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## Boaters and Environmentalism

Boaters have been in the crosshairs of the Marine Environmentalist movement for decades. Many extremist environmental groups would like to see large swaths of our coastlines completely closed to boat traffic. They would like to portray boaters in the image of Rodney Dangerfield from the movie "Caddyshack." You just pictured him dropping his anchor and sinking Ted Knight's vessel after crashing into the side of him, didn't you? If you do not get this reference, you are either too young, not a boater, not a golfer or a combination of all three. While I have seen a few clueless yahoos in my time on the water, a vast majority are extremely responsible.

What if I told you that boaters are the original Marine Environmentalists? I believe that to be 100% true. Boaters have an absolute stake in protecting the environment that they enjoy and love with a passion. Those that enjoy fishing want to protect our fish populations, those that snorkel and scuba dive want to protect our reefs and those that enjoy marine wildlife want to protect that very wildlife. Vast majorities of boaters are responsible and wish to protect our amazing marine ecosystems for generations to come. Responsible boaters are on the front lines and are the first to call out and report bad or illegal marine activity.

Boating is a multi-billion dollar industry that sustains hundreds of thousands of jobs around our Great Nation. Revenue generated from boaters is used to fund our Coast Guard, Marine Patrol, Wildlife Officers and Park Rangers. Boaters are essential to funding, not just monetarily, but with knowledge, the very projects that keep our Coastal Environments healthy. Is there more that can be done and should be done? Absolutely! There are many ongoing projects such as trash cleanup, artificial reef projects and increasing water quality being funded by boaters and boating organizations.

So what is my point? I would ask that you be very leery of funding marine environmentalist groups. Most have very innocent sounding names, but in reality, their mission is to shut down boating, fishing and even beaches to visitors all in the name of environmentalism. While I am all for protecting our marine environment, the true solution is a compromise of responsible access and not a shutdown. There are many marine organizations that are worthy of funding. They want to protect our marine environments while protecting access for everyone, including future generations. The Marine Industries is a good place to start. Standing Watch is another.