

## **Report on December 10 Public Hearing re Willoughby Petition to Prohibit Wake Sports**

The December 10 public hearing regarding Willoughby's petition to the DEC to prohibit wake sports was held at the Gateway Center in Newport. Five other lakes - Big Averill and Little Averill, Echo, Parker, and Shadow - also presented their petitions during the four-hour hearing. Each lake had 10 minutes to provide an overview of their petition before the floor was opened to two-minute comments from the public. The number of those attending in person ranged between 30 and 50 during the evening, with an additional 50 to 70 participating remotely.

The Westmore Association's petition, which proposes a new lake specific rule that says "Wake sports are prohibited," was the last petition on the agenda. Diane Lehder presented the overview which highlighted key portions of the petition, emphasizing Willoughby's designation by the Department of the Interior in 1967 as a National Natural Landmark and its unique geological features. The hearing was then opened to comments from the floor.

Twenty-seven people weighed in on our petition - 22 in support of prohibiting wake sports and five asking the DEC to allow wake sports as permitted under the new regulations adopted last spring. One wake sports supporter who signed up to speak was present at the meeting but chose not to speak when called upon.

Most supporters of the petition shared their concerns about the safety of others on the water, an issue not addressed by the DEC in its initial rulemaking process, and the threat of spreading new aquatic invasive species to Willoughby. A few related frightening personal experiences. All of their comments were rooted in fact, effectively presented, and clearly heartfelt. Those speaking in favor of allowing wake sports, several of whom own wake boats on the lake, emphasized the fact that we had no problems on the lake this summer as evidenced by the fact that no incidents were reported to the state. A recent document issued by the DEC on reported incidents was effectively challenged by several speakers as incomplete. It is an acknowledged fact that lack of enforcement discourages people from filing complaints.

A second hearing was held in Montpelier on December 12 for 4 additional petitions filed by Caspian Lake, Lake Fairlee, Waterbury Reservoir, and Joe's Pond. It was also well attended.

All nine petitions presented during the two hearings were well thought out and well supported. There is no predicting how ANR will finally rule and which, if any, petitions will move into the final rulemaking process.

**Links to videos of both hearings** can be found at <https://dec.vermont.gov/>

[watershed/lakes-ponds/lakes-and-ponds-rulemaking](#).

**Public comments regarding the petitions will be received until 4:30 pm, Monday, December 23. Please make the time to share your concerns with the DEC.**

In its response to the comments submitted during the initial rulemaking process last winter, the DEC admitted it did not have professional expertise in safety on staff and thus did not consider safety in developing the regulations that were finally adopted last spring. It committed to considering safety as it evaluated individual lake petitions.

We encourage you to share your concerns about safety and how large wakes generated by wake boats in wake sports mode threaten the safety and enjoyment of others on the water. Share your concerns about the negative impact of wakesports on the serenity of the lake environment, and on the peaceful enjoyment of the lake by swimmers, paddleboarders, kayakers and others engaging in non-disruptive uses of the lake. If you have had any personal experience with these large wakes, let them know. These incidents provided some of the most dramatic and effective testimony at the hearings. And please - express your concern about the spread of aquatic invasive species via residual water in ballast tanks. Lakes just over the border in Canada are home to many aquatic invasive species not yet found in Vermont lakes.

Send your statement to: [anr.wsmdlakes@vermont.gov](mailto:anr.wsmdlakes@vermont.gov)

The subject line should include the words: wakesports and Willoughby Lake

Please copy us on your email: [dianezlehder@gmail.com](mailto:dianezlehder@gmail.com)

**Deadline: 4:30 pm, Monday, December 23**

We will continue to keep you updated as the process proceeds. With best wishes for the holidays and gratitude for your continuing support.

The Westmore Association