



THE LAKELAND TIMES

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Inside today's Times



Tiffany and Ausman square off at LUHS

Voters will decide Nov. 8

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Voters filed into Lakeland Union High School's (LUHS) auditorium on Tuesday, the location for the U.S. 7th Congressional District Debate featuring incumbent Tom Tiffany (R) and opponent Richard Ausman (D).

LUHS students came up with the idea to host the debate two weeks prior. Both district administrator Bob Smudde and principal Chad Gauwerke praised students' efforts, saying how impressive it was.

Following the LUHS a capella choir's performance of the National Anthem, three students took a seat to question and moderate while other students stood behind cameras and audio equipment to capture it all.

Before questioning, Tiffany introduced himself to the audience and talked about his background.

Tiffany, who served one term in the state assembly and two terms in the state senate, said he grew up on a dairy farm in western Wisconsin. He worked for a farm supply coopera-

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TREVOR GREENE/LAKELAND TIMES

Three LUHS students, seated from the left, Lilah Kirkham, Olivia England, Colton Teichmiller, moderate the U.S. 7th Congressional District Debate between Dick Ausman (D), standing left, and incumbent Tom Tiffany (R) on Tuesday, Oct. 4, in Minocqua.

Natural Resource Board members call for action on wake boat issues

Department of Natural Resources secretary asks for full presentation to board

By Beckie Gaskill
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

At the most recent Natural Resources Board (NRB) meeting, several concerned citizens spoke about wake boat and surf boat issues in the state during the public comment portion of the meeting. One of those people was Jeff Meessmann.

Meessmann spoke about the increasing activity of wake boats on lakes where he is a Clean Boats Clean Waters and Citizen Lake Monitoring volunteer. These boats, he said, generate hazardous wakes with their bow up and stern down, the propellers at a 40 degree angle. The angle of the props, he said, scours the bottom of the lake and the hazardous wakes cause safety issues. He said a "hazardous wake" is defined as a wake that is intentionally magnified through the use of ballast, design features, or operational procedures, to amplify wave height. Some wakes, he said, can reach four feet in height.

See Wake boats. . . page 8

Vilas forestry looks to increase utility easement fee

Resolution sent to county board a second time

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

At the recommendation of Vilas County forest administrator Chad Keranen, the forestry, recreation and land committee agreed to forward a resolution increasing utility easement fees in the county forest to \$1 per foot and a \$1,000 for administrative work.

Keranen said he was absent from the county board's meeting last month, but he was aware it had disapproved the committee's previous resolution with regard to utility easement fees.

"What we need to come up with is a better fee structure," he said.

The appropriate fee is typically \$1 per foot with \$250 for administrative work, according to Keranen.

"And at the county board, like I said I wasn't there, but the thought was that fees are not enough and that utilities should be charged more," he said. "This has nothing to do with private facilities crossing our county forest. This discussion we need to have is about what is the appropriate fee to charge a power company or utility company to cross our county forest."

Keranen said he's reached out to other counties for a reference point but, he said, "as you could imagine it's all over the board."

Committee chairperson Holly Tomlanovich, while looking over the other counties' fees, said Vilas County is relatively high with regard to its dollar-per-foot charge.

The administration fee is what Keranen said

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2022 youth gun deer hunt takes place this weekend

By Beckie Gaskill
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Each year the state holds a youth gun deer hunt. The hunt is always held on the closest Saturday and Sunday to Oct. 8. With Oct. 8 being this Saturday, the youth gun deer hunt for 2022 will be Saturday, Oct. 8, and Sunday, Oct. 9. This special hunt gives youth the opportunity to harvest their deer before the pressure of the regular gun deer season. It also provided an opportunity for young hunters to learn and gain experience while hunting with more experienced hunters.

Mentors must be at least 18 years of age. If the mentor is not a parent or guardian of the youth hunter, they must have a parent or guardian's permission to serve as a mentor to the youth hunter. For youth hunters younger than 12

years old and those who have not completed a hunter education course, the mentor must also be a hunter education graduate and hold a current hunting license.

The mentor must accompany the youth hunter during the entire hunt. This means the adult must be within both visual and voice contact of the youth hunter without the aid of a mechanical or electrical amplifying device other than a hearing aid.

Hunters aged 15 and under, with or without a hunter safety certification, can take part in the hunt with a mentor to present. Youth hunters may hunt with a gun, bow or cross-bow during this special weekend hunt. They may hunt in all management units, with the exception of Menominee County and all state parks.

A gun deer license is required for

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Winchester town board receives hazardous wake presentation

Draft shipping container ordinance to be revised

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

The Winchester town board received a hazardous wake presentation on Monday from the town's lakes committee.

Gary Engstrom, who represents Rock Lake, gave the presentation on the committee's behalf.

How a hazardous wake is produced, its effects on the environment and safety concerns it can cause were all emphasized in the presentation.

With all of the information the committee gathered, Engstrom said it was decided to relay it "with potential for consideration (of) an ordinance to control hazardous wakes."

Following the presentation, former town supervisor Galen Brownell cautioned the town board about creating an ordinance and suggested it should determine whether or not potential ordinances are even enforceable.

Town supervisor John Grimmer, who also represents Harris Lake on the lakes committee, assured Brownell everything discussed is

"All they're asking us to do right now is to take a look at it."

Joe Discianno, Winchester town chairman

solely informational at this point.

Engstrom included at the start of his presentation a graphic depicting three boat types used for water recreation.

Boats meant for water skiing were shown at a speed of 32 miles per hour, boats meant for wakeboarding were shown at a speed of 18 miles per hour and boats meant for wake surfing were shown at a speed of 10 miles per hour.

In particular, boats designed to be used for wake surfing, Engstrom said, are "relatively new" and are the biggest concern because they create the biggest waves.

The big waves, he said, can harm lakes' shores, residents' properties and other boaters.

Wake surfing boats also contain ballast capability, Engstrom pointed out, maintaining large amounts of water that increase the potential of transferring invasive species.

Additionally, he said, the boats' design creates downward pressure which can negatively impact lake beds and fish habitat.

Engstrom mentioned different state laws already in place.

"What relevant laws do we have? Just three," the presentation reads. "1. A law setting minimum distance from shore, for making wakes. 2. A law regarding safety in an 'approach or pass' of another boat. 3. A law permitting anyone harmed by a wake to sue for damages."

Wisconsin state law has set a 100-foot no-wake zone from shore, the presentation continued, with a few towns establishing 200-foot no-wake zones.

"These laws are generally adequate for ski and fishing boats," the presentation reads. "Wake surfing requires 600' to 1000' to decrease wakes to the impact of ski boat wakes at 200 (feet)."

Other municipalities the presentation noted to have already enacted hazardous wake ordinances include Mequon in Ozaukee County and four towns in Sawyer County.

Keeping those ordinances in mind, the lakes committee suggested the town consider three regulations.

Specifically, the regulations pointed to requiring hazardous wake be produced at least 700 feet away from shore, wake surfing not to occur in less than 20 feet of water and wake surfing to be allowed only on lakes large enough to handle it.

Town chairman Joe Discianno reiterated that the lakes committee is only asking the board to look at the information it has gathered so far.

"All they're asking us to do right now is to take a look at it," he said. "And pretty much every town is taking a look at it, so that's all."

Ordinance

A draft shipping container ordinance was sent back to the town's plan commission to be revised.

The board's biggest issue with the draft they reviewed Monday was it included an exemption for businesses and non-profit organizations.

"And I don't think that was the intent on what we were trying to accomplish," Grimmer said.

"I agree with John ... where businesses are exempt from this ordinance," town supervisor Jeff Whitney said. "That's the whole reason we brought this up."

Trevor Greene may be reached via email at trevorgreene@lakelandtimes.com.

Wake boats

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These boats can be loaded with up to 5,000 pounds of water, Meessmann said, and have 350-600 horse power motors powering them. Without a full ballast, many of these boats top 6,000 pounds, meaning a 10,000-pound boat once the water is added. His concern was finding deep enough and wide enough lakes for these boats. Many Northwoods lakes, he said, were not near the size to avoid damage to shorelines, bottom habitat and safety concerns.

He asked the NRB to consider creating a regulation

"It's unacceptable to sit here in Wisconsin, for the next three years in northern Wisconsin, and have these boats go from lake to lake."

Dr. Fred Prehn, NRB member

to require these boats to operate 700 feet from docks, rafts, piers and other watercraft. He said these boats should also not be allowed to operate in less than 20 feet of water because of the damage they have been shown to do. He also asked that wake boats not be allowed to operate on lakes less than 1,500 acres in size.

Meessmann also expressed concerns about invasive species. Because the ballasts of these boats are

not created to be fully drained when moving from one lake to another, the risk of spreading invasive species is quite high, he said. They have closed systems that cannot be inspected by those who, like him, volunteer for Clean Boats Clean Waters.

He spoke about a recent study looking at 23 wake boats, stating 13 of those boats had 13 gallons of water onboard when inspected. Another two boats

held 20 gallons of water. In all, 13 families of zooplankton were found in the ballast water of these boats, and two have invasive mussel larvae.

When Meessmann finished with his presentation, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) secretary Preston Cole asked for input from law enforcement. Warden Peter Wetzel spoke first, saying the state did have a statute requiring boats be at slow no wake

within 100 feet of the shoreline, and in cases where he involved with complaints regarding wake boats, the boats had been in compliance with that. As far as an offense that would be ticketable by a warden, he said, a hazardous wake must be a public safety threat, which holds a much higher standard than a single complainant.

Warden Matt O'Brien offered to bring the matter back to the board and conduct a full informational presentation on the matter. He said there is an aquatic management component, a mechanical dredging component and an ancillary safety

See **Wake boats**. . . page 42

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Wake boats

From page 8

piece that all factored into the equation. A full presentation, he said, may help provide a path forward, whatever that path may be.

Board member Fred Prehn said he felt it was a public safety issue. With the angle at which the boat operate, he said, drivers could not see ahead of them. He said he experienced this himself many times on the Eagle River Chain.

"I'm not sure how to navigate this," he said. "No pun intended. I'm not sure it's legislative, but I think it's within the realm of the DNR to do some regulation in this area. We have an obligation to protect safety, waterway, aquatic plants, sediment, erosion control, and potential conflict of



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOGRAPH

Natural Resources Board member Dr. Fred Prehn, third from the left, had strong concerns about allowing wake boats and surf boats run continue to run, unregulated, on many lakes in northern Wisconsin.

human life. But I'm not sure how to do that." He said he wanted to be able to make a determination as to whether it was within the realm of the board and the DNR to create regulations, or statutes may need to be put into place.

"The public needs to know that focus of this issue is on this board or

administration, or is it not?" Prehn said further. "If it's not, they need to giddy up and do what they've got to do in Madison at the capitol. The sooner we can do that, the better it is for the people who are concerned by this.

John Richter of the Plum Lake Association and the Wisconsin

Shoreline Alliance spoke on the matter also. He told several tales of waterskiers, paddle boarders and others who he had seen injured or dislodged from their crafts by these large wakes. Many instances, he said, go unreported.

"When you have a fallen or injured person

in the water, the last thing you're doing is looking for boat numbers," he told the board.

Richter said Plum Lake saw its first wake boat in 2019 and since then the number had grown to six. This number, he said, did not include the transient boats that come and go from the lake.

Richter was concerned about invasive species as well. Plum Lake, he said, has the invasive species spiny waterflea. Boats leaving Plum Lake with water in their ballast tanks could easily be transporting that invasive species to the next lake into which it is launched. He also spoke about other ecological effects, such as a loon nest on the lake that had been washed out by large wakes for the last four years.

"Action is urgently needed to regulate this threat to our northern lakes and to protect the economy of the north, which is contingent on the health of our lakes," he said. "Your lake stewards from our lakes need your help now to prevent irreversible damage to our lakes and protect other lake users."

Richter said Carroll University and several others had done studies about the effects of wake boats. Their recommendation for wake boat operation, at the current size of boats now, was a lake should be 1,500 acres with a 700-foot buffer zone from shorelines and other users. They also recommended these boats not be allowed to operate in less than 25 feet of water.

With boats getting bigger and having more horsepower, Richter said, that recommendation would likely increase. When looking at a lake such as Big St. Germain, he said, which meets the 1,500-acre minimum, that lake is only 35 feet deep, with much of it being less than 25 feet in depth. If that recommendation went to 30 feet, which he felt was likely, a 1,500-acre minimum may not be enough to protect a lake.

Jim Olson of Vilas County asked the board to create a scope statement, at the very least, and possibly even draft an emergency rule, regarding wake boats that would look to protect the lakes and the people who use them. While he said he understood that process would take time, it would take less time than to go through the Wisconsin Conservation Congress with a resolution, a track on which he had already started.

"I don't know whether the request for the emergency regulation is even needed," said Prehn. "Ballast is clear. Everyone is con-

centrating on fishing boats and live wells. It's no difference if it's ballast in a surf boat." He stated the state, in his mind, would simply need to enforce the regulation already on the books.

"There is a proof component of that," Warden O'Brien said. "Which is I need to prove to our standard, to a preponderance of an evidence at court, that there's water in the tank. Now there's a lot of things we practically know that might be happening, but to actually document that and be able to say that is always a challenge. You can't just show up at court and say I know these boats tend to have it and these are the characteristics."

Most boating regulation in statute, O'Brien said, was likely 50 years old. The technology was far out-pacing regulation. When those regulations were put into play, he said, a 10,000-pound, 600 horsepower boat was not "a thing." He felt manufacturers would need to be part of the conversation as well. He said there may also need to be some statutory changes and some "give and take" involved in the resolution of the multi-faceted challenge.

"Its unacceptable to sit here in Wisconsin, for the next three years in northern Wisconsin, and have these boats go from lake to lake," Prehn said. "These lakes aren't big. Six hundred acres, 800 acres, 300 acres. These boats are going in all the lakes you can't believe. Are we going to wait three years and have all these ballasts — It only takes one ballast to pump out at Plum Lake or Trout Lake up there and dump that fly [spiny waterflea] in these other lakes. One time. If we have existing regulations and statutory authority, we need to enforce it." He said just on the issue of invasive species alone, the boats are made not to dump all of their ballast water, and he felt that alone should be all of the proof needed to prosecute successfully.

Secretary Cole again spoke about the presentation the board would receive regarding the issue. That presentation, he said would shine a clear light on the many facets of the issue and help board members to find a way forward.

"It's a ballast water issue, an invasive species issue, costs associated with problems on lakes," Cole said. "It will be a robust presentation so then this board can act accordingly."

Beckie Gaskill may be reached via email at hgaskill@lakelandtimes.com.

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