

# Recreational Boating and the Environment – Tips and Tricks for Environmentally Conscious Boating

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A day out on the boat is a good way to unwind and relax, but did you know recreational boating may have a significant impact on the marine environment around you?



*Loons and their chicks are often vulnerable to collisions with fast-moving boats. Be sure to use caution when boating out on the lake. Photo courtesy of Tracey McCann.*

Recreational boating is a significant part of the Canadian economy and pastime for the nation's boaters (National Marine Manufacturers Association Canada, 2019). Although an enjoyable pastime, boats interact with aquatic ecosystems in a variety of ways that could be potentially harmful for the environment. Some of the most common impacts of boating may include: noise pollution, sediment disruption, erosion and disturbance of fish habitats (The District Municipality of Muskoka, 2011).

Studies done by Wisconsin University on water quality found that lakes with high boat traffic experience a higher growth of algae and kick up of sediment, affecting water clarity (Asplund, 2000). The Land Between is particularly at risk due to its high concentration of freshwater lakes and shorelines. As sediments begin to get turned up by propellers, adding more minerals and compounds

to the water, the water chemistry begins to change, decreasing the suitability of water quality for both wildlife and humans. Aquatic plants and animals have specific requirements for light, temperature, water clarity, pH level and more. As a result, water dependent species are vulnerable to chemicals put into the water and sediment disturbance caused by frequent boating. Fish can also become endangered by high boat traffic as boat engines are designed to deliver a large amount of power in a relatively small area. For example, the turbulence from a boat motor can dramatically change water temperatures by pushing warmer water from the surface downwards, directly affecting fish habitat and spawning beds.

In addition to recreational boating and fishing, in some areas humans rely on lakes and rivers for swimming and drinking water. Studies have shown that swimming in heavily trafficked waterways has been known to impair health due to toxins found in the water (Environmental International, 2008). For example, tributyltin (TBT), a type of anti-fouling paint additive that is often used on boats, can pollute water and pose as a threat to recreational swimmers. Upon contact TBT can be

absorbed through the skin and eyes through swimming or inhalation. Some side effects may include: eye irritation, headaches, weakness, tremors and incoordination (Cornell University, 1993). Many municipalities also tap fresh waterways and filter it for drinking and human uses. When more pollutants are added to the water, filtration systems require a more energy intensive, and costly filtration process.

Despite the many impacts boating can have on the natural environment, it is possible to continue boating without having such an extreme impact on the water and wildlife around you. Here are a few environmentally conscious boating tips:

- Practice regular boat maintenance to ensure that your vessel is safe for the water and contributing as little pollution as possible
- Avoid large wakes near shore to prevent sediment disturbance and shoreline erosion
- Have a supply of rags on board to clean up any oil or fuel spills as they occur
- Use all natural and non-toxic cleaning solutions for the exterior of your boat, [www.sailorsforthesea.org](http://www.sailorsforthesea.org) specializes in non-toxic cleaning products
- Be cautious with portable fuel tanks, be sure to fill up on shore and secure closed when not in use
- Remain cautious and **slow down** when approaching significant natural habitats such as wetlands and known spawning beds
- Ensure that your boat is free of zebra mussels or any other invasive species before travelling different water bodies
- Opt for paddled watercraft, such as canoes, kayaks or paddleboards to enjoy your time out on the water
- When spotting wildlife on the water or shoreline, be sure to give them lots of space and admire from afar

Employing any or all of these tips has the ability to keep aquatic ecosystems safe and undisturbed, contributing to the overall health of lakes and waterways within The Land Between. Practicing these boat conscious tips will allow you and the wildlife around you to be safer and enjoy your time out on the water!

**To find out more please follow the links below:**

Surber, E. (1971). The Effect of Outboard Motor Exhaust Wastes on Fish and Their Environment. *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, 61(2), 120-123. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24535476>

Winger, P. (2002). Toxicological Assessment of Aquatic Ecosystems: Application to Watercraft Contaminants in Shallow Water Environments. *Journal of Coastal Research*, 179-191. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25736351>

[http://www.trpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010-WI-Dept-of-Natural-Resources\\_UW-Boats-effects-on-ecosystems.pdf](http://www.trpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2010-WI-Dept-of-Natural-Resources_UW-Boats-effects-on-ecosystems.pdf)

<https://eponline.com/Articles/2017/03/27/The-Environmental-Impacts-of-Boating.aspx?Page=2>

<https://www.nmma.ca/press/article/22148>

<http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/profiles/extoxnet/pyrethrins-ziram/tributyltin-ext.html>

<https://muskoka.civicweb.net/document/16874>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0160412007001845>