

## Lindsey Schreier

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**From:** kimballwjohnson@gmail.com  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 12, 2026 10:36 AM  
**To:** Lindsey Schreier  
**Cc:** Ken Wells; Russ Ingalls; John Morley  
**Subject:** [External] Wake Sports Rulemaking - Lake Willoughby

[External]

May 12, 2026

Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules  
State Of Vermont  
Attn: Lindsey Schreier  
Montpelier, VT 05620-3522

RE: Wake Sports Rulemaking – Lake Willoughby / Proposed 500-Foot Distance Requirement and 100-Acre Wake Sports Zone

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in opposition to the proposed expansion of the wake sports setback distance from 200 feet to 500 feet and the proposed increase of the minimum wake sports zone size from 50 acres to 100 acres.

The summer of 2025 was notably quiet on Lake Willoughby with respect to watercraft conflicts and safety incidents, including those involving wake boats. Despite the public controversy surrounding wake-enhanced boats, I am personally unaware of any verified incidents on Lake Willoughby involving injury, property damage, or emergency response directly attributable to the operation of a wake boat.

By way of background, I am 65 years old and have spent my entire life on or around Lake Willoughby. I am the retired Fire Chief of Westmore Fire-Rescue, which I founded in 2001, and I remain a lifelong member. I also served as the town's Emergency Management Director, worked as a first responder/EMT for 14 years, and previously served as a Vermont State Police Boating Safety Instructor. In addition, I have served on the Westmore Planning and Zoning Board and was President of the Lake Willoughby Chamber of Commerce for many years. My wife and I continue to own a camp on the lake, and I remain active in the community.

When concerns about wake boats first arose, I approached the issue with genuine concern and an open mind. I reviewed available information, examined the State's regulatory process that initially permitted wake-enhanced boats on Vermont lakes, and listened carefully to claims being made publicly regarding safety and environmental impacts.

However, many of the stories circulated in public meetings, letters to the editor, and public commentary were anecdotal, exaggerated, or unsupported by documented evidence. Claims such as swimmers being pulled underwater by wake waves, pontoon boats being overwhelmed by wakes at close range, or prop wash damaging lake bottoms at depths exceeding 200 feet deserve objective scrutiny and factual verification before being relied upon in policymaking.

For that reason, I requested that the Westmore Selectboard require any alleged boating safety incident cited in support of restrictions be accompanied by an official report to the Vermont State Police. If an event rises to the level of a serious safety concern, it should be documented and investigated through established public safety channels. Regulatory decisions should be based on verified data, documented incidents, and measurable impacts—not rumor, speculation, or emotionally charged testimony.

I want to commend the DEC staff for the extensive time and effort invested in data collection, technical review, stakeholder meetings, and rulemaking analysis. In my opinion, the Agency reached a balanced and reasonable conclusion under difficult and politically charged circumstances.

It is also important to place public support claims in proper context. While petition supporters have referenced obtaining more than 500 signatures, my understanding is that only approximately 49 signatures came from actual Westmore residents, in a town with roughly 375 residents. That distinction matters because Lake Willoughby residents and taxpayers live with the direct consequences of these decisions year-round.

From a public safety standpoint, my personal observations and response experience do not support claims that wake boats are creating measurable safety emergencies on Lake Willoughby. Over the past several years, from my camp on the lake, I have either directly responded to or monitored approximately 14 emergency incidents on the water, including both pager-dispatched calls through Westmore Fire-Rescue and self-initiated responses. Every one of those incidents involved kayakers or paddle boarders in distress, primarily due to severe wind conditions, exposure, exhaustion, or suspected impairment from alcohol or drugs. To my knowledge, none involved the unsafe operation of a motorized vessel, including wake boats.

In terms of wave action and shoreline impacts, my property is located directly in the prevailing wind path of the lake and routinely experiences significant natural wave energy. Based on decades of firsthand observation, Lake Willoughby generates substantially more wave action during a single high-wind weather event than wake boats collectively produce over an entire boating season.

I also question the assertion that 16 wake boats operated regularly on Lake Willoughby during the 2025 season. To my knowledge, there are only four locally based wake boats, and I personally observed only a small number of visiting wake boats launching at the state access area throughout the summer. My family and I specifically observed wake boats operating in wake sports mode, and the resulting wakes and speeds were comparable to those generated by several larger V-hull recreational and fishing boats that use the lake throughout the season.

I support continued monitoring and data collection during future boating seasons. If credible evidence demonstrates measurable environmental harm or verified public safety issues, those concerns should be addressed appropriately. However, regulatory decisions of this magnitude should be rooted in objective evidence and proportionality.

Unfortunately, this issue has created deep divisions within our small community. Neighbors who have known each other for decades are no longer speaking. Misinformation and hostility have replaced productive discussion. This matter should have been addressed through respectful dialogue among people who all care deeply about Lake Willoughby. Instead, outside organizations and a relatively small but vocal group pushed for sweeping restrictions while rejecting compromise or balanced discussion.

I commend both the Westmore Selectboard and the Westmore Planning Commission for maintaining neutrality throughout this process and recognizing their responsibility to represent the interests of the entire town rather than a narrow interest group.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the committee maintain the current 200-foot operating distance requirement and retain the existing 50-acre wake sports zone standard.

Respectfully,

Kimball W. Johnson  
Westmore Resident

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