

News > Local News

Communities struggling to fund marine patrols

Saturday, March 13, 2010

By ANNETTE KINGSBURY
Of The Oakland Press

With the summer boating season right around the corner, local lakefront communities are scrambling for ways to pay for marine patrols that the Oakland County Sheriff's Office used to provide for free.

The Orion Township Board of Trustees recently approved a plan to pay for patrols on Lake Orion and Lake Voorheis from the township's police fund at an estimated cost of \$20,000 to \$25,000.

"We have somewhat of an urgent need," said Orion Township Supervisor Matt Gibb. "This just seems to be the most practical at this stage."

Gibb said the township and the Village of Lake Orion discussed whether the village police department could take over patrolling the lake, part of which falls within village boundaries. But the police department doesn't have the necessary equipment, he said.

Undersheriff Mike McCabe said Addison Township is considering paying for patrols on Lakeville Lake, while a meeting has been scheduled for residents of Orchard Lake and Cass Lake to discuss the matter.

George Hanley, past president of the Lake Orion Lake Association, said the sheriff's office provided 600 to 900 hours of patrols per season on Lake Orion, "Which is a substantial presence and we felt that contributes to lake life," he said.

Anything less than 450 to 500 hours would mean less compliance with boating rules, he said.

"A lot of boaters who are out there don't necessarily have a good education on what to do," said another LOLA member, Gerry Richards. "It makes for a very interesting situation out there. ... We think it's very, very important to have this."

The state's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act sets aside 49 percent of the revenues from watercraft registration fees for marine law enforcement and education. The Oakland County Sheriff's Office received about \$240,000 from that fund in 2008.

But critics say Oakland County doesn't receive its fair share.

"The formula's a joke," McCabe said. "Oakland County gets the short end of the stick."

In fact, there is no formula. McCabe said the Department of Natural Resources and Environment gets to decide how to allocate the money.

State Rep. Eileen Kowall, R-White Lake Township, said the county gets back only about 25 cents on the dollar on boat

registrations. She is preparing legislation that would clarify how the money is allocated.

“We’re trying to make the law more specific, define the language better,” Kowall said.

She also said it’s been impossible to get accurate information about how many boats are registered in the county.

“We want to know how many boats we have here,” she said.

Kowall said drowning has decreased since the sheriff began marine patrols. She’s hoping her bill, which will require a budget amendment, will be approved in time for this summer’s busy season.

URL: http://www.theoaklandpress.com/articles/2010/03/13/news/local_news/doc4b9c598dade01370524761.prt

© 2010 theoaklandpress.com, a **Journal Register** Property