

Safety on the Waters of Bills Lake

“If people used common sense, I’d be out of a job” – Sheriff Fran Staley of Roscommon County at the April, 2006 Michigan Lake and Stream Associations convention. Unfortunately, onshore spectators witness errant behavior far too often, hence the need for Michigan boating laws.

Each person riding on or being towed behind a PWC or speedboat *must* wear a U.S. Coast Guard-approved Type I, II, or III PFD. Inflatable life jackets may *not* be used. In addition:

- A lanyard of the PWC’s ignition safety switch *must* be attached to the person, clothing, or PFD of the operator.
- The person(s) being towed *must* wear a life jacket.
- There *must* be a third person spotter-lookout.

The 100 foot rule

As you travel around the lake *at speeds faster than No-Wake*, you *must* stay 100 feet from watercraft at anchor (such as fishing boats), 100 feet from rafts and docks, and 100 feet from swimmers in the water. This applies not only to the boats but also to the people (water skiers and tubers) being towed. This law is for the protection not only of swimmers and fishermen in the area but for those who are moving at high speeds.

Refrain from reckless driving. Hotdogging, whoop-dee-doing, and yahooping -- in and of itself -- is not illegal behavior but this kind of activity is *against the law if there are other watercraft nearby*. For instance, it is illegal to:

- jump the wake of another vessel unnecessarily close to the other vessel.
- weave your PWC through congested traffic
- engage in the game of charging at and then swerving from another vessel at the last possible moment

Avoid towing skiers and tubers through the shallow areas of the lake. If somebody being towed falls near, say, Shear Pin Point, there could be a quadriplegic result.

All passengers in a pontoon *must* ride inside the rails. A person who accidentally falls off the front could easily be swept under the boat’s propeller. It’s happened but, thankfully, not on this lake.

Between the hours of 7:30 p.m. and 11:00 a.m., boats *must* move at No-Wake speed (defined by the DNR as “the slowest speed at which it is possible to maintain steering and does not create a wake”). This is DNR regulation WC-62-91-001 which has the force of law. More to the point, it is so consistently observed on Bills Lake that the few who don’t obey stand out. If you are dashing around the lake at 7:32 p.m. or 10:55 a.m., you are probably doing so by yourself. You should wonder why. To be sure, onshore spectators are.

If you are traveling close to the perimeter of the lake, you *must* go in a counterclockwise direction. To do otherwise is analogous to going the wrong way on a one-way street or trying to enter a highway using the exit ramp.

Please show this to renters and guests.