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From: **Mike Keller** <[mikeke07@gmail.com](mailto:mikeke07@gmail.com)>

Date: Wed, Apr 2, 2025 at 9:25 AM

Subject: Fwd: Solberg Lake wake surfing testimonial

To: Jim Michler <[jrmichler@gmail.com](mailto:jrmichler@gmail.com)>

April 2, 2025

To Whom it May Concern:

This is a response to the testimonial request from the DNR regarding the discussion of wake surfing in Wisconsin Lakes. This letter is specifically regarding Solberg Lake in Phillips, WI.

My name is Jill Keller, and I am a 49 year-old substitute teacher, mother of three. I live on Solberg Lake with my husband, Michael Keller, who is a hardworking and successful realtor. He loves all things outdoorsy, especially lake and boat-related—fishing, boating, tubing, water skiing, swimming, wakeboarding, and ice fishing.

When I first met him in 2013, he had just bought a fixer upper cabin on Solberg Lake, and was so excited to be starting his dream of having his own lake home. He started coming up to the Northwoods, even before he was born in 1977, as his parents would come up north from Owen-Withee, to go camping and fishing and snowmobiling. They bought their Solberg Lake lot in 1994. As a family, they built their little cabin, and have since added rooms, a garage, and made it into a full-time residence. Mike grew up fishing, skiing, tubing and wakeboarding on this lake. He started investing in his own boats from when he was 19 years old, starting with fishing boats, and moving on to skiing and wakeboarding boats.

Many years later, he was thrilled when he got the paperwork back from the DNR that he has a 3 boat 'fleet', when we added our 25 year old pontoon, 23 year old fishing boat, and 20 year old wake board boat. He loves boats and lakes and a majority of our family time and memories made in the summer, are on the lake.

We are members of the Solberg Lake Association and my husband is on the board.

We are not sponsored by any major boat companies. Our boat is an '05 Master Craft wake boat. It's a 20 year-old boat that has been very well cared for by my husband who youtubes the boat repairs so we can save some money on mechanics, and use it for gas for the boat. There are probably other motor specifications that are impressive to add to this regarding

the motor size and hours on the boat, but you'll have to talk to the man of the house for that information.

All I know is, our boat is orange, the trailer is orange, it goes fast, and its where our family spends a lot of time in the summer. Our eldest is 10, and he has been wakeboarding since he was 4. The next two (9 and 8) are practicing, but so far they prefer knee boarding and tubing.

As we have three school age children, when I'm driving the boat, and my husband is wake boarding behind the boat, the back of the boat has less than 200 lbs of weight. This does not add much help for a wake behind the boat to jump the wake. Mike adjusts the rope length, speed, and works with a lots of other factors, to get the perfect wake as a ramp for his jumps. He loves this, its great exercise and a way to relax, and our kids are growing to love this too. We all clapped and cheered loudly when our 10 year old learned to jump the wake and stay on the wake board!

Because Mike's schedule is often busy on the weekends and nights, we can be seen doing watersports as a family on a weekday afternoons, before he heads out to show houses to people after they get off work.

Ideally, we enjoy the boat with other people. This helps add a little weight to the back of the boat so that you can have a little "ramp" (wake) to jump. However, with our boating time being afternoons when others are working, it has been WONDERFUL to have ballasts that can fill with the push of a button, to add more weight to the left, right, or middle of the boat. These let in/out the water of the lake.

Before, we used 'wake sacks'. These are a lot of work, especially when the kids were little and trying to help. We had to fill the wake sacks using a pump and little hoses, leaning over the side of the boat, trying not to spill IN the boat, one tube drawing from the lake, the other pouring into the valve of the wake sack. And keep the power source in the cigarette lighter to keep the pump going. I'm sure you can imagine us, when the children were preschoolers, and the family dynamic of two adults and three very 'helpful' children, trying to accomplish the family task of filling the wake sacs without getting too much water on the upholstery. (I'm sorry for what I said when we were trying to fill the wake sacks...!)

Ideally, you get 3-4 adults in the back of the boat, and its perfect, without the need for additional weight. Our boat seats 11, so its very capable of handling this weight. But, we don't live in an ideal world, and as our kids are all pretty little still, and a lot of people work during the afternoon, the in-the-boat-ballasts have worked really well for our family.

This is where we make many memories as family during the summer. Instead of being behind screens or on a computer, we like to spend time with our kids in the boat and

enjoying the beautiful creation that we have here in Wisconsin. At night, after 7, when its quiet hours on the lake, our kids love to fish off the dock, or from a kayak, or in the fishing boat/pontoon when dad gets home from his showings.

Why do we do water sports? Because it is fun. And because we can do it as a family. That is also why we fish, and kayak, and swim together in this lake that we love.

I am honestly not a wakeboarder, personally, because I'm not a big fan of speed. My favorite thing to do is paddle board by myself, early in the morning, or late at night. Behind a boat, wakeboarding at 21-22 mph, the resulting face plant (which happens about half of the time for me) is not something I enjoy, or seek to repeat. So, after trying to improve my wakeboarding "skills" (!?) for a couple summers, I have gone back to just knee boarding and tubing.

However, growing up near the ocean in Japan, and loving body boarding, I was very excited when we learned of a new way to enjoy the lake---wake surfing. Not with the ocean's tide, but with the placement of weight in a boat, lowering the boat speed we learned that the boat could create just enough of a wave to surf or body board on, even in a lake.

We researched how to create this slow wave. We tested it out, and through MUCH trial and error (try a whole summer!) we finally were able to find the right "recipe" to wake surf behind our boat. My husband could even let go of the rope and surf just behind the slow wave that our boat made. During this time, we always were careful to follow the DNR rules regarding staying 200' away from other boats, well over 100' from the shoreline, not having a wake in 'no-wake zones', and all other boater safety rules, and of course the life jacket rules with our little kids in the boat.

In this time, we never went close to the shore, or hit the bottom of the lake with the prop while making a wake surfing wave. We have never dented a prop while wake surfing. We watch the depth finder meticulously to avoid denting the prop.

The few times we have dented a prop in any of our three boats, it is a really big downer to the day, and the man of the house is pretty upset when it happens. I'm very grateful that so far, I have never been driving the boat when this has happened, as I only drive the boat in the deep parts of the lake! This doesn't happen often, but when it does, it is when we are going slowly from our dock, to the main lake, as there are many stumps that are often marked with milk bottles or buoys. Even with the good work that people do to try to mark the stumps and submerged rocks, the shallow areas of the lake bottom are ever changing with each storm, and each tree that falls or fish cribs that start to float back up out of the bottom again.

This results in Mike having to remove the bent prop (he bought our own prop-puller so we don't have to pay a boat mechanic to do this), replace it with a spare, driving to Wausau or Minocqua to deliver the bent prop to the prop-fixer shop, \$150-300 to pay for the repair, and the time away from the lake to do all this.

We do not like bent props.

Back to the topic of wake surfing, and making a big, slow wave behind the boat... There is actually only one place we have found in Solberg Lake that works to wake surf. On the southwest corner of the lake, far away from the shoreline, is a basin, we like to call it, where the lake is 10-15 deep, and where the conditions are perfect for wake surfing. We make a circle and go around and around as long as we can stay going between 10-12 mph. We adjust the amount of water in the ballasts, depending on if it is just our family in the boat, or if we have guests joining us.

After Mike perfected the wake surfing wave, he enjoyed surfing behind the boat without a rope, for several minutes. It was so fun to be surfing in Wisconsin! Then it was my turn. I got behind the boat and within 2 tries, was up and surfing behind the boat. I kept holding on to the rope/tether because I felt more stable with more than just my feet to balance me. It was AMAZING. So much fun. And with the slow speed of 10-12 mph, the couple times I lost my balance, it was not painful! It was just like a fun jump (or plop!) in the lake, not like a wakeboarding face plant at 22 mph. Perfect for an 'old mom' like me! I can honestly say, that was the most fun I've had boating in a lake.

The next summer, we were excited to try wake surfing again. It was a whole new world of fun behind the boat and we were excited to add wake skating to the list of things to do. However, we realized that there were people who were very unhappy with wake surfing, some even going so far to dump motor oil on one of the wake boats of a resident to our lake. This honestly scared me, and it upset my husband a lot.

Petitions were started, and soon, even boats without ballasts, or the title of 'wake boat,' were being lumped into a classification of "those wake boats", inferring that they were the bad boats. If there was any kind of wave behind (even for tubing) we felt like people were looking at us as people who don't care about the lake.

This is very sad for us, because WE LOVE THE LAKE. We love fishing. We love our shoreline. And we love our neighbors, and want to live in peace with the other people who also enjoy the beauty of Solberg Lake.

During this time, we did not have scientific measuring tools to make sure that there were no waves that rippled to the shore. However, with as much as we don't like it when our shoreline gets huge waves from summer storms and bad weather, we always work to be

careful to not do anything man-made that would affect our shoreline or any other homes on the lake. We know how much landscape rocks cost, how much work and muscle it takes to landscape (because we DIY, instead of hiring it out), and how we almost every day are raking weeds off of our little shore that the kids love to play on, just from the waves from a windy night.

We are learning more about this difference of opinion, and even resentment between residents on the lake. There is even a Charlie Berens and Dude Dad video about fisherman vs. wake surfers. The take away from this is that both fisherman and wakesurfers, LOVE their activity, and love the lake.

A general opinion among many fisherman is that they would like there to be rules about 'wake boats.' As I've learned in my years married to a 'boat guy,' in reality, any boat, even a fishing boat, can become a wake boat if the ballasts are filled, or the live wells are full, or if you have 5 really beefy cousins who want to come over and go tubing with you on the lake.

While the idea of 'wake boats' are seemingly taking the brunt of the shaming, the real issue that people do not like is "prop wash." This has to do with the angle of the boat, not yet on plane, at low speeds, for an extended period of time. The resulting wave is similar to what we see in the ocean, so that someone can surf in the wave created by the boat, even to the point where they can throw the tether back into the boat and continue going forward just on the power of the wave without being pulled the whole time, by a rope connected to the boat.

We do not believe that we are hurting Solberg Lake by wake surfing.

We are not breaking any DNR laws by wake surfing as a family.

We follow the suggested ordinances for water sports and fishing times. We respect the fisherman by not engaging in water sports after 7pm. Also, we like to fish after that time, so you might see us fishing then too!

Finally, we believe that common sense will prevent any HUGE triple axle \$100,000 boats, or gigantic cabin cruisers from coming to our lake, to make waves that wash over other boats, or make anything that would resemble a shore-destroying tidal wave. No one with a boat that big will come to our lake, because our lake is too shallow. This is not Lake Superior.

Since we are on the topic of prop wash, I'd like to ask a question. In shallow lakes and flowages with a lot of muck/weeds/milfoil like our lake, is it possible that wake surfing prop wash could actually be HELPING the lake? Is it possible that by stirring up the algae and preventing the deep water from being stagnant, that the fish, lake, and swimmers, are actually healthier? I don't know, I'm not a lake scientist. However, I do know that I do not

like my kids swimming in green water with algae on top. This is what happens to our lake when the temperature gets warm and the water hasn't been stirred up by a storm or wind in a few days.

In closing, I want to say that my husband loves the lake. When people joke that 'those wake boat guys' have no concern for the lake or the fish, or allude to wake boat owners being paid off by big boat companies, that is not true in the case of Michael Keller. He loves fishing, wakeboarding, wake surfing, and he loves Solberg Lake. Our old boats are paid for by our hard work, almost entirely DIY maintenance, and not any kind of 'big boat company' subsidies.

We want to live in peace on our lake.

Thank you so much for reading through these ramblings of a mother, making memories with her children and family on the lake. I sure hope we can still wake surf because it is my favorite boating activity.

Sincerely,

Jill Keller