



**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION**

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**TO:** Lt. Thomas R. Wanless, Boating Law Administrator

**FROM:** Corporal Jill Miller, Marine Specialist

**DATE:** November 2, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Investigative Report – Cisco Chain of Lakes – “Sand Cut” Channel between West Bay Lake and Morley Lake, Watersmeet Township, Gogebic County

Under the direction of Part 801 “Marine Safety” of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.80110(2), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has conducted an investigation and inquiry into whether special rules are needed on a portion of the Cisco Chain of Lakes – “Sand Cut” Channel between West Bay Lake and Morley Lake, located in Watersmeet Township, Gogebic County and included a consideration of all the following:

**A. Whether the activities subject to the proposed special rules pose any issues of safety to life or property.**

Activities subject to the proposed special rules do not pose any additional issues of safety to life or property.

**B. The profile of the water body, including local jurisdiction, size, geographic location, and amount of vessel traffic.**

The “Sand Cut” Channel between West Bay Lake and Morley Lake is located within section 16, town 44 north, range 41 west, township of Watersmeet, county of Gogebic. It is a very shallow channel and many vessels need to trim their motors to make it through. It is approximately 18 feet and only wide enough for one vessel at a time to navigate through.

**C. The current and historical depth of the water body, including whether there is an established lake level for the water body.**

The channel has a depth of approximately one foot or less. There was no data on established lake levels.

**D. Whether any identifiable special problems or conditions exist on the water body for the activities subject to the proposed special rules, such as rocks,**

**pier heads, swimming areas, public access sites, shallow waters, and submerged obstacles.**

The entrance of the channel is very narrow and shallow. The area is a very popular area for mooring and swimming due to the shallow sandy beach lining the bay.

**E. Whether the proposed special rules would unreasonably interfere with normal navigational traffic.**

Any special rule or local control may adversely affect vessel operation by restricting vessel speeds and increasing time of travel.

**F. Whether user conflicts exist on the water body.**

There have been no user conflicts reported.

**G. Complaints received by local law enforcement agencies regarding activities on the water body.**

Research through the Department of Natural Resources Communications Section shows that over the most recent 5-year period there has been one complaint reported to our Report All Poaching hotline. The complaint on 8/6/2020 stated that people are docking on private property and getting out to swim in the area making it more difficult to navigate. They are also leaving trash in the area and a jet ski, more than once, has come through the area full speed. A check with Watersmeet Township and Gogebic County showed no other reported complaints on this channel.

**H. The status of any accidents that have occurred on the water body.**

The U.S. Coast Guard Boat Accident Reporting Database shows no boating accidents reported in the last five years.

**I. Historical uses of the water body and potential future uses of the water body.**

The water bodies are multi-use lakes and is used by kayaks, anglers, recreational boaters, rowboats, and paddleboards. Except for the transfer of ownership of private residences, no other potential uses are in the foreseeable future.

**J. Whether the water body is public or private.**

West Bay Lake and Morley Lake are public lakes.

**K. Whether existing law adequately regulates the activities subject to the proposed special rules.**

Existing laws may address concerns that were brought up regarding high-speed boating.

*The following are the existing regulations:*

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT (EXCERPT)  
Act 451 of 1994

**324.80149 Operation of vessels in counter-clockwise fashion; distance between persons being towed and other objects; exception; violation as misdemeanor; violation as civil infraction; fine.**

**Sec. 80149.**

- (1) A person operating a vessel on the waters of this state in areas not marked by well defined channels, canals, rivers, or stream courses shall operate the vessels in a counter-clockwise fashion to the extent that it is reasonably possible. These persons and persons being towed on water skis or on a water sled, kite, surfboard, or similar contrivance shall maintain a distance of 100 feet from any dock, raft, buoyed or occupied bathing area, or vessel moored or at anchor, except when the vessel is proceeding at a slow—no wake speed or when water skiers are being picked up or dropped off, if that operation is otherwise conducted with due regard to the safety of persons and property and in accordance with the laws of this state. Except as otherwise provided in subsection (2), a person who violates this section is guilty of a misdemeanor.

**324.80146 Maximum or unlimited vessel speed; rules; maximum vessel speed where limits not established; exceptions; resolution requesting reduction in maximum speed limit; emergency conditions; temporary speed limit requirements; time limitations; declaration of state emergency; requiring slow—no wake speed or minimum speed; violation; fine; exceptions; waiver.**

**Sec. 80146.**

- (9) A person shall not operate a vessel on the waters of this state at a speed greater than slow—no wake speed or the minimum speed necessary for the vessel to maintain forward movement when within 100 feet of the shoreline where the water depth is less than 3 feet, as determined by vertical measurement, except in navigable channels not otherwise posted.

**324.80205 Operation of personal watercraft; requirements; violation; fine; exception.**

**Sec. 80205.**

(7) A person shall not operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this state where the water depth is less than 2 feet, as determined by vertical measurement, unless 1 or both of the following circumstances exist:

- (a) The personal watercraft is being operated at slow—no wake speed.
- (b) The personal watercraft is being docked or launched.

Based on the information obtained through this preliminary investigation, there appears to be concerns related to public safety regarding high-speed boating on the “Sand Cut” Channel between West Bay Lake and Morley Lake within the jurisdiction of Watersmeet Township, Gogebic County. Further information will be gathered at a public hearing to determine the extent of these concerns on the “Sand Cut” Channel between West Bay Lake and Morley Lake, and any subsequent rule or control that may be imposed.