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Compromise sought over slow/no wake

By NEIL JOHNSON (Contact) Friday, Dec. 16, 2011

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JANESVILLE — Janesville residents and the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District have for months clashed over a proposed countywide slow/no wake standard.

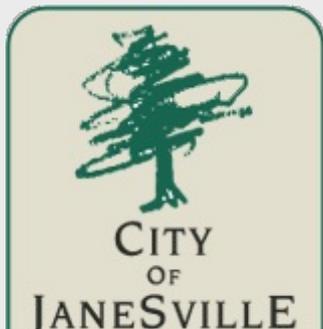
At a public hearing Thursday, the lake district appeared to suggest a compromise.

The Rock County Board held the hearing for a recommendation calling for slow/no wake to be set at 7.5 feet in the north part of the Rock River and at 6.5 feet in the south part, with the dividing line at the Indianford dam.

The recommendation is essentially the status quo for townships in the county who now set slow/no wake orders.

Lake district officials have argued those standards are too restrictive on boating tourism on the river and at Lake Koshkonong. In recent months, lake district officials have pressed for the county to relax slow/no wake to flood action stage—or 9 feet—at Newville.

Some residents oppose that standard, arguing that boats cruising in waters that high would cause damage to shore property and add to shore erosion, particularly in low-lying spots along the Rock River.



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Thursday, the lake district seemed to soften its stance.

"We should compromise," said lake district Chairman Brian Christianson. "We have people living in low-elevation properties."

Rob Montgomery, the lake district's hydrologist, told the board a district analysis shows township officials have been "inconsistent" in setting slow/no wake orders, often setting and releasing the orders when water levels are higher than 8 feet in the northern part of the county.

Even at that rate, Montgomery said, recent boating seasons are crimped by slow/no wake. He argued a standard of 7.5 feet would cut into boating even more, and he urged the board for a compromise "somewhat below" 9 feet.

Montgomery's comments represented a new argument by the lake district. They came after a suggestion early in the hearing by town of Fulton supervisor and lake district member Dave Brown that the county set a slow/no-wake standard of 8 feet in the north part of the river.

Brown brought up that same idea at a county committee meeting earlier this fall, saying the town of Fulton had experimented with an 8-foot standard last spring and had no complaints of property damage along the river.

Still, some at the hearing—including Milton resident Penny Shackelford—urged the county to keep its recommendation for slow/no wake at 7.5 feet. Shackelford said she wonders why the lake district has suddenly backed off its earlier quest for a 9-foot standard.

"I don't even know what to respond to," she told the county.

Meanwhile, the board had no discussion after the hearing, and county officials say the board likely won't take up the ordinance again until mid-January.

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