



Wisconsin Association of Lakes

Assembly Natural Resources Committee
March 11, 2009

STATEMENT IN SUPPORT SENATE BILL 12 AND ASSEMBLY BILL 90

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The Wisconsin Association of Lakes (WAL) urges the Committee to support this proposal which will help protect sensitive lake shorelines and improve public safety.

Swimming and fishing activities are concentrated in the near shore area of our lakes. The use of this area by high speed boats presents an unwarranted threat to the safety of swimmers, especially children. This bill reflects a fair and reasonable balance that would reduce conflicts between swimming and other passive uses of public waters and high speed watercraft.

The legislation would also protect water quality, fish habitat and the value of shoreland property. Wave action resulting from the operation of boats at cruising speeds in the near shore area increases bank erosion. Shore erosion results in the loss of valuable shoreland property, increasing demand for rip rap and similar erosion protection measures. Eroded soil increases the turbidity or cloudiness of lake waters and typically carries phosphorus and other plant nutrients that nourish algae and nuisance aquatic plants.

Propeller wash from the operation of outboard and inboard motors in the shallow areas (especially at higher speeds) worsens turbidity and excess fertilization of lake waters. Boat operation in these shallow areas can also uproot aquatic plants that provide important fish habitat.

This bill will not solve the long-term problem of lake water quality. But a reduction in boat speed in the near shore area is a helpful step in the right direction. Establishing a slow-no-wake speed zone extending 100 feet from the shoreline is a sensible starting point. But WAL recognizes that, in some locations, a 100-foot slow-no-wake zone is too wide and would unreasonably interfere with navigation. A 100-foot slow-no-wake zone may be too narrow to protect sensitive features in other areas.

For this reason, we support the local “opt out” concept in Section 2. However, we are concerned that the current language may be insufficient to clarify: (1) that local “opt out” authority extends to Dane County (whose boat regulation authority is established under s. 33.455 rather than s. 30.77) and (2) that local “opt out” ordinances may establish shoreline slow-no-wake zones that are either wider or narrower than 100 feet based on local conditions. We urge the Committee to consider an amendment to the bill that would avoid confusion on these key points.

The use of slow-no-wake zones has become a common element of local boating ordinances. This is an effective approach that balances different recreational uses with the protection of property, habitat and public safety. Establishing a statewide slow-no-wake area extending 100 feet from shore is an important and positive step, but it must be done in a way that recognizes the continuing need for local regulations that address the particular circumstances of a particular lake or a part of a lake where a slow no wake zone with different dimensions is warranted. We look forward to working with the Committee and the bill authors to make sure the bill accomplishes its goals and urge your support