

Laura Hench
Freeport

I have lived on Cushing Briggs Road, Freeport for 31 years in a quiet residential neighborhood along the tidal Harraseeket River. Our home is our sanctuary, our peaceful space to escape from the rest of this crazy world. We highly value Maine's coastal beauty. Unfortunately, there has been a recent, ongoing intrusion on our haven. For the last several years, the intense sound from airboats has been disturbing the quiet tranquility of our suburban neighborhood. Our home is not directly on the waterfront, but across the street, approximately 200 yards from the water. One might think that is a fairly distant range to be disturbed by the sound of a boat passing by. After all, we have witnessed numerous boats travel by at all hours, all year long, for decades. We should be immune to the sound. However, the airboat is so much louder than any other watercraft, and is really a form of noise pollution.

In summer, my family has been woken up by airboats on numerous occasions, sometimes before sunrise--as early as 3 am--and often around dawn. Awakening from a sound sleep disrupts my sleep cycle on a daily basis, and could be a threat to the health and wellness of perhaps thousands of my coastal neighbors. When we are outside, working in the yard or garden, walking the dog, or enjoying time off on our backyard deck, the sound of airboats is noticeably loud and intrusive. Every time an airboat goes by, this obnoxious noise pollution is remarkable and lasts for several minutes. Airboat noise pollution disrupts and distracts from our daily life. It is very stressful.

We also spend a lot of time on the water, on our pleasure boat, and my husband is a recreational lobsterman. We often spend time at Pound of Tea island, at my sister's cottage. There we have witnessed airboats going by all hours of the day and into the early evening. Sound waves travel very long distances over water. An airboat's high-pitched and extremely loud screech can be heard for 10-15 minutes, beginning as it approaches, becoming a high crescendo as it passes by so loudly that all conversation ceases, so painful that we need to protect our ears with our hands, and then continuing on as it goes out of sight.

As of yet, no law limits the use of airboats or regulates their sound intruding on the Maine coast. I hope others will present testimony regarding scientific studies that show how prolonged exposure to noise can lead to chronic health impacts such as a higher risk of high blood pressure, increased anxiety, coronary heart disease, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, and depression. I hope others will present evidence that shows how these noise polluters adversely affect wildlife. Anecdotally, I can attest that the intrusive sound of airboats increases my stress levels and reduces my quality of life.

We need an anti-noise law to combat the negative effects of airboats along the coast of Maine. We know the sound from a busy freeway at 50 feet is around 80 dBA, and a chain saw can reach 110 dBA or more. With these two familiar sounds in mind, I hope you can see that the proposal to limit daytime airboat noise levels to 90 dBA measured at the shoreline is unacceptable. That level of unwanted noise offers very little relief to thousands of coastal residents and visitors, not to mention wildlife. Please take action to limit airboat noise to a level consistent with other boats, both commercial and recreational, and to limit the time of day that airboats can operate.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Laura Hench