

The Inequity of Small Boat Registration in Utah

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Utah Boat Registration

The total registration fees (aka, licensing, taxes in Utah State documents) for boats (of any size) require an annual "State Tax" (described below) and a "Uniform Fee" (<https://dmv.utah.gov/taxes-fees/uniform-fees>). The uniform fee is effectively a property tax and may be "age-based" or a fixed annual fee.

What are Small Boats?

In the context of this document, small boats are canoes, kayaks, and small pontoon boats (aka kickboats). Pontoon boats are generally inflatable but some are made of rigid materials. Hereafter in this document, the term pontoon boat shall refer to all of these small boats. What defines small as far as the DMV is concerned? Small is 15 feet or less, based on the above-referenced website. If the small boat has no motor, there is no annual tax or registration fee. Once a motor of any kind or size is added, the small boat is required to be registered annually.

Of particular interest to fishermen and fisherwomen in Utah is the application of this State Registration requirement to a pontoon boat. These boats are typically **6.5 to 10 feet in length**. They can be powered by a combination of oars, fins, and/or a small electric trolling motor of less than one horsepower. The electric motors are noiseless, non-polluting, attached to the small boat and are typically used for fishing on a lake. Examples of nine-foot pontoon boats are shown in Figures 1 to 4 below.



Figure 1. Nine Foot Pontoon Boat



Figure 2. Pontoon Boat in the Back of a Short Bed Pickup



Figure 3. Pontoon Boat at Starvation Reservoir



Figure 4. Pontoon Boats Prepared for Fishing in a Southern Utah Lake.

Small pontoon boat users do not generally use the concrete boat ramps necessary for powerboats but prefer to use other access points when they are available such as the bank shown in the photo at the left.

State Registration Fee, aka State Taxes on Boats

In Utah, if a boat has a motor, a boat must be registered or licensed annually. If the motor is gas fueled or electric, it makes no difference. If the motor has less than one (1) horsepower or two hundred and fifty (250) horsepower, it makes no difference. If the boat is 6 feet long or 30 feet long, it makes no difference. Thus, here lies the **inequity**.

Boat registration or licensing fees are paid on an annual basis according to the following website: <https://stateparks.utah.gov/activities/boating/boating-fees/>. An excerpt from that page is shown below.

1. State Taxes (\$43.50)

The State Tax Portion has you covered by the Utah State Parks Boating Program.

Here is the Program's State Tax Fees Breakdown:

- \$30 – Registration Fee
- \$10 – Aquatic Invasive Species Fee
- \$0.50 – Search and Rescue Fee
- \$3 – Electronic Payment Fee.
- **Total: 43.50**

*The remainder of the boat registration fees you pay are allocated to your Local County.

As stated above, this fee or tax is **unrelated to the size of the boat, the size of the motor, or the type of fuel**. The State Tax is the same for all boats that have a motor in Utah. See Figures 5 and 6 for boats that have the same State Tax but are very different.

Uniform Fee

As noted on the referenced website, an additional tax – a Uniform Fee - is collected by the DMV for the counties and is effectively a personal property tax. This Uniform Fee for small boats less than 15 feet is effectively a personal property tax as it is collected



Figure 5. Large Pontoon Boat with 150 HP Motor

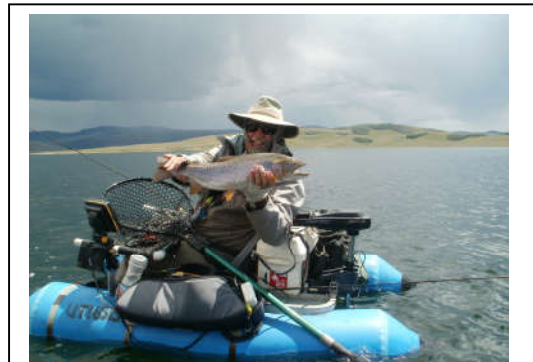


Figure 6. This Boat Pays the Same State Tax as the Large Pontoon Boat

by the State DMV and paid to each county.

For boats less than 15 feet, the Uniform Fee is \$10 annually.

Total Annual Registration Fee for a Small Boat with a Motor

Thus, for a small pontoon boat with an electric trolling motor of less than one horsepower, the total annual fee is \$53.50.

Why the Licensing Fee?

Start Parks argues the small pontoon boat fee helps to support the State Boating Program. Why not then license all small boats, canoes, and any other craft on the water, whether they have a motor or not? That would generate more tax to support the State Boating Program. In addition, State Parks could "license" swimmers who also use the lakes. More revenue still! But the public would be enraged.

Why the AIS Fee?

The aquatic invasive species - AIS – control program in Utah is primarily focused on the Quagga Mussel. The only lake in Utah where the Quagga Mussel exists is Lake Powell. Powerboats are the main boats of concern for transporting these AIS critters to other locations in Utah. Powerboats have numerous wetted locations where Quagga Mussel contamination can occur. In addition, the submersion of the boat trailers can also allow contamination by the Quagga Mussel.

To control the spread of the AIS, Utah has set up watercraft inspection stops near boat launches, where boats are inspected and, if needed, decontaminated. In addition, DWR has built a hot water decontamination dip tank at Lake Powell, where powerboats can

be backed down into the tanks to destroy the Quagga Mussels. These measures for preventing the spread of Quagga Mussels are critically important for powerboats with many wetted surfaces, including engine cooling systems, live wells, anchors, anchor ropes, and the trailer.

Small pontoon boats, kayaks, and canoes could contribute to the spread of Quagga Mussels, but their use in Lake Powell is minimal compared to powerboats. Furthermore, if used in Lake Powell, the effort to decontaminate these small boats is minimal compared to powerboats. Thus, we contend that the revenue associated with the \$10 fee is primarily needed to fund the DWR efforts to prevent the spread of Quagga Mussels by powerboats that go boating in Lake Powell. Nevertheless, we support the \$10 fee for small boats to help prevent Quagga Mussel spread to other Utah waters.

Why the Search and Rescue Fee?

This fee is very reasonable as all boaters could potentially require assistance from the search and rescue volunteers and associated state staff.

Why the Electronic Payment Fee?

Assuming this fee is collected to offset the cost of credit card service, then the fee is reasonable. However, the fee should be proportional to the total fee collected. Thus, a 3% fee would cover the credit card cost for all users.

The Fee for a Small Boat with a Motor is Arbitrary

We contend that the current small boat fee required when an electric trolling motor is attached is arbitrary and unfair for boats with less than a one horsepower motor. Furthermore, we expect that the original intent of the registration program to require boats with a motor to be licensed was focused on multi-horsepower power boats, not small pontoon boats, canoes, and kayaks with a small electric motor.

The Uniform Fee Tax

This uniform fee or property tax on small pontoon boats, kayaks, and canoes is unreasonable and should not be applied to a small boat with an electric motor. The value of these pontoon boats and their electric motor is small and about \$300 to \$800 in most cases.

Recommendation

We recommend that the annual license requirement for small pontoon boats and other small craft with a small one-horsepower or less electric motor attached should be reduced to a total of \$11.00. This amount would help fund the AIS Mitigation Program

(\$10.00), the Search and Rescue Program (\$0.50), and the credit card fee (3% rounded up to \$0.50).

Technical Note

Note most electric trolling motors are sold based on their thrust rating. The table below shows the relationship between horsepower and thrust. Most trolling motors used on small boats are 55 lb. thrust or less.

Pounds of Thrust (lbs)	Amps	Voltage	Horsepower	Product for Your Reference
30	30	12	0.36	Minn Kota Endura C2
40/45	42	12	0.5	Newport Vessels NV-Series (46 lb)
50/55	50	12	0.6	Newport Vessels NV-Series (55 lb)
70	42	24	1.01	Minn Kota Maxxum (70 lb)
80	56	24	1.35	AQUOS Haswing CaymanB (80 lb)
101	46	36	1.66	MinnKota Riptide (101 lb)
112	52	36	1.87	AQUOS Haswing (110 lb)

Pounds of Thrust to HP Conversion Chart

From: <https://electricboatingtips.com/thrust-to-horsepower/>