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Speed vs. noise — Big Lake users can't agree

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CARLTON — Big Lake users and residents offered differing opinions Tuesday to the Carlton County Board on a 40 mph speed limit proposal for boats using the lake.

And not only did residents disagree on the proposal — they disagreed on what the issue was.

About 50 people packed the board room in the courthouse, and about 15 of those spoke. Some said speed and safety were the issue, but others argued that noise was

the real problem.

Big Lake is about 10 miles west of Cloquet and is a public access lake. About 250 people live on or near the lake, but many others use it. Under the proposal, boat speed would be limited to 40 mph. The ordinance would be regulated by the Carlton County Sheriff's Department.

Even if the County Board passes the ordinance, it must be approved by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources before it can take effect.

Ken Marden, chairman of the Big Lake Association, supports the

ordinance. He presented the board with a petition of 215 names supporting the speed limit and urged the ordinance be passed "so everybody can get back to enjoying the lake."

But Steve Stumpf, who lives on the lake in the summer, also had a petition — opposing the ordinance. His had 153 signatures.

"I don't feel we have a problem," he told the board. "I feel we have enough rules and regulations."

David Wait, who has lived on Big Lake for 15 years, endorses the speed limit.

"Big Lake is the street in front of my house," he said, comparing the noisy boats to cars without mufflers. "Forty miles per hour restricts no recreational activity, but makes a safer environment all."

But Willard Nelson argued that a 40 mph speed limit didn't guarantee safety. "You can get killed at 39 mph if you operate your boat unsafely," he said.

Jack Tomhave, who owns a summer home on the lake, said that though he supports the speed limit, his big concern is noise.

"I am endorsing the speed be-

cause it seems to be the only way" to control the noise, he said.

Craig Beck, a former Big Lake resident who still uses the lake, admitted that people have complained about the noise caused by his boat. He opposes the speed limit, saying that there are other ways to control noise.

"I just spent \$130 to have custom mufflers put on," he said. "That's what you're all harping about — noise, not speed. You people that own property, you own the shoreline, you don't own the water."

He said he's been ticketed for the noise, paid the fine and purchased new mufflers on his boat. "What the h--- else do you guys want?" he asked.

The board took no action on the proposal and will discuss it again at its Aug. 13 meeting.