



**Joint Release: Oregon State Marine Board &  
Oregon Department of Emergency Management**

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OEM Contact, [pub\\_info@oem.oregon.gov](mailto:pub_info@oem.oregon.gov) or 503-934-3310

OSMB Contact, [ashley.massey@boat.oregon.gov](mailto:ashley.massey@boat.oregon.gov) or 971-707-2396

## **Boaters Urged to Use Caution in Cold, Low Water Levels**

**SALEM, Ore.** – As warmer weather returns to Oregon, many people are adding water recreation to their weekend plans. If you're heading out on the water, the Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB) and the Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM) want to remind you that even when the air is warm, the water remains very cold and cold water shock leading to drowning is a leading cause in recreational boating fatalities. Dress for the water temperature, not the air temperature and wear a life jacket. Waterways will begin to warm as water levels drop; however, other conditions that arise can be dangerous. [Find tips on what to do if you or someone else is exposed to cold water on the OEM Blog.](#)

In addition, it is expected to be a record-breaking dry season, and Oregon's waterways will be experiencing lower than normal water levels due to limited snowpack and emerging drought conditions. Boaters should expect changing conditions throughout the season, including navigation hazards which contribute to the risk of collisions with fixed objects, groundings and more water recreationists being concentrated in popular waterbodies.

"Low water can expose submerged rocks, stumps, sand or gravel bars, and other hazards to navigation that may not have been visible in previous years," said Ashley Massey, Public Information Officer for the Marine Board. "Even familiar lakes and rivers can look—and behave—differently during drought. River currents can be stronger in some areas and then stall in others. Be prepared for any situation you may encounter out there. Give yourself enough time to launch, play, and take out. Never venture out in the mid-afternoon because as the sun sets, wooded areas become very cold, very fast. It's also recommended to boat with others who can help render aid if it's needed.

### **To help recreational boaters in Oregon stay safe and protect natural resources, OSMB and OEM offer the following safety guidance:**

#### *General Boating Safety*

- **Wear a [life jacket](#).** Whether in a motorboat or paddlecraft, falls overboard are the leading cause of accidental drowning. Oregon is considered a cold-water state, with most waterways remaining under 70 degrees year-round. Most fatalities from drowning are due to cold water shock—sudden immersion into cold water. The chances of survival drastically diminish when not wearing a properly fitting life jacket. In Oregon and Nationwide, roughly 84-87% of fatal boating incident victims were not wearing a life jacket. ([2019-2024 US Coast Guard Accident Statistics](#)).

- **Choose waterways for boating that match your skill level.** To avoid becoming stranded far from the take-out site it is advised for new paddlers to avoid congested areas or waterways where afternoon winds pick up.
- **Carry all required equipment** and ensure safety gear is in good working order.
- **Share your float plan with someone you trust.** Include your destination, boat type and expected return time.
- **Operate slowly and stay alert.** Conditions change quickly, and previously submerged hazards may now be visible or just below the surface.
- **Monitor [water levels](#) closely.** When water conditions are lower than normal, motorized boaters are encouraged to check local regulations and review [the boat facility status map](#) to find waterbodies with open, low-water ramps.
- **Motorized boaters need deeper water to operate safely. Paddlers should operate closer to shore and avoid deeper channels.** Both types of boat users should avoid unfamiliar or narrow channels during low-water conditions. Motorized boaters must watch their wake and operate at [slow-no wake speeds](#), especially in narrow and shallow areas.
- **Use a depth finder**, set shallow-water alarms and monitor depth closely as you make way.
- **Monitor weather** forecasts, tides and changing water conditions.
- **Be courteous** to other boaters and keep launching areas clear by staging gear in designated areas.

### ***Legal Requirements***

- Children 12 and younger must wear a life jacket when underway on any boat.
- Life jackets are required for all boaters on Class III whitewater rivers.
- Operators of motorboats with over 10 horsepower must carry a boating safety education card.
- Paddlers operating non-motorized boats must have a [waterway access permit](#).
- For more information on safe boating practices and legal requirements in Oregon, visit [Boat.Oregon.gov](#). On the home page, scroll to find your boat's propulsion type to learn about equipment, education, rules, and other helpful planning resources.

“Safety is always our top priority,” Erin Zysett, an OEM spokesperson, said. “We want all people in Oregon to enjoy time on the water responsibly. Stay informed. Respect the unique hazards water presents. Be prepared. And help protect our waterways and communities.”

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The **Marine Board** is funded by boater-paid fees, marine fuel taxes and non-motorized boater-paid waterway access permits. **The Marine Board does not receive any lottery or general fund tax dollars.** These funds support boating safety enforcement and education, environmental programs, and facility access improvements statewide.