



**Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
Interim Policy Memorandum
IPM 2024-01**

To: All FWC Staff
From: Roger A. Young, Executive Director
Date: April 25, 2024
Subject: Use of Commission Vessels Update to IMPP 5.3

**Florida Fish
and Wildlife
Conservation
Commission**

Commissioners
Rodney Barreto
Chairman
Coral Gables

Steven Hudson
Vice Chairman
Fort Lauderdale

Preston Farris
Tampa

Gary Lester
Oxford

Albert Maury
Coral Gables

Gary Nicklaus
Jupiter

Sonya Rood
St. Augustine

Office of the
Executive Director
Roger A. Young
Executive Director

Charles "Rett" Boyd
Assistant Executive Director

George Warthen
Chief Conservation Officer

Jessica Crawford
Chief of Staff

850-487-3796
850-921-5786 FAX

*Managing fish and wildlife
resources for their long-term
well-being and the benefit
of people.*

620 South Meridian Street
Tallahassee, Florida
32399-1600
Voice: 850-488-4676

Hearing/speech-impaired:
800-955-8771 (T)
800-955-8770 (V)

MyFWC.com

This Interim Policy Memorandum (IPM) amends the FWC's [IMPP 5.3](#) to update and consolidate agency vessel use. See page 1 Memorandum of IMPP 5.3 for more details. This IPM supersedes any existing FWC vessel related documents unless those materials are more restrictive in nature, in which case the more restrictive directive must be followed.

Division of Law Enforcement (DLE) sworn personnel and reservists shall refer to Division General Orders for specific guidelines and exceptions to this policy as they relate to the use of FWC vessels.

Vessels

A. Definitions

- 1. Airboat:** A vessel that is primarily designed for use in shallow waters and powered by an internal combustion engine with an airplane-type propeller mounted above the stern and used to push air across a set of rudders.
- 2. Crew:** An FWC employee or Regular Service Volunteer (RSV) who is responsible for the safe and efficient execution of on-vessel activities, has completed the required training, and assists the Operator with FWC vessel operations.
- 3. Operator:** An FWC employee or RSV in charge of the safe operation of an FWC vessel and responsible for the safety of all persons on board. The Operator ensures the safe and efficient execution of the intended on-water mission, has completed the required training, ensures the FWC vessel, trailer (when applicable), and gear are in good condition and working order, ensures the safety of all persons aboard, and that all required safety equipment as set forth in the [FWC Airboat Manual](#) and/or the [FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual](#), is present and in good condition and working order prior to getting underway.
- 4. Passenger:** A person being transported on a vessel not meeting the definition of Operator or Crew.
- 5. Paddle craft:** Includes kayak, canoe, and paddle boards.
- 6. Vessel:** Per Section 327.02(47), Florida Statute, "Vessel" is synonymous with boat as referenced in s. 1(b), Art. VII of the State Constitution and includes every description of watercraft, barge, and airboat, other than a seaplane on the water, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water.

B. General Information

- 1.** For all safety and operational guidance not mentioned herein, refer to the FWC Airboat Manual and/or the FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual found on the [FWC Safety SharePoint site \(Intranet\)](#).
- 2.** All staff whose position requires or may require the use of any kind of FWC

vessel (as Operator or Crew), must have language included in their Position Descriptions in the Other Job Responsibilities section indicating this responsibility, or for OPS staff this responsibility must be noticed to them in writing. Example language "Operation of FWC vessels in waters of the state and adjacent federal waters."

3. An FWC Vessel Safety Standing Team consisting of staff from multiple Divisions and Offices will be created and maintained to review vessel related topics and ensure the FWC meets current vessel safety and training standards.

C. Assignment and Use

1. Vessel Classes are as follows:
 - a. Class A (less than 16 feet)
 - b. Class 1 (16 to less than 26 feet)
 - c. Class 2 (26 to less than 40 feet)
 - d. Class 3 (40 to less than 65 feet)
 - e. Class 4 (65 to less than 110 feet) and
 - f. Class 5 (more than 110 feet).

D. Registration Requirements

1. As required in Section 328.48(4), Florida Statutes, all FWC vessels shall have the proper identification markings and current certificate of registration, which must be on the vessel whenever the vessel is in operation.
2. Vessel registration numbers shall be placed on each side of the forward half of the vessel in such positions as to provide clear legibility for identification, except, if the vessel is an airboat, the numbers may be placed on each side of the rudder.
3. The numbers assigned to the vessel shall read from left to right and shall be in block characters of good proportion not less than three inches in height.
4. The numbers shall be of a solid color which will contrast with the color of the vessel background and shall be so maintained as to be clearly visible and legible.
5. The certificate of registration shall be available for inspection on the vessel for which issued whenever such vessel is in operation.
6. The registration decal shall be affixed to the port side of the vessel within six inches before or after the decal in accordance with Section 328.48(5), Florida Statutes.

E. Documentation Requirements

1. While serving as an Operator or Crew on an FWC vessel, a person must have the following documentation in their possession as noted in Section 327.395(2), Florida Statutes:
 - a. A current government issued photographic identification and a Florida Boating Safety Education Identification Card; or
 - b. A state-issued identification card or driver license indicating possession of the Florida Boating Safety Education Identification Card; or
 - c. A current government issued photographic identification and a temporary certificate issued or approved by the FWC, an International Certificate of Competency, a boating safety card or certificate from another state or United States territory, or a Canadian Pleasure Craft Operator Card which demonstrates the holder has satisfied one of the conditions of Section 327.395(2)(a)-(d), Florida Statutes.

F. Training

Note: Satisfactory completion by sworn law enforcement personnel of the FWC Law Enforcement Academy and Field Training Officer Program meets or exceeds the FWC requirements for vessel operations, trailer operations, and airboat operations.

1. General

All FWC employees and RSVs, without exception or exemption and regardless of age, who are acting in the Operator or Crew role, are required to successfully complete:

- a. A National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) approved boating safety education course, resulting in the issuance of a Boating Safety Education Identification Card prior to operating or working on FWC vessels; and
- b. CPR and First Aid certification completed through an FWC approved CPR and First Aid training course within six (6) months of assignment and maintained as current.

Employees and RSVs may not operate or crew an FWC vessel until the training in F.1.a. has been completed.

2. Vessels Operations

In addition to the training requirements set forth in F.1. above, all RSVs and FWC employees newly hired, transferred, promoted, or assigned after March 8, 2024, to a position that meets the Crew or Operator definitions above must successfully complete an FWC approved vessel operations course and proficiency evaluation ride with certified/designated personnel appropriate for any class of vessel not requiring a U.S. Coast Guard license, unless exempted pursuant to H.2. below. This training must occur within six (6) months of assignment. Until successful completion of training, employees and RSVs must be under direct supervision of their supervisor or designee when serving as an Operator or Crew on an FWC vessel.

All current and/or existing employees and RSVs as of March 8, 2024, who meet the Crew or Operator definition above must also successfully complete an FWC approved vessel operations course and proficiency evaluation ride with certified/designated personnel appropriate for any class of vessel not requiring a U.S. Coast Guard license, unless exempted pursuant to H.2. Training will be on-going to accommodate current/existing employees and RSVs, who will continue to perform assigned job duties without the need for direct supervision unless otherwise specified. Supervisors shall prioritize and coordinate with training staff to ensure staff and RSVs attend training as it becomes available.

A list of FWC approved courses can be found on the [FWC Safety SharePoint site \(Intranet\)](#).

3. Airboats

Prior to operating an FWC airboat without direct supervision, all employees and RSVs shall successfully complete the training listed in F.1. and F.2., as well as FWC Airboat Operations Training.

4. Paddle Craft and Florida Youth Conservation Center Network (FYCCN) Fishing and Boating Camp Motorized Vessels

Prior to operating FWC paddle craft or FYCCN Fishing and Boating Camp motorized vessels without direct supervision, all employees and RSVs shall successfully complete the training listed in F.1. as well as the following:

- a. An appropriate American Canoe Association skills course:
 - i. Level 1 for canoes;
 - ii. Level 1 or Level 2 for kayaks;
- b. FYCCN Fishing and Boating Camp training or the agency equivalent for FYCCN Fishing and Boating Camp motorized vessels.

5. Trailing

Successful completion of FWC Trailer Training as outlined in IMPP 5.3.13(C)2 is required of all employees and RSVs driving an FWC vehicle which is pulling an FWC trailer, which includes to and from a location and on a boat ramp.

G. Suspending/Revoking Authorization to Operate a Vessel

Failure to comply with the requirements of this IPM and/or other related FWC policies, including violations of boating regulations, or demonstration of poor judgement while serving as an Operator or Crew on an FWC vessel may result in restriction or suspension of boating operation authorizations and in addition, employees may receive disciplinary action as provided in IMPP 6.1.1.(D). The FWC Vessel Safety Standing Team will determine terms of revocation and suspension on a case-by-case basis and outline requirements for reinstatement, where appropriate.

H. Training Waivers, Training Exemptions, and Emergency Authorizations

1. Training Waivers

- a. A supervisor may grant a temporary waiver, via the FWC SharePoint Training Waiver Form, of the training requirements noted above (except those noted in F.1.) for a period not to exceed 30 days if the employee or RSV has not yet had an opportunity to attend the appropriate training within any noted timelines and all the following conditions are met:
 - i. The supervisor or designee has sufficient trainer certifications to ensure that an appropriate field orientation on the operation and use of the FWC vessel in question can be provided to the employee or RSV.
 - ii. The supervisor or designee must be onboard the vessel with the employee or RSV and immediately and continuously available to assist and guide the employee or RSV during the operation and use of the FWC vessel. For paddle craft, the supervisor or designee is on the water with the employee or RSV and is immediately and continuously available to assist and guide the employee or RSV during the operation and use of the FWC paddle craft.
 - iii. The supervisor or designee notifies the relevant Division/Office Director of the decision to temporarily waive the training requirement on an FWC vessel for a specific employee or RSV and identifies the specific time frame of the waiver, not to exceed 30 days. This notification shall be in writing and be available for inspection upon request and shall identify the expertise or certifications on which the waiver was based.
- b. If requested, the supervisor or designee approving an employee's or RSV's waiver must provide documentation of their own proficiency, such as a certificate of satisfactory completion or written record of proficiency, sufficient to obtain written supervisor or certified/designated personnel approval.
- c. Waivers will expire after 30 days and a new waiver request must be submitted and approved as outlined above. Waivers may not be granted for a period exceeding 60 days.

2. Training Exemptions

Staff or RSVs who have successfully completed a vessel safety course(s) which meets or exceeds the FWC's requirements for vessel operations may be exempted from the training requirements set forth herein only upon review by the FWC Vessel Safety Standing Team of all necessary documentation/certification and written receipt of exemption approval.

3. Emergency Authorizations

In an emergency situation where immediate action related to the operation of an FWC vessel is required to prevent serious bodily injury or death, or necessary to protect critical property or infrastructure, all training related to the operation of vessels and trailers is waived for the duration of that specific emergency situation. This emergency situation waiver of training does not create any requirement or duty to act for any employee or RSV who, at the time the

emergency occurs, has not yet completed all training required by this IPM.

I. Area Familiarization

1. In addition to ensuring that appropriate training or certification is obtained, supervisors are responsible for ensuring that employees (new, promotional, or lateral transfer) and RSVs receive an appropriate introduction to, and familiarization with, an assigned area and environment before operating any FWC vessel independently.
2. Area familiarization may be conducted by the supervisor or another agency employee familiar with the area and environment. Area familiarization shall be documented in writing and added to the employee's or RSV's training records. If applicable to a position, area familiarization shall, at a minimum, include the following:
 - a. General orientation to the assigned area includes boat ramps, trails and trail heads, key roads, common landmarks, and access points to public lands within assigned area.
 - b. Potential hazards in commonly accessed areas on land and on the water.
 - c. Prevailing wind, weather, and tidal conditions.
 - d. Appropriate trailer operations if the employee or RSV is unfamiliar with trailering/towing in a certain type of environment (e.g., trailering in an urban environment or on dirt roads) or if the type of trailer is different from previously operated trailers.
 - e. Introduction to relevant representatives from other divisions or offices, partner agencies, and organizations.
 - f. Introduction of knowledge on any other issue that might assist an employee or RSV new to an area to be a safe Operator of an FWC vessel.

J. Safety and Safety Equipment

1. Float Plans
 - a. Prior to launch, an FWC approved float plan is required to be filed by non-sworn staff or RSV with designated personnel. Full requirements for float plans are outlined within the FWC's Airboat Manual and the FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual.
2. Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)
 - a. An approved PFD as noted in the FWC Vessel Operations Safety Manual shall be worn by all persons while onboard an FWC vessel that is underway unless pre-arranged supervisory approval to waive this requirement has been obtained, in writing, due to potential snagging risks, such as readying gear for immediate deployment, engaging in diving operations, or situations in which a PFD can become an onboard safety risk due to snagging or entanglement. PFD's may be removed for the duration of the task (i.e., deploying a net, hauling lines/gear, readying divers for water entry) but must be properly worn when the vessel is on plane. Special consideration should be given to the use of Type V hybrid vests that may be safely worn when conducting deck operations.
 - b. Additional information and requirements for PFDs are outlined within the FWC Airboat Manual or the FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual.
3. General Vessel Safety Equipment
 - a. In addition to PFDs, all FWC vessels powered by motors of any kind are required to have onboard the vessel safety equipment noted in FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual Section 3.7.
4. Operation
 - a. Any person operating any FWC vessel shall be in compliance with Section E. Documentation Requirements.
 - b. The Operator of any FWC vessel is responsible for compliance with all applicable state and

federal rules and laws pertaining to the operation of a vessel.

- c. The Operator of any FWC vessel shall be held personally responsible for violations of maritime laws and any incidents which occur as a result of any such violation. This shall not apply to DLE members in the performance of their duties in accordance with Section 327.33(3), Florida Statutes.
- d. Operators may only use FWC vessels for official FWC agency-related activities.
- e. FWC Regular Service Volunteers are authorized to operate FWC vessels as per procedures set forth in IMPP 6.9.13, and must also follow the guidelines found therein. FWC Volunteers must complete a [Volunteer Use of Resources Agreement](#).
- f. Vessel Operators will exercise care and caution at all times when operating any FWC vessel and take reasonable and prudent actions necessary to prevent injury to any persons onboard, or any other persons and to avoid damage to the FWC vessel and equipment onboard, other vessels or property or infrastructure. Vessel Operators will be especially vigilant in times of inclement weather, darkness, high vessel traffic, or any other situations that create additional hazards to the safe operation of the vessel.
- g. All items transported in FWC vessels shall be stored in an organized, secure, and safe manner. All safety equipment shall be stored in an easily accessible manner.

K. Maintenance

1. General

- a. The Equipment Assignee or designee shall be directly responsible for the regular maintenance of any FWC vessel assigned to them in accordance with this policy.
 - b. Supervisors or designee shall inspect vessels to ensure compliance with this policy and the FWC Airboat Manual and/or the FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual at least annually.
 - c. Maintenance of FWC vessels shall conform to procedures and specifications provided by the manufacturer.
 - d. All FWC vessels shall be maintained in a clean and serviceable condition. Any system or equipment onboard the vessel that does not function as intended by the manufacturer must be repaired or replaced as soon as reasonably possible. If any system or equipment onboard the FWC vessel that is necessary to the safe operation of the vessel does not function as the manufacturer intended, the vessel will not be utilized until the system or equipment is repaired or replaced by the responsible parties.
- 2. Pre-departure or pre-operation checklists in the FWC Airboat Manual and/or the FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual, as well as any vessel specific checklists, must be followed.
 - 3. Follow all required preventative or periodic maintenance procedures in the FWC Airboat Manual and/or the FWC Vessel Operation Safety Manual and/or manufacturers' instructions.

L. Passengers

- 1. All Passengers riding in an FWC vessel must follow vessel safety requirements. It is the responsibility of the vessel Operator to ensure that passengers follow these requirements.
- 2. Written supervisory approval is required before transporting non-RSV volunteers or non-FWC staff except in the following scenarios:
 - a. Transporting prisoners in custody.
 - b. Search, rescue, and public service.
 - c. Cooperative Endeavors - When transportation of persons is necessary as part of FWC participation with other agencies and organizations on matters of mutual concern.
- 3. FWC staff riding in an FWC vessel as Crew or an Operator are not considered Passengers and must complete the training requirements noted in Section F. Trainings.

4. FWC staff or registered FWC volunteers riding in FWC vessels for simple transport to water accessible locations or for short duration on-water transport are not required to meet the training requirements outlined in Section F. Trainings.
5. Persons (FWC staff and non-FWC staff) participating in a ride along on an FWC vessel, such as VIP tours or with Law Enforcement Personnel, will be considered Passengers.
6. Transportation in or use of FWC vessels for Reserve Officers shall be as provided in the applicable Division of Law Enforcement General Orders.

This policy shall remain in effect until modified or rescinded.

Roger A. Young

Roger A. Young, Executive Director or Designee

Date: 4/25/2024

Created: March 8, 2024; Revised April 25, 2024