

Don Hoch
Director



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

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June 2, 2011

The Honorable Larry Gossett
Chair, King County Council
King County Courthouse
516 3rd Avenue Room 1200
Seattle WA 98104

Dear Councilmember Gossett:

I commend King County for considering an ordinance to require U.S. Coast Guard approved personal floatation devices (PFDs or life jackets) to be worn on major rivers in King County through the summer recreational season. Others are considering or have adopted similar policies: Spokane County has an ordinance requiring life jackets on one of its rivers. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is testing the impact of life jacket wear requirements on some of its waters. The national Boating Safety Advisory Council recently recommended that the U.S. Coast Guard adopt a national mandate for life jacket wear on all recreational vessels 18 feet and under, including PWCs, and on all manually powered boats.

The statewide Boating Safety Program at Washington State Parks recognizes that wearing a life jacket, completing boater safety education, and not boating under the influence of alcohol or drugs, are crucial to reduce the number of accidents, injuries and fatalities that take place every year on Washington's waterways.

Rivers in Washington are dangerous in the springtime when water levels are high and swift, and water temperatures are very cold. In 2010, there were 18 boating related fatalities in Washington; eight were on rivers and ten involved manually powered boats. So far this year, there have already been seven boating fatalities in Washington – and the boating season has just begun. Both in Washington and nationwide, most boating deaths each year are due to capsizes or falls overboard followed by drowning and 80-85 percent of those who drown were not wearing life jackets.

Washington State law requires that children ages 12 and under wear a Coast Guard-approved life vest on vessels less than 19 feet long. However, we recommend them for all boaters. This summer, Washington State Parks Boating Safety Program has teamed up with the National Safe Boating Council in a campaign to stress life jacket wear for adults. The "Wear It Washington" campaign's goal is to encourage everyone to stay safe on the water by always wearing a life jacket.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Kavanaugh".

Susan Kavanaugh
Washington State Boating Law Administrator