



June 15, 2022
For immediate release

Sheriff's patrol uses education to smooth county waters

Fridays on the lake don't get busy until about 3 p.m., according to Rice County Sheriff's Office Water Patrol Deputies Bailey Reichert and Cody Wiese. But they and their counterparts get a head start, helping ensure that everyone on the lake stays safe. (Rice County photo)



Rice County's been blessed with a wealth of beautiful lakes and two major rivers. That bounty makes water safety especially important.

"We want people to be safe and we want to prevent drownings," said Sgt. Nathan Budin, of the Rice County Sheriff's Office.

All Minnesota sheriff's offices are responsible for safety on their county's waterways. Budin oversees the Rice County's Water Patrol unit, five non-licensed deputies who work weekends and holidays from about Memorial Day to Labor Day. The patrol does a bit of everything: sets buoys, works with the lakes associations and educates boaters about water safety.

Water safety, Budin says, starts with always wearing a life jacket/personal floatation device while operating or riding in a watercraft.

Of the 18 boating fatalities in Minnesota in 2021, only two were wearing life jackets, according to Department of Natural Resources figures. Last year, Minnesota recorded 53 non-boating drownings and 69 non-fatal boating accidents.

Members of the Water Patrol can be found on many of the county's lakes, 12 have public access. They're there to ensure everyone is having a good time and following state laws. Budin says the deputies will often stop boaters and jet ski operators, checking to see that they're old enough to operate the watercraft, have

proper registration and the required number of life jackets. If the craft meets certain criteria, a fire extinguisher must be on board and readily available.

While they're not needed often, licensed deputies are readily available to issue citations or make arrests for those behaving dangerously or illegally. Just like in a motor vehicle, operating a watercraft with a blood alcohol level of .08% or higher is illegal.

According to the DNR, alcohol is the No. 1 factor in boating fatalities.

The patrol has a small fleet of watercraft at its disposal. There are two jet skis and five boats, including one that's primarily for rivers and can move without difficulty in extremely shallow water and run over debris and rocks.

Funding for the patrol and its equipment comes from several different sources: the county budget as well as state and federal grants.

The Water Patrol works closely with the Sheriff's Office's Dive Team. Both respond to reported drownings and crashes in the water.

The unit also works out of the water. They host camps and other events to teach water safety, inspect all rental watercraft and life jackets to assure those renting the equipment that it's been given an annual



Rice County Water Patrol Deputies Bailey Reichert and Cody Wiese get ready for an afternoon patrolling Roberds Lake. They, and three other non-licensed deputies, help educate boaters and jet skiers, and ensure they're operating safely. (Rice County photo)

BOATS

OPERATOR AGE	RESTRICTIONS
LESS THAN 12 YEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 hp or less—no restrictions. • More than 25 through 75 hp—must have someone at least 21 years old on board within immediate reach of the controls. • More than 75 hp—not allowed to operate even with an adult on board.
12-17 YEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 hp or less—no restrictions. • More than 25 hp—must either have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a watercraft operator's permit, or – someone at least 21 years old on board and within immediate reach of the controls.

JET SKIS

OPERATOR AGE	RESTRICTIONS
LESS THAN 13 YEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot operate—even with an adult on board.
13 YEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • must have either someone at least 21 years old on board, or • a watercraft operator's permit and be in visual supervision by someone at least 21 years old.
14-17 YEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • must have either a watercraft operator's permit, or • someone at least 21 years old on board.

checkup, and issue permits for anything apart from docks that's anchored in the water: floating rafts, and slalom courses and for fishing tournament.

Boater/operator education remains paramount. Because boating and the use of personal watercraft in Minnesota is seasonal, the rules and regulations that go along with their use tend to be less ingrained than for motor vehicle drivers, says Budin. And, without signs and road markings to act as a guide, it's easy to err.

"Recreational activities are fun and we want people to have fun," said Budin, "but it's not fun if they're getting injured and possibly drowning."

Learn more at bit.ly/39aEar6.

Contact:

Nathan Budin, Sergeant, Rice County Sheriff's Office

nbudin@co.rice.mn.us

507-333-3810

Suzu Rook, Communications Coordinator

srook@co.rice.mn.us

507-384-6509

STAY SAFE ON THE WATER

PFDs (life jackets)

- Children under 10 must wear when watercraft is underway
- All boats must have at least one PFD/person
- Must fit
- Throwable devices don't count
- Jet ski occupants must wear a PFD (Inflatables don't count)
- Boats over 16 feet long must have a throwable PDF

Registration

- All watercrafts over 10' must be registered (includes paddle board, paddle boats)

Fire Extinguisher

- Required for boats with an enclosed gas tank

Jet skis

- May operate from 9:30 a.m. until 1 hour prior to sunset
- Operator must wear a PFD
- Can't make wakes within 150 feet of shore or other boats
- Can tow someone as long as there is a spotter and mirrors

Lights

- Must have navigation lights on from sunset to sunrise
- White light while not moving
- White and green/red light while moving

Invasive Species

- Clean all the weeds off of your boat and trailer before leaving the access
- Drain the water out of your boat. Pull the plug out and leave out while traveling down the road. Live wells need to be drained
- Dispose of unused bait in the trash. Do not release the bait into the lake or river.