

Small Craft Navigation and Community Recreation Corridor

(LOOP the ISLAND)

The waterway between the causeway breach and the bridge functions as the primary navigation corridor serving the lagoon and surrounding shoreline. The 1995 design and permit intentionally created this flow-through navigation route by constructing the bridge to the island while opening the causeway to the north, establishing a passage that allows watercraft to move between the lagoon and the lake. While some smaller recreational motor boats occasionally travel through this passage when clearance allows, the corridor is used extensively by low-profile watercraft, including kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, peddle boats and other smaller vessels or floatations.

Within the community, a widely enjoyed activity among children, teens, and adults is “looping the island.” Participants launch small craft from the lagoon or nearby shoreline and travel around the island, often stopping at small beach areas or sheltered coves along the route. To support this activity, the community installed multiple kayak storage racks on the island, allowing residents to store paddle craft where they’re readily accessible. This infrastructure reflects the frequent use of paddle craft and supports safe, non-motorized recreation around the island and nearby waters.

Seasonal lake levels influence how vessels use the corridor beneath the bridge. When water levels are higher, water depth beneath the bridge increases while vertical clearance decreases. Under these conditions the passage accommodates all paddle craft and certain low profile vessels such as inflatables or aluminum fishing boats. When lake levels drop, vertical clearance increases while water depth decreases. For example, when water depth beneath the bridge is approximately five feet, vertical clearance is roughly 3.25 feet, allowing passage of kayaks, canoes, paddleboards, and small boats. When water depth is closer to two feet, vertical clearance increases to approximately 6.25 feet, allowing somewhat taller vessels such as personal watercraft (jet skis) to pass, provided their draft remains within the available water depth. Different vessel types therefore use the corridor at different times depending on seasonal lake levels, while paddle craft activity continues whenever sufficient water depth exists.

Because paddlers operate close to the water surface, they rely heavily on clear visibility and predictable travel paths. The current corridor allows users approaching from the west shoreline or entering from the breach to maintain visual awareness of other vessels navigating through the passage.

Further encroachment into this corridor will create blind navigation corners along the stretch between the breach and the bridge. Specifically, vessels traveling north within the narrowed corridor, or vessels traveling south after entering from the breach and navigating around the proposed dock expansion, will **encounter a restricted turning area where approaching traffic cannot be clearly seen.** In this situation, small watercraft rounding the proposed structure will emerge directly into the path of larger motorized vessels using the same corridor.

This safety concern is concentrated along this specific section of the navigation corridor (in the exact location of the proposed encroachment), where traffic from the breach merges with vessels traveling north or south along the west shoreline. The same stretch of shoreline is also used by swimmers and residents enjoying the water along the west shoreline of the corridor, further emphasizing the importance of maintaining clear visibility and adequate maneuvering space in this shared area.

Because this corridor serves as both a primary navigation route and a recreational loop around the island, and recreation area for lakeshore property owners, maintaining its width and visibility is essential to preserving safety and accessibility established by the original design of the breach and bridge. Protecting this shared passage ensures that paddlers, swimmers, and motorized vessels can continue to safely use the corridor in the manner the community has relied upon for many years.

From a regulatory perspective, maintaining this corridor also aligns with the Idaho Department of Lands' responsibility to evaluate encroachments based on their effect on navigation and adjacent public use of the waterway. Preserving the established width, sight lines, and maneuvering space within this passage helps ensure the waterway continues to function safely for the variety of vessels and recreational users that depend upon it.

