



# News Release

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For Immediate Release

## **Seaplane Access Unopposed at Public Meetings** Virtually no opposition seen to opening Indiana lakes to public use

*Angola, IN* – Despite adverse weather and one cancelled meeting, supporters of opening Indiana lakes to public use by seaplanes turned out to give public comments to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (INDNR) and Department of Transportation (INDOT). The support was unanimous in favor of seaplanes.

The first scheduled meeting, cancelled at the last minute by the state due to bad weather, still brought out over twenty attendees who engaged in an informal discussion. The second, a day later, drew unanimous support from all speakers in favor of more seaplane access.

The first meeting, scheduled for Tuesday evening in Angola, IN was called off by INDNR hours earlier, when it became apparent that roads snarled by snowbound traffic and accidents would prevent state officials from attending. Representatives of the Indiana Seaplane Pilots Association and the national Seaplane Pilots Association were still on hand, and met to informally chat with a group of nearly two dozen who arrived to find the meeting cancelled. Attendees came from five states, including Florida.

A rough show of hands indicated that approximately a third of the group were seaplane pilots, and another third were non-seaplane pilots who were in favor of the proposed change to open access to Indiana lakes. The remaining attendees were there to learn more about the proposal, without an opinion on it. No one expressed opposition to more seaplane access.

The public meetings were called by INDNR to seek public comment on a proposal to change the status of five lakes, currently available to seaplanes only on a private-use basis, to public-use status.

Indiana, unlike many other states, does not allow seaplane operations on a lake unless there is an established “seaplane base” (landing area) on the lake. In the entire state, there are only four existing public-use seaplane bases. States like Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota allow seaplanes on virtually any lake that has no local prohibition, totaling several thousand lakes.

For the past ten years, the Indiana Seaplane Pilots Association (ISPA) has worked to establish a pilot program of private-use seaplane bases on seventeen lakes. Under the arrangement, seaplane users must request permission from the “airport manager”, to use the lake. No request has ever been denied, making the lakes effectively public-use in practice. The current proposal is to change the status of five of the

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largest of these lakes, Lake James, Lake Hamilton, Lake Wawasee, Lake Winona, and Lake Maxikuckee to public-use. The main outcome will not be to increase traffic significantly but to get rid of the private “middleman” needed to give permission to use what are otherwise public waters.

The second scheduled meeting tonight at DNR regional headquarters in Columbia City, IN, was an even more impressive display of support for the plan. Over twenty members of the public attended. A petition of over 500 signatures in favor of the change was presented, along with letters from local mayors, businesses and individuals. Every person who spoke was in favor of the proposal, many favoring going even farther.

“We commend you on this step, and suggest that you establish a partnership or task force with the seaplane community and other lake users to study ways that more lakes can be opened in the future,” said Randy Strebis, president of the ISPA. Mr. Strebis has led the effort to open more Indiana lakes for the past decade, sometimes almost singlehandedly.

Steve Whitney spoke on behalf of the Seaplane Pilots Association, offering SPA’s help in a joint task force. Mr. Whitney also pointed out that seaplanes have a better safety record than boats. “Over 16 years in the U.S., there were over 100,000 boating accidents. During the same period, there were less than 300 seaplane accidents. Of those, only three involved people outside the seaplane,” said Mr. Whitney. “The facts are clear: If safety is your only goal, you should open up all the lakes to seaplanes...and close them to boaters,” he joked.

Many people spoke against the imposition of any new restrictions, such as weekend bans, that might be imposed. “I am strongly in favor of opening these lakes,” said Paul Kreuter, a seaplane pilot from Lake Wawasee. “At the same time, I am strongly against any new restrictions.”

Mr. Whitney pointed out that the case had already been proven. “These lakes have been essentially open to anyone who wanted to land on them for over 10 years,” he said. “There have been no problems. It’s easy to impose new restrictions if there are problems in the future. It’s very difficult to remove them if they are already in place.”

The lack of opposition impressed Mr. Strebis. “If safety was truly a concern, there would be people here opposing this change. The meetings were well-publicized. The fact is, people like seaplanes on Indiana lakes. They are fun and interesting.”

Lt. Mark Farmer, sitting in for Maj. Felix Hensley of the INDNR, said that the rulemaking process would incorporate the input provided at the public meetings into any rules changes that are put forth. Mr. Adam Fackler of INDOT was also present. He said that—if the change was approved—INDOT would apply to the Federal Aviation Administration for approval for the changes. The FAA would likely require another airspace analysis for each lake, a process that would likely take months.

“We are very encouraged by tonight’s results,” said Mr. Strebis. “I think we may be on the verge of a significant change in how Indiana views and manages seaplanes. We need to keep pressing the issue and working cooperatively with the state and other lake users.”