**AYC Ecology North**

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**Government Update from American Boating Congress**

By Jonathan Sweet, [BoatingIndustry.com](http://www.boatingindustry.com/top-stories/2013/04/19/government-update-from-american-boating-congress/)

With this year’s American Boating Congress only three weeks away, the National Marine Manufacturers Association provided an update on the key issues facing the marine industry in a webinar Thursday.

ABC is the annual conference bringing together the entire industry for a comprehensive legislative conference and visits to Capitol Hill. NMMA runs the conference with the help of 31 co-hosts, including *Boating Industry*.

This year’s ABC will be May 8-9 in Washington, D.C. Currently scheduled speakers include Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.V., Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., U.S. Coast Guard Rear Adm. Dean Lee and others. For a full agenda and more information, including policy briefs, visit [www.nmma.org/abc](http://www.nmma.org/abc).

From E15 to access to tax challenges there will be plenty for industry stakeholders to talk to representatives and senators about next month. Some of the main issues that will be topics of discussion:

**Access**

It’s important to preserve public access to public waters for the industry to grow, said Nicole Vasilaros, NMMA’s director of regulatory and legal affairs.

“There’s a startling trend [of changes] that denies access without proper consideration of the benefits and drawbacks,” she said.

Specifically, the two most pressing issues are the plans to limit access to Biscayne and Everglades national parks. In both cases, the National Park Service has proposed to severely limit access to the parks by boaters and fishermen, Vasilaros said.

The 2011 Biscayne plan called for the closure of 10,000 acres of the park’s waters to fishing and creation of a non-combustion engine zone along the coastline. By working with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the Park Service, NMMA and other industry groups have been able to renegotiate some of the plan, but it remains a work in progress.

The Everglades plan, proposed last month, would make 131,000 acres of park waters into pole and troll zones and require boaters to take a special education course to operate within park waters.

In these two specific cases, as well as the issue of access in general, it’s important that legislators understand the impact on the industry, Vasilaros said.

**Dredging**

The Water Resources Development Act would authorize the Army Corps of Engineers to undertake projects throughout the United States, including dredging. NMMA supports the much-needed bill, said NMMA legislative counsel Jeff Gabriel.

**E15**

The use of the 15 percent ethanol blend is disastrous for boats, with numerous studies showing severe damage to marine engines from the use of E15. NMMA is supporting multiple efforts to revoke the Environmental Protection Agency’s waiver that allowed E15, said NMMA legislative director Jim Currie.

As part of The Engine Products Group, [NMMA has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to review](http://www.boatingindustry.com/news/2013/03/26/nmma-others-appeal-e15-ruling/) last year’s Appeals Court decision that the associations did not have standing to challenge the waiver.

[S. 344](http://www.boatingindustry.com/weekly-5/2013/02/19/weekly-5-bill-to-roll-back-e15-introduced-in-senate/), a Senate bill introduced by Republican senators Roger Wicker of Mississippi and David Vitters of Louisiana that would cap the amount of ethanol in gasoline at 10 percent.

[H.R. 875](http://www.boatingindustry.com/news/2013/02/28/new-house-bill-would-block-e15/), a House bill proposed by Rep. James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., that blocks E15 from the market until further study is done on the effects of E15.

[H.R. 1462](http://www.boatingindustry.com/top-stories/2013/04/12/one-e15-bill-passes-committee-more-legislation-on-way/), introduced by Rep. Robert Goodlatte, R-Va., which reforms the Renewable Fuel Standard and caps the amount of ethanol that can be blended into gasoline at 10 percent.

While NMMA supports all three bills, the biggest area of emphasis is on H.R. 1462 because it is the broadest proposal and also enjoys the most bipartisan support, Currie said.

“If that were to get through Congress, it would solve our problems with ethanol,” he said.

**Taxes**

Although no bills are currently being debated in Congress, there has been talk of eliminating the second-home interest deduction for boats or scrapping the deduction all together.

Homeowners can deduct interest on two dwellings – a primary home and a secondary one, whether it be a vacation home, an RV or a boat. The boat must have a head, galley and a sleeping berth to qualify for the deduction.

The problem is that some members of Congress see the deduction, especially as it relates to boats, as a tax break for the rich yacht owners, Currie said.

In reality, consumer boat loans average $48,900, with 83 percent of those borrowing earning less than $250,000, Currie said.

“It’s likely to come up in the context of tax reform,” he said. “The people who support this think they’re targeting the ‘super rich.’”