

No discharge allowed on Dale Hollow

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CELINA -- As many lake-goers are anticipating warmer weather and weekends on the water, those planning a trip up to Dale Hollow this year could be seeing an overall cleaner lake.

That's because the lake was recently classified as a No Discharge Zone by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), meaning that the discharge of wastewater from vessels such as houseboats or yachts -- treated or untreated -- is now prohibited. According to Dale Hollow officials, the lake now joins Center Hill Lake with its No Discharge classification and is one of the last area lakes to do so.

That's because the process for changing the classification at Dale Hollow was a lengthy one. It took about three years, and the issue was complicated by the fact that Dale Hollow is located in both the states of Tennessee and Kentucky.

"What we had to do to get that classification, we had to get the governors from both the states of Tennessee and Kentucky to be in agreement as well as many of our other partners that we work with," Dale Hollow Ranger Sondra Carmen said. "Then it had to go to the EPA for their lengthy process of posting it as a Federal Register and so forth. So from beginning to end, it's taken several years."

The lake classification was officially made by the EPA in October. And while it is considered illegal to release untreated wastewater into a lake or watershed, the lake's previous designation did allow vessels to release wastewater that had been chemically and mechanically treated through a Coast Guard-approved marine sanitation device.

"Even though the Coast Guard has approved that, it's still going to allow some nutrient load to enter the lake and some other chemical aspect that is not natural to the watershed," Carmen said. "I don't know about you, but even if it meets water quality standards and it comes out the back of that boat, I don't want to be swimming in it. "We realized that we have a beautiful lake that is worthy of protection."

In order for Dale Hollow to meet the criteria to classify as a No Discharge Zone, the lake's Resource Management Staff had to show that the lake had adequate pump-out stations available -- stations that pump wastewater from a vessel through a hose and into either (A) State approved and regulated septic tanks or State approved on-site waste treatment plants, or (B) a large holding tank for transport.

Thus, all vessel sewage will be treated to meet existing standards for secondary treatment.

Fifteen such stations exist at various marinas all across the lake and, Carmen said, some have received state grants to move to a fully closed system, which will drastically reduce the possibility of spillage.

The last step now for the Dale Hollow staff will be to continue educating the boating public about the changes -- the non-profit group Friends of Dale Hollow is currently designing a sticker to acknowledge those vessels which are compliant. And as the word spreads, area marina operators couldn't be happier about the new designation.

"This is quite a milestone," Willow Grove Resort Owner Darren Shell said. "It allows marinas a legal avenue to force compliance, replacing what was once only a friendly agreement between dock operators. It's a designation we've always wanted but could not legally enforce until now."

The popularity of Dale Hollow, located about 35 minutes north of Cookeville, has grown over the past five years. The lake currently ranks 19th in the nation among U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes, with more than 3.3 million visitors each year. These visitors add approximately \$120 million annually to the regional tourism industry, the No. 1 industry in north-central Tennessee and

south-central Kentucky.

But the increasing popularity of Dale Hollow has also brought a potential environmental threat to the long-term water quality of the lake. The No Discharge designation will provide some future protection.

"We view Dale Hollow as very unique and a regional vacation destination," Carmen said. "By having this designation, we are protecting the natural resource as well as the human resource from degeneration or possible illness. People that are environmentally sensitive are going to be aware of that and by their visit to this area, we become an economical asset to the region."

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