

La Crosse Joint Board of Harbor Commissioners

Citizen's Guide for Establishing a Slow No Wake Zone on the River

The process to establish a legal Slow No Wake Zone on the Mississippi and Black Rivers requires several steps and is a partnership undertaking between DNR, La Crosse County, City of La Crosse, the public and adjacent land owners.

Public safety is the controlling justification to establish a Slow No Wake Zone on the public waters of the Mississippi and Black Rivers. A County and/or City ordinance is required to establish a zone and such an ordinance may be enacted under authority of Section 30.77 of the Wisconsin Statutes.

Citizens, typically adjoining property owners, requesting the zone should contact all adjoining property owners to obtain their input on the need for the zone as well as their cooperation in purchasing, placing, and monitoring the buoys.

Slow no wake buoys must be approved for placement by the Joint Board of Harbor Commissioners (JBHC) and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR), and must conform to the federal uniform water way marker system. Slow No Wake buoys will only be approved by WDNR when authorized by a legally enacted local ordinance.

On [Pool 8](#) in La Crosse County a Slow No Wake Zone has been established by local ordinance within 100 feet of all docks and boat landings. The portion of Pool 8 that covers the area from the County line at Goose Island to Lock and Dam 7 and on the Black River to the Onalaska Spillway is covered by the County ordinance. Individual land owners have been permitted to place Slow No Wake buoys at the 100 foot distance from their dock where it has been found that public safety warrants such a permit. No ordinance change is required here.

Timeline

The La Crosse Joint Board of Harbor Commissioners will consider proposed new Slow No Wake Zones only in November of each year. The Board will conduct a public hearing following the November meeting on proposed Slow No Wake requests and communicate its findings to the La Crosse County Board or La Crosse City Council and to the other involved units of government.

November - send requests with neighbor signatures for all properties affected; JBHC reviews request; if approved, an ordinance change goes to public hearing (works on buoy permit) or, if denied, JBHC sends refusal letter; County ordinances go to the Executive Committee and then County Board, while City ordinances go to the Board of Public Works, Judiciary & Administration Committee, and then Common Council.

January – JBHC secretary submits annual no wake zone applications to DNR; DNR reviews; if approved, the buoy permit holder will be contacted within 90 days.

March – Buoy permit holder is notified to pay buoy inspection permit fee

May – Buoys are placed by permit holder; Auxiliary Coast Guard checks buoys, water permitting

September/October – Buoys are removed for winter by permit holder

Additional Links

[Wisconsin boating laws brochure](#) ; [Wis. Stats. Ch. 30 Navigable Waters, Harbors and Navigation](#); [City Code Chapter 48 - Waterways](#); [County Code Chapter 30 - Navigable Waters, Harbors, and Navigation](#); [City Code on Noise Control](#)