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## **DEEP Urges Safe Boating, Social Distancing Practices at State Boat Launches During COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Connecticut State Boat Launches Remain Open at this Time*

With the boating season just around the corner, the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) announces that the state boat launches are currently open. DEEP wants to share best practices to keep boaters safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a fluid and evolving situation and as the weather warms and the demand for use at the boat launches increase, DEEP will continue to closely monitor these facilities to determine if the use of the launches can safely continue.

DEEP manages 117 boat launches across the state on coastal and inland waterbodies where users can launch with no fee. DEEP will continue to monitor the use of the launches and may adjust public access to these facilities, if necessary, in order to ensure the safety of the public and DEEP employees. This approach is consistent with practices already in place at other DEEP-managed outdoor recreational facilities such as State Parks.

“Boating or paddling can provide a refreshing outdoor escape during the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Peter Francis, DEEP Boating Division Director. “We know our boating community is passionate about getting on the water and we want to ensure they can recreate safely.”

To this end, DEEP has developed a suite of common-sense practices and recommendations that can help improve boaters’ safety at state boat launches and on the water.

To use Connecticut’s boat launches safely, DEEP offers the following guidance:

- Parking in state boat launches is only for boating, fishing, or wildlife observation (where permitted). Other non-permitted activities could increase use, reduce safety, and jeopardize the availability of the facilities. Anyone not engaged in these activities should not be using boat launches and will be asked to leave by DEEP Environmental Conservation Police.
- Gatherings of people at state boat launches must be limited to not more than 5 people per Governor Lamont’s Executive Order number 7N.

- Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance on maintaining 6-foot social distancing from others must be followed at all times. When possible, leave an empty parking space between your vehicle and others in the lot.
- Boaters should depart the ramp area as quickly as possible when launching or retrieving your boat.
- Boat occupants should be limited to cohabitating family members only, and groups of no more than five.
- Recreate locally. Rather than traveling to some of Connecticut's more popular boat launches, discover new boating spots close to home. Consult the DEEP Boating website for alternate launching locations.
- If a boat launch appears to be crowded, consider visiting a different boat launch, or returning at a different time or day.

To boat on Connecticut waterways safely, DEEP offers the following guidance:

- Do not raft or tie-up your vessel with other vessels.
- Do not share your equipment or vessel with other boaters.
- Wear gloves and other personal protective equipment (PPE) and practice proper social distancing when using public equipment such as gas pumps or pumpout facilities.
- Coastal and inland water temperatures remain cold and boaters should wear life jackets at all times. A reminder that state law requires anyone operating or riding in a manually-propelled vessel such as a canoe or kayak is required to wear a life jacket until May 31<sup>st</sup>.

DEEP also wishes to provide some additional information for out-of-state boaters using Connecticut's waters:

- Per Governor Lamont's guidance, any person coming to Connecticut by means of transportation, including by boat, are strongly urged to self-quarantine for 14 days.
- Out of state boaters are reminded that prior to operating on Connecticut's inland waters, an Aquatic Invasive Species stamp is required to be purchased online. The demarcation line between inland and coastal waters can be found on the DEEP Boating website.

DEEP will continue to closely monitor capacity and use of the state boat launches and may consider alternate management strategies for these facilities as demand increases. DEEP staff are currently developing operational plans for the state's most popular boat launches, including Squantz Cove and Gardner Lake, including possible targeted reductions in parking availability and other measures on a launch-specific basis to ensure the safety of Connecticut's boaters.

Please visit the DEEP Boating website for news and updates: [www.portal.ct.gov/boating](http://www.portal.ct.gov/boating)