

Private Navigation Buoys – GBA Primer

With the current low water levels crisis many cottagers will have challenges navigating around newly exposed shoals and through narrowing channels. Both individuals and their cottager associations will likely want to mark some of these with buoys. The following information has been developed to provide a guide for those who are contemplating the placement of private buoys. We have drawn on both the experience of some of our Member Associations who have deployed buoys in their communities, and FOCA, plus guidance provided by Transport Canada.

Type of Buoys

While many private citizens may resort to using plastic milk or juice bottles to mark shoals near their cottage it should be noted that these types of buoys are not in keeping with Transport Canada's guidelines. Transport Canada publishes An Owner's Guide to Private Buoys (www.tc.gc.ca/eng/marinesafety/tp-tp14799-menu-634.htm). This guide stipulates that;

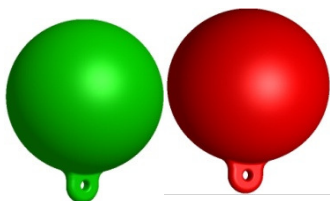
- Buoys need to have minimum above-water dimensions of 6" in width x 12" in height. "large enough to be seen from the distance it takes a mariner to see, interpret and act upon its signal"
- The buoys must display the capital letters PRIV and the owner's ID including the buoy owner's name, address and telephone number. These must be easy to read and affixed in a permanent manner.
- The colour for navigation buoys should adhere to the standard green (port) and red (starboard).
- Buoys used to mark hazards should be yellow.

It should be further noted that Transport Canada can issue fines and/or order removal of private buoys that do not comply with the private buoy regulations.



Key River Area Association (KRAA) has had good success using buoys sourced from Tideland (<http://www.tidelandsignal.com>) (pictured to the left). The price range for these is \$ 250 - \$265

At one point KRAA thought they would replace the Tideland buoys, with Sully Sticks (Taylor Made - \$83 each - www.taylormadeproducts.com). A committee member ran this idea past the Coast Guard (Parry Sound) and they thought they'd be fine. They're sufficiently taller than the required 12" that their narrower width is not a problem. As for red and green, because the sully sticks are white, those colours would have to be added with reflective tape, and that was also acceptable.



FOCA has sourced buoys from Go Deep International (www.buoysandlights.com) (pictured to the left). The price range for these is in the \$15 - \$20 range per buoy.

Installation

A buoy is only as good as its ability to stay in place. Key River Area Association has experimented with several anchors and chain configurations given their desire to keep the buoys in place year round (through freeze up and spring break up) in a channel that experiences considerable water movement. They have concluded the following;

- The anchors should be larger and heavier – 1 foot thick, and 3' x 3' square, weighing between 800 and 1,000 pounds. KRAA use reinforced concrete blocks.
- They should be positioned correctly on the bottom of the River, embedded in the silt where necessary.
- The buoys should be attached to the anchor by chain.

In places where there is less water movement and/or seasonal deployment is possible it should be possible to use less expensive anchors and even use rope or clothesline wire to tie down the buoys. There is no one size fits all recommendation – trial and error is the order of the day.

Liability

While shoal or channel marking may be seen as a community benefit, it could result in a liability to the owner or manager of privately placed buoys. Someone hitting a rock adjacent to a private buoy could try to sue the “owner” of the buoy claiming negligence for damage to property or for personal injury. We have been told that such litigation is unlikely to stand up in court if the buoy complies to Transport Canada standards and is properly situated BUT the cost of defending against such litigation could be high.

Coverage for legal costs (including any compensatory judgement) could be covered by a properly designed insurance policy. Associations and individuals should review their coverage with their insurance carrier to ensure that it covers buoy related claims.

Over and above insurance protection, anyone deploying markers should clearly communicate with their members/neighbours that such deployment has/will take place, what shoals or channels have been marked and when buoys will be deployed and removed (if they are deployed on a seasonal basis).

Making an effort to provide public notice will help you argue that you or your association were being responsible in your deployment of buoys.

Government Buoys

NEVER attempt to alter the position of a marker placed by Transport Canada or other government authority.

If you have any questions or observations about channels that are marked by government buoys or concerns about the location or condition of government buoys you can call the Coast Guard at (613) 925-0666 or visit their Notice to Mariners web site at <http://www.notmar.gc.ca>

Should you have any questions or wish further information please contact;

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