



safe boating hints
for the
Delta



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
THE RESOURCES AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF BOATING AND WATERWAYS

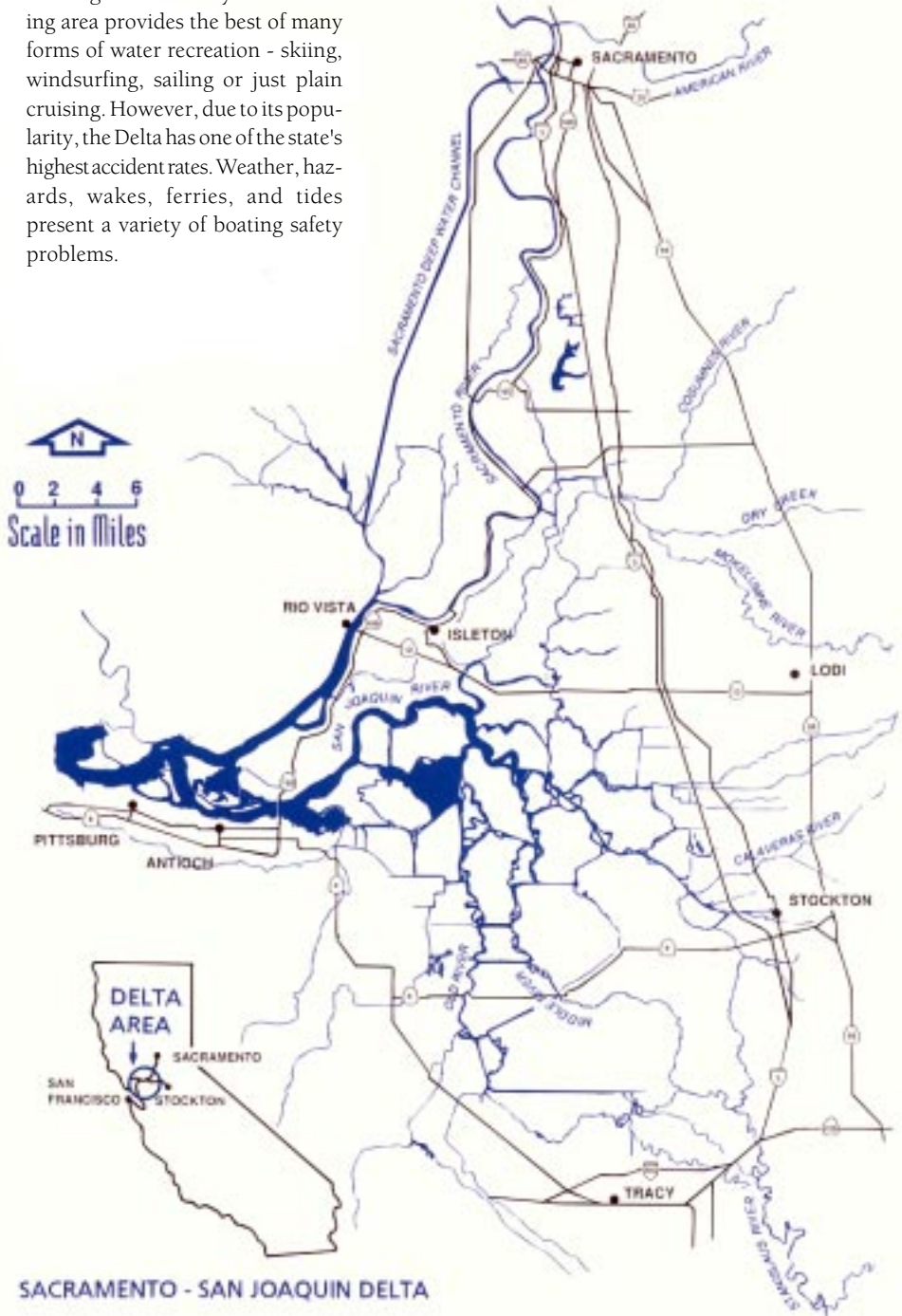
Gray Davis
Governor, State of California

Mary D. Nichols
Secretary for Resources

Raynor Tsuneyoshi, Director
Department of Boating & Waterways

The Delta

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta offers boaters more than 700 miles of navigable waterway. This alluring area provides the best of many forms of water recreation - skiing, windsurfing, sailing or just plain cruising. However, due to its popularity, the Delta has one of the state's highest accident rates. Weather, hazards, wakes, ferries, and tides present a variety of boating safety problems.



Boating

Accurately piloting a watercraft in the Delta involves significant differences in boat-handling techniques from those practiced in lake boating. Be aware of and compensate for: swift main currents; back eddies; eddy lines; boils; large wakes; deep channels within the wide riverbed; sandbars; blind turns; meeting or crossing situations with other boats in a narrow channel; daily fluctuations in river flow-levels; and floating or submerged debris. Because Delta boating can involve remote areas, consider carrying extra fuel, a spare prop and shear pin, tools, anchor line, and an extra paddle.

Hazards, such as shoals, mud flats, submerged piling, floating and submerged debris, sandbars, rocks and overhanging snags offer many navigational problems. Because water levels fluctuate, the visibility of hazards in the water can vary. Some sandbars change position as the current disturbs the river's sandy bottom; others are relatively stationary. Ripples on the water's surface can give some indication of depths, currents and hazards.

Shallow areas are shown on nautical charts (*see Navigational Charts*). Submerged ledges which run parallel to levee banks can trap or ground snags. If you plan to beach a boat, do so at right angles to the shore. Always cruise away from shore and shallow areas.

Whenever possible, check with local marina operators, marine enforcement officers or other boaters who may be able to give you more information on hazards in the Delta.



Piling

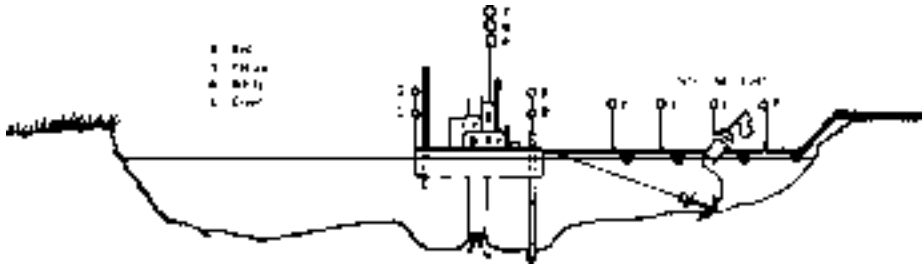
In some areas the remains of old piers extend from the riverbank. Some piles are exposed, and others are broken off just below the surface--their presence sometimes indicated on the surface by swirls or eddies.

Ferry Cables

Ferries operated by cables constitute a special hazard. When the ferry is under

way, its cables are pulled taut and extend from both ends to opposite shores. Fatal accidents have occurred when vessels have attempted to pass over or under these cables while the ferry is in operation. However, after the ferry is secured at its landing and the cable is lowered, you may cross safely. Ferries under way at night should display three lights, red over white over red.





Dredges

Floating platforms that are being used for dredging construction may be at work anywhere in the Delta. At night, both the dredges and their pipelines are well lighted. Anchor buoys indicate the ends of the cables holding the dredge in place.

Delta Water-Skiing

Water-skiing is very popular in the Delta. Unfortunately, a large number of boating fatalities or serious injuries occur as a result of improper or illegal skiing practices. California law requires at least two persons in a boat towing a skier: the operator (at least 16 years of age) and an observer (at least 12 years of age). (A person 12 to 15 years old may operate the vessel if there is also on board a person at least 18 years old who is attentively supervising.) A Coast Guard-approved life jacket must be carried aboard the boat for each skier (as well as each person aboard the boat) unless the skier is wearing such a device. Ski belts do not meet legal requirements, on any craft. It is mandatory for the water ski flag to be displayed to indicate a downed skier, a skier in the water getting ready to ski, or a ski rope, ski, or other equipment in the water. Skiing after sunset and before sunrise is prohibited.

Water Ski Safety Hints

- Never ski around blind bends. An approaching vessel or other hazard may endanger a skier.
- Avoid skiing in narrow channels.
- Avoid ship channels or congested areas when skiing.
- Do not ski close to the shoreline. Ski just to the right of the center of the channel, preferably in uncongested waterways. Collisions with debris or overhanging trees and falls in shallow water have caused serious injury and death.

Speed Limits

Speed is restricted in various areas of the Delta. Many, but not all, of these areas are posted. Posted speed zones are marked by signs showing an orange circle around a black numeral. State law restricts speed to 5 miles per hour when passing within 200 feet of any landing float to which boats are made fast or which is being used for the embarkation or discharge of passengers. Local ordinances also impose speed restrictions in certain areas of the Delta, and in some areas, ordinances restrict speed to 5 miles per hour when passing ferries.

Wakes

Wakes can be extremely hazardous to small boats. Boaters should always be alert for wakes from approaching vessels as well as the wake created by their own vessels. Operators of vessels which create large wakes must respect the rights and safety of others. Passing ships create special hazards. A ship moving in a narrow channel temporarily draws water away from shore, grounding some boats anchored close to shore. As soon as the ship passes, a "following" (or "stern") wake brings water rushing back to shore. Boaters should never leave moored or beached craft unattended when ships are passing. In most cases, it is best to take the boat to deeper water when large ships approach. If the boat is grounded, do not attempt to protect it by standing between the boat and the shore. The return wake may force the boat over you, causing injury.

Water Conditions

Most of the Delta is influenced by tide and tidal currents, varied by seasonal river runoff. During the winter and early spring months, Delta waters may rise due to flood control releases from upstream dams. Winter water flows cause extremely swift currents and, in narrow channels, maneuvering becomes difficult and dangerous for boaters who are not used to navigating under such conditions. Know the limitations of your vessel and your skills for various wind and current conditions. Swift currents have been known to overpower large and small vessels. Wearing a life jacket at all times when boating under adverse conditions may save your life if you find yourself in the water. Be sure you have the proper size life jacket aboard for each passenger.



High Water Safety Hints

- If you are an inexperienced boater, stay ashore when the river current is extremely swift.
- Stay away from areas where the water is flowing over a levee. The force of the water can flip a small boat.
- Carry tools for emergency repairs and an extra propeller.
- If your boat is docked, increase the number or size of your mooring lines.
- Stay in the center of a well-defined channel. Winter flows coupled with tides compound the hazard of running into submerged brush and trees.

For water flow and tide conditions, call the Department of Water Resources at (800) 952-5530 for updated river conditions and forecasts, or visit their Website, www.dwr.water.ca.gov. Some local newspapers carry reports on river conditions.

Darkness

Boating at night involves special hazards for boaters. Underwater obstructions obviously become more dangerous at night, especially if not marked or lighted. While all vessels are required to show proper running lights between sunset and sunrise and during periods of restricted visibility, be on the lookout for vessels that are not exhibiting lights.

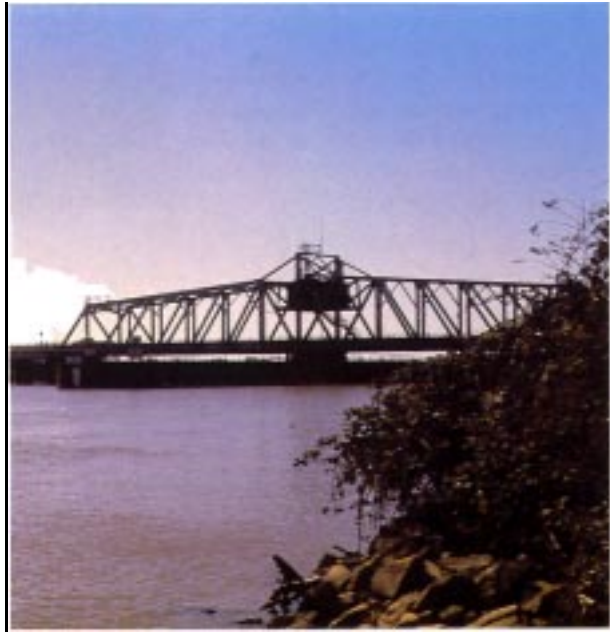
When anchoring at night, recreational vessels must display an anchor light, an all-round white light, exhibited where it can best be seen and so that it is visible for two miles. Anchoring in midchannel is dangerous and in some instances prohibited by law. It creates a hazard whether the vessel is lighted or not.

Weather

Fog and wind are two major weather factors to be considered in this area. In the spring and summer months, strong winds commonly occur in the afternoon, causing unsheltered areas to become rough and occasionally dangerous for small boats. Storms at any time of the year can produce heavy winds, creating similar hazards for small boats. Updated weather forecasts make boating safe and enjoyable. Consult your local newspaper or a radio station that provides frequent forecasts. Twenty-four-hour continuous weather information for the Central Valley is broadcast on 162.400 MHz VHF-FM.

Delta Bridges

There are more than 50 bridges spanning navigable waterways of the Delta. Boaters planning a trip that requires bridge passage should consult nautical charts to determine the minimum vertical clearance allowed by all bridges to be encountered. Clearances noted on charts are reduced at high water levels. Generally, the drawbridges will open for large craft or a sailboat with a high mast during peak boating hours following sound signals (a prolonged blast - 4 to 6 seconds - fol-



lowed by a short blast - 1 second), visual signals, or radio contact. All radio-equipped bridges having a drawtender monitor Channel 16 (156.80 MHz). Most use Channel 9 (156.45 MHz) as the working frequency. Some bridges may require advance notice to open. Remain clear of a drawbridge during openings and closings.

Information on individual bridge opening requirements and hours of operation can be found in the free U.S. Coast Guard booklet "California Drawbridge Regulations," which is available by writing Commander (oan), U.S. Coast Guard, Coast Guard Island, Building 10, Room 214, Alameda, CA 94501, or by calling (510) 437-3514.

Debris

During the winter when the water level is high and the current strong, much debris is carried down river. This debris may lodge against docks, piles, bridges, and anchored boats or float in midstream. Debris can become grounded in shallow areas, and if submerged, is hard to see. Debris may also be a problem in the summer when the water level is low and there is no wind to hold it close to shore.

Assistance

There are several ways to obtain assistance. The Coast Guard and most county sheriff's departments are the primary search-and-rescue agencies in the Delta. However, the quickest remedy may be to seek the aid of a passing boat. Signal for help using flares, smoke, blinking lights or waving arms. A marine radio equipped to handle Coast Guard frequencies will ensure that assistance is on the way. Most enforcement agencies monitor Channel 16 (156.80 MHz). Some also monitor CB Channel 9. It is recommended that you leave a travel plan with a responsible person who will notify authorities if you are overdue. Include in the plan your launch site, destination, description of vessel, CF number and expected time of return. A simple float plan is included in the "ABCs of the California Boating Law," which is available free from the Department of Boating and Waterways.

River Manners

Since the Delta is a popular recreational area, the waterway can become congested with other boaters, water-skiers, fishermen and swimmers. This makes it important to be courteous and watch out for others who are enjoying the Delta. Most of the land within the Delta is privately owned. Boaters should respect the rights of property owners and not trespass on private land. Guides and maps of the Delta, available in bookshops and marine supply stores, provide information on facilities available and locations of popular anchorage areas. (*See back page for a list of additional agencies to contact about the Delta.*)

Navigational Charts

Government charts showing known depths, channels, hazards, obstructions and aids to navigation on the major waterways in the Delta are available from nautical chart agents listed in the Yellow Pages under "maps" or "marine equipment."

- #18652 SC, San Francisco Bay to Antioch
- #18659, Mallard Island to Antioch
- #18661 SC, San Joaquin River (*lower Sacramento River*)
- #18662 SC, Sacramento (*Andrus Island to Sacramento*)
- #18664, Sacramento River (*Sacramento to Colusa*)

Alcohol

Alcohol is a contributing factor to many boating accidents, injuries, and fatalities. Studies indicate that the hazardous side-effects of alcohol are more pronounced when operating a boat. Alcohol combined with wind, boat noise, vibration, wave action, and sun-glare can have a tremendous adverse influence on your judgment and response time in boating. Do not drink and operate a boat.

For More Information

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers
1325 J Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 557-5100

Stockton Chamber of Commerce
445 W. Weber Ave., #220
Stockton, CA 95203
(209) 547-2770

California Department of Parks and Recreation
Brannan Island State Recreation Area
17645 Hwy. 160
Rio Vista, CA 94571
(916) 777-6671

California Department of Fish and Game
Region II Office, 1701 Nimbus Road
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670
(916) 358-2900

Delta Chambers
P.O. Box 6
Isleton, CA 95641
(916) 777-5007

East Bay Regional Park District
Public Information Office
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
P.O. Box 5381
Oakland, CA 94619
(510) 562-PARK

Sacramento County
Department of Parks and Recreation
3711 Branch Center Road
Sacramento, CA 95827
(916) 875-6961

San Joaquin County
Department of Parks and Recreation
11793 North Mickey Grove Road
Lodi, CA 95240
(209) 953-8800

Solano County
Department of Parks and Recreation
Sandy Beach Park
Rio Vista, CA 94571
(707) 374-2097

Yolo County Facilities, Division of Parks
Yolo County Administration Building
292 West Beamer Street
Woodland, CA 95695
(530) 666-8115

Delta Marine Enforcement Patrols
(Non-emergency numbers)

Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office
Marine Services Bureau
(925) 646-2441

Sacramento County Sheriff's Office
(916) 875-0493

San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office
(209) 468-4140 (Monday - Friday, 8 - 5)

Solano County, Sheriff's Office
(707) 421-7090

Yolo County Sheriff's Office
Boating Safety Section
(530) 668-5280

U.S. Coast Guard
Rio Vista Station
(707) 374-6477

BOATING SAFETY CLASSES explaining required and recommended equipment for small boats and offering training in good seamanship are conducted throughout California by the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, the U.S. Power Squadrons and certain chapters of the American Red Cross. For information on Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron classes, call (800) SEA-SKIL (732-7545) or (800) 368-5647. The Department of Boating and Waterways offers a free home study course entitled *California Boating Safety Course*. For more information, e-mail us at pubinfo@dbw.ca.gov, or phone (916) 263-1331 or tollfree (888) 326-2822, or write: Department of Boating and Waterways, 2000 Evergreen Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, California 95815-3888. Visit our Website at www.dbw.ca.gov.