

Snowmobile water racing becoming an issue in Limerick

By Mike Riley

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During the June 14 Limerick Township planning committee meeting, Mayor Carl Stefanski brought up an issue that had the potential to become more serious on Limerick's lakes; snowmobile water racing, or skipping. The committee pledged to find out if there was a bylaw in place within the township to prohibit this activity and also to investigate with the OPP if anything can be done on their end. While there is currently no bylaw in place to prevent water skipping, Victoria Tisdale, the clerk and treasurer, says she hopes to have something in place by the end of the summer.

Stefanski said that over the weekend preceding the committee meeting, a number of people had gathered at the public beach on Steenburg Lake and were doing snowmobile races on the water. In addition, one of the snowmobiles sank to the bottom of the lake, creating an environmental hazard.

Stefanski asked Councillor Ingo Weise when the guardrail would be going up at the beach to try and prevent this from happening in the future. Weise replied that the guardrail went up on June 15. Stefanski also advised caution and keeping an eye on Limerick Lake, as the snowmobile racers may attempt to do the same thing on that lake.

Councillor Jan MacKillican informed council that it was a new sport apparently.

‘The deal is how long they can stay on the water before sinking, and they do sink, and become an environmental hazard,’ she says.

Also called water skipping, snowmobile racing on water involves riding a modified snowmobile across a water source and skipping along the surface of the water for as long as possible without sinking. The first championships for water skipping were held down in Wisconsin in 1977, and it has since developed into a sport that is now popular across North America and around the world. Currently the record for water skipping is held by Morten Blien from Norway, who travelled 212 km on his snowmobile on the Karasjoka and Tanaelva rivers in 2015.

MacKillican said some municipalities have passed bylaws to prohibit this activity on their lakes and wondered if Limerick already had one. Tisdale said they may already have one, and that she would look into it, and bring it to the next council meeting if that was so.

Weise said that putting up the guardrail at the public beach any earlier would only affect the locals who want to fish, as there is not public boat access to Steenburg Lake.

‘It's the only access the locals have to fish until June 14, and then they're done for the summer,’ he says. Stefanski suggested putting a message on the township website for residents to be diligent and on the lookout for these activities and also inform the various lake associations within Limerick, and if they see it happening, they should report it to the OPP.

Weise reiterated that it was a recognized sport and that some municipalities must allow it or even encourage it.

‘But I don't think we should. I'm with you, Carl, I think it should be prohibited on our lakes,’ he says. The committee decided to get Tisdale to see if there was a bylaw precluding snowmobile water racing or not, and if so to bring it to the next council meeting to be looked at, possibly reviewed and thereafter enforced. They also advised Tisdale to get in touch with the OPP to investigate what they could do to put a stop to this activity in Limerick, and asked her to bring this information back to council on June 21. In an email from June 22, Tisdale says that she has been unable to locate a township bylaw that prohibits this snowmobile water racing.

?It is something that I will be looking into, but I need more knowledge of the regulations and rules, as technically this should involve the Ministry of the Environment as well, due to the possibility of pollution in the lakes,? she says. ?This may not make it into the July meeting, but I am hoping to have something by the end of the summer.?