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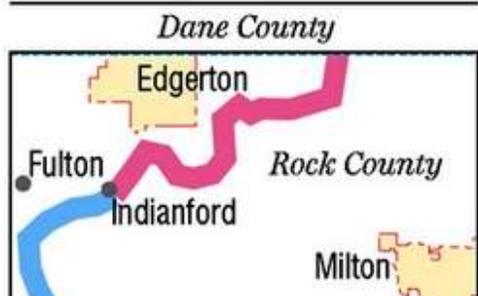
High water keeps summer fun at a minimum on Rock River

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FRANK SCHULTZ
Friday, August 11, 2017

ROCK RIVER
Days without speed restrictions since Memorial Day

22 **6** **0**



Wisconsin can be a summer wonderland for water-skiers, anglers and other boaters.

Rock County's major waterway, however, has been off limits to most boating activities most of the summer because of high water.

The river has been under slow/no-wake orders more often than it's been open to



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* The southern stretch of the Rock River has been open the entire 73 days between Memorial Day and Friday, except for the night of July 4, when the restriction is imposed in the Beloit area because of boat congestion caused by the fireworks display.

Tony DiNicola/tdinicola@gazettextra.com

normal boat speeds during the prime boating season, starting at Memorial Day.

A county ordinance divides the river into three segments. The longest segment is the middle one, from Indianford downstream to the Beloit-Rock Towlne Road bridge. That segment was open to regular boating only six of the 73 days this summer--from Memorial Day through Friday.

The Rock Aqua Jays get an exemption for their water-skiing at Janesville's Traxler Park.

The northern segment, from Indianford north to the county line, has been restriction-free for 22 days.

"It's been a very wet sort of year, and that has contributed to the high

water and kept recreational boaters from using the river the way they'd like to," said Sgt. Ken Marquardt, who runs the sheriff's office's recreation safety branch.

Marquardt said the river has been rather high in recent years, leading to similar situations.

Slow/no wake means a boat must moves as slowly as possible while still maintaining steerage control, the county ordinance

11:18AM



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states.

It's hard to go that slow all the time, Marquardt acknowledged, but that's the county ordinance.

The sheriff's office decides when to impose the restriction, based on the river level as measured at two gauges, one at Afton and one in Lake Koshkonong near Newville.

The Lake Koshkonong gauge controls the northernmost stretch of the river, from the Dane County line to Indianford. The no-wake order goes into effect when that gauge exceeds 8 feet.

The no-wake order goes into effect in the middle segment when the Afton gauge exceeds 6.5 feet.

On the southern stretch of the river, no wakes are allowed when the Afton gauge reaches 8.5 feet. That wider part of the river has been free of speed restrictions this year because of the higher threshold.

Rains have been heavier than normal in the county this year, but the river level is influenced by a watershed that extends north to the Madison-area lakes and the Horicon Marsh.

This June, deputies patrolling the river wrote 16 tickets for violating the no-wake order and gave 13 warnings, Marquardt said. In July, they wrote 36 tickets and 26 warnings.

Tickets come with \$225 fines, a cost regulated by the state Department of Natural Resources and which increased this year, Marquardt said.

"It doesn't make it real pleasurable to write tickets to people, but it's what the DNR wanted," he said.

Violators can get testy, however. These are most often those with less experience and who don't own land along the river and aren't aware that high water and boat wakes can erode shorelines, so deputies explain the reasons for the rule, Marquardt said.

"Usually, people understand that and leave us with handshakes

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more than we get yelled at,” Marquardt said.

Deputies usually find about three boating violations when they stop a boat, so they note the problems and soften the blow by writing up just one violation.

“I think we're pretty fair that way,” Marquardt said.

The spot where Lake Koshkonong becomes the river on the county's northern border is where deputies write many of the tickets, Marquardt said. That's because of the many summer homes and campgrounds and the fact that Lake Koshkonong may be free of speed restrictions, and some boaters don't understand when they have entered the river.

Some residents wanting a higher trigger level for the middle section of the river brought their case to the Rock County Board Public Safety and Justice Committee in 2015. They asked it be changed from 6.5 feet to 7 feet.

But residents who support the current level also attended the meeting, and the committee took no action.

One board member said at the time that he would need to see more support for change for him to vote for it. Another said people would not take the ordinance seriously if the county kept changing it.

Cmdr. Troy Knudson of the sheriff's office noted the speed restrictions were lifted this week, but more rain could push the river back up before Labor Day, the unofficial end of summer.

“It's nice to see a little reprieve, but it's hard to predict these things,” Knudson said.



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