



## KNOW YOUR CRAFT

Personal watercraft are also known as Jet Ski®, WaveRunner®, AquaTrax®, and Sea-Doo®.

*A personal watercraft (PWC) is a motorboat, and you're the captain, so Montana's boating rules and laws apply to you.*



## MONTANA BOATING EDUCATION PROGRAM

Want to learn more?  
Visit FWP on-line at:

[fwp.mt.gov](http://fwp.mt.gov)

## PERSONAL WATERCRAFT



MONTANA BOATING EDUCATION PROGRAM

*You're the captain...  
...know your responsibilities*



This document was printed at state expense. Information on the cost of the publication can be obtained by writing to the Department of Administration or to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (406) 444-2535. Copyright ©2007 by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. All rights reserved. Designed and produced by the Montana FWP Communications and Education Division. Luke Duran, Art Director.



## Registration

New PWC must be registered at the County Treasurer's office and display the permanent registration decal and validation decals. When validation decals expire they can be obtained from any Fish, Wildlife & Parks office, or on line at [www.fwp.mt.gov](http://www.fwp.mt.gov).

## Life Jackets

Anyone driving or riding on PWC must wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket. Read the label to ensure your life jacket is suitable for PWC use.



## Lanyard

Many PWC are equipped with a lanyard or engine shut-off cord. The lanyard must be attached to the operator's wrist or life jacket. The engine will stop if the operator falls off. After riding, remove the cord from the PWC to avoid unauthorized use by children or others.

## Fire Extinguisher

A Coast Guard approved fire extinguisher must be onboard the PWC.

## Operator Age Requirement

Youth 13 and 14 years of age must have a motorboat operator's certificate if an adult is not on board. An adult (18 or older) must accompany those 12 years and younger. Obtain a motorboat operator's certificate by completing an approved boat safety course.

## Rentals

A PWC may not be rented to anyone under 18 years of age.

## Passengers and Towing

If PWC are used to tow a person on water skis, tubes or other devices, there must be an additional person on board to serve as the "spotter."

Never carry more than the maximum passenger load specified for your craft. Never allow a passenger to ride in front of the operator.

## Avoid an Accident

- Scan the area for other watercraft, people and hazards.
- Always look before turning
- Avoid sudden changes in direction.
- Avoid areas with shallow water or submerged objects.
- Take early action to avoid a collision. PWC don't have brakes!

## Know Your Craft

Do not release the throttle when trying to steer away from a hazard – you need power to steer. PWC use a jet pump system – water is drawn into the pump and then forced out a nozzle that pushes the craft forward. To maintain steering control, the pump must be pushing water.

New "sit down" PWC are equipped with off-throttle steering technology which aids in turning by providing thrust or activating small fins while the PWC is decelerating. However, an operator can turn more sharply if the throttle is applied while turning the handlebars.

## Navigating Around Other Recreators:

Keep a sharp lookout for swimmers, as they may be difficult to see. PWC must stay 200 feet away from swimmers.

Give sailboats, canoes, kayaks and rowboats plenty of room; they are not as quick or maneuverable as PWC. Stay 200 feet away from these vessels, or travel at NO WAKE speed if closer.

Watch for divers and know what their flag looks like. Stay 200 feet away from flagged diving areas.

Give anglers plenty of room. On boats or ashore, anglers usually have line in the water which can be cut or damaged by PWC.

It's difficult to judge distances on the water. A good rule of thumb is to stay at least the length of a football field away from other recreators.

## Ride Defensively:

**MEETING HEAD-ON:** each vessel must alter their course to the right to avoid collision.

**OVERTAKING:** the boat being overtaken has the right-of-way. The passing boat can pass on either side but must stay clear of the overtaken boat.

**CROSSING:** when crossing paths, the boat on the right has the right of way. Slow down to let the boat continue its course, then pass behind it.

**SAILBOATS:** (under sail) and non-motorized boats always have the right-of-way over PWC.

## Regulations Include:

**WAKE JUMPING:** It's illegal to cross or jump the wake of another boat when within 100 yards of the vessel (or any thing being towed by it).

**OPERATING SPEED:** Follow posted speed regulations and slow down in congested areas. NO WAKE areas are marked with signs or buoys and are found near marinas, docks and boat ramps. NO WAKE means there is no "white" water in the track or path of the PWC. PWC must travel at NO WAKE speed when within 200 feet of a dock, swimmer, swimming raft, non-motorized boat or anchored vessel.

**NOISE:** Be considerate of others who live or recreate on the water. Ride well away from the shore and vary your operating area often during your ride. Avoid using PWC in the evening or early morning. Never modify a PWC if the result is louder engine or exhaust.

## Sharing Your PWC With Others?

Consider these questions before loaning your PWC. It could save a life.

- Is the person legally old enough to operate it?
- Do they know how to operate the PWC, including steering, reboarding, lanyard use, and stopping?
- Do they know the rules of the road and the laws for wake speed travel?
- Do they have a proper fitting life jacket?

