

Wake Boat Testimony of Phil Dodd
Senate Natural Resources Committee
May 6, 2025

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Phil Dodd and I live in Montpelier. I am not a lakefront property owner but – like thousands of Vermonters and Vermont visitors – I take day trips to recreate on our beautiful lakes. The Vermonters I am talking about are swimmers, paddlers, anglers, sailors and motorboat owners. I feel confident in saying that, as a general rule, we don't like wake boats when used for wake sports.

Wake boats are not like traditional motorboats. They have wake plates to lower the stern into the water to create a bigger, broader wake. The most notable feature of wake boats are their ballast tanks, either a hard ballast tank or soft bags, which are designed to be filled with water to increase the weight of the boat and create more water displacement when used for wake sports. Many wake boats can carry up to 3,000 pounds of water ballast, or about one and a half tons, and some carry more.

In my opinion, wake boat sports are bad for Vermont lakes. They can erode shorelines, damage boats tied to docks, stir up phosphorous and disturb plants on lake bottoms, adversely impact wildlife, and they are potentially dangerous for other lakes users. Today I'd like to focus on safety issues related to the huge, rogue waves that wake boats create.

My wife and I are in our mid-seventies and own two kayaks. These particular kayaks are really small pack canoes, but we sit on the bottom and paddle them like a kayak. These boats are tender, so a sudden, big wave from a wake boat could easily capsize me and fill the canoe with water, not a happy prospect for this geezer. I also have a Sunfish that I

take by trailer to sail on Vermont lakes. That too could easily be capsized by a wave of the size generated by wake boats.

At the other end of the age spectrum, my 6 -and 8-year-old granddaughters have their own kayaks. They are learning fast, but I know they couldn't handle a sudden two- to four-foot wave. If my daughter – who has her own kayak – took them to a lake where one or more wake boats were operating, I am sure she would turn around and drive home, fearing the lake would not be safe for her family.

A friend of mine who has a place on Joe's Pond says that when wake boats come out there, he has to tell his grandchildren to come to shore if they are on the lake paddling or sailing or swimming off a boat because it is not safe to stay on the lake. This does not seem fair. Why should our lakes at times be essentially off limits to those – the majority, by far – who want to fish, kayak, canoe, paddleboard, sail, swim, waterski, or use their normal motorboats or pontoon boats?

The Legislature has in the past expressed interest in keeping lakes safe. When it directed the Agency of Natural Resources to write rules governing Vermont lakes, it said, among other things, "The purposes of the rules shall be to further the maintenance of safe and healthful conditions . . ." 10 VSA §1421.

When used for wake sports, wake boats are unsafe for traditional and normal lake users on Vermont's relatively small inland lakes because of the large, unnatural waves they create. Wake sports using wake boats should be prohibited.

Even with a ban, they would still be allowed on international waters in Vermont including Lake Champlain, Lake Memphremagog and the Connecticut River lakes, since those bodies of water are federally regulated.

In particular, Lake Champlain, where I have sailed many times on larger boats, is an appropriate place for wake boats. That lake already sometimes has very large waves caused by big cabin cruisers. The lake is big enough for wake boats to go a long way in one direction without going back and forth as they must on inland lakes.

The state has long sought to protect its lakes and their uses. We don't allow people to overnight on their boats on inland lakes. We have maximum speed limits. We don't allow high speeds within 200 feet of shore or swimmers or other boats. We don't allow trees and bushes to be cut on the water's edge. Our lakes are held in trust for the public. When something is bad for our lakes and ponds or those who use them, we prohibit it.

Wake sports using wake boats is a new and unusual use that is not good for our lakes or for other users, and it should be prohibited as well. Looking to the future, wake boats are likely to get bigger and make bigger waves, and there will be more of them. I urge you to act boldly now, while you can.

Thank you for listening.



