

A summary of wakesports activity and observations from the 2024 boating season in relation to the new UPW rule regulating wakesports

At the close of the 2024 boating season, the Department of Environmental Conservation (Department) compiled information relevant to wakesports recreation on Vermont's inland lakes to help better understand the impact of the new rule and to identify whether any areas of concern arose. The Department requested information from the following sources:

- Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department Game Wardens
 - The Department requested information about any observed violations or complaints that were investigated and/or received regarding wakesports during the 2024 boating season.
- The Vermont Public Access Greeter Program
 - The Department reviewed data collected from public access area greeters on the frequency of wakeboat launches and the last launch locations prior to each launch at the access area during the 2024 boating season.
- Representatives from the 30 inland lakes with wakesports zones
 - A brief informal survey was sent to representatives of the 30 lakes that support wakesports zones to request local observations regarding the presence (or absence) of wakeboats and wakesports during the 2024 boating season.

Game Warden Observations

During the 2024 boating season, the Game Wardens received five complaints from the public related to this rule. These complaints were investigated and determined to be unfounded, possibly due to a misunderstanding of the new rule. These unfounded complaints included: a complaint about the presence of a wakeboat on a waterbody that upon further investigation was determined to be in an allowable location; violations of the shoreline safety zone by traditional motorboats (not wakeboats); and after-the-fact generalized complaints that could not be validated. One additional complaint involved traditional motor boaters harassing a wakeboat operator on Waterbury Reservoir. This issue was elevated to State Police. Although Game Wardens anticipated receiving many complaints during the 2024 boating season, very few complaints were filed, and none of the complaints were found to be in violation of the wakesports rule.

Vermont Public Access Greeter Program Observations

The Vermont Public Access Area Greeter Program collects data about watercraft entering and exiting public waters at many public access areas across the State. These sites are not staffed full time, and the data captures a snapshot of when boats enter or leave a lake. Typically, Greeters are stationed at the access areas during busy summer weekends and holidays. During the summer of 2024, the Greeters logged 20,000 launches of all types of watercraft. Each launch does not necessarily represent a unique watercraft, rather a unique launch. For example, the same boat could launch from the same access area three Saturdays in a row, and it would count as three launches. Of the total boat launches, 11,475 were logged as some type of motorized watercraft (i.e., inboard, outboard, pontoon boat, jetski, wakeboat, or "other"). Of the motorized watercraft logged by the Greeters, 127 wakeboat launches were counted across the State. Based on the

available Greeter data, wakeboats represented 1.1% of all motorized boat launches observed this summer. The five lakes with the most recorded wakeboat launches were:

- Lake Bomoseen, 37 wakeboat launches (28 of the launched wakeboats were last launched in Bomoseen)
- Lake Willoughby, 25 wakeboat launches (19 of the launched wakeboats were last in Willoughby)
- Lake Dunmore, 13 wakeboat launches (10 of the launched wakeboats were last in Dunmore)
- Harriman Reservoir, 12 wakeboat launches (10 of the launched wakeboats were last in Harriman)
- Lake Iroquois, 11 wakeboat launches (9 of the launched wakeboats were last in Iroquois)

The Greeter data show that in lakes with frequent wakeboat launches, the majority of the launches are from wakeboats that are not traveling between lakes. Rather, most wakeboats counted at the public access areas were launched on the same body of water.

Observations about Wakesports on Specific Lakes from Lake Representatives

The Department sent out an informal survey to representatives (from lake associations or watershed groups) of the 30 lakes that currently have wakesports zones to ask whether wakesports were observed on their lake prior to 2024 and whether wakesports were present during the 2024 season. If wakesports were present during 2024, the survey requested observations about wakesports activities on those lakes during the 2024 season. There were 22 responses to the survey. The informal observations from this survey are not a complete representation of all wakesports activity, as some lake representatives were not able to respond, and this only captures a limited perspective. However, the information about the presence and absence of wakesports is helpful to understand trends in wakesports recreation behavior. The following is a summary of responses:

- 15 of the lakes' representatives stated that wakesports occurred on their representative lake prior to 2024
- 4 of the lakes' representatives stated that wakesports did not occur on their representative lake prior to 2024
- 3 lakes were unsure if wakesports have occurred on their representative prior to 2024. Two of the lakes are Great Averill and Little Averill. A recent petition for Great and Little Averill proposing to restrict wakesports on those waterbodies state that no wakesports have ever occurred on these lakes. The other "unsure" response was from Holland Pond. Given that no wakesports have been observed on that waterbody previously, it appears unlikely that wakesports occurred there prior to 2024.
- Of the 7 total lakes that answered "no" or "unsure" about whether or not wakesports occurred on their representative lakes prior to 2024, none of those lakes reported observing wakesports in 2024. No lakes reported a new observation of wakesports in 2024 where wakesports did not occur in previous years.

- 13 lake representatives answered, “yes,” that wakesports recreation was observed during the 2024 season. Of the 13 lakes where wakesports were observed during 2024, 10 responded that “yes,” the wakeboats appeared to be generally operating in wakesports mode only in the wakesports zone. One response said “no,” and two responses said “unsure.”
- When asked for additional feedback about wakesports activity on specific lakes, by the lakes that self-identified as having wakesports recreation during the 2024 boating season, the responses were (summarized):
 - Having buoys to identify the wakesports zone would be helpful for all.
 - Fewer wakeboats were present than expected
 - There is a need for better enforcement on the 200-foot shoreline safety zone
 - Concerns about future impacts from wakesports (not observed impacts)