

New law increases



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

A new law in South Carolina changes rules over no wake zones and on other areas of lakes.

wake zone limit on lakes

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SENECA — Boaters preparing for a summer on the water need to adapt to extended no wake zones.

S.C. Gov. Henry McMaster has signed House Bill 3308 into law, increasing the wake zone limit from 50 feet to 100 feet on most lakes in South Carolina, including Lakes Hartwell, Jocassee and Keowee.

The wake zone limit forbids boats and other personal watercraft from driving above idle speed within 100 feet of a “wharf, dock, bulkhead or pier” and within 50 feet of a “moored or anchored vessel or a person in the water.”

The new bill also creates a separate wake zone limit for wake surfing. It defines “wake surf” as “a vessel that is ballasted in the stern so as to create a wake that is ... surfed by another person.”

Boaters must not wake surf above idle speed within 200 feet of a moored vessel, wharf, dock, bulkhead, pier or person in the water.

S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) spokesman Greg Lucas said the new law increases boater safety by providing a greater buffer.

“Boating numbers have increased a lot — even during the past two years during the COVID years,” Lucas said. “A lot more people are getting out and using boats, and boating

safety seems to be more of an issue everywhere, especially South Carolina because we have so much water and we have so many lakes and rivers and oceans that it’s becoming something that we’re paying a lot of attention to.”

He said the amendment originated when members of the General Assembly heard concerns about boating safety.

DNR was asked to provide input throughout the legislative process, Lucas said, and the bill is “the result of a compromise between the House and Senate.”

Lucas said nothing will really change from an enforcement standpoint.

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“It will just give our officers another tool to be able to use,” Lucas said. “This is something that a lot of members of the public have been asking for for a long time.”

Dale Wilde, president of the nonprofit Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS), said the group

has been working toward an updated boat safety law for several years.

“We have been encouraging our nearly 900 members for more than three years to write and call legislators to encourage passage of a wake zone bill,” she told the Journal in an email. “We also did significant outreach to other lakes and water-

ways throughout South Carolina.”

The previous law held the wake limit at 50 feet from a dock, which Wilde said was “insufficient for the safety of boaters and swimmers.”

“This bill is just one step forward in boater safety,” she said.