

SLPOA Mission: To develop the capacity within our community to provide a sustainable lake habitat that will allow all people who live, work and play within its environment an optimal North Idaho experience.

Lake Quality – Are Wood Fires Harmful to Lakes?

Who doesn't love gathering around a warm fire, especially near a beautiful lake? Fires are a cherished tradition, bringing warmth, cooking opportunities, and a sense of community. However, while the fire itself is not a problem, the leftover ash can have serious consequences for our lakes and water ecosystems.

Why Wood is Good for Lakes: Wood plays an important role in lake ecosystems. Fallen trees and logs provide shelter for fish, breeding grounds for aquatic life, and even help prevent erosion by stabilizing shorelines. Submerged wood also helps capture carbon, slowing down climate change. However, modern shoreland development often removes 90% of natural wood debris, disrupting the delicate balance of lake habitats.

The Trouble with Ash: When wood burns, it undergoes a chemical transformation, leaving behind ash that is far more potent than the original wood. One of the biggest concerns? Lye—a substance created when ash mixes with water. This chemical, which is used in strong cleaners, can raise water pH levels to dangerous levels, making it difficult for fish and plants to survive.



Wood ash also contains high levels of phosphorus, a key nutrient that can fuel harmful algal blooms. These blooms choke out aquatic life, reduce oxygen levels, and can produce toxins harmful to humans and animals. The phosphorus content in ash is so high that even a single cord of burned wood can release more phosphorus than the amount an adult produces in sewage over a year!

Adding to the concern, wood ash can contain heavy metals such as lead, arsenic, and mercury. These contaminants can accumulate in the water, affecting both wildlife and drinking water quality.

Furthermore, burning trash, treated wood, or plastic materials can release dangerous pollutants into the air and into the water through the ash left behind.

Taking Action: Simple Steps to Protect Our Lakes: The good news? The solution is simple and completely within our control. By properly managing wood ash, we can enjoy campfires without harming our water resources. Here's what you can do:

- **Keep Ash Away from Water** – Never dump ash near lakes, rivers, or streams. Even rain can wash it into the water.
- **Dispose of Ash Properly** – Let it cool completely, then dispose of it in designated waste areas or spread it thinly in forests where it won't wash away.
- **Use Ash Wisely** – Ash can be used as fertilizer for acidic soils but should never be added near water sources.
- **Check Fire Safety Regulations** – Follow local guidelines to minimize wildfire/ecosystem risks.

Our Role in Keeping Lakes Healthy: Late this past fall, a member of SLPOA noticed what appeared to be the burning of logging slash on the lake shore.

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The member contacted the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) and reported concerns. The IDEQ staff were able to contact the contractor. After a productive conversation, the contractor agreed to discontinue burning slash on the beach, now recognizing that it is not a good practice. This is an example of how important it is for each of us to act when something doesn't seem right.

Enjoying a lakeside fire is a wonderful experience, but it comes with the responsibility of keeping our waters clean for future generations. A simple act—disposing of ash properly—can make a big difference. Let's work together to keep our lakes pristine, our fish thriving, and our outdoor traditions alive for years to come. Next time you enjoy a cozy fire by the water, remember: Take your ash with you! Our lake will thank you.

Resources:

<https://seagrant.umn.edu/news-info/directors-column/fire-water-ash-are-wood-fires-harmful-lakes>

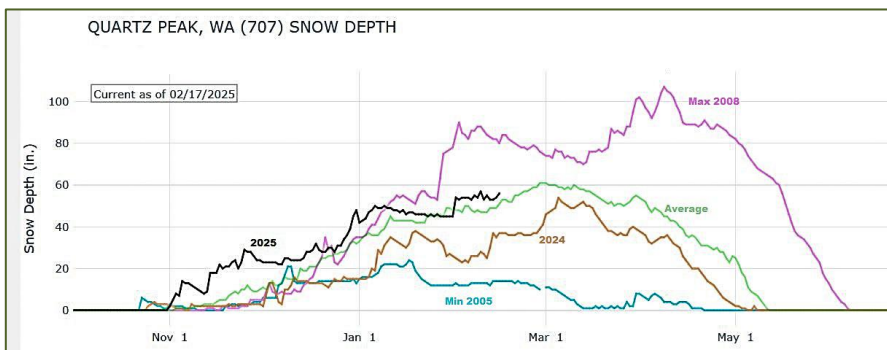
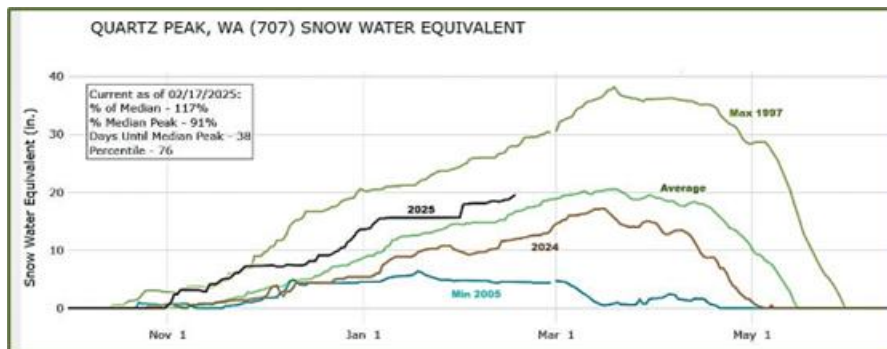
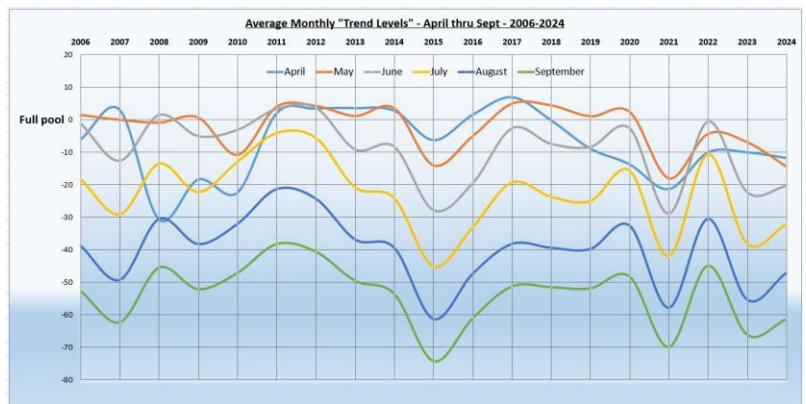
<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/OpenBurning/Impacts.html>

<https://www.cdatribe-nsn.gov/lake/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2020/03/CDABasinLakeASyst2013s.pdf>

Lake Data — Jerry Peterson, SLPOA Board Director

At this writing, data was available only through February 2025. The 2025 story is still in the making. During the first half of the winter, it appeared that 2024-2025 was going to be pretty mild with little snow accumulations in the valleys and lower elevations.

Meanwhile, mother nature was blanketing the higher elevations with snow and moisture. Average snow water equivalent (SWE) reached as high as 192% in the month of December. As a reminder that winter was not over in the first half of February, mother nature finally froze the lake over and gave us a few more layers of the “white stuff”! The SWE was 117% of

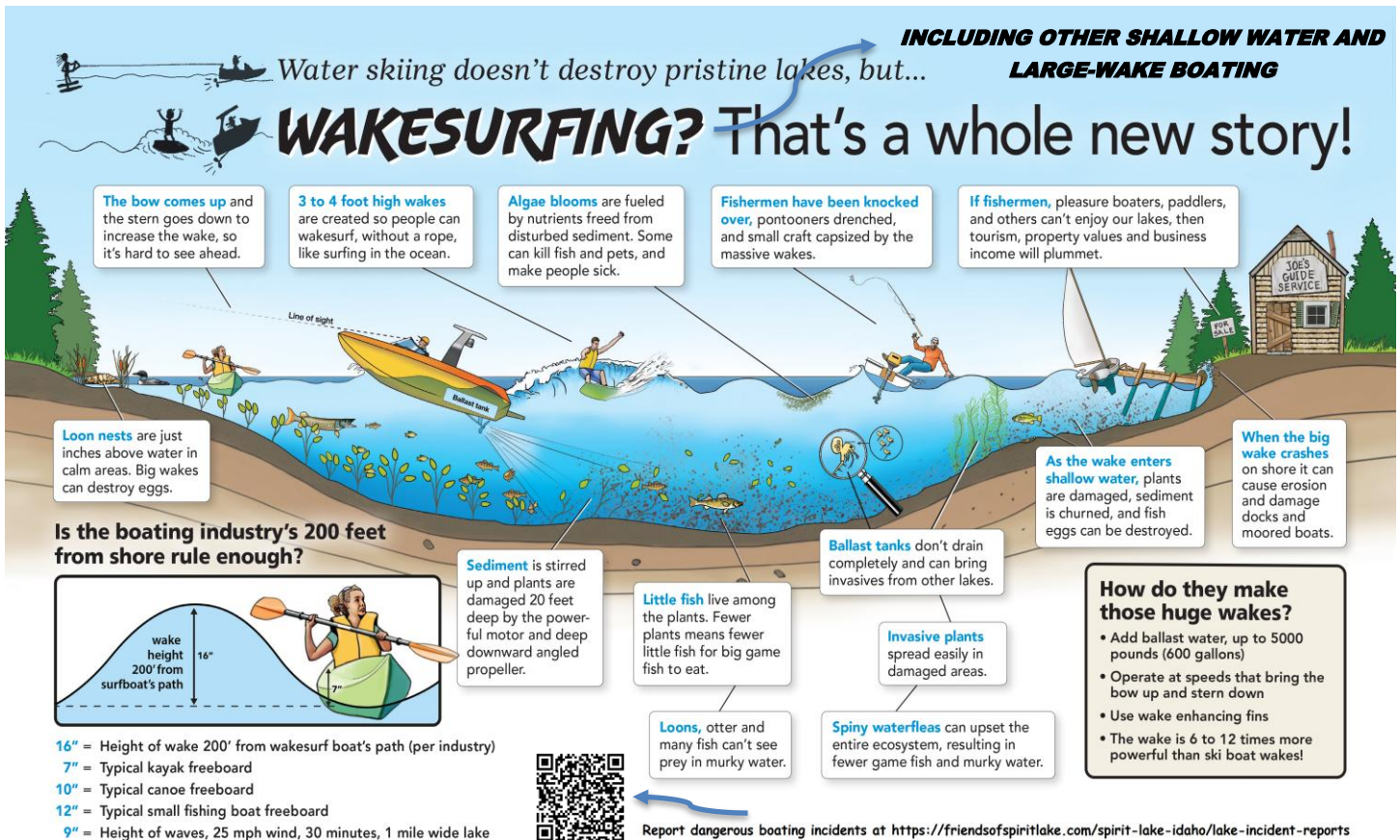


an average February and appear to be better than 2024.

However, lake water levels are dependent on spring temperatures and rains, both effecting how fast the snow pack melts. Also, with our new Dam to prevent flooding and retaining as much water as possible, our outlook is promising. We can also hope that no new “sink holes” appear and that the repairs made over the past three years hold.

We were fortunate not to have any hazardous algae blooms (HABs) in 2024, as we have experienced in recent years. Even though there were some very hot periods during the summer, the levels of phosphorus, (a main contributor to HABs) were 43-66% less than 2023. This may be due to the lower amount and rate of runoff last year bringing less nutrients into the lake.

Powerful Wakes – Help Us Make Wakesurfing Safe



General Boating Safety and Etiquette for All

Follow Right-of-Way Rules

- Sailboats and non-motorized vessels have the right of way over motorized boats
- Boats crossing from the right have the right-of-way
- **Stay to the right in narrow channels**

Respect No-Wake Zones

- Ride the core - Avoid the shore
- Prevent injury, erosion and property damage
- No-Wake within (200') two hundred feet of shoreline or dock, or any person in the water
- Observe and obey posted no-wake zones
- Reduce speed when passing anchored boats, kayakers, paddleboarders, and fishing boats.

Environmental Respect

- Pack out trash
- Never throw trash, fishing lines, or other waste into the lake.
- Use designated waste disposal sites

Avoid Fuel and Oil Spills

- Refill fuel tanks carefully and use absorbent pads to catch spills.

Prevent the Spread of Invasive Species

- Clean, drain, and dry your boat (including bladders) before moving to another body of water
- Comply with Idaho's boat inspection and decontamination laws.

Consideration for Others

- Keep Music at a Respectful Volume
- Avoid blasting music that disturbs others on the lake.
- Give plenty of space to people fishing, and avoid driving through their fishing spots.
- Watch Your Speed and Avoid Reckless Boating
- Follow posted speed limits and be aware of your surroundings to avoid collisions.

Safety First

- Have proper safety gear on board
- Carry a whistle, fire extinguisher, and navigation lights if boating at night.
- Operating a boat under the influence is illegal and dangerous.
- Safely help other boaters in need

Kootenai County Boating Rules and Regulations:
or open in your browser:

<https://friendsofspiritlake.com/spirit-lake-idaho/kootenai-county-boating-rules>

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Friends of Spirit Lake
Spirit Lake Property Owners Association
PO Box 363
Spirit Lake, ID 83869

Help Us Plan the 2025 Annual Meeting

Changing It Up

The next SLPOA Annual Meeting is scheduled for Saturday, August 9, 2025. It will be held again at Timberlake High School in Spirit Lake.

This year we are planning to try something new. Since our mission is clearly focused on lake and watershed conservation, we have invited some special guests to form a panel discussion about the conservation issues potentially impacting Spirit Lake.

To that end we are asking members to submit questions for the panel to consider. The questions may focus on such things as:

- Brickel Creek and surrounding wetlands
- Sediment accumulation
- Nutrient migration into the lake
- Hazardous algae blooms
- Sealed lake bottom
- Impact of large boat wakes
- Whatever is on your mind about the quality of Spirit Lake

Please submit questions via the website at <https://friendsofspiritlake.com/contact-spirit-lake>
Or you can also email us at spiritleakepoa@gmail.com.

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We want to have a gathering that is relevant to you and we plan to have some fun in the process. Of course, we do have business to attend to, as well. Stay tuned for more details to come.