

## **Slow No Wake Ordinance Update, May 2023**

by Eugene Clark

Last year in May Watersmeet Township held a meeting to discuss establishing a Township ordinance to formally regulate the speed and wake generation of watercraft on channels connecting various lakes on the Michigan side of the Chain. The CCROA identified 8 such channels, many of which already have “Slow No Wake” signs put up many years ago by the CCROA in an educational effort to draw awareness in protecting shorelines, aquatic habitats, and safety. This became a contentious subject among residents on the Chain. The meeting resulted in the Township passing a resolution which then went to the Michigan DNR for review. If the MDNR’s review indicated merit in this resolution, then it would return to the Township for the drafting of an ordinance.

The MDNR visited many properties impacted by this resolution and interviewed riparian residents as part of their due diligence in reviewing this resolution during the Summer of 2022. Their preliminary conclusion (8 draft reports, one for each proposed channel) was distributed in November, 2022. It said that 7 of the 8 channels do not meet the threshold in requiring an ordinance. The only exception they cited was possibly the sand cut. Their reviews comment on the nature of each channel, number of reported complaints, and the number of reported boating accidents.

The MDNR draft reports said that existing Michigan boating laws sufficiently cover any of the issues raised by those favoring the ordinance. Michigan boating law does regulate watercraft operation on open lakes. The rules are a watercraft must operate at a slow no-wake speed when less than 100 feet from shore/docks/rafts AND water depth less than 3 feet. When overtaking an anchored boat or smaller craft, the watercraft must slow to “slow no wake” speed when within 100 feet of the other watercraft. Michigan law goes on to say that channels between lakes are exempt from this law, but that safety regulations still apply. The example here would be a boater in a channel at slow no wake speed is overcome by another boater at a higher speed endangering the former.

In the MDNR draft reports they cite that these reviews are preliminary in nature and that they will hold a public hearing on any concerns. Watersmeet Township is in the process of setting such a hearing in mid-June. Note: It has been scheduled for Tuesday, June 20, 2023, 6:00 p.m. at the Township Community Center. Information is posted on the Township website about the hearing, including the preliminary reports from the DNR investigation last summer. The public hearing will be conducted by Corporal Jill Miller from DNR. She is listed as the author on the draft reports. According to Corporal Miller, DNR still considers this matter an “open investigation”. I take that to mean public input can still impact the final DNR decision. For people who are interested in this issue, they should read the reports posted on the Township website and be prepared to offer input at the hearing on the 20th.

The CCROA believes that the “Slow No Wake” speed in our connecting channels is important for safety reasons and the health of the Chain overall. We urge residents and visitors to follow these guidelines whether a formal ordinance passes or not. This is part of the “lake culture” we embrace.