

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/opinion/2025/04/03/wisconsin-lakes-wake-surf-water-sports-summer-fun/82634993007/>

## **Wake surfing done responsibly is fine. Don't restrict Wisconsin boaters like me. | Opinion**

***We cannot make Wisconsin the most restrictive boating state in the country. These patchwork regulations create confusion and confrontation.***

**Ed Gignac**

Special to Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

April 3, 2025

### Key Points (AI generated)

- Wake surfing is a safe and enjoyable way for people of all ages to enjoy being on the water.
- Claims that wake boats negatively impact the environment are unfounded and not based on scientific evidence.
- Safety concerns about wake surfing are overblown, and the activity is actually very controlled and low-risk.
- Efforts to restrict or ban wake surfing are driven by fear and misinformation rather than legitimate concerns.

There are few things that make me happier than spending a warm [summer day on the lake](#) with my friends and family. Whether it's getting out early to cast a line, water skiing or tubing during the afternoon, or an evening cruise on the pontoon, [lake life](#) is a huge part of what makes summer in our [great state](#) so much fun. In recent years, my family and I have discovered a new passion – wake surfing. Wake surfing is a low speed, safe way for people of all ages to enjoy the water. Instead of a tow rope and big wipeouts behind a speed boat, wake surfing happens behind a boat that is going slower and creates a wake that allows the surfer to ride the waves. It's low-impact on the surfer, which allows people of all ages to participate, and, despite what detractors would want you to think, it's low-impact on Wisconsin's lakes.

Opinion: [On Wisconsin's glacial lakes, wake-enhanced boating damaging and dangerous](#)

That last part is important, because as someone who enjoys wake surfing, my love for the lake and health of the ecosystem is most important. Without a [healthy lake](#), all of the fun would eventually vanish.

### **Claims about negative impact of wake boating don't hold up**

Unfortunately, there has been a lot of misinformation spread about [wake boats](#) and wake surfing. Opponents – many of them the same people that will find just about any reason to support restrictions on outdoor recreation opportunities – claim that wake boats will lead to a spread of invasive species, destroy shorelines and lake bottoms, and pose a safety risk. These arguments are nonsense – compelling and emotionally-charged, but nonsense nonetheless. First, let's quickly address the invasive species issue. Wake boats– like all watercraft – are subject to state law requirements that are in place to protect our lakes from invasive species. Boat owners must drain water from boats, motors and all equipment before moving them from one body of water to another. The bottom line: when drained properly – as required by law – wake boats do not increase the spread of invasive species.

Then there's the shoreline and lake bottom argument. The low-impact nature of wake surfing means that, when done responsibly, it generates minimal wave energy, far less than what we see on windy days. Research has demonstrated that at a 200-foot distance from shore, the energy of a wake boat wave is about the same as waves generated by a 20-mph wind over a one-mile of water and much less than waves generated by wind on large lakes. And compared to windy conditions that may persist for hours at a time, waves from wake boats are only on the lake for a brief period of time.

### **Fear of the unknown is driving concerns about wake surfing safety**

Safety is another critical component of this conversation. Wake surfing is inherently a controlled, low-risk activity. Specially-designed wake boats don't have outboard motors, eliminating one massive safety risk for participants. As for other users on the lake, when safety regulations are consistent and enforced, such as the requirement to maintain a minimum distance from the shore, piers and swimming areas, this helps ensure that our lakes remain safe for everyone — boaters, swimmers, and fishermen alike.

Wake surfing is becoming more popular, and opponents have seized on many people's unfamiliarity with it to scare communities across the state into instituting onerous regulations on wake boats – and some outright bans. We cannot make Wisconsin the most restrictive boating state in the country. These patchwork regulations create confusion and confrontation, and will run into legal issues with the state's constitution. The constitution's Public Trust Doctrine ensures free access to Wisconsin's waterways, something no local ordinance can supersede.

At the end of the day, this shouldn't be an issue dominated by scare tactics and legal issues. At the end of the day, what's truly important is ensuring access for all lake users to enjoy sharing stories and laughs with your friends and family about the great time you just had out on the water as you watch the sun set on another beautiful Wisconsin summer day at the lake – whether it was on a fishing boat, a pontoon, or, yes, a wake boat.

*Ed Gignac is an avid water sports enthusiast. He lives on Powers Lake in Kenosha County and also has a longtime family property on Butternut Lake in the Northwoods.*