

Public Comments on Chapter 71 – *Regulation of Icebound Inland Waters*

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Drafted by: Kyle Minks Lakes and Watershed Commission staff

Purpose: This is a summary of public comments received by the Dane County Land & Water Resources Department (LWRD) in regards to the current Dane County Ordinance Ch 71 - *Regulation of Icebound Inland Waters*.

Background: Dane County Board Supervisors and members of the Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission (LWC) received inquiries from the public requesting changes be made to Chapter 71. In response, LWC members at their February 5th, 2025 meeting, reviewed and discussed the current ordinance language. Dane County Deputies from the Marine and Trail Enforcement Bureau and Conservation Wardens from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) attended and responded to LWC questions. Commission members then worked with LWRD staff to develop a process to collect public comments on the ordinance which was shared at their April 24th, 2025 meeting.

LWRD issued a press release along with social media posts and newsletters encouraging the public to submit comments. A website containing ordinance information as well as an electronic comment form was made available for the public. A public information meeting was also held on June 17th, 2025 to provide individuals the opportunity to attend an in person meeting and ask questions from county staff regarding the ordinance. Public comments were also accepted at the meeting.

The comment period was open from May 28th, 2025 through July 15th, 2025. A summary of comments is provided below as well as a table containing all public comments received.

Public Comments Summary: In total, 31 individuals submitted comments. They were received from people residing in the following municipalities: City of Fitchburg, City of Madison, City of Monona, City of Stoughton, Town of Black Earth, Town of Cottage Grove, Town of Dane, Town of Dunkirk, Town of Dunn, Town of Mazomanie, Town of Roxbury, Town of Westport, Village of Oregon, Village of Windsor, Village of Waunakee, and outside of Dane County. Only one of the 31 comments was submitted on behalf of an organization (Yahara Fishing Club).

These comments could be generally grouped into the following groups listed below. Some individuals provided responses that could be placed into more than one group; as a result; the total numbers below do not equal the total number of individuals that submitted comments (31 total).

Weight restrictions and floatation requirements

- 6 comments were received advocating support for the current weight and floatation requirements of the ordinance.
- 16 comments were received advocating for removal of the current weight and or floatation requirements.

Restrictions on the number of riders on an All-terrain Vehicle (ATV)

- 3 comments advocated for the removal of one rider on an ATV. This regulation is in State law and is outside the scope and rulemaking authority of the County.

Use of Utility Task Vehicle (UTV's)

- 8 comments were in support of expanding the types of vehicles allowed on icebound waters to include UTV's
- 3 comments were against allowing the use of UTV's

Speed and distance restrictions

- 1 comment suggested implementing a speed limit for vehicles when driving on the icebound waters.
- 1 comment asked that vehicles traveling on the ice be required to be a safe distance away from people.

Shorter icebound period

- 2 comments asked that any changes to the ordinance consider the shorter time period in which the lakes have been frozen.

Dane County Marine and Trail Enforcement and DNR Conservation Warden Comments:

Members of the LWC along with LWRD staff also engaged and asked Dane County Deputies and DNR Conservation Wardens to submit comments. They represent the primary law enforcement agencies tasked with implementing the ordinance. Comments received by them were focused on simplifying implementation of the ordinance while providing for public safety.

- Limit the types of vehicles that are allowed access to Dane County icebound inland waters to recreational vehicles registered through the Wisconsin DNR.
- Remove the weight restrictions and flotation requirements for those recreational vehicles allowed access to Dane County icebound inland waters
- Require that personal flotation be worn by all individuals operating or riding on a vehicle on icebound inland waters.
- Keep the ordinance consistent for all Dane County icebound inland waters.

LWRD Received Comments

ID	Submit Date	Municipality	Are you representing an organization?	Comments
1	5/28/2025	City of Madison	No	The restrictions of Chapter 71 seem prudent and fair. The environmental damage caused by a vehicle falling through the ice and being recovered is extremely high. Our lakes aren't large enough to justify the risk, and there are numerous areas where the ice is much thinner, posing a major danger for anyone not extremely familiar with the lakes. I would be supportive of keeping this as-is, or even increasing the environmental protections for our lakes under this ordinance.
2	5/28/2025	Town of Mazomanie	No	This comment has do with riding double on 4 wheelers now being illegal. Why can't there be like a speed limit of say 5 or 10mph and make it legal again. It really sucks to have to make young kids have to walk or be towed behind a machine, which I think is more of a chance of injury of tipping side to side or making contact with the rear of the machine while coming to a stop than if they sitting center on the machine in front of or behind the operator. Most people are not out to bomb around in an unsafe manor, but it seems to me that we've gotten a bad rap by some individuals. I assume this more of a information mine to see who all would like to allow utv's on the madison chain. I personally think that if that is allowed we're gonna see alot more issues with machines going through the ice. Conditions for good ice making days has gotten less and less in the last 30 yrs. Expansion cracks on Mendota specifically can be very dangerous especially with abnormal temp fluctuations which are way to common these days. Maybe setting speed limits may help in curbing some unsafe issues, but thats gonna take enforcement which would most likely take too much vested time and money probably needed more elsewhere. Thanks for listening and sorry for the rant!
3	5/28/2025	City of Madison	No	I have been enjoying the frozen Lake Mendota for over 40 years in one form or another. I have skied it, walked it, and rode my ATV from shore to shore, skated it, ice fished it, and sometimes just simply sat on chair on it enjoying the warming sunshine. What we have right now is a good balance of access and usage. However, I, and others have seen the lake freeze much later, and thaw much earlier. Getting to solid ice, especially in the spring , is much more difficult than it was just 10 years ago. So I would not support any measure to increase the current weight limits.

				UTVs and street vehicles will only end up breaking through the ice, and that is never good. Right now I already have seen motorcycles and other vehicles without flotation following the termination of mandatory float inspections.
4	5/30/2025	Town of Roxbury	No	The weight limit allowed for ATVs/UTVs on Fish Lake seems unreasonable since most of these vehicles are over the weight limit if a newer model and large enough to have capacity for gear and family.
5	5/30/2025	City of Madison	No	I like the regulations as they are. Specifically I do not want any additional vehicles on the lakes.
6	5/31/2025	City of Madison	No	The county needs to thoroughly consider other counties experiences. Especially related to increases in ice emergencies due to less stable ice conditions. Rules of thumb about ice are no longer generally applicable. Changes in climate are making ice more unpredictable and risky. Please make sure the ordinance reflects the current and future conditions not the past.
7	6/7/2025	Town of Roxbury	No	I am writing to voice my support for changing the weight restrictions of vehicles on inbound lakes in Dane County. I had the opportunity to virtually attend the Lakes and Water Shed Commission meeting on 2/5/2025. As I recall the discussion, no one was certain why this restriction was ever implemented. I live on Fish (and Mud) Lakes in northern Dane County. Nearby Crystal Lake is in both Dane and Columbia Counties. There is no weight restrictions in Columbia County. Full-sized vehicles (cars and trucks) routinely drive on Crystal Lake. I don't know how this people can know when they drive over the (under water) county line. I have tried to purchase the flotation devices that would allow me to drive my 2009 Polaris Ranger UTV on the lake, but have learned they no longer manufacture such floatations. My 1993 Kawasaki Mule is rated as a dry weight of 719 pounds, so when empty it meets the restriction. My 2009 Polaris Ranger is rated as 1215 pounds so it does not meet the restriction. The more deluxe UTVs utilized on this same lake, by Dane County employees, would most likely weigh over 3,000 pounds empty. I have tried to find similar ordinances anywhere else in Wisconsin after which we could model this restriction, but I have been unable to do so. I can't find any other county that has such a restriction. Please modify or eliminate this restriction so that families can more easily access fishing spots and enjoy the winter on Dane County lakes by using their UTVs and ATVs. Respectfully, Trudi Marquardt

				<p>As a lifelong ice angler who traveled to destinations throughout the midwest including the great lakes and Lakes in Manitoba and Ontario, I encourage the policy makers to get rid of the antiquated and over zealous far reaching restrictions on recreational vehicle usage within icebound waters of Dane County Wisconsin. Changes made by WDNR on ATV passenger requirements have led to more market sales of UTVs. Without OEM seats on ATVs that allow for 2 people, anglers and their friends, families, etc. are forced to either walk or be pulled via a sled. Often times this makes it unsafe in itself by exposing those passengers to the elements and risking falling off. With UTV sales taking over 70% of the market, it makes sense to allow them (without weight restrictions) to access and use public waters of the state. It also should be understood that many of the newer ATVs exceed current weight limitations. This is no longer the days of the older lower cc units of the 80s! Secondly, reality is no ice is ever considered safe. However, common sense and responsibility should not be the role of government regulations. There isn't another county government that has such a regulation. Most anglers and users of recreational vehicles are diligent and do take safety into account when traveling on ice. My experience in natural resources tells me most decision makers have very little to no knowledge on topics such as these. As an owner of an ATV, UTV and two snowmobiles, please take into account the amount of money these vehicles generate for local economies. Many folks in the angling community no longer fish winter on the Yahara Chain because they can't pull their shacks/huts and not feasible to actually walk. Make the right choice and abolish Chapter 71 of Dane County Ordinances. Regards Pete Jopke-Town of Black Earth</p>
8	6/9/2025	Town of Black Earth	No	
9	6/9/2025	Town of Dane	No	yes
				<p>As ATV vehicles keep getting manufactured heavier and heavier, for ice fishing, the weight requirement needs to be adjusted in line with what is being manufactured. As such, I also believe the flotation requirement should be dropped as proper flotation is harder and harder to find, and the Nebulus is no longer made. Ignoring current manufacturing practices and availability to make it current would be negligent.</p>
10	6/13/2025	City of Monona	No	
11	6/16/2025	City of Fitchburg	No	<p>I think that the ordinance needs to be updated to increase the weight limits to allow the use of UTVs. These are now more popular than</p>

				traditional 4-wheelers and would be a good compromise from not allowing vehicles.
12	6/19/2025	City of Madison	No	Please remove the ordinance requiring floats on ATVs on Dane County Lakes. There is nowhere you can commercially buy floats so it is a regulation that is impossible...or at best, very difficult to follow. I do not support UTVs being allowed on Dane County lakes and obviously full size vehicles should never be allowed. Thank you for your consideration!
13	6/20/2025	City of Stoughton	No	Anywhere else in the state (or just about any state, for that matter) it is the angler's responsibility that if they drive a vehicle on the ice they are responsible for the retrieval for that vehicle, if it is to go through the ice. I am fine with not allowing cars on the ice - those bring salt and other nasty things from the road onto the lake. But, as an angler who owns a snowmobile, I would like to take it onto the ice without the need of building a float for it! It's my responsibility if it would ever go through the ice to retrieve it, and heck, even if it does go through and there's floats on it, it still needs to get retrieved, so what's the big deal?
14	6/24/2025	Town of Dunn	No	I think you should be able to have two people on an atv when ice fishing I'm 73 years old and need to be able to get a ride out to access ice
15	6/24/2025	Village of Oregon	No	I'm opposed to changes that would allow UTVs or ATVs on the ice.
16	6/24/2025	Town of Westport	No	Get rid of it and allow all atv, utv, and vehicle traffic on the lakes. It is allowed on all other lakes in surrounding counties.
17	6/24/2025	Waunakee	No	Get rid of it and allow atv and utv traffic on the lakes in the winter. All surrounding counties allow this. Or continue to require floatation, but allow utv's as well. So someone can use a nebulus or create floatation for their utv. With the passing of the recent regulation not allowing multiple people on an atv, it really limits people to get out and enjoy ice fishing. There was no safety concern before with multiple people on an atv, but allowing utv would allow for multiple people to get out ice fishing.
18	6/26/2025	City of Monona	No	I support the removal of floatation requirements on ice bound vehicles on the Madison area lakes. Additionally, I support an increase in the maximum vehicle weight to 2000lbs to allow for vehicles like side by sides or other UTV like vehicles. I do not support a complete removal of the regulation, especially in the possibility of any given road bound vehicle to be allowed on the Madison area lakes.

19	6/26/2025	Village of Windsor	No	Dane county is the only county in the state that requires floatation on ATV's. The floats can be difficult to purchase as the two main manufacturers of pre-approved floats have gone out of business. The requirements for fabricated floats makes it nearly impossible to trailer an ATV to the lakes. Once installed, floats limit the use of the ATV. It is time to remove the floatation requirement and allow ATV's on lakes like every other county in the state.
20	6/26/2025	City of Madison	No	I think that you are keeping a lot of people off the lakes with this law. It's at your own expense if your quad/snowmobile goes in. I say get rid of the flotation law.
21	6/26/2025	City of Madison	No	Thankyou for taking input on this rule. I say that any vehicle under 400 lbs should not require any flotation on the Madison lakes because that is not much different than a large person walking out on the ice and therefore would not break the ice and cause issues for the lake. With smaller vehicles the chances of falling through are very minimal and therefore you shouldn't need to waste money and time on flotation devices for such light vehicles.
22	6/26/2025	Town of Cottage Grove	No	The ordinance should be changed to allow all ATVs and UTVs access to the lakes without flotation devices, while still prohibiting full size vehicles from lake access. The current rules don't allow anything bigger than a single seat ATV on the ice, even with floatation. That makes it harder for people to go out on the lake with multiple people which is inherently safer
23	6/26/2025	City of Madison	Yes	I am the vice president of the YFC and a prominent ice fishing participant that is interested in safety. I believe the flotation ordinance should be continued, as the excuse that flotation devices are not currently commercially available is invalid. That's how it was in the early nineties, people built their own floats and were inspected for compliance. I know personally a life that was saved by this, it is worth it. I had the hand built side pontoon style and currently have Nebulus deployable units. The side pontoon style is what I used when guiding, it would keep an ATV high and dry, resistant to flipping. Just because the Nebulus and bag floats aren't sold does not mean that it is safe to not use flotation, I use it on all frozen waters, not just the three city of Madison lakes.
24	6/26/2025	City of Madison	No	I do not believe that ATV'S need to have flotation attached to there machines just to be able to fish the 2 MADISON LAKES. NO OTHER LAKES REQUIRE THIS !!! HOPEFULLY YOU WILL MAKE THIS HAPPEN!

25	6/26/2025	Waunakee	No	I would like to see the ice flotation ordinance include all other Dane County water bodies as well (Waubesa, Kegonsa, Upper and Lower Mud Lakes). The last several years of poor ice conditions in our area puts rescuers in danger on all of our lakes when someone goes through. Keep and expand the ordinance please.
26	6/27/2025	Town of Dunn	No	When are you considering to let the public used UTV or motor vehicles over the 850# Dane county ordinance.
27	6/27/2025	* OUTSIDE Dane County *	No	Although I am not a resident of Dane County, I do commute to and work in Dane County for the past 13 years. I spend time on the local lakes frequently and purchase a lake access pass every year. In addition to kayaking, boating, and fishing open water; I also enjoy ice fishing on Mendota, Monona, and Waubesa where I often utilize my ATV for travel. I don't feel the float systems should be required on the City lakes for several reasons; one key one is that there is not a commercially available float system someone can purchase, the company went out of business. Another would be that most Wisconsin lakes statewide (and other states) don't require float systems, what makes the Madison lakes so unique? Lastly, I personally purchased a homemade float system for \$400, and it is a deterrent at times for me to frequent the Madison lakes to to the hassle to put on and remove since I am unable to get it on/off my trailer with it. If you eliminated the requirement, I think you would improve lake use/tourism and better support all the local bait shops and other businesses in the city.
28	6/27/2025	Waunakee	No	I'd like to see it legal for ice fishing to be able to ride double on an atv. For parents to have to pull an adult or child in a sled to be legal is so unsafe. Riding double is much safer. Please allow people to ride double on an atv. Still continue with the proper flotation requirements. Maybe consider allowing UTV.

				As a citizen of Dane county and Town of Dunn who resides and recreates on Lake Kegonsa year round, I ask that Dane County's Chapter 71 be updated to provide better protection to participants of slower moving ice bound lake activities such as walking, hiking, cross country skiing, fishing, skating and similar activities. My suggestion is to follow the example set by Wisconsin legislation for motor boats and personal water craft and similar in 30.66, 30.69 and 29.083. Specifically, I recommend setting a minimum allowable distance of 100 feet for anything capable of moving at speeds of 10 mph or greater from any person engaged in the aforementioned slower moving activities or wildlife. I also request that iceboats, kite skates, ice windsurfs, paraskating, and similar wind powered activities be defined in the ordinance and included with snowmobiles, ATV's and other motorized vehicles as fast moving activities that must maintain at least 100 feet distance. 2 years ago, the ice boat community descended on Kegonsa and proved a danger to those engaged in ice fishing and similar activities. Finally, ice boats and other wind power craft should either be limited in operation to the hours of dusk to dawn or be required to have lights installed similar to those found on motor boats.
29	7/7/2025	Town of Dunn	No	
30	7/11/2025	Town of Dunkirk	No	Eliminate the needs for floatation on all dane county lakes. Let people make their own choices. Atvs float anyways
31	7/14/2025	City of Monona	No	This law has worked well for many decades! Not sure about some of the new vehicles. Might need some review.