



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 13th, 2019

Chair Witt, Vice-Chair Gorsek, members of the committee:

Last year, Representative Rich Vial reached out to me about an issue his constituents had raised in District 26: boat wakes and their potential impacts on river health. I came to learn that wakeboats also cause a profound impact on some of my own constituents by affecting housing structures, inflicting considerable economic burdens on homeowners, and creating hazardous recreational conditions.

During the 2018 Legislative Session, Representative Vial introduced HB 4099 and HB 4138 to address the impact of motorboats operating on the lower Willamette River. Those two bills did not pass, but House Transportation Committee Chair, Representative Susan McLain, asked the bill sponsors, myself included, to convene a work group to find solutions to support the long-term health of the river and of river recreation. In the interim, we met with stakeholders and corresponded with the Oregon State Marine Board about this matter.

Oregonians who live or recreate in the river channel have shared their stories with me in the past months. Floating homeowners talked about how their house joints are cracking along the seams, and how large wakes are causing docks to slide under or on top of one another damaging the pipes underneath. The wakes cause continued regular damage to such a great extent that contractors are unwilling to even take the jobs. The task seems fruitless when the beams or docks become damaged shortly after despite being reinforced with sturdy materials like steel. Floating home owners have spent hundreds to even thousands of dollars on repairs with no end in sight unless we take action to address the issue of large wakes. I would also be remiss if I failed to mention the negative impacts on house boat owners, their children, and their pets, who often find the conditions so unbearable during summer weekends, some stay with friends or family off the river.

Safety on the river is also of paramount concern to me. Several crewing teams came forward during a community listening session I held in Sellwood last month to let me know that they feel acutely unsafe at times on the river in the summer. For example, the Wasabi Team VIP (Visually Impaired Paddlers) was capsized last summer by a boat that came flying down the river far too close to them. One team recorded six incidents of dragon boat swamping caused by wake boats last summer before the Portland Rose Festival Dragon Boat Race. The Willamette River is an incredible asset to our state, and we want to encourage conditions that allow more people to enjoy its waters for recreation, not less.

HB 2352 is the consensus bill coming from Representative Vial's interim task force, and it focuses on education. It is my hope that HB 2351 will tee up the need for a more comprehensive multi-use management discussion and the need for more agency resources to ensure public safety out on the



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Willamette waters. HB 2351 is not a consensus bill, and I believe it requires further conversation, but can serve as a launching off point.

We want to encourage Oregonians to continue using the river for recreation and to continue calling it home. Together we can balance the needs of all the different types of users on the Willamette River and minimize adverse impacts so it remains viable as a recreational resource for a wide-range of users for generations to come.

Thank you, members of the committee, for hearing these bills.

State Representative Karin Power

