

## **Barnett Reservoir Board passes lake user fee**

RIDGELAND — Beginning Oct. 1 2015, boaters on Ross Barnett Reservoir will be required to pay a lake user fee under a plan passed Thursday by the Pearl River Valley Water Supply District Board of Directors.

According to Board President Jack Winstead, all funds raised from the user fee will be directed to a special revenue fund and be used only for recreational enhancements on the aging lake.

“Ross Barnett Reservoir is celebrating its 50th anniversary, and while we celebrate this milestone we must also realize that a lot of infrastructure is aging and in need of renovation or repair,” Winstead said. “To this point, our leaseholders have shouldered all the financial burden, but under this plan all lake users will contribute to maintaining and improving our facilities.”

It is estimated that about 30,000 boats are registered within the five counties that surround Barnett Reservoir — Hinds, Leake, Madison, Rankin, and Scott counties. PRVWSD officials estimate that the lake user fee could generate about \$250,000 to \$300,000 annually.

These funds would be used to update boat ramps, increase or replace navigational aids and improve shore support facilities. When possible, they can be matched with federal funding arranged through cooperation with the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks.

“Two good examples of what \$250,000 can do are the recently completed projects at Fannin Landing with a breakwater and new comfort station, and the renovation at Goshen Springs Landing on Mississippi

Highway 43,” said John Sigman, PRVWSD general manger. “These were both \$1 million projects that required a 25 percent match on our end.”

Winstead and Sigman both said stake holders and user groups would be involved in all aspects of the planning of projects, and added that reservoir officials have discussed the lake user fee with several such groups and have found nearly universal support.

According to PRVWSD officials, boaters paying the lake user fee will be issued a decal to be placed on the bow of the watercraft near the required State registration number and decal. Registrants will have the option of purchasing an annual permit or a three-year permit. A shorter-term 10-day permit will also be available for visitors.

The fees rates are:

- \* Boats under 26 feet — \$35 annual, \$90 for three years.
- \* Boats 26 feet and above — \$50 annual, \$135 for three years.
- \* 10-day, any size, consecutive days — \$10.

Decals will be good from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

The only vessels excluded from the user fees are paddleboards, sail boards, kayaks, canoes and approved towable devices, plus boats operated by law enforcement, fire/rescue, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks and PRVWSD workboats.

Sigman said that registration would be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

“That way, anybody anywhere who decides, even on the spur of the moment, that they want to fish or boat on Barnett Reservoir will have the opportunity to go online and pay, and our officers on the water will have access to the system to check and say, ‘Yes, you are good to go,’” Sigman said. “They then would receive their decals by mail.”

The Board's action on Thursday begins a 30-day comment period. To find the proposed rule, visit [therez.ms](http://therez.ms).

Comments may be sent to [comments@therez.ms](mailto:comments@therez.ms).