

Consideration of Approval of Metrics to Evaluate Success of Tippecanoe Lake and James Lake Ecozone; Administrative Cause No. 09-020D

During its meeting of January 13, the Natural Resources Commission gave final adoption to rule amendments to establish restricted boating zones (commonly known as “ecozones”) at Tippecanoe Lake and James Lake in Kosciusko County. The amendments are now in effect. The amendments provide these zones would expire on January 1, 2014 unless the Commission elects to extend their effectiveness. The determination whether to extend effectiveness would be based upon the success of the amendments for the intended purposes. The hearing officer report recommended the DNR establish metrics by which to measure success, and members of the Commission stressed this need during January deliberations. Included in the January meeting minutes was a statement by Vice Chair, Jane Ann Stautz, which provides in part: “...I would like to emphasize the importance of having those metrics in place as we anticipate more issues like this in the establishment of these types of ecozones to make sure that we are very clear on what we are measuring, the effectiveness of this. I think it will help us going forward.”

In response to the expressed need for metrics to measure the success of the ecozone at Tippecanoe Lake and James Lake, the Division of Fish and Wildlife has developed proposed metrics. The metrics are set forth below, and the Division seeks the Commission’s approval for their usage.



EVALUATING TIPPECANOE LAKE AND JAMES LAKE ECOZONE (09-020D)

The administrative rule (312 IAC 5-6-9) creating the ecozone became effective in April of 2009. The rule contains a sunset clause ending on January 1, 2014. During this time period the effectiveness of the ecozone is to be measured and a determination made whether to develop a permanent rule beginning in 2014. That determination will be based on how effective the ecozone was in addressing the following four reasons for establishing the ecozone.

- 1) To protect the Ball Wetland’s vegetation from further decline.
- 2) To address public safety issues in the boating channel between the lakes and in shallow water.
- 3) To make the boating restricted zones enforceable by clearly making them so that law enforcement and boaters do not have to guess where is the legal shoreline.
- 4) To create the opportunity for restoration of both emergent and submerged native aquatic plants, particularly in the flats area, either naturally or by restoration projects.

Reasons 1 and 4 will be evaluated by ecozone plant surveys in 2008, 2009 and at least in 2012 using DNR standard guidelines. The 2008 base surveys were completed in 2008. The 2009 surveys are planned and funded by the DNR Lake and River Enhancement program. At least one future survey is planned for 2012 but state budgeting requirements do not allow funding commitments that far in the future.

AGENDA ITEM #14

The plant surveys will determine the plant species present and how they are distributed within the ecozone. This is done by running transects through the floating leaf plant beds and identifying all species present. These beds are mapped by using GPS coordinates. Submerged plants are sampled with plant hooks at multiple GPS sample points. The cattail or emergent plant line will also be identified by GPS coordinates.

The GPS information will overlay the most recent aerial photograph and any changes in plant species and distribution can be determined from when the ecozone rule went into effect. From this information coupled with Law Enforcement records and local observations regarding public safety issues, a determination can be made on the effectiveness of the ecozone and whether a permanent rule should be established.