

Briefing Paper

Indiana Seaplane Access – Upcoming IN DNR Hearings

January 21, 2009



Summary

The state of Indiana is considering opening five lakes to public-use access by seaplanes. This action follows a multi-year pilot program in which 17 lakes were opened under private-use status. The Indiana DNR plans hearings in early February (Feb. 3 and 4) for public comment on this change in status for the five lakes.

The Indiana Seaplane Pilots Association has worked hard for a decade to prove the safety, effectiveness, and compatibility of seaplanes on Indiana lakes. Prior to this, only four lakes had designated seaplane landing areas.

Call to Action Checklist – HOW TO HELP!

- All seaplane supporters, worldwide:
 - Write a letter of support to INDNR, with a copy to INDOT and our organization (see sample letter)
 - Sign our online petition at:
<http://www.petitiononline.com/inseapln>
 - Send this message to other supporters
- Supporters near NE Indiana (incl. S. Michigan, NW Ohio)
 - Attend and speak at one or both meetings scheduled by INDNR for Feb. 3 and Feb 4.
 - Write a letter to the editor of your local Indiana paper

Details available on following pages.



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History

In 1998, the Indiana Seaplane Pilots Association (ISPA) was founded by Randy Strebog, a private pilot with a seaplane rating who lives in Angola, IN. The purpose of the organization was to promote the safe and compatible use of seaplanes on Indiana waterways.

Prior to 1998, Indiana had only four designated seaplane landing areas, all public-use. For decades, other lakes were also occasionally used by seaplanes, without objection from the state of Indiana. However, the rule in Indiana differs from many other Midwestern states.

In states like Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, the basic rule has been "open if no local prohibitions." In other words, there are literally thousands of potential seaplane landing sites in those states.

In Indiana, the general rule has been the opposite: "closed unless a designated seaplane 'base' exists." The result is that seaplanes are far less welcome and common in the Hoosier state than elsewhere.

In 1998, ISPA began working with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (INDNR) and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) to develop a pilot program that would allow the seaplane community to prove its compatibility with Indiana lakes. In 1999, INDOT granted private-use seaplane landing area status to eight lakes in northeastern Indiana. Later, an additional nine lakes were granted private-use status, bringing the total to seventeen.

The arrangement worked well on a pilot basis. Randy Strebog of ISPA was listed as the manager of the seventeen private-use landing areas. The sites were added to the FAA's inventory, and the national Seaplane Pilots Association put the sites in its Water Landing Directory, with instructions to contact Mr. Strebog for permission to use the lakes.

In 2003, ISPA held its first Indiana Seaplane Pilots Fly-In on Lake James, near Angola, IN. Every year the event has grown. In 2008, over thirty aircraft attended and hundreds of members of the public got a chance to experience seaplanes up close.

One drawback to the situation is the nature of the permission-granting process. It essentially gives one person control over public access to what otherwise are public waters. It also raises liability issues for that individual. As a permanent solution, it is not optimal, but for the pilot program it was sufficient to show that seaplanes could and do operate safely in harmony with other Indiana lake users.

Current Situation

In January of 2009, the officer in charge of the program for INDNR, Maj. Felix Hensley, announced public meetings designed to solicit public comment on a proposal to change the status of five of the private-use seaplane landing areas to public-use.

Opportunity

While ISPA would prefer that INDNR grant this status change to all seventeen lakes, this is a significant positive development, and Maj. Hensley should be commended strongly for his willingness to take this next step.

ISPA believes that, if these five lakes are granted public-use status, it will prove the ultimate compatibility of public seaplane access with the other uses of Indiana lakes. In the long run, this is a step to a fairer and more open policy for seaplane users of Indiana waterways.



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It will be **CRITICAL** for supporters of seaplane access **to demonstrate strong support** for this change in status. Any time public policy is opened for public input, there is the possibility of unforeseen outcomes. For seaplane supporters to succeed, we will need as many people to attend the hearings, write letters, sign petitions, and submit letters to the editor as possible.

Risks/Concerns

There is some concern that, simultaneous with opening these five lakes to public seaplane access, new restrictions might be put on the seaplane users.

For instance, under public pressure, the DNR might attempt to reduce the remaining number of private-access seaplane landing areas, or place restrictions on the new public-use lakes during specific days or times of the year.

In these cases, the cause of seaplane access rights would actually be set back rather than advanced. For this reason, too, it is important for seaplane supporters to express support for the public-use initiative, and especially to oppose any unfair and unnecessary restrictions that might be proposed in its wake.



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Call to Action

The Indiana Seaplane Pilots Association needs YOUR help, in five ways:

1) **ATTEND ONE (or both) MEETINGS**

If at all possible, please attend one (or preferably BOTH) of the scheduled public meetings:

a. Meeting #1:

Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2009
6:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.
Jimmerson Lake Room
Potawatomi Inn, Pokagon State Park
6 Lane 100A Lake James
Angola, IN 46703

(Note: The Potawatomi Inn is the site of the annual Indiana Seaplane Pilots Fly-In.)

b. Meeting #2:

Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2009
6:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.
Indiana State Department of Natural Resources
District 2 Conservation Officers Headquarters
1353 South Governors Drive
Columbia City, IN

If you are able, please plan to speak in support of the proposed change. (Talking points appear below.) The plan is for each speaker to have up to five minutes. Be sure to practice your comments to make sure you can finish them in the time allotted. If you are not able to or comfortable speaking publicly, still plan to attend. The larger the attendance of supporters, the stronger our case.

2) **Write a letter or e-mail of support.**

- a. Sample letters are attached below; change it to put it in your own words, if possible
- b. Address the original to Maj. Hensley at INDNR.
- c. Send a copy to INDOT.
- d. **IMPORTANT:** Send a copy to us, and make sure we receive it before the meetings

3) **Sign our online petition at**

<http://www.petitiononline.com/inseapl/>

4) **Write a letter to the editor**

If you live in Indiana, consider writing a letter of support to the editor of your local newspaper. Use <http://www.publishaletter.com/writeletter> to write to your local newspaper.

5) **Forward this information to others**

Send it to anyone you know who might be supportive, whether or not they live in Indiana. Seaplane pilots, pilots in general, aviation enthusiasts, tourism and economic development officials, etc.



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Talking Points

1. You support the change in status of the five proposed seaplane landing areas from private-use to public-use.
2. The proposed opening of the five lakes will treat seaplane users fairly with other users of those public waters. It is a step in the right direction.
3. The change will make Indiana more competitive with its neighboring states in attracting seaplane users for tourism and economic development.

States like Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota have literally thousands of public-use locations for seaplanes to land. Indiana currently only has four designated public-use seaplane landing areas.

4. The ten-year-long private-use pilot program of private-use landing areas has proven that seaplanes are safe and compatible with other users of Indiana waterways. Seaplane users should no longer be discriminated against in access to these public waters.
5. Seaplanes are fun and interesting, and attract public interest. The annual Indiana Seaplane Pilots Fly-In at Pokagon State Park is one of the most popular public events at the park.
6. By opening more lakes to public access by seaplanes, Indiana will be attracting economic activity that otherwise would go to other states.

For instance, many participants in the annual Fly-In are from out of state, and stay overnight, spending money on food, fuel, and lodging that would otherwise be spent elsewhere.

Also, by making more waters open to seaplanes, it will encourage more seaplanes to be based in Indiana, adding economic activity from aircraft sales and maintenance, fuel sales, training, and travel within the state.

7. The change will not have major effects on traffic. Seaplanes already have access to the five lakes, with permission from the private manager. The main effect of changing the status to public-use will be to avoid having to ask permission from a private individual or organization to use a public waterway, a basic issue of fairness and public access.
8. **IMPORTANT:** In supporting the opening of the five proposed lakes, you oppose any policy changes that would simultaneously increase restrictions on the access of seaplanes to Indiana waters.

For instance, you encourage INDNR to maintain the other existing private-use landing areas, and ultimately to open them to public-use as well.

You also oppose any restrictions on the public-use sites that would decrease the access from what is currently available under the existing private-use arrangement. (For instance restrictions on certain days of the week or times of the year.)



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SUGGESTED LETTER OF SUPPORT

[On your personal or company letterhead, if possible. Personalize as appropriate.]

Major Felix Hensley
Boating Law Administrator
Indiana Department of Natural Resources
Law Enforcement Division
402 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

317-233-3847
Fax 317-232-8035
fhensley@dnr.in.gov

Subject: Seaplanes in Indiana

Dear Maj. Hensley:

I am writing to express my strong support for increasing access for seaplanes to Indiana's lakes and waterways.

I applaud your efforts to bring balance and fairness to access for seaplanes to Indiana's lakes. For many years, the state of Indiana has lagged other states such as Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota in allowing seaplane access to public lakes and waterways.

Improving seaplane access to Indiana will have significant positive effects both for Indiana residents and visitors. It will have a positive effect on tourism and economic development as seaplane users come from other states to spend their travel dollars. It will increase spending and tax revenues on sales and maintenance of seaplanes in the state, along with boosting training, fuel sales, and travel spending within the state. It will attract seaplane users to relocate to Indiana, bringing increased spending during a challenging time for our economy. Above all, it will increase the fun and excitement of Indiana's lakes and waterways. Seaplanes are an exciting and interesting addition to any waterfront.

Since 1998, a series of private seaplane landing areas on a limited number of Indiana lakes has demonstrated the ability of seaplanes to operate with other water-borne traffic both safely and effectively.

I am in strong support of the proposed change in status of five existing seaplane landing areas from private use to public-use. The lakes include Winona Lake and Lake Wawasee in Kosciusko County, Lake Maxinkuckee in Marshall County and Lake James and Hamilton Lake in Steuben County.

In addition, I strongly urge you to consider extending this change to the private landing areas on twelve other lakes and to consider allowing access to even more of Indiana's wonderful lakes and rivers.

Likewise, I request that you not impose new, unwarranted restrictions on seaplanes, such as landing restrictions during certain days or times of the year, or a reduction in the number of private seaplane landing areas.

In summary, thank you for seeking public input on this question so important to the aviation community.

Yours sincerely,

[Name]

[Address]

cc: Mr. Adam Fackler, 100 N. Senate Ave., Room N901, Indianapolis, IN, 46204-2219,
317-232-1485, afackler@indot.in.gov
Mr. Randy Streb, Indiana Seaplane Pilots Assn., 537 W. Jefferson Blvd. Ft. Wayne, IN 46802
Fax: (260) 422-9030, randy.streb@strebconstruction.com

