

MINUTES OF MEETING
Kootenai County Waterways Advisory Board
June 12, 2025
Kootenai County Search & Rescue Building
10865 N Ramsey Rd
Hayden, Idaho 83835

MEMBERS PRESENT: Doug Harris, Michael Pelissero, Casey Price, Gary Schmidt, Tom Torgerson, Don Warner

STAFF PRESENT: Director Nick Snyder, Kootenai County Parks & Waterways; Sergeant Ryan Miller, Deputy Fresh, Deputy Mohawk, Kootenai County Sheriff's Office; Ranell Schwartz, Recording Secretary

OTHERS PRESENT: Doug Parker, Susan & Bob Stiger, Bethany & Lee Darough, Dan Redline, Dave Muise, KEA; Jim Stafford, Jose Jara, Sheri Scofield, Marcus & Lisa Maning

Chairman Harris called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. Advisory Board members declared no conflicts of interest.

MOTION: Michael Pelissero moved to approve the minutes of the March 20, 2025, meeting. The motion was seconded; all were in favor; the motion carried.

MOTION: Michael Pelissero moved to approve the minutes of the April 15, 2025, meeting. The motion was seconded; all were in favor; the motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

A. APPLICATION OF STATE BOATING LAWS TO THE SPOKANE RIVER

Susan Stiger presented new information about the Spokane River, the carrier capacity of the river, and new Idaho State boating laws about wake surfing. See attached. Chairman Harris relayed that Commissioner Duncan stated to him in 2023 that the only Spokane River issue the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) will consider for the next two years, is a possible ban on weekend towing. He also gave a brief history of the wake issues brought before the P&W Advisory Board and stated that this board recommended an amendment to the restricted zone designation in Resolution 2020-38, and if applicable, to add a 150 ft no tow zone from any structure, dock, or shoreline on the Spokane River and to rescind 2021-63 in December 2022. The BOCC subsequently unanimously passed a motion similar to above. There was some discussion. Jim Stafford asked what the BOCC was willing to consider and what the next steps were for that. He recommended making any new rules uniform, with no exceptions, so the Sheriff's Office can do their job. Sheri Schofield stated that she represents Concerned Citizens, a group that is against expansion (dock projects) on the Spokane River.

OLD BUSINESS

NONE

STAFF REPORTS

Sergeant Ryan Miller, from the Kootenai County Sheriff's Office stated that they do not have many marine deputies for the summer season. They have only six deputies that will make three teams for the season. He would like six teams. All their equipment is in good shape.

Director Nick Snyder, from the Parks & Waterways Department, stated that he was just notified that Waterways Resolutions for the last few years will be codified soon. The department is very busy with the summer season. New marine infrastructure will be installed at Upper Twin, Mica Bay, Gould's Landing and Bayview. The department's FY26 budget request includes an additional Park Ranger position. He will know this week if the Waterways Improvement Fund Grant for the Boat Garage

Replacement Project will be funded. He has heard that the RTP Grant for the Centennial Trail Phase I resurface project has been approved. Director Snyder stated there are 27,000 registered boats in Kootenai County. Power boating is big business in Kootenai County; boaters are voters, and to keep that in mind when considering what elected officials will approve.

FUTURE AGENDA TOPICS

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dave Muise from Kootenai Environment Alliance introduced himself and thanked this board for giving Susan the time to present this information.

The meeting adjourned at 10:09 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rarell Schwartz

Recording Secretary

What's New on the Spokane River?

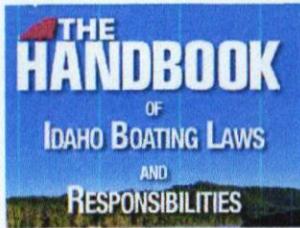
Susan Stiger, PE (June 2025)

- New Laws and Rules
 - State law and rules for Wakesurfing
 - Kootenai County “No Waterskiing Zone”
 - Out-of-State boats require invasive species inspection and decontamination before launch
- Updates on field studies with U of I and IWRRRI
 - Heavy metals and other contaminants
- Recreation levels continue to increase significantly – Carrying Capacity?
- Looking to the River's long-term health

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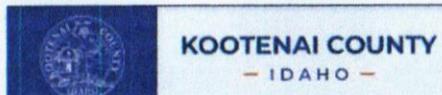
New Laws, Rules and Guides Affect Boating on Spokane River



- *Wakesurfing Behind a Boat (*new*)
coupled with
- *Interference with Navigation
- *Excessive wake restrictions



- Idaho Wake Responsibly
- *Stay at least 200 feet away
- *Minimize repetitive passes
- WSIA and manufacturers:
- *Wake surf in water at least 20' deep



Boating Rules & Regulations

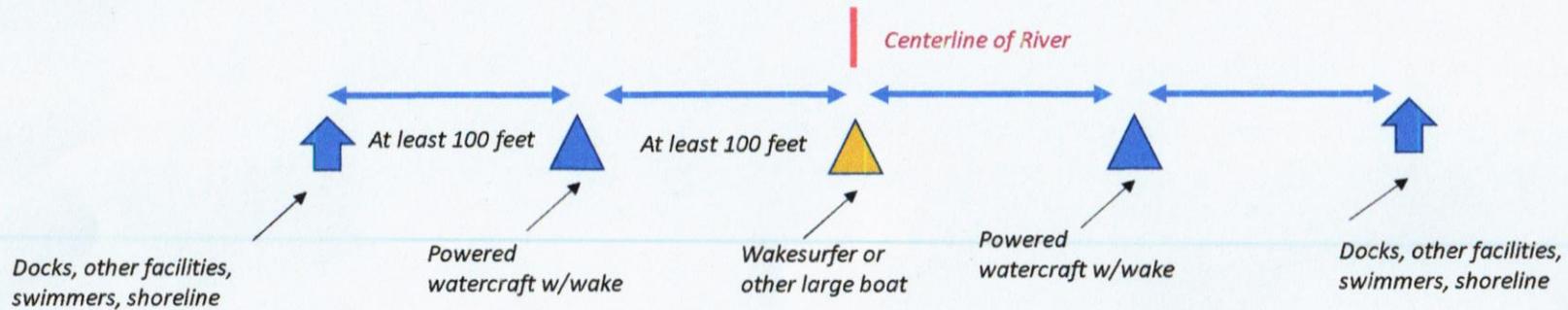
Resolution 2023-42
"No Waterskiing Zone"
on Spokane River

- *Wakesurf at least 100 feet away from docks, other vessels, swimmers, or other persons in the water
- *When towing operate so as not to create excessive wake
- *Unlawful to operate a vessel in a way that unreasonably or unnecessarily interferes with other vessels or free navigation
- *Be a responsible boat operator and respect shoreline property owners—at least 200 feet away
- *Wakesurf in water at least 20 feet deep
- *Prohibits towing (including surfing) within 150 feet of shore, dock or other structure

How to Apply to Narrow Waterways like the the Spokane River?

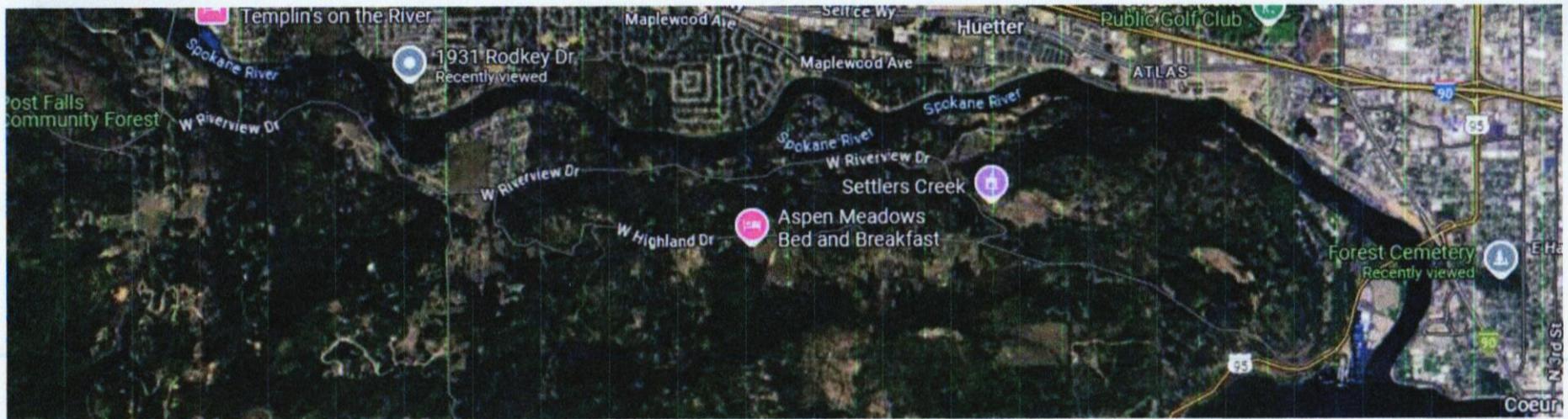
Idaho Boating Program Manager and Boating Law Administrator:

Boats engaged in wakesurfing and other large boats with significant displacement are to operate in the center of the river with sufficient distance for another watercraft to legally travel on either side without having to give way



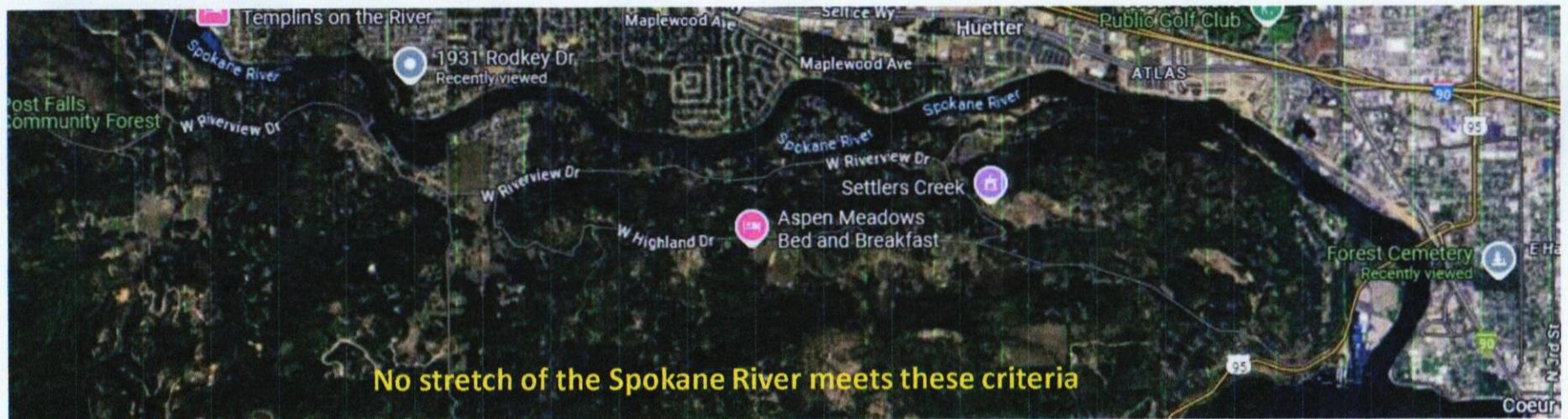
What Does that Mean Legally and Practically?

- Stretches of the River that are at least 550 -- 600 feet wide, *and*
- Water depth of at least 20 feet, *and*
- Enough distance for a reasonable wake surf run (>3 to 5 minutes based on input from experienced surfers)
- Stay in center of river, give way to other boats, minimize wake when returning for dropped surfer
- Extra caution around parks, camps, launch areas



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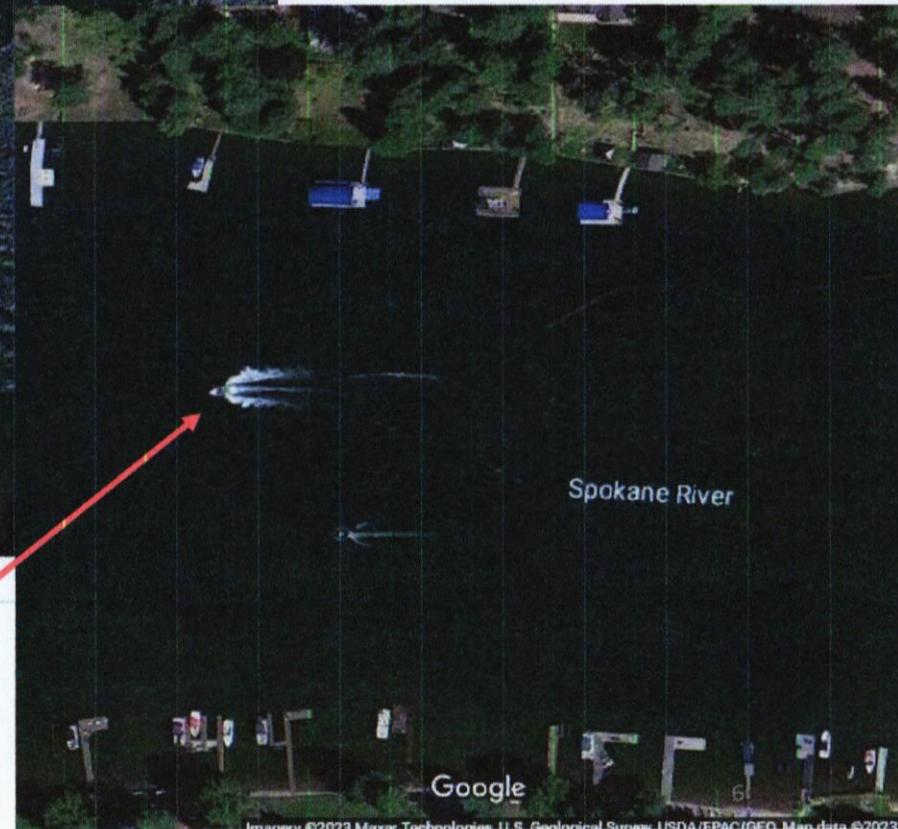
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Wake surfers should be directed to Lake Cd'A. Other large boats should take extreme care on the River. Those recreating and living on the Spokane River deserve the same protection as on all other waterways in Kootenai County



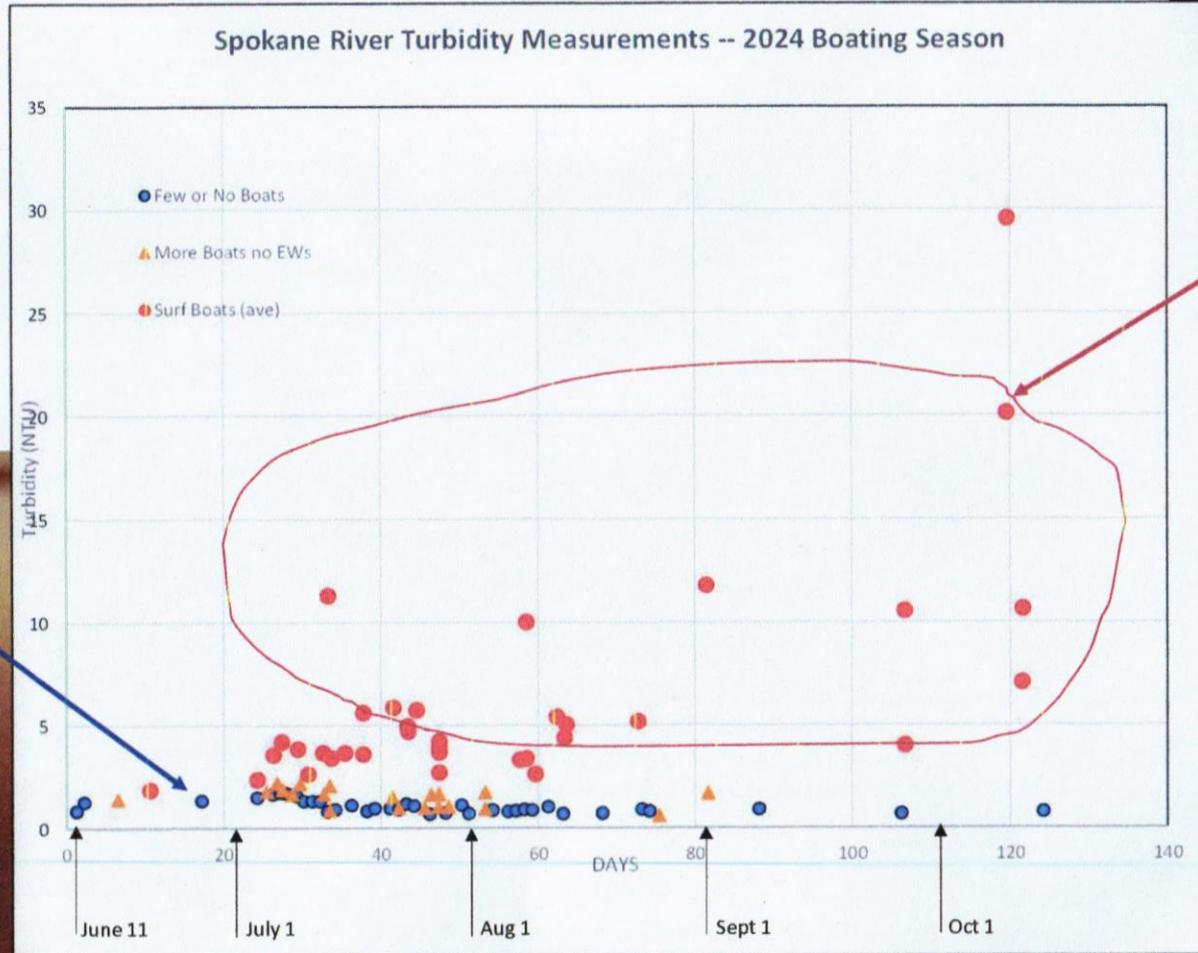
Large, powerful boat wakes interfere with navigation on the Spokane River
(satellite photos, same scale)



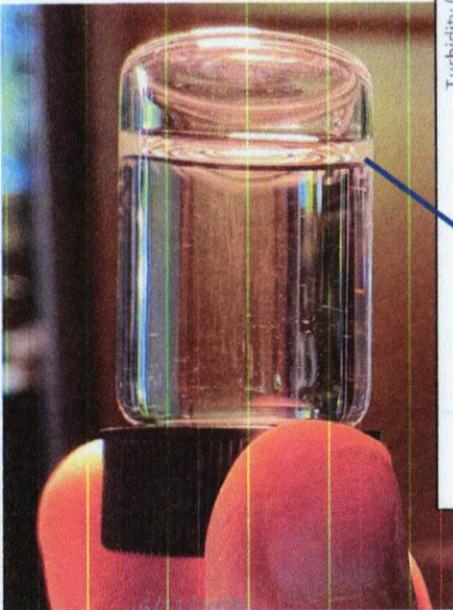
Boat making an excessive wake – **20 times more powerful** than a typical sport boat wake (photo on right). The difference in wakes is clearly visible, even on satellite photos. **Because the Spokane River is narrow, a single surf boat on the River makes it difficult for other boaters to safely cross the wake.**

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Surf Boats stir up more sediments than any other type of boat
(based on 4 years of data for U of I Bay Watchers)



U of I boat wake studies in near-shore areas to be continued summer 2025



Spokane River Sediments Contain the Same Heavy Metals and Other Contaminants as does Lake Coeur d'Alene

- **Contaminants pose little risk as long as river sediments are not disturbed**
- Large, powerful boat wakes can stir up sediments, scour the river bottom and destroy aquatic habitats at depths of 16 to 20 feet or more. Much of the River is not that deep.
- What's in the Spokane River?
 - INBRE sediment samples 2023
 - Lead as high as 200 ppm (at DEQ "contaminated" level, exceeds aquatic life protection level)
 - Zinc up to 8000 ppm (DEQ considers "high")
 - 2024 samples of surf boat wakes (same location)
 - Lead levels 10 times higher than in Cd'A Lake
(levels are of concern for both human and aquatic health)
 - Phosphorus 5 to 10 times higher than in Cd'A Lake
- Further studies are warranted

New Idaho Invasive Species Rules (2024)

Watercraft Inspections:

All watercraft from out-of-state must be inspected and decontaminated at a designated watercraft inspection station to ensure they are free of aquatic invasive species before launching.

Due to the location of the Huetter Boat Inspection Station on I-90 east of Post Falls, boaters can launch at Q'emiln Park and other river launches without passing an Idaho inspection station. The new State law requires out-of-state boats to travel to a state inspection station for inspection before they launch on Idaho waterways. Uninspected boats pose a risk to the aquatic health of the River and many boats launching on the Spokane River use the River as a route to Coeur d'Alene Lake, a further risk.

What can be done?

- **Enforce inspection rule at Q'emiln and commercial launch sites on the Spokane River**
- **KCSO should check out-of-state boats for proof of inspection (with support from the State)**
- **Expand education**
- **Idaho inspectors recognize boats with ballast tanks and similar equipment are very difficult to inspect and decontaminate – consider “home lake rule” in place in Vermont**

What is the River's Carrying Capacity? Balancing Competing Values on the Spokane River



- Power boat traffic more than doubled in 4 years; large boats on the River increased by a factor of 5
- Scientific-based guidelines indicate **the Spokane River is on the border between MODERATE RISK (suitable for power boating with restrictions) and HIGH RISK (unsuitable for power boating)**
- Expanding the number and size of “no wake” zones on the River concentrates and magnifies the detrimental impacts of motorized boating on the remaining sections of the River (a potential liability for the County)
- **KCSO: “What does the future look like? Specifically with the Spokane River, with the addition of docks and other structures, the river would have to become a ‘no wake zone’ for much of it...”**

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How Should the Myriad Issues on the Spokane River be Addressed Responsibly, Fairly, and Sustainably?

We can no longer ignore and avoid the issues

- **The River is at a tipping point** – multiple threats point to the need to take effective actions
 - Boat wakes and safety/erosion/heavy metals, invasive species, significant increases in recreation pressure and conflicts, continued shoreline development and restrictions
- **Actions now will help:**
 - **Provide the River with at least the same protections as other County waterways;**
 - **Add the Spokane River to Cd'A Lake studies and support further U of I studies;**
 - **Partner with other local and regional efforts focused on improving and sustaining the quality of regional waterways (WaterKeeper, Spokane RiverKeeper, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Bay Watchers, KEA, Trout Unlimited, SRRPA Advisory Board, Hayden Watershed Improvement District, etc.)**

"Given this growth and the historic impacts of metals on Lake Coeur d'Alene, we're concerned that we may be approaching levels that could be environmentally and ecologically damaging" (DEQ)

"We have a great resource here, but if the resource goes away, everything it's connected to goes away as well."

"We're loving our lakes to death. As humans, we do some crazy things and then we wonder why we have a problem."

(Dr. Frank Wilhelm)

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"The River's confined space creates 'a kind of bathtub effect' where secondary and reflective waves from opposite shores compound water quality impacts" (U of I Limnologist)

*If the land for sale turns into home, condominiums, or anything with a dock, the waterways in between Johnson Mill Rier Park and the highway 95 bridge would all be "no wake" In addition to these restrictions, it would be strongly suggested that county ordinance be amended to restrict towing on the Spokane River, **although with current population and congestion we are already there.**" KCSO*

Resources (*links not necessarily active, cut and paste on web browser*)

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/rra.4438> (*Most recent paper comparing wakesurfing, wakeboarding and waterskiing wakes*)

<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2019R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/159409> (*Testimony of Dr Gregor Macfarlane to Oregon State Legislature*)

J. Marr et al (2002), U of Minn St Anthony Falls Laboratory, SAFL Project Report 600, A Field Study of Maximum Wave Height, Total Wave Energy, and Maximum Wave Power Produced by four Recreational Boats on a Fresh Water Lake.

Lake Windermere Recreational Impact and Sediment Quality Assessment, Larratt Aquatic Consulting and Ecoscape Environmental Consultants, August 2024

Videos:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmkK_zVlKGs&t=3s (boat wakes on Spokane River)

youtube.com/watch?v=XuUvWnIXRPo&t=7s (surf boat wake impacts Big Cedar Lake)



Coeur d'Alene High School students Jack Jenkins and Jane Dance earned a first-place award for their project, titled "The Impact of Waves," presented at the 2025 Youth Water Summit. Courtesy photo

More people, including high school students, are getting interested in boat wakes and their effects. A candidate for future WAB meeting?