

Big boats disrupting lakeside harmony in Quebec

Conservation group wants municipalities to have more power over boat activity

By Kim Garritty, [CBC News](#) Posted: Aug 28, 2016 9:00 PM ET Last Updated: Aug 29, 2016 12:02 PM ET

A group of people who live or have cottages on Lake Memphremagog are pushing to have federal laws changed so municipalities can have more control over boat activity on Quebec lakes.

"When everybody is on the lake, there is a hell of a lot of people," said Robert Benoît, the president of Memphremagog Conservation.

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Benoît has lived on the lake for four decades and said the tensions are rising as the popularity of power boating increases. The lake has seen an increase in an array of boats, including monster boats, cigar boats and small boats.

Residents are worried about pollution and other environmental impacts but also about late-night partying, according to Benoît.

"You should hear the noise of some these boats on Memphremagog on the weekend," he said. "You stop talking, you cannot hear the people talking across the table from you."

- [SQ taking to lakes, rivers to curb drinking and boating](#)

He said the conservation group, which counts a membership of about 1,200 people, is also concerned about the impact on the quality of the drinking water of the lake, a source for 170,000 people.

Not just Quebec

Benoît claims Lake Memphremagog is just one example but that lakes across the country are affected by the same issues.

The problem, he said, is that lakes are governed by federal legislation. A number of municipalities tried to implement rules on their lakes, but the courts have to turn them down because they don't have jurisdiction, according to Benoît.

"The law is a very old law and never got improved."

Benoît hopes to convince Marie-Claude Bibeau, the MP for Compton—Stanstead, to seek changes to the current rules.

Environmental issues

Will Dubitsky, the president of the Coalition for Responsible and Sustainable Navigation is also requesting changes to the way lakes are overseen by the federal government.

- [Nestle's water taking permit in Aberfoyle under review by Ontario's Ministry of Environment](#)

"The number of problematic boats is increasing with each year as there are more residents on our waterways," he said. "We want these changes made because we have a situation now where we have actually nothing in legislation to protect our environment vis a vis boats which have negative impacts on the environment. "

Dubitsky said the coalition wants to submit science-based proposals to amend current legislation, specifically the Canada Shipping Act, which governs safety and navigation for waterways.

"It's not a useful tool for protecting the environment," Dubitsky said.

The coalition is concerned about the impact of the energy of waves on shoreline erosion, according to Dubitsky. It also has questions about whether big wakes stir up the sediment on the bottom of a lake increasing the amount of phosphorous in the water.

'I'm sure a lot of the population would be upset'

Olivier Derôme, a professional wake boarder based in Coteau-du-Lac, said dramatic restrictions on power boats could affect and upset regular boaters in Quebec. The best way to spend the summer would be on the lake, he added.

- [Val-des-Monts powerboat fees sharply increase](#)

"If you take away that from the mass population for a short summer it would be quite disappointing and I'm sure a lot of the population would be upset."

Alain Roy, the president of the Quebec Marine Association, said his organization is open to the idea of safer, more responsible boating.

"We need more study and research around it," he said, but agrees that the law hasn't kept up to the changing technology.

"We need to protect the shoreline and we need to improve the education of the boaters."

He is also concerned about improving the safety on the water when it comes to alcohol and wearing life jackets.

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