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NEWS RELEASE

NM State Parks and U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Recommend Valentine's Day Gift Ideas for Boaters

SANTA FE, N.M. –Spring and the boating season are just around the corner and NM State Parks' Boating Safety Program, along with the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, offer some Valentine's Day gift ideas for boaters to help them stay safe all year long.

"These are a few thoughtful gifts that could save lives," said Toby Velasquez, chief of Law Enforcement and Boating Safety. "Remember to *Boat Safe and Boat Smart in New Mexico.*"

One of the best gift ideas for boaters is a boating education course. Studies have shown that boaters who take a safety class are far less likely to be involved in a boating mishap or fatality. Registration for U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary and the New Mexico State Parks formal boating courses is available at www.nmparks.com on the boating education link. Paddlesports lovers may find courses on water rescue techniques and wilderness first aid at community aquatics centers, college recreational services, or outfitters.

The start of the traditional boating season is just months away, so schedule a free Vessel Safety Check – a valuable gift for boaters that costs only time. These vessel safety checks can be scheduled with the U. S. Coast Guard Auxiliary New Mexico Flotillas or New Mexico State Parks Boating Safety Program. Both agencies will offer signups at Bob Gerding's Hunting and Fishing Show scheduled Feb. 13-15 in the Manuel Lujan Exhibition Hall, Expo New Mexico in Albuquerque.

The "switch to digital" affects boaters as well as television viewers. As of Feb. 1, the Coast Guard no longer monitors analog distress signals transmitted from the older Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs). A new personal location beacon is another great Valentine's Day gift idea for boaters on lakes with spotty cell phone coverage. Some modern units provide satellite tracking and "check in" capability with cell phone location messaging.

Other great gift ideas to help keep boaters safe include:

- Sleek, lightweight and comfortable inflatable life jackets (personal flotation devices)
- Warm and practical foam-lined float coat life jackets for early season fishing trips

- Carbon monoxide detectors for cabin motorboats and other closed tops
- Waterproof emergency ditch bag with space blanket, tarp, fleece blankets, hats, gloves, and food
- Emergency signaling kits with flares, signal mirror, and whistle
- Kill switch leash or electronic key fob leash that cuts the engine if a boater falls overboard
- Current lake maps and/or a handheld land and water GPS unit
- Handheld VHF marine radio with extra batteries

The New Mexico Coast Guard Auxiliary and New Mexico State Parks Boating Safety recommend these gifts to save lives and reduce mishaps on New Mexico's lakes and rivers.

The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary is the uniformed volunteer component of the United States Coast Guard created by an Act of Congress in 1939. The Auxiliary, America's volunteer guardians, supports the Coast Guard in nearly all of the service's missions.

NM State Parks is the lead agency for the U.S. Coast Guard Recreational Boating Safety Grant administration in New Mexico. It investigates boat accidents, enforces boating safety laws, performs search and rescue, education, and oversees New Mexico's vessel registration system.

For more information about boating volunteering in New Mexico contact Flotilla 24 at 505-281-8567; 505-217-3969 or the NM State Parks Boating Volunteer program at 505-827-3587.

State Park officials remind boaters to always wear a lifejacket when boating on the water and to be aware of weather conditions. New Mexico State Parks offers free boating safety classes around the state and online throughout the year; for more information, call 888-NMPARKS or visit www.nmparks.com.

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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.

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