAW will continue to support both the Derelict Vessel Removal Program (DVRP) and the Derelict Structures Removal Program that we have worked on closely with DNR to implement over the last couple years. RBAW in conjunction with DNR will advocate that funding remain sustainable and that incentive funds are maximized. On the regulatory side of DVRP, it remains important for RBAW to push for as much of the funding as possible going to the Vessel Turn-In Program and to bolster the removal of vessels from non-public lands.
- **Boating safety and access:** RBAW will continue to promote increased awareness of and education on the importance of boater safety and access. The Association will monitor action in the 2024 legislative session to see whether any lawmakers propose an expansion of requirements to wear Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) or boating education changes. RBAW will want to be at the table to ensure any such proposals are limited and targeted.

Regulatory Matters and Work on Agency & Budget Initiatives at the Federal, State, and Local Levels

- **Watercraft Excise Tax (WET):** RBAW will continue its longstanding policy of actively opposing any proposals that would increase the Watercraft Excise Tax – as it did in 2021 by successfully heading off a proposal to *double* the WET. Additionally, fresh off a successful 2022 initiative to re-direct 25 percent of the WET dollars from the General Fund into the Derelict Vessel Removal Program (DVRP), RBAW is exploring conversations with key state agencies and state agency leaders regarding future initiatives that could be put in place to set aside additional WET monies for RBAW Marine Parks Conservancy acquisition projects.
- **Seattle Harbor Patrol:** RBAW will support efforts to bolster funding, FTEs, and equipment for the Harbor Patrol. RBAW led a 2022 delegation that met with Seattle’s Mayor and was pleased that the mayor’s two-year budget put an additional \$250,000 a year into Harbor Patrol overtime emphasis patrols and equipment replacements. RBAW and other coalition partners plan to be directly involved in an upcoming study of Harbor Patrol manpower and equipment needs to determine the appropriate resources needed.
- **San Juan Islands Destination Management Plan:** San Juan County has released a preliminary San Juan Island Destination Management plan with the goal of delivering a plan of action for Island visitation that meets the needs of the community, environment, economy, and visitors. While portions of the plan are noble, RBAW has initial concerns that recommendations contained in this plan may prohibit and restrict boating and anchoring in the San Juan Islands and creates new fees and financial burden to boat in the area. The proposed plan includes a new Salish Sea Marine Pass (similar to a Discovery Pass), as well as establishing a new annual San Juan Islands boating sticker (along with car and bicycle sticker programs). RBAW submitted joint comments with industry stakeholders to the initial plan as proposed, citing our concerns of new fees, stickers, passes, and anchoring restrictions in the plan.
- **Seaplanes on Lake Union:** RBAW will continue to monitor the issue of seaplane traffic and the use of advisory buoys on Lake Union. As Lake Union is an extremely busy waterway with growing recreational and commercial demands, continued efforts and solutions may be required to ensure all users of the lake can co-exist.
- **Expansion of buoys, piloting of “Stern Ties,” and other ways to assist recreational boaters in having available capacity:** This has been a priority item for RBAW and there have been *some* success stories, such as the repair and replacement of hundreds of existing buoys by Washington State Parks. That said, RBAW will continue to stress the importance with State Parks, DNR, and others to put in place a more aggressive game plan to add mooring buoys or stern-tie pilot projects, especially at a time where the establishment of any new marina capacity is very rare.
- **Southern Resident Killer Whale Task Force:** Now that SB 5371 has passed into law, the Department of Fish & Wildlife is creating the Orca Regulations Communications Advisory Group (workgroup), to inform the development of outreach and education strategies designed to support public awareness and compliance with the mandatory 1,000-yard vessel buffer around endangered Southern Resident killer whales (SRKW). This workgroup must contain representatives from the recreational boating and commercial whale watching industries (and various others).

RBAW will have Board Member representation on this taskforce to represent recreational boaters and is awaiting next steps from the Department.

- **Prioritization and use of funding from 2023 session to expand pump-out service on key waterways:** RBAW, the Northwest Marine Trade Association (NMTA) and environmental organizations were successful in the 2023 legislative session in securing \$1.8m in the State Capital Budget for the expansion of recreational and commercial vessel pump-out capacity. RBAW's top focus is to expand recreational pump-out capacity – particularly mobile capacity within the state. While a portion of the \$1.8 million secured was for commercial pump out operations, there was \$500,000 for a needs assessment of recreational marine pump out facilities to identify underserved areas, and another \$500,000 to assist facilities with hardships in paying federal matching requirements for projects funded under the Clean Vessel Act program. RBAW will continue to work with State Parks on the use of this funding to support recreational boaters.
- **Andrews Bay:** RBAW has invested significant time and energy into promoting safe and responsible boating through a "Responsible Play in the Bay....so we can Stay in the Bay" initiative and 'ambassadors' events over the past few years. RBAW will work with Seattle Harbor Patrol to prioritize emphasis patrols, as well as other options where appropriate and safe behavior can be maintained and enhanced to ensure anchoring is preserved in Lake Washington.
- **Lower Snake River Dam Removal:** RBAW will continue to track this issue area closely and oppose efforts to remove the four (4) hydropower dams on the Lower Snake River. RBAW was pleased to join numerous other organizations in declaring at least a partial victory with the late-August 2022 release of the *Lower Snake River Dams: Benefits Replacement Study*. U.S. Senator Patty Murray and Governor Jay Inslee, the two elected officials who helped trigger the report, released a statement indicating that breaching the Lower Snake River dams is "not an option right now."
- **Capitol Lake Management Study:** RBAW will continue lending strong support to our members with the Olympia Yacht Club, who are trying to ensure that the ongoing Capitol Lake Management Study and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) does not decimate its current location or saddle it with new costs stemming from a potential "Estuary Alternative." While the estuary alternative appears to have momentum in the local community and may be the preferred alternative cited by the Department of Enterprise Services when the full EIS is issued, it is also clear that DES recognizes the important role played by recreational boating and area marinas and would like to avoid the imposition of new cost burdens on that sector.