

## **Extending the sunset provisions of AS.05.25 (the Alaska Boating Safety Act of 2000)**

### **BACKGROUND**

From 1987 to 2000 Alaska was the only state without a comprehensive recreational boating safety program, even though Alaska was experiencing one of the highest fatality rates in the nation. During the same time, Alaska's share of the federal funding available to the states for boating safety programs was being distributed to the other states. Also, because Alaska was also the only state that did not register boats, the U.S. Coast Guard administered boat registration in Alaska, and Alaskan's registration fees went to the U.S. Treasury rather than remaining in the state. Following at least 11 attempts at passage, in May of 2000, *HB 108*, the Alaska Boating Safety Act was signed into law.

The Act did four things;

1. It brought Alaska's state boating laws into uniformity with federal laws.
2. Assigned the state's boating regulatory functions to appropriate state agencies (DNR as the lead agency, DPS - law enforcement, and DMV - boat registration).
3. It qualified Alaska to receive the state's share of federal grant funds.
4. Established Alaska's state boating education program.

Proceeding cautiously, the 21<sup>st</sup> Legislature originally added two "sunset" clauses to repeal the Alaska Boating Safety Act in the event the state did not receive the anticipated federal funds. The first sunset would take effect and the boating safety program would terminate if federal funds were not received. The second sunset terminated the program by date (currently extended to July 1, 2011 after HB 151 passed in 2009).

Essentially, it was left to a future legislature to verify the federal funding stream was indeed in place.

However, as expected, the federal funds (over 1 million dollars a year into Alaska's economy) have been consistent for 11 years. The program has been successful, and the sunset provisions of the Alaska Boating Safety Act should be extended.

## **PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

The *Kids Don't Float* life jacket loaner program is a collaborative effort between the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, the Alaska Boating Safety Program, the U.S. Coast Guard, and local sponsors. A total of **514** life jacket loaner board stations in **153** communities have been established statewide. The Alaska Boating Safety Program is the primary supplier for the program, and has thus far provided **20,133** life jackets for *Kids Don't Float*. At least **17** Alaskan children survived a water emergency thanks to a *Kids Don't Float* loaner life jacket.

*Kids Don't Float* also has an educational component that provides school programs for Alaska's students. To date, classes provided by the program have reached more than **56,235** children.

The program offers *Alaska Water Wise (AWW)*, Alaska's nationally approved and Alaska – relevant, boating safety course. **1,400** boaters (representing all of Alaska's census areas) have completed an AWW course to date.

The program also trains Alaskans to teach *Alaska Water Wise* courses and supports their efforts to teach boating safety in and around their communities. **250** potential instructors from more than **52** Alaska communities have completed the *Alaska Water Wise Instructor* course thus far.

The program conducts an ongoing social marketing campaign using variety of boating safety messages on radio and television, and produces publications and articles including the popular *Alaska Boater's Handbook*, an award - winning poster series, and the nationally recognized film *Cold Water Boating*.

The program provides marine law enforcement training for the Alaska State Troopers and other Alaska law enforcement officers.

The program provides support for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Vessel Safety Check program.

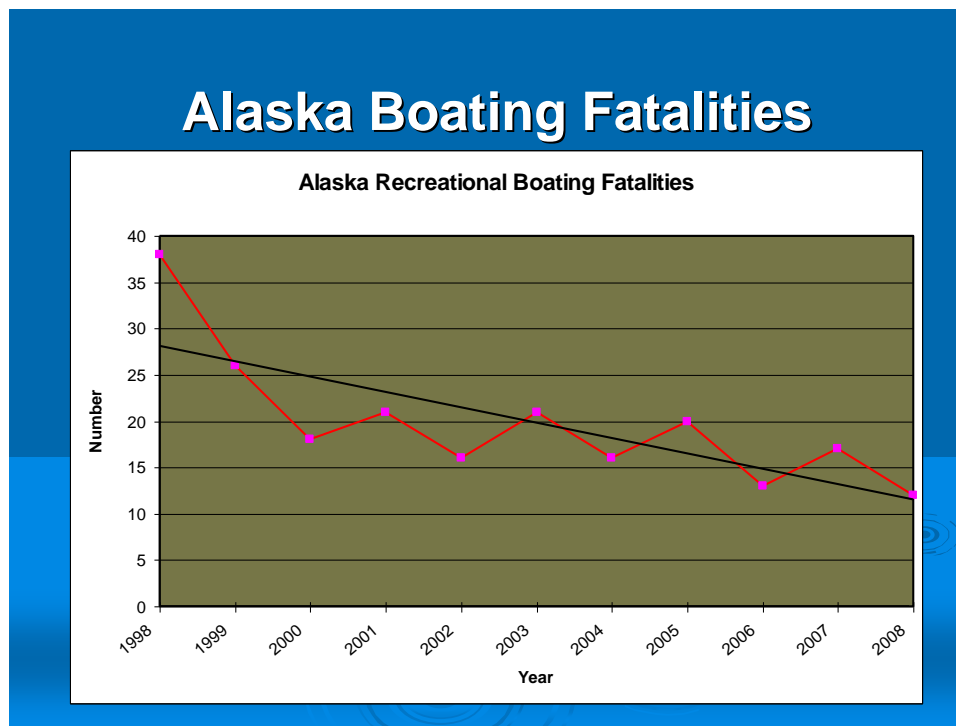
The Alaska Boating Safety Program is entirely user – funded, through the federal *Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund* and a portion of Alaska's state boat registration receipts.

Observational behavior studies, statewide boater surveys, instructor and course evaluations, student testing, and U.S Coast Guard statistics are examples of sources used to evaluate program performance.

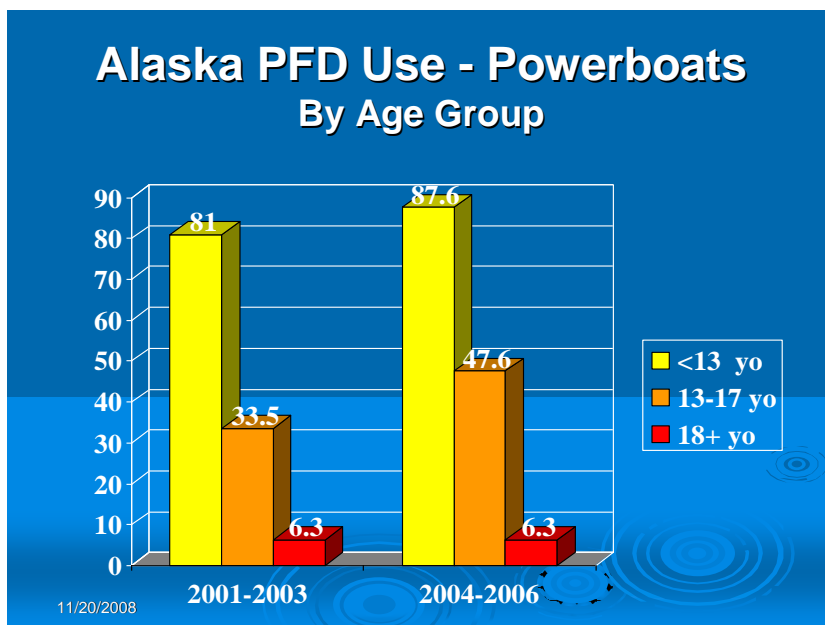
In its short history the Alaska Boating Safety Program and its staff have received numerous awards, including; the U.S. Coast Guard *Public Service Commendation*, the U.S. Department of Transportation's *Partnering for Excellence Award*, the National Safe Boating Council's *Boating Education Advancement Award*, and the National Association of State Boating Law Administrator's prestigious *Boating Safety* and *Bonner Awards*.

### THE PROGRAM IS MAKING PROGRESS

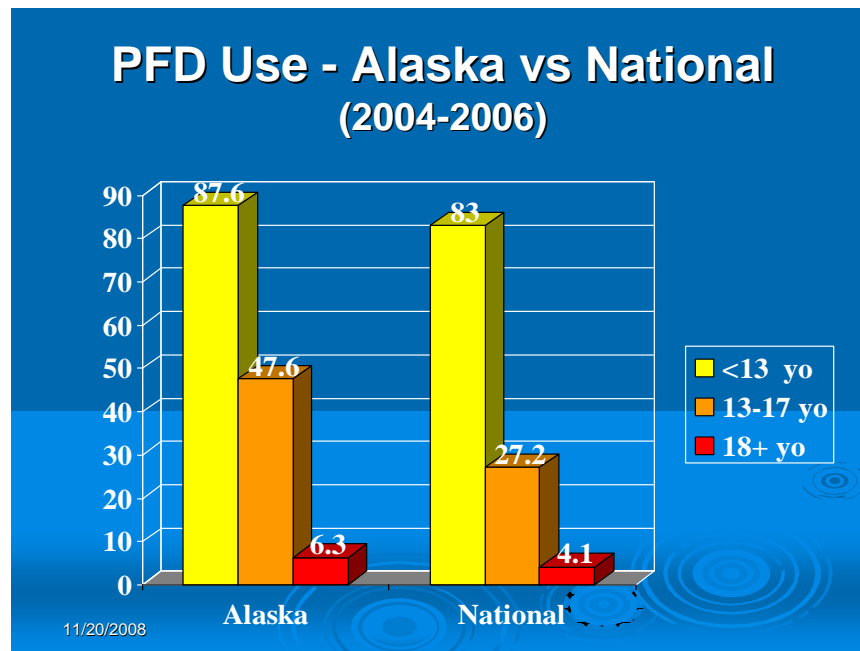
Alaska's recreational boating fatality rate (fatalities per 100,000 boats) has decreased steadily from 144 in 1998 (when the state's Alaska Office of Boating Safety was established) to 34 in 2007. In comparing the number of fatalities during each of the two five - year periods within the previous 10 years, fatalities have dropped 20% between the two periods:



Observational life jacket wear rate studies show increased life jacket wear in ages 17 and younger:



Alaska's life jacket wear rates are above the national average in all age groups:



U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement boarding statistics show increasing compliance:

