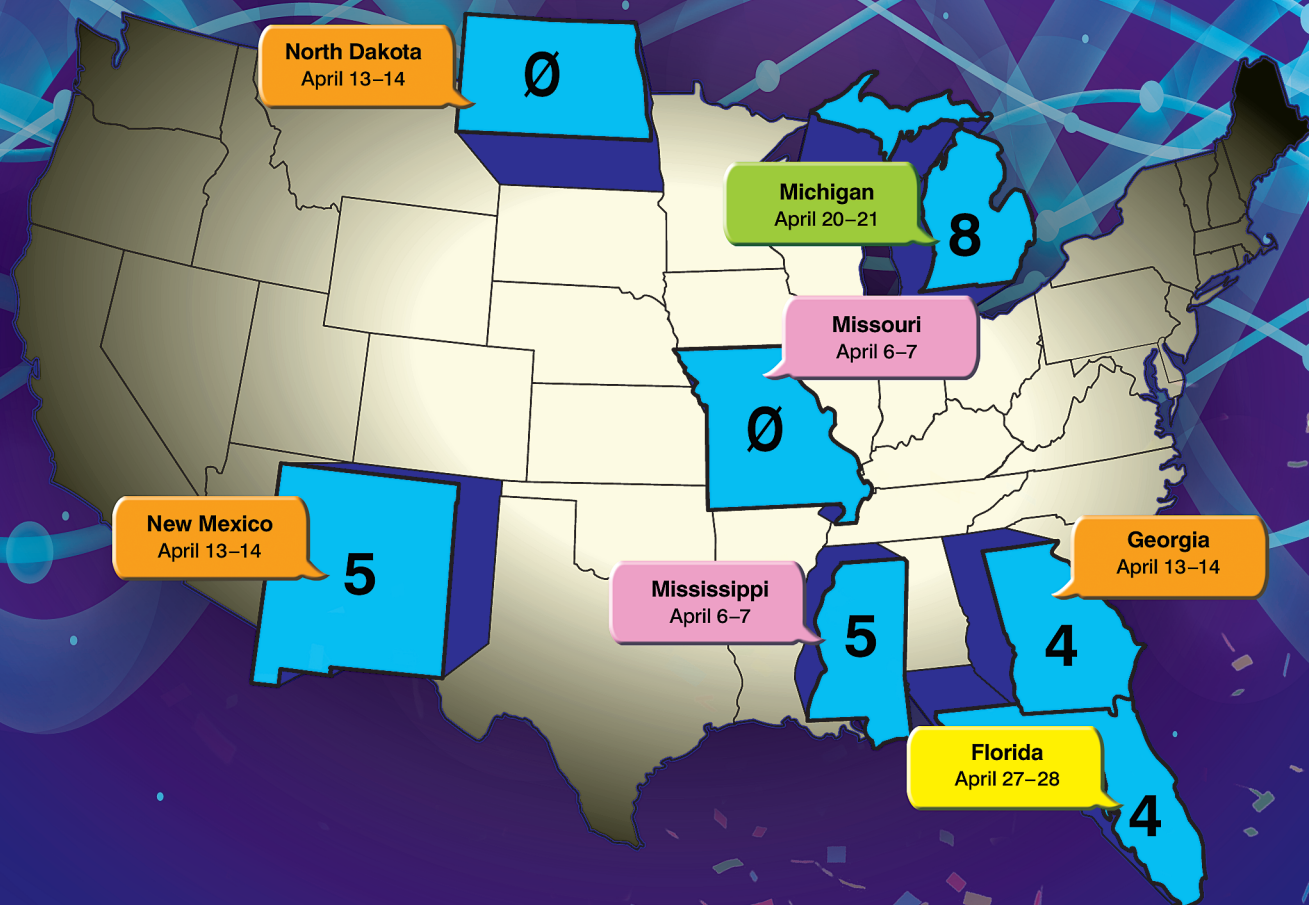


State and Regional QSO Parties

Something for Everybody

Whether you approach them as a contest or just some on-air fun, it's easy to get involved with these events that enliven the bands year 'round.



Hal Kennedy, N4GG

Highly appreciated by those that know about them, state and regional QSO parties are an on-air activity that many operators have yet to discover. All 50 states have one, and operators can choose how they want to participate in these events, treating them as if they are low-key parties, contests, or both. There will be a few stations going all-out, but even if you dislike contesting, QSO parties are still an activity for you.

Benefits of Participation

There are many reasons to take part in a state or regional QSO party. As a low-key operating event, its biggest draw is to have fun with it, whether you're participating to say hello to old friends, encourage newcomers, or you're looking to fill in some counties or grid squares in your logbook.

Most QSO parties also provide the benefit of having one or more rover (mobile) stations that travel through different counties, and they can be worked each time they enter a new one (see the sidebar, "Increase Your Score County by County"). Following their progress is a lot of fun, can sharpen your state geographic knowledge, and can develop new friendships. Rovers drive many hours to give operators new counties, and supporting their efforts can go a long way toward increasing your score.

No one should fear jumping in, because these events are often seen as a casual way to make contacts. There is a lot of participation by operators that only get into one on-air activity a year — the QSO party for their state. Even as a hardcore contest, I find that these events are the perfect opportunity to sharpen old skills or build new ones, all at a relaxed pace. If you are a newbie or an old-timer getting rusty, the parties provide the perfect learning atmosphere. Leisurely and hardcore participants mix very well in state QSO parties, and the high-speed all-out guys will invariably slow down for beginning operators.

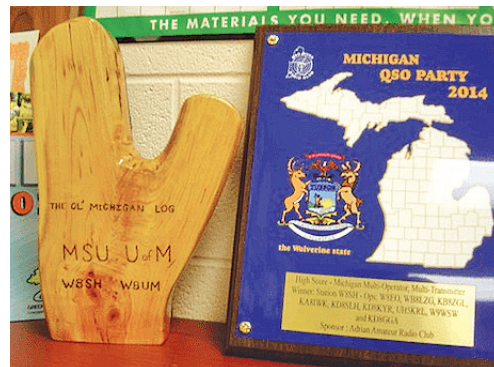
Awards

If you're interested in pursuing awards, the easiest way to win them is by participating in state QSO parties. Many contacts in state QSO parties are casual because many participants aren't trying to win anything, but sometimes, operators will win something without even trying.

Every state and regional QSO party issues dozens of paper certificates for various achievements. In 2014, I won a beautiful plaque from the New England QSO Party (NEQP), which arrived as a complete surprise.



Hal Kennedy, N4GG, received the New England QSO Party plaque for his efforts in the event. [Hal Kennedy, N4GG, photo]



The plaque (on right) awarded to the W8UM operating team after winning the 2014 Michigan QSO Party. As an added bonus, the University of Michigan Amateur Radio Club and rival Michigan State University Amateur Radio Club have developed their own trophy (on left) to be held by the winner each year. [Dan Romanchik, KB6NU, photo]

State and Regional QSO Party Schedule

January	Montana	May	New England QSO Party (ME, NH, VT, MA, CT, RI), 7th Call Area QSO Party (WY, UT, OR, WA, NV, MT, ID, AZ), Arkansas, Delaware, Indiana	September	Alabama, Washington State Salmon Run, New Hampshire, Maine, Texas, Colorado, Iowa, New Jersey, Tennessee
February	Vermont, Minnesota, North Carolina, South Carolina				
March	Idaho, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Virginia, Wisconsin	June	Kentucky, West Virginia	October	California, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New York, South Dakota
April	Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota	August	Maryland/DC, Hawaii, Ohio, Kansas		

For dates, times, and rules, check www.contestcalendar.com/stateparties.html.



Hal, N4GG, enjoying a coffee break during leisure participation in the Georgia QSO Party. [Hal Kennedy, N4GG, photo]

Increase Your Score County by County

Working counties is important! Every state QSO party is scored using a formula that includes number of QSOs × number of counties contacted. The details vary however, so check the rules. Some QSO parties let you count a county twice on each band — once for an SSB contact and once for CW. Working as many counties as possible on as many bands and modes as possible is a time-tested way to earn a plaque for your wall. Contacting the roving mobile stations is your key to maximizing county totals.

Other awards are more extravagant and specific to the state. For instance, the California QSO Party (CQP) awards a bottle of California wine to each of the top 20 scorers from outside the state, and the NEQP flies a lobster dinner for two overnight to the out-of-state winner. Other states send handmade plaques shaped like their state, and Hawaii awards plaques shaped like surfboards. These awards are often won without much effort, but they can be very special and meaningful, offering an added incentive to join in the fun.

When you do win a plaque or award in any contest or QSO party, it would be nice to send a thank-you note to the award sponsor. Email is fine these days, but I still mail handwritten thank-you notes via the USPS. I've gotten comments about how appreciated those are, and when I sponsor plaques, the thank-you notes mean a great deal to me.

Choosing a QSO Party

There are state and regional QSO parties many weekends of the year (see the sidebar, "State and Regional QSO Party Schedule"), so you can schedule which ones you want to

participate in, and your options are abundant.

Times and days may vary, with some events running for a few hours throughout the weekend, and some taking place all day. Based on when you want to operate and the time you're willing to commit to the event, there will always be options for you. It is important to check the event's website for rules and times before operating in the QSO party.

See you in the next state or regional QSO party!

Tips on Deciphering Exchanges

For operators new to state QSO parties, it is important to understand the concept of *directed CQs*. A directed CQ is one where the CQing station is looking for a reply from a specific place. For example, in the Georgia QSO party (GQP), stations outside Georgia want to make contacts with Georgia, so they call "CQ GA" on CW, or "CQ Georgia" on SSB.

Stations inside Georgia would call "CQ GQP" on CW, or "CQ Georgia QSO Party" on SSB. In the GQP, I will sometimes call "CQ GQP de N4GG/CHER" on CW, indicating I am in Georgia, specifically in Cherokee County for those looking for my county.

When I am out of state and the QSO party is in a "4" calling area, known as the "4-land" (including Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida), I usually sign N4GG/GA to help other operators know that, while I have a "4-land" callsign, I'm not in the state they are looking for.

Nearly every logging program supports the state QSO parties and every county in the US has a four-letter abbreviation. Logging programs have the county lists built in. Keep the counties list close by to use as a cheat sheet during exchanges.

Amateur Extra Hal Kennedy, N4GG, has been licensed and on the air for 57 years. He received his BSEE from Lafayette College and an MS in management from the Sloan School at MIT. Now retired, Hal worked in the aerospace and defense industry for 30 years. Hal has won numerous awards as an active contester and DX chaser on all HF and VHF bands, and he particularly likes building and experimenting with wire antennas. Hal has written articles for *NCJ* and *QST*, and he is a contributor to both *The ARRL Handbook* and *The ARRL Antenna Book*. In 2010, Hal built "Blue Lightning," a replica 1910 rotary spark-gap transmitter that has been displayed at several hamfests. Hal can be reached at n4gg@arrl.net.

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