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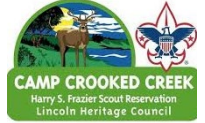
Staff Guide, Management Guide, Resource Guide.

BSA NATIONAL AQUATICS SUBCOMMITTEE

Contact the Subcommittee or subscribe to the newsletter



VOLUNTEER SAVED BY QUICK ACTIONS OF AQUATICS STAFF



It was the beginning of staff week at Camp Crooked Creek in Shepherdsville, KY, June 2023. Long-time volunteer Bruce Otto, 72, was among a group taking the swim test for BSA Lifeguard. Supervising were Aquatic Director Michael “MJ” Todd and his staff.

MJ noticed that Bruce was slowing down and slipping below the water’s surface. He immediately executed a deep-water rescue bringing Bruce to the surface with the aid of a rescue tube. Members of the Aquatics Staff brought Bruce onto the dock using an extraction board. Assistant Aquatics Director, Cleis Newell, immediately began administering CPR chest compressions. CPR continued with the help of several trained staff members until the arrival of an AED a few minutes later. CPR continued along with the administration of the AED. By the time an ambulance arrived 20 minutes later Bruce was breathing faintly on his own.

Bruce Otto had suffered cardiac arrest. By his own admission he might not have survived had it not happened in the presence of these trained lifeguards. "I'm not sure the English language has words for the depths of gratitude I have," Otto said. "It's just very emotional. How do you thank people for that?"

The teamwork and group effort of staff and volunteers was pivotal in the successful outcome. "It was training and having this phenomenal team with me," said Cleis Newell, assistant aquatics director "Everyone was on their toes, knew exactly what they needed to do. We worked so well together as a team, everyone jumped in to help."

The excellent training of the Aquatics Staff also played a huge role in the rescue. MJ Todd and Cleis Newell are recent graduates of BSA’s National Camping School where they were certified as *Aquatics Instructors BSA* and they are certified as *American Red Cross Lifeguards*. Also, members of the staff were certified as *BSA Lifeguards* and/or as *ARC Lifeguards*. **For their actions five members were nominated for the American Red Cross Certificate of Merit and the BSA Medal of Merit.**



Bruce Otto with Members of Aquatics Staff
L-R: Adaline Hampton, Chloe Newell, Cleis Newell, Otto, MJ Todd, Nick Linnean, and Leo Prechtel (Kneeling)

Thomas Geary, Director of Camping for Lincoln Heritage Council, Louisville, oversaw the after-action debriefing and report. The Council provided access to a trauma counselor. Any camp staff member was invited to meet with her in a private setting. The counselor also met with the Aquatics crew as a group as well and offered individual sessions. The council also consulted with Dr. Chuck Pemberton, nationally renowned child psychologist, who worked with the staff on developments and training for mental health throughout the rest of the summer.

Coverage of this rescue by WLKY, Louisville, KY: <https://www.wlky.com/article/louisville-man-saved-heart-attack-swimming-bullitt-county/44257267>





NEW RIVER EXPERIENCE -- SUMMIT BECHTEL RESERVE

There's no time like river time!

The New River Experience at the Summit Bechtel Reserve lets scouts explore over 50 miles of the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve. The New River starts its 320-mile-long journey in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. The river winds its way through Virginia, before entering West Virginia and running into the Allegheny Plateau. Here, the New cuts a 1500 foot deep canyon through ancient mountains, providing diverse ecosystems and habitat for some species found nowhere else on earth. The New River Gorge is an adventurer's dream destination; drawing visitors from around the globe to experience epic climbing, hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, and of course, whitewater!



Though the Gorge is largely uninhabited today, this area was once the heart of the West Virginia coal mining industry. More than 40 mining towns once lined the banks of the New River Gorge. Today, scouts can hike from the river to explore long abandoned stone ruins overtaken by lush Appalachian forests.



The goal of the New River Experience is for our participants to leave as more confident whitewater paddlers. We want you to go home feeling ready to plan your own river adventure. You'll learn rigging, proper whitewater paddling techniques, and basic river rescue.

New River Experience participants will run class I-III rapids in inflatable kayaks called "duckies" for the first four days of the Trek. Then, we'll switch out for larger rafts to tackle the world-famous class IV rapids of the Lower New River Gorge! At the end of each day, you'll stop at one of our riverside campsites and set up an expedition-rafting style kitchen. The food on this trek is a fan favorite, including everything from peach cobbler to steaks on the grill. 5 days of action-packed

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padding and nights around the campfire are the perfect mixture of adrenaline and relaxation.

Visit [The New River Experience Trek](#) website for more information and availability for 2024 and 2025.



Updated Mile Swim BSA Award

The Mile Swim BSA award was introduced in 1961 by the BSA Health and Safety Service. The original purpose of the award was for Scouts to learn to swim a mile safely with ease. It was, and remains, a challenging recognition that contributes to fitness and safety. The last time the award requirements were updated was in 1981 when the purpose shifted from a worthwhile accomplishment promoting both safety and physical fitness to “encourage the development of physical fitness by introducing the youth to swimming as regular exercise.” Four hours of required training before swimming the mile was added as a requirement.



Based on feedback from BSA Aquatics personnel, the emphasis of the revised Mile Swim BSA award is going back to increasing swimming stroke effectiveness and efficiency for those who need improvement. Most Scouts who can walk or bike on level ground for an hour or so without stopping will likely have enough stamina to swim a mile. There are numerous other Scouts BSA programs that promote and develop regular exercise. The Mile Swim BSA award purpose is to build confidence and improve water competency.

New BSA Mile Swim Award Requirements:

1. Successfully complete the BSA swimmer test: Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth, level off, and begin swimming. Swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy, resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and must include at least one sharp turn.
2. Learn through discussion and application how skill, stamina, stroke selection, and pace influence distance swimming.
3. Pre-qualify for the mile by either swimming continuously for ¼ mile or otherwise demonstrating ability to the satisfaction of a counselor approved by the local council.
4. Swim one mile under safe conditions over a course approved by the counselor supervising the swim.

Program Implementation

The revised Mile Swim BSA requirements are effective immediately (Spring/Summer 2024). It is recognized that many BSA camps will already have planned their camp summer aquatics program. Those camps may continue to present the previous (1981) version of the award program; however, all BSA Camps and Mile Swim BSA Counselors should plan on implementing the new Mile Swim BSA requirements for their 2025 programs. The Scouts BSA Mile Swim Emblem (SKU 245) and the Mile Swim Pocket Certificate (SKU 34394) remain unchanged. These recognition items

are available at scoutshop.org. Award application and support materials can be found in the 2024 version of BSA Aquatics Supervision No. 34346

The Mile Swim BSA aquatics award is the ultimate recognition of Scouts and Leaders swimming prowess. It is hoped that this revised version of the award will encourage more BSA members to take the plunge and achieve this award.

Comments and Rationale

These revisions cut the required award time from roughly five hours to two, while still allowing screening and coaching to foster success. Safely swimming a mile remains the capstone requirement of the award while the other requirements are simplified to promote success.

Swimmer classification, previously assumed, has been added to be consistent with other awards and Safe Swim Defense. The swim classification test need not be re-done specifically for the award. That is, the counselor may accept successful completion undertaken for other activities within the past year.

The previous first requirement focused on general physical fitness achieved through regular exercise. The new second requirement is more about understanding the tradeoff between energy expenditure and speed while swimming; that is, stroke effectiveness and efficiency. Appropriate support material is in the award application, which is found in the 2024 version of BSA Aquatics Supervision No. 34346.

Rather than “tell” or “explain” the proposed second requirement uses “learn”. Instead of each Scout regurgitating canned information provided by the counselor, the intent is to provide the Scout with simple drills that physically convey concepts. For example, showing how gliding reduces effort but increases time by seeing how few strokes are needed to cover a given distance. Also, how tired Scouts become swimming a given distance as fast as they can with a head-up crawl compared with swimming the same distance with a relaxed crawl using rhythmic breathing.

The previous third requirement, combined with the mile itself, resulted in roughly five hours of supervised activity needed to earn the award. That is comparable to what many camps allow for Swimming merit badge. Reconsideration of that time and resource commitment is based on several premises. Most Scouts seeking the award should be able to complete the mile without additional conditioning. The Mile Swim program at camps should not be considered a learn-to-swim activity. Time, staff, and water space currently absorbed by the program would be better directed to other activities that better build water competency. An hour of training over four days, if combined with coaching in stroke improvement, allowed a few more Scouts to complete the mile at the end of a week. However, that amount of effort is unlikely to result in much improvement in overall fitness or really encourage Scouts to continue distance swimming as a year-round exercise program. Other Scouts BSA programs do a better job of promoting regular exercise, which could include swimming.

Since some Scouts will more easily complete the mile with simple coaching in stroke selection and execution, the old four-hour training program has been replaced with a ¼ mile swim in new requirement 3, along with some tips in new requirement 2. The intent is to both pre-screen applicants who are not ready, and to get those who are close over the hump. However, the counselor (or camp) is allowed flexibility. Competitive swimmers who regularly swim as part of a swim team need not be forced to do an extra quarter mile. The 400-yard swim for Lifesaving merit badge is close enough to a ¼ mile (440 yards) to serve, likewise the 300-yard swim for Red Cross Lifeguard should suffice if a Scout has that training. Camps may allow those enrolled in Swimming merit badge instruction to substitute class attendance for the ¼ mile prequalification swim.

“Safe conditions” has been added to the revised fourth requirement to connect back to Safe Swim Defense. It also places the responsibility on knowing and implementing the open water procedures previously covered in the old second requirement on the counselor. Scouts will then learn the procedure by example if they do the mile outside of the camp swimming area. Those completing the mile in a pool are only allowed to swim in open water as a Scouting activity by following procedures in the Guide to Safe Scouting. Those details are covered in numerous other places for Scouts and Leaders and should be reviewed for each new swimming activity, so it is not necessary for Scouts to memorize the rules prior to doing the mile.

Questions or comments about the Mile Swim BSA aquatic award can be directed to outdoorprograms@scouting.org



BSA Aquatics Activity Awards Popularity

2022 ranking



26,282 total
across BSA

2023 ranking



24,403 total
across BSA

Most popular



Least popular





DIVE INTO OPPORTUNITY: ENCOURAGE SCOUTS TO APPLY FOR PADI TRAINING SCHOLARSHIP

Attention, adventurous Scouts! An exciting opportunity awaits those who dream of exploring the wonders beneath the waves. The Boy Scouts of America is thrilled to announce another year of the unique scholarship opportunity for PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) training. This scholarship is designed to empower Scouts with a passion for underwater exploration, providing them with the skills and knowledge to become certified divers.

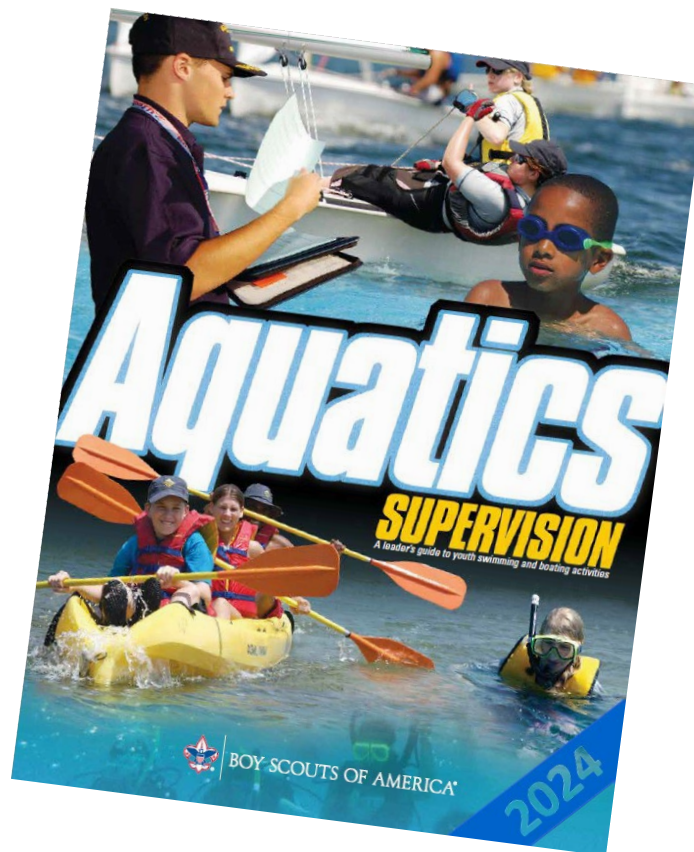
PADI certification not only opens doors to thrilling underwater adventures but also instills a sense of responsibility and environmental stewardship. By applying for the PADI training scholarship, Scouts can embark on a journey that goes beyond the ordinary, immersing themselves in a world of marine diversity while developing leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. The application process is straightforward, and the potential for a life-changing experience awaits those who seize this opportunity. Don't miss the chance to dive into a world of discovery – apply for the PADI training scholarship today!

https://scouting.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_73goUuHpEzwtcAS



AQUATICS SUPERVISION UPDATE

A 2024 update to the 2018 edition of Aquatics Supervision will be uploaded to the [Aquatics Resource](#) page on scouting.org for this summer. The revised version includes up-to-date policy statements, such as the current BSA Scuba Policy, some new material, such as the revised requirements to Mile Swim and new life jacket labels, some text edits, and over a hundred new photos replacing previous illustrations and photos. The new copy also includes various digital links and QR codes.



AQUATICS IN THE NEW CUB SCOUT PROGRAM

A new Cub Scout Program was rolled out in January of this year and will become effective June 1st. Many of the aquatics features in the old program have changed to reflect a more simplified approach to the ranks while strengthening the concept of a “continuum” of aquatics skills and safety through the ranks which are tied to the child’s grade in school.

2024-2025
Cub Scout Badges of Rank
Requirements

The Bobcat Adventure is designed to be the first required Adventure. Each badge of rank is earned by completing six required and two elective Adventures. The six required Adventures are focused on the aims and focus areas of the BSA.

LION Kindergarten	TIGER 1 st Grade	WOLF 2 nd Grade	BEAR 3 rd Grade	WEBELOS 4 th Grade	ARROW OF LIGHT 5 th Grade
BOBCAT Character/Leadership	BOBCAT Character/Leadership	BOBCAT Character/Leadership	BOBCAT Character/Leadership	BOBCAT Character/Leadership	BOBCAT Character/Leadership
MOUNTAIN LION Outdoors	TIGERS IN THE WILD Outdoors	PAWS ON THE PATH Outdoors	BEAR HABITAT Outdoors	WEBELOS WALKABOUT Outdoors	OUTDOOR ADVENTURER Outdoors
FUN ON THE RUN Personal Fitness	TIGER BITES Personal Fitness	RUNNING WITH THE PACK Personal Fitness	BEAR STRONG Personal Fitness	STRONGER, FASTER, HIGHER Personal Fitness	PERSONAL FITNESS Personal Fitness
KING OF THE JUNGLE Citizenship	TEAM TIGER Citizenship	COUNCIL FIRE Citizenship	PAWS FOR ACTION Citizenship	MY COMMUNITY Citizenship	CITIZENSHIP Citizenship
LION ROAR Personal Safety	TIGER ROAR Personal Safety	SAFETY IN NUMBERS Personal Safety	STANDING TALL Personal Safety	MY SAFETY Safety/First Aid	FIRST AID Safety/First Aid
LION'S PRIDE Family/Reverence	TIGER CIRCLES Family/Reverence	FOOTSTEPS Family/Reverence	FELLOWSHIP Family/Reverence	MY FAMILY Family/Reverence	DUTY TO GOD Family/Reverence
2 Elective Adventures	2 Elective Adventures	2 Elective Adventures	2 Elective Adventures	2 Elective Adventures	2 Elective Adventures

The aquatics elements in the Cub Program (see table) are found in the Elective Adventures for each rank beginning with Tiger. In Tiger, the Elective Adventure ***Floats and Boats*** introduces the Cubs to on-the-water safety and activity. For the Wolf Elective Adventure, ***Spirit of the Water*** is the aquatics element and introduces the Cub to in-the-water activities and safety. For Bear the aquatics Elective Adventure is ***Salmon Run***. Moving to Webelos and Arrow of Light, we find ***Aquanaut*** as the elective.

For those who have worked in Cub Aquatics in the past, the names of these electives should sound familiar. They are, as they have the same names as in the old program; however, the requirements within each element have changed to reflect the simplification of requirements and continuum goals of the new program.

New Cub books and leader support materials are coming out this spring in advance of the program going live June 1st which should give leaders and aquatics staff time to modify their programs to be ready for summer camp activities. That said, most of the requirements will feel familiar but with modifications made to reflect the goals of the new program.

The Aquatics Subcommittee would greatly appreciate your feedback regarding these changes in the Aquatics Elective Adventures at the end of summer. And remember, the skills and safety training the Cubs receive now will serve in their transition to the Scouts BSA Aquatics Program and, more importantly, play a foundational role in their safety in and around the water for the rest of their lives.



Springtime is Annual Swim Check Time!

In the BSA if you are going to be swimming or boating you need an annual Swim Check. The Swim Check is required to meet some of the requirements for “Ability Groups” found in the BSA Safe Swim Defense Program. This program, along with its complimentary “Safety Afloat Program” for on the water activities, i.e. boating, is fundamental to running a safe aquatics event and is one of the key reasons the BSA has such an excellent record of aquatics safety.

Many of us have limited opportunities to swim in the winter months and therefore our physical as well as our swimming skills may have diminished since summer. Therefore, before heading to summer camp it is a great idea to have a Swim Check now.

As mentioned, after hibernating all winter our skills may be rusty. Swim Check Administrators should be aware of that and run their Swim Checks with this in mind. Unit Leaders too should consider this and it might be worthwhile taking their units to a pool for a bit for practice and fun before the actual swim check.

At the Swim Check, Administrators and Unit Leaders should recognize that Swim Checks may be stressful for some (both youth and adults!) and should attempt to lower anxiety levels for participants by providing clear and concise instructions and allowing plenty of time for participants to complete their checks.

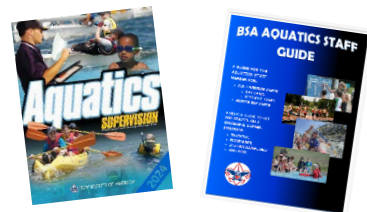
Staff giving the checks should be considerate and relaxed and not give the appearance of trying to rush anyone during the checks. Importantly, during the check itself the staff member giving the swim check should suggest that the participant not do it fast, but rather they should swim in a steady, relaxed manner. This helps lower the anxiety for the participant that with all their peers watching they are expected to swim like they were on a swim team all winter. Most importantly, staff should help pace them through the check, so they don't tire out prematurely during the check.

The environment of the Swim Check can also play a role in anxiety. Chaotic crowds of Scouts and leaders herded around by staff shouting direction does little to relax the participants. The Swim Check Administrator and staff should consider this and devise procedures to minimize the need for such approaches to managing the check. Another consideration is that it will be clear that some participants are anxious regardless. An approach for these

“Swim tests for district, council and national level events may be conducted following procedures approved by a council-level committee, preferably the Council Aquatics Committee.”

[BSA Aquatics Management Guide](#)

Additional guidance for Swim Test supervision and administration can be found in **[Aquatics Supervision – a leader’s guide to youth swimming and boating activities](#)** and **[BSA Aquatics Staff Guide](#)**. Both are available at scouting.org

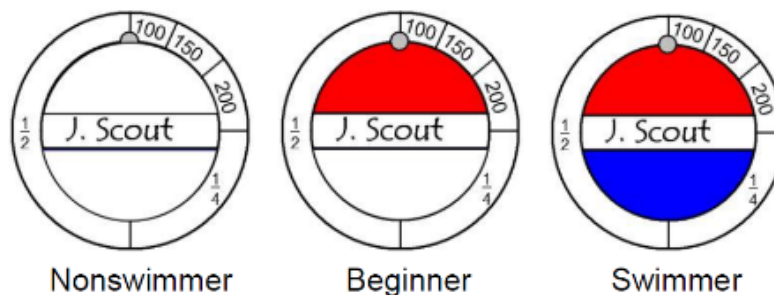


participants might be to offer them an opportunity to first get in the pool and paddle around to acclimate to the water with some reassuring words from the staff.

Don't forget, adults too can be anxious about the check and rightfully so. Chances are they have not been swimming much either over the winter and maybe they are in less than perfect condition. Couple that with the staring eyes of the unit members it can certainly raise the anxiety of adults taking the Swim Check. One approach may be to offer adults a separate time, say immediately after the youth, to take the check. And, like the youth, they too must be encouraged to go slow, it's not a race!

If a participant is having difficulty, consider pulling them to the side before they falter and allow them to rest with the opportunity to try again later that day. This is better than them having a bad experience during the check and requiring assistance from the staff. Such an event could very well discourage them from trying again and therefore limit their aquatic activities at camp.

So, now is the time to get your units summer camp ready so they can fully participate in aquatics activities and potentially avoid spending remedial time at camp working to pass the Swim Check when they could be working on other fun aquatic skills and merit badges. Swim Checks, when conducted pre-camp, under less stressful conditions than one typically finds at check in at summer camp may go a long ways in supporting your youth to have a great aquatic experience at camp and most importantly ensure they, and their leaders will be safe in and on the water.



STARTING AN AQUATICS COMMITTEE

“Councils may already have established an Aquatics Committee, but some committees may go inactive over time. Interested volunteers should check with their local council service center to determine if a committee exists in their council. The volunteer should then contact the designated staff advisor to see how they can help rejuvenate the committee. If an active committee exists, there is generally a need for additional trained, enthusiastic scouters who have an interest in BSA aquatics.

There is a proven sequence of steps involved in starting a Council Aquatics Committee. These are:

- Designate Professional Staff Advisor
- Recruit Volunteer Chairperson
- Decide where the committee fits
- Determine committee objectives
- Decide a committee structure
- Promote the committee as a resource
- Recruit committee members
- Conduct meetings
- Communicate

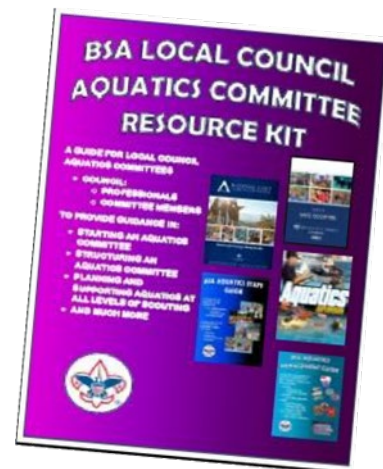
Once an Aquatics Committee is started there are best practices that have been shown to be used by successful Aquatics Committee.”

This was excerpted from “*BSA Local Council Aquatics Committee Resource Kit*”.

This document contains a wealth of guidance for those planning or conducting council aquatics programs.

From starting a committee to annual goals, meeting agendas, year-round programs, local council spotlights, Cub Scout aquatics, Lifeguard training, and Best Practices. This guidance document covers it all.

It is available for digital download at [scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org).

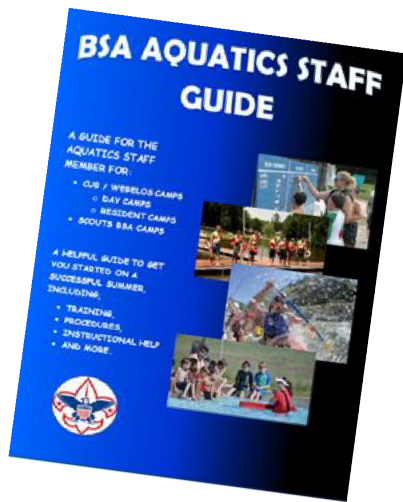


Click on “*Local Council Aquatics Committee Starter Kit*” at the following link:

<https://www.scouting.org/outdoor-programs/aquatics/forms/>

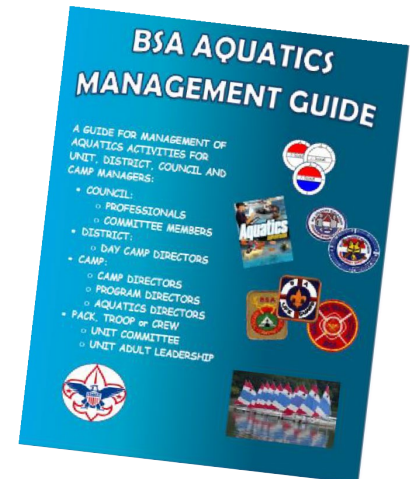


KEY RESOURCES FOR COUNCIL AQUATICS PROGRAMS



The *BSA Aquatics Staff Guide* is intended to serve as a guide for those serving on aquatics staff at camps at all levels of Scouting. It will guide the new staff members through their first summer and, at the same time, provide a valuable reference to more experienced staffers.

The *BSA Aquatics Management Guide* is intended to serve as a guide for those tasked with planning, developing, and delivering aquatics program at all levels of scouting. It will provide guidance for Camp Management and Aquatics Directors while, at the same time, giving Council and District professionals and volunteers direction in developing exciting and safe aquatics programs.



The BSA Local Council Aquatics Resource Kit is both an invaluable guide to starting and maintaining an aquatics committee, as well as a critical ongoing resource for running a successful aquatics program.

- These guides and other useful information can be found on the Aquatics Resources page at: <https://www.scouting.org/outdoor-programs/aquatics/forms/>



THE BSA NATIONAL AQUATICS SUBCOMMITTEE

The National Aquatics Subcommittee meets at least twice a year and has multiple ongoing projects aimed at helping you in support of your local aquatics programs.

This eNewsletter is one effort to keep you informed regarding what's going on in BSA aquatics.

Direct information or inquiries regarding this newsletter or the National Aquatics Subcommittee to

outdoorprograms@scouting.org

To subscribe to this newsletter, go to

[Aquatics Program | Boy Scouts of America \(scouting.org\)](#)

