

Sept 27, 2025

Idaho Dept of Lands, Coeur d'Alene Office
3284 W. Industrial Loop
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815

Re: OAH Case No 25-320-07, River's Edge Apartments Community Docks

We attended the hearing on September 16, 2025, but the extreme limitations on the public's ability to speak near the end of the hearing made it difficult to make any points clearly. This letter is intended to address that.

For context, we have lived on the Spokane River for more than 20 years, and for the past six years have been collecting a range of data regarding boat-related issues on the Spokane River for the University of Idaho's Baywatchers program. Analysis of this data is the basis for several of the comments included in this letter.

Bottom line, we request Dept of Lands suspend any actions on community docks, including this one, as well as similar developments on the Spokane River until a more comprehensive management approach to the river as a whole is developed. The Spokane River is currently at a tipping point and multiple threats point to the need to take effective actions now. Issues outlined below for the subject community dock application should be key factors in such a management plan for the Spokane River. We recognize the Idaho Dept of Lands does not have the authority to unilaterally address all the issues, but it typically controls the early steps through authorizing shoreline development and encroachment actions such as docks.

Significant increase in number of boats on the Spokane River. The number of boats on the river is a common thread in many of the issues facing the river. Boat census data show that the number of boats on the river has gone up by nearly a factor of three in the past 5 years and frequently exceeds 100 per hour. On weekends, we have counted more than 8 boats per minute passing our dock. The number of large boats and surf boats has increased by a factor of 5.

Power boats have the most significant impacts because the river is relatively narrow and shallow, even more so in sections that are narrower and shallower than typical. The stretch where the proposed docks would be located is one of those narrower and shallower sections.

Carrying Capacity of the Spokane River. More docks on the Spokane River likely leads to even more boats on the river. Can the river handle continued increases in boats, especially power boats? No. Using well-developed models¹ of a waterway's carrying capacity, the Spokane River is already at high risk, unsuitable for power boating without restrictions. The models include a number of the lake value properties listed as factors the Dept of Lands is responsible for considering in its actions. It is worth

¹ US Bureau of Reclamation, 2011. Water and Land Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (WALROS). Users' Handbook, Second Edition.

Larratt Aquatic Consulting Ltd and Ecoscape Environmental Consultants, 2024. Lake Windermere Recreational Impacts

See additional references: Beaver Lake Boating Carrying Capacity Study Literature Review, January 2017, CDM Smith for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

noting here that if the 1581 feet of waterfront were being developed as individual residential lots (typically 100 ft along the river), Dept of Lands would be considering 15 or 16 boat slips, not 74.

Conflicts and Safety Threats to Those Recreating on and near the Spokane River. As addressed by the Kootenai County Sheriff's letter, threats to the safety of those recreating on the river or along the shorelines are increasing as the number of boats increases. The types of recreation continue to increase and that leads to even more conflicts and safety issues, especially between power boats and non-powered activities, and particularly related to wake sports on the narrow river. We see such conflicts throughout the boating season. Very few are reported, including several incidents that could easily have led to deaths², so the numbers of reported incidents cannot be used as a measure of the river's safety. Nor can statistics on the number of citations issued by KCSO. The Sheriff's Office marine patrols are dramatically understaffed compared to just a few years ago and they were rarely seen on the Spokane River this boating season. That has led not only to an increase in unsafe behaviors, but also a common perspective that boating rules do not need to be followed.

Those recreating on the Spokane River have less protection under County laws than those on other County waterways. Of particular note, the no-wake zone is only 100 ft from shore and docks on the river, while it is 200 feet on other waterways. Boats on the river only must stay 50 feet away from other boats, while on other waterways that distance is 100 ft. This leads to increased density of boats on the Spokane River, making it very difficult for anyone recreating on the river to readily avoid danger. The 150-foot buffer zone for the proposed development accommodates the County's current "no towing" zone but leaves less than 70 ft for the "navigational drive aisle". Such a narrow aisle makes it difficult for boats to safely pass or overtake each other through this section, especially on busy days. It is also too narrow for wake surfers to comply with the "responsible boater" elements of the State of Idaho wake surfing rules.

Although the Dept of Lands may not consider the future in its deliberations on applications such as the one from River's Edge Apartments, history on the river has shown that such developments as that proposed will likely lead to the County making this stretch of the river "no wake" to address the increased safety risks. That then further concentrates power boating activities elsewhere on the river, which then only increases risks in those sections. Such consequential impacts are already being seen on the river.

Threats from heavy metals stirred up by boat wakes. Boat wakes stir up river sediments, particularly in shallower sections like that where the proposed community docks will be located. Sediments in the Spokane River can contain the same heavy metals and other contaminants seen in Lake Cd'A, at levels considered contaminated by the Idaho Dept of Environmental Quality. Surf boat wakes are particularly concerning in narrower, shallow stretches of the river where the proposed docks will be located. They can stir up sediments in water at least 20 feet deep and pose a threat not only to humans but to aquatic life. Surf boat wakes are exponentially more powerful than other boat wakes and their wakes not only cause much more shoreline erosion and damage to facilities, they also can carry sediments and any contaminants they contain onto shoreline property. Unfortunately, Kootenai County eliminated on the Spokane River controls on wake surfing that exist on other County waterways.

² For example, children washed off docks by boat wakes, adults knocked over in the water and on docks, a boater whose watercraft was destroyed when another boat hit it, a grandmother and grandchild seriously injured when a wake boat plowing to avoid a surf boat wake ran over their jet ski (classified by KCSO as property damage).

We recognize that the Idaho Dept of Lands is only one entity with regulatory authority on the Spokane River. Continuing to make decisions like the one for OAH Case No 25-320-07, one by one, in a silo, not considering the broader, cumulative, or long-term consequences is irresponsible. Action on developments such as the one proposed by River's Edge Apartments should be suspended until those regulatory entities get together and develop a comprehensive management plan that protects the Spokane River and those recreating on it now and well into the future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Handwritten signatures of Susan and Robert Stiger. The signature on the left is 'S Stiger' and the signature on the right is 'R Stiger'.

Susan and Robert Stiger
11831 W. Riverview Drive, Post Falls, ID 83854