



BY DAN ARMITAGE

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Dan Armitage is a popular Great Lakes-based outdoor writer and host of the Buckeye Sportsman show (buckeyesportsman.net), syndicated weekly on 30 radio stations across Ohio. Dan is a certified Passport to Fishing instructor and leads kids fishing programs at Midwest boat and sport shows, and is a licensed Captain with a Master rating from the US Coast Guard.



The author at the helm of the latest high-tech wakesurf boat model from Malibu, that actually allows the surfer to determine the wave's size, shape, and even the side of the boat it is created while riding it, via a wireless remote control on his wrist.

# WAKE IMPACTS

As water levels reached record highs across the Great Lakes earlier this summer, boaters in several states were prompted to be sensitive to the wakes their watercraft leave. That's especially true in designated no-wake zones, where high waters have exacerbated the erosion problem caused by boat wakes.

One example is Michigan's St. Clair River. At press time, water levels on Lake Huron were the highest since 1986 and near record levels, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"The high water levels have the potential to cause a lot of damage to property if boaters aren't following the rules," St. Clair County Sheriff Tim Donnellon said in a news release. "Our Marine Patrol deputies will be strictly enforcing the no wake laws throughout the county."

According to reports, many boaters being stopped for wake violations are unaware of the River's rules, which establish wider no wake zones than the 100 foot buffer in place on most Michigan waterways. Michigan law also requires boats less than 26 feet in length to maintain no wake speed within 200 feet of shore, while boats more than 26 feet in length must maintain no wake speed within 600 feet of shore.

These rules are designed to protect the shore from damage caused by the waves generated by powerboats, and *should* be followed in all waters of our Inland Seas.

Meanwhile, a fast-growing water sport requires boats that are actually designed specifically to create the largest wake possible. Using a combination of ballast tanks and underwater foils, wakesurf boats leave an ocean breaker-size wave high enough for surfers to ride on a board free of any attachment to the boat. Needless to say, these boats leave an exaggerated wake and

have become the bane of waterfront property owners and dock owners on lakes where the sport is quickly gaining popularity and erosion runs rampant. What's more, part of the current problem is the result of changing technology. A lot of the wake boats built prior to 2012 required boat operators to turn huge circles to create a good wave. The newer boats only create the desired wave when they travel in a straight line – and when that's down a shoreline, the waves left behind rock the docks and erode the waterfront.

The Water Sports Industry Association is acting to head off problems by calling on the industry to help educate boaters about safe practices. Dubbed the "Wake Responsibly" campaign, the WSIA is urging the industry to get out in front of potential trouble by making available applicable marketing materials. These range from website ads to handout and insert cards available by request by contacting [info@wsia.net](mailto:info@wsia.net).



Boats built for wakesurfing actually create the largest wake possible via water ballast to weigh down the boat and underwater foils to throw the desired wave.

**The Wake Responsibly campaign stresses three key points that address, in part, complaints about water sports, especially wakesurfing:**

- 1.** Stay at least 150 feet away from docks, structures, and shorelines. (“Ride the core, avoid the shore.”)
- 2.** Keep music on board at reasonable levels. We boaters know that sounds carries over water, so if it’s loud enough for the surfer to hear, homeowners can likely hear it, too.
- 3.** Minimize repetitive passes, and once you’ve run a shoreline, move to another area.

**If you enjoy wake surfing and other tow sports, here are additional etiquette tips offered by industry reps:**

- Drive a predicted path. In Arizona waters, for example, boats must travel in a counterclockwise traffic flow.
- Avoid close passes to other boats, and don’t follow another boat too closely.
- Don’t impede traffic. Wakesurfers usually travel at 10 to 12 mph, slower than most powercraft; avoid wakesurfing in fairways and busy areas.
- Look before you turn.
- Refrain from tricks when near other boats.

■ Early morning times usually have less traffic and are more conducive to wakesurfing.

Remember that local boating laws and navigation rules still apply in addition to the above guidelines. Follow them and everyone can enjoy their time on the water. The flip side is that, if enough lawsuits from property owners and other boaters are filed, insurance premiums could rise and/or exclusions for wakesurf boats (or those that create an artificial wake), could begin on select waters around the Great Lakes.