

Washburn County Lakes and Rivers Article

Regulation Of Enhanced Wakes

By Cathie Erickson

There has been considerable recent activity across Wisconsin with the goal of getting appropriate regulation to reduce environmental and safety impacts of enhanced wakes. Meanwhile, wake boats are becoming more powerful and more common.

A new, rapidly growing coalition focused on protecting Wisconsin's lakes was announced in August by five statewide organizations. The founding members of the coalition are the Wisconsin Lakes Association, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Lakes At Stake Wisconsin, Last Wilderness Alliance, and Wisconsin's Green Fire. WCLRA has joined the coalition along with numerous other water-protection organizations, anglers, advocates for local control, and lake property landowners.

The coalition's principles include:

700 ft. from shore -- Wake-enhanced boating activities should occur at least 700' from any shoreline.

30-ft. depth -- Wake-enhanced boating activities should occur in water depths of no less than 30'.

Prevent the transfer of invasive species in ballast tanks -- Boats moving from lake-to-lake must have proof of decontaminated ballast tanks before entering lakes.

Local control -- Local municipalities' existing right to enact and maintain local ordinances that are more restrictive than these state minimums shall be preserved.

One coalition member, the Last Wilderness Alliance (LWA), is assisting Wisconsin towns and their lake organizations with the process of developing local ordinances to regulate enhanced wakes. LWA has developed a standard template that local governments can use to reduce the work involved. Having uniform ordinances around the state avoids the confusion that could be caused by implementation of ordinances with vastly different language. Several towns and lake organizations in Washburn County have received assistance from LWA volunteers.

State legislators are also discussing the impacts of enhanced wakes and considering what type of regulations would be most appropriate and effective. It would not be surprising to see new legislation proposed in 2025. But at this time nobody knows what will be proposed or the likelihood of passage.

WCLRA will continue to monitor these developments. If you have questions or comments on this topic, contact Cathie Erickson at CathieErickson@gmail.com.

