

# Federal grants help marinas fund renovation projects

by Wendy Larimer

Today's marina owners and operators are caught between a desire to improve their facilities to attract and keep customers and the need to be careful about spending too much money on renovations and improvements. There are possible solutions to help marinas accomplish both objectives in the form of federal grants.

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), offers three grant programs designed specifically to assist marinas: the Clean Vessel Act fund, the Boating Access Grant and the Boating Infrastructure Grant.

These grants are not new. The trust fund has been in existence since 1950, although it has gone through various name and programmatic changes over the years. The trust fund is a rare "user pays-user benefits" government structure because it is funded by the excise taxes paid by fishing equipment manufacturers and the fuel taxes paid by recreational boaters to support programs that invest back into fishing and boating activities.

States apply for these funds each year, and then individual businesses apply through the state. States receive their portions of the funds based on a formula of 40 percent of their inland lake and coastal land area (square miles) plus 60 percent of the number of paid fishing licenses in proportion to the national total. No state receives more than five percent or less than one percent of the total available funds during each cycle.

## Clean Vessel Act

The Clean Vessel Act (CVA) was signed into law in 1992 as a means to provide funds to construct, renovate and

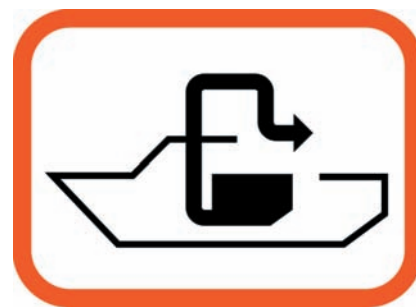
maintain pumpouts. Under the program, the federal government pays 75 percent of the cost of pumpout equipment and installation to each facility that applies. The marina must get estimates up front and submit them as part of the grant application. Then, the marina pays for the project, submits receipts and gets reimbursed. The grant can also go toward maintaining and replacing a pumpout, under the same general process.

Any facility that serves boats can apply for this grant money. The caveat is that the pumpout must be open to the public. While there may be marinas that don't want just any boater visiting them for a pumpout, marina managers need to look at the bigger picture—clean water. If you turn a boater away, what are his options for disposing the waste in his holding tank?

CVA guidelines stipulate that marinas may charge no more than five dollars per pumpout. However, marinas can make adjustments to this stipulation if they can justify to USFWS their reasons for charging more. For instance, a facility that services very large vessels with several hundred-gallon holding tanks has a right to charge more per pumpout for those vessels than for the guy pumping out five-gallon tanks. The price, however, should remain reasonable.

This is a simple grant for marinas to get, and other than the initial construction management and future maintenance, there isn't much further action required. However, marina owners and operators with pumpout systems should take on the following two responsibilities.

A recent USFWS survey indicated that many boaters do not recognize the universal pumpout symbol. A likely



*This is the universal pumpout symbol that every marina with a pumpout should prominently display so boaters know what to look for when trying to find available pumpouts.*

cause is that they pumpout at a facility that does not display the symbol. Marinas should post the pumpout symbol in a highly visible location, large enough for boaters to see. Boater's inability to recognize the sign go hand in hand with boaters claiming they do not have pumpouts or operable pumpouts in their waterways of choice. If boaters can't find the pumpout, they will assume one doesn't exist. It is a marina operator's responsibility to make finding the pumpout easy.

It is also the operator's responsibility to ensure the pumpout is in working order. If the pumpout needs to be fixed, fix it and apply for grant money to keep it in working order for the long term. If it needs to be replaced, you can also get grant money to do that.

## Boating Infrastructure Grant

The Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG), which became part of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund in 1998, is another grant available to both public and private marinas. Each year, USFWS distributes this grant money for constructing docks and other amenities for non-trailerable transient boats, 26 feet long or more.

Over the years there has been some confusion that these funds are available only for public facilities, such as municipalities. *Any marina can apply*, as long as the facility being built will be open to the boating public. USFWS estimates



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that two-thirds to three-fourths of projects funded have been in private facilities. Eligible projects include: docks, power and water, restrooms and showers, fuel, dinghy docks, recycling and trash receptacles and retaining walls and bulkheads.

This is another grant program where the federal portion is 75 percent of total cost while the applicant and any eligible partners combine funds to cover the remaining 25 percent. Facilities must be dedicated for transient use for a minimum of 20 years to qualify for this grant.

The grant is divided into two tiers. Tier 1 grants are noncompetitive but have a ceiling of \$100,000. Funds are distributed to states, and the states determine which projects receive the grants. Approximately \$3 million is available for 2010. To get an application for Tier 1, go to <http://apply07.grants.gov/apply/UpdateOffer?id=12513>.

Tier II grants are competitive across the nation and have no ceiling, though there is a set amount of money in the grant fund each year, and generally no one project receives all the funding. This year, there is approximately \$10 million available. Applicants send their information to the state coordinators who choose their top projects. The final decision is determined by a national panel. Last year more than \$12.4 million was awarded to 11 states for 14 boating infrastructure projects. To get an application for Tier II, go to <http://apply07.grants.gov/apply/UpdateOffer?id=12375>.

BIG funds are designated for infrastructure related to transient boaters. When a proposed amenity, such as a restroom, will be used by both transient and long-term customers—which may be the case when the grant project is to be part of an existing marina—the project cost must be prorated. For instance, if you are building a new restroom to serve 10 transients and 100 long-term customers you can only apply for 10 percent of the total project cost unless you can somehow prove transient use will be higher.

With marinas not being quite as full as they used to be, now might be the time to consider adding transient customers to your marina and take advantage of this grant money to make your facility attractive and comfortable for visiting boaters.

### **Boating Access Grants**

The Boating Access Grant program began in 1984, again as part of the ever-evolving Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. Funds from this grant program were to be distributed to states for developing or renovating facilities that improve water access to recreational boaters. Over the years, the majority of the money has gone to boat launch ramps and adjacent parking lots, but funds can also be used for amenities at access sites, marina construction and education programs.

Access funds can be used for the acquisition of land to develop new access facilities and for renovation and improvement of existing facilities. Monies can also be used for enhancements to access such as docks, fueling stations, buoys, retaining walls, utilities and restrooms. Finally, projects that help expedite access to open water are also eligible and could include channel improvements, vegetation clearance and navigational aids.

As with the grant programs mentioned above, the state gets a set amount from the fund and then distributes this to applicable project applicants. Applicants must provide the

land, provide access to the proposed boat ramp, supply 25 percent of the development cost and accept operation and maintenance responsibilities for at least 25 years.

Also, because the grant comes from the “user pays-user benefits” pool of money, the launch ramps must be for powered vessels whose fuel tax goes into the fund. They can not be canoe/kayak launches because kayaks and canoes do not add money to the trust fund through the fuel tax.

More information on this program is available here: <http://wsfrprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/GrantPrograms/BoatAccess/BA.htm>.

### **Conclusion**

Marinas should consider any or all of these grants if improvements or enhancements to their current facilities are short-term goals. All programs have been funded annually since their inception, and hundreds of marinas have taken advantage of the “free money.” Each program is run through a state agency, generally the Department of Fish & Wildlife or a similarly named entity, and each state program is managed by a USFWS regional coordinator. State and regional coordinators are there to answer questions and guide marinas through the application process.

The applications are fairly straightforward and do not require the use of engineers or consultants. Marina operators can complete these on their own with minimal time and effort. However, a marina should talk to a grant coordinator early in the process to make sure its proposed project is eligible and to determine the best approach to ensure funding. Marinas can also find more information on these grants and others by going to [www.marinaassociation.org/grant-programs](http://www.marinaassociation.org/grant-programs). ⚓

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