

Parisi vetoes 'no-wake' measure

STEVEN VERBURG | sverburg@madison.com | 608-252-6118 | Posted: Thursday, May 26, 2011 10:55 pm

Dane County Executive Joe Parisi on Thursday vetoed a measure that he said would have led to more days when motorboats were required to slow down to prevent shoreline-eroding wakes when lake water levels rise.

Parisi also objected to part of the ordinance amendment that could leave the county executive out of the decision to limit boat speeds, and to a lack of public scrutiny given to the final version of the amendment the county board passed May 19.

Existing county law allows "no wake" orders to be issued jointly by the county executive, the board chair and the sheriff. For years, some boaters have complained that there were too many no-wake days, while shoreline homeowners and others have said there were too few.

Parisi said in a letter to board members that he understands the importance of protecting lakeshores by issuing slow-down orders.

"However, these orders mustn't be taken lightly because of the unintended economic hardship and loss in tourism they can lead to over extended periods of time," Parisi said.

Officials have worked since last fall on changing the ordinance to set standards and make them clear to the public, but two key committees disagreed on exactly how to do it.

Sup. Robin Schmidt of Monona introduced what she called a hybrid proposal at the board meeting, and it passed after a lengthy debate.

The amended ordinance would have required the lake expert on the county staff to recommend slow-down orders when the lakes rose to specified levels. The recommendations would have been made public on the county website, and they could have been enacted by agreement of just two of the three officials - the sheriff and either the county board chair or the executive.

Letting the public know the staff recommendations and the reasoning behind them would remove some of the "mystery" behind the no-wake orders, Schmidt said.

County Board Chair Scott McDonell said the current law makes it too easy for officials to make arbitrary decisions without sufficient regard to water levels.

"The way it has been, you could have one of us say 'Well, it's a busy holiday weekend. We should just let it go even though the water is high,'" McDonell said.

Parisi said he could support an amendment similar to one of the two approved by the county committees. Schmidt said she was concerned about delaying changes into flood season. She and other board members said they hadn't decided if they would attempt to override the veto.