



BMP of the Month (JULY): Adhering to NO WAKE Zones decreases shoreline erosion

By Kate Wilson for SEEP

Summer is upon us, and the water is finally starting to warm. It might be time to get the boat in the water, break into the swim gear, and hit the deck. Before you launch though, let's take a moment to review why NO WAKE zones exist in our favorite regional water bodies.

On the SEEP front, we are concerned about the impacts of boats on the shoreline—namely in the name of erosion. Shoreline erosion may affect water clarity in near shore areas, shading submerged aquatic plants as well as providing nutrients for algal growth. It can interfere with fish use of shallow water habitat, as well as wildlife use of the land—water edge. Excessive shoreline erosion can negatively affect property values and can be expensive for riparian landowners to prevent and control.

In Idaho, a NO WAKE zone is defined as: “the slowest speed at which it is still possible to maintain steering, not to exceed five miles per hour.” In Kootenai County, regulations were passed to make all of Coeur d’Alene Lake, and the Coeur d’Alene Spokane Rivers a NO WAKE zone during high water. This new rule makes waterskiing, wakeboarding, and fast cruising implausible. But, it’s important for keeping our shorelines stable and in good working order.

The mid-summer pool for Coeur d’Alene Lake is 2,128 feet elevation, maintained at the level until after Labor Day, the same type of lake level operation as Priest and Pend Oreille lakes. The spring of 1997 was the last big flow event for Couer d’Alene Lake, where lake level reached about 8 feet higher than mid-summer pool. Apparently there was considerable erosion damage in that event, reports Glen Rothrock of Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality, and Kootenai County passed an ordinance for the lake and Couer d’Alene and Spokane Rivers, that when the level reached 5 feet above mid-summer pool, there would be a NO WAKE restriction until lake level dropped back below 5 feet above mid-summer pool. There was concern that boat wakes under this high water condition caused further shoreline erosion damage. In May of 2008, with high spring runoff, the lake level exceeded the 5 feet above mid-summer pool again and the boat wake restriction went into effect.

Rothrock reports that the Kootenai County Site Disturbance Ordinance #374, Section 8.B, requires a 25 foot minimally disturbed natural vegetation buffer (for selected lakes). For Coeur d’Alene Lake, the 25 foot buffer starts at the mid-summer pool elevation. It has been occasionally observed that this 25 foot natural vegetation buffer in Coeur d’Alene Lake continues to be developed with major excavation, and replaced with landscaping, sandy beaches, sea-walls, rip-rap, etc. Not good.

“When we have a high water year like this spring,” says Rothrock, “depending on shoreline slope, large areas of excavation within the 25 foot zone can become inundated and BMPs destroyed.”