



November 7, 2023

Senator Mary Felzkowski
Room 415 South, State Capitol
PO Box 7882
Madison, WI 53707

Subject: Enhanced Wake Regulation - LRB-3518

Dear Ms. Felzkowski:

Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area (FOECLA) is a nonprofit lake association representing more than 300 member households in Douglas and Bayfield counties. There are 22 lakes within the FOECLA service area ranging in size from 50 to 1,000 acres. Our members include lake owners with recreational lake interests including boating, related water sports, and fishing who wish to preserve quality lake recreation for future generations.

FOECLA is writing this letter to express our serious concerns about LRB-3518, whose draft version would allow wake boats to operate as close as 200 feet from shore. Because wake surfing has been shown to disturb pollutants embedded in lake sediment as deep as 20 feet, we firmly believe it needs to be restricted to more than 700 feet from the shore and in a minimum water depth of 20 feet. In addition, we call for inspection access to wake boat bladders and water compartments to be designed into watercraft so boat landing monitors can verify the boats are free from invasive species.

Wake Surfing is a Threat to the Eau Claire Chain Area and Statewide Lakes

The Eau Claire Chain of Lakes faces many threats to its excellent water quality. Invasive species, shoreline erosion, and recreational conflicts are three key wake boat challenges we face today. Over the years, recreational boating has increased, and recently the introduction of large and powerful watercraft known as “wake boats” has brought a new and greater threat to our lakes. The extremely large waves created by the wake boats clearly produce exciting and entertaining recreation for a segment of the population; however, this activity comes at a cost to our lakes’ health and is inhibiting enjoyment of our lakes by other recreational users. The hazardous wakes and damaging waves produced by this powerful watercraft are larger than any waves ever experienced by our lakes’ shorelines, and new active erosion is evidence of this change. Our observations and concerns regarding wake boats include:

1. **Shoreline erosion** has increased since the introduction of wake boats on the lakes in the FOECLA service area. The University of Minnesota [St. Anthony Falls Hydraulic Laboratory study](#) suggested wake boats be operated a minimum of 500 feet from shore. The study also concluded that to attenuate maximum wave power to the level of a non-wakesurf boat the distance from shore needs to be greater than 600 feet (page 94). Other studies suggest it requires up to 950 feet ([Michigan DNR 2022](#)) from shore and in water 30 feet deep or deeper to dissipate the wakes and prevent scouring of the lake bottom.
2. **Aquatic Invasive Species** – Due to the design of wake boats, Clean Boats Clean Waters (CBCW) watercraft inspectors at boat ramps cannot inspect ballast tanks in the wake boats; hence, we have no assurance that tanks are being drained and invasive species are not being introduced to our lakes or transported from our lakes to other lakes.

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3. **Lake Bottom Scouring** – Wake boats operated in areas where the water depth is 20 feet or less disturb the lake’s aquatic environment by scouring the bottom, stirring up pollutants embedded in the sediments, uprooting plants and destroying fish habitat. Worse yet, the boat’s strong propeller wash uproots aquatic invasive plants and spreads them around the lakes.

Local Observations

First-hand reports of damaging activities in our area, communicated to us by lakeshore owners, include:

1. “After an afternoon of a wake boat operating in a shallow bay, there were acres of aquatic plants floating on the water surface; roots were still attached to the plants.”
2. “Large waves from wake boats impacting our shoreline caused five mature birch trees to tumble into the lake leaving a gap in the shoreline that quickly eroded more by the large wave action.”
3. “We lost two feet of shoreline in some spots along our all-natural tree and shrub shoreline as a result of the introduction of wake boats.”
4. “Since the introduction of wake boats on our lake, large waves have gone over the natural 18-inch-high-vertical-shoreline-berm resulting in rapid shoreline erosion.”
5. “The shoreline has been undercut by large wave action, causing the once level shelf to slant toward the lake, with sand eroded from the shoreline covering up gravel walleye spawning beds.”
6. “We were forced to install costly shoreline stabilization measures along 110 feet of our shoreline to stabilize and protect the shoreline.”
7. “A kayak on Upper Eau Claire Lake was swamped by the immense wave created by the wake boat.”
8. “The wake washed the loon eggs from the nest on Lake Nebagamon; then loons left the lake.”

Recommendations

1. Restrict wake boat operations to more than 700 feet from shore or better yet, to larger lakes of adequate acreage to allow enough distance from shore to dissipate wave energy before it reaches the shoreline and causes erosion and property damage. We recommend limiting enhanced wakes to lakes 1,500 acres in size or larger.
2. Further, we recommend enhanced wakes not be allowed in water depths less than 20 feet; as noted above, studies have shown that propeller wash easily reaches 20 feet below the water surface.
3. Additionally, we recommend that wake boats provide inspection access to ballast water tanks or bladders so that CBCW inspectors can confirm that tanks are completely drained and free from invasives before launching and retrieving the boat from the lake. Without this capability, we risk the transport of aquatic invasive species across the state.
4. We recommend that the state legislature move forward quickly and with vigor to protect the ecology of our lakes.

Thank you for considering our concerns. We recognize the inherent rights of every citizen to enjoy and participate in water recreation. We also believe it is of utmost importance that the lakes be protected so that everyone, current and future recreationists, may enjoy the lakes of our state. We urge you to take action that you have within your power to protect our lakes.

Sincerely,



Jim Bakken, President
Friends of the Eau Claire Lakes Area