

Dane County's Rules of the Water

Welcome to Dane County, a land graced with 37 fish-filled lakes, 475 miles of beautiful streams and rivers, and 14 miles of the spectacular Wisconsin River.

Each year, these glistening resources beckon thousands to enjoy fishing, boating, swimming, canoeing, kayaking, water-skiing, and more. This flyer covers the basics of the rules of the water in Dane County. The rules are based on common sense and designed to make sure that the public waters of Dane County remain safe and pleasurable for all.

The Rules

1. There is a 200 feet "Slow No Wake" zone on the Yahara Lakes (Lakes Mendota, Monona, Waubesa and Kegonsa) meaning that within 200 feet of any shore you may operate your boat no faster than the minimum speed at which you can maintain steerage.

But how far is 200 feet? If you're a football fan, it's 2/3 of a football field. If you fish, it's all the four pound test line on your spinning reel. The Dane County Lakes & Watershed Commission has developed a free boater's card designed to help you know when you're in the "Slow No Wake" zone.

Hold the card at arm's length. If a person on shore is a lot bigger than the drawing on the card, you're in the zone. If a 16 foot boat looks longer than the drawing on the card, you're in the zone and need to slow down to avoid a \$50 fine. Contact the Lakes & Watershed Commission at 266-2626 to request one or more cards.

2. State boating law requires "Slow No Wake" speeds within 100 feet of docks, rafts and piers on all lakes.

3. Personal Water Craft (known as jet skis or PWC) must operate at "Slow No Wake" speeds within 100 feet of all watercraft, including other PWC, and 200 feet from any shore.

4. When 2 motorboats approach each other, each boat should bear right and pass the other boat on its left.

5. When a motorboat and a boat propelled by sail or muscle approach each other, the motorboat yields the right-of-way.

6. When 2 motorboats approach each other in a crossing situation, the boat on the right has the right-of-way.

7. Navigation lights must be used from sunset to sunrise and during periods of restricted visibility. For motor boats, this means a red/green light on the bow and a white light on

the stern. Non-motorized boats must carry, and display in time to avoid a collision, a white light, such as a spotlight, lantern or flashlight.

8. Personal Water Craft (PWC) can't be used between sunset and sunrise.

9. A Personal Flotation Device (PFD) of the proper size for each wearer must be available for each passenger on all boats, including inflatables. Boats 16 feet or longer (except canoes and kayaks) must have at least one throwable PFD, such as a buoyant cushion or ring buoy, on board. On Personal Water Craft (PWC), operators and riders must wear their PFDs at all times.

10. You must be at least 10 years old to operate a motorboat and 12 years old to operate a personal watercraft (PWC). See the Wisconsin Boating regulations for further restrictions regarding age of operation.

11. To keep Dane County's waters safe and fun for all users, it is unlawful

✓ to operate a motorboat at unsafe speeds for the conditions

✓ to operate a boat while intoxicated

✓ to create hazardous wakes

✓ to operate a PWC faster than slow-no-wake within 200' of shore on any lake

✓ for any boat or water skier to approach closer than 100 feet from any swimmer or skin diver's flag, unless the boat is part of the skin diving operation or is accompanying the swimmer.

Remember, never drink and drive, on land or water.

Where the BUOYS Are

All regulatory buoys are white with a single orange band at the top and bottom. The control symbol is between these bands and is also orange. Any wording or message will be in black letters.

BOATS KEEP OUT: A white buoy or sign with a cross inside an orange diamond means no boats of any type may enter. The reason (swim area, dam ahead) is printed in black. You'll find these at most Madison City Parks, some Dane County parks and Governor Nelson and Lake Kegonsa State Parks.

DANGER: A white buoy or sign with an orange diamond warns of dangers like rocks and rapids. The specific danger is printed in black. There are several rock bars marked with these. Some buoys are also equipped with flashing lights.

CONTROLLED AREA: A white buoy or sign with an orange circle marks areas where vessel speed is controlled for safety. The restriction, such as "Slow No Wake," around

boat launches and other congested areas, is printed in black. These buoys have been placed 200 feet off-shore at landings to help you judge the "Slow No Wake" zone.

INFORMATIONAL: A white buoy or sign with an orange rectangle gives boaters information or directions. The information is printed in black.

AIDS TO NAVIGATION: Green and Red companion buoys mark the edges of the boating channel. Sometimes you'll find the markings on bridge pilings. In flowing water, keep the red buoy on the right side of the channel when traveling upstream. Stay in the channel to maintain depth.

CENTER MARKERS: White buoys with black vertical stripes show the center of the channel. Pass close to this buoy on the right side.

MOORING BUOYS: Mooring buoys are usually round, all white, with a blue stripe mid-way between the top and the waterline. You must have a permit to place these buoys.

Signal Flags

SCUBA DIVERS FLAG: This red flag with a white diagonal stripe means that dive operations are underway. No vessel may operate within 100 feet.

DISTRESS SIGNAL FLAG: This orange flag has a black square over a black circle. It is the duty of any boat operator observing such a flag to stop and render aid. This signal must only be displayed when assistance is needed.

Boaters' Guide to Lake Protection

Don't litter. Each year up to 350 million pounds of packaging, 6-pack yokes, styrofoam cups, cigarette butts & fishing gear are lost or dumped in our nation's waters.

Help keep invader species, like Eurasian water milfoil and zebra mussels out of our lakes and streams. Eurasian water milfoil frequently reaches nuisance levels on Dane County lakes, but a few lakes don't have it yet and boaters can help protect these water bodies. Zebra mussels infested seven in-land lakes in just seven years and are a serious threat to local aquatic ecosystems. These striped, thumbnail-sized mollusks cause damage by clogging water intake pipes, corroding boat engines, encrusting boat hulls and out-competing native species. Zebra mussels can affect fisheries, causing a shift from open-water species to bottom feeders like carp. Their sharp shells can make shoreline walks painful experiences.

Since invader species can be transported unknowingly by boaters and anglers it's important for all who use Dane County's waters to take these steps to protect our lakes:

- ✓ Drain all water from your boat and trailer, including live wells, bait buckets, bilges and engine compartments to protect against zebra mussel larvae.
- ✓ If possible, wash your boat and let it dry for three days before using it in another lake, because adult zebra mussels die in dry environments.
- ✓ Clean all mud and plant matter from your boating equipment (including canoes!) to prevent the spread of Eurasian water milfoil.
- ✓ Inspect boat hulls, props, trailers and other equipment and scrape off any attached zebra mussels (young adults attached to boat hulls feel like grainy surfaces).
- ✓ Inspect and clean fishing tackle to protect against the spiny water flea.
- ✓ Empty boat buckets on land, never dump water and fish from one lake to another.
- ✓ Tip up outboard engines to drain cooling passages and keep mussels from attaching, or flush the motor cooling system with hot water using special "motor muffs" available at your local marina.

Be aware of how pollution affects fish and how that can affect you. Check out the yearly "Health Guide for People Who Eat Sport Fish from Wisconsin Waters," put out by the Division of Health and the Department of Natural Resources, to make sure you don't eat dangerous amounts of fish from contaminated waters. Call 266-5325 for information.

If you wouldn't put it in a fish tank, keep it out of the gutter. Rain and melting snow wash pollutants like road salt, pesticides and car care products into water bodies. Leaves, grass clippings and fertilizer make our lakes too rich in nutrients, causing nuisance weed and algae growth.

Do your best to keep soil in its place, whether you're farming, building or looking after your lawn. Soil is the #1 pollutant by volume in Wisconsin and Dane County, reducing water clarity and threatening fish habitat.

Protect wetlands, nature's own pollution filtering systems and day care centers for our finned friends. Wetlands provide spawning areas for some fish species and help keep pollution out of our lakes and streams.

Remember that good boating flows from good water quality and clean boats mean clean water. To keep current with efforts to prevent water pollution, call the Lakes & Watershed Commission at 266-2626.