

Deep Creek Lake Policy and Review Board Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: August 4, 2025

Time: 6:00PM

Location: Garrett College, PAC

Board Members in Attendance:

- Chairman Bob Browning
- Bob Sutton, Property Owners Association representative
- Patty Manown Mash, Chamber of Commerce representative
- Bob Hoffman, representing Senator McKay
- Jim Hinebaugh, Delegate
- David Myerburg (Virtual)
- Marta Schroyer, Member
- Ryan Savage, Commissioner
- Steve Green, Alternate for the Delegate

Other Attendees:

- Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Regional Manager Sarah Milbourne, Assistant Secretary Paul Peditto (virtual), Deep Creek Lake Manager Cristina Sanders, Jenna Sivic, Grace Armendariz
- Dr. Jim George, Maryland Department of the Environment
- Tom Parham, Resource Assessment Service (Virtual)
- J.C Brooks, Maryland Department of the Environment (Virtual)
- Sgt. Ethan Lenoard, NRP
- Bruce Michael, Garrett County Government
- Members of the Public

Meeting Summary:

- The Policy and Review Board Regulatory Committee Meeting met on June 26, 2025.
- Karen Myers reported the DCL 100th Birthday Bash
- The Chairman reported on a Wake Boat Study being performed by the BAAC
- Cristina Sanders, Lake Manager, reported on four items:
 - The Brookfield Renewable Power Tour
 - The Harvester Pilot Study
 - Permit digitization
 - Aquatic Invasive Species Decontaminations
- Garrett County employee Bruce Michael reported on the Arrowhead Point Dredging Project
- Natural Resources Police reported on notable incidents and infractions for this season.

Detailed Minutes

Policy and Review Board Regulatory Committee Updates:

The Policy and Review Board Regulatory Committee met on May 27, 2025. Former Lake Manager Paul Durham joined the call to discuss points that were brought up in his letter dated February 27, 2025, regarding the various roles of Deep Creek Lake Management and the Policy and Review Board.

The Policy and Review Board Regulatory Committee met again on June 26, 2025, to follow-up on the action items from the previous meeting. We discussed:

Dock Rental Slips: The regulation change allowing property owners to rent out one dock slip has been in effect since June 9, 2025. There have been minimal permit applications submitted to the Lake Management Office requesting to rent dock slips.

Commercial Operations: The general policy has been that commercial operations must be tied to a commercial permit, which leads to greater discussion of whether commercial operations can happen outside of a commercial permit. There are options that exist currently with Maryland Park Service sites, which Deep Creek Lake as a lake is designated as a State Park site. This ongoing discussion covers the potential for commercial permittees to not have to go through a commercial permit around the lake and fine-tuning what that looks like. The main takeaway is that proper documentation is required, particularly a certificate of liability insurance, to ensure appropriate coverage and to protect the Maryland Park Service from liability. This is the current process in place for Maryland Park Service; however, potential adjustments are under discussion, with input from the Policy and Review Board and public stakeholders.

Action Items: Create a catalog of businesses that operate on the lake, find out if there is a policy that outlines the number of rental boats and versus slips allotted for rental boats, and discuss a future capacity study.

Deep Creek Lake Events:

DCL 100 Birthday Bash: Karen Meyers commented on the DCL 100 Birthday Bash and contributed its success to Missy Gralish's skillful planning. The event quickly became an all-county and beyond event and not just for lake folks. Attendance was estimated to be around 8,000 visitors and the vendors ran out of food. Other notable DCL 100 events coming up include the Roaring 20's Gala and the Water Sports Exhibition.

Boat Act Advisory Committee (BAAC) Wake Study:

Wake boats are recurring concerns raised at meetings, indicating it's a largescale concern. The Boat Act Advisory Committee, which typically meets in Annapolis and includes around 20 members, two now from Garrett County, will be reviewing the matter on a state-wide level. The BAAC is reviewing studies that have already been completed by other states as well as looking

at specific issues surrounding Maryland lakes. Recommendations are expected by the end of the year. Any regulatory changes for Deep Creek Lake will still require approval.

Lake Management Updates:

Brookfield Tour: Senator McKay, Delegate Hinebaugh, Secretary Kurtz, PRB members, Lake Management, POA members, Garrett County Commissioners, and Deep Creek Watershed Foundation members attended the Brookfield Renewable Power Tour held on July 18, 2025, followed by lunch and a boat tour. It was a good collaborative effort with everyone, coming together to discuss interests in the lake.

Harvester Pilot Program: The Harvester Pilot study will be conducted in the week of August 18, 2025, in three sites of varying depths. The harvester is an aquatic vegetation removal vessel. The pilot study is being done to test the feasibility of this type of equipment in Deep Creek Lake to manage submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV). The majority of the SAV in the lake is native and does provide an ecological function to the lake such as maintaining water quality and providing habitat for aquatic species, but there are areas that become overrun and hinder recreational opportunities. For the study, divers will complete surveys prior to the initial cutting and another survey following the cut. This is to gather data and to ensure that hydrilla, which is an invasive species, is not present in any of the areas that will be cut.

DNR Fisheries will also be involved in looking at the potential impact on fisheries. Survey data isn't sufficient to assess the fishery impacts due to the small scale of the project relative to the lake's size. Instead, harvested material from the harvester will be examined to identify any fish killed during the process, including their number and species. Side scan sonar will also be used to map habitat at fish survey sites to explore correlations between fish presence and factors like SAV density. Pre- and post-harvest sonar scans will be conducted to verify diver observations and help interpret the sonar data more accurately, potentially offering deeper insights into habitat conditions.

Permit Digitization: Dock permit applications are currently submitted by mail, and stickers are sent out upon receipt. The process is planned to be transitioned to the Maryland Outdoor System, similar to the system used for hunting and fishing licenses. Permits would be paid online, stickers mailed out, and automatic notifications generated. This change is intended to reduce the workload experienced during permit season. A document outlining the desired website functions and expectations has been prepared and submitted to the technical team. However, it is unlikely the system will be ready for the upcoming permitting season, so the current mail-in process will continue for now.

AIS Decontamination Station Launch stewards are stationed at the ramp to inspect boats as they arrive. A questionnaire is used to determine previous launch locations, with areas known for invasive species flagged as high risk. Boats are also visually inspected for invasives. When invasive species are found, preventing their entry into the lake is a priority. In previous years, marinas and individuals provided decontamination services, but this season that service was not offered. As a result, a hot water pressure washer meeting the required temperatures for

decontamination was purchased by the Lake Management Office and staff have been nationally certified to perform these decontaminations, which are offered for a \$25 fee. A total of six boats have required decontamination services this year with the majority of them having zebra mussels present.

However, the launch is not staffed 24 hours a day; stewards, who are students from Garrett County College, typically cover weekends and holidays. Although signage is posted for outreach, gaps in coverage remain, but the current system is an improvement over having no monitoring at all.

The pressure washer also serves other maintenance purposes, such as cleaning buoys and equipment.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fisheries:

Western Region Fisheries Manager, Matt Sells, reported that a minor fish kill involving young yellow perch was reported and investigated by staff the day after the report. Water quality measurements indicated that warm weather caused low dissolved oxygen levels in shallow areas, affecting the cool-water yellow perch more than other species. The affected fish were small, around two to three inches long. With recent cooler temperatures, the issue is expected to resolve, and the fish kill to cease.

Garrett County Government:

Bruce Michael reported that the Arrowhead Cove dredging project is nearly complete, with all final reports submitted to DNR. Upland vegetation has been checked and is in good condition, including the replanting of a tree that did not survive the winter. DNR will inspect SAV planting sites in Arrowhead Cove during August 18–22. The project, which cost approximately \$2.2 million, was completed ahead of schedule thanks to extended contractor's work hours. The contract with Maryland Environmental Service, which managed much of the project's background work, will be concluding soon. Final contract details and costs are pending.

Natural Resources Police (NRP):

Sergeant Ethan Leonard reported a significant decrease in boating under the influence observed this year on the lake. However, there has been a rise in vessel fires, with about four incidents reported, mostly caused by ignition of gas fumes inside boats after refueling. Fortunately, injuries and property damage have been minor. Most other interactions have been educational, and overall boating safety and recreation have been maintained.

Resource Assessment Services (RAS):

Tom Parham reported no big updates; RAS is continuing to work with Lake Management and Fisheries for the Harvester Pilot Study.

Final Remarks and Adjournment:

Public Comments and Questions:

1. Is there a timeframe for the wake study?

The BAAC is conducting a wake study to develop recommendations, and these recommendations are anticipated by the end of the year. However, the findings will then be reviewed by Lake Management and the Policy and Review Board. Any regulation changes on Deep Creek Lake must be reviewed by the board and public input will also be taken into consideration during the decision-making process.

2. Are there any additional plans for additional dredging or of the lake in problematic coves or was it one and done?

The Arrowhead Cove dredging was conducted as a pilot project, costing over \$2.2 million and fully funded by the state. While it was considered highly successful, no additional dredging projects are currently planned. Any future efforts would require a lengthy process involving studies, permitting, and approvals. A "lessons learned" document was produced following the project to guide potential future efforts.

3. Additional funds were allocated at the end of the legislation session for a special study on Deep Creek Lake. And I know DNR must work and figure out exactly what that special study means and entails and everything. Have you all been working on that or have any idea on how those special funds might be spent or what your project might be?

The \$1 million in the budget is designated as pilot funding. With the sunset of the State Lakes Fund, decisions on how to use these funds are delayed until results from the current harvester pilot program are reviewed. If the program proves successful, the funds may be used over multiple years to support continued harvesting efforts. Other potential uses include supporting shoreline erosion control, the hydrilla program, or other existing initiatives. Final decisions will be made once more information is available, and updates will be shared accordingly.

4. Are any coves being reviewed for "no wake zones?" Is safety being factored into these decisions?

Numerous complaints have been received, primarily concerning wake boat activity. These concerns are being incorporated into the Boat Act Advisory Committee (BAAC) study. Data is being gathered, and recommendations will be developed based on factors such as cove size, depth, and other relevant conditions. Safety, property damage, and shoreline erosion are among the top concerns being considered in ongoing evaluations and decision-making processes.

5. If the Harvester Pilot Study proves successful and is expanded, would future operations be managed by the state, a private enterprise, or possibly a combination of both, especially if someone were interested in starting a business to provide that service on the lake?

At this stage, no final decision has been made regarding whether future operations would be state-run, privately operated, or a mix of both. The current focus is on completing the pilot study. However, there is potential for private involvement, possibly through a state-issued bid or as independent commercial operations, depending on demand and the success of the program. Due to the slow pace and labor-intensive nature of aquatic vegetation harvesting, a single operator may not be sufficient, which could create opportunities for multiple vendors. The structure, whether sole or multiple providers, will depend on findings from the ongoing study.

6. Given the heavily wooded conditions around Deep Creek Lake and the rise in wildfire nationally, concerns have been raised about the potential for fast-spreading wildfire, especially from sources like lightning strikes. Has any action been considered by DNR to help mitigate this risk in the area?

The Deep Creek Lake Volunteer Fire Department was recently visited, and collaborative discussions were held regarding emergency response capacity, including from the water for hard-to-access areas. DNR staff are now engaged in broader planning efforts involving hazmat and wildfire-related risks to the lake. Efforts are being made to ensure staff are equipped and connected to emergency communications, particularly in cases like dock fires that could spread to wooded areas. For concerns related to dead or standing timber within the buffer strip or conservation easement, the Lake Management Office can assist. For private lands, the state forestry office can be contacted. While wildfire is not currently considered a high concern in the area, the Maryland Park Service and Forest Service have highly trained wildfire response teams. A regional wildfire response trailer, funded with \$30,000 from the DNR budget, is also stationed in Western Maryland for use when needed. Preventative and response measures are both part of the department's approach.

The next meeting will be held at 6:00pm on October 27, 2025, at the Garrett College Performing Arts Center.

The meeting adjourned at 7:17pm.