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Boone County Could Lose Water Rescue Unit

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Boone County's Water Rescue Unit has patrolled the Ohio River for 35 years, but money concerns mean the plug might be pulled on that service.

If you're a boater on the Ohio River, chances are you've seen the Boone County Water Rescue Unit.

It is the only floating ambulance between Louisville and Pittsburgh.

Boone County taxpayers now provide most of its funds; Covington and Kenton County contribute \$15,000 each.

A review is underway to see if the service is needed and if others can help share the cost.

Captain Dale Appel has navigated the Ohio for over three decades with the Boone County Water Rescue team and helped found the 35-member unit.

Appel said he would hate to see any cuts.

"To have it go away would be hurtful not only to me, but to everybody and especially to the people that we're serving out here on the water," said Captain Appel.

So, will the unit actually be cut?

"It's possible, but unlikely at this point we think," said Boone County Administrator James Parsons.

Regardless, there will be funding changes.

The water rescue boat is fully equipped with ambulance equipment and patrols the river three days a week during the summer.

It also goes out of Boone County for events like Tall Stacks or responses for accidents.

That's where the money problems come in.

"A lot of times we're just not able to recover the special expenses of doing those activities," said Dan Maher, Boone County Emergency Management Director.

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Captain Dale Appel
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Parsons says that can't continue.

"I think probably the best solution is that we continue to provide the service we're providing, but we get some contributions, more than we're getting now from other units of government," Parsons said.

So, how about a regional service involving Kentucky and Ohio, other counties and communities?

"I think it's a valuable to anybody that needs the service and that need exists out here," said Parsons.

Boone County's big water rescue boat is moored at Villa Hills Marina.

You won't hear the owners there complain about its value.

"In my opinion, that's the most valuable boat on the river regardless of the size or the equipment. There's no boat as valuable on the Ohio River as that boat," said Bill Ruholt, Villa Hills Marina Co-Owner.

Boone County is expected to talk with Cincinnati, Hamilton County and others about a possible joint venture.

The 35 members of the Boone County team meet to talk about their future Thursday night.

The Boone County Fiscal Court could have its final funding decision on June 24.



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