

WE PUT BOATS ON THE WATER!

You drive to your favorite lake or river boat-launching area. The driveway leading to the ramp is paved and well maintained – no potholes. The road is easily wide enough for two rigs with those big 96-inch wide beam boats, or wider, to pass each other without difficulty. The two-lane road splits and you are now on a one-way lane dedicated to boaters who are headed to the ramp to launch their boats. The ramp gently slopes and is amply wide, so backing your boat down the concrete ramp is not like trying to thread a needle. There is a courtesy dock on both sides of the ramp to temporarily tie off your boat while you park the truck and trailer, allowing another boat to be launched in the meantime.

The parking stalls are long, wide and well-marked, so your rig is not squeezed along side others like sardines in a can. On your way back to your boat, you visit the restroom conveniently located in a corner of the parking lot. Near the ramp and courtesy docks you stop to look over the lake map and other information on the kiosk. You untie the boat, gently push off, and clear the dock. Now you're off for a day on the lake – a simple, no-hassle entry onto the water whether to fish or enjoy time with family or friends.

Does this describe the boat ramp you use? It may not. But, it will, after the men and woman of SOBA finish their work remodeling your old ramp area, or putting in a totally new one. If you've ever wondered how that boat ramp you use got there or how the marina you use got built, you can probably assume SOBA had a hand in it.



Dedicated to Access

The States Organization for Boating Access (SOBA) is a relatively small group of professionals, from the states, federal government and private suppliers and manufacturers, that work hard to ensure boaters can get on the water and enjoy it. They are dedicated women and men who design, build and help maintain boat ramps and marina projects on the Great Lakes and on all other bodies of water in the nation and along the sea coasts.

SOBA is a direct outgrowth of the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund Act, known as the Wallop-Breaux Act that was enacted by Congress in 1984. That landmark user pay/user benefit legislation earmarked federal tax on the sale of gasoline used in motorboats and on sport fishing equipment as aid to states for the acquisition, construction and repair of public boat access. Due to this infusion of funds, it was decided that the states would benefit from a dedicated national organization in support of public boating access and SOBA was established in 1986.

As the only national organization with a boating access mission, SOBA is dedicated to improving public boating access through the acquisition, development and maintenance of public recreational boating facilities. The mission is clear and focused – provide the best, well-designed, engineered and constructed public boating facilities possible.

Great Lakes states played an integral part in the formation of SOBA. Its first meeting, setting the stage for its formation, was held near Detroit, Michigan. Those involved with its founding represented all of the Great Lakes states and 10 SOBA presidents have come from Great Lakes states. SOBA members include state boating officials from



all 50 states and five territories, as well as a wide range of other boating organizations, engineering firms, consultants, manufacturers and suppliers interested in public boating access.

Beyond Structures

Today, SOBA is considered a national leader in technical publications, innovations, research, and design related to boating access facilities. Recent technical publications including *Design Handbook for Recreational Boating and Fishing Facilities*, *Construction Techniques for Recreational Boating Access Facilities and Operations and Maintenance Program Guidelines for Recreational Boating Facilities* are the industry standard for boating access facilities. SOBA is also developing best practices to address aquatic invasive species as it relates to boating access. The organization also helps lake associations, counties, cities and towns that need help with remodeling or installing a new boat ramp facility get state-of-the-art assistance.

National Marine Manufacturers Association and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are two of SOBA's biggest partners. Working alongside NMMA, SOBA stays in direct contact with the boating manufacturing industry – often telling NMMA, "You build 'em and we get them on the water!"

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers grants to the states from the Aquatic Resources Trust Fund,

BOATS LIKE TO BE ON THE WATER, SO THE NEXT TIME YOU NEED A RAMP, OR LAUNCH YOUR BOAT – THINK SOBA

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so a close working relationship between state and federal government officials is essential for effective and efficient use of these dedication funds.

SOBA hosts the annual National Boating Access Conference, which always takes place in a different state. Exposing members to a variety of boating access programs dictated by different water and climatic conditions allows them to see and experience design and construction features that would benefit their programs. Six national conferences have been held in Great Lakes states.

Each year, awards recognizing outstanding work by organizations and individual professionals are presented at the annual National Boating Access Conference to members and affiliates. SOBA also



presents an annual Congressional Award to a U.S. representative that has made a national contribution to boating access. SOBA has recognized numerous Great Lakes Congressional representatives and most recently, Rep. Candice Miller from Michigan.

A Boater's Ally

Boaters can take heart that there's a group looking out for their interests to get on the water. Due to SOBA's mission and the state boating access programs, the successes are plenty. The accomplishments of state programs have yielded

many benefits to boaters through the conservation of fisheries, boating access site development and education.

As an example, since 2004 there have been 2,355 boat shoreside sewage pump-out facilities built under the Clean Vessel Act, more than 10,000 sites managed for boating and fishing access and 1,171 new transient dock facilities built through the Boating Infrastructure Grant program.

Access sites can be located by visiting the SOBA Boating Access Directory, www.sobaus.org/boating-access-directory/map, and clicking on

any state's name to access that state's recreational boating and boating access Web site.

Credit: James Adams, SOBA President and with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, and Steve Miller, SOBA Immediate Past President and with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

