

PROTECTING VERMONT LAKES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

BY MANAGING THE IMPACTS OF WAKE BOATS AND THEIR ENHANCED WAVES

Developed by the *Responsible Wakes for Vermont Lakes* group: responsiblewakesvt@gmail.com

Issues Presented by Wake Boats and Enhanced Waves: Artificially enhanced wakes created by wake boats and wake-enhancing devices can cause environmental damage, degrade water quality, create safety hazards for people in or on the water and near shore, and cause physical damage to property and shorelines.

What are Wake Boats: Wake boats are powerful motorboats designed to produce large wakes to enhance recreational activities such as wakeboarding and wake surfing. These boats were introduced in the 1980s, became popular in the 1990s and are now growing in popularity.

Reasons to Manage Wake Boat Usage: The wave energy of these enhanced wakes is much greater than that produced by other boats or by wind-driven waves. Wakes can be 4 to 5 feet in height.

The thrust from a wake boat engine is powerful and angled down toward the lake bottom. It can reach down 20 feet, scouring the bottom and causing significant disruptions below the surface of the water.

Environmental effects:

- Invasive species introduction (from lake-to-lake transport in ballast tanks) and proliferation through fragmentation
- Shoreline erosion
- Increased algal blooms due to stirred-up sediment, including phosphorous, which adds nutrients to the water
- Habitat destruction, aquatic plant disruption and threat to wildlife (turtles, amphibians, nesting loons, etc.)

Economic impacts:

- Damage to shoreline buffers -- trees, shrubs, natural borders and homeowner plantings
- Damage to property -- docks, boats, lifts, etc.
- Diminished property values
- Reduced tax base
- Threat to tourism from adverse impacts

Safety concerns:

- Personal injury to swimmers, anglers and other boaters
- Obscured forward vision resulting from boat operation in enhanced-wave mode (heavy ballast weighs down the stern and causes the bow to rise, blocking ability to see swimmers or small watercraft in the path of the boat.)

What can be done about managing wake boats and wake boat activities in Vermont?

In many other states, the adverse impacts of wake boats and wake boat activities have increased significantly over time. At least 15 states and the province of Quebec are considering artificial wake-enhancement restrictions. Vermont needs to address these issues before they become unmanageable. Education is essential – BUT NOT ENOUGH – to prevent the damage caused by enhanced wakes. There is growing momentum across the US and Canada to address the environmental and safety impacts of wake-enhanced water sports. Vermont needs to join this effort and develop restrictions based on water depth as well as distance from shore, other watercraft and other public uses -- particularly on small and/or shallow lakes and ponds. *Efforts to manage wake boats and the impact of large and enhanced boat waves are not intended to prohibit wake boats or wake-riding sports in Vermont. There are appropriate bodies of water in Vermont for these boats and activities. Small or shallow lakes and ponds are inappropriate for wake boats and wake sports.*

More detailed information can be found by watching our July 14, 2021 Sierra Club presentation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXBtAJyqStM>