

NMMA Launches Waterways Access Initiative to Protect America's Boating and Fishing Future

New campaign will advance policies that protect public water access, modernize recreation infrastructure, support conservation, and strengthen the made-in-America recreational boating industry

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NMMA launched this week the Waterways Access Initiative, a multi-year advocacy campaign focused on protecting and expanding access to America's public waters.

For more than 85 million Americans each year, boating and fishing are a way to spend time with family, enjoy the outdoors, and connect with America's rivers, lakes, harbors, and coastlines. But access to the water does not happen by chance. It depends on safe boat ramps, modern marinas, adequate parking, properly dredged waterways, healthy fisheries, and policies that allow public and private partners to invest in the infrastructure boaters and anglers use every day.

That foundation is under growing pressure.

According to NMMA's most recent Quarterly Marine Leadership Barometer, 88% of marine industry leaders say boating infrastructure constraints are having a negative effect on growth, with more than half — 54% — reporting a moderate to significant impact. Industry leaders ranked regulatory, permitting, and funding barriers as the top access risk over the next decade, followed by aging, inadequate, or poorly maintained infrastructure.

"Access to the water is the foundation of recreational boating and fishing in America. Boating and fishing connect Americans to the outdoors, to their families, and to their communities. Millions of families rely on safe ramps, modern marinas, and healthy waterways to enjoy time on the water. The Waterways Access Initiative will work to protect and expand that access, strengthen our infrastructure, and support the made-in-America manufacturers who power this uniquely American industry."

"Access to the water is the foundation of recreational boating and fishing in America," said Frank Hugelmeyer, President and CEO of the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA). "Our Waterways Access Initiative campaign advocates for policies that protect and expand access to public waters, strengthen our infrastructure, sustain working waterfronts, and bolster the \$230 billion recreational boating and fishing industry."

When asked what types of investments or policy changes would most meaningfully improve boating access and strengthen the industry's long-term success, industry leaders pointed first to water access infrastructure. Policies protecting and expanding public access followed closely with fisheries access and management, storage capacity, and permitting barriers. In their own words, industry leaders called for more "access to water," more investment in "boat ramps, dredging, etc.," more marinas for public access, more launch and retrieval points, and more boat slips and storage options.

These findings reinforce a simple truth: Access is essential to the future of recreational boating and fishing.

Recreational boating and fishing are the number one driver of the U.S. outdoor recreation economy, which accounts for \$1.3 trillion in economic impact, 2.4% of GDP, and 5.2 million American jobs. Recreational boating alone generates \$230 billion in annual economic activity and supports more than 812,000 jobs across 36,000 U.S. businesses.

Recreational boat building is also a uniquely made-in-America industry. Ninety-five percent of boats sold in the U.S. are made in the U.S., and approximately 93% of boat builders are small businesses. Protecting boating access means protecting American jobs, small businesses, local tourism, and the communities that depend on healthy waterways.

The Waterways Access Initiative will focus on a targeted set of federal priorities that directly support NMMA's core policy goals:

- Protecting boater access to public waters
- Driving innovation in sustainability and marine technology
- Keeping U.S. marine manufacturing globally competitive
- Improving and expanding recreation infrastructure

Read more about NMMA's Waterways Access Initiative and policy priorities [here](#).

Watch the short video below to hear from recreational marine leaders about why protecting access to public waters is important: [here](#).

