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

Subject: Activities Report for FY 23-24

Dear Chairpersons & County Managers,

This report summarizes the Lake Norman Marine Commission (LNMC) Activities for the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2024.

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, who are residents of NC. We continue to support all boater education classes and maintain 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 also began team meetings with legislators, attorneys, and citizens to develop a plan to close the loophole in the NC state law which exempts renters from any training requirements.

B. Boater Education

The Boater Education committee continued to develop education materials and programs around the theme "Love Where You Lake". Cards and brochures with "Love Where You Lake" logo have been distributed to boat dealers, marinas, restaurants, rental companies and lake law enforcement. The card includes a QR code link to a web site that lists all boater safety laws and lake information.

In February we participated with a booth at the annual Mid-Atlantic Boat Show in Charlotte to provide information and interact with the public on questions and concerns about the lake. Many new residents and new boat owners visited us.

The Marine Commission also sponsored a meeting with boat rental companies, charter operators, insurance providers, and law enforcement to review and discuss the Charter Boat and Rental Boat regulations. Over 60 interested parties attended.

In March we held a Fire, Emergency, Medical training session with the Denver Fire Department and Lincoln County EMS and 911 staffs for lake Captains, commercial operators, and public. Simulations and hands-on exercises were used. In June we held a Lake Weather Awareness and Safety class featuring three local television meteorologists.

In May, we met with YMCA managers from the three Lake Norman facilities to discuss options for materials and resources for boater safety education. We also provided contacts for Boy Scout troops that may help The Y's lifeguard shortage.

In June the Joshua Murray Boater Safety Center at Blythe Landing was opened in a remodeled facility donated by Mecklenburg Parks and Rec. Under the "Love Where You Lake" umbrella, several agencies will offer boater education material and classes and staff the facility in busy times to provide resources to the public. The LNMC has partnered with the Cornelius Police Lake Patrol and USCG Auxiliary to present NASBLA-approved Safe Boating Programs at the Center. Through a coordinated effort, future programs will be sponsored by Freedom Boat Club and Workhorse Marine and will be provided free of charge this season.

Later in June, the LNMC participated in the lake-wide Safe Harbor Lake Day, providing information to over 450 members of the public.

c. No-Wake Issues

Very few applications for No Wake buoys have been received since 150 foot no wake law is already in place. There is concern about the large number of illegal buoys that have been placed in the lake which pose navigation hazards. NC Wildlife began removal, but progress is slow. Duke Energy, NC Wildlife and the Lake Wylie Marine Commission and we have formed a team to develop the plan to accelerate removals.

We continue to distribute our updated Lake Norman map which indicates areas for water sports activities that show wake surfing must be conducted at least 200 feet from docks and structures on the lake and that no wake speeds should be observed in this area per state law.

Lake patrol officers continue to issue warnings and citations for wake violations, the largest number of complaints by residents and boaters.

D. Navigational Aids

The LNMC currently maintains 192 navigational aids on Lake Norman including Channel Markers, Shoal Markers and No Wake Bridge Buoys. This marker system is fundamental to the safety of all boaters on Lake Norman.

We have upgraded Markers that had faded signs for better visibility. A list of all markers requiring repair is on our website under "ATON Report to Boaters".

E. PFD Distribution Program

Each year Lake Norman has fatalities due to individuals entering the water without a PFD (Personnel 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.

For the past two seasons, the Marine Commission has provided PFD's in all sizes to local law enforcement, NC Wildlife and Coast Guard Auxiliary to provide free of charge to boaters that do not have the proper equipment.

F. Dock Floatation / Life Rings Program

In addition to drownings from boats, there have been several off of docks in recent years. Along with supporting initiatives started by other groups, we continued this year our program of giving free lifesaving rings to be added to personal docks in the 2024 season. Over a hundred have been provided across all four counties.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC RECREATION

A. Aquatic Growth Management

The 2018 outbreak of hydrilla growth was eliminated by the stocking of 22,500 sterile grass carp in the spring of 2018 & 2019 and maintenance stocking of 750 grass carp each year since then.. An NC State survey in fall of 2023 found a small infestation of hydrilla in the North end of the lake in a very shallow area where carp cannot reach. We stocked another 750 carp this year as part of the ongoing morbidity study, and treated the North end patch with herbicide.

Lyngbya, a blue-green alga that can form dense mats on the surface of waterbodies, was discovered in the last Fall survey. It is very difficult to control. Homeowners and Duke worked with us to survey the problem which had spread to approximately ten acres. All Counties, Duke and Charlotte Water quickly responded in February to the Marine Commission's request for funding to cover the costs of the initial applications which started in April. Results have been good after the first three treatments. There have been some additional patches discovered and a fall survey will give accurate data on the size of the problem. Our Environmental Committee is working with NC State to plan and administer the program in 2025.

B. Recreation & Boating

We continue to see an increase in lake traffic. The number of rental boats and rental properties with boats has continued to grow exponentially, resulting in many first-time boaters on the lake. We continue to work with all lake county enforcement officers and NC Wildlife Resources Commission 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. LNMC 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. Modeled on Coast Guard rules, it requires a Captain’s license, picking up passengers at approved areas and annual boat inspections by the Marine Commission. 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 procedure and permit application are on our website at lnmc.org. The procedure involves review by a buoy committee and NC WRC 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.

D. Rental Boat Regulation: A new regulation to insure the safety of rental boats went into effect January 1, 2024. It requires vessel registration and inspection, insurance, and training for renters, and a pre-rental checklist. Using our online registration system we have enrolled nearly 50 companies and over 400 vessels.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE

A. Shoreline Management Plan We continue meetings with Duke Energy to provide input to the proposed changes to the Duke Shoreline Management Plan. This governs all activities along the shoreline of Lake Norman. The SMP must be updated and sent to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) every 10 years, with the next revision due in 2025. Duke has set up a stakeholder group, which includes LNMC, to help identify changes needed. Public meetings will be held in Fall to review proposed changes, and these will be sent out to Commissioners and the public for comment.

B. County Communication

In February we convened a meeting of all County Managers and Commission Chairs and Commissioners, Duke Energy, Charlotte Water, and citizens to provide an update to the Lyngbya plan and all of our key initiatives. It was a very good exchange and we are planning similar sessions in the future.

c. Communication / Website

The Marine Commission website at Inmc.org provides links to any information that would be useful to boaters operating in Lake Norman as well as residents and owners. Monthly meeting agenda and minutes are also published. Usage continues to grow year over year, most notably in the areas dealing with laws, regulations and navigation.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Scott". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "S".

David Scott
Executive Director