

NEW ENGLAND WATER WORKS ASSOCIATION, INC.  
WATER RESOURCES COMMITTEE

FINAL REVISED POLICY

DECEMBER 20, 2006

RESOLUTION & POLICY CONCERNING RECREATIONAL USE OF  
PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES

It is a fundamental principle of water supply development and protection that water should be obtained from the highest quality source feasible, and every effort should be made to prevent contaminants from entering the source. When faced with efforts by recreational users or others to increase recreational access to water supply reservoirs and/or surrounding land, utilities should oppose such efforts on the basis of increased risk and communicate those risks accordingly.

Maximizing drinking water quality to protect public health is of the highest priority to public water suppliers. Public water suppliers recognize that multiple barrier protection of drinking water supplies and their watersheds is essential in order to meet these goals.

WHEREAS:

In New England, many public water supply reservoirs were created and developed primarily as sources of drinking water that now serve approximately 80% of the region's population, while other surface water sources accommodate recreational uses that predated their use as water supply sources.

Body-contact recreation introduces disease-causing organisms into water bodies, and many other forms of water-dependent recreation are known to introduce contaminants into source waters as well.

As the science of pathogen detection improves, new waterborne diseases associated with drinking water continue to emerge.

Most surface water treatment facilities are designed to greatly reduce, but not completely eliminate, the activity of known pathogenic organisms present in the source water.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

That New England Water Works Association recognizes society's wish to accommodate legally existing recreational uses on or adjacent to water supply sources, ~~albeit at some~~ despite the risk to the quality of the water supply and to public health.

That the New England Water Works Association (NEWWA) opposes legislation or any administrative action that would permit or require the opening of domestic water supply reservoirs and adjacent lands to increased recreational use, and

That the official policy of the NEWWA with respect to recreational usage of water supply reservoirs, including reservoirs that provide storage of water at various points in the watershed, and adjacent lands is as follows:

POLICY – Recreational use of or upon any natural lake, artificial reservoir or impoundment used as a source of water supply as well as the supporting land-based infrastructure necessary to support recreational activities, increases the potential for microbial, physical, and chemical contaminants in the drinking water produced from these source waters. Body-contact recreation (e.g., swimming, bathing, water skiing, wind surfing, and use of personal watercraft) should not be allowed on water bodies used as sources of public water supply. Where it is allowed to occur, it should be separated from the water intake by the greatest distance possible, and it should not be expanded or increased.

Non-body-contact water-based recreation, particularly the use of two-stroke carbureted gasoline engines that discharge exhaust into the water and the use of petroleum-powered vehicles and tools on the ice, should be discouraged. Where it is allowed to occur, it should be separated from the water intake by the greatest distance possible, and it should not be expanded or increased.

Recreation on land adjacent to the water supply source and its tributaries should be restricted to prevent the disturbance of soil and vegetation, the depositing of waste or other contaminants, and the channelization of overland flow; and to maintain the ability of the buffer to trap nutrients, sediment, and other pollutants and to infiltrate runoff. The suggested minimum distance based on maintaining the functions of an undisturbed buffer is several hundred feet. This may vary based on the topography and site-specific features of the surrounding area and the intensity of the recreational use.

IN ADDITION, IT IS RECOMMENDED that water suppliers develop watershed protection plans and policies, and that all proposals to allow recreation activities, or the expansion or increase of existing recreation activities, on a water supply reservoir or within the watershed and other contributing sources to a water supply reservoir should be

reviewed for consistency with said plans and policies. This will insure that such proposed activities do not conflict with measures required to protect source water quality.

A proponent of recreational use near or on a public water supply must be required to provide technical evidence supporting the claim that such activity will not adversely affect the water quality, or public health and safety of the water consumer served by said water supply. When a proposal for recreational use is inconsistent with this policy it should be opposed by the water supplier.

Where recreational or other non-water supply uses of a drinking water source are permitted, the public health risks of this practice should be communicated to the recreational users, drinking water consumers and public decision makers. Efforts should be made to unify all three of these factions in protection, enforcement and outreach activities designed to minimize the risk of contamination and degradation of water quality.

The water utility and its ratepayers should not be forced to bear the burden of financing recreational use. Consequently, any cost for water quality monitoring, evaluations and mitigation programs should be borne by those proposing or benefiting from the recreational activity, not by the water utility or its customers.

Adopted by vote of the NEWWA Board of Directors: December 20, 2006