



Post Office Box 2454
Cornelius, NC 28031

Phone (704) 564-6333
email: lnmc@lnmc.org

August 15, 2020

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

Subject: Activities Report for 4th Quarter 2019-2020

Dear Chairpersons & County Managers,

This report will summarize the Lake Norman Marine Commission (LNMC) Activities for the 4th Quarter of the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2020 and a yearly expense summary.

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. Unfortunately, the virus meeting restrictions have cancelled the in-person boating courses this spring & summer, but we continue to encourage folks to take an on-line course as the best available option. Boating knowledge for boat 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.

B. Boater Education

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 public about no wake issues especially with the larger wake surfing boats. The LNMC provided pamphlets outlining all the requirements for boating on the Lake to local law enforcement, Coast Guard Auxiliary and Lake Norman Power Squadron to provide to boaters. This pamphlet with a summary of boating regulations is available on our website at lnmc.org. The site usage statistics show we have an increasing number of people accessing our website to view boating regulations. We also participated in the spring Boat Show in Charlotte to help promote public boating safety and educate boaters on requirements for operating a boat on Lake Norman.

In 2019, we revised our Lake Norman Search & Rescue map and we provide this map free to all law enforcement, emergency services and support agencies that operate on the lake. The rescue side of the map shows a grid system that gives law enforcement and emergency services a simple grid location that can be easily relayed to responding organization. The other side of the map provides locations for lake services and all boater navigation aids are marked on the map along with their GPS coordinates for local boaters to use in chart plotters. This map was sold at the Boat Show and is available to the public for \$10 to offset our costs.

C. No-Wake Issues

The No Wake Buoy Application currently requires an applicant to engage with law enforcement to address violation of current no wake requirements. As the popularity of wake surfing continues to grow, more complaints are being received concerning the larger wakes made by boats specifically designed for wake surfing. A working group of local interested parties, law enforcement, Coast Guard Auxiliary and Power Squadron has met to help determine what we could do to educate boaters on the no wake requirements and the concerns over the shore erosion and dock damage being accelerated by wake surfing activities. The working group will make any recommendations to the Marine Commission for additional boater education possibilities or changes in current no wake requirements.

D. Navigational Aids

The LNMC currently maintains 184 navigational aids on Lake Norman including Channel Markers, Shoal Markers and No Wake Bridge Buoys. We also have plans to upgrade markers that are degraded due to age and have installed new shoal markers in areas identified as a safety hazard. A list of all markers requiring repair is currently located on our website under "ATON Report to Boaters".

We have partnered with America's Boating Club of Lake Norman (formerly known as the Lake Norman Power & Sail Squadron) to conduct an annual survey of all lake markers to determine any needed repairs. This is an invaluable service provided by the Boating Club and will help maintain our lake marker system which provides safety information to all boaters on Lake Norman

For several years we have partnered with the NC Wildlife Federation to identify locations where Osprey nests have been built on ATON's. Nesting poles were installed adjacent to those ATON's to allow Ospreys to build a nest and not damage our lake markers. Of the 15 poles installed, most of them were occupied with nesting Osprey's this year. We have identified 3 additional locations where Osprey nests were built on lake markers and will work with NC Wildlife

Federation to place a nesting pole adjacent to these navigation aids after the Osprey's leave in the fall.

We are seeing some of the smaller islands on the lake disappear due to water erosion and as these become shallow areas, we will mark with appropriate Shoal markers. We installed 3 new shoal markers this past year for areas that are typically less than 8 feet deep at full pond and have increasing boat traffic. As boat traffic increases, we are seeing problems with shallower areas on the lake that now have more boat traffic than previous years. We work with the boat clubs around the lake to get feedback on areas where their members have issues with groundings. It is anticipated that additional shoal markers will be needed in the future.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC RECREATION

A. Hydrilla Management

A survey in fall of 2019, by NC State, found no visible hydrilla. The 2018 outbreak of hydrilla growth primarily in Ramsey Creek has been eliminated by the stocking of 22,500 sterile grass carp over two years, spring of 2018 & 2019.

We continue to discuss with DEQ and NC Wildlife a program to establish a routine maintenance stocking number to be placed in the lake each spring to eliminate the possibility of reoccurrence. In the spring of 2020, 750 grass carp were stocked to continue to replenish the carp population that should control any regrowth from tubers (roots) that are active for 8-10 years following the initial growth. Our current plans are to stock at this level for the next 3-4 years.

We have entered into an agreement with DEQ to conduct a mortality study in future years to determine the survival rate of the carp once the visible growth of hydrilla is eliminated. The tubers will continue to produce growth over the next several years and we know that hydrilla is prevalent throughout the Southeast and will likely be accidentally reintroduced into the lake from boaters visiting our area. DEQ and NC Wildlife have installed underwater acoustic receivers on 32 of our lake markers and in the future a group of grass carp will have acoustic transmitters attached which will allow more detailed tracking of fish movements and longevity. This study is a jointly funded by DEQ, NC Wildlife, Marine Commission, Duke Energy and Charlotte Water.

B. Swimming Beach—Ramsey Creek Park, Lake Norman State Park
Swimming areas at these parks continue to operate. Unfortunately, the virus restrictions have required these swimming areas to be currently closed.

C. Recreation Boating Traffic – This year has seen a large increase in lake traffic and many local boat dealers have reported a record number of boat sales in 2020. Apparently, due to other travel restrictions, recreation on the lake has

been the choice for many in our area. This has caused some concern with increased boating traffic and having many first-time boaters on the lake. This has possibly contributed to unfortunately having 4 fatalities on the lake to date. We continue to work with all lake enforcement officers from the 4 surrounding counties, Cornelius Police and NC Wildlife to identify possible ways to enhance boater safety and knowledge of boating safety laws.

3. ORDINANCES

- A. **Charter Boat Ordinance:** We currently have 6 charter boats permitted to operate on the lake. Charter boats are required to submit operational plans, complete a safety inspection and verification of insurance to renew their permits each spring.
- B. **No Wake Buoy Ordinance:** As the number of boats on the lake continues to grow, we anticipate additional applications for installation of No Wake Buoys. Currently the Marine Commission has approved 91 No Wake Buoys since establishing this ordinance in 2000. We continue to evaluate our process for No Wake Buoys to determine if additional changes are necessary. No Wake Buoys are only approved to mark the current 150 ft zone required by state law.
- C. **Rafting Ordinance:** Events on the lake that involve larger number of boats continue to apply for rafting permits as required. This has been effective in controlling the larger rafting events that had 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 is provided.

The 2019-2020 support provided by the counties was sufficient to fund the activities of the Marine Commission over this current fiscal year. We ended the 2019-2020 fiscal year with \$56,216 in reserve funds, an increase over previous years. A reserve fund in this range has been recommended by our auditors to ensure that we can meet future obligations and any increased maintenance of the lake marker system.

2019-2020 Expenses

Navigation Aid Maintenance	41%
Staff & Legal	32%
Administrative & Office	10%
Audit & Accounting	8%
Hydrilla Management	5%
Boater Education	4%

Our estimates for the current 2020-2021 fiscal year indicate that we may need to allocate some of our reserve due to increased maintenance on the lake marker system and the need to have more legal support of ongoing activities. While we have not asked for an increase in county support over the previous 3 years, we anticipate some increase in support requested when we submit our request for the 2021-2022 fiscal year in January 2021.

The audit of the 2018-2019 year is complete and has been approved by the Local Government Commission. No issues were identified in the audit which found full compliance with all state requirements for local government fiscal activities. Copies of the approved audit have been transmitted to each county. The audit of the fiscal year 2019-2020 is currently in progress and we will provide the approved audit report to each county when completed.

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

Morris Sample
Executive Director
msample@lnmc.org