

Governor's Clean Water Initiative: Shoreland Rules Update Project Article Number 7

DNR NEWS

Fall 2005

Your Lake, Our Lakes: Boat density can be a problem

By Paul Radomski and Russ Schultz

We are often contradictory in our opinions of lake development. We want to preserve the natural character of our lakes, yet we don't like limits to development. We do not want others to infringe on our freedom to enjoy our lakes, yet we want additional regulations on those who detract from our experiences. Our population continues to grow unabated and the miles of shoreline remain static, so conflict arises.

Today's human demand exceeds available natural resource supplies, whether it is ducks, sunfish, or lakeshore. The economics of supply and demand produce higher costs for lakeshore property, greater need for public boat launches, and more interest in private boat mooring areas. Increasingly, this leads to conflicts that are difficult for governments to address.

How many boats are too many? Safety standards for boat density vary; however, two common standards are 20 acres per boat on lakes with high-speed watercraft and 9 acres per boat on small lakes with low-powered watercraft.

Most north central Minnesota lakes currently do not exceed those standards. One can estimate when boat densities may approach or exceed standards. DNR boat surveys show that 10 percent of the total number of lakehome owners are out boating during high use weekend afternoons.

If every lake in the state had the maximum number of lakehomes (using existing state shoreland standard lot dimensions) and 10 percent of those lakeshore residents would be boating on nice summer weekends, a large percentage of our lakes would exceed safe boating capacity.

Many Midwest lakes already exceed safe boating capacities, and several Minnesota lakes have also reached that point. Naturally, local governments have responded to overcrowding with regulations for those waterbodies to promote safe enjoyment of these public spaces.

For example, Lake Minnetonka has an ordinance related to boating activity, including size of watercraft, no wake zones, quiet times, speed of watercraft, and docking. Only two watercraft may be kept within a landowner's dock area on Minnetonka (with some

exceptions). In addition, mooring areas and multiple dock areas are strictly regulated on Lake Minnetonka so that boat density criteria and goals are obtained.

White Bear Lake also has a docking ordinance to deal with overcrowding. And recently, Wisconsin DNR has begun discussing the merits of limiting boat docking to two boat slips per the first 50 feet of shoreline and one slip for each additional 50 feet of shoreline owned.

Local governments are also debating the wisdom of controlled access lots. Controlled access lots give accesses to public waters for owners of non-lakeshore lots. Crow Wing County prohibits the use of controlled access lots, and Cass County has been discussing whether to continue to allow these accesses.

DNR has created many public boat launching facilities across Minnesota, so that all of us have good public access to hundreds of fishing lakes. Thus, the often-cited reason for the allowance of these lots appears no longer relevant. And given that future development may result in potential overcrowding, the creation of additional controlled access lots may not be appropriate.

Governor Pawlenty's Clean Water Initiative pilot project in the north central lakes area is bringing people together to create an alternative set of shoreland development standards in the lakes area. Citizens working on the Shoreland Rules Update project have been discussing the higher standards for lake accesses to manage crowding, including prohibiting the use of controlled access lots and their derivatives. The updated standards adopted through this project will give local governments an alternative for local ordinances.

Details of the Shoreland Rules Update project are online at www.dnr.state.mn.us/waters (Click on the Governor's Clean Water Initiative link). Email comments to shorelandupdate@dnr.state.mn.us .

Paul Radomski, research scientist, and Russ Schultz, hydrologist, both work at the DNR at the Brainerd area office.

#####