



# CASS COUNTY OFFICE OF SHERIFF

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RICHARD J. BEHNKE, Sheriff

CLINTON D. ROACH, Undersheriff

Cass County Sheriff Richard J. Behnke releasing his Offices' response to the Diamond Lake Sandbar event on July 4, 2020.

The Diamond Lake Sandbar July 4<sup>th</sup> event has been held for several years in LaGrange and Jefferson Townships of Cass County, Michigan. It originated as a local event for people of the lake and surrounding community to celebrate Independence Day. In recent years it has become more organized as an event with bands and other entertainment on barges anchored in the lake. This has resulted in many individuals coming from many different communities to attend the event. The traditional holiday event once a year has evolved into a commercial event that takes place several times a summer. At no time has the Cass County Sheriff's Office been in support of these events as it brings many hardships to the community. These events have had no local governmental support, but has garnered the support of some local businesses.

Since these events have grown, there has been many issues concerning to the Sheriff's Office and local residents. One of the biggest issues is access to the sandbar itself. There are few convenient access areas since most of the lake frontage is privately owned. People wishing to access will park on private property and walk across private property without permission from the owners. Even when asked not to by the property owners themselves. Many times, these people urinate on the property and leave trash. Other concerns are excessive drinking, underaged drinking, public indecency, unsafe boating, and public order. Other issues at the lake's public access and other parking areas being overwhelmed with cars, trash and human defecation.

The Sheriff's Office has increased patrols both on the lake and on land to best control this activity from happening. We advise party goers that they must park legally and to not trespass on private property. We maintained a presence at the public access so there is control to the number of spaces provided and some order to those using. We have also increased the amount of patrol boats in the water to keep the area as safe as possible. The Sheriff's Office has been increasing the presence with funding help from lake associations and local support. These activities have resulted in arrests, drunk driving, assaults and citations issues for minors in possession, boating violations, etc.

The Cass County Sheriff's Office, recognizing its commitment of service to all citizens, will provide professional law enforcement and crime prevention in accordance with the highest possible standards of integrity and fairness.

In the months leading up to the July 4th event, the Sheriff's Office tried to engage the State Department of Natural Resources in controlling this event with the permitting process. The DNR issues permits for activities on the lakes. They advised that they did not see the need for a permit for the sandbar event. Although they require one for the fireworks event that took place on the lake just hours after the sandbar event disbanded.

Prior to the July 4th event, the Sheriff's Office did engage in conversation with of the event's organizers, about the concerns of the event and crowd that it draws and the pandemic. They advised that they had a plan to announce to attendees to keep socially distanced and take precautions. They also indicated that this is a public lake and they planned on continuing with the event. It should be noted that the organizers did make announcements about COVID and the need to socially distance periodically throughout the event.

The Sheriff's Office cannot keep events like this from happening on the lake. The Cass County Office of Sheriff has never worked with or in conjunction with the events organizers. In attempts to work with the event's organizers we have found them to be confrontational and not willing to work towards a controlled event. The Sheriff's Office has tried to keep the residents and citizens in the area as safe as possible and taking enforcement action when necessary. This has happened with people not controlling the event and those in attendance.

The Cass County Prosecutor will be forwarded any and all possible criminal charges involved to be reviewed. We are also working with other local governing offices in a response to this activity.

This incident remains under investigation.