



MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION

TO: Lt. Thomas R. Wanless, Boating Law Administrator

FROM: Corporal Ivan Perez, State Marine Specialist

DATE: July 07, 2020

SUBJECT: Investigative Report – Gull Lake, Ross Township, Kalamazoo County

Under the direction of Part 801 "Marine Safety" of 1994 PA 451, MCL 324.80110(2), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has conducted an investigation and inquiry into whether special rules are needed on Gull Lake, located in Ross Township, Kalamazoo County and included a consideration of all the following:

A. Whether the activities subject to the proposed special rules pose any issues of safety to life or property.

A control to further regulate vessel traffic would not pose any safety concern to life or property.

B. The profile of the water body, including local jurisdiction, size, geographic location, and amount of vessel traffic.

The Lake shares jurisdiction with Barry County, (Prairieville and Barry Townships), and Kalamazoo County, (Richland and Ross Townships), with a majority of the lake within Kalamazoo County. It has a total surface area of 2,030 acres. The long axis of Gull Lake extends in a northwest-southeast direction. The lake is over four miles long and more than one mile wide for most of its length. The lake has one large island on the south end that contains privately owned residences. This island used to be a peninsula before a dam structure was installed. Two sunken islands, locally known as the "Hogs backs", are present in the middle of the lake. Both are about 20 feet underwater. Gull Lake is located just two miles from Richland, and about 6 miles south of Delton. The population center of Kalamazoo is about 11 miles to the southwest of the lake. The jurisdiction of the southern-most bay requesting the local watercraft control resides solely within Ross Township, Kalamazoo County. The waterbody is a multi-use, all sports lake and frequently shares its water's with fishing sports and other recreational water activities. These activities come in various opportunities including the use of motor vessels, personal watercraft, sailboats, wake boats, canoes, kayaks, tubing and waterskiing activities, stand up paddle boarding, bass fishing tournaments, scuba diving, sailing races and regattas, and bow fishing to name a few. Speaking with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Gull Lake Marine, Mac Waldorf, he stated that there could be anywhere from 400 to 600 vessels on the lake during weekends and holidays throughout the boating season.

C. The current and historical depth of the water body, including whether there is an established lake level for the water body.

Gull Lake has no established lake level. An installed dam assists with maintaining lake levels throughout the year. Each fall the lake is drawn down eight-ten inches to prevent ice damage to the shoreline. Lake levels are raised back to normal at ice out. This practice of seasonal alteration of water level has been occurring since at least 1935. Mapped in 1941 by the Institute for Fisheries Research, several deep depressions exist in the lake. The deepest (110 feet) is located almost exactly in the middle of the lake. Another depression (108 feet) is located at the north end of the lake.

D. Whether any identifiable special problems or conditions exist on the water body for the activities subject to the proposed special rules, such as rocks, pier heads, swimming areas, public access sites, shallow waters, and submerged obstacles.

There are two public access sites located on the lake. One is on the northern most part of the lake and is maintained by the township. The other is site located on the east side of the lake at a road ending. There are also various private/commercial accesses also. Within the bay, where the local watercraft control is being sought, there is a significant amount of public docking due to the commercial services offered there. This area can become highly congested with vessel traffic during peak boating times throughout the boating season.

E. Whether the proposed special rules would unreasonably interfere with normal navigational traffic.

No issues are anticipated.

F. Whether user conflicts exist on the water body.

Sergeant Jim Harrison, of the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Dept., stated that a majority of complaints in the bay area come from homeowners and fisherman complaining about excessive wakes. Gull Lake Marine C.E.O., Mac Waldorf, stated that on a busy day, 15 to 20 boats will be idling, waiting in line, to gas up at his two fuel docks. He has witnessed vessels, pulling tubers, coming in at full speed, then slowing down causing excessive wakes that interfere with the awaiting vessels ability to station keep while awaiting their turn to approach the gas docks. In some cases, patrons at the dockside will suffer "pinched fingers and legs" due to the wake issues and added that it makes refueling difficult for his workers.

G. Complaints received by local law enforcement agencies regarding activities on the water body.

This investigator reviewed the DNR Report All Poaching files and since 1993, only 5 complaints were located referencing Gull Lake, and none were in the proposed area. The Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Department reported that they see complaints generated annually pertaining to wake issues.

H. The status of any accidents that have occurred on the water body.

None reported by the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Department.

I. Historical uses of the water body and potential future uses of the water body.

The lake is a multi-use lake with a surge of visitors during the summer months. The lake has approximately 800 residence that share riparian access. The southern bay, where the township is seeking the local watercraft control, holds almost all the commercially zoned properties on the entire lake contributing to the added congestion in this area throughout the boating season.

J. Whether the water body is public or private.

The waterbody is public.

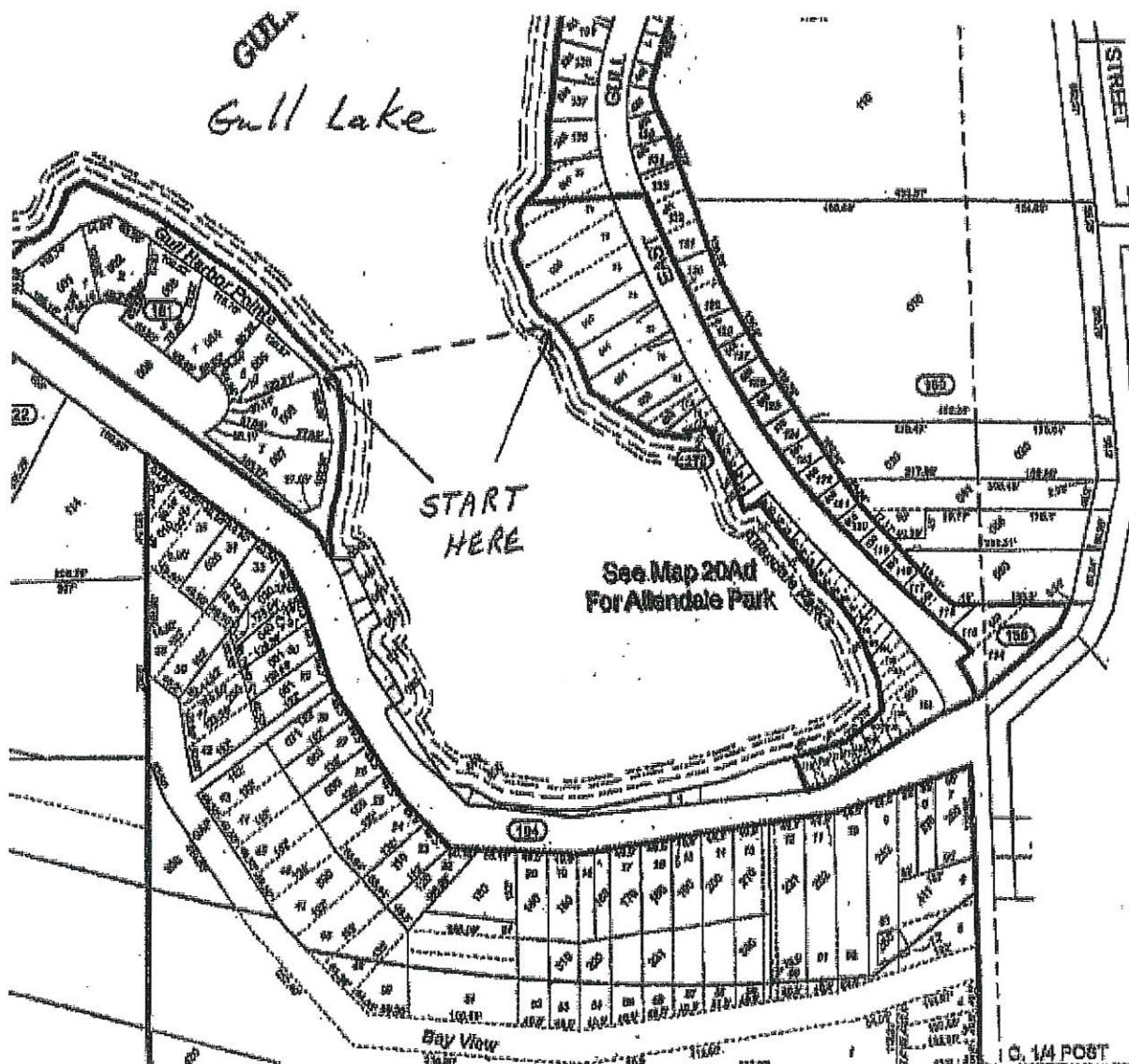
K. Whether existing law adequately regulates the activities subject to the proposed special rules.

Although existing law does address issues pertaining to the 100-foot rule, there are circumstances this investigator found that are not addressed specifically. This includes the high degree of transients in this bay due to the commercial nature of this area. On busy days there are numerous vessels station keeping while awaiting transient docks or refueling, coupled with vessels still operating at high speed within the bay. From my interviews with residents, where the entrance to the bay narrows, vessels will remain on plane when transiting this location. Due to

this, I witnessed where docks along the channel were beginning to loosen from their bases due to wake issues.

During the investigation I was provided the map below (figure 1) by Township Supervisor Rob Baker. The map shows a proposed boundary line for any recommended control. This suggested line provided by the supervisor marks the general location of the area of concern.

Fig. 1



Based on the above information obtained through this preliminary investigation, there appears to be issues related to public safety and compatibility of use within the jurisdiction of Ross Township, Kalamazoo County. Further information will be gathered at a public hearing to determine the extent of these safety concerns on Gull Lake, and any subsequent rule or control that may be imposed or modified. I contacted Sergeant Jim Harrison of the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Department, Marine Division, concerning the proposed slow no-wake zone. He stated the bay is used by a variety of water enthusiasts, although boating, personal watercraft, kayaks, and skiing are the most routine. He added that there are also complaints generated regarding wake issues impacting activities from a variety of users; this includes homeowners, fishermen, swimmers, and paddle sport users. Sergeant Harris feels a public hearing would be beneficial to provide the public's input in determining the impacts of identified issues. A control may aid in providing a safer atmosphere for boating activities.