

Remarks by Gov. Gaylord Nelson at the Conservation Education Clinic, Student Center, Stevens Point, Wis.:

I want to talk about the vital problem of preserving our lakes and streams. I want to tell you why I sponsored the new statewide program to open new lakes to the public, and why I worked for a bigger park program so that people could camp along our shores under supervised conditions. Above all, I want to explain why I have started a long-range program to classify all Wisconsin waters for their best recreational uses.

Let's start with a few facts. Wisconsin's population has increased by 600,000 in the past ten years -- adding 67 potential users for every one of our state's 9,000 lakes. In addition, with more people having more leisure time, water sports like fishing are increasing twice as fast as our population. On top of this, we have new water sports competing for space, including power-boating and water-skiing. And we have increasing demands on our water resources from industry and from agriculture.

Many of us who used Wisconsin's lakes and streams for recreation last summer saw the results. We saw fishermen complaining of swimmers, swimmers complaining of water-skiers, water-skiers complaining of lack of space, and cottage owners complaining of the loss of peace and quiet. The fact is that on many small lakes, especially near our urban centers, we saw too many people with too many different interests competing for too little water.

But there is an even more basic problem. Our lakes, rivers and streams can stand only so much pressure. Beyond this point, the result is more than annoyed people. The result is eroded banks, ruined spawning beds and polluted waters. In the end, we can destroy the very water resources that all of us in Wisconsin have depended on so long for our recreation.

Seventy-five years ago, our grandfathers destroyed Wisconsin's virgin stands of white pine and hardwood, with no thought to the future. We don't want our grandchildren to say that we did the same thing to our lakes and streams. That is why I have proposed to start on solutions right now.

Some have tried to distort my proposal to classify Wisconsin's lakes and streams, perhaps for selfish or political motives. The fact is that many of these people stand to gain the most from such a program. Every lake we allow to become congested or polluted is a direct loss not only to people seeking recreation, but to all those who produce the boats and motors used on our lakes.

For those who may have been misled on lake classification, I'd like to explain that this is a long-range program. First, we must get a complete inventory of all the surface waters in each of Wisconsin's 71 counties. Then, we must set up a pilot project on a few of the smaller lakes that are most threatened by pollution or overcrowding. Then we must consult with property owners, local residents and town



and county officials to get agreement on a plan for zoning and use. This program will move forward only as fast as we get general public understanding and agreement. That is why scare talk about banning motorboats from 95 per cent of our lakes is so outlandish.

The fact is that motors should be banned on a few of our smallest lakes -- just as a few bodies of water should be maintained as wilderness lakes, with no access roads. On a few other lakes, the size of motors might be limited, especially if the lakes are so shallow that larger motors would destroy vegetation and spawning beds. But this still leaves us with a vast number of lakes, all over Wisconsin, that are big enough and deep enough to accommodate all water sports, from fishing and swimming to sailing, power-boating and water-skiing.

This is only a small part of lake classification, however. Small lakes in the heavily-populated southeastern corner of Wisconsin may need limits that are totally unnecessary on lakes of the same size located in isolated sections of northern Wisconsin. And in addition to population pressures, there are such factors as the abundance or lack of fish habitat, the suitability of shoreline and bottom to various sports, and the degree of public access.

Still, I have only talked about uses on the water. There must also be classification of uses permitted on the shore. This involves setbacks for buildings to preserve a lake's scenic beauty, minimum lot frontages to prevent over-crowding of cottages, and regulations for sewage facilities to prevent drainage and pollution. It involves strict controls on shoreline alteration, preservation of marshy boundaries for wildlife, and regulation of sand blankets to protect vegetation and spawning beds. It involves public access, bank stabilization, and prevention of water diversion.

There are no easy solutions. Each lake and stream has its own potential and its own problems. None of them can be properly zoned for the best combination of uses without the understanding and the cooperation of the town, the county and the public.

But the state can show the way. And if we act with care and common sense, the entire nation will some day look to Wisconsin for guidance in preserving its great fresh water resources.

