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July 17, 2022

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

Subject: Activities Report for 4th Quarter of FY 21-22

Dear Chairpersons & County Managers,

This report summarizes the Lake Norman Marine Commission (LNMC) Activities for the 4th Quarter of the fiscal year ending on June 30, 2022.

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.

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.

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. We make this map available to all law enforcement and first responders on the lake. We are also preparing to publish an updated version of the lake map that would include 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.

C. No-Wake Issues

The Commissioners approved the new No Wake Buoy permit application. This new permit process provides for review of the request by a buoy review committee and the NC Wildlife Association. The 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.

The NC Wildlife Commission is conducting a review of all buoys on Lake Norman. Any buoy that is not approved by the Marine Commission or the NC Wildlife Commission is subject to removal. The owner, if determined, is notified to remove the buoy within 10 days. If buoy is not removed by the owner, then the Wildlife Commission will remove the buoy.

D. Navigational Aids

The LNMC currently maintains 182 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 are replacing 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.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC RECREATION

A. Aquatic Growth Management

A survey in fall of 2021, completed by NC State, found only a trace of 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, in the 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 May of 2022, 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.

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. No additional growth of Hydrilla has been found.

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.

- 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 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 designated marinas and boat inspections by the Marine Commission annually. This will ensure that any 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 prior to consideration by the Commission.
- 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 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 will allow 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.
- 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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