



BOAT-TOWED WATERSPORTS



by Ariadne Capotis

With numerous lakes, reservoirs and rivers, boat-towed watersport enthusiasts have lots of options in Pennsylvania. The three key components to finding a great location for boat-towed watersports are a large body of water that is typically calm or flat, a boat launch with a dock and a place to refuel on the water. To add to the fun, consider restaurants and entertainment near or along the water. A good spot to consider is Presque Isle Bay, Erie County.

Pennsylvania's only natural harbor, Presque Isle Bay is formed by a west to east arching sand peninsula known as Presque Isle State Park. The bay is a superb body of water to partake in boat-towed watersports like water skiing. There are public boat launches located on multiple sides of the bay, restaurants where you can dock your boat while you dine, fuel docks, and most importantly, the water is typically as calm as it is vast. It is ideal for the specialized wake boats that have become popular with water skiing enthusiasts. Presque Isle Bay is over 4.5 miles long and 1.5

miles wide—plenty of room for pleasure boaters, sailors, anglers and water skiers. For more information on boat launches, visit porter.org/boating/. The Erie Western PA Port Authority page lists locations and additional details about the four public launch ramps located in and around Presque Isle Bay. From west to east, they are Bay Harbor, Chestnut Street, Lampe Marina and East Avenue. Lampe Marina also offers bathrooms, picnic tables and a fuel dock. There are restaurants near the Bicentennial Tower, at State Street, that offer free boat docking while boaters dine. The closest boat launch to most of the food and entertainment is Bay Harbor. If Erie County is too far to launch an adventure that requires towing a boat, the Commonwealth boasts many other great options.

To the south of Presque Isle, Pittsburgh's Three Rivers, the Monongahela, Allegheny and Ohio, offer great opportunities for boat-towed watersports. The Allegheny Reservoir in the Allegheny National Forest offers a great flat water opportunity, among others found in the western part of the state.

The Susquehanna River flows through the central part of the state offering opportunities for skiing and boat-towed watersports



Photo: Scott Stover Photography

There are many great locations for water skiing in Pennsylvania.

from the northern to southern borders. Between the borders, watersport enthusiasts will also find Foster Joseph Sayers Lake (dcnr.pa.gov) and Raystown Lake. Enjoy Bald Eagle State Park (dcnr.pa.gov), Centre County, with other opportunities for outdoor recreation, as well. Raystown Lake, an artificial impoundment in Huntingdon County, is the largest lake located entirely within Pennsylvania with over 100 miles of shoreline. For more information on Raystown Lake, visit raystown.org.

For boating enthusiasts needing a location in the eastern part of the state, sections of the lower Delaware River are popular for boat-towed watersports and personal watercraft. Blue Marsh Lake's 1,150 acres of flat water near Reading, Berks County, has three boat docks, and Lake Wallenpaupack, Pike and Wayne counties, has 52 miles of shoreline and seven docks and launch sites to support a great day of watersports.

Before setting out on any adventure, do your research. Check regulations regarding boat-towed watersport restrictions, designated areas, and other important information to ensure the safety of participants and others on the water. Make sure the location you have chosen is open and safe for the activity. Know

where you can launch, if the lake or reservoir has the proper depth for your activity and the necessary wake, and where the boat can be refueled. Find more information on the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's website under "Boating," "Where to Boat" and filter for Boat Accesses. The access should have unlimited horsepower and a dock, so you have a place to tie off the boat. You will need an observer and a boat operator for the person being towed, and remember that everyone should wear a life jacket, even those in the boat. Life jackets are required to be worn by all boat-towed watersport participants. Life jackets must also be carried onboard for all passengers in the boat, and it is strongly recommended that all passengers wear a life jacket. ☐

Propeller safety

Propeller safety is important for all boaters, especially boat-towed watersport participants. Accidents involving propellers are often fatal or severe, leaving lifelong impacts. In addition to wearing a life jacket, staying sober and taking a boating safety course, here are some tips for boaters to ensure passengers are safe from propeller strikes:

- Turn off your engine before picking up boat-towed watersport participants and swimmers from the water.
- Ensure no one is near the swim platform, swim ladder or boarding ladder while the engine is running. People in the water near the propeller can be hard to see from the helm. Move to the rear of the boat and look for people before starting the engine.
- Wear an engine cut-off switch. It shuts off the engine if the operator moves too far from the helm or falls overboard.
- Be aware of your position. Stay at least 100 feet from dive flags, rafts, moored or anchored vessels, shorelines and swimming areas.
- Keep passengers in safe and secure locations. Don't allow passengers to ride on the bow, transom, seat backs, or gunwales, or outside the passenger carrying area.
- Use the correct engine for the activity. Boats with outboard, inboard/outboard and water jet engines are prohibited from towing a person in or on the wake of the boat.
- Read the *Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Pennsylvania Boating Handbook* (available at fishandboat.com) for more boat-towed watersport tips and regulations.

PFBC-owned lakes:



fishandboat.com/About-Us/PFBC-by-Region/PFBC-Lakes/Pages/default.aspx