

MEETING MINUTES
Town of Spider Lake
Health, Safety and Environment Committee
June 18, 2026

1. The meeting was called to order at 4:00 pm by Chair Johnson. In attendance: Berkopec, Johnson, Lawton, Thearin and Amery.
2. Agenda approval. Motion by Thearin to approve an amended agenda, seconded by Berkopec. Motion carried.
3. Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Approve minutes from May 5, 2026 meeting. Motion to approve by Berkopec, seconded by Amery. Motion carried.
5. Discussion of letter and material from WWSC (WI Watersports Coalition) concerning Wake Enhancement Activity

A document titled "WHY ARE TOWNS AND LAKE GROUPS BEING PRESSURED TO ADOPT WAKE ORDINANCES?" was discussed. This document (copy attached) was forwarded to us by the Wisconsin Watersports Coalition, with the request that it be reviewed at the Town level. A summary of committee findings based on a review of the document, including a review of the source document used to support the Coalitions position, was also discussed (copy attached).

Based on this review, the Committee recommends to the Board that no change in the current wake enhanced ordinance be made at this time.

6. Discussion of letter regarding TOSL Boating Ordinance 2025-1

The Committee reviewed a letter from Attorney Anders B. Helquist of the Weld Riley law firm in Eau Claire. Mr. Helquist represents "several riparian owners on Spider Lake that own wake boats that have reached out to us and would like to continue use of their wake boats for wake surfing on Spider Lake." Mr. Helquist joined the meeting via Zoom and was invited to outline his client's interests and their request for a meeting to discuss them further. Chairman Johnson noted that he schedules regular meeting hours at the Town Hall that are open to anyone who wants an audience with him, offering this same opportunity to Attorney Helquist and his clients.

7. Update on Public Safety Officer

Chairman Johnson reported on the search for a Public Safety Officer to support the Town's efforts to enforce the boating ordinances. To date, no qualified candidates have expressed an interest in this position. The Committee discussed additional advertising and alternative means of accomplishing the purposes of this role. A program to enhance community response to observed boating ordinance infractions was discussed as an additional tool for augmenting the Town's ordinance education and communication program (see attached draft). Efforts to find a strong candidate will continue.

8. Discussion of Amendment to Ordinance 2024-2 to specifically include Ghost Lake as a "Quiet Lake" (10 mph) (Motion)

Chairman Johnson outlined proposed amendments to Ordinance 2024-2, as follows:

- a. Under Section 4, item d: delete the word "surfboard"
- b. Under Section 5: Add Ghost Lake to Lost Land and Teal Lakes; and, revise the wording from "less than 50 acres." to "less than 100 acres."

It was noted that these changes do not require an advisory letter from the Wisconsin DNR.

Motion made by Amery for approval of proposed amendments, seconded by Thearin. Motion carried.

9. Website Update

Updates to the Town website regarding the Health, Safety and Environment Committee were discussed. Bob Berkopec agreed to work on them.

10. Adjournment

Amery moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Thearin. Motion carried.

Motion Meeting adjourned at 5:25 pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Bill Amery, Vice Chair

WISCONSIN WATERSPORTS COALITION

WHY ARE TOWNS AND LAKE GROUPS BEING PRESSURED TO ADOPT WAKE ORDINANCES?

A coordinated campaign is underway to persuade Wisconsin towns and lake organizations to adopt a pre-packaged “model ordinance” before conducting the due diligence necessary to determine whether restrictions are justified, effective, enforceable, or even needed.

Activist groups frequently portray Wisconsin lakes as facing an urgent and immediate threat from wake-surfing boats and encourage local governments to act quickly. However, many of the claims used to justify these ordinances are either unsupported, exaggerated, or contradicted by available scientific evidence.

Before restricting the activities of lake users, local officials should require objective evidence that a measurable problem exists on their specific lake, that wake-surfing activity is responsible for that problem, and that existing laws are inadequate to address it. Absent that evidence, regulation becomes a solution in search of a problem.

The following compares the most common claims made in support of wake ordinances with the available evidence.

CLAIM: “THESE ORDINANCES WILL NEVER BE LEGALLY CHALLENGED, AND WE WILL DEFEND ANY LAWSUIT FREE OF CHARGE TO THE TOWN.”

- Lawsuits regarding wake surfing ordinances are occurring throughout Wisconsin.
- There are at least 9 current, pending, or settled lawsuits involving wake surfing ordinances in Wisconsin...with more coming.
- The activist’s attempts to “intervene” in the initial lawsuit was dismissed by a Federal Judge, advocacy interests like those asserted by the Alliance are not sufficient to support intervention as of right.

CLAIM: WAKE BOATS ARE A MAJOR DRIVER OF AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS).

- Wisconsin DNR leadership has publicly stated available research does not support claims that wake boats uniquely or disproportional spread aquatic invasives species.
- AIS existed in Wisconsin long before wake boats became popular.
- Data indicates the number of newly invaded lakes has declined over the past decade.
- Natural Resources Board 1/2026, Deputy Secretary Little stated:
“In spite of what you’ve heard over the past several years from individuals and organizations who have come before the NRB, the research has not demonstrated that wake boats uniquely or disproportionately drive AIS spread compared to other watercraft.”

CLAIM: WISCONSIN LAKES ARE AT IMMEDIATE RISK FROM WAKE BOATS.

- Activists have yet to identify through Aquatic Plant Management Plans and WDNR trophic state Data a lake exhibiting long term health degradation attributed to wake boats.
- There is no evidence that Wisconsin lakes are experiencing a statewide water quality crisis caused by wake-surfing activity. [Source WDNR Water Quality Reports online](#)
- WDNR has permitted weed cutting for decades on hundreds of Wisconsin lakes. Harvesting occurs repeatedly in shallow near-shore areas, the activity can disturb sediments, fragment plants, alter habitat, and resuspend nutrients

CLAIM: “ARTIFICIALLY ENHANCED WAKES” ARE UNIQUELY DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER BOATING ACTIVITY.

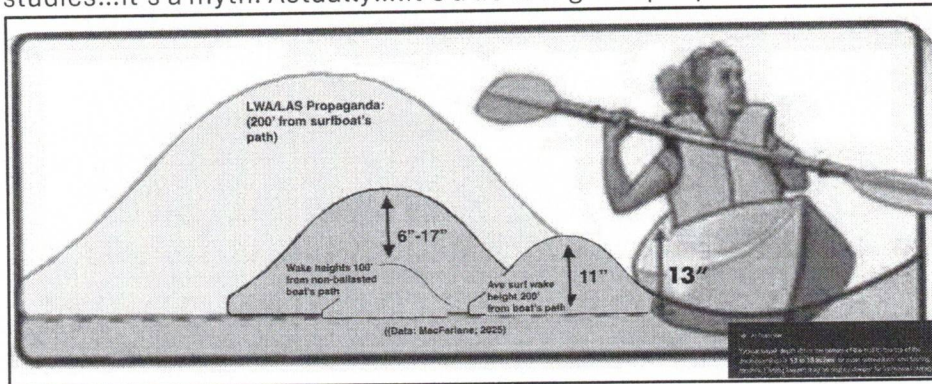
- “Artificially Enhanced Wakes” is an activist-created term rather than a recognized scientific or legal classification, to single out wake boats as “different”.

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- All motorized boats are capable of generating significant wakes under certain operating conditions (slow cruising, kids skiing and tubing etc).
- Many proposed ordinances single out wake-surfing boats while exempting other vessels capable of producing comparable wave height and energy.

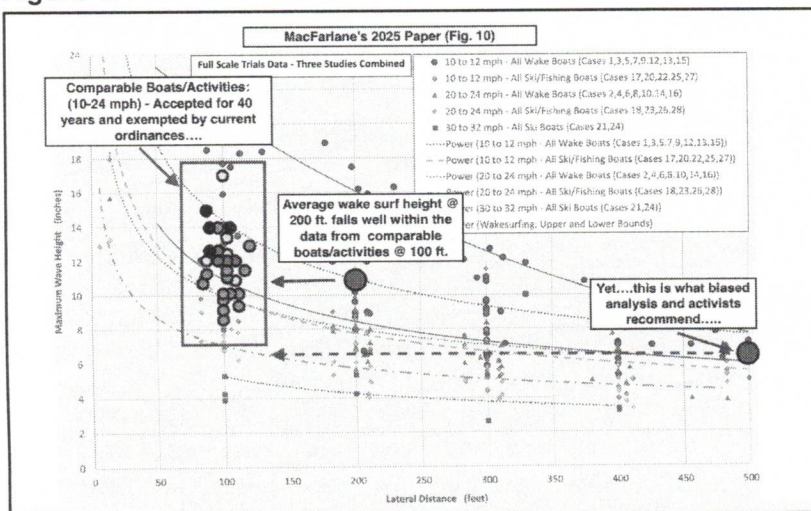
CLAIM: WAKE BOATS CREATE MASSIVE 4-FOOT WAVES. WAKE BOATS ARE DESTROYING SHORELINES AND REQUIRE 500-FOOT SETBACKS.

- The frequently cited “4–5 foot wake” by activists has not been documented in published studies...it’s a myth. Actually....it’s a lie to frighten people.



- Wake-surf waves are highly unstable and diminish rapidly with distance. While wave heights measured directly behind a wake boat average approximately 30 inches, the surf wave 100 feet from the boat averages approximately 14 inches. Comparable boats and activities without ballast systems, including tubing and skiing, have produced waves measuring 12–17 inches at the same distance (Figure 1).
- To date, neither activists nor researchers have identified any extensive shoreline that has been demonstrably affected by wake-surfing activity from the approximately 1% of boats equipped for the sport. Instead, concerns have largely been based on well-coached anecdotal observations and speculation rather than documented evidence.
- The measured data does not support the substantially larger setbacks being advanced by activists and researchers. Instead, the evidence indicates that a setback—an additional 100 feet—greater than existing requirements for comparable boating activities would align with the observed wave characteristics existing on lakes today and documented in the studies. (Figure 1)

Figure 1.



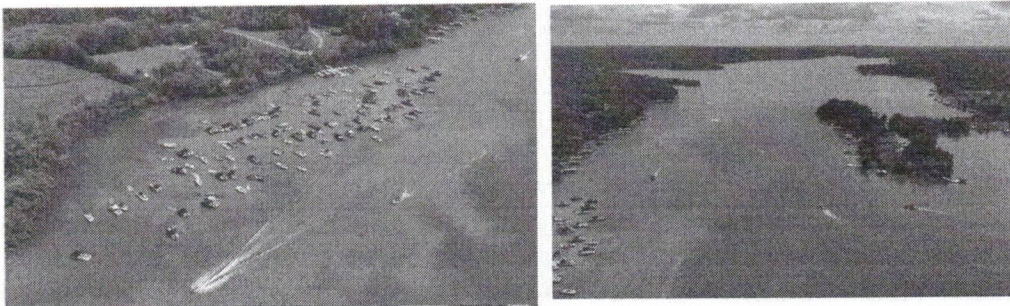
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Utilizing MacFarlane's 2025 data, the highlighted data points represent comparable boats and/or activities resulting in wave heights ranging from 8-17". The average surf wave height from all three studies at 200' from shore was approximately 11", well within the range of comparable boats and activities 100' from shore (Figure 1). In fact, this is where MacFarlane acknowledges comparable boats cruising at 20-24 mph and his recommendation was 250 ft. Unfortunately, MacFarlane ignored a similar activities comparison which would have reduced his recommendation distance further.

CLAIM: WAKE BOATS ARE DESTROYING LAKE BOTTOMS. WAKE SURFING REQUIRES A MINIMUM DEPTH OF 25 FEET.

- Activists and researchers have not identified or documented a lake where wake-surfing activity alone has been shown to cause long-term ecological impacts. As a result, concerns are often based on observations of sediment resuspension rather than documented evidence of lasting ecological harm.
- A depth requirement premised on eliminating all sediment suspension creates an unrealistic standard that goes beyond what is required of any other activity on the lake, often in more shallow waters

Figure 2. Source SWRPC Big Cedar Lake



Wake surfing occurs on Big Cedar Lake in the deep part of the lake in the top of the right-hand picture. The sediment resuspension in the left picture is allowed in shallow waters. Sand bar hopping and other activities in shallow water happen throughout Wisconsin Lakes continuously.

- Much of the evidence presented consists of videos showing temporary sediment resuspension, localized scouring, or vegetation disturbance. While these observations demonstrate that disturbance can occur, they do not establish long-term ecological harm, or a specific correlation to a wake surfing boat.
- Multiple studies have failed to measure meaningful differences in sediment resuspension associated with wake surfing beyond approximately 14 feet of water depth. To date, no study has established a direct connection between wake-surfing-related sediment disturbance and measurable long-term degradation of lake health.
- Sediment disturbance is a well-documented and common occurrence on lakes. Studies dating back to the 1970s have identified sediment resuspension from numerous natural and recreational sources (Figure 2), including:
 - ❖ Wind, ice action, and stormwater runoff
 - ❖ Any boat operating in shallow water (less than 10-15 feet).
 - ❖ Rapid acceleration from piers, launches, or near-shore locations
 - ❖ Anchoring and anchor dragging
 - ❖ Mechanical weed-cutting and weed-harvesting operations, which have been conducted on Wisconsin lakes for decades under permits issued by the Wisconsin DNR

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CLAIM: WAKE BOATS CREATE SIGNIFICANT SAFETY HAZARDS.

- Wake boats are federally approved vessels that are specifically designed and manufactured for wake-surfing activities.
- The U.S. Coast Guard permits the manufacture, sale, and operation of wake boats for their intended purpose. Wake boats do not present an inherent visibility or operational hazard that would prevent them from meeting applicable federal safety standards.
- The Wisconsin DNR annually identifies the state's most significant boating safety concerns. Wake boats and wake-surfing activity have not been identified among Wisconsin's primary boating safety issues.
- To date, concerns regarding wake-surfing safety have largely been based on anecdotal complaints rather than documented statewide accident trends or evidence demonstrating a unique safety risk associated with wake boats.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The issue before local governments is not whether wake boats alone can create waves, resuspend sediment, or contribute to user conflicts. All forms of boating can create impacts under certain conditions.

The real question is whether proposed ordinances are supported by measurable evidence, documented local impacts, and enforceable standards.

Local governments should conduct their own due diligence before adopting restrictions that affect property owners, businesses, and recreational users.

Public policy should be based on evidence, not fear. Facts, not anecdotes. Science, not activists' speculation.

To: Quent Johnson, Chair, TOSL Health, Safety and Environment Committee

From: Bill Amery, Member, TOSL Health, Safety and Environment Committee

Date: June 14, 2026

Re: Response to document from Wisconsin Watersports Coalition on Wake Ordinances

In preparation for our upcoming meeting, I reviewed the document "WHY ARE TOWNS AND LAKE GROUPS BEING PRESSURED TO ADOPT WAKE ORDINANCES?", that was sent to us by group identifying as the WISCONSIN WATERSPORTS COALITION (Coalition).

Based on my review, the major issues presented in this document are familiar to us and were evaluated by the Board in our deliberations on establishing an enhanced wake ordinance. What is new or different, and what permeates this document, is an overarching argument that enhanced wake ordinances are wrong because they are not based upon objective evidence, and that Wisconsin towns are being influenced by activists to enact policies that are "unsupported, exaggerated, or contradicted by available scientific evidence."

I agree with the Coalition that using objective/scientific evidence is very important. Unfortunately, this document doesn't offer much of it. Instead, the importance of scientifically proving the damage by wake enhanced activities is used as a hammer to drive home the same point -- that in the absence of proof we should do nothing. The argument goes something like this: *Decisions should be made on scientific evidence, but there is none, or what there is has been misinterpreted by activists and researchers; therefore, until there is incontrovertible scientific evidence/proof that damage is being done, all wake ordinances are wrong.* My problem with using this logic is that we would do nothing until there is proof, that we all agree on, of wake enhanced activities have causing serious problems in our lakes. By then, the damage will be done, and the kind of damage we are talking about here may be irreversible. To me, this approach would be irresponsible -- it is bad public policy, and is not what the Town wants from its leadership.

So, while I am unconvinced by the Coalition's broader argument, I do feel it is important to analyze new data as it becomes available. The objective or scientific evidence that is referenced in the Coalition document is a research paper entitled "Wakesurfing, Wakeboarding, and Waterskiing: A Comparison of Wake Characteristics". The author is Gregor J. McFarlane, and he is associated with the Australian Maritime College, University of Tasmania, Australia. The paper was published in the Australian journal River Research and Applications. I downloaded the entire study and will make it available to the Committee.

This paper is a compilation of engineering/scientific data from three studies: 1. The study commissioned by the WSIA, 2. The St Anthony Falls Laboratory/University of Minnesota study

and 3. The author's own study data. The first two studies are familiar to us, having been part of the BOAHC study and Board deliberations.

The Coalition document focuses specifically on one chart in the McFarlane paper -- Figure 10. The following is excerpted from their document:

"The measured data does not support the substantially larger setbacks being advanced by activists and researchers. Instead, the evidence indicates that a setback—an additional 100 feet—greater than existing requirements for comparable boating activities would align with the observed wave characteristics existing on lakes today and documented in the studies. (Figure 1)

Utilizing MacFarlane's 2025 data, the highlighted data points represent comparable boats and/or activities resulting in wave heights ranging from 8-17". The average surf wave height from all three studies at 200' from shore was approximately 11", well within the range of comparable boats and activities 100' from shore (Figure 1). In fact, this is where MacFarlane acknowledges comparable boats cruising at 20-24 mph and his recommendation was 250 ft. Unfortunately, MacFarlane ignored a similar activities comparison which would have reduced his recommendation distance further."

My review yielded several discrepancies we should investigate, if we decide to take this matter further:

1. The chart from McFarlane's paper (Figure 10 in his original paper) has been altered in the graphic presented in the Coalition document (their Figure 1).
 - a. McFarlane draws none of the conclusions that were added in the Coalition amended version. This looks like the Coalition used selected parts of raw data from the McFarlane presentation and came up with their own interpretation.
 - b. The Coalition graphic speaks to "average" wave heights. McFarlane makes no reference to average wave height. Generally speaking, using average as a statistical measure can be problematic, which may be why McFarlane doesn't use it. Think tidal waves – they do massive devastation without changing the average wave height very much.
 - c. McFarlane's reference to a 250' setback distance (page 1203) may not be related to Figure 10 and is not a "recommendation" as stated in the Coalition document.
2. McFarlane's **actual** conclusions were omitted in the Coalition document. His conclusions were that wave energy, rather than wave height, may be a more rational benchmark, and that this would suggest setback distance of 350 or perhaps 500 feet. Here is an excerpt from his paper (highlights added in yellow):

Conclusions

“A comparison of full-scale trials from three separate studies has confirmed that wake boats, either ballasted or unballasted, when operating around 10–12 mph, generally generate significantly higher and more energetic waves than “conventional” recreational craft operating within higher speed zones of 20 mph and above.

The data presented may assist in defining rational management options for waterways where the waves generated by sporting activities such as wakesurfing may be causing issues related to shoreline erosion, damage to maritime structures, and/or presenting a danger to other users of the waterway.

The leading advocate for the towed water sports industry in the USA, the WSIA, recommends wakesurfers stay at least 200 ft away from the shoreline, docks, or other structures. The appropriateness of this distance can be examined using the presented data from multiple locations from the sailing line of the test boats and compared against a suitable benchmark. It is likely that some rational benchmarks may recommend a greater distance, likely to be in excess of 350 ft when considering wave height and 500 ft when considering wave energy. In the vast majority of cases where vessel wave wake is being assessed, the author believes wave energy to be a notably more appropriate measure than wave height for the reasons presented in Section 1.2.”

Coincidentally, our Board did consider allowing wake enhanced activities with a 500 ft setback. As I recall, and based on recommendations from the BOAHC study, we concluded that the Spider Lake chain is made up of lakes that do not have areas large and deep enough to accommodate the 500 ft option.

3. The Coalition document refers to a 200 ft measurement of wave height and argues this is meaningful in relation to the 100 ft measures in Mcfarlane’s data. It is worth noting that Mcfarlane commented on possible bias in that the 200 ft setback recommendation originated with the WSIA and was not supported by their study’s data. Here is an excerpt from the Mcfarlane paper, found on page 1193:

“The WSIA report includes some valuable data. However, the report itself may be tainted by bias, as a number of the conclusions are not supported by the data presented. It appears that the consulting engineers commissioned by WSIA performed the study, but the WSIA may have made their own interpretation of the results from which they based their recommendations—most notably that wakesurf activities stay at least 200 ft from the shoreline, docks, or other structures. The following statement was available on the WSIA website:

“In 2015, Ocean Engineer and Naval Architect Clifford Goudey scientifically studied and collected wave energy data on the characteristics of boat wakes. WSIA analyzed the data to develop

recommendations to protect shorelines, docks and other personal property” (WSIA 2023).”

In conclusion, my analysis found nothing that would cause us to change our current position. I understand that the Coalition wants to eliminate enhanced wake ordinances, and I respect their right to pursue this goal. It does concern me, however, that objective data may be selectively interpreted to make their case. There are parts of their document I find questionable. That said, I am not an expert in these matters. Therefore, if we decide to pursue this further, I suggest we reach out to people with expertise in this area – perhaps members of the BOAHC group that have science or engineering backgrounds.

Draft Proposal for a Community Response Program to Monitor Compliance with TOSL Boating Ordinances

Background:

Going back to the 1960s, the Town of Spider Lake has relied upon community “policing” of its boating ordinances. To the community it was a satisfactory, if not particularly effective, way to encourage compliance. More recently things have changed, and Towns are expected to demonstrate that their boating ordinances are both *enforceable* and *being enforced*. This proposal is offered as a means to enhance the TOSL community response mechanism in a way that is better, inexpensive, provides useable data and does so without creating conflict or ill will.

Purpose:

This program will:

- Provide a way for community members to report ordinance infractions or activities that are not in compliance with TOSL boating ordinances
- Provide the Town Board with data to help assess boating ordinance compliance.
- Demonstrate the Town is actively monitoring its boating ordinances in ways that will enhance education and communication.

This program will not:

- Be used to enforce Town ordinances. This is a data reporting tool, not a tool for ordinance enforcement. No enforcement actions will be made based on reports received through this program.
- Record or retain details of reported events. To further underscore it is not an enforcement tool, no information or records of parties that may be violating an ordinance, nor any records or information on parties reporting a violation, will be retained. All submitted information will be discarded or destroyed. This is intended to discourage one neighbor “telling on” another neighbor, or any party feeling they have been unfairly accused of an infraction.
- This program is not intended to provide full and comprehensive reporting. That is, it is understood that not all infractions will be observed, and those infractions observed may not be reported. It is understood to be partial and imperfect data, with the notion that some information is better than no information at all.

Program Organization

- A summary of data will be submitted to the TOSL Board on a monthly basis (see attached reporting form).
- The source of information will include telephone message and email messages received via the “Hey Gov” feature of the website.
- An individual will be appointed by the Board to collect and report on all data. This individual will have no obligation to report specific details to the Board, however, he/or she may be asked to respond to ways to improve the quality of reporting for this program.
- This will be a trial program with a designated starting and ending date for its effectiveness to be evaluated.

TOSL Boating Ordinance Compliance -- Community Reporting						
Date	Body of Water	Description of Incident	Applicable Ordinance	Confirmed	Unconfirmed	Notes