



Department of
Natural Resources

Boat Registration Guide



January 2025

Registering Your Boat

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Where can I register my boat?

Boats are registered with the county recorder in the county where you reside, if you don't live in Iowa you should register in the county where the boat will be primarily used. Also, if you don't live in Iowa you can use your boat for 60 non-consecutive days within a year without registering in Iowa if your vessel is registered in your state.

If you have questions about boat safety regulations the regulations are available on the DNR website. If you aren't sure about a regulation or have any questions you can call our customer service number at 515-725-8200.

If you would like to review the Boating Safety Handbook, please visit the [Boating page](#) of the DNR Website.

Who registers your boat with the DNR?

Purchase from a dealer or retail store

Some businesses that sell boats will register your boat for you. If they register your boat for you, they will give you a "registration applied for" card that allows you to use your boat for 35 days without a registration or title. Your registration will be sent to you directly from the County Recorder. If the business that sold your boat to you doesn't register your boat for you, then you will be responsible for registering it with the County Recorder in the county where you reside.

Private Purchase

If you purchased your boat from another boat owner in a private sale, and the registration is current, you can operate your boat for 30 days from the date of purchase without registering the boat in your name. After 30 days you cannot operate the boat on public water unless you have a registration in your possession at the time of operation. You must be listed as the owner on the registration after 30 days.

Registration Exemptions

First let's determine if your boat or watercraft needs to be registered. The following vessels do not need to be registered:

- Inflatable boats that are 7 ft. or less in length, with no motor or sail.
- Conventional canoes and Kayaks (includes inflatable canoes and kayaks) that are 13 ft. or less in length, and do not have a motor or sail.
- Government owned boats used for search, rescue and enforcement.
- Boats owned by public schools used for official research and studies

You can choose to register the above vessels but it isn't required. You can also use your vessel on public water without registering if your boat fits the exemptions above. If you aren't sure if your boat needs to be registered you can contact DNR Customer Service at 515-725-8200. If you would like to know the final cost of your registration which could include a local tax, you can contact your County Recorder in the county you reside.

How much will this cost?

This will depend on whether your boat has a motor or sail, the length of the boat, and when your boat is registered. Boats are renewed every 3 years. The fee will decrease each year of the renewal season for new registrations.

Previously Owned Boats

If your boat is used and previously registered in Iowa you will pay \$4.50 to transfer your boat into your name. If the registration is expired and was not renewed by the previous owner, you will pay the fee for renewal, plus a \$5.00 penalty fee.

Out of State Registration

If your boat wasn't purchased in Iowa, you will pay the fee for a new boat registration which will decrease with each year of the renewal season.

Registration Fees

Includes new registrations and out of state purchases. The fees for renewals will not decrease, please see page 4 for renewal fees.

Jet Ski (Personal Watercraft)

Registered Jan 1, 2025-April 30, 2026-\$50.65

Registered May 1, 2026-April 30, 2027-\$35.65

Registered May 1, 2027-December 31, 2027 -\$20.65

Vessels without a motor or sail

Registered Jan 1, 2025-April 30, 2026-\$17.65

Registered May 1, 2026-April 30, 2027-\$13.65

Registered May 1, 2027-December 31, 2027 -\$9.65

Vessels less than 16 ft. in length with a motor or sail (if your vessel is 17 feet or longer, you will need to add \$13.50 for a title)

Registered Jan 1, 2025-April 30, 2026 \$28.15

Registered May 1, 2026-April 30, 2027-\$20.65

Registered May 1, 2027-December 31, 2027 -\$13.15

Vessels 16 ft. in length but less than 26 ft. with a motor or sail (if your vessel is 17 feet or longer, you will need to add \$13.50 for a title)

Registered Jan 1, 2025-April 30, 2026 -\$41.65

Registered May 1, 2026-April 30, 2027-\$29.65

Registered May 1, 2027-December 31, 2027 -\$17.65

Vessels 26 ft. in length but less than 40 ft. with a motor or sail (remember to add \$13.50 for a title)

Registered Jan 1, 2025-April 30, 2026-\$80.65

Registered May 1, 2026-April 30, 2027-\$55.65

Registered May 1, 2027-December 31, 2027 -\$30.65

Vessels 40 ft. in length and over with a motor or sail (remember to add \$13.50 for a title)

Registered Jan 1, 2025-April 30, 2026 -\$155.65

Registered May 1, 2026-April 30, 2027-\$105.65

Registered May 1, 2027-December 31, 2027 -\$55.65

Documented Vessel

If your vessel is documented with the Coast Guard, you will not receive a title from the DNR, just a registration. If there is a lien on the boat, you will need to file your lien with the United States Coast Guard. Be sure to bring your certificate of documentation with you to the County Recorder's office when you register your boat along with your bill of sale. You will still be required to pay sales tax or provide proof that it has already been paid when you register your boat with the County Recorder.

For more information on documented vessels please visit the [Coast Guard website](#).

Documented Vessel Fees

Registered Jan 1, 2022-April 30, 2023 -\$30.65

Registered May 1, 2023-April 30, 2024-\$22.25

Registered May 1, 2024-December 31, 2025 -\$13.95

Don't forget your paperwork

- If your boat is new, don't forget to bring the receipt that lists how much you paid for your boat and if taxes were paid at the time of purchase. Also, bring the manufacturer's certificate of origin (MCO or MSO). Boats that are new and titled must have a manufacturer's certificate of origin to register. If your boat is not titled, please also bring your certificate because the County Recorder will need that information to register your boat. If your boat does not have a certificate because it isn't titled, you will need to know the information required on the application such as length and capacity.
- If your boat is previously owned bring the registration documents signed over to you from the last registered owner. If your boat was titled, you will need the title from the last owner on the title, signed over to you. You will also need a bill of sale, or statement from the seller that indicates how much you paid for your boat. The seller can use the back of the DNR registration or title as a bill of sale if the amount paid is provided. If your boat was registered but not titled, you will need the registration signed over from the last owner on the registration and a bill of sale.
- If your boat is previously owned and it has never been registered you can register with an affidavit of untitled/unregistered vessels. You will need to contact a conservation officer or peace officer to sign your affidavit. The affidavit can be found at on the [Bonding page](#) of the Iowa DNR website.
- If your boat is homemade, your boat will need to be inspected by a DNR Conservation Officer. If your boat is reconstructed, or it contains major parts from other boats, it is not considered homemade. If any of the parts you used to reconstruct your boat contain a registration number or HIN number from a boat that was previously registered, you will need to provide the registration and/or title from the previous registered owner.

Examples

1. You have purchased a new 30 ft. boat with a motor and you need to add a lien. The boat was purchased January 29th, 2025 and you will be registering February 1st, 2025. How much will this cost?

\$80.65-Registration

\$13.50-Title

\$13.50-Lien

Total-\$107.65 for a New Registration

State and local taxes may also be due. Also, add a \$2.00 mailing fee if you are mailing your registration to the County Recorder.

2. You purchased a used 10 ft. boat. The previous owner has given the registration to you with the required information and signature. The registration is current.

Transfer-\$4.50

State and local taxes may also be due. Include a \$2.00 mailing fee if you are mailing your registration to the County Recorder.

Renewals

Once your boat is registered it will need to be renewed at the end of a 3 year renewal cycle. Your boat can be renewed after January 1st of the renewal season. If your boat is renewed after July 1, a \$5.00 penalty fee will be added to the total fee. You will receive new decals and a registration when you renew your registration. Registrations are renewed in the county that you reside with the County Recorder.

Registration Schedule:

2025-2028-Renewal period begins January 1, 2025

2028-2031-Renewal period begins January 1, 2028

2031-2034-Renewal period begins January 1, 2031

Renewal Fees

Documented Vessel	\$30.65
Personal Watercraft (Jet Ski)	\$50.65
No motor/sail-any length	\$17.65
Less than 16ft motor/sail	\$28.15
16 ft. to 26 ft. motor/sail	\$41.65
26 ft. to 40 ft. motor/sail	\$80.65
40 ft. and over	\$155.65