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

Subject: Activities Report for First Quarter FY 24-25

Dear Chairpersons & County Managers,

This report summarizes the Lake Norman Marine Commission (LNMC) Activities for the fiscal first quarter of FY 2024 - 2025 ending on September 30, 2024. As we wrapped up the 2024 boating season, we were gratified to report a year with fewest number of fatalities, three, in the last several years. Thanks to the efforts of our lake patrol officers and our ongoing efforts, summarized below, the trend continues to improve.

At the end of the quarter in September Hurricane Helene caused lots of damage and introduced lots of pollutants in the lake. It disrupted several of our programs, most notably weed and algae management. It will be Spring before we fully identify the effects of the storm. In the meantime we are working with the Wildlife Federation, Catawba Riverkeeper, Duke and others on coordinated efforts to remove debris and navigation hazards.

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 continued 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. We are providing rental companies and marinas with copies of our brochure that details the boating safety laws and requirements in NC and we are encouraging them to conduct training prior to renting boats on Lake Norman.

We also had several 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 were 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. LNMC provided handouts and participated in the Big Day at the Lake event in July.

The LNMC is cooperating with Boat Clubs, Lake Norman businesses, and the US Coast Guard Auxiliary to sponsor Boating Education programs presented in the area. This allows students to attend August and September free of charge at the new Murray Safety Center.

LNMC boater education is providing monthly informational articles published in “mailbox” publications around the lake. Recent articles featured the LNMC Rental and Charter Boat Regulations, and the What 3 Words app for emergency location. We worked with WSOC-TV and Lake Norman law enforcement to present new features aired during evening news broadcasts related to boating safety during the quarter. One feature featured rules for boat rentals and how to avoid getting scammed by illegal renters. Another included a simulated emergency call and response by Lake Patrol to show how boaters can contact first responders and handle on-water emergencies on Lake Norman.

C. No-Wake Issues

We continued to distribute our updated Lake Norman map which indicates the 150 foot no wake zone and areas for water sports activities that show wake surfing must be conducted at least 200 feet from docks and structures.

Lake patrol officers continued to issue warnings and citations for wake violations, the largest number of complaints by residents and boaters. Most are caused by jet skis in coves.

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 upgraded Markers that had faded signs for better visibility. We also repaired or replaced lights on the markers that had failed. We worked with our contractor to select a better light solution which should provide over double the life of the current solution. A list of all markers requiring repair is on our website under “ATON Report to Boaters”. Hurricane Helene damage assessment was started, but appeared to be fairly limited though quite a few lights may need replacement.

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. Again this year, 100% of the fatalities could have been prevented with the use of PFDs. Law enforcement has reported that violations of this requirement occur because boaters do not have the proper equipment, especially for inexperienced boaters. To address this we continued to supply 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. Over a hundred have been provided, over 20 in the quarter.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC RECREATION

A. Aquatic Growth Management

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

Lynngbya, a blue-green algae that can form dense mats on the surface of waterbodies, was discovered in Fall 2023, covering approximately ten acres. During the quarter we completed the last three of the six prescribed applications of a copper-based herbicide. The September survey to determine effectiveness was disrupted by Hurricane Helene. It will be March 2025 before a full survey can be completed to 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 continued 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, passenger pickups 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. During the Quarter we had a dozen charter

operators with twenty vessels registered. There are still companies operating illegally and we are working with legal and counties to plan enforcement.

B. No Wake Buoy Ordinance: The procedure and permit application for No Wake buoys are on our website at Inmc.org. Very few applications 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. We are working with Duke Energy, NC Wildlife and the Lake Wylie Marine Commission to develop a plan to accelerate removals.

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. There are many more rentals not in compliance and we are working with legal and counties to plan enforcement.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE

A. Shoreline Management Plan We continued 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 LNMCM, to help identify changes needed. Public meetings will be held early next year to review proposed changes, and these will be sent out to Commissioners and the public for comment.

B. 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.



David Scott
Executive Director