

Background on modification of the reduced boat speed ordinance during high water on Clear Lake

Our first bass tournament of the year is scheduled to take place February 4th. The organizer is understandably concerned about the 5mph lake-wide speed limit and is considering changing venues. Three more tournaments are scheduled in February, one the 11th and two on the 25th. Additionally, nine fishing tournaments are scheduled in March. Fishing tournaments and other boating events are a significant component of the Lake County economy.

Water Resources director staff did some online research on wave decay rates, wave energy and shoreline erosion. Interestingly, power boats erode on average, about 8 square feet of unprotected shoreline per gallon of fuel. He also found that wave height decreases by half as distance from the boat increases by 8-fold. So a two foot-high wake wave 20 feet from the boat decreases to a one foot-high wave at 160 feet from the boat, but does not decrease to a 6" wave until being 1280 feet from the boat.

Wave energy – the ability to erode shoreline – does not follow the same rate of decay. The erosive force does not begin to diminish until the wave is 1300 feet from the boat and only diminishes fully when the motive energy hits the shore.

Clearly, boat wake damage can be far reaching and costly in many ways and some of the homes on Clear Lake currently have water lapping at their thresholds. The lake stage is presently predicted to reach 8.0'R about 3pm Wednesday and hover around that mark until early Saturday morning (0100) when the lake will begin to rise in response to the coming rain.

Recognizing the economic importance of lake-related events as well as the value of lakefront properties and the potential for continued high lake levels in wet years, we should attempt to derive a satisfactory solution that protects property while allowing to the fullest extent possible recreational activities on the lake. The establishment of an emergency-related extended (2500') near shore no-wake zone would best address the needs of those concerned. It is further recommended that the lake stage should be at 7.9'R for a 24-hour period prior to lifting the extended near shore no-wake zone restriction. Boat operators must still understand the need to exercise caution when operating in debris-laden waters as occurs after heavy rain events on Clear Lake.