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Catawba, Iredell, Lincoln, and Mecklenburg Board
Of County Commissioners and County Managers

Subject: Activities Report for FY 22-23 (July, 2022 – June, 2023)

Dear Chairpersons & County Managers,

This report summarizes the Lake Norman Marine Commission (LNMC) Activities for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2023.

1. BOATING SAFETY

A. Boater Safety Law (State)

Current state law requires boater education for all operators of boats in North Carolina born after Jan 1, 1988, that are residents of NC. We continue to support all boater education classes by posting a comprehensive list of all education opportunities available throughout the year on our website at lnmc.org. Boating knowledge for rentals continues to be a concern and we are encouraging boat rental companies to conduct some form of training prior to renting boats on Lake Norman. We are providing rental companies and marinas with copies of our brochure that details the boating safety laws and requirements in NC. We have formed a rental boat committee and have a draft of a Rental Boat Regulation. This is currently under review by our legal advisor and Commissioners. We hope to have this regulation approved and effective on Jan 1, 2024.

B. Boater Education

The Boater Education committee includes individuals involved with wake surfing activities, lake shore residents, law enforcement and boat dealerships. This group has developed an education program around the theme "Love Where You Lake". Cards with "Love Where You Lake" logo have been distributed to boat dealers, marinas, and lake law enforcement. The card includes a QR code that will take someone to a more detailed web site that lists all the applicable boater safety laws and lake information.

A pamphlet with this information has also been distributed and boat rental clubs have indicated that they plan on placing this information on each of their rental boats. Current feedback is that this information has been very effective in communicating boater safety laws to the public. We are actively involved with other organizations to encourage participation in a Boater Safety Class and participate in meetings with law enforcement to consider ways to educate the public about no wake issues especially with the wake surfing boats. Our web site usage statistics show we have an increasing number of people accessing our website to view boating regulations.

Recently, we revised our Lake Norman map to include changes to marinas and additional shoal markers. This revision includes recommended areas for water sports activities that complies with the recommendation of the Water Sports Association that wake surfing be conducted at least 200 feet from docks and structures on the lake. The area that is within 200 feet of the shoreline are shaded to indicate that no wake speeds should be observed in this area. This map will be provided to the public and law enforcement at no charge.

C. No-Wake Issues

The current No Wake Buoy Permit process provides for review of the request by a buoy review committee and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. The Marine Commission will take into consideration the report of these reviews prior to deciding on approving the No Wake Buoy request. The new permit process is on our website under Laws & Regulations, No Wake Buoy Permit Application.

D. Navigational Aids

The LNMC currently maintains 193 navigational aids on Lake Norman including Channel Markers, Shoal Markers and No Wake Bridge Buoys. We have upgraded Markers that had faded signs for better visibility. A list of all markers requiring repair is currently located on our website under "ATON Report to Boaters".

We have partnered with a group of lake residents, the Coast Guard Auxiliary and County Lake Patrols to conduct ongoing surveys of all lake markers to determine any needed repairs. This is an invaluable service that will help maintain our lake marker system which provides safety information to all boaters on Lake Norman.

As a result of boater input, we have replaced the lighting on all channel markers with high intensity lighting that will increase visibility of the markers at night and in inclement weather. These new lights have a 5-mile visibility range.

E. PFD Distribution Program

Each year Lake Norman has fatalities due to individuals entering the water without a PFD (Personal Floatation Device, Life Jacket) available. The state Safe Boating law requires that everyone on a vessel have a properly fitting PFD and anyone under the age of 13 must be wearing the PFD while a vessel is underway. Law enforcement has reported that violations of this requirement occur because boaters do not have the proper equipment, especially for inexperienced boaters.

The Marine Commission has provided PFD's from infant through adult sizes to local law enforcement, NC Wildlife and Coast Guard Auxiliary to provide free of charge to boaters that they encounter that do not have the proper equipment. As of this year, the Commission has provided 430 PFD's for these agencies to distribute. The program is greatly appreciated by boaters and serves to illustrate the importance of having proper equipment aboard all vessels. This program was started due to receiving the state grant but the Commission plans on continuing this program in the future.

Due to a very tragic drowning on Lake Norman this spring, we have partnered with residents to provide life rings to be placed on docks around Lake Norman. The life rings will provide a life saving device quickly for anyone that has trouble around the docks. It is thought that if something like this had been available, the previously mentioned drowning may have been prevented. The Marine Commission has provided 100 life rings to be provided free of charge upon request by anyone living on the lake with a dock.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC RECREATION

A. Aquatic Growth Management

A survey in fall of 2022, completed by NC State, found no growth of hydrilla below the Hwy 150 bridge. The 2018 outbreak of hydrilla growth primarily in Ramsey Creek has been prevented due to yearly stocking of 750 sterile grass carp which will continue in 2023. This level of stocking appears to be sufficient to prevent the hydrilla from reestablishing growth from previous outbreaks.

A small area of hydrilla was found on the northern most part of Lake Norman in an area that is very shallow and largely inaccessible for the grass carp. In conjunction with Duke Energy Aquatic Weed group we are monitoring this area to

ensure that it doesn't expand beyond this small area or lead to infestations in other areas.

This past summer had a significant increase in the reports of a naturally occurring algae growth, Chara. This alga grows during the warm summer months but will disappear in the fall as the water temperature decreases. Chara can be confused with Hydrilla growth since it looks similar underwater. We are partnered with Duke Energy Aquatic Weed group to investigate all the reports of growth in the lake and so far, all the investigations have found that Chara is what people are reporting.

Currently we are also monitoring a small amount of Lyngbya, a blue-green alga that can form dense mats on the surface of waterbodies. It's currently only in a few locations in the Ramsey Creek area but is of concern because it's very difficult to control. Current studies are underway at NC State to determine effective control for this growth. Duke Energy is closely monitoring this area to determine any spread of this growth. Recently we have received additional reports of possible Lyngbya in other areas of the lake and are working with Duke Energy Aquatic Weed group to identify and document these areas. Currently there is no effective control for this growth but several Universities are working on determining a method for control.

- B. Recreation Boating Traffic – We continue to see an increase in lake traffic and many local boat dealers have reported a record number of boat sales. This has resulted in increased boating traffic and with many first-time boaters on the lake. We continue to work with all lake enforcement officers from the 4 surrounding counties, Cornelius Police and NC Wildlife Resources Commission to identify possible ways to enhance boater safety and knowledge of boating safety laws. Our Love Where You Lake campaign is getting support from boat rental companies and marinas to display information that gives basic boater safety rules.

3. ORDINANCES

- A. **Charter Boat Ordinance:** The Charter Boat Ordinance has been revised to include all boats that operate on Lake Norman that offer paid services to the public. This revision is in line with Coast Guard requirements for operation of Charter Boats in Coast Guard controlled waters. It generally requires a Captain's license, picking up passengers at approved areas and boat inspections by the Marine Commission annually. This will ensure that any charter vessel being operated on Lake Norman serving the public will meet safety requirements.
- B. **No Wake Buoy Ordinance:** The Commissioners have approved a revised procedure for requesting a No Wake Buoy. The procedure and permit application are on our website at Inmc.org. The procedure involves review by a

buoy committee and NC Wildlife Resources Commission prior to consideration by the Marine Commission.

- C. **Rafting Ordinance:** Events on the lake that involve a larger number of boats continue to apply for rafting permits as required. This has been effective in controlling the larger rafting events that have caused problems in the past. Law enforcement participates in the approval of these permits. The popular gathering spot known as the “Sandbar” has been relocated adjacent to a small island away from residents and has eliminated the problems seen in the past.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE

The Marine Commission website at Inmc.org has been upgraded to provide more functionality for boaters. Our goal is to provide links to any information that would be useful to boaters operating in Lake Norman as well as residents and owners. Links to local organizations providing boater education and lake information are provided.

The website also includes minutes from the past Marine Commission meetings and the agenda for the next scheduled public meeting. We have returned to having in person meetings at the Charles Mack Citizens Center on the second Monday of each month at 7pm..

The Commission received a state government directed grant that has allowed us to fund the following special projects:

- Upgrade lighting on Aids to Navigation to high intensity lights that will increase visibility at night and inclement weather.
- Install additional shoal markers in areas where groundings have been reported and where some of the smaller islands have eroded to become shallow areas.
- Purchase life jackets for the police lake patrols to give to boaters who do not have the required equipment. This provides the needed safety equipment immediately.
- Purchase life rings to be installed on private docks to provide an immediately accessible life saving device.
- Expand the social media campaign for the Love Where You Lake program with the goal of getting boating safety regulations to all boaters on the lake including rentals and new boaters. Providing brochures to all boat rental and marinas that provides this information to boaters.
- Install additional No Wake Bridge Buoys on some of the smaller bridges where lake traffic has increased in the last few years.

- Produce a lake map that shows areas where wake surfing should not be conducted. The wake surfing associations have endorsed a 200 foot zone around docks and in smaller coves where wake surfing activities should be avoided. This map will be a convenient way for boaters to know where these activities can be safely conducted.
- Purchase display for trade shows that will allow the Marine Commission to expand their participation in public events.

Please contact me if you have any questions about any activities of the Marine Commission.

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