

Many questions have been raised around wake boat use on our lakes. This is an issue we have been addressing at the Board level for several years. We (MKLPA) have taken proactive steps already, but are planning stronger steps to be rolled out for the 2026 boating season.

While there is no state law providing guidance yet, our Board has proactively adopted the widely accepted recommendation that wake boats, under ballast, should operate in greater than 20 feet of water and greater than 500 feet from shore. A detailed study by the University of Minnesota released this summer re-confirmed this guidance as well. This has been our (MKLPA) position for several years, and we post this guidance on our sign board at all boat landings, on our website, and in our safety brochure that is available at all boat landings, and at all boat rental businesses in the Minocqua area.

This was our first attempt to drive the right behavior, however, we know that both education and enforcement are required to effect real change, and from visual observation (standing on my dock!), we know that not all wake boats are following these guidelines.

So, we (MKLPA) are taking a two pronged approach for the 2026 boating season to strengthen our approach:

1 - Beyond just the wake boat concern, we have a bigger issue on our two lakes, which is the need for increased police boat presence and enforcement to improve boating safety. We have heard this concern from many of our constituents on the lake with regard to unsafe boat and jet ski operation. In 2025, the Town of Minocqua did not have a full time police boat officer on duty. They filled shifts using overtime from their regular beat officers. While they were able to fill most shifts, we felt the lack of a focused officer on the water was a concern. In order to

seek understanding, we met with the Police Chief and the Town Chairman to discuss. The meeting was very enlightening. The bottom line - it is very difficult for the Police Department to recruit a dedicated officer who is willing to work full time Thursday-Sunday for the entire summer (May to Sept) for the wages they are able to pay.

With that backdrop, we did some brainstorming and determined a new course of action for 2026. The most likely candidate for this job would be a newly graduated cadet from the Police Academy, as they are just looking for that first job. The biggest issue is that the cost/challenge of obtaining housing in the Minocqua area over the summer is a major deterrent, making it very difficult to recruit. We came up with an idea to offer to provide lodging for the candidate for the summer, and got agreement from the MKLPA Board that MKLPA would cover this expense for the candidate (estimated at \$7000). We felt this would be a good investment towards solving the problem.

Next steps, the Minocqua Police Department will begin recruiting very soon for this candidate with this improved offer which provides housing for the summer. They are confident they will be successful in finding a strong candidate.

Why am I telling you all of this? It is a critical piece to the equation in helping us both educate and enforce these new recommendations to wake boat users. We will work with our full time boat officer to explain that, while there are no laws regulating where wake boats can be used, we want them pulling over boats operating in the wrong areas, explaining to them our recommendations, and directing them to the recommended areas for wake boat use. We feel this approach will be highly successful, as the message will be coming from the uniformed boat police officer, which is impactful. Again, the key is education

combined with enforcement. Which leads me to the second prong of our approach -

2 - We need to make it easy for people to comply with our recommendation. Therefore, we are in the process of clearly identifying designated areas on our two lakes for wake boat use that meet or exceed the criteria of greater than 20 feet of water and greater than 500 feet from shore, and avoid high boat traffic areas. This is an idea we were working on last summer, and with the help of several people on the lake, including the *Surf Sconsin* owners (wake surf business), we identified two areas; one on Kawaga, and one on Minocqua, that we felt would be the best areas for wake boat operation, in the deepest water available, and with the least amount of disruption to other boat traffic. This is not a perfect science, and like any solution involves some compromise, but we feel we came up with a very amenable solution that best protects the interests of ALL users on the lake. The designated area on Kawaga uses the deepest part of the lake and averages over 30 feet deep throughout. The designated area on Minocqua averages over 45 feet deep. We are in the process of finalizing these maps which will clearly identify these two areas. (map with clear red boxes highlighting the recommended areas).

Our plan for the 2026 boating season is to broadcast these newly designated areas using the maps/signs at all boat landings, updating our safety brochure to include maps with these areas identified, and putting posters at on-water restaurants.

So, you can see we have a lot going on to address the concern, and you are getting this information before we have rolled it out to the greater community, which we will do as the 2026 boating season approaches.

Thanks for your continued support and concern for the safety and health of our lakes, and I welcome your feedback/questions on our plans.

Steve Beckwith
President MKLPA