



# SHERIFF KOOTENAI COUNTY



SHERIFF ROBERT B. NORRIS

UNDERSHERIFF BRETT A. NELSON

To: Idaho Department of Lands and Community Leadership

From: Sergeant Ryan Miller

Re: Impact and Growth on Local Waterways

Date: March 10, 2025

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Every Kootenai County public safety entity is being stressed because of the aggressive growth in this county. Population is increasing within Kootenai County and the waterways are no exception. The homes along the Spokane River, Lake Coeur d'Alene, and Hayden Lake continue to grow in number and size, as do the smaller lakes and tributaries at a smaller increment. The marinas are expanding in number and size, and the boat launches are at or over capacity. Kootenai County has more rental companies or private owner rentals than ever before, and paddle sports have grown exponentially in recent years as the most affordable way to experience the water. All of this is documented to outline the heavy use of our waterways within the county.

Every year, the Recreation Safety Supervisor receives dozens of letters from the Idaho Department of Lands (DOL) indicating a permit is being sought to add a dock, rip rap (large rocks at the waters edge), or other structures along the waterway or shore. Each of these letters is sent to the agencies listed at the bottom of this document, requesting comments, recommendations, or objections. These objections are in regard to navigation impacts, fish and wildlife habitat, aquatic life, recreation, aesthetic beauty, or water quality impacts. From the standpoint of the Sheriff's Office, a rebuttal to these letters is typically only made when there is a significant concern for safety or navigation. Several years ago, a new marina was being placed on the Spokane River near the Highway 95 bridge. A portion of the stretch from where the marina was being placed to the mouth of Lake Coeur d'Alene was a 'no wake zone'. Due to the impacts of placing the marina in that area, it was recommended by the Sheriff's Office and subsequently approved that the 'no wake zone' be extended to 300' west of the Highway 95 bridge, thus offering a safe solution. This wasn't popular by many Spokane River homeowners wishing to reduce impacts (safety and environmental) on the river, but was the appropriate solution when taking all of the public's rights and access to the waterways in account.

Similar to the previously mentioned marina, an expansion of a long-standing marina on the Spokane River was recently proposed and passed with no objection from the Sheriff's Office. This was due to the marina already being in a designated 'no wake zone' and no known navigational issues being added by this addition. Again, many homeowners on the Spokane River want the Sheriff's Office to oppose items like this as they believe it clearly adds too many vessels to the river, to which we do not have proof thereof. Will **more** vessels add further congestion to our waterways? Yes. Will this project add further congestion to our waterways? Unknown. Questions to consider with this type of addition include 1. Are these new vessels to the area or vessels already crowding the roads and boat launches in the county? 2. Are all vessels using the waterways at the same time on the same days? 3. Should the Sheriff's Office be responsible for stopping expansion and growth or alert/advise governing authorities when expansion and growth is becoming troublesome? In addition to these questions also comes the question of responsibility and jurisdiction. The Sheriff's Office has jurisdiction on all waterways within it's boundaries according to state law. However, the two additions to marinas in the past few years have been in the city limits of Coeur d'Alene and Post Falls, respectively. They have the authority to build or not where the Sheriff has the duty to patrol and enforce ordinances, and course offer advice to the governing body.



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What does the future look like? Specifically with the Spokane River, with the addition of docks and other structures, the river would have to become a 'no wake zone' for most of it, especially in the narrowest areas with docks on either side. Currently, there is a large property for sale on the south bank across from the River's Edge Community (south of Atlas Rd. and Seltice Way) that is currently under construction. If the land for sale turns into homes, condominiums, or anything with a dock, the waterways in between Johnson Mill River Park and the highway 95 Bridge (plus the current 'no wake zone' east of the bridge) would all be 'no wake' due to the structures allowed on the waterway and public safety. In addition to these restrictions, it would be strongly suggested that county ordinance be amended to restrict towing on the Spokane River, although with current population and congestion, we are already there. Sheriff Norris previously requested 'no towing' on the Spokane River during peak boating hours, however that request was not passed into county ordinance.

Kootenai County saw no boating related deaths during the 2022, 2023 or 2024 season. If the usage on the waterways increases, combined with no mandated boater education, the fear of that not happening again may become a reality. Rather than approving any request for growth that comes in with plan of what the future waterways look like, a detailed plan on and of the waterways should be created and followed as to not surpass the supported infrastructure. At some point, there will simply be too many vessels on the water but what is that number? In addition, law enforcement and support services are supplemented by dedicated vessel funds (boater registration dollars) or the Recreational Boater Safety Grant (fuel taxes dispersed by federal government). This is not enough funds for future growth and none of the unregistered (non-motorized) vessels contribute to these funds.

Agencies currently receiving DOL Letter:

Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Idaho Department of Water Resources, Idaho Department of Transportation, US Army Corps of Engineers-CDA, Kootenai County Parks, Recreation/Waterways, Kootenai County Marine Division, Kootenai County Building & Planning & Zoning, Kootenai Environmental Alliance, Panhandle Health District 1-Kootenai County, Coeur d'Alene Tribe, Idaho Conservation League, and Adjacent Neighbors

Professionally,

Ryan A. Miller, Recreation Safety Supervisor

Narrow river with future land growth.





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Spokane River current 'no wake zone' from bridge to Lake CDA



Newest marina addition in current 'no wake zone'



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