

Special Report: DNR on Wake Boat

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Protecting Michigan's Lakes & Streams

Special DNR Report

Wake Boats:

Concerns and recommendations related to natural resource management in Michigan waters

Today DNR Fisheries Division released Fisheries Report 37, "Wake boats: concerns and recommendations related to natural resource management in Michigan waters." With 3,300 miles of Great Lakes shoreline and more than 10,000 inland lakes, Michigan welcomes millions of boaters, anglers and other water-based recreationists every year. Wake boating, and towing surfers or wakeboarders behind wake boats, is an increasingly popular activity. These boats use ballast and other technologies to generate significantly larger wakes for wakeboarders to jump. Over time, though, these types of boats can potentially harm the environment.

New research compiled in the report shows that operation of wake boats can potentially threaten lake health. Several recent studies show that wake boats can produce waves of 1.7 to 17 times the energy of those created by other comparably sized power boats, and these generated waves take much longer to decrease in size, too – between 225 feet to 900 feet from the boat. These

larger waves can damage property and cause shoreline erosion, decrease water clarity and plant abundance, and add excess nutrients that contribute to poor water quality.

Another design feature on wake boats directs water from the boat's propeller toward the lake bottom. This water can generate turbulence that can kick up bottom sediments at much greater depths, which decreases water clarity and quality. Additionally, the water ballast systems in wake boats are easy places for aquatic invasive species, such as zebra mussels, to catch a ride and spread to other locations.

We know that wake boat operators want to enjoy time spent on clean, healthy lakes, just like everyone else who visits Michigan's waters. We've learned a lot in the last few years about the detrimental effects these boats can have on the environment, and these guidelines can help wake boaters do their part to protect our lakes.

To protect the health of Michigan's waters, and the fish and plant life that rely on them, through this report DNR Fisheries recommends that wake boaters should remember these three simple steps:

- When wakesurfing or wakeboarding, during which boat speed, wave shapers and/or ballast are used to increase wave height, operate at least 500 feet from docks or the shoreline, regardless of water depth.
- When wakesurfing or wakeboarding, never operate in water less than 15 feet deep.
- Completely drain ballast tanks before transporting a watercraft over land.

This summary of the report was provided by one of the authors:

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[You can find the full report here](#)

Michigan Lakes and Streams Association looks forward to working with legislators using these recommendations to help protect our inland waters from potential harm from large wakes.

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